

oil. The captain, a gruff, red-faced fellow, looked rather surlily at his unexpected passenger, but was soon mollified by her gentle manner, and the readiness with which she paid the money he demanded for taking her.

"You won't be very warm," he said, eying her from head to foot—"but I can lend you a rug to sleep in."

Thelma smiled and thanked him. He called to his wife, a thin, overworked-looking creature, who put up her head from a window in the cabin, at his summons.

"Here's a lady going with us," he announced. "Look after her, will you?" The woman nodded. Then, once more addressing himself to Thelma, he said: "We shall have nasty weather and a wicked sea!"

"I do not mind!" she answered quietly, and turning to Friedrich, who had come to see her off, she shook hands with him warmly and thanked him for the trouble he had taken in her behalf. The good landlord bade her farewell somewhat reluctantly—he had a presentiment that there was something wrong with the beautiful, golden-haired daughter of the *Jarl*—and that perhaps he ought to have prevented her making this uncomfortable and possibly perilous voyage. But it was too late now—and at a little before seven o'clock, the vessel—which rejoiced in the name of the "Black Polly"—left the harbor, and steamed fussily down the Humber in the teeth of a sudden storm of sleet and snow.

CHAPTER X.

What of her glass without her? The blank gray
There, where the pool is blind of the moon's face—
Her dress without her? The tossed empty space
Of cloud-rack whence the moon has passed away!

DANTE G. ROSSETTI.

"GOOD God!" cried Errington, impatiently. "What's the matter? Speak out!"

He had just arrived home. He had barely set foot within his own door, and full of lover-like ardor and eagerness was about to hasten to his wife's room, when his old servant Morris stood in his way trembling and pale-faced, looking helplessly from him to Neville, who was as much astonished as Sir Philip at the man's woe-begone appearance.

"Something has happened," he stammered faintly at last. "Her ladyship—"

Philip started—his heart beat quickly and then seemed to grow still with a horrible sensation of fear.

"What of her?" he demanded in low, hoarse tones. "Is she ill?"

Morris threw up his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Sir Philip, my dear master!" cried the poor old man, "I do

not know whether she is ill or well—I cannot guess! My lady went out last night at a little before eight o'clock—and—and she has never come home at all! We cannot tell what has become of her! She has gone!"

And tears of distress and anxiety filled his eyes. Philip stood mute. He could not understand it. All color fled from his face—he seemed as though he had received a sudden blow on the head which had stunned him.

"Gone!" he said, mechanically. "Thelma—my wife—gone! Why should she go?"

And he stared fixedly at Neville, who laid one hand soothingly on his arm.

"Perhaps she is with friends," he suggested. "She may be at Lady Winsleigh's or Mrs. Lorimer's."

"No, no!" interrupted Morris. "Britta, who stayed up all night for her, has since been to every house that my lady visits, and no one has seen or heard of her!"

"Where is Britta?" demanded Philip, suddenly.

"She has gone away to Lady Winsleigh's," answered Morris. "She says it is there the mischief has been done; I don't know what she means!"

Philip shook off his secretary's sympathetic touch, and strode through the rooms to Thelma's boudoir. He put aside the velvet curtains of the *portière* with a noiseless hand—somehow he felt as if, in spite of all he had just heard, she *must* be there as usual to welcome him with that serene sweet smile which was the sunshine of his life. The empty, desolate air of the room smote him with a sense of bitter pain—only the plaintive warble of her pet thrush, who was singing to himself most mournfully in his gilded cage, broke the heavy silence. He looked about him vacantly. All sorts of dark forebodings crowded on his mind. She must have met with some accident, he thought with a shudder, for that she would depart from him in this sudden way on her own accord and for no reason whatsoever seemed to him incredible—impossible.

"What have I done that she should leave me?" he asked, half aloud and wonderingly.

Everything that had seemed to him of worth a few hours ago became valueless in this moment of time. What cared he now for the business of Parliament—for distinction or honors among men? Nothing—less than nothing! Without her, the world was empty—its ambitions, its pride, its good, its evil, seemed but the dreariest and most foolish trifles!

"Not even a message!" he thought. "No hint of where she meant to go—no word of explanation for me? Surely I must be dreaming—my Thelma would never have deserted me!"

A sort of sob rose in his throat, and he pressed his hand strongly over his eyes to keep down the womanish drops that threatened to

overflow them. After a minute or two, he went to her desk and opened it, thinking that there perhaps she might have left a note of farewell. There was nothing—nothing save a little heap of money and jewels. These Thelma had herself placed before her sorrowful, silent departure, in the corner where he now found them.

More puzzled than ever, he glanced searchingly round the room, and his eyes were at once attracted by the sparkle of the diamond cross that lay uppermost on the cover of "Gladys, the Singer," the book of poems which was in its usual place on his own reading-table. In another second he seized it—he unwound the slight gold chain—he opened the little volume tremblingly. Yes!—there was a letter within its pages addressed to himself. Now, now he should know all! He tore it open with feverish haste—two folded sheets of paper fell out—one was his own epistle to Violet Vere, and this, to his consternation, he perceived first. Full of a sudden misgiving, he laid it aside, and began to read Thelma's parting words.

"MY DARLING BOY"—she wrote—"A friend of yours and mine brought me the inclosed letter, and though, perhaps, it was wrong of me to read it, I hope you will forgive me for having done so. I do not quite understand it, and I cannot bear to think about it—but it seems that you are tired of your poor Thelma! I do not blame you, dearest, for I am sure that in some way or other the fault is mine, and it does grieve me so much to think you are unhappy! I know that I am very ignorant of many things and that I am not suited to this London life—and I fear I shall never understand its ways. But one thing I can do, and that is to let you be free, my Philip—quite free! And so I am going back to the Alten Fjord, where I will stay till you want me again, if you ever do. My heart is yours and I shall always love you till I die, and though it seems to me just now better that we should part, to give you greater ease and pleasure, still you must always remember that I have no reproaches to make to you. I am only sorry to think my love has wearied you, for you have been all goodness and tenderness to me. And so that people shall not talk about me or you, you will simply say to them that I have gone to see my father, and they will think nothing strange in that. Be kind to Britta—I have told her nothing as it would only make her miserable. Do not be angry that I go away—I cannot bear to stay here, knowing all. And so, good-bye, my love, my dearest one! If you were to love many women more than me, I still should love you best—I still would gladly die to serve you. Remember this always—that, however long we may be parted, and though all the world should come between us, I am, and ever shall be your faithful wife,

THELMA."

The ejaculation that broke from Errington's lips as he finished reading this letter was more powerful than reverent. Stinging tears darted to his eyes—he pressed his lips passionately on the fair writing.

"My darling—my darling!" he murmured. "What a miserable misunderstanding!"

Then without another moment's delay he rushed into Neville's study and cried abruptly:

"Look here! It's all your fault!"

"My fault!" gasped the amazed secretary.

"Yes—your fault!" shouted Errington almost beside himself with grief and rage. "Your fault, and that of your accursed wife, Violet Vere!"

And he dashed the letter, the cause of all the mischief, furiously down on the table. Neville shrunk and shivered—his gray head drooped—he stretched out his hands appealingly.

"For God's sake, Sir Philip, tell me what I've done?" he exclaimed, piteously.

Errington strode up and down the room in a perfect fever of impatience.

"By Heaven, it's enough to drive me mad!" he burst forth. "Your wife!—your wife!—confound her! When you first discovered her in that shameless actress, didn't I want to tell Thelma about it—that very night?—and didn't you beg me not to do so? Your silly scruples stood in the way of everything! I was a fool to listen to you—a fool to meddle in your affairs—and—and I wish to God I'd never seen or heard of you!"

Neville turned very white, but remained speechless.

"Read that letter!" went on Philip, impetuously. "You've seen it before! It's the last one I wrote to your wife imploring her to see you and speak with you. Here it comes, the devil knows how, into Thelma's hands. She's quite in the dark about your secret, and fancies I wrote it on my own behalf! It looks like it too—looks exactly as if I were pleading for myself and breaking my heart over that detestable stage-fiend—by Jove! it's too horrible!" And he gave a gesture of loathing and contempt.

Neville heard him in utter bewilderment. "Not possible!" he muttered. "Not possible—it can't be!"

"Can't be? It *is*!" shouted Philip. "And if you'd let me tell Thelma everything from the first, all this wouldn't have happened. And you ask me what you've done! *Done!* You've parted me from the sweetest, dearest girl in the world!"

And throwing himself into a chair, he covered his face with his hands, and a great uncontrollable sob broke from his lips.

Neville was in despair. Of course it was his fault—he saw it all clearly. He painfully recalled all that had happened since that night at the Brilliant Theater when, with sickening horror, he had discovered Violet Vere to be no other than Violet Neville—his own little Violet!—as he had once called her—his wife that he had lost and mourned as though she were some pure dead woman, lying sweetly at rest in a quiet grave. He remembered Thelma's shuddering repugnance at the sight of her—a repugnance which he himself had shared—and which made him shrink with fastidious

aversion from the idea of confiding to any one but Sir Philip the miserable secret of his connection with her. Sir Philip had humored him in this fancy, little imagining that any mischief would come of it, and the reward of his kindly sympathy was this—his name was compromised, his home desolate, and his wife estranged from him!

In the first pangs of the remorse and sorrow that filled his heart, Neville could gladly have gone out and drowned himself. Presently he began to think. Was there not some one else besides himself who might possibly be to blame for all this misery? For instance, who could have brought or sent that letter to Lady Errington? In her high station, she so lofty, so pure, so far above the rest of her sex, would have been the last person to make any inquiries about such a woman as Violet Vere. How had it all happened? He looked imploringly for some minutes at the dejected figure in the chair without daring to offer a word of consolation. Presently he ventured to remark:

"Sir Philip!" he stammered, "it will soon be all right—her ladyship will come back immediately: I myself will explain. It's—it's only a misunderstanding—"

Errington moved in his chair impatiently, but said nothing. Only a misunderstanding! How many there are who can trace back broken friendships and severed loves, to that one thing—"only a misunderstanding!" The tenderest relations are often the most delicate and subtle, and "trifles light as air" may scatter and utterly destroy the sensitive gossamer threads extending between one heart and another, as easily as a child's passing foot destroys the spider's web woven on the dewy grass in the early morning of spring.

Presently Sir Philip started up—his lashes were wet and his face was flushed.

"It's no good sitting here," he said, rapidly buttoning on his overcoat. "I must go after her. Let all the business go to the devil! Write and say I won't stand for Middleborough—I resign in favor of the Liberal candidate. I'm off for Norway to-night."

"To Norway!" cried Neville. "Has she gone *there*? At this season—"

He broke off, for at that moment Britta entered, looking the picture of misery. Her face was pale and drawn, her eyelids red and swollen, and when she saw Sir Philip she gave him a glance of the most despairing reproach and indignation. He sprung up to her.

"Any news?" he demanded.

Britta shook her head mournfully, the tears beginning to roll again down her cheeks.

"Oh, if I'd only thought!" she sobbed. "If I'd only known what the dear Froken meant to do when she said good-bye to me

last night, I could have prevented her going—I could—I would have told her all I knew, and she would have stayed to see you! Oh, Sir Philip, if you had only been here, that wicked, wicked Lady Winsleigh *couldn't* have driven her away!"

At this name such a fury filled Philip's heart that he could barely control himself. He breathed quickly and heavily.

"What of her?" he demanded in a low, suffocated voice.

"What has Lady Winsleigh to do with it, Britta?"

"Everything!" cried Britta, though as she glanced at his set, stern face and paling lips she began to feel a little frightened. "She has always hated the Froken, and been jealous of her—always! Her own maid, Louise, will tell you so—Lord Winsleigh's man, Briggs, will tell you so! They've listened at the doors, and they know all about it!" Britta made this statement with the most childlike candor. "And they've heard all sorts of wicked things. Lady Winsleigh was always talking to Sir Francis Lennox about the Froken—and now they've made her believe you do not care for her any more—they've been trying to make her believe everything bad of you for ever so many months—" she paused, terrified at Sir Philip's increasing pallor.

"Go on, Britta," he said, quietly, though his voice sounded strange to himself. Britta gathered up all her remaining stock of courage.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" she continued, desperately. "I *don't* understand London people at all, and I never shall understand them! Everybody seems to want to be wicked! Briggs says that Lady Winsleigh was fond of *you*, Sir Philip—then, that she was fond of Sir Francis Lennox—and yet she has a husband of her own all the time! It is so very strange!" And the little maiden's perplexity appeared to border on distraction. "They would think such a woman quite mad in Norway. But what is worse than anything is that you—you, Sir Philip—oh! I *won't* believe it," and she stamped her foot passionately, "I *can't* believe it!—and yet everybody says that you go to see a dreadful, painted dancing woman at the theater, and that you like her better than the Froken—it *isn't* true, is it?" Here she peered anxiously at her master, but he was absolutely silent. Neville made as though he would speak, but a gesture from Sir Philip's hand restrained him. Britta went on rather dispiritedly: "Anyhow, Briggs has just told me that only yesterday Lady Winsleigh went all by herself to see this actress, and that she got some letter there which she brought to the Froken;" she recoiled suddenly with a little scream. "Oh, Sir Philip! where are you going?"

Errington's hand came down on her shoulder, as he twisted her lightly out of his path and strode to the door.

"Sir Philip—Sir Philip!" cried Neville anxiously, hastening after him. "Think for a moment; don't do anything rash!"

Philip wrung his hand convulsively. "Rash! My good fellow, it's a woman who has slandered me—what *can* I do? Her sex protects her!" He gave a short, furious laugh. "But, by God! were she a man I'd shoot her dead!"

And with these words, and his eyes blazing with wrath, he left the room. Neville and Britta confronted each other in vague alarm.

"Where will he go?" half whispered Britta.

"To Winsleigh House, I suppose," answered Neville in the same low tone.

Just then the hall-door shut with a loud bang that echoed through the silent house.

"He's gone!" and as Neville said this he sighed and looked dubiously at his companion. "How do you know all this about Lady Winsleigh, Britta! It may not be true—it's only servants' gossip."

"Only servants' gossip!" exclaimed Britta. "And is that nothing? Why, in these grand houses like Lord Winsleigh's, the servants know everything! Briggs makes it his business to listen at the doors—he says it's a part of his duty. And Louise opens all her mistress's letters—she says she owes it to her own respectability to know what sort of a lady it is she serves. And she's going to leave, because she says her ladyship *isn't* respectable! There what do you think of that? And Sir Philip will find out a great deal more than even I have told him—but oh! I *can't* understand about that actress!" And she shook her head despairingly.

"Britta," said Neville suddenly, "that actress is my wife!"

Britta started, and her round eyes opened wide.

"Your wife, Mr. Neville?" she exclaimed.

Neville took off his spectacles and polished them nervously. "Yes, Britta—my wife!"

She looked at him in amazed silence. Neville went on rubbing his glasses, and continued in rather dreamy, tremulous accents:

"Yes, I lost her years ago. I thought she was dead. But I found her on the stage of the Brilliant Theater. I—I never expected—that! I would rather she had died!" He paused and went on softly: "When I married her, Britta, she was such a dear little girl—so bright and pretty!—and I—I fancied she was fond of me! Yes, I did—of course I was foolish—I've always been foolish, I think. And when—when I saw her on that stage I felt as if some one had struck me a hard blow—it seems as if I'd been stunned ever since. And though she knows I'm in London, she won't see me, Britta—she won't let me speak to her even for a moment! It's very hard! Sir Philip has tried his best to persuade her to see me—he has talked to her and written to her about me; and that's not all—he has even tried to make her come back to me—but it's all no use—and—and that's how all the mischief has arisen—do you see?"

Britta gazed at him still, with sympathy written on every line of

her face; but a great load had been lifted from her mind by his words—she began to understand everything.

"I'm so sorry for you, Mr. Neville," she said. "But why didn't you tell all this to the Froken?"

"I *couldn't*!" murmured Neville, desperately. "She was there that night at the Brilliant—and if you had seen how she looked when she saw my wife appear on the stage! So pained, so sorry, so ashamed! and she wanted to leave the theater at once. Of course, I ought to have told her—I wish I had—but—somehow I never could." He paused again. "It's all my stupidity, of course—Sir Philip is quite blameless—he has been the kindest, the best of friends to me—" his voice trembled more and more, and he could not go on. There was a silence of some minutes, during which Britta appeared absorbed in meditation, and Neville furtively wiped his eyes.

Presently he spoke again more cheerfully. "It'll soon be all right again, Britta!" and he nodded encouragingly. "Sir Philip says her ladyship has gone home to Norway, and he means to follow her to-night."

Britta nodded gravely, but heaved a deep sigh.

"And I posted her letter to her father!" she half murmured. "Oh, if I had only thought or guessed why it was written!"

"Isn't it rather a bad time of the year for Norway?" pursued Neville. "Why, there must be snow and darkness—"

"Snow and darkness at the Alten Fjord!" suddenly cried Britta, catching at his words. "That's exactly what she said to me the other evening! Oh, dear! I never thought of it—I never remembered it was the dark season!" She clasped her hands in dismay. "There is no sun at the Alten Fjord now—it is like night, and the cold is bitter! And she is not strong—not strong enough to travel—and there's the North Sea to cross. Oh, Mr. Neville!" and she broke out sobbing afresh, "the journey will kill her—I know it will! my poor, poor, darling! I must go after her—I'll go with Sir Philip—I *won't* be left behind!"

"Hush, hush, Britta!" said Neville kindly, patting her shoulder. "Don't cry—don't cry!"

But he was very near crying himself, poor man, so shaken was he by the events of the morning. And he could not help admitting to himself the possibility that so long and trying a journey for Thelma in her present condition of health meant little else than serious illness—perhaps death. The only comfort he could suggest to the disconsolate Britta was, that at that time of year it was very probable there would be no steamer running to Christiansund or Bergen, and in that case Thelma would be unable to leave England, and would, therefore, be overtaken by Sir Philip at Hull.

Meanwhile, Sir Philip himself, in a white heat of restrained anger, arrived at Winsleigh House, and asked to see Lord Wins-

leigh immediately. Briggs, who opened the door to him, was a little startled at his haggard face and blazing eyes, even though he knew, through Britta, all about the sorrow that had befallen him. Briggs was not surprised at Lady Errington's departure—that portion of his "duty" which consisted in listening at doors had greatly enlightened him on many points—all, save one—the reported connection between Sir Philip and Violet Vere. This seemed to be really true according to all appearances.

"Which it puzzles me," soliloquized the owner of the shapely calves, "it do, indeed. Yet I feels very much for Sir Philip. I said to Flopsie this morning—'Flopsie, I feels for 'im!' Yes—I used them very words. Only, of course, he shouldn't 'ave gone on with Vi. She's a fine woman certainly—but skittish—d—d skittish! I've allus made it a rule myself to avoid 'er on principle. Lor'! if I'd kep' company with 'er and the likes of 'er I shouldn't be the man I am!" And he smiled complacently.

Lord Winsleigh, who was in his library as usual, occupied with his duties as tutor to his son Ernest, rose to receive Sir Philip with an air of more than his usual gravity.

"I was about to write to you, Errington," he began, and then he stopped short, touched by the utter misery expressed in Philip's face. He addressed Ernest with a sort of nervous haste:

"Run away, my boy, to your own room. I'll send for you again presently."

Ernest obeyed. "Now," said Lord Winsleigh as soon as the lad had disappeared, "tell me everything, Errington. Is it true that your wife has left you?"

"Left me!" and Philip's eyes flashed with passionate anger. "No, Winsleigh!—she's been driven away from me by the vilest and most heartless cruelty. She's been made to believe a scandalous and abominable lie against me—and she's gone! I—I—by Jove!—I hardly like to say it to your face—but—"

"I understand," a curious flicker of a smile shadowed rather than brightened Lord Winsleigh's stern features. "Pray speak quite plainly. Lady Winsleigh is to blame? I am not at all surprised."

Errington gave him a rapid glance of wonder. He had always fancied Winsleigh to be a studious, rather dull sort of man, absorbed in his books and the education of his son—a man, more than half blind to everything that went on around him—and, moreover, one who deliberately shut his eyes to the frivolous coquetry of his wife—and though he liked him fairly well, there had been a sort of vague contempt mingled with his liking. Now a new light was suddenly thrown on his character—there was something in his look, his manner, his very tone of voice which proved to Errington that there was a deep and forcible side of his nature of which his closest friends had never dreamed, and he was somewhat taken aback by

the discovery. Seeing that he still hesitated, Winsleigh laid a hand encouragingly on his shoulder, and said:

"I repeat—I'm not at all surprised. Nothing that Lady Winsleigh might do would cause me the slightest astonishment. She has long ceased to be my wife, except in name—that she still bears that name and holds the position she has in the world is simply—for my son's sake! I do not wish"—his voice quivered slightly—"I do not wish the boy to despise his mother. It's always a bad beginning for a young man's life. I want to avoid it for Ernest, if possible, regardless of any personal sacrifice." He paused a moment, then resumed: "Now, speak out, Errington, and plainly—for if mischief has been done and I can repair it in any way, you may be sure I will."

Thus persuaded, Sir Philip briefly related the whole story of the misunderstanding that had arisen concerning Neville's wife, Violet Vere—and concluded by saying:

"It is, of course, only through Britta that I've just heard about Lady Winsleigh's having anything to do with it. Her information may not be correct—I hope it isn't—but—"

Lord Winsleigh interrupted him. "Come with me," he said composedly. "We'll solve this difficulty at once."

He led the way out of the library across the hall. Errington followed him in silence. He knocked at the door of his wife's room. In response to her "Come in!" they both entered. She was alone, reclining on a sofa, reading—she started up with a pettish exclamation at sight of her husband, but observing who it was that came with him, she stood mute, the color rushing to her cheeks with surprise and something of fear. Yet she endeavored to smile, and returned with her usual grace their somewhat formal salutations.

"Clara," then said Lord Winsleigh, gravely, "I have to ask you a question on behalf of Sir Philip Errington here—a question to which it is necessary for you to give the plain answer. Did you, or did you not procure this letter from Violet Vere, of the Brilliant Theater—and did you, or did you not, give it yourself yesterday into the hands of Lady Bruce-Errington?" And he laid the letter in question, which Philip had handed to him, down upon the table before her.

She looked at it—then at him—then from him to Sir Philip, who uttered no word—and lightly shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said, carelessly. Sir Philip turned upon her indignantly.

"Lady Winsleigh, you *do* know—"

She interrupted him with a stately gesture.

"Excuse me, Sir Philip! I am not accustomed to be spoken to in this extraordinary manner. You forget yourself. My husband, I think, also forgets himself! I know nothing whatever about Violet Vere—I'm not fond of the society of actresses. Of course,

I've heard about your admiration for her—that is common town talk—though my informant on this point was Sir Francis Lennox."

"Sir Francis Lennox!" cried Philip, furiously. "Thank God! there's a man to deal with! By Heaven, I'll choke him with his own lie!"

Lady Winsleigh raised her eyebrows in well-bred surprise. "Dear me! It *is* a lie, then? Now, I should have thought from all accounts that it was so very likely to be true!"

Philip turned white with passion. Her sarcastic smile, her mocking glance, irritated him almost beyond endurance.

"Permit me to ask you, Clara," continued Lord Winsleigh, calmly, "if you—as you say, know nothing about Violet Vere, why did you go to the Brilliant Theater yesterday morning?"

She flashed an angry glance at him.

"Why? To secure a box for the new performance. Is there anything wonderful in that?"

Her husband remained unmoved. "May I see the voucher for this box?" he inquired.

"I've sent it to some friends," replied her ladyship, haughtily. "Since when have you decided to become an inquisitor, my lord?"

"Lady Winsleigh," said Philip, suddenly and eagerly, "will you swear to me that you have said or done nothing to make my Thelma leave me?"

"Oh, she *has* left you, has she?" and Lady Clara smiled maliciously. "I thought she would! Why don't you ask your dear friend, George Lorimer, about her? He is madly in love with her, as everybody knows—she is probably the same with him!"

"Clara, Clara!" exclaimed Lord Winsleigh in accents of deep reproach. "Shame on you! Shame!"

Her ladyship laughed amusedly. "Please don't be tragic!" she said; "it's too ridiculous! Sir Philip has only himself to blame. Of course, Thelma knows about his frequent visits to the Brilliant Theater. I told her all that Sir Francis said. Why should she be kept in the dark? I dare say she doesn't mind—she's very fond of Mr. Lorimer!"

Errington felt as though he must choke with fury. He forgot the presence of Lord Winsleigh—he forgot everything but his just indignation.

"My God!" he cried, passionately. "You *dare* to speak so—you!"

"Yes, I!" she returned coolly, measuring him with a glance, "I dare! What have you to say against *me*?" She drew herself up imperiously.

Then turning to her husband, she said: "Have the goodness to take your excited friend away, my lord! I am going out—I have a great many engagements this morning, and I really cannot stop

to discuss this absurd affair any longer! It isn't my fault that Sir Philip's excessive admiration for Miss Vere has become the subject of gossip. I don't blame him for it! He seems extremely ill-tempered about it; but, after all, '*ce nest que la vérité qui blesse!*'"

And she smiled maliciously.

CHAPTER XI.

For my mother's sake,
For thine and hers, O Love! I pity take
On all poor women. Jesu's will be done,
Honor for all, and infamy for none,
This side the borders of the burning lake.

ERIC MACKAY'S *Love-letters of a Violinist.*

LORD WINSLEIGH did not move. Sir Philip fixed his eyes upon her in silence. Some occult fascination forced her to meet his glance, and the utter scorn of it stung her proud heart to its center. Not that she felt much compunction—her whole soul was up in arms against him, and had been so from the very day she was first told of his unexpected marriage. His evident contempt now irritated her; she was angrier with him than ever, and yet she had a sort of strange triumph in the petty vengeance she had designed; she had destroyed his happiness, for a time, at least. If she could but shake his belief in his wife! she thought, vindictively. To that end she had thrown out her evil hint respecting Thelma's affection for George Lorimer, but the shaft had been aimed uselessly. Errington knew too well the stainless purity of Thelma to wrong her by the smallest doubt, and he would have staked his life on the loyalty of his friend. Presently he controlled his anger sufficiently to be able to speak, and still eying her with that straight, keen look of immeasurable disdain, he said in cold, deliberate accents:

"Your ladyship is in error—the actress in question is the wife of my secretary, Mr. Neville. For years they have been estranged. My visits to her were entirely on Neville's behalf—my letters to her were all on the same subject. Sir Francis Lennox must have known the truth all along—Violet Vere has been his mistress for the past five years!"

He uttered the concluding words with intense bitterness. A strange bewildered horror passed over Lady Winsleigh's face.

"I don't believe it," she said, rather faintly.

"Believe it or not, it is true!" he replied, curtly. "Ask the manager of the Brilliant, if you doubt me. Winsleigh, it's no use my stopping here any longer. As her ladyship refuses to give any explanation—"

"Wait a moment, Errington," interposed Lord Winsleigh, in his coldest and most methodical manner. "Her ladyship refuses—but I do not refuse! Her ladyship will not speak—she allows her husband to speak for her. Therefore," and he smiled at his aston-