

self!"

For the first time in all his brave young life Gerald Ravelow knew what it was to be dazed and half mad with terror.

He reeled backward in the dense darkness, clutching the letter. How he found his way out of the vault he never afterward remembered. Everything seemed to him a blank until he found himself on the grounds of his own estate, with well known trees and paths gleaming all about him, and the faint, inscrutable stars glittering down upon him from the mighty conclave of the midnight heaven.

CHAPTER V.

Brenda wondered for three or four hours the next morning why Gerald did not keep his promise and appear. Natalie passed her once or twice in the halls with a pale, supercilious face. Repeatedly Brenda went out on the piazza and looked with longing eyes toward Gerald's home, whose roofs were just faintly seen above masses of greenery.

At last, to her surprise, she saw him coming up the lawn from the outer road with a man on either side of him. She slipped into the house again, and watched the approaching figures from one of the drawing room windows.

While she did so Natalie entered the room. "I see Gerald Ravelow coming here," she broke out, "with two men in his company. Who are they?"

"I have no idea," answered Brenda, turning from the window. "Why should I have?"

Natalie gave a slight laugh that was like a sneer made into sound. Just then steps were heard on the piazza. Moved by a sudden impulse, Brenda flung open the blinds of the window near which she had been standing.

"This way, Gerald," she said.

Gerald entered soon afterward alone. But Brenda saw that his two companions waited just outside.

The young man put out his hand toward Brenda while he fixed a hard and cold stare at Natalie.

"I have a paper," he said, "written a day or two before his death by your late husband. In that paper he accuses you of trying to poison him. He detected you, but said nothing. He preferred to die by your hand, since he had loved you so well that to live on would have been a horror. I quote almost his exact words. And there is no doubt about the authenticity of this paper that he left. Brenda, here, received it from him and placed it secretly within his breast after he had been laid in his coffin. I found it there. In it he also states that not long ago he forced from you a certain confession regarding a man named Archibald Clay, and that he has reason to believe you hide at the present time a packet of letters from this man and one or more bottles of poison as well

within a particular cabinet upstairs. I have secured a search warrant and must therefore"—

At the word "search warrant" Natalie darted toward the door. Gerald followed her, after a swift sign through the wide piazza window. He sprang up stairs, knowing the house so well that the cabinet to which his friend's letter had alluded and the apartment in which it stood were both well remembered by him.

But quick as he had been, Natalie reached the cabinet before him. He saw her kneeling at one of its open drawers. The next instant he saw her lift something to her lips. Almost immediately after that she fell heavily backward. There had lain a swifter poison here in the cabinet than that stealthily one which had doubtless wrought her husband's death.

She was quite lifeless when they picked her up. Afterward, when rigid examinations were made as to her previous life, it seemed slight wonder that such a woman should have preferred to end by suicide the final collapse of her evil hopes. She had undoubtedly been the wife of a certain disreputable Englishman called "Capt." Clay, and one of whose aliases was Leveridge, long before her marriage with poor infatuated Louis Bond. From some of the letters from this man found in the cabinet it was only too evident that she had planned Louis' murder with his full knowledge, and that the two expected at some future day to enjoy the wealth which would thus vilely have been secured.

During the following autumn occurred Gerald's marriage with Brenda, greatly to the delight of Mrs. Ravelow, whose health had now regained its usual gentle state of invalidism. Some time before this event Brenda had visited the vault where her brother lay, and had first ordered with her own hand what dismay had been caused by Gerald's weird visit, and afterward quietly obtained aid for the restoration of the injured coffin.

But Gerald could never be induced to accompany her on either of the several little pilgrimages which her task involved. "No, Brenda," he would say, "there are memories connected with that place which will haunt me till I die. No need of making them more vivid than they are sure to be already."

But once Brenda said: "Perhaps you are quite wrong in believing, Gerald, that anything supernatural really occurred that night. In my hurry and agitation, seizing a moment when she was not present, I thrust the paper within poor Louis' breast. It may be that I lodged it insecurely, and that the movement of the coffin afterward displaced it still more. When, as you say, you departed the flowers that lay on the breast of Louis, the paper may have been half concealed by these, while its whiteness corresponded to that of the

flowers themselves, all being seen in a dim light. Hence, when the candle fell!"—

"Folk?" interrupted Gerald. "Why do you state that it fell?"

Brenda smiled ever so faintly. "Because you had set it, in its sconce, at the edge of one of the stone niches. That it should fall would have been nothing remarkable. And when, as it seemed to you, the paper was almost put into your outstretched hand, this may merely have been the natural result of its having slid to the floor like some of the flowers that I found there."

Gerald listened intently, and then shook his head with an unwonted gravity.

"No, Brenda," he said. "Nothing can ever shake my faith that the dead man miraculously made me an agent of his vengeance beyond the grave."

"Perhaps he did," answered Brenda. "I don't deny it. I'm not attempting to explain any deep spiritual truth; I'm only seeking to account for material facts. The last—who knows?—may often be but the blind, obedient servants of the first."

"I dare say that is true," returned Gerald, musingly. But for many years afterward he adhered to his own private opinion, nevertheless.

THE END.

An Unparalleled Suicide.

It remained for a Yankee boy in Connecticut to devise a method for ending his life, which has in all probability never had a parallel.

Reproved or punished for some trifling offense he went to his father's barn and spent three days in rigging up a guillotine, with which he successfully beheaded himself. Between a pair of grooved uprights he fixed a butcher's cleaver sharpened to a razorlike edge. This he weighted on top with a box of scrap iron and stone weighing 200 pounds. From the top of the uprights to the bottom the distance was five feet, and the cleaver was held in position at the top by a rope reeved through a pulley and held by a wooden level four feet in length.

On the end of this lever he hung a tin pail, in the bottom of which a small hole had first been bored. The pail was filled with water, which slowly dripped through the hole in the bottom. After these arrangements had been completed, the lad placed his neck between the uprights directly in line with the cleaver. When the water in the pail had nearly all escaped the lever flew up, the rope was released and the sharpened blade fell like a flash. The head of the suicide was cut off clear and clear.