BOOK THE LAST.

I. AT THE TERMINUS.

On the night of the 2d of December, Mr. Bashwood took up his post of observation at the terminus of the South-eastern Railway for the first time. It was an earlier date, by six days, than the date which Allan had himself fixed for his return. But the doctor, taking counsel of his medical experience, had considered it just probable that "Mr. Armadale might be perverse enough, at his enviable age, to recover sooner than his medical advisers might have anticipated." For caution's sake, therefore, Mr. Bashwood was instructed to begin watching the arrival of the tidal trains on the day after he had received his employer's letter.

From the 2d to the 7th of December, the steward waited punctually on the platform, saw the trains come in, and satisfied himself, evening after evening, that the travelers were all strangers to him. From the 2d to the 7th of December, Miss Gwilt (to return to the name under which she is best known in these pages) received his daily report, sometimes delivered personally, sometimes sent by letter. The doctor, to whom the reports were communicated, received them in his turn with unabated confidence in the precautions that had been adopted up to the morning of the 8th. On that date the irritation of continued suspense had produced a change for the worse in Miss Gwilt's variable temper, which was perceptible to every one about her, and which, strangely enough, was reflected by an equally marked change in the doctor's manner when he came to pay his usual visit. By a coincidence so extraordinary that his enemies might have suspected it of not being a coincidence at all, the morning on which Miss Gwilt lost her patience proved to be also the morning on which the doctor lost his confidence for the first time.

"No news, of course," he said, sitting down with a heavy sigh. "Well! well!"

Miss Gwilt looked up at him irritably from her work.

"You seem strangely depressed this morning," she said. "What are you afraid of now?"

"The imputation of being afraid, madam," answered the doctor, solemnly, "is not an imputation to cast rashly on any man--even when he belongs to such an essentially peaceful profession as mine. I am not afraid. I am (as you more correctly put it in the first instance) strangely depressed. My nature is, as you know, naturally sanguine, and I only see to-day what but for my habitual hopefulness I might have seen, and ought to have seen, a week since."

Miss Gwilt impatiently threw down her work. "If words cost money," she said, "the luxury of talking would be rather an expensive luxury in your case!"

"Which I might have seen, and ought to have seen," reiterated the doctor, without taking the slightest notice of the interruption, "a week since. To put it plainly, I feel by no means so certain as I did that Mr. Armadale will consent, without a struggle, to the terms which it is my interest (and in a minor degree yours) to impose on him. Observe! I don't question our entrapping him successfully into the Sanitarium: I only doubt whether he will prove quite as manageable as I originally anticipated when we have got him there. Say," remarked the doctor, raising his eyes for the first time, and fixing them in steady inquiry on Miss Gwilt--"say that he is bold, obstinate, what you please; and that he holds out--holds out for weeks together, for months together, as men in similar situations to his have held out before him. What follows? The risk of keeping him forcibly in concealment--of suppressing him, if I may so express myself--increases at compound interest, and becomes Enormous! My house is at this moment virtually ready for patients. Patients may present themselves in a week's time. Patients may communicate with Mr. Armadale, or Mr. Armadale may communicate with patients. A note may be smuggled out of the house, and may reach the Commissioners in Lunacy. Even in the case of an unlicensed establishment like mine, those gentlemen--no! those chartered despots in a land of liberty--have only to apply to the Lord Chancellor for an order, and to enter (by heavens, to enter My Sanitarium!) and search the house from top to bottom at a moment's notice! I don't wish to despond; I don't wish to alarm you; I don't pretend to say that the means we are taking to secure your own safety are any other than the best means at our disposal. All I ask you to do is to imagine the Commissioners in the house--and then to conceive the consequences. The consequences!" repeated the doctor, getting sternly on his feet, and taking up his hat as if he meant to leave the room.

"Have you anything more to say?" asked Miss Gwilt.

"Have you any remarks," rejoined the doctor, "to offer on your side?"

He stood, hat in hand, waiting. For a full minute the two looked at each other in silence.

Miss Gwilt spoke first.

"I think I understand you," she said, suddenly recovering her composure.

"I beg your pardon," returned the doctor, with his hand to his ear. "What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"If you happened to catch another fly this morning," said Miss Gwilt, with a bitterly sarcastic emphasis on the words, "I might be capable of shocking you by another 'little joke.'"

The doctor held up both hands, in polite deprecation, and looked as if he was beginning to recover his good humor again.

"Hard," he murmured, gently, "not to have forgiven me that unlucky blunder of mine, even yet!"

"What else have you to say? I am waiting for you," said Miss Gwilt. She turned her chair to the window scornfully, and took up her work again, as she spoke.

The doctor came behind her, and put his hand on the back of her chair.

"I have a question to ask, in the first place," he said; "and a measure of necessary precaution to suggest, in the second. If you will honor me with your attention, I will put the question first."

"I am listening."

"You know that Mr. Armadale is alive," pursued the doctor, "and you know that he is coming back to England. Why do you continue to wear your widow's dress?"

She answered him without an instant's hesitation, steadily going on with her work.

"Because I am of a sanguine disposition, like you. I mean to trust to the chapter of accidents to the very last. Mr. Armadale may die yet, on his way home."

"And suppose he gets home alive--what then?"

"Then there is another chance still left."

"What is it, pray?"

"He may die in your Sanitarium."

"Madam!" remonstrated the doctor, in the deep bass which he reserved for his outbursts of virtuous indignation. "Wait! you spoke of the chapter of accidents," he resumed, gliding back into his softer conversational tones. "Yes! yes! of course. I understand you this time. Even the healing art is at the mercy of accidents; even such a Sanitarium as mine is liable to be surprised by Death. Just so! just so!" said the doctor, conceding the question with the utmost impartiality. "There is the chapter of accidents, I admit--if you choose to trust to it. Mind! I say emphatically, if you choose to trust to it."

There was another moment of silence--silence so profound that nothing was audible in the room but the rapid click of Miss Gwilt's needle through her work.

"Go on," she said; "you haven't done yet."

"True!" said the doctor. "Having put my question, I have my measure of precaution to impress on you next. You will see, my dear madam, that I am not disposed to trust to the chapter of accidents on my side. Reflection has convinced me that you and I are not (logically speaking) so conveniently situated as we might be in case of emergency. Cabs are, as yet, rare in this rapidly improving neighborhood. I am twenty minutes' walk from you; you are twenty minutes' walk from me. I know nothing of Mr. Armadale's character; you know it well. It might be necessary--vitally necessary--to appeal to your superior knowledge of him at a moment's notice. And how am I to do that unless we are within easy reach of each other, under the same roof? In both our interests, I beg to invite you, my dear madam, to become for a limited period an inmate of My Sanitarium."

Miss Gwilt's rapid needle suddenly stopped. "I understand you," she said

again, as quietly as before.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, with another attack of deafness, and with his hand once more at his ear.

She laughed to herself--a low, terrible laugh, which startled even the doctor into taking his hand off the back of her chair.

"An inmate of your Sanitarium?" she repeated. "You consult appearances in everything else; do you propose to consult appearances in receiving me into your house?"

"Most assuredly!" replied the doctor, with enthusiasm. "I am surprised at your asking me the question! Did you ever know a man of any eminence in my profession who set appearances at defiance? If you honor me by accepting my invitation, you enter My Sanitarium in the most unimpeachable of all possible characters--in the character of a Patient."

"When do you want my answer?"

"Can you decide to-day?"

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing more."

"Leave me, then. I don't keep up appearances. I wish to be alone, and I say so. Good-morning."

"Oh, the sex! the sex!" said the doctor, with his excellent temper in perfect working order again. "So delightfully impulsive! so charmingly reckless of what they say or how they say it! 'Oh, woman, in our hours of ease, uncertain, coy, and hard to please!' There! there! there! Good-morning!"

Miss Gwilt rose and looked after him contemptuously from the window, when the street door had closed, and he had left the house.

"Armadale himself drove me to it the first time," she said. "Manuel drove me to it the second time.--You cowardly scoundrel! shall I let you drive me to it for the third time, and the last?"

She turned from the window, and looked thoughtfully at her widow's dress in the glass.

The hours of the day passed--and she decided nothing. The night came--and she hesitated still. The new morning dawned--and the terrible question was still unanswered.

By the early post there came a letter for her. It was Mr. Bashwood's usual report. Again he had watched for Allan's arrival, and again in vain.

"I'll have more time!" she determined, passionately. "No man alive shall hurry me faster than I like!"

At breakfast that morning (the morning of the 9th) the doctor was surprised in his study by a visit from Miss Gwilt.

"I want another day," she said, the moment the servant had closed the door on her.

The doctor looked at her before he answered, and saw the danger of driving her to extremities plainly expressed in her face.

"The time is getting on," he remonstrated, in his most persuasive manner. "For all we know to the contrary, Mr. Armadale may be here to-night."

"I want another day!" she repeated, loudly and passionately.

"Granted!" said the doctor, looking nervously toward the door. "Don't be too loud--the servants may hear you. Mind!" he added, "I depend on your honor not to press me for any further delay."

"You had better depend on my despair," she said, and left him.

The doctor chipped the shell of his egg, and laughed softly.

"Quite right, my dear!" he thought. "I remember where your despair led you in past times; and I think I may trust it to lead you the same way now."

At a quarter to eight o'clock that night Mr. Bashwood took up his post of observation, as usual, on the platform of the terminus at London Bridge. He was in the highest good spirits; he smiled and smirked in irrepressible exultation. The sense that he held in reserve a means of influence over Miss Gwilt, in virtue of his knowledge of her past career, had had no share in

effecting the transformation that now appeared in him. It had upheld his courage in his forlorn life at Thorpe Ambrose, and it had given him that increased confidence of manner which Miss Gwilt herself had noticed; but, from the moment when he had regained his old place in her favor, it had vanished as a motive power in him, annihilated by the electric shock of her touch and her look. His vanity--the vanity which in men at his age is only despair in disguise--had now lifted him to the seventh heaven of fatuous happiness once more. He believed in her again as he believed in the smart new winter overcoat that he wore--as he believed in the dainty little cane (appropriate to the dawning dandyism of lads in their teens) that he flourished in his hand. He hummed! The worn-out old creature, who had not sung since his childhood, hummed, as he paced the platform, the few fragments he could remember of a worn-out old song.

The train was due as early as eight o'clock that night. At five minutes past the hour the whistle sounded. In less than five minutes more the passengers were getting out on the platform.

Following the instructions that had been given to him, Mr. Bashwood made his way, as well as the crowd would let him, along the line of carriages, and, discovering no familiar face on that first investigation, joined the passengers for a second search among them in the custom-house waiting-room next.

He had looked round the room, and had satisfied himself that the persons occupying it were all strangers, when he heard a voice behind him, exclaiming: "Can that be Mr. Bashwood!" He turned in eager expectation, and found himself face to face with the last man under heaven whom he had expected to see.

The man was MIDWINTER.

II. IN THE HOUSE.

Noticing Mr. Bashwood's confusion (after a moment's glance at the change in his personal appearance), Midwinter spoke first.

"I see I have surprised you," he said. "You are looking, I suppose, for somebody else? Have you heard from Allan? Is he on his way home again already?"

The inquiry about Allan, though it would naturally have suggested itself to any one in Midwinter's position at that moment, added to Mr. Bashwood's confusion. Not knowing how else to extricate himself from the critical position in which he was placed, he took refuge in simple denial.

"I know nothing about Mr. Armadale--oh dear, no, sir, I know nothing about Mr. Armadale," he answered, with needless eagerness and hurry. "Welcome back to England, sir," he went on, changing the subject in his nervously talkative manner. "I didn't know you had been abroad. It's so long since we have had the pleasure--since I have had the pleasure. Have you enjoyed yourself, sir, in foreign parts? Such different manners from ours--yes, yes, yes--such different manners from ours! Do you make a long stay in England, now you have come back?"

"I hardly know," said Midwinter. "I have been obliged to alter my plans, and to come to England unexpectedly." He hesitated a little; his manner changed, and he added, in lower tones: "A serious anxiety has brought me back. I can't say what my plans will be until that anxiety is set at rest."

The light of a lamp fell on his face while he spoke, and Mr. Bashwood observed, for the first time, that he looked sadly worn and changed.

"I'm sorry, sir--I'm sure I'm very sorry. If I could be of any use--" suggested Mr. Bashwood, speaking under the influence in some degree of his nervous politeness, and in some degree of his remembrance of what Midwinter had done for him at Thorpe Ambrose in the by-gone time.

Midwinter thanked him and turned away sadly. "I am afraid you can be of no use, Mr. Bashwood--but I am obliged to you for your offer, all the same." He stopped, and considered a little, "Suppose she should not be ill? Suppose some misfortune should have happened?" he resumed, speaking to himself, and turning again toward the steward. "If she has left her mother, some trace of her might be found by inquiring at Thorpe Ambrose."

Mr. Bashwood's curiosity was instantly aroused. The whole sex was interesting to him now, for the sake of Miss Gwilt.

"A lady, sir?" he inquired. "Are you looking for a lady?"

"I am looking," said Midwinter, simply, "for my wife."

"Married, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Bashwood. "Married since I last had the pleasure of seeing you! Might I take the liberty of asking--?"

Midwinter's eyes dropped uneasily to the ground.

"You knew the lady in former times," he said. "I have married Miss Gwilt."

The steward started back as he might have started back from a loaded pistol leveled at his head. His eyes glared as if he had suddenly lost his senses, and the nervous trembling to which he was subject shook him from head to foot.

"What's the matter?" said Midwinter. There was no answer. "What is there so very startling," he went on, a little impatiently, "in Miss Gwilt's being my wife?"

"Your wife?" repeated Mr. Bashwood, helplessly. "Mrs. Armadale--!" He checked himself by a desperate effort, and said no more.

The stupor of astonishment which possessed the steward was instantly reflected in Midwinter's face. The name in which he had secretly married his wife had passed the lips of the last man in the world whom he would have dreamed of admitting into his confidence! He took Mr. Bashwood by the arm, and led him away to a quieter part of the terminus than the part of it in which they had hitherto spoken to each other.

"You referred to my wife just now," he said; "and you spoke of Mrs. Armadale in the same breath. What do you mean by that?"

Again there was no answer. Utterly incapable of understanding more than that he had involved himself in some serious complication which was a complete mystery to him, Mr. Bashwood struggled to extricate himself from the grasp that was laid on him, and struggled in vain.

Midwinter sternly repeated the question. "I ask you again," he said, "what do you mean by it?"

"Nothing, sir! I give you my word of honor, I meant nothing!" He felt the hand on his arm tightening its grasp; he saw, even in the obscurity of the remote corner in which they stood, that Midwinter's fiery temper was rising, and was not to be trifled with. The extremity of his danger inspired him with the one ready capacity that a timid man possesses when he is compelled by main force to face an emergency--the capacity to lie. "I only meant to say, sir," he burst out, with a desperate effort to look and speak confidently, "that Mr. Armadale would be surprised--"

"You said Mrs. Armadale!"

"No, sir--on my word of honor, on my sacred word of honor, you are mistaken--you are, indeed! I said Mr. Armadale--how could I say anything else? Please to let me go, sir--I'm pressed for time. I do assure you I'm dreadfully pressed for time!"

For a moment longer Midwinter maintained his hold, and in that moment he decided what to do.

He had accurately stated his motive for returning to England as proceeding from anxiety about his wife--anxiety naturally caused (after the regular receipt of a letter from her every other, or every third day) by the sudden cessation of the correspondence between them on her side for a whole week. The first vaguely terrible suspicion of some other reason for her silence than the reason of accident or of illness, to which he had hitherto attributed it, had struck through him like a sudden chill the instant he heard the steward associate the name of "Mrs. Armadale" with the idea of his wife. Little irregularities in her correspondence with him, which he had thus far only thought strange, now came back on his mind, and proclaimed themselves to be suspicions as well. He had hitherto believed the reasons she had given for referring him, when he answered her letters, to no more definite address than an address at a post-office. Now he suspected her reasons of being excuses, for the first time. He had hitherto resolved, on reaching London, to inquire at the only place he knew of at which a clew to her could be found--the address she had given him as the address at which "her mother" lived. Now (with a motive which he was afraid to define even to himself, but which was strong enough to overbear every other consideration in his mind) he determined, before all things, to solve the mystery of Mr. Bashwood's familiarity with a secret, which was a marriage secret between himself and his wife. Any direct appeal to a man of the steward's disposition, in the steward's present state of mind, would be evidently useless. The weapon of deception was, in this case, a weapon literally forced into Midwinter's hands.

He let go of Mr. Bashwood's arm, and accepted Mr. Bashwood's explanation.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I have no doubt you are right. Pray attribute my rudeness to over-anxiety and over-fatigue. I wish you good-evening."

The station was by this time almost a solitude, the passengers by the train being assembled at the examination of their luggage in the custom-house waiting-room. It was no easy matter, ostensibly to take leave of Mr. Bashwood, and really to keep him in view. But Midwinter's early life with the gypsy master had been of a nature to practice him in such stratagems as he was now compelled to adopt. He walked away toward the waiting-room by the line of empty carriages; opened the door of one of them, as if to look after something that he had left behind, and detected Mr. Bashwood making for the cab-rank on the opposite side of the platform. In an instant Midwinter had crossed, and had passed through the long row of vehicles, so as to skirt it on the side furthest from the platform. He entered the second cab by the left-hand door the moment after Mr. Bashwood had entered the first cab by the right-hand door. "Double your fare, whatever it is," he said to the driver, "if you keep the cab before you in view, and follow it wherever it goes." In a minute more both vehicles were on their way out of the station.

The clerk sat in the sentry-box at the gate, taking down the destinations of the cabs as they passed. Midwinter heard the man who was driving him call out "Hampstead!" as he went by the clerk's window.

"Why did you say 'Hampstead'?" he asked, when they had left the station.

"Because the man before me said 'Hampstead,' sir," answered the driver.

Over and over again, on the wearisome journey to the northwestern suburb, Midwinter asked if the cab was still in sight. Over and over again, the man answered, "Right in front of us."

It was between nine and ten o'clock when the driver pulled up his horse at last. Midwinter got out, and saw the cab before them waiting at a house door. As soon as he had satisfied himself that the driver was the man whom Mr. Bashwood had hired, he paid the promised reward, and dismissed his own cab.

He took a turn backward and forward before the door. The vaguely terrible suspicion which had risen in his mind at the terminus had forced itself by this time into a definite form which was abhorrent to him. Without the shadow of an assignable reason for it, he found himself blindly distrusting

his wife's fidelity, and blindly suspecting Mr. Bashwood of serving her in the capacity of go-between. In sheer horror of his own morbid fancy, he determined to take down the number of the house, and the name of the street in which it stood; and then, in justice to his wife, to return at once to the address which she had given him as the address at which her mother lived. He had taken out his pocket-book, and was on his way to the corner of the street, when he observed the man who had driven Mr. Bashwood looking at him with an expression of inquisitive surprise. The idea of questioning the cab-driver, while he had the opportunity, instantly occurred to him. He took a half-crown from his pocket and put it into the man's ready hand.

"Has the gentleman whom you drove from the station gone into that house?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear him inquire for anybody when the door was opened?"

"He asked for a lady, sir. Mrs.--" The man hesitated. "It wasn't a common name, sir; I should know it again if I heard it."

"Was it 'Midwinter'?"

"No, sir.

"Armadale?"

"That's it, sir. Mrs. Armadale."

"Are you sure it was 'Mrs.' and not 'Mr.'?"

"I'm as sure as a man can be who hasn't taken any particular notice, sir."

The doubt implied in that last answer decided Midwinter to investigate the matter on the spot. He ascended the house steps. As he raised his hand to the bell at the side of the door, the violence of his agitation mastered him physically for the moment. A strange sensation, as of something leaping up from his heart to his brain, turned his head wildly giddy. He held by the house railings and kept his face to the air, and resolutely waited till he was steady again. Then he rang the bell.

"Is?"--he tried to ask for "Mrs. Armadale," when the maid-servant had opened the door, but not even his resolution could force the name to pass

his lips--"is your mistress at home?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

The girl showed him into a back parlor, and presented him to a little old lady, with an obliging manner and a bright pair of eyes.

"There is some mistake," said Midwinter. "I wished to see--" Once more he tried to utter the name, and once more he failed to force it to his lips.

"Mrs. Armadale?" suggested the little old lady, with a smile.

"Yes."

"Show the gentleman upstairs, Jenny."

The girl led the way to the drawing-room floor.

"Any name, sir?"

"No name."

Mr. Bashwood had barely completed his report of what had happened at the terminus; Mr. Bashwood's imperious mistress was still sitting speechless under the shock of the discovery that had burst on her--when the door of the room opened; and, without a word of warning to proceed him, Midwinter appeared on the threshold. He took one step into the room, and mechanically pushed the door to behind him. He stood in dead silence, and confronted his wife, with a scrutiny that was terrible in its unnatural self-possession, and that enveloped her steadily in one comprehensive look from head to foot.

In dead silence on her side, she rose from her chair. In dead silence she stood erect on the hearth-rug, and faced her husband in widow's weeds.

He took one step nearer to her, and stopped again. He lifted his hand, and pointed with his lean brown finger at her dress.

"What does that mean?" he asked, without losing his terrible self-possession, and without moving his outstretched hand.

At the sound of his voice, the quick rise and fall of her bosom--which had been the one outward betrayal thus far of the inner agony that tortured her-

-suddenly stopped. She stood impenetrably silent, breathlessly still--as if his question had struck her dead, and his pointing hand had petrified her.

He advanced one step nearer, and reiterated his words in a voice even lower and quieter than the voice in which he had spoken first.

One moment more of silence, one moment more of inaction, might have been the salvation of her. But the fatal force of her character triumphed at the crisis of her destiny, and his. White and still, and haggard and old, she met the dreadful emergency with a dreadful courage, and spoke the irrevocable words which renounced him to his face.

"Mr. Midwinter," she said, in tones unnaturally hard and unnaturally clear, "our acquaintance hardly entitles you to speak to me in that manner." Those were her words. She never lifted her eyes from the ground while she spoke them. When she had done, the last faint vestige of color in her cheeks faded out.

There was a pause. Still steadily looking at her, he set himself to fix the language she had used to him in his mind. "She calls me 'Mr. Midwinter,'" he said, slowly, in a whisper. "She speaks of 'our acquaintance.'" He waited a little and looked round the room. His wandering eyes encountered Mr. Bashwood for the first time. He saw the steward standing near the fireplace, trembling, and watching him.

"I once did you a service," he said; "and you once told me you were not an ungrateful man. Are you grateful enough to answer me if I ask you something?"

He waited a little again. Mr. Bashwood still stood trembling at the fireplace, silently watching him.

"I see you looking at me," he went on. "Is there some change in me that I am not conscious of myself? Am I seeing things that you don't see? Am I hearing words that you don't hear? Am I looking or speaking like a man out of his senses?"

Again he waited, and again the silence was unbroken. His eyes began to glitter; and the savage blood that he had inherited from his mother rose dark and slow in his ashy cheeks.

"Is that woman," he asked, "the woman whom you once knew, whose name was Miss Gwilt?"

Once more his wife collected her fatal courage. Once more his wife spoke her fatal words.

"You compel me to repeat," she said, "that you are presuming on our acquaintance, and that you are forgetting what is due to me."

He turned upon her, with a savage suddenness which forced a cry of alarm from Mr. Bashwood's lips.

"Are you, or are you not, My Wife?" he asked, through his set teeth.

She raised her eyes to his for the first time. Her lost spirit looked at him, steadily defiant, out of the hell of its own despair.

"I am not your wife," she said.

He staggered back, with his hands groping for something to hold by, like the hands of a man in the dark. He leaned heavily against the wall of the room, and looked at the woman who had slept on his bosom, and who had denied him to his face.

Mr. Bashwood stole panic-stricken to her side. "Go in there!" he whispered, trying to draw her toward the folding-doors which led into the next room. "For God's sake, be quick! He'll kill you!"

She put the old man back with her hand. She looked at him with a sudden irradiation of her blank face. She answered him with lips that struggled slowly into a frightful smile.

"Let him kill me," she said.

As the words passed her lips, he sprang forward from the wall, with a cry that rang through the house. The frenzy of a maddened man flashed at her from his glassy eyes, and clutched at her in his threatening hands. He came on till he was within arms-length of her--and suddenly stood still. The black flush died out of his face in the instant when he stopped. His eyelids fell, his outstretched hands wavered and sank helpless. He dropped, as the dead drop. He lay as the dead lie, in the arms of the wife who had denied him.

She knelt on the floor, and rested his head on her knee. She caught the arm of the steward hurrying to help her, with a hand that closed round it like a vise. "Go for a doctor," she said, "and keep the people of the house away till

he comes." There was that in her eye, there was that in her voice, which would have warned any man living to obey her in silence. In silence Mr. Bashwood submitted, and hurried out of the room.

The instant she was alone she raised him from her knee. With both arms clasped round him, the miserable woman lifted his lifeless face to hers and rocked him on her bosom in an agony of tenderness beyond all relief in tears, in a passion of remorse beyond all expression in words. In silence she held him to her breast, in silence she devoured his forehead, his cheeks, his lips, with kisses. Not a sound escaped her till she heard the trampling footsteps outside, hurrying up the stairs. Then a low moan burst from her lips, as she looked her last at him, and lowered his head again to her knee, before the strangers came in.

The landlady and the steward were the first persons whom she saw when the door was opened. The medical man (a surgeon living in the street) followed. The horror and the beauty of her face as she looked up at him absorbed the surgeon's attention for the moment, to the exclusion of everything else. She had to beckon to him, she had to point to the senseless man, before she could claim his attention for his patient and divert it from herself.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

The surgeon carried Midwinter to the sofa, and ordered the windows to be opened. "It is a fainting fit," he said; "nothing more."

At that answer her strength failed her for the first time. She drew a deep breath of relief, and leaned on the chimney-piece for support. Mr. Bashwood was the only person present who noticed that she was overcome. He led her to the opposite end of the room, where there was an easy-chair, leaving the landlady to hand the restoratives to the surgeon as they were wanted.

"Are you going to wait here till he recovers?" whispered the steward, looking toward the sofa, and trembling as he looked.

The question forced her to a sense of her position--to a knowledge of the merciless necessities which that position now forced her to confront. With a heavy sigh she looked toward the sofa, considered with herself for a moment, and answered Mr. Bashwood's inquiry by a question on her side.

"Is the cab that brought you here from the railway still at the door?"

"Yes."

"Drive at once to the gates of the Sanitarium, and wait there till I join you."

Mr. Bashwood hesitated. She lifted her eyes to his, and, with a look, sent him out of the room.

"The gentleman is coming to, ma'am," said the landlady, as the steward closed the door. "He has just breathed again."

She bowed in mute reply, rose, and considered with herself once more--looked toward the sofa for the second time--then passed through the folding-doors into her own room.

After a short lapse of time the surgeon drew back from the sofa and motioned to the landlady to stand aside. The bodily recovery of the patient was assured. There was nothing to be done now but to wait, and let his mind slowly recall its sense of what had happened.

"Where is she?" were the first words he said to the surgeon, and the landlady anxiously watching him.

The landlady knocked at the folding-doors, and received no answer. She went in, and found the room empty. A sheet of note-paper was on the dressing-table, with the doctor's fee placed on it. The paper contained these lines, evidently written in great agitation or in great haste: "It is impossible for me to remain here to-night, after what has happened. I will return to-morrow to take away my luggage, and to pay what I owe you."

"Where is she?" Midwinter asked again, when the landlady returned alone to the drawing-room.

"Gone, sir."

"I don't believe it!"

The old lady's color rose. "If you know her handwriting, sir," she answered, handing him the sheet of note-paper, "perhaps you may believe that?"

He looked at the paper. "I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, as he handed it back--"I beg your pardon, with all my heart."

There was something in his face as he spoke those words which more than

soothed the old lady's irritation: it touched her with a sudden pity for the man who had offended her. "I am afraid there is some dreadful trouble, sir, at the bottom of all this," she said, simply. "Do you wish me to give any message to the lady when she comes back?"

Midwinter rose and steadied himself for a moment against the sofa. "I will bring my own message to-morrow," he said. "I must see her before she leaves your house."

The surgeon accompanied his patient into the street. "Can I see you home?" he said, kindly. "You had better not walk, if it is far. You mustn't overexert yourself; you mustn't catch a chill this cold night."

Midwinter took his hand and thanked him. "I have been used to hard walking and cold nights, sir," he said; "and I am not easily worn out, even when I look so broken as I do now. If you will tell me the nearest way out of these streets, I think the quiet of the country and the quiet of the night will help me. I have something serious to do to-morrow," he added, in a lower tone; "and I can't rest or sleep till I have thought over it to-night."

The surgeon understood that he had no common man to deal with. He gave the necessary directions without any further remark, and parted with his patient at his own door.

Left by himself, Midwinter paused, and looked up at the heavens in silence. The night had cleared, and the stars were out--the stars which he had first learned to know from his gypsy master on the hillside. For the first time his mind went back regretfully to his boyish days. "Oh, for the old life!" he thought, longingly. "I never knew till now how happy the old life was!"

He roused himself, and went on toward the open country. His face darkened as he left the streets behind him and advanced into the solitude and obscurity that lay beyond.

"She has denied her husband to-night," he said. "She shall know her master to-morrow."

III. THE PURPLE FLASK.

The cab was waiting at the gates as Miss Gwilt approached the Sanitarium. Mr. Bashwood got out and advanced to meet her. She took his arm and led him aside a few steps, out of the cabman's hearing.

"Think what you like of me," she said, keeping her thick black veil down over her face, "but don't speak to me to-night. Drive back to your hotel as if nothing had happened. Meet the tidal train to-morrow as usual, and come to me afterward at the Sanitarium. Go without a word, and I shall believe there is one man in the world who really loves me. Stay and ask questions, and I shall bid you good-by at once and forever!"

She pointed to the cab. In a minute more it had left the Sanitarium and was taking Mr. Bashwood back to his hotel.

She opened the iron gate and walked slowly up to the house door. A shudder ran through her as she rang the bell. She laughed bitterly. "Shivering again!" she said to herself. "Who would have thought I had so much feeling left in me?"

For once in her life the doctor's face told the truth, when the study door opened between ten and eleven at night, and Miss Gwilt entered the room.

"Mercy on me!" he exclaimed, with a look of the blankest bewilderment. "What does this mean?"

"It means," she answered, "that I have decided to-night instead of deciding to-morrow. You, who know women so well, ought to know that they act on impulse. I am here on an impulse. Take me or leave me, just as you like."

"Take you or leave you?" repeated the doctor, recovering his presence of mind. "My dear lady, what a dreadful way of putting it! Your room shall be got ready instantly! Where is your luggage? Will you let me send for it? No? You can do without your luggage to-night? What admirable fortitude! You will fetch it yourself to-morrow? What extraordinary independence! Do take off your bonnet. Do draw in to the fire! What can I offer you?"

"Offer me the strongest sleeping draught you ever made in your life," she replied. "And leave me alone till the time comes to take it. I shall be your patient in earnest!" she added, fiercely, as the doctor attempted to remonstrate. "I shall be the maddest of the mad if you irritate me to-night!"

The Principal of the Sanitarium became gravely and briefly professional in an instant.

"Sit down in that dark corner," he said. "Not a soul shall disturb you. In half an hour you will find your room ready, and your sleeping draught on the table."--"It's been a harder struggle for her than I anticipated," he thought, as he left the room, and crossed to his Dispensary on the opposite side of the hall. "Good heavens, what business has she with a conscience, after such a life as hers has been!"

The Dispensary was elaborately fitted up with all the latest improvements in medical furniture. But one of the four walls of the room was unoccupied by shelves, and here the vacant space was filled by a handsome antique cabinet of carved wood, curiously out of harmony, as an object, with the unornamented utilitarian aspect of the place generally. On either side of the cabinet two speaking-tubes were inserted in the wall, communicating with the upper regions of the house, and labeled respectively "Resident Dispenser" and "Head Nurse." Into the second of these tubes the doctor spoke, on entering the room. An elderly woman appeared, took her orders for preparing Mrs. Armadale's bed-chamber, courtesied, and retired.

Left alone again in the Dispensary, the doctor unlocked the center compartment of the cabinet, and disclosed a collection of bottles inside, containing the various poisons used in medicine. After taking out the laudanum wanted for the sleeping draught, and placing it on the dispensary table, he went back to the cabinet, looked into it for a little while, shook his head doubtfully, and crossed to the open shelves on the opposite side of the room.

Here, after more consideration, he took down one out of the row of large chemical bottles before him, filled with a yellow liquid; placing the bottle on the table, he returned to the cabinet, and opened a side compartment, containing some specimens of Bohemian glass-work. After measuring it with his eye, he took from the specimens a handsome purple flask, high and narrow in form, and closed by a glass stopper. This he filled with the yellow liquid, leaving a small quantity only at the bottom of the bottle, and locking up the flask again in the place from which he had taken it. The bottle was next restored to its place, after having been filled up with water from the cistern in the Dispensary, mixed with certain chemical liquids in small quantities, which restored it (so far as appearances went) to the condition in which it had been when it was first removed from the shelf. Having completed these mysterious proceedings, the doctor laughed softly, and went back to his speaking-tubes to summon the Resident Dispenser next.

The Resident Dispenser made his appearance shrouded in the necessary white apron from his waist to his feet. The doctor solemnly wrote a prescription for a composing draught, and handed it to his assistant.

"Wanted immediately, Benjamin," he said in a soft and melancholy voice. "A lady patient--Mrs. Armadale, Room No. 1, second floor. Ah, dear, dear!" groaned the doctor, absently; "an anxious case, Benjamin--an anxious case." He opened the brand-new ledger of the establishment, and entered the Case at full length, with a brief abstract of the prescription. "Have you done with the laudanum? Put it back, and lock the cabinet, and give me the key. Is the draught ready? Label it, 'To be taken at bedtime,' and give it to the nurse, Benjamin--give it to the nurse."

While the doctor's lips were issuing these directions, the doctor's hands were occupied in opening a drawer under the desk on which the ledger was placed. He took out some gayly printed cards of admission "to view the Sanitarium, between the hours of two and four P.M.," and filled them up with the date of the next day, "December 10th." When a dozen of the cards had been wrapped up in a dozen lithographed letters of invitation, and inclosed in a dozen envelopes, he next consulted a list of the families resident in the neighborhood, and directed the envelopes from the list. Ringing a bell this time, instead of speaking through a tube, he summoned the man-servant, and gave him the letters, to be delivered by hand the first thing the next morning. "I think it will do," said the doctor, taking a turn in the Dispensary when the servant had gone out--"I think it will do." While he was still absorbed in his own reflections, the nurse re-appeared to announce that the lady's room was ready; and the doctor thereupon formally returned to the study to communicate the information to Miss Gwilt.

She had not moved since he left her. She rose from her dark corner when he made his announcement, and, without speaking or raising her veil, glided out of the room like a ghost.

After a brief interval, the nurse came downstairs again, with a word for her master's private ear.

"The lady has ordered me to call her to-morrow at seven o'clock, sir," she said. "She means to fetch her luggage herself, and she wants to have a cab at the door as soon as she is dressed. What am I to do?"

"Do what the lady tells you," said the doctor. "She may be safely trusted to return to the Sanitarium."

The breakfast hour at the Sanitarium was half-past eight o'clock. By that time Miss Gwilt had settled everything at her lodgings, and had returned with her luggage in her own possession. The doctor was quite amazed at the promptitude of his patient.

"Why waste so much energy?" he asked, when they met at the breakfast-table. "Why be in such a hurry, my dear lady, when you had all the morning before you?"

"Mere restlessness!" she said, briefly. "The longer I live, the more impatient I get."

The doctor, who had noticed before she spoke that her face looked strangely pale and old that morning, observed, when she answered him, that her expression--naturally mobile in no ordinary degree--remained quite unaltered by the effort of speaking. There was none of the usual animation on her lips, none of the usual temper in her eyes. He had never seen her so impenetrably and coldly composed as he saw her now. "She has made up her mind at last," he thought. "I may say to her this morning what I couldn't say to her last night."

He prefaced the coming remarks by a warning look at her widow's dress.

"Now you have got your luggage," he began, gravely, "permit me to suggest putting that cap away, and wearing another gown."

"Why?"

"Do you remember what you told me a day or two since?" asked the doctor. "You said there was a chance of Mr. Armadale's dying in my Sanitarium?"

"I will say it again, if you like."

"A more unlikely chance," pursued the doctor, deaf as ever to all awkward interruptions, "it is hardly possible to imagine! But as long as it is a chance at all, it is worth considering. Say, then, that he dies--dies suddenly and unexpectedly, and makes a Coroner's Inquest necessary in the house. What is our course in that case? Our course is to preserve the characters to which we have committed ourselves--you as his widow, and I as the witness of your marriage--and, in those characters, to court the fullest inquiry. In the entirely improbable event of his dying just when we want him to die, my idea--I might even say, my resolution--is to admit that we knew of his

resurrection from the sea; and to acknowledge that we instructed Mr. Bashwood to entrap him into this house, by means of a false statement about Miss Milroy. When the inevitable questions follow, I propose to assert that he exhibited symptoms of mental alienation shortly after your marriage; that his delusion consisted in denying that you were his wife, and in declaring that he was engaged to be married to Miss Milroy; that you were in such terror of him on this account, when you heard he was alive and coming back, as to be in a state of nervous agitation that required my care; that at your request, and to calm that nervous agitation, I saw him professionally, and got him quietly into the house by a humoring of his delusion, perfectly justifiable in such a case; and, lastly, that I can certify his brain to have been affected by one of those mysterious disorders, eminently incurable, eminently fatal, in relation to which medical science is still in the dark. Such a course as this (in the remotely possible event which we are now supposing) would be, in your interests and mine, unquestionably the right course to take; and such a dress as that is, just as certainly, under existing circumstances, the wrong dress to wear."

"Shall I take it off at once?" she asked, rising from the breakfast-table, without a word of remark on what had just been said to her.

"Anytime before two o'clock to-day will do," said the doctor.

She looked at him with a languid curiosity--nothing more. "Why before two?" she inquired.

"Because this is one of my 'Visitors' Days,' And the visitors' time is from two to four."

"What have I to do with your visitors?"

"Simply this. I think it important that perfectly respectable and perfectly disinterested witnesses should see you, in my house, in the character of a lady who has come to consult me."

"Your motive seems rather far-fetched. Is it the only motive you have in the matter?"

"My dear, dear lady!" remonstrated the doctor, "have I any concealments from you? Surely, you ought to know me better than that?"

"Yes," she said, with a weary contempt. "It's dull enough of me not to understand you by this time. Send word upstairs when I am wanted." She

left him, and went back to her room.

Two o'clock came; and in a quarter of an hour afterward the visitors had arrived. Short as the notice had been, cheerless as the Sanitarium looked to spectators from without, the doctor's invitation had been largely accepted, nevertheless, by the female members of the families whom he had addressed. In the miserable monotony of the lives led by a large section of the middle classes of England, anything is welcome to the women which offers them any sort of harmless refuge from the established tyranny of the principle that all human happiness begins and ends at home. While the imperious needs of a commercial country limited the representatives of the male sex, among the doctor's visitors, to one feeble old man and one sleepy little boy, the women, poor souls, to the number of no less than sixteen--old and young, married and single--had seized the golden opportunity of a plunge into public life. Harmoniously united by the two common objects which they all had in view--in the first place, to look at each other, and, in the second place, to look at the Sanitarium--they streamed in neatly dressed procession through the doctor's dreary iron gates, with a thin varnish over them of assumed superiority to all unladylike excitement, most significant and most pitiable to see!

The proprietor of the Sanitarium received his visitors in the hall with Miss Gwilt on his arm. The hungry eyes of every woman in the company overlooked the doctor as if no such person had existed; and, fixing on the strange lady, devoured her from head to foot in an instant.

"My First Inmate," said the doctor, presenting Miss Gwilt. "This lady only arrived late last night; and she takes the present opportunity (the only one my morning's engagements have allowed me to give her) of going over the Sanitarium.--Allow me, ma'am," he went on, releasing Miss Gwilt, and giving his arm to the eldest lady among the visitors. "Shattered nerves--domestic anxiety," he whispered, confidentially. "Sweet woman! sad case!" He sighed softly, and led the old lady across the hall.

The flock of visitors followed, Miss Gwilt accompanying them in silence, and walking alone--among them, but not of them--the last of all.

"The grounds, ladies and gentlemen," said the doctor, wheeling round, and addressing his audience from the foot of the stairs, "are, as you have seen, in a partially unfinished condition. Under any circumstances, I should lay little stress on the grounds, having Hampstead Heath so near at hand, and carriage exercise and horse exercise being parts of my System. In a lesser degree, it is also necessary for me to ask your indulgence for the basement

floor, on which we now stand. The waiting-room and study on that side, and the Dispensary on the other (to which I shall presently ask your attention), are completed. But the large drawing-room is still in the decorator's hands. In that room (when the walls are dry--not a moment before) my inmates will assemble for cheerful society. Nothing will be spared that can improve, elevate, and adorn life at these happy little gatherings. Every evening, for example, there will be music for those who like it."

At this point there was a faint stir among the visitors. A mother of a family interrupted the doctor. She begged to know whether music "every evening" included Sunday evening; and, if so, what music was performed?

"Sacred music, of course, ma'am," said the doctor. "Handel on Sunday evening--and Haydn occasionally, when not too cheerful. But, as I was about to say, music is not the only entertainment offered to my nervous inmates. Amusing reading is provided for those who prefer books."

There was another stir among the visitors. Another mother of a family wished to know whether amusing reading meant novels.

"Only such novels as I have selected and perused myself, in the first instance," said the doctor. "Nothing painful, ma'am! There may be plenty that is painful in real life; but for that very reason, we don't want it in books. The English novelist who enters my house (no foreign novelist will be admitted) must understand his art as the healthy-minded English reader understands it in our time. He must know that our purer modern taste, our higher modern morality, limits him to doing exactly two things for us, when he writes us a book. All we want of him is--occasionally to make us laugh; and invariably to make us comfortable."

There was a third stir among the visitors--caused plainly this time by approval of the sentiments which they had just heard. The doctor, wisely cautious of disturbing the favorable impression that he had produced, dropped the subject of the drawing-room, and led the way upstairs. As before, the company followed; and, as before, Miss Gwilt walked silently behind them, last of all. One after another the ladies looked at her with the idea of speaking, and saw something in her face, utterly unintelligible to them, which checked the well-meant words on their lips. The prevalent impression was that the Principal of the Sanitarium had been delicately concealing the truth, and that his first inmate was mad.

The doctor led the way--with intervals of breathing-time accorded to the old lady on his arm--straight to the top of the house. Having collected his

visitors in the corridor, and having waved his hand indicatively at the numbered doors opening out of it on either side, he invited the company to look into any or all of the rooms at their own pleasure.

"Numbers one to four, ladies and gentlemen," said the doctor, "include the dormitories of the attendants. Numbers four to eight are rooms intended for the accommodation of the poorer class of patients, whom I receive on terms which simply cover my expenditure--nothing more. In the cases of these poorer persons among my suffering fellow creatures, personal piety and the recommendation of two clergymen are indispensable to admission. Those are the only conditions I make; but those I insist on. Pray observe that the rooms are all ventilated, and the bedsteads all iron and kindly notice, as we descend again to the second floor, that there is a door shutting off all communication between the second story and the top story when necessary. The rooms on the second floor, which we have now reached, are (with the exception of my own room) entirely devoted to the reception of lady-inmates--experience having convinced me that the greater sensitiveness of the female constitution necessitates the higher position of the sleeping apartment, with a view to the greater purity and freer circulation of the air. Here the ladies are established immediately under my care, while my assistant-physician (whom I expect to arrive in a week's time) looks after the gentlemen on the floor beneath. Observe, again, as we descend to this lower, or first floor, a second door, closing all communication at night between the two stories to every one but the assistant physician and myself. And now that we have reached the gentleman's part of the house, and that you have observed for yourselves the regulations of the establishment, permit me to introduce you to a specimen of my system of treatment next. I can exemplify it practically, by introducing you to a room fitted up, under my own direction, for the accommodation of the most complicated cases of nervous suffering and nervous delusion that can come under my care."

He threw open the door of a room at one extremity of the corridor, numbered Four. "Look in, ladies and gentlemen," he said; "and, if you see anything remarkable, pray mention it."

The room was not very large, but it was well lit by one broad window. Comfortably furnished as a bedroom, it was only remarkable among other rooms of the same sort in one way. It had no fireplace. The visitors having noticed this, were informed that the room was warmed in winter by means of hot water; and were then invited back again into the corridor, to make the discoveries, under professional direction, which they were unable to make for themselves.

"A word, ladies and gentlemen," said the doctor; "literally a word, on nervous derangement first. What is the process of treatment, when, let us say, mental anxiety has broken you down, and you apply to your doctor? He sees you, hears you, and gives you two prescriptions. One is written on paper, and made up at the chemist's. The other is administered by word of mouth, at the propitious moment when the fee is ready; and consists in a general recommendation to you to keep your mind easy. That excellent advice given, your doctor leaves you to spare yourself all earthly annoyances by your own unaided efforts, until he calls again. Here my System steps in and helps you! When I see the necessity of keeping your mind easy, I take the bull by the horns and do it for you. I place you in a sphere of action in which the ten thousand trifles which must, and do, irritate nervous people at home are expressly considered and provided against. I throw up impregnable moral intrenchments between Worry and You. Find a door banging in this house, if you can! Catch a servant in this house rattling the tea-things when he takes away the tray! Discover barking dogs, crowing cocks, hammering workmen, screeching children here--and I engage to close My Sanitarium to-morrow! Are these nuisances laughing matters to nervous people? Ask them! Can they escape these nuisances at home? Ask them! Will ten minutes' irritation from a barking dog or a screeching child undo every atom of good done to a nervous sufferer by a month's medical treatment? There isn't a competent doctor in England who will venture to deny it! On those plain grounds my System is based. I assert the medical treatment of nervous suffering to be entirely subsidiary to the moral treatment of it. That moral treatment of it you find here. That moral treatment, sedulously pursued throughout the day, follows the sufferer into his room at night; and soothes, helps and cures him, without his own knowledge--you shall see how."

The doctor paused to take breath and looked, for the first time since the visitors had entered the house, at Miss Gwilt. For the first time, on her side, she stepped forward among the audience, and looked at him in return. After a momentary obstruction in the shape of a cough, the doctor went on.

"Say, ladies and gentlemen," he proceeded, "that my patient has just come in. His mind is one mass of nervous fancies and caprices, which his friends (with the best possible intentions) have been ignorantly irritating at home. They have been afraid of him, for instance, at night. They have forced him to have somebody to sleep in the room with him, or they have forbidden him, in case of accidents, to lock his door. He comes to me the first night, and says: 'Mind, I won't have anybody in my room!'--'Certainly not!'--'I insist on locking my door.'--'By all means!' In he goes, and locks his door; and there he is, soothed and quieted, predisposed to confidence, predisposed to sleep, by having his own way. 'This is all very well,' you may say; 'but suppose

something happens, suppose he has a fit in the night, what then?' You shall see! Hallo, my young friend!" cried the doctor, suddenly addressing the sleepy little boy. "Let's have a game. You shall be the poor sick man, and I'll be the good doctor. Go into that room and lock the door. There's a brave boy! Have you locked it? Very good! Do you think I can't get at you if I like? I wait till you're asleep--I press this little white button, hidden here in the stencilled pattern of the outer wall--the mortise of the lock inside falls back silently against the door-post--and I walk into the room whenever I like. The same plan is pursued with the window. My capricious patient won't open it at night, when he ought. I humor him again. 'Shut it, dear sir, by all means!' As soon as he is asleep, I pull the black handle hidden here, in the corner of the wall. The window of the room inside noiselessly opens, as you see. Say the patient's caprice is the other way--he persists in opening the window when he ought to shut it. Let him! by all means, let him! I pull a second handle when he is snug in his bed, and the window noiselessly closes in a moment. Nothing to irritate him, ladies and gentlemen--absolutely nothing to irritate him! But I haven't done with him yet. Epidemic disease, in spite of all my precautions, may enter this Sanitarium, and may render the purifying of the sick-room necessary. Or the patient's case may be complicated by other than nervous malady--say, for instance, asthmatic difficulty of breathing. In the one case, fumigation is necessary; in the other, additional oxygen in the air will give relief. The epidemic nervous patient says, 'I won't be smoked under my own nose!' The asthmatic nervous patient gasps with terror at the idea of a chemical explosion in his room. I noiselessly fumigate one of them; I noiselessly oxygenize the other, by means of a simple Apparatus fixed outside in the corner here. It is protected by this wooden casing; it is locked with my own key; and it communicates by means of a tube with the interior of the room. Look at it!"

With a preliminary glance at Miss Gwilt, the doctor unlocked the lid of the wooden casing, and disclosed inside nothing more remarkable than a large stone jar, having a glass funnel, and a pipe communicating with the wall, inserted in the cork which closed the mouth of it. With another look at Miss Gwilt, the doctor locked the lid again, and asked, in the blandest manner, whether his System was intelligible now?

"I might introduce you to all sorts of other contrivances of the same kind," he resumed, leading the way downstairs; "but it would be only the same thing over and over again. A nervous patient who always has his own way is a nervous patient who is never worried; and a nervous patient who is never worried is a nervous patient cured. There it is in a nutshell! Come and see the Dispensary, ladies; the Dispensary and the kitchen next!"

Once more, Miss Gwilt dropped behind the visitors, and waited alone--looking steadfastly at the Room which the doctor had opened, and at the apparatus which the doctor had unlocked. Again, without a word passing between them, she had understood him. She knew, as well as if he had confessed it, that he was craftily putting the necessary temptation in her way, before witnesses who could speak to the superficially innocent acts which they had seen, if anything serious happened. The apparatus, originally constructed to serve the purpose of the doctor's medical crotchets, was evidently to be put to some other use, of which the doctor himself had probably never dreamed till now. And the chances were that, before the day was over, that other use would be privately revealed to her at the right moment, in the presence of the right witness. "Armadale will die this time," she said to herself, as she went slowly down the stairs. "The doctor will kill him, by my hands."

The visitors were in the Dispensary when she joined them. All the ladies were admiring the beauty of the antique cabinet; and, as a necessary consequence, all the ladies were desirous of seeing what was inside. The doctor--after a preliminary look at Miss Gwilt--good-humoredly shook his head. "There is nothing to interest you inside," he said. "Nothing but rows of little shabby bottles containing the poisons used in medicine which I keep under lock and key. Come to the kitchen, ladies, and honor me with your advice on domestic matters below stairs." He glanced again at Miss Gwilt as the company crossed the hall, with a look which said plainly, "Wait here."

In another quarter of an hour the doctor had expounded his views on cookery and diet, and the visitors (duly furnished with prospectuses) were taking leave of him at the door. "Quite an intellectual treat!" they said to each other, as they streamed out again in neatly dressed procession through the iron gates. "And what a very superior man!"

The doctor turned back to the Dispensary, humming absently to himself, and failing entirely to observe the corner of the hall in which Miss Gwilt stood retired. After an instant's hesitation, she followed him. The assistant was in the room when she entered it--summoned by his employer the moment before.

"Doctor," she said, coldly and mechanically, as if she was repeating a lesson, "I am as curious as the other ladies about that pretty cabinet of yours. Now they are all gone, won't you show the inside of it to me?"

The doctor laughed in his pleasantest manner.

"The old story," he said. "Blue-Beard's locked chamber, and female curiosity! (Don't go, Benjamin, don't go.) My dear lady, what interest can you possibly have in looking at a medical bottle, simply because it happens to be a bottle of poison?"

She repeated her lesson for the second time.

"I have the interest of looking at it," she said, "and of thinking, if it got into some people's hands, of the terrible things it might do."

The doctor glanced at his assistant with a compassionate smile.

"Curious, Benjamin," he said, "the romantic view taken of these drugs of ours by the unscientific mind! My dear lady," he added, turning to Miss Gwilt, "if that is the interest you attach to looking at poisons, you needn't ask me to unlock my cabinet--you need only look about you round the shelves of this room. There are all sorts of medical liquids and substances in those bottles--most innocent, most useful in themselves--which, in combination with other substances and other liquids, become poisons as terrible and as deadly as any that I have in my cabinet under lock and key."

She looked at him for a moment, and creased to the opposite side of the room.

"Show me one," she said,

Still smiling as good-humoredly as ever, the doctor humored his nervous patient. He pointed to the bottle from which he had privately removed the yellow liquid on the previous day, and which he had filled up again with a carefully-colored imitation in the shape of a mixture of his own.

"Do you see that bottle," he said--"that plump, round, comfortable-looking bottle? Never mind the name of what is beside it; let us stick to the bottle, and distinguish it, if you like, by giving it a name of our own. Suppose we call it 'our Stout Friend'? Very good. Our Stout Friend, by himself, is a most harmless and useful medicine. He is freely dispensed every day to tens of thousands of patients all over the civilized world. He has made no romantic appearances in courts of law; he has excited no breathless interest in novels; he has played no terrifying part on the stage. There he is, an innocent, inoffensive creature, who troubles nobody with the responsibility of locking him up! But bring him into contact with something else--introduce him to the acquaintance of a certain common mineral substance, of a universally accessible kind, broken into fragments; provide yourself with

(say) six doses of our Stout Friend, and pour those doses consecutively on the fragments I have mentioned, at intervals of not less than five minutes. Quantities of little bubbles will rise at every pouring; collect the gas in those bubbles, and convey it into a closed chamber--and let Samson himself be in that closed chamber; our stout Friend will kill him in half an hour! Will kill him slowly, without his seeing anything, without his smelling anything, without his feeling anything but sleepiness. Will kill him, and tell the whole College of Surgeons nothing, if they examine him after death, but that he died of apoplexy or congestion of the lungs! What do you think of that, my dear lady, in the way of mystery and romance? Is our harmless Stout Friend as interesting now as if he rejoiced in the terrible popular fame of the Arsenic and the Strychnine which I keep locked up there? Don't suppose I am exaggerating! Don't suppose I'm inventing a story to put you off with, as the children say. Ask Benjamin there," said the doctor, appealing to his assistant, with his eyes fixed on Miss Gwilt. "Ask Benjamin," he repeated, with the steadiest emphasis on the next words, "if six doses from that bottle, at intervals of five minutes each, would not, under the conditions I have stated, produce the results I have described?"

The Resident Dispenser, modestly admiring Miss Gwilt at a distance, started and colored up. He was plainly gratified by the little attention which had included him in the conversation.

"The doctor is quite right, ma'am," he said, addressing Miss Gwilt, with his best bow; "the production of the gas, extended over half an hour, would be quite gradual enough. And," added the Dispenser, silently appealing to his employer to let him exhibit a little chemical knowledge on his own account, "the volume of the gas would be sufficient at the end of the time--if I am not mistaken, sir?--to be fatal to any person entering the room in less than five minutes."

"Unquestionably, Benjamin," rejoined the doctor. "But I think we have had enough of chemistry for the present," he added, turning to Miss Gwilt. "With every desire, my dear lady, to gratify every passing wish you may form, I venture to propose trying a more cheerful subject. Suppose we leave the Dispensary, before it suggests any more inquiries to that active mind of yours? No? You want to see an experiment? You want to see how the little bubbles are made? Well, well! there is no harm in that. We will let Mrs. Armadale see the bubbles," continued the doctor, in the tone of a parent humoring a spoiled child. "Try if you can find a few of those fragments that we want, Benjamin. I dare say the workmen (slovenly fellows!) have left something of the sort about the house or the grounds."

The Resident Dispenser left the room.

As soon as his back was turned, the doctor began opening and shutting drawers in various parts of the Dispensary, with the air of a man who wants something in a hurry, and does not know where to find it. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, suddenly stopping at the drawer from which he had taken his cards of invitation on the previous day, "what's this? A key? A duplicate key, as I'm alive, of my fumigating apparatus upstairs! Oh dear, dear, how careless I get," said the doctor, turning round briskly to Miss Gwilt. "I hadn't the least idea that I possessed this second key. I should never have missed it. I do assure you I should never have missed it if anybody had taken it out of the drawer!" He bustled away to the other end of the room--without closing the drawer, and without taking away the duplicate key.

In silence, Miss Gwilt listened till he had done. In silence, she glided to the drawer. In silence, she took the key and hid it in her apron pocket.

The Dispenser came back, with the fragments required of him, collected in a basin. "Thank you, Benjamin," said the doctor. "Kindly cover them with water, while I get the bottle down."

As accidents sometimes happen in the most perfectly regulated families, so clumsiness sometimes possesses itself of the most perfectly disciplined hands. In the process of its transfer from the shelf to the doctor, the bottle slipped and fell smashed to pieces on the floor.

"Oh, my fingers and thumbs!" cried the doctor, with an air of comic vexation, "what in the world do you mean by playing me such a wicked trick as that? Well, well, well--it can't be helped. Have we got any more of it, Benjamin?"

"Not a drop, sir."

"Not a drop!" echoed the doctor. "My dear madam, what excuses can I offer you? My clumsiness has made our little experiment impossible for to-day. Remind me to order some more to-morrow, Benjamin, and don't think of troubling yourself to put that mess to rights. I'll send the man here to mop it all up. Our Stout Friend is harmless enough now, my dear lady--in combination with a boarded floor and a coming mop! I'm so sorry; I really am so sorry to have disappointed you." With those soothing words, he offered his arm, and led Miss Gwilt out of the Dispensary.

"Have you done with me for the present?" she asked, when they were in the hall.

"Oh, dear, dear, what a way of putting it!" exclaimed the doctor. "Dinner at six," he added, with his politest emphasis, as she turned from him in disdainful silence, and slowly mounted the stairs to her own room.

A clock of the noiseless sort--incapable of offending irritable nerves--was fixed in the wall, above the first-floor landing, at the Sanitarium. At the moment when the hands pointed to a quarter before six, the silence of the lonely upper regions was softly broken by the rustling of Miss Gwilt's dress. She advanced along the corridor of the first floor--paused at the covered apparatus fixed outside the room numbered Four--listened for a moment--and then unlocked the cover with the duplicate key.

The open lid cast a shadow over the inside of the casing. All she saw at first was what she had seen already--the jar, and the pipe and glass funnel inserted in the cork. She removed the funnel; and, looking about her, observed on the window-sill close by a wax-tipped wand used for lighting the gas. She took the wand, and, introducing it through the aperture occupied by the funnel, moved it to and fro in the jar. The faint splash of some liquid, and the grating noise of certain hard substances which she was stirring about, were the two sounds that caught her ear. She drew out the wand, and cautiously touched the wet left on it with the tip of her tongue. Caution was quite needless in this case. The liquid was--water.

In putting the funnel back in its place, she noticed something faintly shining in the obscurely lit vacant space at the side of the jar. She drew it out, and produced a Purple Flask. The liquid with which it was filled showed dark through the transparent coloring of the glass; and fastened at regular intervals down one side of the Flask were six thin strips of paper, which divided the contents into six equal parts.

There was no doubt now that the apparatus had been secretly prepared for her--the apparatus of which she alone (besides the doctor) possessed the key.

She put back the Flask, and locked the cover of the casing. For a moment she stood looking at it, with the key in her hand. On a sudden, her lost color came back. On a sudden, its natural animation returned, for the first time that day, to her face. She turned and hurried breathlessly upstairs to her room on the second floor. With eager hands she snatched her cloak out of the wardrobe, and took her bonnet from the box. "I'm not in prison!" she burst out, impetuously. "I've got the use of my limbs! I can go--no matter where, as long as I am out of this house!"

With her cloak on her shoulders, with her bonnet in her hand, she crossed the room to the door. A moment more--and she would have been out in the passage. In that moment the remembrance flashed back on her of the husband whom she had denied to his face. She stopped instantly, and threw the cloak and bonnet from her on the bed. "No!" she said; "the gulf is dug between us--the worst is done!"

There was a knock at the door. The doctor's voice outside politely reminded her that it was six o'clock.

She opened the door, and stopped him on his way downstairs.

"What time is the train due to-night?" she asked, in a whisper.

"At ten," answered the doctor, in a voice which all the world might hear, and welcome.

"What room is Mr. Armadale to have when he comes?"

"What room would you like him to have?"

"Number Four."

The doctor kept up appearances to the very last.

"Number Four let it be," he said, graciously. "Provided, of course, that Number Four is unoccupied at the time."

* * * * *

The evening wore on, and the night came.

At a few minutes before ten, Mr. Bashwood was again at his post, once more on the watch for the coming of the tidal train.

The inspector on duty, who knew him by sight, and who had personally ascertained that his regular attendance at the terminus implied no designs on the purses and portmanteaus of the passengers, noticed two new circumstances in connection with Mr. Bashwood that night. In the first place, instead of exhibiting his customary cheerfulness, he looked anxious and depressed. In the second place, while he was watching for the train, he was to all appearance being watched in his turn, by a slim, dark, undersized

man, who had left his luggage (marked with the name of Midwinter) at the custom-house department the evening before, and who had returned to have it examined about half an hour since.

What had brought Midwinter to the terminus? And why was he, too, waiting for the tidal train?

After straying as far as Hendon during his lonely walk of the previous night, he had taken refuge at the village inn, and had fallen asleep (from sheer exhaustion) toward those later hours of the morning which were the hours that his wife's foresight had turned to account. When he returned to the lodging, the landlady could only inform him that her tenant had settled everything with her, and had left (for what destination neither she nor her servant could tell) more than two hours since.

Having given some little time to inquiries, the result of which convinced him that the clew was lost so far, Midwinter had quitted the house, and had pursued his way mechanically to the busier and more central parts of the metropolis. With the light now thrown on his wife's character, to call at the address she had given him as the address at which her mother lived would be plainly useless. He went on through the streets, resolute to discover her, and trying vainly to see the means to his end, till the sense of fatigue forced itself on him once more. Stopping to rest and recruit his strength at the first hotel he came to, a chance dispute between the waiter and a stranger about a lost portmanteau reminded him of his own luggage, left at the terminus, and instantly took his mind back to the circumstances under which he and Mr. Bashwood had met. In a moment more, the idea that he had been vainly seeking on his way through the streets flashed on him. In a moment more, he had determined to try the chance of finding the steward again on the watch for the person whose arrival he had evidently expected by the previous evening's train.

Ignorant of the report of Allan's death at sea; uninformed, at the terrible interview with his wife, of the purpose which her assumption of a widow's dress really had in view, Midwinter's first vague suspicions of her fidelity had now inevitably developed into the conviction that she was false. He could place but one interpretation on her open disavowal of him, and on her taking the name under which he had secretly married her. Her conduct forced the conclusion on him that she was engaged in some infamous intrigue; and that she had basely secured herself beforehand in the position of all others in which she knew it would be most odious and most repellent to him to claim his authority over her. With that conviction he was now watching Mr. Bashwood, firmly persuaded that his wife's hiding-place was

known to the vile servant of his wife's vices; and darkly suspecting, as the time wore on, that the unknown man who had wronged him, and the unknown traveler for whose arrival the steward was waiting, were one and the same.

The train was late that night, and the carriages were more than usually crowded when they arrived at last. Midwinter became involved in the confusion on the platform, and in the effort to extricate himself he lost sight of Mr. Bashwood for the first time.

A lapse of some few minutes had passed before he again discovered the steward talking eagerly to a man in a loose shaggy coat, whose back was turned toward him. Forgetful of all the cautions and restraints which he had imposed on himself before the train appeared, Midwinter instantly advanced on them. Mr. Bashwood saw his threatening face as he came on, and fell back in silence. The man in the loose coat turned to look where the steward was looking, and disclosed to Midwinter, in the full light of the station-lamp, Allan's face!

For the moment they both stood speechless, hand in hand, looking at each other. Allan was the first to recover himself.

"Thank God for this!" he said, fervently. "I don't ask how you came here: it's enough for me that you have come. Miserable news has met me already, Midwinter. Nobody but you can comfort me, and help me to bear it." His voice faltered over those last words, and he said no more.

The tone in which he had spoken roused Midwinter to meet the circumstances as they were, by appealing to the old grateful interest in his friend which had once been the foremost interest of his life. He mastered his personal misery for the first time since it had fallen on him, and gently taking Allan aside, asked what had happened.

The answer--after informing him of his friend's reported death at sea--announced (on Mr. Bashwood's authority) that the news had reached Miss Milroy, and that the deplorable result of the shock thus inflicted had obliged the major to place his daughter in the neighborhood of London, under medical care.

Before saying a word on his side, Midwinter looked distrustfully behind him. Mr. Bashwood had followed them. Mr. Bashwood was watching to see what they did next.

"Was he waiting your arrival here to tell you this about Miss Milroy?" asked Midwinter, looking again from the steward to Allan.

"Yes," said Allan. "He has been kindly waiting here, night after night, to meet me, and break the news to me."

Midwinter paused once more. The attempt to reconcile the conclusion he had drawn from his wife's conduct with the discovery that Allan was the man for whose arrival Mr. Bashwood had been waiting was hopeless. The one present chance of discovering a truer solution of the mystery was to press the steward on the one available point in which he had laid himself open to attack. He had positively denied on the previous evening that he knew anything of Allan's movements, or that he had any interest in Allan's return to England. Having detected Mr. Bashwood in one lie told to himself. Midwinter instantly suspected him of telling another to Allan. He seized the opportunity of sifting the statement about Miss Milroy on the spot.

"How have you become acquainted with this sad news?" he inquired, turning suddenly on Mr. Bashwood.

"Through the major, of course," said Allan, before the steward could answer.

"Who is the doctor who has the care of Miss Milroy?" persisted Midwinter, still addressing Mr. Bashwood.

For the second time the steward made no reply. For the second time, Allan answered for him.

"He is a man with a foreign name," said Allan. "He keeps a Sanitarium near Hampstead. What did you say the place was called, Mr. Bashwood?"

"Fairweather Vale, sir," said the steward, answering his employer, as a matter of necessity, but answering very unwillingly.

The address of the Sanitarium instantly reminded Midwinter that he had traced his wife to Fairweather Vale Villas the previous night. He began to see light through the darkness, dimly, for the first time. The instinct which comes with emergency, before the slower process of reason can assert itself, brought him at a leap to the conclusion that Mr. Bashwood--who had been certainly acting under his wife's influence the previous day--might be acting again under his wife's influence now. He persisted in sifting the steward's statement, with the conviction growing firmer and firmer in his mind that the statement was a lie, and that his wife was concerned in it.

"Is the major in Norfolk?" he asked, "or is he near his daughter in London?"

"In Norfolk," said Mr. Bashwood. Having answered Allan's look of inquiry, instead of Midwinter's spoken question, in those words, he hesitated, looked Midwinter in the face for the first time, and added, suddenly: "I object, if you please, to be cross-examined, sir. I know what I have told Mr. Armadale, and I know no more."

The words, and the voice in which they were spoken, were alike at variance with Mr. Bashwood's usual language and Mr. Bashwood's usual tone. There was a sullen depression in his face--there was a furtive distrust and dislike in his eyes when they looked at Midwinter, which Midwinter himself now noticed for the first time. Before he could answer the steward's extraordinary outbreak, Allan interfered.

"Don't think me impatient," he said; "but it's getting late; it's a long way to Hampstead. I'm afraid the Sanitarium will be shut up."

Midwinter started. "You are not going to the Sanitarium to-night!" he exclaimed.

Allan took his friend's hand and wrung it hard. "If you were as fond of her as I am," he whispered, "you would take no rest, you could get no sleep, till you had seen the doctor, and heard the best and the worst he had to tell you. Poor dear little soul! who knows, if she could only see me alive and well--" The tears came into his eyes, and he turned away his head in silence.

Midwinter looked at the steward. "Stand back," he said. "I want to speak to Mr. Armadale." There was something in his eye which it was not safe to trifle with. Mr. Bashwood drew back out of hearing, but not out of sight. Midwinter laid his hand fondly on his friend's shoulder.

"Allan," he said, "I have reasons--" He stopped. Could the reasons be given before he had fairly realized them himself; at that time, too, and under those circumstances? Impossible! "I have reasons," he resumed, "for advising you not to believe too readily what Mr. Bashwood may say. Don't tell him this, but take the warning."

Allan looked at his friend in astonishment. "It was you who always liked Mr. Bashwood!" he exclaimed. "It was you who trusted him, when he first came to the great house!"

"Perhaps I was wrong, Allan, and perhaps you were right. Will you only wait till we can telegraph to Major Milroy and get his answer? Will you only wait over the night?"

"I shall go mad if I wait over the night," said Allan. "You have made me more anxious than I was before. If I am not to speak about it to Bashwood, I must and will go to the Sanitarium, and find out whether she is or is not there, from the doctor himself."

Midwinter saw that it was useless. In Allan's interests there was only one other course left to take. "Will you let me go with you?" he asked.

Allan's face brightened for the first time. "You dear, good fellow!" he exclaimed. "It was the very thing I was going to beg of you myself."

Midwinter beckoned to the steward. "Mr. Armadale is going to the Sanitarium," he said, "and I mean to accompany him. Get a cab and come with us."

He waited, to see whether Mr. Bashwood would comply. Having been strictly ordered, when Allan did arrive, not to lose sight of him, and having, in his own interests, Midwinter's unexpected appearance to explain to Miss Gwilt, the steward had no choice but to comply. In sullen submission he did as he had been told. The keys of Allan's baggage was given to the foreign traveling servant whom he had brought with him, and the man was instructed to wait his master's orders at the terminus hotel. In a minute more the cab was on its way out of the station--with Midwinter and Allan inside, and Mr. Bashwood by the driver on the box.

* * * * *

Between eleven and twelve o'clock that night, Miss Gwilt, standing alone at the window which lit the corridor of the Sanitarium on the second floor, heard the roll of wheels coming toward her. The sound, gathering rapidly in volume through the silence of the lonely neighborhood, stopped at the iron gates. In another minute she saw the cab draw up beneath her, at the house door.

The earlier night had been cloudy, but the sky was clearing now and the moon was out. She opened the window to see and hear more clearly. By the light of the moon she saw Allan get out of the cab, and turn round to speak to some other person inside. The answering voice told her, before he appeared in his turn, that Armadale's companion was her husband.

The same petrifying influence that had fallen on her at the interview with him of the previous day fell on her now. She stood by the window, white and still, and haggard and old--as she had stood when she first faced him in her widow's weeds.

Mr. Bashwood, stealing up alone to the second floor to make his report, knew, the instant he set eyes on her, that the report was needless. "It's not my fault," was all he said, as she slowly turned her head and looked at him. "They met together, and there was no parting them."

She drew a long breath, and motioned him to be silent. "Wait a little," she said; "I know all about it."

Turning from him at those words, she slowly paced the corridor to its furthest end; turned, and slowly came back to him with frowning brow and drooping head--with all the grace and beauty gone from her, but the inbred grace and beauty in the movement of her limbs.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" she asked; her mind far away from him, and her eyes looking at him vacantly as she put the question.

He roused his courage as he had never roused it in her presence yet.

"Don't drive me to despair!" he cried, with a startling abruptness. "Don't look at me in that way, now I have found it out!"

"What have you found out?" she asked, with a momentary surprise on her face, which faded from it again before he could gather breath enough to go on.

"Mr. Armadale is not the man who took you away from me," he answered. "Mr. Midwinter is the man. I found it out in your face yesterday. I see it in your face now. Why did you sign your name 'Armadale' when you wrote to me? Why do you call yourself 'Mrs. Armadale' still?"

He spoke those bold words at long intervals, with an effort to resist her influence over him, pitiable and terrible to see.

She looked at him for the first time with softened eyes. "I wish I had pitied you when we first met," she said, gently, "as I pity you now."

He struggled desperately to go on and say the words to her which he had

strung himself to the pitch of saying on the drive from the terminus. They were words which hinted darkly at his knowledge of her past life; words which warned her--do what else she might, commit what crimes she pleased--to think twice before she deceived and deserted him again. In those terms he had vowed to himself to address her. He had the phrases picked and chosen; he had the sentences ranged and ordered in his mind; nothing was wanting but to make the one crowning effort of speaking them--and, even now, after all he had said and all he had dared, the effort was more than he could compass! In helpless gratitude, even for so little as her pity, he stood looking at her, and wept the silent, womanish tears that fall from old men's eyes.

She took his hand and spoke to him--with marked forbearance, but without the slightest sign of emotion on her side.

"You have waited already at my request," she said. "Wait till to-morrow, and you will know all. If you trust nothing else that I have told you, you may trust what I tell you now. It will end to-night."

As she said the words, the doctor's step was heard on the stairs. Mr. Bashwood drew back from her, with his heart beating fast in unutterable expectation. "It will end to-night!" he repeated to himself, under his breath, as he moved away toward the far end of the corridor.

"Don't let me disturb you, sir," said the doctor, cheerfully, as they met. "I have nothing to say to Mrs. Armadale but what you or anybody may hear."

Mr. Bashwood went on, without answering, to the far end of the corridor, still repeating to himself: "It will end to-night!" The doctor, passing him in the opposite direction, joined Miss Gwilt.

"You have heard, no doubt," he began, in his blandest manner and his roundest tones, "that Mr. Armadale has arrived. Permit me to add, my dear lady, that there is not the least reason for any nervous agitation on your part. He has been carefully humored, and he is as quiet and manageable as his best friends could wish. I have informed him that it is impossible to allow him an interview with the young lady to-night; but that he may count on seeing her (with the proper precautions) at the earliest propitious hour, after she is awake to-morrow morning. As there is no hotel near, and as the propitious hour may occur at a moment's notice, it was clearly incumbent on me, under the peculiar circumstances, to offer him the hospitality of the Sanitarium. He has accepted it with the utmost gratitude; and has thanked me in a most gentlemanly and touching manner for the pains I have taken

to set his mind at ease. Perfectly gratifying, perfectly satisfactory, so far! But there has been a little hitch--now happily got over--which I think it right to mention to you before we all retire for the night."

Having paved the way in those words (and in Mr. Bashwood's hearing) for the statement which he had previously announced his intention of making, in the event of Allan's dying in the Sanitarium, the doctor was about to proceed, when his attention was attracted by a sound below like the trying of a door.

He instantly descended the stairs, and unlocked the door of communication between the first and second floors, which he had locked behind him on his way up. But the person who had tried the door--if such a person there really had been--was too quick for him. He looked along the corridor, and over the staircase into the hall, and, discovering nothing, returned to Miss Gwilt, after securing the door of communication behind him once more.

"Pardon me," he resumed, "I thought I heard something downstairs. With regard to the little hitch that I adverted to just now, permit me to inform you that Mr. Armadale has brought a friend here with him, who bears the strange name of Midwinter. Do you know the gentleman at all?" asked the doctor, with a suspicious anxiety in his eyes, which strangely belied the elaborate indifference of his tone.

"I know him to be an old friend of Mr. Armadale's," she said. "Does he--?" Her voice failed her, and her eyes fell before the doctor's steady scrutiny. She mastered the momentary weakness, and finished her question. "Does he, too, stay here to-night?"

"Mr. Midwinter is a person of coarse manners and suspicious temper," rejoined the doctor, steadily watching her. "He was rude enough to insist on staying here as soon as Mr. Armadale had accepted my invitation."

He paused to note the effect of those words on her. Left utterly in the dark by the caution with which she had avoided mentioning her husband's assumed name to him at their first interview, the doctor's distrust of her was necessarily of the vaguest kind. He had heard her voice fail her--he had seen her color change. He suspected her of a mental reservation on the subject of Midwinter--and of nothing more.

"Did you permit him to have his way?" she asked. "In your place, I should have shown him the door."

The impenetrable composure of her tone warned the doctor that her self-command was not to be further shaken that night. He resumed the character of Mrs. Armadale's medical referee on the subject of Mr. Armadale's mental health.

"If I had only had my own feelings to consult," he said, "I don't disguise from you that I should (as you say) have shown Mr. Midwinter the door. But on appealing to Mr. Armadale, I found he was himself anxious not to be parted from his friend. Under those circumstances, but one alternative was left--the alternative of humoring him again. The responsibility of thwarting him--to say nothing," added the doctor, drifting for a moment toward the truth, "of my natural apprehension, with such a temper as his friend's, of a scandal and disturbance in the house--was not to be thought of for a moment. Mr. Midwinter accordingly remains here for the night; and occupies (I ought to say, insists on occupying) the next room to Mr. Armadale. Advise me, my dear madam, in this emergency," concluded the doctor, with his loudest emphasis. "What rooms shall we put them in, on the first floor?"

"Put Mr. Armadale in Number Four."

"And his friend next to him, in Number Three?" said the doctor. "Well! well! well! perhaps they are the most comfortable rooms. I'll give my orders immediately. Don't hurry away, Mr. Bashwood," he called out, cheerfully, as he reached the top of the staircase. "I have left the assistant physician's key on the window-sill yonder, and Mrs. Armadale can let you out at the staircase door whenever she pleases. Don't sit up late, Mrs. Armadale! Yours is a nervous system that requires plenty of sleep. 'Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep.' Grand line! God bless you--good-night!"

Mr. Bashwood came back from the far end of the corridor--still pondering, in unutterable expectation, on what was to come with the night.

"Am I to go now?" he asked.

"No. You are to stay. I said you should know all if you waited till the morning. Wait here."

He hesitated, and looked about him. "The doctor," he faltered. "I thought the doctor said--"

"The doctor will interfere with nothing that I do in this house to-night. I tell you to stay. There are empty rooms on the floor above this. Take one of them."

Mr. Bashwood felt the trembling fit coming on him again as he looked at her. "May I ask--?" he began.

"Ask nothing. I want you."

"Will you please to tell me--?"

"I will tell you nothing till the night is over and the morning has come."

His curiosity conquered his fear. He persisted.

"Is it something dreadful?" he whispered. "Too dreadful to tell me?"

She stamped her foot with a sudden outbreak of impatience. "Go!" she said, snatching the key of the staircase door from the window-sill. "You do quite right to distrust me--you do quite right to follow me no further in the dark. Go before the house is shut up. I can do without you." She led the way to the stairs, with the key in one hand, and the candle in the other.

Mr. Bashwood followed her in silence. No one, knowing what he knew of her earlier life, could have failed to perceive that she was a woman driven to the last extremity, and standing consciously on the brink of a Crime. In the first terror of the discovery, he broke free from the hold she had on him: he thought and acted like a man who had a will of his own again.

She put the key in the door, and turned to him before she opened it, with the light of the candle on her face. "Forget me, and forgive me," she said. "We meet no more."

She opened the door, and, standing inside it, after he had passed her, gave him her hand. He had resisted her look, he had resisted her words, but the magnetic fascination of her touch conquered him at the final moment. "I can't leave you!" he said, holding helplessly by the hand she had given him. "What must I do?"

"Come and see," she answered, without allowing him an instant to reflect.

Closing her hand firmly on his, she led him along the first floor corridor to the room numbered Four. "Notice that room," she whispered. After a look over the stairs to see that they were alone, she retraced her steps with him to the opposite extremity of the corridor. Here, facing the window which lit the place at the other end, was one little room, with a narrow grating in the

higher part of the door, intended for the sleeping apartment of the doctor's deputy. From the position of this room, the grating commanded a view of the bed-chambers down each side of the corridor, and so enabled the deputy-physician to inform himself of any irregular proceedings on the part of the patients under his care, with little or no chance of being detected in watching them. Miss Gwilt opened the door and led the way into the empty room.

"Wait here," she said, "while I go back upstairs; and lock yourself in, if you like. You will be in the dark, but the gas will be burning in the corridor. Keep at the grating, and make sure that Mr. Armadale goes into the room I have just pointed out to you, and that he doesn't leave it afterward. If you lose sight of the room for a single moment before I come back, you will repent it to the end of your life. If you do as I tell you, you shall see me to-morrow, and claim your own reward. Quick with your answer! Is it Yes or No?"

He could make no reply in words. He raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it rapturously. She left him in the room. From his place at the grating he saw her glide down the corridor to the staircase door. She passed through it, and locked it. Then there was silence.

The next sound was the sound of the women-servants' voices. Two of them came up to put the sheets on the beds in Number Three and Number Four. The women were in high good-humor, laughing and talking to each other through the open doors of the rooms. The master's customers were coming in at last, they said, with a vengeance; the house would soon begin to look cheerful, if things went on like this.

After a little, the beds were got ready and the women returned to the kitchen floor, on which the sleeping-rooms of the domestic servants were all situated. Then there was silence again.

The next sound was the sound of the doctor's voice. He appeared at the end of the corridor, showing Allan and Midwinter the way to their rooms. They all went together into Number Four. After a little, the doctor came out first. He waited till Midwinter joined him, and pointed with a formal bow to the door of Number Three. Midwinter entered the room without speaking, and shut himself in. The doctor, left alone, withdrew to the staircase door and unlocked it, then waited in the corridor, whistling to himself softly, under his breath.

Voices pitched cautiously low became audible in a minute more in the hall.

The Resident Dispenser and the Head Nurse appeared, on their way to the dormitories of the attendants at the top of the house. The man bowed silently, and passed the doctor; the woman courtesied silently, and followed the man. The doctor acknowledged their salutations by a courteous wave of his hand; and, once more left alone, paused a moment, still whistling softly to himself, then walked to the door of Number Four, and opened the case of the fumigating apparatus fixed near it in the corner of the wall. As he lifted the lid and looked in, his whistling ceased. He took a long purple bottle out, examined it by the gas-light, put it back, and closed the case. This done, he advanced on tiptoe to the open staircase door, passed through it, and secured it on the inner side as usual.

Mr. Bashwood had seen him at the apparatus; Mr. Bashwood had noticed the manner of his withdrawal through the staircase door. Again the sense of an unutterable expectation throbbed at his heart. A terror that was slow and cold and deadly crept into his hands, and guided them in the dark to the key that had been left for him in the inner side of the door. He turned it in vague distrust of what might happen next, and waited.

The slow minutes passed, and nothing happened. The silence was horrible; the solitude of the lonely corridor was a solitude of invisible treacheries. He began to count to keep his mind employed--to keep his own growing dread away from him. The numbers, as he whispered them, followed each other slowly up to a hundred, and still nothing happened. He had begun the second hundred; he had got on to twenty--when, without a sound to betray that he had been moving in his room, Midwinter suddenly appeared in the corridor.

He stood for a moment and listened; he went to the stairs and looked over into the hall beneath. Then, for the second time that night, he tried the staircase door, and for the second time found it fast. After a moment's reflection, he tried the doors of the bedrooms on his right hand next, looked into one after the other, and saw that they were empty, then came to the door of the end room in which the steward was concealed. Here, again, the lock resisted him. He listened, and looked up at the grating. No sound was to be heard, no light was to be seen inside. "Shall I break the door in," he said to himself, "and make sure? No; it would be giving the doctor an excuse for turning me out of the house." He moved away, and looked into the two empty rooms in the row occupied by Allan and himself, then walked to the window at the staircase end of the corridor. Here the case of the fumigating apparatus attracted his attention. After trying vainly to open it, his suspicion seemed to be aroused. He searched back along the corridor, and observed that no object of a similar kind appeared outside any of the other

bed-chambers. Again at the window, he looked again at the apparatus, and turned away from it with a gesture which plainly indicated that he had tried, and failed, to guess what it might be.

Baffled at all points, he still showed no sign of returning to his bed-chamber. He stood at the window, with his eyes fixed on the door of Allan's room, thinking. If Mr. Bashwood, furtively watching him through the grating, could have seen him at that moment in the mind as well as in the body, Mr. Bashwood's heart might have throbbed even faster than it was throbbing now, in expectation of the next event which Midwinter's decision of the next minute was to bring forth.

On what was his mind occupied as he stood alone, at the dead of night, in the strange house?

His mind was occupied in drawing its disconnected impressions together, little by little, to one point. Convinced from the first that some hidden danger threatened Allan in the Sanitarium, his distrust--vaguely associated, thus far, with the place itself; with his wife (whom he firmly believed to be now under the same roof with him); with the doctor, who was as plainly in her confidence as Mr. Bashwood himself--now narrowed its range, and centered itself obstinately in Allan's room. Resigning all further effort to connect his suspicion of a conspiracy against his friend with the outrage which had the day before been offered to himself--an effort which would have led him, if he could have maintained it, to a discovery of the fraud really contemplated by his wife--his mind, clouded and confused by disturbing influences, instinctively took refuge in its impressions of facts as they had shown themselves since he had entered the house. Everything that he had noticed below stairs suggested that there was some secret purpose to be answered by getting Allan to sleep in the Sanitarium. Everything that he had noticed above stairs associated the lurking-place in which the danger lay hid with Allan's room. To reach this conclusion, and to decide on baffling the conspiracy, whatever it might be, by taking Allan's place, was with Midwinter the work of an instant. Confronted by actual peril, the great nature of the man intuitively freed itself from the weaknesses that had beset it in happier and safer times. Not even the shadow of the old superstition rested on his mind now--no fatalist suspicion of himself disturbed the steady resolution that was in him. The one last doubt that troubled him, as he stood at the window thinking, was the doubt whether he could persuade Allan to change rooms with him, without involving himself in an explanation which might lead Allan to suspect the truth.

In the minute that elapsed, while he waited with his eyes on the room, the

doubt was resolved--he found the trivial, yet sufficient, excuse of which he was in search. Mr. Bashwood saw him rouse himself and go to the door. Mr. Bashwood heard him knock softly, and whisper, "Allan, are you in bed?"

"No," answered the voice inside; "come in."

He appeared to be on the point of entering the room, when he checked himself as if he had suddenly remembered something. "Wait a minute," he said, through the door, and, turning away, went straight to the end room. "If there is anybody watching us in there," he said aloud, "let him watch us through this!" He took out his handkerchief, and stuffed it into the wires of the grating, so as completely to close the aperture. Having thus forced the spy inside (if there was one) either to betray himself by moving the handkerchief, or to remain blinded to all view of what might happen next, Midwinter presented himself in Allan's room.

"You know what poor nerves I have," he said, "and what a wretched sleeper I am at the best of times. I can't sleep to-night. The window in my room rattles every time the wind blows. I wish it was as fast as your window here."

"My dear fellow!" cried Allan, "I don't mind a rattling window. Let's change rooms. Nonsense! Why should you make excuses to me? Don't I know how easily trifles upset those excitable nerves of yours? Now the doctor has quieted my mind about my poor little Neelie, I begin to feel the journey; and I'll answer for sleeping anywhere till to-morrow comes." He took up his traveling-bag. "We must be quick about it," he added, pointing to his candle. "They haven't left me much candle to go to bed by."

"Be very quiet, Allan," said Midwinter, opening the door for him. "We mustn't disturb the house at this time of night."

"Yes, yes," returned Allan, in a whisper. "Good-night; I hope you'll sleep as well as I shall."

Midwinter saw him into Number Three, and noticed that his own candle (which he had left there) was as short as Allan's. "Good-night," he said, and came out again into the corridor.

He went straight to the grating, and looked and listened once more. The handkerchief remained exactly as he had left it, and still there was no sound to be heard within. He returned slowly along the corridor, and thought of the precautions he had taken, for the last time. Was there no other way than the way he was trying now? There was none. Any openly avowed posture of

defense--while the nature of the danger, and the quarter from which it might come, were alike unknown--would be useless in itself, and worse than useless in the consequences which it might produce by putting the people of the house on their guard. Without a fact that could justify to other minds his distrust of what might happen with the night, incapable of shaking Allan's ready faith in the fair outside which the doctor had presented to him, the one safeguard in his friend's interests that Midwinter could set up was the safeguard of changing the rooms--the one policy he could follow, come what might of it, was the policy of waiting for events. "I can trust to one thing," he said to himself, as he looked for the last time up and down the corridor--"I can trust myself to keep awake."

After a glance at the clock on the wall opposite, he went into Number Four. The sound of the closing door was heard, the sound of the turning lock followed it. Then the dead silence fell over the house once more.

Little by little, the steward's horror of the stillness and the darkness overcame his dread of moving the handkerchief. He cautiously drew aside one corner of it, waited, looked, and took courage at last to draw the whole handkerchief through the wires of the grating. After first hiding it in his pocket, he thought of the consequences if it was found on him, and threw it down in a corner of the room. He trembled when he had cast it from him, as he looked at his watch and placed himself again at the grating to wait for Miss Gwilt.

It was a quarter to one. The moon had come round from the side to the front of the Sanitarium. From time to time her light gleamed on the window of the corridor when the gaps in the flying clouds let it through. The wind had risen, and sung its mournful song faintly, as it swept at intervals over the desert ground in front of the house.

The minute hand of the clock traveled on halfway round the circle of the dial. As it touched the quarter-past one, Miss Gwilt stepped noiselessly into the corridor. "Let yourself out," she whispered through the grating, "and follow me." She returned to the stairs by which she had just descended, pushed the door to softly after Mr. Bashwood had followed her and led the way up to the landing of the second floor. There she put the question to him which she had not ventured to put below stairs.

"Was Mr. Armadale shown into Number Four?" she asked.

He bowed his head without speaking.

"Answer me in words. Has Mr. Armadale left the room since?"

He answered, "No."

"Have you never lost sight of Number Four since I left you?"

He answered, "Never!"

Something strange in his manner, something unfamiliar in his voice, as he made that last reply, attracted her attention. She took her candle from a table near, on which she had left it, and threw its light on him. His eyes were staring, his teeth chattered. There was everything to betray him to her as a terrified man; there was nothing to tell her that the terror was caused by his consciousness of deceiving her, for the first time in his life, to her face. If she had threatened him less openly when she placed him on the watch; if she had spoken less unreservedly of the interview which was to reward him in the morning, he might have owned the truth. As it was, his strongest fears and his dearest hopes were alike interested in telling her the fatal lie that he had now told--the fatal lie which he reiterated when she put her question for the second time.

She looked at him, deceived by the last man on earth whom she would have suspected of deception--the man whom she had deceived herself.

"You seem to be overexcited," she said quietly. "The night has been too much for you. Go upstairs, and rest. You will find the door of one of the rooms left open. That is the room you are to occupy. Good-night."

She put the candle (which she had left burning for him) on the table, and gave him her hand. He held her back by it desperately as she turned to leave him. His horror of what might happen when she was left by herself forced the words to his lips which he would have feared to speak to her at any other time.

"Don't," he pleaded, in a whisper; "oh, don't, don't, don't go downstairs to-night!"

She released her hand, and signed to him to take the candle. "You shall see me to-morrow," she said. "Not a word more now!"

Her stronger will conquered him at that last moment, as it had conquered him throughout. He took the candle and waited, following her eagerly with his eyes as she descended the stairs. The cold of the December night seemed

to have found its way to her through the warmth of the house. She had put on a long, heavy black shawl, and had fastened it close over her breast. The plaited coronet in which she wore her hair seemed to have weighed too heavily on her head. She had untwisted it, and thrown it back over her shoulders. The old man looked at her flowing hair, as it lay red over the black shawl--at her supple, long-fingered hand, as it slid down the banisters--at the smooth, seductive grace of every movement that took her further and further away from him. "The night will go quickly," he said to himself, as she passed from his view; "I shall dream of her till the morning comes!"

She secured the staircase door, after she had passed through it--listened, and satisfied herself that nothing was stirring--then went on slowly along the corridor to the window. Leaning on the window-sill, she looked out at the night. The clouds were over the moon at that moment; nothing was to be seen through the darkness but the scattered gas-lights in the suburb. Turning from the window, she looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past one.

For the last time, the resolution that had come to her in the earlier night, with the knowledge that her husband was in the house, forced itself uppermost in her mind. For the last time, the voice within her said, "Think if there is no other way!"

She pondered over it till the minute-hand of the clock pointed to the half-hour. "No!" she said, still thinking of her husband. "The one chance left is to go through with it to the end. He will leave the thing undone which he has come here to do; he will leave the words unspoken which he has come here to say--when he knows that the act may make me a public scandal, and that the words may send me to the scaffold!" Her color rose, and she smiled with a terrible irony as she looked for the first time at the door of the Room. "I shall be your widow," she said, "in half an hour!"

She opened the case of the apparatus and took the Purple Flask in her hand. After marking the time by a glance at the clock, she dropped into the glass funnel the first of the six separate Pourings that were measured for her by the paper slips.

When she had put the Flask back, she listened at the mouth of the funnel. Not a sound reached her ear: the deadly process did its work in the silence of death itself. When she rose and looked up the moon was shining in at the window, and the moaning wind was quiet.

Oh, the time! the time! If it could only have been begun and ended with the first Pouring!

She went downstairs into the hall; she walked to and fro, and listened at the open door that led to the kitchen stairs. She came up again; she went down again. The first of the intervals of five minutes was endless. The time stood still. The suspense was maddening.

The interval passed. As she took the Flask for the second time, and dropped in the second Pouring, the clouds floated over the moon, and the night view through the window slowly darkened.

The restlessness that had driven her up and down the stairs, and backward and forward in the hall, left her as suddenly as it had come. She waited through the second interval, leaning on the window-sill, and staring, without conscious thought of any kind, into the black night. The howling of a belated dog was borne toward her on the wind, at intervals, from some distant part of the suburb. She found herself following the faint sound as it died away into silence with a dull attention, and listening for its coming again with an expectation that was duller still. Her arms lay like lead on the window-sill; her forehead rested against the glass without feeling the cold. It was not till the moon struggled out again that she was startled into sudden self-remembrance. She turned quickly, and looked at the clock; seven minutes had passed since the second Pouring.

As she snatched up the Flask, and fed the funnel for the third time, the full consciousness of her position came back to her. The fever-heat throbbed again in her blood, and flushed fiercely in her cheeks. Swift, smooth, and noiseless, she paced from end to end of the corridor, with her arms folded in her shawl and her eye moment after moment on the clock.

Three out of the next five minutes passed, and again the suspense began to madden her. The space in the corridor grew too confined for the illimitable restlessness that possessed her limbs. She went down into the hall again, and circled round and round it like a wild creature in a cage. At the third turn, she felt something moving softly against her dress. The house-cat had come up through the open kitchen door--a large, tawny, companionable cat that purred in high good temper, and followed her for company. She took the animal up in her arms--it rubbed its sleek head luxuriously against her chin as she bent her face over it. "Armadale hates cats," she whispered in the creature's ear. "Come up and see Armadale killed!" The next moment her own frightful fancy horrified her. She dropped the cat with a shudder; she drove it below again with threatening hands. For a moment after, she stood

still, then in headlong haste suddenly mounted the stairs. Her husband had forced his way back again into her thoughts; her husband threatened her with a danger which had never entered her mind till now. What if he were not asleep? What if he came out upon her, and found her with the Purple Flask in her hand?

She stole to the door of Number Three and listened. The slow, regular breathing of a sleeping man was just audible. After waiting a moment to let the feeling of relief quiet her, she took a step toward Number Four, and checked herself. It was needless to listen at that door. The doctor had told her that Sleep came first, as certainly as Death afterward, in the poisoned air. She looked aside at the clock. The time had come for the fourth Pouring.

Her hand began to tremble violently as she fed the funnel for the fourth time. The fear of her husband was back again in her heart. What if some noise disturbed him before the sixth Pouring? What if he woke on a sudden (as she had often seen him wake) without any noise at all? She looked up and down the corridor. The end room, in which Mr. Bashwood had been concealed, offered itself to her as a place of refuge. "I might go in there!" she thought. "Has he left the key?" She opened the door to look, and saw the handkerchief thrown down on the floor. Was it Mr. Bashwood's handkerchief, left there by accident? She examined it at the corners. In the second corner she found her husband's name!

Her first impulse hurried her to the staircase door, to rouse the steward and insist on an explanation. The next moment she remembered the Purple Flask, and the danger of leaving the corridor. She turned, and looked at the door of Number Three. Her husband, on the evidence of the handkerchief had unquestionably been out of his room--and Mr. Bashwood had not told her. Was he in his room now? In the violence of her agitation, as the question passed through her mind, she forgot the discovery which she had herself made not a minute before. Again she listened at the door; again she heard the slow, regular breathing of the sleeping man. The first time the evidence of her ears had been enough to quiet her; this time, in the tenfold aggravation of her suspicion and her alarm, she was determined to have the evidence of her eyes as well. "All the doors open softly in this house," she said to herself; "there's no fear of my waking him." Noiselessly, by an inch at a time, she opened the unlocked door, and looked in the moment the aperture was wide enough. In the little light she had let into the room, the sleeper's head was just visible on the pillow. Was it quite as dark against the white pillow as her husband's head looked when he was in bed? Was the breathing as light as her husband's breathing when he was asleep?

She opened the door more widely, and looked in by the clearer light.

There lay the man whose life she had attempted for the third time, peacefully sleeping in the room that had been given to her husband, and in the air that could harm nobody!

The inevitable conclusion overwhelmed her on the instant. With a frantic upward action of her hands she staggered back into the passage. The door of Allan's room fell to, but not noisily enough to wake him. She turned as she heard it close. For one moment she stood staring at it like a woman stupefied. The next, her instinct rushed into action, before her reason recovered itself. In two steps she was at the door of Number Four.

The door was locked.

She felt over the wall with both hands, wildly and clumsily, for the button which she had seen the doctor press when he was showing the room to the visitors. Twice she missed it. The third time her eyes helped her hands; she found the button and pressed on it. The mortise of the lock inside fell back, and the door yielded to her.

Without an instant's hesitation she entered the room. Though the door was open--though so short a time had elapsed since the fourth Pouring that but little more than half the contemplated volume of gas had been produced as yet--the poisoned air seized her, like the grasp of a hand at her throat, like the twisting of a wire round her head. She found him on the floor at the foot of the bed: his head and one arm were toward the door, as if he had risen under the first feeling of drowsiness, and had sunk in the effort to leave the room. With the desperate concentration of strength of which women are capable in emergencies, she lifted him and dragged him out into the corridor. Her brain reeled as she laid him down, and crawled back on her knees to the room to shut out the poisoned air from pursuing them into the passage. After closing the door, she waited, without daring to look at him the while, for strength enough to rise and get to the window over the stairs. When the window was opened, when the keen air of the early winter morning blew steadily in, she ventured back to him and raised his head, and looked for the first time closely at his face.

Was it death that spread the livid pallor over his forehead and his cheeks, and the dull leaden hue on his eyelids and his lips?

She loosened his cravat and opened his waistcoat, and bared his throat and breast to the air. With her hand on his heart, with her bosom supporting his

head, so that he fronted the window, she waited the event. A time passed: a time short enough to be reckoned by minutes on the clock; and yet long enough to take her memory back over all her married life with him--long enough to mature the resolution that now rose in her mind as the one result that could come of the retrospect. As her eyes rested on him, a strange composure settled slowly on her face. She bore the look of a woman who was equally resigned to welcome the chance of his recovery, or to accept the certainty of his death.

Not a cry or a tear had escaped her yet. Not a cry or a tear escaped her when the interval had passed, and she felt the first faint fluttering of his heart, and heard the first faint catching of the breath of his lips. She silently bent over him and kissed his forehead. When she looked up again, the hard despair had melted from her face. There was something softly radiant in her eyes, which lit her whole countenance as with an inner light, and made her womanly and lovely once more.

She laid him down, and, taking off her shawl, made a pillow of it to support his head. "It might have been hard, love," she said, as she felt the faint pulsation strengthening at his heart. "You have made it easy now."

She rose, and, turning from him, noticed the Purple Flask in the place where she had left it since the fourth Pouring. "Ah," she thought, quietly, "I had forgotten my best friend--I had forgotten that there is more to pour in yet."

With a steady hand, with a calm, attentive face, she fed the funnel for the fifth time. "Five minutes more," she said, when she had put the Flask back, after a look at the clock.

She fell into thought--thought that only deepened the grave and gentle composure of her face. "Shall I write him a farewell word?" she asked herself. "Shall I tell him the truth before I leave him forever?"

Her little gold pencil-case hung with the other toys at her watch-chain. After looking about her for a moment, she knelt over her husband and put her hand into the breast-pocket of his coat.

His pocket-book was there. Some papers fell from it as she unfastened the clasp. One of them was the letter which had come to him from Mr. Brock's death-bed. She turned over the two sheets of note-paper on which the rector had written the words that had now come true, and found the last page of the last sheet a blank. On that page she wrote her farewell words, kneeling

at her husband's side.

"I am worse than the worst you can think of me. You have saved Armadale by changing rooms with him to-night; and you have saved him from me. You can guess now whose widow I should have claimed to be, if you had not preserved his life; and you will know what a wretch you married when you married the woman who writes these lines. Still, I had some innocent moments, and then I loved you dearly. Forget me, my darling, in the love of a better woman than I am. I might, perhaps, have been that better woman myself, if I had not lived a miserable life before you met with me. It matters little now. The one atonement I can make for all the wrong I have done you is the atonement of my death. It is not hard for me to die, now I know you will live. Even my wickedness has one merit--it has not prospered. I have never been a happy woman."

She folded the letter again, and put it into his hand, to attract his attention in that way when he came to himself. As she gently closed his fingers on the paper and looked up, the last minute of the last interval faced her, recorded on the clock.

She bent over him, and gave him her farewell kiss.

"Live, my angel, live!" she murmured, tenderly, with her lips just touching his. "All your life is before you--a happy life, and an honored life, if you are freed from me!"

With a last, lingering tenderness, she parted the hair back from his forehead. "It is no merit to have loved you," she said. "You are one of the men whom women all like." She sighed and left him. It was her last weakness. She bent her head affirmatively to the clock, as if it had been a living creature speaking to her; and fed the funnel for the last time, to the last drop left in the Flask.

The waning moon shone in faintly at the window. With her hand on the door of the room, she turned and looked at the light that was slowly fading out of the murky sky.

"Oh, God, forgive me!" she said. "Oh, Christ, bear witness that I have suffered!"

One moment more she lingered on the threshold; lingered for her last look in this world--and turned that look on him.

"Good-by!" she said, softly.

The door of the room opened, and closed on her. There was an interval of silence.

Then a sound came dull and sudden, like the sound of a fall.

Then there was silence again.

* * * * *

The hands of the clock, following their steady course, reckoned the minutes of the morning as one by one they lapsed away. It was the tenth minute since the door of the room had opened and closed, before Midwinter stirred on his pillow, and, struggling to raise himself, felt the letter in his hand.

At the same moment a key was turned in the staircase door. And the doctor, looking expectantly toward the fatal room, saw the Purple Flask on the window-sill, and the prostrate man trying to raise himself from the floor.