While she and Sir Jaffray were in London and the Frenchman was absent the feeling wore away, but as the time for the return to Walcote approached it came back again, and could she have had her choice she would have taken Sir Jaffray right away out of Europe for another long tour, such as that which had made their honeymoon so pleasant.

But Sir Jaffray would not hear of it. He was anxious to spend the late summer and autumn at Walcote. He longed to see Lola at the head of his splendid old home, and he was keenly anticipating the shooting. Thus he left London full of the most pleasurable anticipation.

Sir Jaffray and Lola were alone in the house for two or three days before any of the guests came, and during that time Lola struggled against the presentiment of evil which depressed her. But she could not shake it off, and as the day approached on which Pierre Turrian was to arrive she grew dull and moody and even irritable.

She had done all that she dared to prevent his coming to stay in the house, and the idea of it both angered and disgusted her. She had entered on the deception without at all realizing the constant association with lies which it necessitated.

She shrank from having the two men under the same roof. She had expected that Pierre would have taken her money, and, after staying perhaps a short time at Walcote, would have gone away to the continent, back to that disreputable, roaming life which he had always lived. She could have borne that, but this constant association with him, his presence in the house and the life of continuous deceit and lying which it forced upon her made her sin against the man she loved so patent, so flagrant, so ever present and pressing that she began to repent that she had ever chosen the path of deceit.

Sir Jaffray caught her in one of her fits of moodiness on the day when Pierre Turrian arrived. Mrs. De Witt and Beryl were also in the house. Sir Jaffray had surprised Lola with her mask off just before dinner.

He crept up to her quietly, and, running his arm round her waist, kissed her.

"What's the matter, Lola?" he asked gently. "You look sad and ill, and both are strange for you, though I've seen you so two or three times lately. Is anything up?"

To his consternation, she burst into tears. He had never seen her do such a thing before, and he did not know what to do.

Like everything with her, her grief was violent, stormy and passionate, but it soon passed.

"I am a fool," she cried, "a child, frightened by a shadow. If I were to tell you, you would laugh or be angry."

"See if I should," he said kindly. "Tell me."

Her husband looked at her thoughtfully.

"A shadow that seems to be ahead often looms up out of the past," he said.

The remark put her on her guard in a moment.

"Partly the past, partly the present and partly the future," she replied. "I have never played the hostess on such a scale as I shall have to here in a few days, and I think the prospect of it unnerves me."

"Is that all?" There was something in his tone which made her feel he did not quite accept the answer, and he took his arm away from round her waist. "You are a creature of moods, Lola," he continued thoughtfully, "and I sometimes think that some of the things in your past life which you have never told me depress you."

"Why do you think there is anything I have not told you?"

"You have told me very little."

"There is only little to tell," she replied, surprised at his words, for he had never pressed her as to any incident of her life with her father, "and certainly nothing not to tell." Her quickness to read in his words a suggestion of doubt roused her into an attitude of defense.

He noticed the change, and he stooped and kissed her.

"When I doubt you, child, I will tell you so openly. I am with you and for you against the world."

She answered his caress impulsively and threw her arms round him and, kissing him passionately, exclaimed:

"Ah, Jaffray, I think sometimes I should be a happier woman if I did not love you as I do."

"Happier if you did not love me?" he questioned and smiled. "That is a puzzle I can't read. Would you rather that I did not love you, then?"

"Ah, no, no! I would rather you killed me by the cruelest of deaths." And she clung to him.

"Then you are a problem I can't solve," he answered, laughing, "but a problem that is very dear to me, solved or unsolved."

While they were thus lovemaking the first of the dinner gongs sounded, and they had to hasten away to dress.

Then at dinner an incident happened which disturbed Lola profoundly and marked the beginning of the end.

They had only three guests—Mrs. De Witt, Beryl Leycester and Pierre Turrian—and at dinner Lola saw that the Frenchman was taking a good deal of wine. The conversation turned on what each of those present had been doing during the past few weeks, and presently Lola saw him set down his glass with an expression which she knew well boded mischief to some one and look in her direction furtively out of the corner of his eyes. Then he broke into the conversation in a tone which drew the attention of all to him:

"My faith, but I have had an experience, or rather have heard of one, which is, if you like, uncommon!"

"About fiddle strings?" asked Mrs. De Witt mischievously.

"No, madame; about human lives and about something which I am sure you could not comprehend—woman's faithlessness."

"I have heard of it," said the little woman innocently, "but if it is anything too dreadful don't spoil it by telling us too hurriedly—keep it for by and by, in the drawing room."

"Out with it, man," exclaimed the baronet.

"It is the story of a friend of mine," said the Frenchman, pausing a moment to emphasize his next remark. "Do you know the Devil's rock in the Swiss mountains? Do you, Lady Walcote?" he asked when the others said nothing.

Something in the tone made Beryl Leycester look up, and she saw that Sir Jaffray's wife was on the defensive.

"The Devil's rock, the Devil's rock," replied Lola, repeating the words as if waiting for the name to strike some chord of recollection and speaking very naturally. "I seem to have heard of it, and yet—you know how one's memory will play tricks—I really can't say." And she smiled very sweetly.

"It is well named at any rate," said M. Turrian. "Imagine a semicircular background of rough, steep crags, with here and there thick, dark firs and pines on them, and in the middle a sharp pinnacle rock standing sheer and grim and solitary, joined to the background by a narrow path, each side of which is a precipice stretching down hundreds of feet to the bottom of the gorge. That is the Devil's rock, and the precipice might be called in truth the mouth of hell."

"But what has the devil to do with woman's faithlessness?" asked Mrs. De Witt, with a smile.

"More than usual," returned the Frenchman, laughing dryly. "There was murder done on that very spot—murder, so far as intent was concerned, and my friend was the victim. I went to the place last month with him."

"I'm getting a bit mixed, professor," said the baronet.

"My friend was married to a woman who seems to have got the idea of freeing herself from him. She took him to that place one day, told him she had ceased to love him and that she meant to leave him."

"What a very conventional creature!" exclaimed Mrs. De Witt. "She was, of course, a woman of the middle classes."

"Scarcely conventional, madame," said M. Turrian. "She goaded him with some hot, bitter words—that was conventional, of course—and when he caught hold of her to take her away from the place she struck him in the face with the parasol she was carrying, and he stumbled back and fell over."

"Oh, that's not murder! Much more like suicide," said Mrs. De Witt. "If he knew what sort of a woman she was, he might have known what to expect if he tried force on such a spot."

"Wait," resumed the Frenchman. "In falling he caught hold of a point of the rock with one hand and would have saved himself, but she, seeing what had happened, stamped on his fingers with all her strength, bruising and crushing them and causing him to lose his hold. That was murder."

"But you say he didn't die," said the baronet.

"I say it was murder in intent. What think you, Lady Walcote?" And he stopped and looked boldly into Lola's eyes.

"I should think your friend was romancing, M. Turrian, though I can

"But what has the devil to do with woman's faithlessness?"

believe that some women might be goaded to act in such a way to men by whom they had been ill treated."

"As there was no one about to see her, I can quite believe she did it, and I've no doubt the man deserved it," said Mrs. De Witt viciously.

"And you, Miss Leycester?"

"I am not skilled in the casuistry of murder defenses," replied Beryl coldly.

"But if this was such a ghastly place how did the man escape?" asked the baronet.

"His clothes were caught on a tree in some miraculous way, and after a time of suspense, in which his wits nearly left him, he was rescued."

Lola had schooled herself to reveal no sign of the painful and absorbing interest with which she listened to the story, but at this she could not avoid a quick, sudden exclamation:

"Ah!"

"This part of the story interests you, Lady Walcote?" said the Frenchman, turning and looking fixedly at her.

"No more than the rest," she replied, keeping her voice under control with an effort the strain of which was beginning to tell upon her, and she gripped her hands tightly together on her lap as she saw the calm, clear, gray eyes of Beryl Leycester scrutinizing first herself and then the Frenchman, as if she understood that a duel was going on between them.

The scene was photographing itself on Lola's memory. The soft yellow of the lamplight, the lovely flowers on the table, those at the table turning to listen to the Frenchman's words, his attitude as he bent forward and leered, half threateningly, half jeeringly and all audaciously, at her, and through the flowers and ferns Sir Jaffray, upright and handsome, listening with the rest, as unconcernedly as if it were a tale which in nowise touched the fringe of his life.

How would he look if he knew who the murderess was?

The thought flashed across Lola's brain just as she forced herself to speak in a tone of polite but casual interest. Her own voice sounded to her like that of another.

"And what did he do next?"

"Ah, that was not conventional," replied M. Turrian, turning to smile on Mrs. De Witt, but looking back almost directly to Lola, with the expression which to Beryl had seemed like a challenge and a defiance. "He went his way. He said to himself, 'This is no common act, and the vengeance shall be like it.'"

"Quite theatrical," murmured Mrs. De Witt. "But what was the end, please?"

"He let her remain, madame, under the impression that she had killed him. He hid himself, and to this hour he has never revealed the truth. He is waiting until she has taken some step which will make his reappearance her ruin, and then he will strike, choosing his own time."

"What a pity he didn't die!" exclaimed Mrs. De Witt.

"He's rather a cold blooded brute, professor. Shouldn't care for many such friends," said the baronet.

"Does he come from Montreux?" asked Beryl, and the Frenchman, turning hastily round, met the calm, searching gaze of the girl fixed keenly on him, and in an instant recognized what a clumsy blunder he had made, and while he was muttering in some confusion a vigorous denial Lola, who had turned pale despite her fight for self control, rose from the table, and at the signal the ladies left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

BERYL SPEAKS.

Almost as soon as the four ladies reached the drawing room old Lady Walcote pleaded a headache for an excuse to go to her rooms and carried away Beryl with her.

"Now, then, my dear, let us settle ourselves for a quiet chitchat in the corner here," said Mrs. De Witt as soon as she and Lola were alone, "and let's be comfortable. Tell me, who's your friend? I like him rather, but shouldn't care to like him much."

"Do you mean M. Turrian?"

"Well, I don't mean Sir Jaffray, do I? And when I say friend I can't mean a woman, can I?"

"He's no friend of mine," replied Lola indifferently. "He's here because Jaffray asks him."

"Well, my dear, of course he is." And she laughed significantly.

"I mean that I do not want him here," said Lola rather warmly, resenting her companion's tone.

"Oh, it's that way, is it? He is the snarer, is he? Has it been that way with him long? How long is it since you refused him?"

Lola laughed in her turn.

"You think there must always be that kind of tie, eh?"

"Not always, but in this case yes. Else why is he here, my dear? But he's not clever when he drinks, and if there had been 20 people at the table tonight they could all have seen that there was some sort of relationship between you two other than that of mere casual acquaintance or friendship."

"It's just as easy for 20 people to make a mistake as one," returned Lola again warmly.

"I only speak for your guidance, Lola," said her companion, not noticing the interruption, "and you can be very angry with me if you like. Never have an affair with a man who wants to blurt it out right in the teeth of the world. That man was looking at you tonight when he was telling that cock and bull story with an expression in his eyes which said as plainly as possible, 'You and I understand one another.' And you are so inexperienced—don't be angry, my dear; you'll grow out of it in time—that you even turned a shade pale and bit your lip hard when he did look at you. Of course I don't doubt you a bit about having no understanding with him, but in that case I wouldn't have him in the house an hour if I were you, for he acts just as if you both did understand one another very thoroughly. And one has to be very innocent nowadays before one can afford to be suspected for nothing. It's bad enough when it's for something." And Mrs. De Witt laughed again and shrugged her plump white shoulders.

"You find it hard, I dare say, to look through smoked glasses and see what you take for smoke and not cry 'Fire!' directly."

"That may be as you like," replied the other curtly, "but in any case I'm not such a fool as to let a man cry 'Fire! Fire!' very loudly and plainly in order that other people may amuse themselves by speculating whether there's smoke or not." And Mrs. De Witt coughed a little aggravatingly. "But tell me who is he? Where did Magog pick him up?"

Lola told her shortly.

"An old pupil. Oh!" And she coughed again. "You know, Lola, you are very pretty and—well, I have heard of such a thing as a music master falling in love—you know what I mean. Of course you know best, and it's not for me to say a word. But if I were you I shouldn't encourage Magog in that intimacy."

Lola laughed this time and quite unrestrainedly. Mrs. De Witt had gone so far off the track that there was no danger of her guessing anything of the truth.

"I tell you what I'll do," she said, after a moment's pause. "I'll lend him to you. Jaffray was saying the other day he'd like to see you 'setting your wicked little wits at him,' and I'll give you unconditional leave to flirt with him as much as you can."

Mrs. De Witt looked a little puzzled at this.

"No, thank you. I have a graver mission than that. I mean to bring back Magog himself to his lost allegiance," she said audaciously. "You've monopolized him quite long enough. But I'll give your Frenchman any time I can spare from the more serious business of my visit."

"Very well," said Lola, smiling. "I'll give you all of Sir Jaffray that—you can take."

"You're very prodigal with your gifts," said Mrs. De Witt in a rather waspish tone. She was irritated at not quite understanding Lola.

At that moment the two men were heard laughing, and directly afterward they entered the room together.

Lola, mindful of Mrs. De Witt's words, was especially guarded in her manner toward the Frenchman.

The two men sat down close to Mrs. De Witt, who held them in conversation, and Lola, sitting a little apart, grew thoughtful.

She was beginning to realize more and more clearly how the lead that she was bearing would gall and wound with its weight and how difficult it might be to carry it at all without its crushing her.

She had noticed Beryl's tone and look when the girl had asked that question about Montreux, and she saw instantly that from that side there might develop a really serious suspicion fraught with much danger.

Lola had never understood Beryl. She could not gauge the strength and possibilities of a nature that seemed to her so indifferent, so cold and so hard to wound. She knew that Beryl had loved Sir Jaffray, probably loved him now and possibly might never again feel a spark of love for any other man. Such, she thought, was sometimes the persistence of these self restrained women.

Yet there had never been a sign of hostility or resentment on Beryl's part at the breaking of that old tacit engagement and the wrecking of her life.

Why was this?

Lola had puzzled over that problem more than once, and the episode of the dinner table showed her now that the answer to it might be the hinge on which the whole future of her life at Walcote manor might turn.

Given that Beryl harbored any suspicion and that by any freak of fortune she could get at the truth, how would her old love for Sir Jaffray prompt her to act?

"I should strike at any cost," thought Lola, "but we are very different. She may have that power of self sacrifice which I have not, and it may be that if I could control other things," and she glanced in disgust at Pierre Turrian, "she would even do nothing. I wonder what she thinks."

"You seem very quiet, Lola," said Sir Jaffray, coming to her side at this moment. He had glanced several times at his wife and had noticed how unusually preoccupied and silent she was.

"Yes, I was listening for once," she answered, smiling.

"Where is Beryl? Turrian is going to sing, and I know she would like to hear him."

"She went away with the mother. I'll go and tell her." And Lola, glad to be alone for a moment, went out of the room.

She did not go directly to Lady Walcote's rooms, but when she reached the long, broad corridor which led to them she staid and walked two or three times the full length of it, pursuing the train of thought which had been interrupted.

While she was thus occupied Beryl came out of one of the rooms and stood in astonishment watching Lola, who was so absorbed that she did not hear the door open.

When she reached the end of the corridor and turned, Lola for the first time noticed Beryl and thought that the girl was watching her.

"Aren't you well, or is anything the matter, Lola?" asked Beryl.

"What should be the matter?" returned Lola a little irritably, for Beryl's cold manner always seemed to ruffle her, and she was annoyed now at having been found doing what was unusual, "I was coming to ask you if you would not like to hear M. Turrian sing. He is going to sing now."

"It is very good of you to think of it," said Beryl. "I'll come. I should like to hear him. He interests me."

"It was not I who thought of it, but Jaffray," answered Lola. "I mustn't claim credit that belongs to him."

"Well, you came to fetch me at any rate," replied Beryl, with a smile that warmed her face and lighted it. Then in a different tone she said as they went down stairs together: "M. Turrian is a strange character. He seems to show a new side every time I see him. I have not heard him before in the role of story teller."

"Have you not?" answered Lola indifferently. "I am rather surprised at that. He prides himself on his powers a good deal, and Jaffray thinks much of him on account of them."

But though Lola had answered lightly she had an instinct that there was something behind the remark which menaced mischief.

As the two entered the drawing room together Lola glanced round her rapidly, with a curious sense that in some way a crisis was at hand; but, meeting her husband's eyes, which rested upon her with an expression of warm love, she smiled him back a signal and went and stood close to him, as though safe in the strength of his protection.

Beryl crossed to Mrs. De Witt and sat by her, looking chilled and half restrained, taking the chair which M. Turrian offered her with exaggerated gesture and politeness.

Then the Frenchman went to the piano, where Lola and her husband stood together, and sang to Lola's accompaniment.

When he sang, it was difficult to think of him as connected with anything evil. He had a marvelously rich and sweet tenor voice, which he used with consummate skill as the vehicle of every phase of emotion.

Beryl sat listening half in a dream, leaning back in her chair and drinking in the intoxicating sweetness of the man's voice as it swept at will the underlying chords of her nature.

"Satan certainly had a voice like that when he sang to Eve about that

Then the Frenchman went to the piano and sang.

apple," said Mrs. De Witt, leaning across to whisper to Beryl and ending with a raspy, jerky laugh of shallow cynicism, which she much affected.

The words broke up a reverie in which Beryl was castle building.

"He sings magnificently," she assented, with a slight frown at the interruption.

"Who is he, my dear? Do you know?" asked Mrs. De Witt, who was very tired of listening in silence even to the singing and was, moreover, very curious to know more about the Frenchman.

"Sir Jaffray will probably be able to tell you much more about him than I can," replied Beryl, who did not want to talk and certainly had no intention of speaking to Mrs. De Witt on the subject.

"Quite a conspiracy of silence," was the sharply spoken reply, and a moment afterward she added: "I only wanted to know whether he'd do to have at one's house in town. What do you think, Beryl?"

"A voice like his would cover any other faults for that sort of thing. Let us listen to him, dear." And Mrs. De Witt, shrugging her shoulders impatiently at this fresh failure to find out anything about the singer, sank back in her chair and was not contented until she caught Sir Jaffray's eye and beckoned him to her side.

Meanwhile Beryl sat and listened and picked up again the broken thread of her thoughts, watching the two at the piano and turning now and then to glance at the handsome figure of the baronet, who sat listening to the chatter of the lively little woman at his side, but looking at his lovely wife with his heart in his eyes.

It was a strange position, and as Beryl thought of it all it dazed and confused her, and she wondered if what she thought or rather what she believed she knew could possibly be true, and as often as her eyes rested on Sir Jaffray, knowing his honest, sterling honor and mindful of her old unshakable love for him, she was filled with a deep pity for him on account of the blow which might fall at any moment, glooming his life.

But her face hardened and her heart steeled when she looked toward the woman who had come between her and her cousin, filling her life with the blight of lovelessness.

One step she resolved to take, and that at once. She would speak to the Frenchman, and this resolve she put in force the next day.

After breakfast on the following morning she waited for an opportunity of finding the Frenchman alone and then joined him.

"M. Turrian, there is a subject on which you can help me. Can you spare me five minutes?" she said. "Will you come to the conservatory?"

"I will give you five hours, Miss Leycester," he said, with his exaggerated gesture. "What is it?" And the air of surface indifference which he assumed did not blind Beryl to the quick, questioning glance which he shot at her.

Beryl said nothing until they were in the conservatory and it was certain that no one could hear them.

"I want to make sure that we are not overheard, M. Turrian," she said calmly, "because what I want to ask you is very private and very important."

She took a folded paper from her pocket as she spoke, and her fingers did not tremble in the least as she unfolded it.

"I was in Montreux this summer," she continued, "and in the course of my stay I visited the Chapel of St. Sulpice and examined the register there. I found an entry which has been a most painful puzzle to me. It is that of the marriage of a certain Pierre Turrian with Lola Crawshay. Here is a copy. Can you tell me what it means?"

As she said this Beryl looked him steadily in the face and held out the paper for him to read.

He took it from her and read it, holding it with fingers which with all his efforts he could not keep from trembling violently, while his face turned to the ghastly ashen color which she had seen once before when she had told him in their first interview that Lola was married to Sir Jaffray.

She recalled that incident as she stood watching him steadily with eyes that never left his face and waiting for the answer, which he seemed absolutely unable to force from between his lips.

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