CHAPTER LXVI

Dr. Williamson was a rising young practitioner at Roxham, and what is more, a gentleman and a doctor of real ability.

On the night that Lady Bellamy took the poison he sat up very late, till the dawn, in fact, working up his books of reference with a view to making himself as much the master as possible of the symptoms and most approved treatment in such cases of insanity as appeared to resemble Angela Caresfoot's. He had been called in to see her by Mr. Fraser, and had come away intensely interested from a medical point of view, and very much puzzled.

At length he shut up his books with a sigh--for, like most books, though full of generalities, they did not tell him much--and went to bed. Before he had been asleep very long, however, the surgery bell was violently rung, and, having dressed himself with the rapidity characteristic of doctors and schoolboys, he descended to find a frightened footman waiting outside, from whom he gathered that something dreadful had happened to Lady Bellamy, who had been found lying apparently dead upon the floor of her drawing-room. Providing himself with some powerful restoratives and a portable electric battery he drove rapidly over to Rewtham House.

Here he found the patient laid upon a sofa in the room where she had been found, and surrounded by a mob of terrified and half-dressed

servants. At first he thought life was quite extinct, but presently he fancied that he could detect a faint tremor of the heart. He applied the most powerful of his restoratives and administered a sharp current from the battery, and, after a considerable time, was rewarded by seeing the patient open her eyes--but only to shut them again immediately. Directing his assistant to continue the treatment, he tried to elicit some information from the servants as to what had happened, but all he could gather was that the maid had received a message not to sit up. This made him suspicious of an attempt at suicide, and just then his eye fell upon a wineglass that lay upon the floor, broken at the shank. He took it up; in the bowl there was still a drop or two of liquid. He smelt it, then dipped his finger in and tasted it, with the result that his tongue was burnt and became rough and numb. Then his suspicions were confirmed.

Presently Lady Bellamy opened her eyes again, and this time there was intelligence in them. She gazed round her with a wondering air. Next she spoke.

"Where am I?"

"In your own drawing-room, Lady Bellamy. Be quiet now, you will be better presently."

She tried first to move her head, then her arm, then her lower limbs, but they would not stir. By this time her faculties were wide awake.

"Are you the doctor?" she said.

"Yes, Lady Bellamy."

"Then tell me why cannot I move my arms."

He lifted her hand; it fell again like a lump of lead--and Dr. Williamson looked very grave. Then he applied a current of electricity.

"Do you feel that?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Why cannot I move? Do not trifle with me, tell me quick."

Dr. Williamson was a young man, and had not quite conquered nervousness. In his confusion, he muttered something about "paralysis."

"How is it that I am not dead?"

"I have brought you back to life, but pray do not talk."

"You fool, why could you not let me die? You mean that you have

brought my mind to life, and left my body dead. I feel now that I am quite paralysed."

He could not answer her, what she said was only too true, and his look told her so. She gazed steadily at him for a moment as he bent over her, and realized all the horrors of her position, and for the first time in her life her proud spirit absolutely gave way. For a few seconds she was silent, and then, without any change coming over the expression of her features--for the wild gaze with which she had faced eternity was for ever frozen there--she broke out into a succession of the most heart-rending shrieks that it had ever been his lot to listen to. At last she stopped exhausted.

"Kill me!" she whispered, hoarsely, "kill me!"

It was a dreadful scene.

As the doctors afterwards concluded, rightly or wrongly, a very curious thing had happened to Lady Bellamy. Either the poison she had taken--and they were never able to discover what its exact nature was, nor would she enlighten them--had grown less deadly during all the years that she had kept it, or she had partially defeated her object by taking an overdose, or, as seemed more probable, there was some acid in the wine in which it had been mixed that had had the strange effect of rendering it to a certain degree innocuous. Its result, however, was, as she guessed, to render her a hopeless paralytic for

life.

At length the patient sank into the coma of exhaustion, and Dr. Williamson was able to leave her in the care of a brother practitioner whom he had sent for, and in that of his assistant. Sir John had been sent for, but had not arrived. It was then eleven o'clock, and at one the doctor was summoned as a witness to attend the inquest on George Caresfoot. He had, therefore, two hours at his disposal, and these he determined to utilise by driving round to see Angela, who was still lying at Mr. Fraser's vicarage.

Mr. Fraser heard him coming, and met him in the little drive. He briefly told him what he had just seen, and what, in his opinion, Lady Bellamy's fate must be--one of living death. The clergyman's remark was characteristic.

"And yet," he said, "there are people in the world who say that there is no God."

"How is Mrs. Caresfoot?" asked the doctor.

"She had a dreadful fit of raving this morning, and we had to tie her down in bed. She is quieter now, poor dear. There, listen!"

At that moment, through the open window of the bedroom, they heard a sweet though untrained voice beginning to sing. It was Angela's, and

she was singing snatches of an old-fashioned sailor-song, one of several which Arthur had taught her:

"Fare ye well, and adieu to all you Spanish ladies,
Fare ye well, and adieu to ye, ladies of Spain,
For we've received orders to return to Old England,
But we hope in a short time to see you again.

* * *

"We hove our ship to with the wind at sou'west, my boys;
We hove our ship to for to strike soundings clear;
It was forty-five fathom and a grey sandy bottom;
Then we filled our main topsail, and up channel did steer.

* * *

"The signal was made for the grand fleet to anchor,
All in the Downs that night for to meet;
So cast off your shank-painter, let go your cat's-topper,
Hawl up your clew-garnets, let fly tack and sheet."

Without waiting to hear any more, they went up the stairs and entered the bedroom. The first person they saw was Pigott, who had been sent

for to nurse Angela, standing by the side of the bed, and a trained nurse at a little table at the foot mixing some medicine. On the bed itself lay Angela, shorn of all her beautiful hair, her face flushed as with fever, except where a blue weal bore witness to the blow from her husband's cruel whip, her head thrown back, and a strange light in her wild eyes. She was tied down in the bed, with a broad horse-girth stretched across her breast, but she had wrenched one arm free, and with it was beating time to her song on the bed-clothes. She caught sight of Mr. Fraser at once, and seemed to recognize him, for she stopped her singing and laughed.

"That's a pretty old song, isn't it?" she said. "Somebody taught it me --who was it? Somebody--a long while ago. But I know another--I know another. You'll like it; you are a clergyman, you know." And she began again:

"Says the parson one day as I cursed a Jew,
Now do you not know that that is a sin?
Of you sailors I fear there are but a few
That St. Peter to heaven will ever let in.

"Says I, Mr. Parson, to tell you my mind,
Few sailors to knock were ever yet seen;
Those who travel by land may steer against wind
But we shape a course for Fiddler's Green."

Suddenly she stopped, and her mind wandered off to the scene of two days previous with Arthur by the lake, and she began to quote the words wrung from the bitterness of his heart.

"'You miserable woman, do you know what you are? Shame upon you! Were you not married yesterday?' It is quite true, Arthur--oh, yes, quite true! Say what you like of me, Arthur--I deserve it all; but oh! Arthur, I love you so. Don't be hard upon me--I love you so, dear! Kill me if you like, dear, but don't talk to me so. I shall go mad--I shall go mad!" and she broke into a flood of weeping.

"Poor dear, she has been going on like that, off and on, all night. It clean broke my heart to see it, and that's the holy truth," and Pigott looked very much as though she were going to cry herself.

By this time Angela had ceased weeping, and was brooding sullenly, with her face buried in the pillow.

"There is absolutely nothing to be done," said the doctor. "We can only trust to her fine constitution and youth to pull her through. She has received a series of dreadful mental shocks, and it is very doubtful if she will ever get over them. It is a pity to think that such a splendid creature may become permanently insane, is it not? You must be very careful, Pigott, that she does not do herself an injury;

she is just in the state that she may throw herself out of the window or cut her throat. And now I must be going; I will call in again to-night."

Mr. Fraser accompanied him down to the gate, where he had left his trap. Before they got out of the front door, Angela had roused herself again, and they could hear her beginning to quote Homer, and then breaking out into snatches of her sailor-songs.

"'High aloft amongst the rigging
Sings the loud exulting gale.'

"That's like me. I sing too," and then followed peal upon peal of mad laughter.

"A very sad case! She has a poor chance, I fear."

Mr. Fraser was too much affected to answer him.