

Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

# A Secret Inheritance. Volume 3 of 3



Benjamin Farjeon

**A Secret Inheritance. Volume 3 of 3**

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**Farjeon B.**

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# **Farjeon B. L. Benjamin Leopold**

## **A Secret Inheritance (Volume 3 of 3)**

### **BOOK THE SECOND (Continued)**

IN WHICH THE SECRET OF THE INHERITANCE TRANSMITTED TO GABRIEL CAREW IS REVEALED IN A SERIES OF LETTERS FROM ABRAHAM SANDIVAL, ESQ., ENGLAND, TO HIS FRIEND, MAXIMILIAN GALLENGA, ESQ., CONTRA COSTA CO., CALIFORNIA.

VOL. III.

## VII

The investigations in the course of which Emilius related his version of what had passed between him and his ill-fated brother-I use the phrase to give expression to my meaning, but indeed it is hard to say to which of the brothers, the living or the dead, it can be applied with the greater force-took place in private, only the accused and the magistrate, with a secretary to write down what was said, being present. The magistrate in his conversations with Doctor Louis and Gabriel Carew, did not hesitate to declare his belief in the prisoner's guilt. He declined altogether to entertain the sentimental views which Doctor Louis advanced in Emilius's favour-such as the love which it was well known had existed between the brothers since their birth, the character for gentleness which Emilius had earned, the numberless acts of kindness which could be set to his credit, and the general esteem which was accorded to him by those among whom he had chiefly lived.

"My experience is," he said, "that all pervious records of a man's life and character are not only valueless but misleading when the passions of love and jealousy enter his soul. They dominate him utterly; they are sufficiently baleful to transform him from an angel to a demon. He sees things through false light, and justifies himself for the commission of any monstrous act. Reason becomes warped, the judgment is distorted, the sense of right-doing vanishes; he is the victim of delusions."

Doctor Louis caught at the word. "The victim!"

"Will that excuse crime?" asked the magistrate severely.

Doctor Louis did not reply.

"No," said the magistrate, "it aggravates it. Admit such a defence, and let it serve as a palliation of guilt, and the whole moral fabric is destroyed. What weighs heavily against the prisoner is his evident disinclination to reveal all he knows in connection with the hours he passed in the forest on the night of his brother's death. He is concealing something, and he seeks refuge in equivocation. When I accused him of this his confusion increased. I asked him whether his meeting with his brother was accidental or premeditated, and he was unable or unwilling to give me a satisfactory reply. He made a remark to which he evidently wished me to attach importance. 'There are matters between me and my brother,' he said, 'which it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for an unsympathetic person to understand.' 'I am such a person,' I said. 'Undoubtedly,' was his reply; 'you are seeking to convict me out of my own mouth of a crime I did not commit.' 'I am seeking to elicit the truth,' I said. 'Have these mysterious matters between you and your brother of which you speak any bearing upon his death?' Observe, that out of regard for the prisoner's feelings I used the word death instead of murder; but he corrected me. 'They have,' he said, 'a distinct bearing upon his murder.' 'And you cannot explain them to me?' I asked. 'I cannot,' he replied. 'You expect me, however, to place credence in what you say?' I asked. 'I do not,' he said; 'it is so strange even to me that, if you were in possession of the particulars, I should scarcely be justified in expecting you to believe me.' After that there was, of course, but little more to be said on the point. If a criminal chooses to intrench himself behind that which he is pleased to call a mystery, but which is simply an absurd invention for the purpose of putting justice off the track, he must take the consequences. Before our interview was ended it occurred to me to ask him whether he intended to persist in a concealment of his so-called mystery. He considered a little, and said that he would speak of it to one person, and to one person only. Upon that I inquired the name of the person, saying that I would seek him and send him to the prisoner. Emilius refused to mention the name of the person. Another mystery. As you may imagine, this did not dispose me more favourably towards him, and I left him to his meditations."

"Having," said Doctor Louis, "a thorough belief in his guilt."

"There is not a shadow of doubt in my mind," said the magistrate.

"You once entertained an esteem for him."

"True; but it only serves to prove how little we really know of each other. This mask that we wear, and which even in private we seldom remove, hides so much!"

"So much that is evil?"

"That is my meaning."

"You are growing pessimistic," said Doctor Louis sadly.

"Late events and a larger experience are driving me in that direction," replied the magistrate.

"Have you any objection to granting me a private interview with Emilius?"

"None whatever. You have but to name your own time."

"May Mr. Carew see him also?"

"If he wishes."

In this conversation Gabriel Carew had borne no share. This was due to an absolute fairness on Carew's part. Prejudiced as he was against Emilius, he was aware that he could say nothing in favour of the accused, and he did not wish to pain Doctor Louis by expressing what he felt. When the magistrate left them, Doctor Louis said, "The one person to whom Emilius is willing to confide is either you or myself."

To this view Gabriel Carew did not subscribe. In his remarks to Doctor Louis he touched lightly but firmly upon the instinctive aversion which, from the first, he and the brothers had felt towards each other, and said that this aversion, on the part of Emilius, must have been strengthened rather than modified by the opinions he had felt it his duty to express with respect to Emilius's dealings with Patricia.

"But he behaved honourably to her," contended Doctor Louis, and endeavoured to win Carew to a more favourable judgment of the unhappy man. He was not successful.

"There are sentiments," said Carew, "which it would be folly to struggle against. Emilius was always my enemy, and is still more so now. If he wishes to see me I will go to him. Not otherwise."

Shortly afterwards Doctor Louis had an interview with Emilius.

"I thought you might come to me," said the prisoner, but he refused the hand which Doctor Louis held out to him. "Not till I am free," he said, "and pronounced innocent of this horrible charge."

"You will be-soon," said Doctor Louis with inward sinking, the evidence was so black against Emilius.

"I scarcely dare to hope it," said Emilius gloomily. "A fatality dogs our family. It destroyed my father and his brother; it has destroyed Eric; it will destroy me."

"Under any circumstances," said Doctor Louis, not pursuing the theme, "I should have endeavoured to see you, but there is a special reason for my present visit. The magistrate by whom you have been examined informed me that there is a certain matter in connection with this deplorable event which you will disclose to one person only. Am I he-and should you make the disclosure, is it likely to serve you?"

"I was not quite exact," said Emilius, "when I made that statement to the magistrate, in answer to a question he put to me. There were, indeed, two persons in my mind-but you are the first, by right."

"And the other-is it Gabriel Carew?"

"Yes, it is he-though I doubt whether he would come of his own free will. He bears me no friendship."

"He is an honourable, upright man," said Doctor Louis. "Though you have not been drawn to each other, as I hoped would be the case, I am sure he would be willing to serve you if it were in his power."

"Does he believe me to be innocent?" Doctor Louis was silent. "Then why should he be willing to serve me? You are mistaken. But it is not of this I wish to speak. What I have to disclose will be received with sympathy by you, who knew and loved my poor father, and who are acquainted with all the particulars of his strange story. Related to any other than yourself it would be regarded as the

ravings of a maniac, or as a wild and impotent invention to help me to freedom. For this reason I held my tongue in the presence of the magistrate."

"Before hearing it," said Doctor Louis, "I ought to say that, though I am groping in the dark, I can understand dimly why you would not confide in an officer of the law. But I cannot understand why you should be willing to confide in Gabriel Carew. I speak in the light of your belief that Carew bears you no friendship."

"I cannot explain myself to you," said Emilius, "and should most likely fail in the attempt with Mr. Carew. But there are promptings which a man sometimes feels it a duty to obey, and this is one of them. I perceive that you do not receive these apparent inconsistencies with favour. It is natural. But reflect. Had you not, through your close intimacy and almost brotherly friendship with my father, been made familiar with his story-had it been related to you as a stranger, would you not have received it with incredulity, would you not have refused to believe it?" Doctor Louis nodded. "A wild effort of imagination could alone have invented it-had it not happened. But it was true, in the teeth of improbabilities and inconsistencies. For his sake you will bear with me, for his sake you will be indulgent and merciful to his unhappy son."

Doctor Louis was inexpressibly moved. He again offered Emilius his hand, who again refused it.

"Circumstantial evidence," he said, "is so strong against me that I fear I have played out my part in the active world. Should my fears be confirmed, I shall ask you to render me an inestimable service. Meanwhile, there is that which should not be concealed from you, my father's dearest friend, and mine. It relates chiefly to the murder of my brother. That part of my story which affects my wife, Patricia, may be briefly passed over. I have known her for nearly five years, and grew insensibly to love her. It is only lately that my poor Eric made her acquaintanceship, and surrendered his heart to her. I should have been frank with him; I should have spoken of my love for Patricia instead of concealing it. It may be that it would not have averted his doom and mine, for when men are pursued by an inexorable fate, there are a thousand roads open for its execution. Why did I not go frankly to Patricia's father, and ask him for his daughter's hand? It is a question that may well be asked, but there is some difficulty in answering it. Chiefly, I think, it was Patricia who guided me here, and who desired to keep our love locked in our breasts. She feared her father; he is a man of stern and fixed ideas, and, once resolved, is difficult to move. His daughter, he declared, should marry in her own station in life; never would he consent to her marrying a gentleman. Patricia chose to consider me one, and had a genuine and honest dread that her father would tear her from me if he discovered our love. I did not argue with her; I simply agreed to all she said. We were married in secret, at her wish; and when concealment was no longer possible, we fled. This flight was not undertaken in haste; it was discussed and deliberately planned. We hoped for her father's pardon when he discovered that his intervention would be useless. I was for an earlier revealment to Martin Hartog of his daughter's union with me, but I yielded to Patricia's pleadings. She had a deep, unconquerable fear of her father's curse. 'It would kill me,' she said; and I believed it would.

"This is the end to which love has led us. I will speak now of my brother Eric."



## VIII

"It was arranged," said Emilius, after a pause, during which he recalled with clearness the momentful history of the few short hours which had sealed his brother's fate, "that Patricia should leave her father's cottage at midnight, when her father was asleep. I was to wait for her about a quarter of a mile from Mr. Carew's house with a horse and cart, in which we were to travel to the lodgings I had taken for her. This portion of our plan was successfully carried out, and Patricia and I were journeying to our new home. It was midnight by my watch when we started, and we had ridden for less than an hour when Patricia was overtaken with a sudden faintness. I was alarmed, and upon questioning her she said that she felt too weak to bear the jolting of the cart. The fact is, she was exhausted and worn with fatigue and anxiety. With her contemplated flight in her mind she had had but little sleep for two or three nights; her strength was overtaxed, and I saw that she needed immediate rest. I proposed that we should stop for three or four hours, so that she could sleep without disturbance, and upon my assuring her that we were quite safe she gratefully acceded to my proposal. In a very short time I made preparations for her repose; some hay I had brought with me furnished her a tolerably comfortable bed, and I had also provided rugs, with which I covered her. I took the horse from the cart, and tethered it, and before this was accomplished Patricia was in a peaceful slumber.

"There was no fear of our being disturbed. We were in a secluded part of the forest, which even in daylight is seldom traversed. The night was fine, though dark. All being secure, I sat me down on some dry moss by the side of the cart, and in a few moments was myself asleep. I awoke suddenly and in terrible agitation. In outward aspect nothing was changed. All was as I had left it but fifteen minutes ago; for, upon consulting my watch by means of a lighted match, I found that I had been asleep but a quarter of an hour. The horse was grazing quietly and contentedly; Patricia was sleeping peacefully, and I judged that she would continue to do so for many hours unless she were aroused. Nature's demands upon her exhausted frame were imperative.

"Everything being so secure, what cause was there for agitation?

"The cause lay in myself, and had been created during the last few minutes when I was in a state of unconsciousness. It seems incredible that so much should have passed through my brain in so short a time, but I have heard that a dream of years may take place in a moment's sleep.

"I dreamt of my father and his brother, and I was living a dual existence as it were, my father's and my own; and as I was associated with him, so was my brother Eric with our uncle Kristel. There was a strange similarity in the positions; as my father had flown, unknown to his brother, with the woman he loved, so was I flying, unknown to *my* brother, with the woman to whom I was bound in strongest bonds of love, and who had inspired in *his* heart feelings akin to my own. The tragic end of my father and uncle seemed to be woven into my life and the life of my brother. It was a phantasmagoria of shadow, belonging both to the past and the present; and it was succeeded by another, which was the chief cause of my violent awaking.

"Eric was walking in the forest at some distance from the spot upon which I was sleeping. I saw him distinctly, though he was walking through darkness, and although I do not remember in my conscious moments to have ever taken note of the particular conformation of the ground and the arrangement of the trees, the scene, with all its details of natural growth, was strangely familiar to me. And behind him, unknown to himself, stalked a threatening Shadow, with Death in its aspect. Then came a whisper, 'Your brother is in danger. Seek, and warn him!'

"This spiritual whisper was in my ears when I awoke.

"'Seek, and warn him!' It was clearly my duty. Such visitations had come to my father, and were fatally realised. Dare I neglect the warning?

"But what was to be done must be done instantly and without delay. Could I leave Patricia? I leant over her, and gently called her name. She did not reply. I softly shook her, but did not succeed

in arousing her. And while I was thus engaged I continued to hear the whisper, 'Your brother is in danger. Seek, and warn him!'

"I decided. Patricia could be safely left for a little while. If I awoke her she would probably prevail upon me to remain with her, and I might have cause in all my after life to reproach myself for having neglected the spiritual warning. To be lightly regarded perhaps by other men, but not by me. I was Silvain's son.

"I wrote on a leaf torn from my pocketbook, 'Do not be alarmed at my absence; I shall be back at sunrise. There is something I have forgotten, which must be done immediately. Sleep in peace. All is well. – Your lover and husband, EMILIUS.' I pinned this paper at her breast, arranged the rugs securely about her, and left her.

"I cannot describe to you how I was directed, but I plunged without hesitation and in perfect confidence into the labyrinths of the forest, and my steps were directed aright. I walked swiftly, and recognised certain natural aspects made familiar to me in my dreams. And in little more than an hour I saw Eric a few yards ahead of me, strolling aimlessly and in a disturbed mood. I called to him.

"Eric!"

"Emilius!"

"But there was no friendliness in his tone.

"It is you who have been dogging me!" he cried.

"I have but this moment arrived," I replied.

"In search of me?"

"Yes, my dear brother," I said, passing my arm around him. "We must speak together, in love and confidence, as we have ever done."

"Already he was softened, and I breathed a grateful sigh.

"Have you been followed, Eric?" I asked.

"I do not know," he replied. "I cannot say. I have been racked and tormented by torturing fancies. Trees have taken ominous shapes; shadows have haunted me; my mind is distraught; my heart is bleeding!"

"It would occupy me for too long a time to narrate circumstantially all that passed between me and Eric on that our last interview. Suffice it that I succeeded to some extent in calming him, that I succeeded in making him understand that I had done him no conscious wrong; that Patricia was my wife and loved me.

"Had it been your lot, Eric," I said, 'to have won her love, I should have suffered as you are suffering; but believe me, my dear brother, that I should have endeavoured to bear my sufferings like a man. It lay not with us that this should have occurred; it lay with Patricia. It is not so much our happiness, but hers, that is at stake.'

"It is a consolation to me in my present peril to know that I succeeded in wooing him back to our old relations, in which we were guided wholly and solely by brotherly love. You are not to believe that this was accomplished without difficulty. There were, on his side, paroxysms of rebellion and despair, in one of which-after he had learned that I and Patricia were man and wife-he cried, 'Well, kill me, for I do not care to live!' These were the words heard by the witness who has testified against me. They bear, I well know, an injurious construction, but my conscience is not disturbed. My heart is-and I am racked by a torture which threatens to undermine my reason when I think of my wife and unborn child.

"At length peace was established between me and my dear brother. And then it was that I told him of my dream, and of the uncontrollable impulse which had urged me to seek for him in the forest. I asked him to accompany me back to Patricia, but he said that was impossible, and that he could not endure the agony of it. I put myself in his place, and recognised that his refusal was natural. But I could not entirely dismiss my fears for his safety. Eric, however, refused to share them. 'What is to

be will be,' he said; 'otherwise it would not have been fated that our father and his brother-twins, as we are-should have loved the same woman, and that we should have done the same.'

"I was anxious to get back to Patricia, and I left him in the forest. I knew nothing further until I was arrested and thrown into prison."

"An innocent man?" said Doctor Louis.

"As innocent as yourself," was Emilius's reply.

## IX

Throughout this narration Doctor Louis was impressed by the suspicion that something was hidden from him. He pressed Emilius upon the point, and his suspicion was strengthened by the evasive replies he received.

"Enough, for the present, of myself," said Emilius; "let me hear something of the outside world-of the world that is dead to me."

"What do you wish to know?" asked Doctor Louis sadly.

"Of yourselves," replied Emilius. "Of your good wife, whom I used to look upon as a second mother. She is well?"

"She is well," said Doctor Louis, "but in deep unhappiness because of these terrible events."

"How does she regard me-as innocent or guilty?"

"She has the firmest belief in your innocence. When I told her I was about to visit you, she desired me to give you her love and sympathy."

"It is like her. And Lauretta?"

"I did not inform her that I was coming. She is in great distress. You and Eric were as brothers to her."

"And now," said Emilius, with a certain recklessness of manner which puzzled Doctor Louis, "one is dead and the other disgraced. But she will live through it. She has a happy future before her?"

He put this somewhat in the form of a question, to which Doctor Louis replied without hesitation: "We have the best of reasons for hoping so. But our conversation, Emilius, appears to have taken a heartless turn. Let us rather consider the chances of establishing your innocence and setting you free."

"No, let us continue to speak of your family. There may not be another opportunity-who knows? My judges may take it into their heads to keep me in solitary confinement, and to deprive me entirely of the solace of friendly intercourse, until they have got rid of me altogether. The chances of establishing my innocence are scarcely worth considering; they are so slender. Slender! They are not even that. I see no loophole, nor do you. What is wanted is fact-hard, solid fact, such as an actual witness, or a frank confession from the murderer. Everything tangible and intangible is against me. Eric and I were rivals in a woman's love; we had a meeting, in which we reconciled our differences, and in which the horror of brotherly hatred was scotched clean dead. Who were present at this meeting? My dear brother, who is gone and cannot testify; and I, whose interest it is to say whatever my tongue can utter in my defence. To prove my innocence I can bring forward-what? Shadows. I could forgive my judges for laughing at me were I to set up such a defence. Easier to believe that I killed my brother in a dream. Could that be proved, there would be some hope for me, for it might be argued that I was not accountable. Let us dismiss it. I have told you all I know positively; for the rest, I am strong enough to keep it to myself, being aware of the manner in which it would be received."

"Surely you are not wearied of life!" said Doctor Louis, shocked at this reckless mood.

"That is not to the point. Wearied or not, it is not in my power to choose. Were I free, were my fate in my own hands, it would be worth my while to consider how to act in order that the crime might be fixed upon the guilty one. And hearken, Doctor, I am not swayed by impulse; there is something of inward direction which holds me up. I hear voices, I see visions-not to be heard or seen or taken into account in a court of justice; of value only in a prison. They assure me that, though I may suffer and be disgraced, I shall not die until my innocence is proved."

"Heaven grant it!" exclaimed Doctor Louis.

"Meanwhile, I wait and take the strokes which fate deals out to me. A crushed manhood, a ruined life, a blasted happiness! And there is a happy future, you say, before Lauretta? You have every confidence in Mr. Carew? Lauretta loves him?"

"With her whole heart."

"And you and your good wife approve-are content to intrust her happiness into his keeping?"

"We are content-we approve."

"May all be as you hope! Say nothing to them of me. The best mercy that can be accorded to me is the mercy of forgetfulness. I have a favour to beg of you."

"It is granted."

"You will be kind to my wife; you will not desert her-you will, if necessary, protect her from her father, who, I fear, will never forgive her?"

"I will do all that lies in my power to further your wishes-though I still hope for a favourable turn in your affairs."

"Your hope is vain," said Emilius. "I thank you for your promise."

## X

There were no further discoveries. Doctor Louis engaged eminent lawyers to defend Emilius when his trial took place, but their case was so weak that they held out no hope of a successful issue. They pleaded hard and brilliantly, and took advantage of every vulnerable point. A great number of witnesses testified to the good character of the accused, to his consistent kindness of heart, to his humanity, to acts of heroism now for the first time made public. These efforts were not entirely without effect. Emilius was pronounced guilty, but a chord of sympathy had been touched, and he received the benefit of it. A strong recommendation to mercy accompanied the verdict, and he was condemned to imprisonment for twenty-five years. Thus he passed away, and was as one dead to those who had loved and honoured him; but it was long before they forgot him.

These events retarded for a little while the marriage of Gabriel Carew and Lauretta, and even the ardent lover himself had the grace to submit patiently to the delay. During that time he endeared himself more than ever to Doctor Louis and his family, by his tenderness to Lauretta, and by his charities to the poor. His mind recovered its healthy tone; his habits became more regular; he paid attention to religious duties; and when the wedding-day arrived it was a day of rejoicing in the whole village. He and Lauretta departed on their honeymoon tour amidst general demonstrations of love and esteem. The sun was shining on their present and their future, and it may be truly said that never did bride and bridegroom go forth under more joyful auspices. For weal or woe the lives of Lauretta and Gabriel were henceforth one.

They were absent from Nerac for between two and three months, travelling through delightful scenes and climes, and their letters home betokened that they were perfectly happy.

"For the first time," wrote Gabriel Carew, "I recognise the sweetness and beauty of life. I have hitherto been wandering in darkness. Association with Lauretta has opened windows of light in my soul; heaven is nearer to me. How can I sufficiently thank you for the precious gift of a nature so pure?"

Their honeymoon over, they journeyed homewards to Nerac. Carew had given all necessary instructions with respect to his house, and it was ready for occupation upon their return. Martin Hartog had left the village, and was never again seen in it. No one knew whither he had gone; he left no sign behind, and, having few friends, was but little missed, and was soon forgotten. Other changes had also occurred, of infinitely more importance to Gabriel Carew and his wife. The first which arrested their attention and brought fear to their hearts was the health of Lauretta's mother, and Carew observed in Doctor Louis's grave and anxious face that the fear which smote himself and Lauretta had found a lodgment in the doctor's soul. She had grown thin and wan during their absence; her limbs were oppressed with langour, her eyes were dim, there was a wistful trembling of her lips. This was not immediately observable, so profound was her joy in embracing once more her beloved child, but Gabriel Carew was struck by it within a few minutes of their being together. He did not, however, speak of it of his own accord to Doctor Louis. So deep was the love between those faithful souls, that Carew was fearful of referring to what might prove to be not only a separation, but a destruction of happiness. Doctor Louis was the first to mention it. He and Carew were sitting apart from the mother and the daughter, who, embracing, were at the other end of the room.

"You have had a happy time, Gabriel?"

"Very, very happy."

"Our dear Lauretta is the same as ever."

"Yes. I would wish that she should never change."

"But changes come," said Doctor Louis with a sigh.

"Yes, unhappily."

"I am not so sure," said the doctor, with a trembling lip. "Yet when they do come, sooner than we expected in one we love, they are hard to bear. Faith in God alone sustains us in such a trial. To live a good life, a life without reproach, upon which lies no shame, a life in which we have endeavoured to fulfil our human duties-surely that must count!"

"Otherwise," said Carew, "the sinner would rank with the just."

"The sinner is the more to be pitied," said Doctor Louis; and then, after a pause, "Gabriel, you have been away from us for nearly three months, and are more likely to detect changes in persons and things than those who are hourly familiar with them. Do you observe anything?"

"In what-in whom?" asked Carew, in a hesitating tone.

"In the dear mother," said Doctor Louis. "Is she thinner, paler, than when you saw her last?"

"Yes," replied Carew, deeming frankness the best course; "she looks as if she had passed through a sickness."

"She has not been really ill-that is, she has attended regularly to her duties and has not complained. But she is drooping; I am filled with fears for her."

"She looks better within these few minutes," said Carew. "Her eyes are brighter, her cheeks have more colour in them."

"She has her dear Lauretta by her side," said Doctor Louis, his eyes fixed upon her beloved face. "It is the delight of the reunion that has excited her."

"It may be," said Carew, "that Lauretta's absence has affected her. They have never been separated before. How often has Lauretta said during her travels, 'There is only one thing wanting-the presence of my dear mother and father!' Now that they are together again, the dear mother will grow stronger."

It was not so, however; the good woman drooped daily, and daily grew weaker. The remembrance of that brief time at the end of which Lauretta's mother passed from earth to heaven, never faded from the minds of those nearest and dearest to her. Her illness lasted for not longer than two weeks after Lauretta's return.

"She was only waiting for her child," sighed Doctor Louis.

It needed all his strength of mind and all the resources of his wise nature to enable him to bear up against the impending blow; and these would not have availed but for the sweet and tender words whispered by his wife as he sat by her bedside, holding her hand in his. Lauretta did not leave her mother. The young girl-wife suffered deeply. Even the love of her husband, it seemed, could not compensate for the loss of the dear one, whose unselfish course through life had been strewn with flowers, planted and tended by her own hands to gladden the hearts of those around her. The whole village mourned. Grateful men and women clustered outside the gates of Doctor Louis's house from morn till night, anxiously inquiring how the invalid was progressing, and whether there was any hope. Simple offerings of love were hourly left at the house, and were received with gratitude. Her eyes brightened when she was told of this.

"The dear people!" she murmured. "God guard them and keep them free from temptation and sin!"

These words were uttered in the presence of her husband and Gabriel Carew, and they learned from them how her heart had been racked by the terrible events which had occurred lately in Nerac, staining the once innocent village with blood and crime.

"She loved Eric and Emilius," said Doctor Louis to Carew, "as though they were her own sons. To this moment she has a firm belief in Emilius's innocence."

"Her nature," was Gabriel Carew's comment, "is too gentle for justice. Fittingly is she called 'The Angel Mother.'"

It was a title by which she had been occasionally spoken of in the village, and now that she was lying on her death-bed it was generally applied to her.

"For the Angel Mother," said the villagers, as they left their humble offerings at her door.

In his goings in and out of the house the good priest, Father Daniel, was besieged by eager sympathisers, asking him to convey loving messages from this one and that one to the Angel Mother, and the wish being father to the thought-inquiring whether she was not, after all, a little better than she was yesterday, and whether there was hope that she might still be spared to them. He took advantage of the sad occasion to impress moral lessons upon his flock, bidding them purify their hearts and live good lives. It was remarked by a few that a feeling of restraint had grown up between Father Daniel and Gabriel Carew since the latter's return from his honeymoon tour. Indeed, on Father Daniel's part, this new feeling must have been generated before Carew's return, and it very quickly impressed itself upon Carew. He was not slow in paying coldness for coldness; his nature was not of that conciliatory order to beg for explanations of altered conduct. Proud, self-contained, and to some extent imperious and exacting in his dealings with men, Carew met Father Daniel in the spirit in which he was received. No words passed between them; it was simply that the priest evinced a disposition to hold aloof from Gabriel Carew, and that, the moment this was clear to Carew, he also fell back, and did not attempt to bridge the chasm which separated these two men who had once been friends.

So the days wore on till the end came. With each member of her family the Angel Mother held converse within a few hours of her death.

"Be good to my dear child," she said to Carew.

There was no one else but these two in the chamber, and it was at her request that they were alone.

"My heart, my life, are devoted to her," said Carew. "So may I be dealt by as I deal by her!"

"She loves you as women do not always love," said the mother. "You have by your side one who will sweeten and purify your days. No thought but what is tender and sweet has ever crossed her mind. She is the emblem of innocence. In giving her to you I believed I was doing what was right. Do not question me—my moments are numbered. I have been much shaken by the fate of Eric and Emilius. You believe Emilius to be guilty. Be more merciful in your judgments. With my dying breath I declare my belief in his innocence. It would be disloyal to one I loved as my son if I did not say this to you."

"But why," asked Carew gently, "especially to me?"

"I would say it to all," she replied, "and I would have all believe as I believe. His poor wife—his poor wife! Ah, how I pity her! Help her, if you can. Promise me."

"I will do so," said Carew, "if it is in my power, and if she will receive help from me."

"Lauretta and you are one," said the dying woman; "if not from you, she will receive it from my daughter. Before you leave me, answer one question, as you would answer before God. Have you anything hidden in your heart for which you have cause to reproach yourself?"

"Nothing," he replied, wondering that such a question should be put to him at such a moment.

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Pardon me for asking you. May no shadow of sin or wrong-doing ever darken your door! Lift your heart in prayer. If you have children, teach them to pray. Nothing is more powerful to the young as the example of parents. Farewell, Gabriel. Send my husband and my daughter to me, and let my last moments with them be undisturbed." She gazed at him kindly and pityingly. "Kiss me, Gabriel."

He left the room with eyes overflowing, and delivered the message to Doctor Louis and Lauretta, who went immediately to the chamber of death.

Father Daniel was in the apartment, praying on his knees. He raised his head as Gabriel Carew stepped to his side. The time was too solemn for resentment or coldness.

"Pray with me," said the priest.

Gabriel Carew sank upon his knees, and prayed, by the priest's direction, for mercy, for light, for pardon to sinners.



Half an hour afterwards the door was opened, and Doctor Louis beckoned to his son-in-law and the priest. They followed him to the bedside of the Angel Mother. All was over; her soul had passed away tranquilly and peacefully. Carew knelt by Lauretta, and passed his arm tenderly around her.

When the news was made known, the village was plunged in grief. The shops were closed, and the villagers went about quietly and softly, and spoke in gentle tones of the Angel Mother, whose spirit was looking down upon them from heavenly heights. Early on the morning of the funeral the children went into the woods and gathered quantities of simple wild flowers, with which they strewed the road from Doctor Louis's house to the grave. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, soft breezes floated over the churchyard.

"It is as the dear mother would have wished," said Doctor Louis to Lauretta. "I remember her saying long ago in the past that she would like to be buried on a bright summer day-such as this. Ah, how the years have flown! But we must not repine. Let us rather be grateful for the happiness we have enjoyed in the association of a saintly woman, an angel now-waiting for us when our time comes."

And in his heart there breathed the hope, "May it come soon, to me!"

The people lingered about the grave over which to this day the flowers are growing.

## XI

So numerous had been the concourse of people, and so engrossed were they in their demonstrations of sorrow and affection for their departed friend, that the presence of a stranger among them had not been observed. He was a man whose appearance would not have won their favour. Apart from the fact that he was unknown-which in itself, because of late events, would have predisposed them against him-his face and clothes would not have recommended him. He had the air of one who was familiar with prisons; he was common and coarse-looking; his clothes were a conglomeration of patches and odds and ends; he gazed about him furtively, as though seeking for some particular person or for some special information, and at the same time wishful, for private and not creditable reasons, not to draw upon himself a too close observation. Had he done so, it would have been noted that he entered the village early in the day, and, addressing himself to children-his evident desire being to avoid intercourse with men and women-learnt from them the direction of Gabriel Carew's house. Thither he wended his way, and loitered about the house, looking up at the windows and watching the doors for the appearance of some person from whom he could elicit further information. There was only one servant in the house, the other domestics having gone to the funeral, and this servant, an elderly woman, was at length attracted by the sight of a stranger strolling this way and that, without any definite purpose-and, therefore, for a bad one. She stood in the doorway, gazing at him. He approached and addressed her.

"I am looking for Gabriel Carew's house," he said.

"This is it," the servant replied.

"So I was directed, but was not sure, being a stranger in these parts. Is the master at home?"

"No."

"He lives here, doesn't he?"

"He will presently; but it is only lately he came back with his wife, and has not yet taken up his residence."

"His wife! Do you mean Doctor Louis's daughter?"

"Yes."

"Ah, they're married, then?"

"Yes, they are married. You seem to know names, though you are a stranger."

"Yes, I know names well enough. If Gabriel Carew is not here, where is he?"

"It would be more respectful to say Mr. Carew," said the servant, resenting this familiar utterance of her master's name.

"Mr. Carew, then. I'm not particular. Where is he?"

"You will find him in the village."

"That's a wide address."

"He is stopping at Doctor Louis's house. Anybody will tell you where that is."

"Thank you; I will go there." He was about to depart, but turned and said, "Where is the gardener, Martin Hartog?"

"He left months ago."

"Left, has he? Where for?"

"I can't tell you."

"Because you won't?"

"Because I can't. You are a saucy fellow."

"No, mistress, you're mistaken. It's my manner, that's all; I was brought up rough. And where I've come from, a man might as well be out of the world as in it." He accompanied this remark with a dare-devil shake of his head.

"You're so free at asking questions," said the woman, "that there can be no harm in my asking where *have* you come from-being, as you say, a stranger in these parts?"

"Ah, mistress," said the man, "questions are easily asked. It's a different thing answering them. Where I've come from is nothing to anybody who's not been there. To them it means a lot. Thank you for your information."

He swung off without another word towards the village. He had no difficulty in finding Doctor Louis's house, and observing that something unusual was taking place, held his purpose in and took mental notes. He followed the procession to the churchyard, and was witness to the sympathy and sorrow shown for the lady whose body was taken to its last resting-place. He did not know at the time whether it was man or woman, and he took no pains to ascertain till the religious ceremony was over. Then he addressed himself to a little girl.

"Who is dead?"

"Our Angel Mother," replied the girl.

"She had a name, little one." His voice was not unkindly. The answer to his question-"Angel Mother" – had touched him. He once had a mother, the memory of whom still remained with him as a softening if not a purifying influence. It is the one word in all the languages which ranks nearest to God. "What was hers?"

"Don't you know? Everybody knows. Doctor Louis's wife."

"Doctor Louis's wife!" he muttered. "And I had a message for her!" Then he said aloud, "Dead, eh?"

"Dead," said the little girl mournfully.

"And you are sorry?"

"Everybody is sorry."

"Ah," thought the man, "it bears out what *he* said." Again, aloud: "That gentleman yonder, is he Doctor Louis?"

"Yes."

"The priest-his name is Father Daniel, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"The young lady by Doctor Louis's side, is she his daughter?"

"Yes."

"Is her husband there-Gabriel Carew?"

"Yes; there he is." And the girl pointed him out.

The man nodded, and moved apart. But he did not remain so; he mingled with the throng, and coming close to the persons he had asked about, gazed at them, as though in the endeavour to fix their faces in his memory. Especially did he gaze, long and earnestly, at Gabriel Carew. None noticed him; they were too deeply preoccupied in their special sorrow. When the principal mourners moved away, he followed them at a little distance, and saw them enter Doctor Louis's house. Being gone from his sight, he waited patiently. Patience was required, because for three or four hours none who entered the house emerged from it. Nature, however, is a stern mistress, and in her exactions is not to be denied. The man took from his pocket some bread and cheese, which he cut with a stout clasp knife, and devoured. At four o'clock in the afternoon Father Daniel came out of the house. The man accosted him.

"You are Father Daniel?"

"I am." And the priest, with his earnest eyes upon the stranger, said, "I do not know you."

"No," replied the man, "I have never seen you before to-day. We are strangers to each other. But I have heard much of you."

"From whom?"

"From Emilius," said the man.

"Emilius!" cried Father Daniel, and signs of agitation were visible on his face. "Are you acquainted with him? Have you seen him lately?"

"I am acquainted with him. I saw him three days ago."

Father Daniel fell back with a sudden impulse of revulsion, and with as sudden an impulse of contrition said humbly, "Forgive me-forgive me!"

"It is I who should ask that," said the man, with a curious and not discreditable assumption of manliness, in the humbleness of which a certain remorseful abasement was conspicuous. He bowed his head. "Bless me, Father!"

"Do you deserve it?"

"I need it," said the man; and the good priest blessed him.

"It is, up to now," said the man presently, raising his head, "as Emilius told me. But he could not lie."

"You are his friend?" said Father Daniel.

"I am not worthy to be called so," said the man. "I am a sinner. He is a martyr."

"Ah," said Father Daniel, "give me your hand. Nay, I will have it. We are brothers. No temptation has been mine. I have not sinned because sin has not presented itself to me in alluring colours. I have never known want. My parents were good, and set me a good example. They taught me what is right; they taught me to pray. And you?"

"And I, Father?" said the man in softened accents. "I! Great God, what am I?" It was as though a revelation had fallen upon him. It held him fast for a few moments, and then he recovered his natural self. "I have never been as yourself, Father. My lot was otherwise. I don't complain. But it was not my fault that I was born of thieves-though, mind you, Father, I loved my mother."

"My son," said Father Daniel, bowing his head, "give *me* your blessing."

"Father!"

"Give *me* your blessing!"

Awed and compelled, the man raised his trembling hands above Father Daniel's head. When the priest looked again at the man he saw that his eyes were filled with tears.

"You come from Emilius."

"Yes, with messages which I promised to deliver. I have been in prison for fifteen years. Emilius joined us; we hardened ones were at first surprised, afterwards we were shocked. It was not long before we grew to love him. Father, is there justice in the world?"

"Yes," said Father Daniel, with a false sternness in his voice. "That it sometimes errs is human. Your messages! To whom?"

"To one who is dead-a good woman." He lowered his head a moment. "I will keep it here," touching his breast; "it will do me no harm. To you."

"Deliver it."

"Emilius desired me to seek you out, and to tell you he is innocent."

"I know it."

"That is the second. The third is but one word to a man you know-Gabriel Carew."

"He is here," said Father Daniel.

With head bowed down to his breast, Gabriel Carew came from Doctor Louis's house. His face was very pale. The loss which had fallen upon him and Lauretta had deeply affected him. Never had he felt so humble, so purified, so animated by sincere desire to live a worthy life.

"This man has a message to deliver to you," said Father Daniel to him.

Gabriel Carew looked at the man.

"I come from Emilius," said the man, "and am just released from prison. I promised him to deliver to you a message of a single word in the presence of Father Daniel."

In a cold voice and with a stern look Gabriel Carew said, "All is prepared. What is your message?"

"Understand that it is Emilius, not I, who is speaking."

"I understand."

"Murderer!"

## XII

In pursuance of the plan I decided upon before I commenced this recital-one of the principal features of which is not to anticipate events, in order that the interest of the story should not be weakened-a gap is necessary here, which before the end is reached will be properly bridged over. All that I deem it requisite to state at this point is that within two years of the death of Lauretta's mother Gabriel Carew left Nerac, never again to set foot in the village. He came to England, bringing with him his wife and one child, named Mildred, after Lauretta's mother. As you will understand, I have only lately gathered my materials, and had no acquaintanceship whatever with Gabriel Carew and his family at the time of his return to his native country; and it may be as well to state now that there were sufficient grounds for Carew's abandonment of his design to settle permanently in Nerac. The place became more than lightly distasteful to him by reason of his falling into disfavour with the inhabitants of the village. Some kind of feeling grew silently against him, which found forcible expression in a general avoidance of his company. He strove in vain to overcome this strange antipathy, for which he could not account. Even Father Daniel took sides with his flock against Carew. What galled him most was that when he challenged those who were once his friends to state their reasons for withdrawing their friendship from him, he could elicit no satisfactory replies. Then befel an event which decided his course of action. Doctor Louis died. The loss of the good doctor's wife had suddenly aged him; the break in the happy life weighed him down, and he went to his rest contentedly, almost joyfully, to rejoin his beloved mate. Within a few weeks after his burial, Gabriel Carew shook the dust of Nerac from his feet, and departed from the pretty village with a bitter feeling in his heart towards the inhabitants. They would have been glad to demonstrate to Lauretta their affection and sorrow, but she stood by her husband, whom she devotedly loved, and with a sad and indignant persistence rejected their advances. Thus were the old ties broken, and her new life commenced in a foreign land.

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