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MILLER**

LITTLE GOLDEN'S
DAUGHTER; OR, THE
DREAM OF A LIFE TIME

Alex. McVeigh Miller

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The Dream of a Life Time**

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Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller

Little Golden's Daughter; or, The Dream of a Life Time

CHAPTER I

Beautiful Golden Glenalvan stood by the willow-bordered lake and looked into its azure depths with a dreamy light in her pansy-blue eyes.

She had been singing as she danced along the sunny path, but the sweet song died on the coral lips as she came to the little lake with its green fringe of willows and the white lilies sleeping on its breast.

The wind as it sighed through the trees, and the low, soft ripple of the water, always sounded sad to Golden.

It seemed to her vivid fancy that the wind and the waves were trying to tell her some sad story in a language she could not understand.

She was unconsciously saddened whenever she came to its banks and listened to the low, soft murmur.

It had a tragic story to tell her, indeed, but its language was too mysterious for her to understand. Some day she would know.

The afternoon sunshine threw the long, slanting shadows of old Glenalvan Hall far across the level greensward almost to the border of the lake.

It had once been a fine and stately mansion, picturesque and pretentious, with many peaks and gables and oriel windows. But its ancient glory had long departed.

It seemed little more than a picturesque, ivy-covered ruin now. But there still remained in one wing a few habitable apartments that were fine and large, and lofty.

Here the last of the Glenalvans—once a proud and wealthy race—dwelt in respectable, shabby-genteel poverty.

But poverty did not seem to have hurt lovely little Golden Glenalvan.

She had a wealth of beauty, and a happy heart that made her seem like a gleam of sunshine in the home she brightened. She was a careless, willful child not yet sixteen.

The plain, simple, blue gingham dress was worn quite short, yet, the beautiful, golden tresses fell to her waist in long, loose, childish ringlets.

Free and careless as the birds, she roamed at will through the wild, neglected park and the green woods that lay around her ancestral home.

The dwellers in Glenalvan Hall were divided into two families. In the best and most habitable part, John Glenalvan lived with his wife and family, consisting of two daughters and a son. In a few battered rooms in the tumble-down wing, John Glenalvan's father, an old and hoary-headed man, kept house with his pretty little granddaughter, Golden, and one old black servant called Dinah.

We have digressed a little from Golden as she stands beside the lake, swinging her wide, straw hat by its blue ribbons. Let us return.

The little maiden is communing with herself. Quite unconsciously she speaks her thoughts aloud:

"Old Dinah says that Elinor and Clare will give a little party to-night in honor of their brother's wealthy friend, who is to come on a visit to him to-day. How I wish they would invite me. I should like to go."

"Should you now, really?" said a slightly sarcastic voice close to her.

She looked up, and saw her cousin, Elinor coming along the path toward her.

Elinor Glenalvan was a tall and queenly beauty of the most pronounced brunette type. She had large, black eyes that sparkled like diamonds, and glossy, black hair braided into a coronet on the top of her haughty head.

Her features were well-cut and regular, her skin a clear olive, her cheeks and lips were a rich, glowing crimson. She was twenty-one years old, and her sister Clare, who walked by her side, was nineteen.

Clare Glenalvan was a weak, vain, pretty girl, but with no such decided claim to beauty as Elinor. Her hair and eyes were not as dark as her sister's, her cheeks and lips were less rosy. She had a mincing, affected air, but was considered stylish and elegant.

Both girls were attired in the best their father could afford from his very limited income, and their little cousin's simple blue gingham looked plain indeed by contrast with their cool, polka-dotted lawns, and lace ruffles.

Elinor carried a small basket on her arm. They had come to the lake for water-lilies to decorate the rooms for the party of which they had caught Golden talking aloud.

The little girl blushed at her dilemma a moment, then she faced the occasion bravely.

"I did not know that you could hear me, Elinor," she said, lifting her beautiful, frank, blue eyes to her cousin's face, "but it is true. I should like to come to your party. You have invited grandpa's old servant to come and help with the supper, and she will go. Why do you not ask grandpa and me?"

"Grandpa is too old to come, and you are too young," replied Elinor, with a careless, flippant laugh, while Clare stared at Golden, and murmured audibly:

"The bold, little thing."

Golden revolved her cousin's reply a moment in her mind.

"Well, perhaps he is too old," she said, with a little sigh, "and yet I think he might enjoy seeing the young people amusing themselves. But as for me, Elinor, I know I am not too young! Minnie Edwards is coming, I have heard, and she is a month younger than I am! The only difference is that *she* puts up her hair, and wears long dresses. I would wear long dresses, too, only I do not believe grandpa could afford it. It would take several yards more for a trail, or even to touch all around."

Clare and Elinor laughed heartlessly at the wistful calculation of the difference between short and long dresses. Then the elder sister said, abruptly:

"It is a great pity grandpa cannot keep you a little girl in short dresses forever, Golden! You will not find it very pleasant to be a woman."

"Why not?" said innocent Golden. "Are not women happy?"

"Some are," said Elinor, "but I do not think *you* will ever be."

"Why not?" asked the girl again.

The two sisters exchanged significant glances that did not escape Golden's keen eyes.

"Elinor, why do you and Clare look at each other so hatefully?" she cried out in sudden resentment and childish passion. "What is the matter? What have I done?"

"You have done nothing except to be born," said Clare Glenalvan, irritably, "and under the circumstances, *that* is the worst thing *you could have* done."

Was it only the fancy of beautiful Golden, or did the wind in the trees and grasses sigh mournfully, and the blue waves go lapsing past with a sadder tone?

"Clare, I don't know what you mean," she cried, half-angrily. "I never harmed anyone in my life! I have not hurt anyone by being born, have I?"

The sisters looked at the beautiful, half-defiant face with its rose flushed cheeks and flashing, violet eyes, and Elinor sneered rudely, while Clare answered in a sharp, complaining voice:

"Yes, you have hurt every soul that bears the name of Glenalvan—the dead Glenalvans as well as the living ones. You are a living disgrace to the proud, old name that your mother was the first to disgrace!"

Then she paused, a little frightened, for Golden had started so violently that she had almost fallen backward into the lake.

She steadied herself by catching the branch of a bending willow, and looked at her cousin with death-white lips and cheeks, and scornful eyes.

"Clare, you are a cruel, wicked girl," she cried. "I will go and tell grandpa what terrible things you have said of me! I did not believe one word!"

The tears of wounded pride were streaming down her cheeks as she sped along the path and across the green lawn up to the old hall. The sisters looked at each other, a little disconcerted.

"Clare, you were too hasty," said Elinor, uneasily. "Grandpa will be very angry."

CHAPTER II

Little Golden sped across the green lawn, her young heart full of pain and anger at the cruel words her cousins had spoken to her.

Flying through the long, dark corridor of the old hall, and passing through several lofty and empty old rooms, she emerged at last in the sunny bay-window where her grandfather dozed daily, surrounded by pots of fragrant roses and geraniums.

But with the breathless words of complaint just parting her coral lips, Golden saw that the old arm-chair was vacant.

She was surprised and a little dismayed; she had been so sure of finding him there.

She turned round and ran out to the sunny kitchen in the back yard, where old Dinah stood at a table ironing some simple white garments for her young mistress, and crooning to herself a fragment of a negro revival tune.

The only nurse and the best friend that Golden had ever known after her grandfather, was homely, warm-hearted, black Dinah.

Golden loved the old negress dearly. Ever since she had first lisped her name, the girl had familiarly called her "black mammy," after the fashion of most southern children with their nurses.

Now she called out quickly before she had reached the kitchen door.

"Oh, black mammy, where is grandpa?"

Black mammy turned with such a start that she dropped the flat-iron she was wielding with such consummate skill.

"Oh! honey, chile, how you skeered me," she cried, "an' I've dropped de flat-iron, and e'enamost burnt my black toes off! What for did ye come callin' me so suddent?"

"Where is grandpa?" repeated the child.

She came up to the door and looked at Dinah, and the old woman saw how pale she was, and what a strange light gleamed in the violet eyes under their long, curling lashes of golden-brown.

"Come, dearie, don't be afeard because de old man ain't a-nid-noddin' in his arm-cheer as usual. He's out a-walkin' wif his son."

"Uncle John?" asked little Golden, with a wondering look.

"Who else, honey?" said Dinah, as she vigorously rubbed a fresh iron with salt and beeswax.

"It is so strange," said Golden, momentarily diverted from her immediate grievance by Dinah's news. "Uncle John comes so seldom. What did he want, black mammy?"

"Want? De debbil, his best friend, knows better dan your poor ole black mammy," said Dinah, shaking her head. "All I know is dat he come looking black as a thunder-cloud, and ax ole massa to take a walk with him."

"And he went?" said Golden.

"Oh! yes, he went, pore ole soul, a-hobblin' off as sweet as a lamb with that snake in the grass!"

"Oh! black mammy, grandpa would not like you to speak that way of his son," cried Golden.

"I axes your pardon, honey. I spoke my mind afore I thought," answered Dinah.

"There is no offense as far as I am concerned," replied her young mistress, readily. "There is no love lost between my uncle and me."

Then she added, with a shade of anxiety in her voice:

"Will they be long gone, do you think?"

"I hasn't the leastest idea," said busy Dinah, "but ole massa is too feeble to walk very fur."

Golden turned away silently, and went to her grandfather's nook in the bay-window to await his return. She was burning with impatience to tell him the cruel and unkind things her cousins had said to her, and to ask if they were true.

She sat down in the old arm-chair, among the blossoming flowers, herself the fairest flower of all, and leaning her dimpled cheek on her hand, relapsed into troubled thought.

The strange relations sustained by her grandfather and herself toward his son's family puzzled her as it had often done before. Living in the same house, and nearly related as they were, there was little or no intercourse between the two families and they were barely friendly.

Ever since Golden could remember, it had been so. She had questioned her grandfather and she had questioned Dinah, but they gave her no satisfaction on the subject.

It remained a pregnant mystery to the lonely child, living her thoughtless, girlish life in the ruined rooms of the western wing, and in the tangled gardens, and the wild, green wood.

A brief time of impatient waiting, then Golden heard the murmur of voices beneath the window.

She leaned her curly head out, and heard one sentence spoken in the clear, curt voice of John Glenalvan:

"You understand now, father, how important it is to us that you should keep Golden's daughter more carefully secluded?"

"The child will fret—she has been so used to an outdoor life, it will injure her health," feebly objected the old man.

"Her health is the poorest objection you could urge with me," said John Glenalvan, cruelly. "If she had died long ago it would have been the very best thing that could have happened for us all."

The father's reply was lost in the distance as they passed on. They came in at the front door, passed down the long corridor, and separated to their divided abodes.

Golden's grandfather came heavily into the quiet sitting-room, leaning on his oaken cane, and sought his favorite chair at the sunny window where the flowers bloomed and the bright-winged butterflies hovered.

He was not prepared to see Golden start up from the chair with a white face, and wild, frightened, blue eyes.

She clutched his arms and leaned against him. He felt her frightened heart-beats plainly.

"Oh, grandpa, grandpa," she wailed, "what is the matter with everyone? What have I done that some wish me dead and others are sorry that ever I was born?"

She felt the tremulous lips of the old man pressed fondly on her drooping head, she heard a sorrowful murmur:

"Poor little Golden's daughter," then he said aloud:

"My darling, who has been saying such cruel things to you?"

"It is Clare and Elinor, and Uncle John," she sobbed. "They—the girls, I mean, now—said the worst thing I could have done was to be born; and that my mother was the first to disgrace the name of Glenalvan. And, grandpa, I heard what Uncle John said when he passed under the window. He said if I had died long ago it must have been better for all."

Old Hugh Glenalvan's kindly blue eyes were flashing fire. He held the quivering little form against his breast with loving arms, and his outraged old heart beat fast against the girl's.

But he could not answer her. Indignant pain and grief kept him dumb.

"Grandpa, tell me what I have done to be hated by my kind," she sobbed. "Am I deformed? Am I repulsive to look at?"

"My darling, you are as perfect and as beautiful as an angel," he answered, fondly kissing the fair, innocent brow.

"Why do they hate me, then?" she wailed. "I would love them all if they would let me."

"They are cruel and heartless. If they were not, they could not help but love you, my Golden," said the old man, bitterly. Then he sat down and drew her to a seat upon his knee.

"Think no more of them, my darling," he said, brushing away the shining pearls of grief that hung trembling on her thick lashes. "They are cruel and unjust to you. Keep away from their presence

and forget that the same strain of blood flows in your veins. Look upon them as aliens and strangers. Give all your love to me."

She hid her sweet face against his shoulder, her breast heaving with the sobs that she could not repress.

"I have a heart full of love," she sighed, "and it is all your own, dear grandpa. But tell me, oh, tell me of my mother! Can it be true? She did not, oh, she could not disgrace our proud old name."

"Hush, Golden, you torture me," the old man said, hoarsely. "There is a mystery surrounding you, my little one. Your history is a sad one. But you shall never know it if I can keep the blighting secret from your knowledge. Ask me no more, my darling. Dismiss it from your thoughts. You have always been happy heretofore. Be happy still. You are innocent, pure and beautiful. There is no reason why you should not have a quiet, happy life if you will keep away from those who wound you with their cruel words, and cling closely to your simple, peaceful home."

Her wild sobs had ceased. She was looking earnestly into his face, while long, low sighs quivered over her lips.

"Now, listen to me, Golden," he said. "Your uncle has made a hard request of me, darling, but I have promised that it shall be done. Golden, will you trust me, and help me to keep my word?"

"Is it about me?" she said.

"Yes, dear. You know the three upper chambers which foolish people believe to be haunted, Golden?"

"Yes," she said, and he saw a slight quiver pass over the delicate lips, and her face grew pale.

"Of course you know that is all nonsense, little one," he said, reassuringly. "There are no ghosts in Glenalvan Hall. It is only foolish and superstitious people who believe that silly tale. Golden, would you be willing to remain secluded in those haunted rooms for one week, or for whatever number of days John Glenalvan's expected guest shall remain?"

The breath came a little faster over the beautiful, parted lips.

"I am almost afraid," she sighed. "Oh, grandpa, why should they wish to hide me away like a criminal? I have done nothing."

"I know that, dear. It is a heartless whim of those heartless people. They do not wish their guest to see you, or even to know of your existence. Do not mind them, pet. Perhaps they are jealous and fear that he might fall in love with you. That would never do, because they mean to marry him to Elinor and prop the fallen fortunes of the Glenalvans. You will humor their fancy, won't you, Golden?"

The pansy-blue eyes flashed with resentful fire.

"Why should I humor them?" she cried. "They are hard and cold to me. Why should I shut myself up in prison, away from the sunshine, and the flowers and the birds in those gloomy, haunted chambers for their sake?"

"It is for *my* sake, darling," he replied. "I have promised them that you will do it for me. Will you not do so, Golden?"

"I am afraid of the haunted rooms, grandpa," said the child, with a shiver.

"Not in the daylight I hope," he said.

"No, not in the daytime," she replied.

"Old Dinah could sleep in your room at night, Golden. So, you see, there could be nothing to fear. My little darling, I have loved you and cared for you all your life, and I have never asked you for a sacrifice before. Will you make this concession for my sake?"

The beautiful girl clasped her white arms round his neck, and kissed his withered cheek.

"I cannot refuse if it is for your sake, grandpa," she said. "You have been father, mother, friends and home to me all my life! I have had no one but you, grandpa, and I love you too dearly to grieve you. I will do as you wish me."

He kissed her and thanked her many times.

"You must believe that it hurts me as much as it does you, my pet," he said, "but it will not be for long—and John is so violent, I had to promise for the sake of peace. I hope you will never regret this sweet yielding to my will."

"I am sure I shall not," said the child-like girl, but she gave an unconscious shudder.

His hands rested, as if in blessing, on her hair. He whispered, inaudibly:

"God bless my hapless daughter's child."

CHAPTER III

Glenalvan Hall, like all old family mansions belonging to old and respectable families, had its reputed ghost.

It was currently reported that three rooms in the upper story were haunted by the spirit of a fair young girl who had once inhabited them, and who had pined away and died for love of a handsome man who had not known of her love nor reciprocated it.

This fair ancestress of Golden's—Erma Glenalvan, as she was called—was said to haunt the suite of rooms she had occupied in life, and credulous people believed that on moonlight nights she walked up and down, weeping and sighing, and wringing her white hands because her spirit could not retain its grave.

It was to these gloomy and dismantled rooms, haunted by the restless ghost of an unhappy girl, that little Golden was consigned for a week or more by the stern desire of John Glenalvan. It was a hard trial to the child.

She would not have consented to it but for the pleadings of her grandfather. Her love and gratitude to him made her yield an easy consent to his prayer, while she inwardly quaked with fear at the dread ordeal before her.

Old Dinah was desired by her master to transfer suitable bedding and furniture to the room Golden would occupy, and to carry her meals to that room daily and attend carefully on her young mistress. Black Dinah was furious.

"I know'd dar was deviltry afoot," she said. "I know'd it! John Glenalvan never sets his foot in ole massa's presence without some devil's broth is a-brewing!"

"Hush, Dinah," old Hugh said, sternly. "You must not speak of my son that way. Do as I bid you. No harm can come to the child. She is willing to the plan."

Dinah's loud complaints subsided into muttering and grumbling, but she did as her master had ordered.

That night when old Hugh had laid his gray head on his pillow, and old Dinah had gone into the other wing of the hall, little Golden sat down to read in the ghostly-looking chamber where Erma Glenalvan's loving heart had broken for a hopeless love.

Through the weird stillness and solitude of the haunted room, the sound of the gay dance music came to Golden's ears, softened and mellowed by the distance.

The little maiden's heart beat faster at the delicious sound, so inspiring to youthful ears. She threw down her book impatiently.

"How sweet it sounds," she said. "They are in the great dancing-hall. I should like to see them. How cruel my cousins are to me!"

The sweet lips quivered, and the blue eyes darkened with anger. Golden was a spoiled, impetuous child. Her grandpa and old Dinah had always yielded to her in everything and placed no restraint on her impetuous temper.

Her little heart was swelling bitterly now, with resentment against her cruel cousins. She felt their neglect and their insults keenly, the more so because she was ignorant of any possible reason for their contumely.

"I should like to spoil their party for them," the little creature said to herself with a passionate vindictiveness, quite unusual with her. "I have a great mind to play ghost, and frighten them all out of the dancing-hall. It would not be a bit too bad for them, after their meanness to me!"

She had heard old Dinah say that Clare and Elinor were very much afraid of the beautiful phantom of Glenalvan Hall. They would not have ventured into the haunted suite alone for any amount of money.

Clare had been heard to say that the very sight of the ghost would be sufficient to strike her dead.

Beautiful Golden, who was as changeable as the summer breeze, began to laugh at the mischievous idea which had occurred to her.

"What a fine joke it would be to personate poor Erma Glenalvan," she thought. "How Clare and Elinor would fly from the festive scene when I appeared, weeping and wringing my hands."

She had heard the ghost described by Dinah, who averred that she had seen it several times.

She remembered the long, white robe, the flowing veil of golden hair, the pearl necklace, the wondrous beauty, shining, as old Dinah declared, like a star.

The beauty, the youth, the veil of golden hair she had. But the dress and the pearls. Where should she find them?

An old wardrobe which had once belonged, no doubt, to the love-lorn Erma, stood against the wall. Golden pulled the door open, not without some little fear, and looked in at the collection of moth-eaten dresses that hung on the pegs.

She could not tell whom they belonged to, for she had never looked into the wardrobe before, but she guessed that they were very old, for a cloud of dust rose from them as the door flew open, and as she touched them with her hand, some of the folds fell into rents, and showed how long they had been the prey of the moth.

But as Golden pulled one after another down from the pegs and tossed them into a rainbow heap on the floor, she came to one at last that would serve her purpose.

It was a long, white dress of rich, brocaded silk, yellowed by time, antique in style, but tolerably well-preserved.

Golden uttered a cry of delight, patting her little foot blithely to the merry measure of the dance music.

"The very thing," she cried, and then she shivered slightly. "Perhaps it belonged to poor Erma," she thought.

But in a few minutes Golden's blue gingham lay on the floor, and she had slipped into the old brocade, and hooked it together. It fitted her perfectly.

The neck was low, and finished with a deep frill of fine, old, yellow lace. The sleeves were short, and the dimpled shoulders and beautifully moulded arms were exposed to the greatest advantage.

Golden then took up the comb and brush and brushed her long, yellow ringlets out of curl until they fell about her slender, graceful form like a veil of summer sunshine.

"If I only had the pearls, now, I might readily pass for the phantom," she said, looking at the reflection of herself in the glass. "How nice I look. This dress is quite becoming, I declare."

As she turned round, admiring the long, soft, trailing folds of the brocade, something rattled in what appeared to be the region of the pocket.

Golden ran her slim fingers into the pocket, and they encountered a rent between the lining and the material of the dress.

Following the rent with her fingers to the very edge of the skirt, they encountered something which she drew out and found to be a necklace of large, gleaming, milk-white pearls.

Golden uttered a cry of surprise and joy as she clasped the beautiful treasure, so strangely found, around her firm, white throat.

In the dancing-room that night they had been talking of the Glenalvan ghost. Elinor or Clare had taken a great deal of pains to let Bertram Chesleigh know how grand and wealthy the Glenalvans had been before the war, and especially they had been pleased to have him hear about the beautiful phantom of the girl, Erma, who had died of a broken heart.

Though they were afraid of her, and would not have willingly beheld her for anything, they were proud of the *prestige* of a family ghost. They considered that only distinguished families ever had such visitations.

Elinor told him the pretty legend she had heard from a superstitious old servant. She said the phantom would fly if anyone approached her, but if she could once be overtaken and kissed by a very handsome man she would rest in her grave and walk no more.

But it was confidently asserted that no one could accomplish such a feat, for the phantom flew before every pursuer as if fear lent it wings.

"If you could catch and kiss her, Mr. Chesleigh, I think the ghost would be forever laid," said Clare Glenalvan, with a simper, and affected laugh.

"Thank you, Miss Clare," said Bertram Chesleigh, with a bow, though he was inwardly disgusted. He knew that he was a very handsome man.

His mirror had told him so, but he did not admire Clare's forwardness in telling him of it so plainly.

The merry dance went on. The subject of the Glenalvan ghost had passed from the minds of the dancers when suddenly the music, which had been filling the air with sweetness, came to a dead stop.

All the dancers looked toward the door where the band was stationed, for the cause of the silence.

The performers had dropped their instruments, and were staring open-mouthed at a vision in the wide, open doorway that opened from a long dark, corridor—a vision clearly outlined against the outer darkness, and plainly seen by all in the room—a girlish form in sweeping, white robes and falling, golden hair, the beautiful face, convulsed with woe and pain, the white arms extended, the small hands clasping and unclasping each other in gestures of infinite despair.

"The Glenalvan ghost!" ran from lip to lip in a murmur of awe and terror, while timid young girls clung shrieking to their partners, and the utmost confusion prevailed.

Elinor Glenalvan tried to faint in the arms of Bertram Chesleigh, but he put her hastily into a chair and said quickly:

"Miss Glenalvan, I am going to earn your everlasting gratitude. I shall kiss the beautiful Erma, and the Glenalvan ghost will be forever laid."

He sprang toward the doorway, but in that moment the beautiful phantom turned and fled precipitately before him.

CHAPTER IV

It had not entered into little Golden's plan for the discomfiture of her scornful cousins, that anyone would have the temerity to approach her in her character of the Glenalvan ghost. On the contrary, she had confidently expected to spread fear, dismay and confusion among the festive guests, and to effect her own escape unmolested and unsuspected.

What was her surprise and dismay to see a tall, dark, handsome man start from Elinor's side, and cross the room toward her with the evident purpose of accosting her!

Beautiful Golden was filled with fear and alarm. She turned swiftly and fled down the long, dark corridor, her heart beating with dread lest she should be overtaken and identified by her pursuer.

She thought of her grandfather's grief and mortification if he should find out her girlish prank, and of her stern uncle's wrathful anger.

These swift thoughts seemed to lend wings to her light feet. She flew rather than ran down the dark hall, but her rapid heart-beats could not drown the quick and steady footsteps of her pursuer. They seemed to come nearer and gain upon her.

To gain her own rooms in the western wing Golden would be compelled to go up a wide stairway leading directly from the corridor in which she was then running.

It dawned on her mind in the whirl of thoughts that rushed over her, that it would be very unwise to return to the haunted rooms just then. She believed that she would undoubtedly be pursued and captured if she did.

It occurred to her that her best plan would be to escape into the open air and hide herself in the belt of thick, dense shrubbery that grew below the lake.

She knew every bend and turn, and secret nook within it. Her pursuer did not. She could baffle him there.

Inspired by what seemed to her a happy thought, Golden flew past the wide staircase and gained the outer door.

She flashed down the marble steps outside, and struck breathlessly across the green lawn.

But swift and breathless as her flight had been, she had "a foe-man worthy of her steel." Bertram Chesleigh had never faltered in his swift pursuit of the supposed phantom.

If such a thing were indeed possible, he meant to capture the flying form, and kiss the face whose beauty had struck him even through its tragic expression of sorrow and despair.

He was light-footed and swift, and inspired by the novelty of the chase. He was determined to keep his word to the handsome Elinor, if possible.

He went over the marble steps at one flying bound that gained him a great advantage over Golden. As he followed her over the lawn he was so near that the frightened girl could hear his quick, panting breath, and dreaded every moment to feel his outstretched hands clutch her white shoulder.

It was a lovely night. The moon was at its full. Its white radiance touched everything with weird beauty. It shone on the leaves, the flowers, and the grass, and made the dew-drops glitter like diamonds.

Golden's white brocade shone with a silvery gleam as she fled through the moonlight, her white arms and neck gleamed like ivory through the golden mist of her streaming hair.

She had crossed the green expanse of the lawn in safety. Her light feet struck into the path by the lake. When once she had crossed that path she would be into the shrubbery. She felt sure that she might mislead the determined follower then.

But the race had been an unequal one. That flying leap over the flight of marble steps had decided the contest in the man's favor.

Scarce a minute more and the dreaded touch fell on her shoulder, two strong arms were passed quickly around her waist, her head was drawn back against a manly breast, and to Golden's horror and consternation, she felt a pair of warm, mustached lips pressed fully and passionately upon her own.

"Lovely Erma, may your spirit rest in peace after this fond kiss of love," he cried; and Golden, trying vainly to struggle out of his clasp, lifted her eyes and saw a dark, splendid, handsome face gazing into her own, with large, black eyes that were full of eager admiration and sparkled with pleasant excitement.

"Let me go!" she cried, with her blue eyes full of angry tears, "let me go! How dared you—oh, how dared you *kiss* me?"

But the strong arms held her fast, although Bertram Chesleigh began to realize that it was not a phantom, but a real creature of flesh and blood he had kissed so warmly.

He held her fast, and looked down with a smile into the girlish face that was so very beautiful even through the crimson flush of anger.

"Do not be angry," he said. "You should be glad that I have kissed you."

"Why should I be glad?" she demanded, in a sharp, imperious little voice.

The dark eyes of little Golden's captor sparkled with mirth at her indignant question.

"They told me up yonder at the hall," he replied, "that if a handsome man could catch and kiss the Glenalvan ghost its wandering spirit would be laid forever. Do you think that you can rest easy in your grave now, beautiful Erma?"

Golden wrenched herself from his clasp, but he still held her so tightly by one hand that she could not leave him. She looked at him with bright eyes in which anger and reluctant mirth were strangely blended. His quaint humor was infectious.

"Do you think yourself so very handsome, sir?" she demanded.

"A lady told me so this evening," he replied, unblushingly. "One must always take a lady's word, must not one, fair Erma?"

"I am not Erma," she replied, impetuously; "I am only Golden."

"Golden! What a beautiful name!" cried Golden's captor. "Golden—*what?*"

"Golden Glenalvan," she replied.

"That is prettier still," he said; then he looked at her more closely. "Are you any kin to Clare and Elinor?"

"Yes; we are cousins," the girl replied, frankly.

She forgot how strange it was for her to be standing there talking to this stranger from whom she had been desperately fleeing a moment ago.

But the dark, mesmeric eyes held her gaze with a luring power; the warm, soft hand that clasped her own, sent strange thrills of tingling sweetness through every nerve.

When she had looked at the dark, handsome, smiling face once she liked to look at it again. She forgot to feel afraid of him.

They were standing on the border of the lake. The moonlight made it shine like a sheet of silver; but Bertram Chesleigh had no eyes for its beauty while the fair, fresh face of that innocent girl was lifted to his.

He said to himself that in all his life he had never seen anyone half so lovely.

"And you are not a ghost, after all?" he said.

"No; I was only masquerading," she replied. "I did it to frighten my cousins and spoil their party. Do you think I have succeeded?" she inquired, with *naïve* anxiety.

He looked a little surprised.

"I do not know, I am sure," he said. "Why did you wish to spoil their pleasure?"

"Because they would not invite me to go, and said cruel things to me, besides," answered Golden, with a heaving breast.

"Why would they not invite you?" he inquired, more surprised than ever.

"Elinor said I was *too young*, but I should sooner think that grandpa guessed the true reason!" she replied with innocent frankness.

"What did grandpa guess?" he inquired.

"They were afraid for Uncle John's rich guest to see me. They mean to marry him to Elinor," she replied, readily, and without a suspicion that it was the "rich guest" himself who held her small hand that moment so warmly and tightly in his own.

Bertram Chesleigh laughed long and merrily, and the little girl awoke to a sense of her imprudence.

"Oh? I should not have talked to you so," she cried. "They will be very angry. Oh, please don't tell anyone I was the ghost! Grandpa would scold me, and I could not bear that."

At that moment the murmur of voices and laughter was borne to them on the breeze from the hall door.

"Your friends are coming to look for you," she cried. "Oh! *do* let go my hand. I must hide myself. You will not betray my secret?"

"No; I will keep it faithfully, Golden," he replied, then he kissed her small hand and released her, for he did not wish his friends to find him with her.

She darted away like a bird, and hid herself in the shrubbery. The young man lighted a cigar and turned back to meet his friends.

"Did you catch the ghost? Did you kiss her?" they asked him, eagerly.

"I was never so outwitted in my life," he replied. "Would you believe it if I should tell you that I pursued her across the lawn to the border of the lake, and that just as I might have touched her with my hand she sprang into the water and not a ripple on the surface showed where she had gone down?"

This clever and non-committal reply was accepted as a statement of facts by the credulous. The romantic story spread from one to another rapidly.

Bertram Chesleigh found himself quite a hero a few minutes after he had returned to the house. But though they praised his bravery, everyone chaffed him because he had failed to get the kiss from the beautiful phantom.

CHAPTER V

"Father, where is Golden this morning?"

Old Hugh Glenalvan looked up with a frightened start as his son came into his presence with a stern brow and heavy footstep.

It was the morning after the Glenalvans' little party, and the old man was sitting in the sunny bay-window, thinking of his little sunbeam, as he called her lovingly in his thoughts.

Old Dinah had been in and brought him a message to say that she was very lonely and wished her grandpa to come and see her and bring her a bunch of roses. He was just thinking of doing so, when John Glenalvan came frowningly into his presence.

"Father, where is Golden this morning?" he asked, sharply, and the old man trembled with fear of, he knew not what, as he replied:

"She is up in the haunted rooms where you told me to put her, John."

"Come with me. I wish to see her," he said, and the old man's face grew ashen pale as he asked:

"What is the matter? Has Golden done anything, John?"

"You will know soon enough," was the short reply; and full of apprehension the old man led the way to his granddaughter's room.

Beautiful Golden was walking up and down the dreary chamber, impatient as a captive bird. She started, and grew very pale as she caught sight of her Uncle John's stern face. She did not speak to him, but ran up to her grandfather and kissed his poor, old, wrinkled cheek.

"Good-morning, dear grandpa," she said. "I am very lonely. I miss you so much. Did black mammy tell you to bring me some roses?"

"Yes, dear, but I did not have the time," said the grandfather, with a tremulous voice, and stealing a glance at his son. For some inexplicable reason he stood in great fear of him.

"Have done with such foolish chat, girl," broke in John Glenalvan, roughly. "So you played the ghost last night, eh, miss?"

Golden gave a violent start, and clung to her grandfather. She trembled, and her sweet lips grew very pale.

"You need not deny it. Your looks betray your guilt," continued John Glenalvan, roughly.

"No, no, my Golden would not have done such a thing," cried her grandfather, warmly. "Who says that she did?"

Golden looked anxiously into her uncle's face as that question left the old man's lips. Her heart fell at the thought that the handsome man who had kissed her by the lake, had betrayed her to her merciless uncle.

But his next word relieved her from the dread.

"I say so myself," he replied. "I saw and recognized her myself, as did Clare and Elinor also. She came and stood in the hall doorway where they were dancing, tricked out like the ghost of Erma Glenalvan. Deny it if you dare, miss!"

The girl's quick temper flamed up at his harsh manner.

"I do not wish to deny it," she cried defiantly. "I did it, and I frightened all your fine company, too! I am very glad of it."

John Glenalvan sprang toward her with upraised hand as though he would strike her, but she stepped quickly out of his reach, and he said, with sullen rage:

"You hear the little Jezebel, father. Take care, take care that I do not put my long-pending threat into execution."

"John, she is but a playful child," he pleaded, pitifully. "She meant no harm, I am sure. Oh, Golden, my darling! why did you do it?"

"To spite the girls, grandpa, for their cruelty to me," she replied, "but I am very sorry now, since it has grieved you so. Believe me, grandpa, I did not think you would ever hear of it. Can you forgive me?" she pleaded, wistfully.

"You must ask your uncle's forgiveness, not mine, my dear," was the tremulous reply.

"I will not ask his pardon," she replied, stoutly, her blue eyes flashing, and the color flaming into her cheeks, "I am sorry to have displeased you, grandpa, dear, but I do not in the least care for anyone else whether they are offended or not."

"Where did you get the fine toggery you wore last night?" demanded John Glenalvan, his fingers tingling with the impulse to slap the fair, defiant face.

"That is no concern of yours," she replied, resentfully.

"Tell me, dear," whispered old Hugh, intent on preserving a semblance of peace if it were possible.

Golden threw open the door of the wardrobe and showed him the brocade, which looked very yellow and old in the clear light of day.

"She had a necklace of pearls around her neck," said John, in an artful aside to his father.

"Did you, Golden?" asked her grandfather.

Golden went to the little toilet-table and took up the costly necklace which John Glenalvan instantly snatched from her hand and placed in his pocket.

Golden looked at him, tearful, dismayed, and excessively angry.

"Give them back to me," she cried. "They are mine! I found them—indeed I did, grandpa. They had fallen through a hole in the pocket of the dress into the skirt lining. They are mine, and you shall give them back to me, Uncle John."

"I will show you whether I will or not," he replied. "The necklace belongs to me. Everything in the house belongs to me, as well as the estate itself. You only have a home on sufferance here. Take care that you do not lose that."

"Is it true, grandpa?" asked Golden, and the old man nodded sadly.

John Glenalvan took down the white brocade, and carried it away in a compact bundle under his arm.

"I shall take this away," he said, "to make sure that you do not play any more disgraceful tricks upon us. I depend upon you, father, to see that she keeps to this room, and behaves herself for the remainder of the week. If she does not, I emphatically assure you that you both will suffer through her willfulness and disobedience!"

"I will promise for her," said the old man, putting his hand over Golden's pouting and rebellious mouth. "She will not be naughty any more!"

"See that she keeps the promise," his son replied, sternly, as he turned away.

He went to Elinor's *boudoir* where he found his two daughters quarreling over Bertram Chesleigh.

"I tell you he admires me the most," exclaimed the elder girl, angrily, just as her father threw the necklace and the brocade into her lap, and said, triumphantly:

"Here is the finery the ghost wore, my dears. Divide it between you."

The brocade was thrown down in disgust, but a pitched battle ensued over the pearl necklace.

"I am the elder, and I am determined to have it," cried Elinor, resolutely.

"I shall have it myself, if I perish in the effort," retorted Clare.

A wordy war ensued, from which John Glenalvan, to whom it was nothing new, retreated in disgust.

The contest was ended at last by the handsome Elinor's boxing the ears of her sister, and taking possession of the spoil on the barbarous principle of "might is right."

CHAPTER VI

"Did I dream the whole thing?" said Bertram Chesleigh to himself, "or was it, indeed, only a ghost that I kissed on the border of the lake? Do ghosts have warm, living flesh and blood, and balmy lips, and blushes that come and go, and delicious little tempers, and the power to thrill one's nerves with quivering darts of fire? Have I lost my heart to a phantom?"

He might well ask himself these questions. A day and night had gone since the Glenalvans had their little party, and so far he had been unable to learn anything at all concerning the beautiful girl whom all but himself believed to have been the ghost of the dead Erma Glenalvan.

As he had promised to keep little Golden's secret inviolate, he could of course make no opening inquiries, but his little, careless, artful speeches, and innocent inquiries all failed of effect.

He could learn nothing of the maid whose beauty and grace had literally carried his heart by storm. It seemed quite plain that she did not live in the house.

It was equally certain that she did not reside in the neighborhood, for his friend, young Fred Glenalvan, had often assured him that his father's family were the only living descendants of the once numerous race.

Mr. Chesleigh asked himself if there was indeed a mystery, or if he had been fooled by an elfish spirit from the world of shadows.

His heart and his reason answered in the negative. It was a human being, warm, breathing, living, whom he had clasped and kissed that night. His veins tingled with electric fire at the remembrance.

Alone in his room the second night after his rencontre with the ghost, Bertram Chesleigh walked up and down restlessly, half mad with himself that he should dwell so persistently on that one thought, yet finding it so dangerously sweet he would not willingly have forgotten it. It seemed to him that he had never really lived till now, when this romantic passion for the beautiful unknown fired his heart.

Elinor and Clare had been very much frightened at the appearance of the family ghost. They talked about it in low, awe-struck whispers.

When Bertram Chesleigh expressed a desire to visit the haunted suite of rooms they expressed themselves as horrified, and declared that the rooms of the hapless Erma had been walled up long years before, and that all the rooms of the western wing were in such a ruinous condition that it was exceedingly dangerous to venture there at all.

They declared that their father had engaged workmen to pull down the western wing on account of its precarious condition.

But singularly enough Bertram Chesleigh's thoughts were running on the haunted rooms almost continuously to-night. Everything connected with the Glenalvan ghost had a deep interest for him.

Some impulse impelled him to visit the western wing.

He knew that the wide hall on which his room door opened had a corridor leading from it into the ruined western wing of the hall.

Some impulse stronger than his will, some "spirit in his feet," tempted him forth under cover of the silence and the night to explore the dangerous region in the vague hope of finding some trace of the mysterious ghost of last night.

To have met her again he would have dared even more threatening dangers than the settling timbers and falling roof which Fred, and Clare and Elinor were unanimous in declaring menaced everyone who entered the decaying portion of the hall.

Softly shod in his velvet slippers, he opened the door and peered out into the long hall.

It was lighted by long windows at either end, through which the moonlight poured a flood of white radiance. Putting a convenient box of matches into the pocket of his dressing-gown, he sallied boldly forth.

Whether ghost or human, he longed to encounter the beautiful girl he loved again.

He entered the long corridor and walked along softly, guided by the moonlight that entered through the windows and lay in fantastic shadows upon the floor.

He found that the building was in a ruinous condition indeed. The rooms into which he looked were dismantled and bare, the papering hung in ragged, fantastic strips from the walls; huge rats scampered over the floor, frightened night-birds flapped against the windows with wild, unearthly noises. Surely, the place was well-fitted to be the abode of ghosts and shadows, it was so weird and uncanny.

But Bertram Chesleigh held on his way undauntedly. It seemed to him that he had explored every room on that upper floor, when suddenly he discovered a little passage down which he turned and found himself in front of a closed door.

The majority of the doors had stood open, swinging carelessly on their hinges.

The midnight explorer did not know why his heart beat so strangely when he stood before this closed one.

He turned the handle noiselessly, and entered, carefully closing the door behind him.

In the large and lofty apartment, where he now found himself, a dim and shaded night-lamp was burning, thick, dark curtains shaded the windows, a large rug covered the center of the floor, a low, white cottage-bed stood in the furthest corner, draped in neat and spotless white.

Then the midnight explorer started, and with difficulty repressed the cry that rose to his lips.

For the soft, white counterpane thrown over the bed, outlined the curves of an exquisite, girlish form.

On the white, ruffled pillow nestled a sleeping face as lovely as a budding rose.

The round, white arms were thrown carelessly up above her head, the wealth of curling, golden hair, strayed in rich confusion over the pillow; the golden-brown lashes lay softly on the rosy, dimpled cheeks; the lips were smiling as if some happy dream stirred the white breast that rose and fell so softly over the innocent heart.

"Ghost or human?" Bertram Chesleigh asked himself, as he gazed in astonishment and ecstasy at the beautiful, unconscious sleeper.

He came nearer with noiseless footsteps and bated breath to the bedside. He bent so near that he could hear the soft, sweet breath that fluttered over the parted lips.

"It is she," he said to himself, with mingled rapture and amaze.

Then, in the next breath, he murmured:

"I must beat a quiet retreat. How frightened and angry she would be, were she to awake and find me here!"

He was one of the purest and most honorable minded men in the world.

He turned to go, but could not tear his fascinated eyes from that beautiful, child-like, sleeping face.

His splendid black eyes lingered on its innocent beauty in passionate admiration.

"If I might only touch that little hand that lies so near me on the pillow, it would cool the thirst of my heart," he said wistfully to himself, while his heart beat fast with joy that he had found her again, this lovely creature of whom he had dreamed night and day for twenty-four hours.

He looked at the sweetly-smiling, parted lips, and his pulses thrilled at the remembrance of the tender caress he had pressed upon them such a short while before.

Carried away by the force of as pure and mad a passion as ever thrilled the heart of man, the enraptured lover bent his head and pressed a kiss as soft and light as the fall of a rose-leaf on the white hand that lay so temptingly near him.

He meant to go then, but as he lifted his head, blushing with shame at the temptation that had prompted him to that wrongful and stolen caress, a sharp indignant voice fell on his ears with the suddenness of a thunder-clap.

"Oh, you black-hearted wilyun—you wicked betrayer of innercense! Get out o' this afore I kill you with my own hands, you han'some debbil!"

Bertram Chesleigh turned and saw a ludicrous, yet startling sight framed in the open doorway of an inner chamber which in his agitation, he had not noticed before.

Old Black Dinah, who was the color of ebony and very tall and lean, stood before him, clad in a short night-gown of gay, striped cotton from which her slim legs and arms stuck out like bean-poles.

Her stubbly, gray wool seemed to stand erect on her head with horror, and her brandished arms, snapping black eyes, and furious face, made up a startling picture of wrath and horror, strangely combined with the ludicrous.

"You black-hearted wilyun!" old Dinah repeated, advancing angrily upon her dismayed foe, "get out o' de room o' my innercent lamb afore she wakes and finds you here, you wolf!"

"I beg your pardon—I stumbled into this room by the merest accident," Chesleigh was beginning to say, when, startled by Dinah's loud and angry tones, little Golden awoke, and flashed the light of her wide blue eyes upon their excited faces.

She uttered a cry of fear and terror when she saw the tall, manly form standing in the room.

Old Dinah ran to her instantly, and she hid her frightened face on the shoulder of the old black woman.

"Black mammy, what does all this mean?" cried the girl, nervously.

Dinah gave a prolonged and lugubrious groan, and rolled up the whites of her eyes in reply. The intruder saw that it was imperative that he should stay long enough to explain matters to the alarmed girl.

He said to himself that no one had ever been placed in such a strange and embarrassing position before.

Every instinct of delicacy and respect for the young girl prompted him to retire at once; yet he could not bear to go and leave a wrong impression on the mind of the beautiful girl whom he admired so much.

He retreated to the door, and, standing there, said, anxiously and respectfully:

"I entreat you to believe, Miss Glenalvan, that I entered here with no wrongful motive. Led by a fit of curiosity, I was exploring the ruined wing of the hall, and I entered without a dream of finding it occupied by any living being. I had been led to believe that these rooms were totally unoccupied, and were even unsafe to enter. Will you accept my apology?"

Little Golden's head was still hidden against Dinah's shoulder, and the old woman broke out sharply and quickly:

"Honey, chile, don't you go for to 'cept dat wilyun's 'pology! Ef he done really cum in dis room by accident, he would agone out ag'in when he found dat a young lady occupied de room. But no; de first sight my ole brack eyes saw when I jumped off my pallet and come to de door was dat strange man a-kissin' you, my precious lamb."

Golden began to sob, and Mr. Chesleigh mentally anathematized the old woman's long tongue that had thus betrayed the secret he had intended to keep so carefully.

His face grew scarlet as he hastened to say:

"I kissed your hand, Miss Glenalvan, and I entreat your pardon for yielding to that overmastering temptation. Can you forgive me?"

But Golden was still weeping bitterly, and old Dinah, in her fear and indignation for her darling, pointed quickly to the door.

"Go," she said. "Don't you see how you frighten the chile by staying?"

There seemed nothing to be gained by staying. The old woman was utterly unreasonable, and Golden was so agitated she could not speak.

The embarrassed intruder silently withdrew to his own apartment, where he spent the night brooding over the strange discovery he had made and the unpleasant position in which he had placed himself.

CHAPTER VII

"Honey, chile, where did you git 'quainted wid dat ondecnt man?" inquired old Dinah of her nursling, as soon as Mr. Chesleigh had quitted the room.

"What makes you think I am acquainted with him, mammy?" inquired the child in surprise.

Dinah shook her woolly head sagely.

"Don't try to deceabe your ole brack mammy, my lamb," she said. "He called you Missie Glenalvan—do you think I didn't notice that?"

Golden's pretty cheeks grew scarlet with blushes.

"I shall have to 'form your grandpa of what he done, the impident wilyun!" continued Dinah, emphatically.

"Oh, black mammy, please don't tell," cried the girl impulsively. "You heard what he said—it was a mere accident, I am quite, quite sure he meant no harm."

"Ole massa shall be de jedge o' dat," replied Dinah decidedly. "I'll miss my guess if de ole man don't put a pistol-hole frew my fine, han'some gentleman!"

"Oh, black mammy! then you shall not tell," cried Golden in terror. "Indeed, indeed, he is not the wicked man you believe him. He has kept my secret for me, and I must keep his now. That would only be fair."

"Ah, den you *do* know him," cried Dinah, horrified. "Tell me all about it dis minute, if you know what's best for you, chile."

Golden did not resent the old nurse's tone of authority. She knew the old woman's love for her too well. She dried her eyes and reluctantly related her escapade two nights before.

"He kept my secret," she concluded, "and it would not be fair for us to make trouble for him, would it, black mammy?"

Old Dinah had slipped down to the floor, and sat with her long, black arms clasped around her knees, looking up into her nursling's eager, fearful face, with a good deal of trouble in her keen, black eyes.

The old woman was shrewd and intelligent in her way. She foresaw trouble, and perhaps the bitterest sorrow from these two meetings between the handsome guest of John Glenalvan and the young mistress.

"Black mammy, promise me you will not tell grandpa," Golden pleaded. "I will do anything you ask me if only you will not tell him."

Thereupon Dinah announced her ultimatum.

"If you will promise me never to speak to the strange gentleman again, little missie, I will not tell ole massa."

Golden opened wide her blue eyes. She looked very lovely as she leaned back among the snowy, ruffled pillows, her golden hair straying loosely about her shoulders, her cheeks tinted with a deep, warm blush, her little hands nervously clasping and unclasping each other.

"Black mammy, I think you are very cross to-night," she pouted. "Why should I never speak to the handsome gentleman again?"

"Because it's best for you. Ole brack mammy knows better dan you, chile."

"But I liked him so much," said Golden, blushing rosy red.

"You had no business to like him," responded Dinah. "He's to marry Miss Elinor."

"I do not believe it," said Golden, quickly.

"He's not for you, anyway," retorted Dinah. "You'll nebber marry no one, my dear."

"Why not?" asked the child. "Will nobody ever love me?"

"Nobody'll ever love ye like your grandpa, honey, and 'taint likely dat ever he will give ye away to anyone."

Golden was silent a moment. She seemed to be thinking intently. After a moment she said gravely and sadly:

"Grandpa is old, and I am young. Who will take care of me when he is gone?"

"Your old brack mammy, I guess, honey."

"You are old, too," said Golden. "You may not live as long as I do."

"Bless the chile's heart, how she *do* talk," said the old negress. "Ah, my precious lamb, I has outlived dem as was younger and fairer dan ole black Dinah."

The old black face looked very sad for a moment, then Dinah continued:

"Little missie, it's my clair duty to tell old massa de sarcumstances of the case to-morrow morning. Leastwise, unless you promise me nebber to speak to dat man ag'in."

"That is very hard," sighed Golden.

"Hard," said Dinah. "I should think you would be so mad at the wilyun, a-comin' in and kissin' you so unceremonious, dat you would nebber want to speak to him any more."

Golden hid her face in the pillows, and a deep sigh fluttered over her lips.

"Come, dearie, won't you promise?" said Dinah. "I knows what's for your good better dan you does yourself, chile."

"Must I promise it, indeed?" sighed the innocent child, lifting her flushed face from the pillow a moment to fix her big, blue, imploring eyes on the old woman's obdurate face.

"Yes, you must sartainly promise it," was the uncompromising reply.

There was silence for a moment, and Dinah saw the tears come into the sweet, blue eyes.

"Honey, chile, does you promise me?" she inquired, only confirmed in the opinion by this demonstration.

"Yes, I promise not to speak to him unless you give me leave, black mammy," replied Golden, with quivering lips.

"That's right, darling. Mammy can depend on your word. Lie down, and go to sleep, honey, and I'll fetch my pallet in yere, and sleep on de flo' by your bedside, so that no one kin 'trude on you ag'in."

The girl laid her fair head silently on the pillow, and Dinah threw down a quilt on the floor and rolled herself in it. She was soon snoring profoundly.

Not so with beautiful Golden. It was quite impossible for her to sleep again. She shut her eyelids resolutely, but the busy, beautiful brain was too active to admit of her losing consciousness again. She lay thinking of the splendid, dark-eyed stranger.

"He has kissed me twice," she whispered to her heart, "and yet I do not even know his name. I wonder if I shall ever see him again. I hope I shall."

As she remembered how earnestly he had apologized for his presence in her room, she could not believe him the wicked villain old Dinah had so loudly represented him.

"He is handsome, and I believe that he is good," the girl said to herself, "and they tell me Elinor wants to marry him; I would like to marry him myself, just to spite my cousins."

Poor little Golden! Her spite against her cousins was almost as old as her years. They had always hated her, and Golden had been quick to find it out and resent it.

She had a quick and fiery temper, but it did not take her long to repent of her little fits of passion.

She was a bright, winsome, lovable child. It was a wonder that anyone could hate her for her beautiful, innocent life.

Yet there were those who did, and it was beginning to dawn vaguely on the mind of the girl that it was so. She knew that her life was passed differently from that of the other girls of her age and class.

There were no teachers, no companions, no pleasures for her, and no promise of any change in the future.

She wondered a little why it was so, but she never complained to her grandfather. It was, perhaps, only his way, she said to herself, little dreaming of the dark mystery that lay like a deep,

impassible gulf between her and the dwellers in the outside world of which she knew so very, very little.

CHAPTER VIII

A week elapsed, and there seemed but little prospect of the little prisoner's release from the haunted chambers of the ruined wing.

The Glenalvans' guest lingered on, fascinated, it appeared, by the attractions of the beautiful Elinor. At least Elinor stoutly maintained this fact in the privacy of the family circle, while Clare as obstinately persisted that Mr. Chesleigh was perfectly impartial in his attentions to both.

But however doubtful was Elinor's impression, the fact remained that he was pleased with his visit.

He consented by their urgent invitation to prolong his stay another week. The girls were jubilant over his decision.

Meanwhile, old Dinah watched her secluded nursling with unremitting vigilance. She could not remain with her all day, because her housekeeping duties took her constantly into the lower part of the house, but she visited her intermittently, and at night rolled herself in a thick counterpane and slept on the floor by the side of Golden's couch.

She took the added precaution to turn the rusty key in the lock at night.

Old Dinah had never heard the familiar adage that "love laughs at locksmiths."

She was ordinarily a very sound and healthy sleeper. The mere accident of a rheumatic attack, and consequent sleeplessness, had caused her appearance the night Mr. Chesleigh had entered the room.

Usually she might have been lifted, counterpane and all, and carried away bodily without being aware of it.

Nearly two weeks after the night of her rencontre with Mr. Chesleigh, old Dinah awoke suddenly "in the dead waste and middle of the night," seized in the relentless grip of her old enemy, the rheumatism.

She rolled herself out of her quilt and sat upright, groaning dolorously, and rubbing her knees in which the pain had settled.

"Oh, Lordy! oh, Lordy!" she groaned, "how my ole bones does ache! Miss Golden! Miss Golden! my precious lam', wake up, and bid your ole brack mammy a las' far'well. I'm a-dyin', sartin, shuah!"

But Golden, usually a very light sleeper, made no reply. Dinah reared her woolly head upward and looked into the bed.

The bed was *empty*.

Then Dinah looked around her in amazement to see if Golden was not in the room, laughing at her lugubrious groans as she had often done before. But she saw no trace of her young mistress.

"Miss Golden! Miss Golden!" she called, "is you in de udder room? Ef you is, come in here! I'se berry sick, honey, almos' a-dyin'."

But her repeated calls elicited no reply. It appeared that pretty Golden was out of sight and hearing.

Suddenly old Dinah saw the dainty, white, ruffled night-dress, in which Golden had retired that night, lying in a snowy heap upon the floor.

Dinah seized upon the garment and shook it vigorously, as if she expected to see the slight form of her young mistress drop from its folds to the floor.

"Um—me-e-e," she groaned, "has de sperets carried de chile off?"

She glanced up at the row of pegs where she had hung Golden's few articles of apparel. Her best dress—a dark-blue cashmere—was gone, also her hat and a summer jacket.

"She hab runned away from us," old Dinah exclaimed, with almost a howl of despair.

The thought inspired her with such grief and terror that she forgot her ailment entirely. She hobbled out from the room and made her way down stairs to her master's apartment and burst into his presence—a ludicrous object indeed in her striped cotton bed-gown.

Old Hugh Glenalvan, late as it was, had not retired to bed. Wrapped in an old wadded dressing-gown he sat in an easy-chair before an old, carved oaken cabinet.

One quaint little drawer was open, and the white-haired old man was poring over some simple treasures he had taken from it—simple treasures, yet dearer to his heart than gold or precious stones—a few old photographs, an old-fashioned ambrotype in an ebony case, a thin, gold ring and some locks of hair.

Upon this sad and touching picture of memory and tenderness old Dinah's grotesque figure broke startlingly.

"Ole massa! ole massa!" she cried, wildly, "has you seen little missie? Is she here with you?"

The old man swept his treasures off his knees into the quaint cabinet and looked at his old servant in amazement.

"Dinah, what does this startling intrusion mean?" he inquired, pushing his spectacles off his brow and regarding her with a mild frown.

"Little Golden is missing. She hab runned away from us, ole massa!" shouted Dinah, desperately.

"Dinah, you must be crazy," repeated Mr. Glenalvan, blankly.

"It's de Lard's truth, ole massa. She hab done followed in her mudder's footsteps! Dat han'some man ober at John Glenalvan's has been and gone and 'ticed our Golden from us," wailed the old negress, in despair.

CHAPTER IX

It was not long before Mr. Glenalvan had heard the whole of Golden's simple love-story from his servant. They were filled with horror and grief at its too probable termination.

"Dinah, it may be that she has stolen out into the grounds for a walk in the fresh air. She was growing very restless with the close, indoor confinement. Have you thought of that?" he said, hoping feebly against hope.

"Shall I go out and look for her, den, ole massa?" said Dinah, in a tone that plainly betrayed her hopelessness.

"Let us both go," said old Hugh.

They sallied forth anxiously into the brilliant moonlight that lay in silvery brightness all over the sweet, southern landscape—old Hugh, bareheaded, in his tattered dressing-gown, old Dinah in her short night-dress, too ridiculous a figure for anyone to contemplate without inward mirth.

It so happened that Elinor, whom the hard exigencies of poverty compelled to be her own dressmaker, had sat up late that night to complete some alterations in a dress in which she had intended to array her fair self for the morrow.

Having stitched on the last bit of lace, she went to the window and leaned out to cool her heated brow.

"My head aches, and I am almost melted with sewing by that hot lamp," she said to herself, fretfully. "How I hate this poverty that grinds one down so! When once I am married to Bertram Chesleigh I will never touch a needle again! I will order all my dresses of Worth, of Paris. And I *will* marry Bertram Chesleigh! I swear it; and woe be to anyone that tries to prevent me!"

Her dark eyes flashed luridly a moment, and her white hand was angrily clenched.

She was thinking of Clare, who had persisted in rivaling her with Mr. Chesleigh.

At that moment the subdued murmur of voices floated up to her window from the lawn.

She glanced down quickly, and saw old Dinah and her master crossing the lawn, their grotesque shadows flying long and dark before them in the brilliant moonlight.

Quick as thought Elinor was out of her seat, and gliding softly through the door in quest of her father.

Before old Glenalvan and his servant had crossed the lawn, two dark figures stole forth from the hall and silently followed them.

On the green border of the silver lake two figures were standing in the beautiful moonlight. One was a man, tall, dark, splendid, with a princely beauty.

His arm was thrown protectingly about a slender form that clung lovingly to his side.

It was Golden Glenalvan, dressed in a dark suit and light cloth jacket, a neat, little walking-hat, set jauntily on her streaming, golden curls.

Her blue eyes were lifted tenderly, and yet anxiously to her lover's face.

"Oh, Bert," she said, giving him the tender name by which he had taught her to call him, "you must indeed let me go now. We have been saying good-bye at least a half an hour."

"Parting is such a sweet pain," said the lover, bending to kiss the tempting, up-turned lips. "Give me just one more minute, my darling."

"But I have been out so long," she objected, faintly. "What if black mammy should awake and find me gone?"

"There is not the slightest danger," said Bertram Chesleigh carelessly. "The old woman sleeps so soundly that a thunder-clap would scarcely wake her."

But just at that moment of his fancied security, old Dinah, in Golden's deserted chamber, was vigorously shaking her empty night-dress in a dazed attempt to evolve from its snowy folds the strangely missing girl.

Golden smiled, then sighed faintly. He kissed her lips before the sigh had fairly breathed over them.

"If you must indeed go, my darling," he said to her in a low voice, freighted with passionate tenderness, "tell me once again, my little Golden, how dearly you love me."

"Love you," echoed the beautiful girl, and there was a Heaven of tenderness in the starry blue eyes she raised to his face. "Oh, my dearest, if I talked to you until the beautiful sun rose to-morrow, I could not put my love into words. It is deep in my heart, and nothing but death can ever tear it thence."

She threw her arms around his neck, and their lips met in a long, passionate kiss. There was a silence broken only by the soft sigh of the rippling waves, while they stood

"tranced in long embraces,
Mixed with kisses, sweeter, sweeter
Than anything on earth."

On that hush of exquisite silence that brooded round them, broke hastening footsteps and angry voices.

The lovers started back from each other in dismay to find themselves surrounded by an astonished group.

Old Dinah formed a central and conspicuous figure, beyond which old Hugh Glenalvan's silvery locks fluttered forlornly in the breeze.

John Glenalvan and Elinor, his daughter, brought up the rear. Perhaps the old gentleman and his servant were as much astonished at seeing these followers as they were at the sight that met their eyes.

Old Dinah recovered her self-possession first of all, perhaps because she had vaguely suspected some such eclat from the facts already in her possession.

She rushed forward and caught her disobedient nursling by the hand.

"Oh, my darlin', my honey, chile," she cried. "Come away from dat black-hearted wilyun to your grandpa and your ole brack mammy."

But to the consternation of everybody, the girl shook Dinah's hand off, and clung persistently to her lover.

He drew his arm protectingly around the slight figure, and Golden cried out with pretty, childish defiance:

"He loves me! he loves me! and I will not leave him."

That sight and those words fairly maddened Elinor Glenalvan. The blood seemed to boil in her veins.

"Loves you—ha! ha! loves you, the child of sin and shame!" she cried out, in a hoarse voice of bitter scorn and passion. "Oh, yes, he loves you. That is why he has lured you to your ruin, as a stranger did your mother before you."

"Hush, Elinor," said John Glenalvan, in his sternest tone; then he looked at his father, who had crept to Golden's side, and stood there trembling and speechless. "Father," he said, harshly, "take the girl away. I must speak with Mr. Chesleigh alone."

"I will not go," said Golden, and she looked up into her lover's face with a strange, wistful pleading in her soft, blue eyes, and in her sweet, coaxing lips.

He bent down and whispered something that made her leave his side and put her small hand gently into her grandfather's.

"Grandpa, I will go home with you now," she said to him, tremulously, and he led her away, followed by Dinah, who glared angrily behind her, and muttered opprobrious invectives as she went.

If looks could have killed, Bertram Chesleigh would never have lived to figure any further in the pages of my romance.

CHAPTER X

Bertram Chesleigh was left alone by the lake, with the angry eyes of John Glenalvan glaring upon him, while Elinor, speechless with rage, stood a little apart and watched him.

"Mr. Chesleigh, may I ask the meaning of this singular scene?" inquired his host, stiffly.

Bertram Chesleigh, standing with folded arms in dignified silence, opened his lips and said, briefly:

"It means, Mr. Glenalvan, that I have made the acquaintance of your niece and fallen in love with her."

A threatening flash came into Elinor's eyes in the moonlight. She bit her lips fiercely to keep back the words that rose to them.

"I am sorry to hear that," said John Glenalvan, in a subdued voice. Inwardly he was raging with anger, but he allowed no trace of it to escape him. "Will you tell me where and how you became acquainted with that child?"

"I must decline to do so," said the young man, firmly.

John Glenalvan looked around at his daughter.

"Elinor, return to the house," he said. "I will join you there presently."

Elinor walked away, but she did not return to the hall as her father had commanded. Instead, she hid herself behind a clump of willows, where she could hear every word that passed between the two men.

Some excited words ensued. Bertram Chesleigh was cool and calm. He denied that John Glenalvan had any right to call him to account for what he carelessly termed his innocent flirtation with little Golden.

"From what I can hear," he said, "you have treated the girl both cruelly and wrongfully. I stand ready to answer to Golden's grandfather for any wrong he may consider I have done, but I shall make no apology to you, Mr. Glenalvan."

"Why, not?" said the man, with repressed passion. "The girl is my niece!"

"Yet you have wickedly secluded her from all society, and even debarred her of her freedom," said Bertram Chesleigh, indignantly. "It is your fault alone that she has been driven to seek the natural delights of youth in a clandestine manner."

"It is not my fault, but her mother's," said John Glenalvan, significantly.

His face grew pale as he spoke; his eyes strayed furtively to the quiet lake, lying silvery and serene in the clear moonlight.

"How? I do not understand you," said the other, haughtily.

John Glenalvan hesitated a moment. When he spoke it was with an affectation of deep feeling and manly sorrow.

"Mr. Chesleigh," he said, "your unhesitating charge against me of cruelty to my niece forces me to the disclosure of a most painful family secret—one that I would fain have guarded from your knowledge. There is a strong reason for my course toward Golden Glenalvan."

He paused, and the listener said, hoarsely:

"A reason—" then paused, because his voice had broken utterly.

"Yes, a reason," was the bitter reply. "Mr. Chesleigh, little Golden is the child of my own and only sister, but—how shall I tell you—she has no right and no place in the world. She is *a nameless child!*"

The solid earth seemed to reel beneath Mr. Chesleigh's feet. He staggered back dizzily, and threw up his hands as if the man had struck him.

"He is proud. The blow tells fearfully," thought Elinor, watching him through the trees with vindictive eyes. "Ah, my defiant Golden, your last chance is gone now. He will never look at you again!"

"Mr. Glenalvan, you do not mean it. You are but trying my credulity," cried Bertram Chesleigh.

"Is it likely that I would publish a falsehood to my own discredit?" inquired the other.

"No, no—but, oh, God, this is too dreadful to believe!"

"Dreadful, but true," groaned John Glenalvan. "Golden is the child of sin and shame. If I had had my way she would have been consigned to a foundling asylum. But my father weakly insisted on rearing her himself, and I was injudicious enough to permit it. The only stipulation I made was that she should be kept away from the sight of the world as much as possible. I see now that all precautions were useless. Young as she is, the bad blood in her veins begins to show itself already in depraved conduct."

"Hush! do not censure her harmless meetings with me," said Bertram Chesleigh, in a voice of agony. "The child is so pure and innocent she has no idea of evil. I would die before I would wrong her!"

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the other. "If you really mean it, perhaps you will agree to relinquish your useless pursuit of her. You would not be willing to marry her after what you have heard, I am quite sure."

Meantime little Golden walked away with her grandfather, who stumbled along like one in a painful dream, his gray head bowed as if beneath the weight of sorrow, his footsteps faltering and slow.

He had not spoken one word, and his silence impressed Golden with a sense of her wrongdoing and disobedience far more than the loudest reproaches could have done.

She clung to his hand, weeping and sighing, and shivering silently at old Dinah's muttered invectives against Mr. Chesleigh.

Hugh Glenalvan spoke no words to his granddaughter until he had led her into the house.

Then he sank into his chair, and his gray head drooped upon his breast.

Surprise and sorrow seemed to have deprived him of the power of speech.

Golden knelt at his feet and laid her golden head upon his knee.

"Grandpa, speak to me," she wailed. "Do not be angry with your little Golden! Oh, grandpa, you have been so hard and strict with me; you have kept me too secluded. If you had let me have freedom and happiness like other girls, this never would have happened!"

"Hush, little missie; you must not speak to ole massa like dat," cried Dinah, trying to pull her away. "You don't know what you talkin' 'bout. Come away till ole massa is well enough to talk to you 'bout dis fing."

She lifted the girl and would have led her away, but the old man waved his hand feebly to detain her, and so she placed her in a chair instead.

Then she brought a glass of wine and poured a little between the white, writhing lips of her old master.

"Grandpa, speak to me!" wailed Golden again.

Old Dinah looked at her almost sternly, and said abruptly:

"You must let him alone, Miss Golden, you have enamost kilt him now, with your badness and deceit."

"Black mammy, you shall not speak to me so," cried the girl, resentfully, and then the bright head drooped on the arm of the chair, and she wept bitterly, more from fright at the condition of her grandfather, than from any tangible sense of her own wrong-doing.

She loved her grandfather dearly, and the sight of his suffering stabbed her tender heart deeply.

While she wept silently, old Dinah busied herself in anxious cares for the old man.

He seemed frozen into a statue of despair, sitting with his head bowed forlornly, and his vacant eyes on the floor.

But quite suddenly he roused himself and looked around him with a heavy, hopeless gaze.

"Dinah, leave me alone," he said, with unwonted impatience. "I am not ill, or if I am it is with a sickness beyond mortal healing. Golden's disobedience and her cruel, undeserved reproaches have broken my heart."

Golden threw herself impulsively at his feet again.

"Grandpa, forgive me," she wailed. "I shall die if you do not say that you will pardon me!"

He did not answer her. He only looked at his old black servant.

"Dinah, you may leave us," he said, sorrowfully, "I had hoped to keep the secret all my life; but the time has come when I must reveal to my grandchild her mother's story."

"Um-me-e e," groaned the old negress. "Sh, I t'ought it was a brack day when John Glenalvan kem here dat mornin' a-askin' ole massa to shut my pore chile up like a crim'nal."

"Hush, Dinah," the old man repeated, pointing to the door. She went out, and Golden turned her beautiful eyes, like blue violets drowned in tears, upon his pale, drawn face.

"Oh, grandpa," she cried, "you will tell me something of my mother at last. I have so longed to hear something of my mother and my father."

A groan forced itself through Hugh Glenalvan's livid lips.

"Your desire shall be gratified," he replied. "But the telling will cost you great sorrow, child."

Her beautiful face grew white and scared.

"Oh, grandpa," she cried, "then Elinor and Clare told the truth. My poor mother—"

A bursting sob checked the rest of her speech.

"Golden, before I tell you your mother's story, I must receive your own confession. Dinah has told me all the beginning of your acquaintance with my son's visitor. You must now give me the history of what further intercourse has passed between you. How comes it that my little Golden, whom I deemed so true and pure, broke her promise to old Dinah?"

The beautiful face drooped from his gaze, overspread with warm, crimson blushes. No words came from the sweet, tremulous red lips.

"A promise, child, no matter how humble the person to whom it is made, should be held perfectly sacred and inviolate," he continued. "I could not have believed that you, the child I had reared so carefully, could have been so ignoble as to falsify your promise."

CHAPTER XI

Beautiful Golden sobbed wildly at the reproachful words of her grandfather.

"Grandpa, I didn't mean it," she wept. "Indeed, indeed, I intended to keep my promise to black mammy. It was quite by accident that I broke it."

"How could it have been by accident?" inquired the old man, incredulously.

"Do you remember my habit of sleep-walking?" she inquired.

"Yes—ah, yes, for it has frightened me often to see a little, white figure glide into my room at night, with vacant, unseeing eyes. I always feared you would run into some terrible danger. Your mother had the same unfortunate habit," replied the old man.

"Grandpa, it was through that habit of mine that I broke my word to black mammy," said Golden, with an earnestness that showed how truthful was her explanation.

"Tell me how it occurred, Golden," he said, fixing his dim eyes anxiously on her face.

"Grandpa, I am almost ashamed to tell you," she replied, blushing crimson, "but it was in this way. The night after Mr. Chesleigh entered my room by accident, I was very restless in my sleep. I will tell you the truth. I had begun to love the handsome stranger. I thought of him before I fell asleep, and in my restless slumbers I dreamed of him. So I fell into my old habit of wandering in a state of somnambulism. It was a beautiful moonlight night. I dressed myself and wandered out into the grounds, and down by the lake, my favorite resting-place. Suddenly I started, broad awake in the arms of Mr. Chesleigh. I had gone too near the edge of the lake, and he had saved me from falling in."

She shuddered slightly, and resumed:

"In common gratitude I was compelled to speak, and thank the gentleman for saving me from a watery grave. Do you think I was wrong to do so?"

"It would have been cold and ungrateful to have omitted thanking him," he admitted.

"So I thought," said Golden.

"If your intercourse had stopped there, Golden, I should have had no words of blame for you. But you have carried on a secret intrigue ever since. You have stolen out to meet that man every night, have you not?"

"Yes, grandpa, but we loved each other," said the simple child, who seemed to think that was ample excuse for what she had done.

Hugh Glenalvan groaned, and remained lost in thought for a moment.

Then he bent down and whispered a question in her ear.

She started violently; the warm, ever-ready color flashed into her cheek; she threw up her head and looked at him with proud, grieved eyes.

"Grandpa, you hurt me cruelly," she replied. "Do not think of me so unkindly. I am as pure as the snow."

He seemed to be relieved by the words so quickly and proudly spoken. The next minute he said, gravely:

"My child, has this gentleman ever said anything to you of marriage?"

Little Golden remained silent and thoughtful a moment, then she answered, steadily.

"Yes."

"He wishes to marry you, then?"

"Yes," answered the girl, with a little quiver of triumphant happiness in her voice.

"When?" he asked.

A shadow fell over the fair, sweet face a moment.

"I do not know exactly when," she replied. "But Mr. Chesleigh will see you to-morrow—he told me just now that he would—and then he will settle everything."

There was a silence for a moment. The breeze sighed softly through the trees outside; they could hear it in the utter stillness. The dim, flaring light fell on the gray head of the old man, drooping forlornly on his breast, and on the lovely, upturned face of the girl, with its tender blue eyes and falling golden hair.

"Grandpa," she whispered, "do not be angry with your little girl. Put your hand on my head and say you forgive me for my fault."

He could not resist the coaxing voice and the asking blue eyes. He laid his hand on the golden head and said, solemnly and kindly:

"I forgive you, my little Golden, and I pray Heaven that no evil may come of this affair!"

She kissed his wrinkled, tremulous, old hand, where it hung over the arm of the chair.

"Thank you," she said, gratefully. "I am so glad you are not angry with me. And now, dear grandpa, I am going to kneel right here and listen while you tell me my mother's story."

In the momentary silence the wind outside seemed to sigh more sadly through the trees; the dim light flared and flickered, casting weird, fantastic shadows in the corners of the room. Deep, heavy sighs quivered over the old man's lips as the beautiful, child-like girl knelt there, with her blue eyes lifted so eagerly to his face.

CHAPTER XII

"You are the image of your mother, my child," said Golden's grandfather. "She had a white skin, pink cheeks, blue eyes, and shining hair. You inherit her happy, light-hearted disposition. You bear the same name also—Golden Glenalvan."

"Why was I never called by my father's name?" asked innocent Golden.

"My child, you anticipate my story," he answered, "but I will tell you. You have no right to your father's name."

A cry of terror came from the parted lips of the girl.

"Oh, grandpa, you do not mean *that*—you could not be so cruel!"

"You must remember that it is not my fault," he answered.

She sprang up and stood before him, with a look of white despair on her lovely young face.

"Now I understand it all," she said. "I know why my life is so unlike that of other girls. Oh, grandpa, grandpa, tell me where to find my mother that I may curse her for my ruined life!"

His only answer was a low and heart-wrung groan.

"Grandpa, tell me where to find her," repeated little Golden, wildly. "She must be living, for I remember now that no one has ever told me plainly that she was dead. I will go to her—I will reproach her for her sin! I will tell her what a life mine has been—how I have been hated and despised for my mother's fault, even by my kindred."

Sighs, long and bitter, heaved the old man's breast, but he answered her not. She flung herself weeping at his feet.

"You do not speak!" she cried. "Oh, grandpa, tell me where to find my cruel mother!"

"She is with your father," said Hugh Glenalvan, in a deep and bitter voice that showed what agony he endured in the revelation of his daughter's disgrace and infamy.

Golden threw up her little hands in convulsive agony.

"Oh, not that!" she cried. "Tell me it is not true!"

Again he had no answer for her, and Golden cried out reproachfully:

"Grandpa, grandpa, why did you suffer her to be so wicked?"

"It was through no fault of mine," he answered heavily.

She looked at him in silent anguish a moment, then she asked him:

"Where is she? Tell me where to find her, if you know."

"John told me she was in New York the last time he heard of her; but that was years ago. I pray God that she may be dead ere this."

And then he wrung his hands, and the tears rolled down his withered cheeks.

"Oh, my lost little daughter, my precious little Golden," he moaned in agony. "How little I dreamed in your innocent babyhood that you were reserved for such a fate!"

Golden was regarding him attentively.

"Uncle John told you she was in New York," she said. "What did Uncle John know? Did he hate my mother as he hates me?"

He looked at her, startled.

"Hate your mother," he cried. "His own sister! No—of course not—that is, not until she fell!"

"He hated her then?" asked Golden, musingly.

"Yes, he hated her then. I believe he could have killed her."

"He should have killed her betrayer," said Golden, who seemed suddenly to have acquired the gravity and thoughtfulness of a woman.

"I would have killed him myself if I could have laid hands on the villain," said her grandfather, with sudden, irrepressible passion.

The bitter grief and impatient wrath of the girl had sobered down into quietness more grievous than tears.

Her face showed deathly white in the dim light; her lips were set in a line of intense pain; her pansy-blue eyes had grown black with feeling.

She brought a low stool and sat down at her grandfather's feet, folding her white hands meekly in her lap, and drooping her fair head heavily.

"Grandpa, I will not interrupt you again," she said. "I will sit here quite still, and listen. Now tell me all my mother's story."

She kept her word.

After he had told her all he had to tell, and she knew the whole tragic story of her mother's disgrace, she still sat there silently, with her dark eyes bent on her clasped hands.

The cloud of shame and disgrace seemed to lower upon her head with the weight of the whole world.

"You understand all I have told, my child?" he said to her, after waiting vainly for her to speak.

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