tugging at the skirt of my gown; and I sat down, though I did not care particularly to meet the factor, who was apparently coming home. Then I heard the sound of several voices in the hall, and rose once more.

At that instant the door opened, and McPhail's wife appeared, carrying an old-fashioned carpet bag. Close behind her came her husband, and with him another woman, at sight of whom a sea of half-forgotten memories swept over my brain, confusing me to that extent that I scarcely knew where I was.

It was Mrs Martin!

I remembered the "dour," though not unkindly face, with the long upper lip, and the cold light-coloured eyes, in a moment. This was the woman who had brought me from Australia—the woman who could prove, if anyone could, that I was really the daughter of James Grant.

The consciousness of this fact made me for the moment forget the danger in which I stood; but even if I had remembered it, I could not have escaped. As it was, it was not until the woman held out her hand, exclaiming, "Miss Sybil! Iis this really you?" that the truth flashed upon me. My secret was mine no longer! The days when I could masquerade as Sidney Grant were at an end.

I expected, in a stupid sort of way, that the next moment the air would be filled with exclamations—that I would be denounced as an imposter on the spot. But apparently neither McPhail, who nodded to me in his gruff way, nor his wife, seemed to take any notice of the Christian name by which Mrs Martin had addressed me. Probably they thought they had heard her imperfectly, and at any rate they had no great interest in the matter. With the old woman, however, it was different. She bent forward in eager curiosity, and turned her withered face first to Mrs Martin and then to me, as though demanding an explanation.

"How are ye, mother?" said Mrs Martin, going over to her mother, and kissing her in a rough, perfunctory fashion. "This warm weather 'll just suit you. Yon don't look a day older than when I saw you last year."

Good manners would have compelled me to depart and leave the family to themselves; but my wits had returned to me, and I was extremely anxious to make Mrs Martin of some use to me—in other words, to get some information out of her—before the inevitable disclosure was made to her that I had been living at the Castle under another name. And chance seemed to favour me. McPhail went out to "see about the beast," as he called putting up the horse, and Mrs McPhail went upstairs to take off her bonnet. Mrs Martin sat down beside her mother, and I seated myself opposite to her.

"It seems strange to meet you again, after all these years," I began. "You are the first person I remember, Mrs Martin."

"Ay, I would be that."

"Did you bring me over from Australia yourself?"

"What makes you think you ever saw Australia?" (frowning).

"Oh, because I know my father and mother lived there—and I know my sister was born there. Besides, I have some recollection of being in a big ship when I was a very little thing—before we lived in London."

"Humph!"

"I wish you would tell me something about my father and mother, Mrs Martin. Did they die soon after I was born?"

"Ay, ye were but a baby when they died."

"My father's name was James, wasn't it—James Grant?"

"Yes—James Grant. But what for do ye spier sae mony questions at me? Can ye no spier them at him wha best behoves tae answer them?"

"Who do you mean?" I asked innocently.

"Wha wad I mean but Maister Mitchell?"

"Mr Mitchell? Oh, he doesn't seem very ready to talk about my father."

"And what brings you here?"

A long residence out of Scotland had made a change in Mrs Martin's way of speaking—at least she did not use the broad Scotch in London. But I imagine that when she returned to her own country the old way of speaking returned to her, as it was natural it should.

"I came to see Mr Mitchell," I said lightly. "He said I had greatly changed. But you knew me at once, didn't you, Mrs Martin?"

"Ou, ay, I kent ye fine. You were a weel grown lassie when ye gaed to the schule. An' ye've grown up a braw wumman—my certes! A fine lass, wi' a wull o' her ain, I reckon."

I laughed, and taking off my hat pushed back my hair, to gain, if possible, a few minutes more. But Mrs Martin said nothing more of any importance, and I felt certain that Mrs McPhail, if not her husband, would be back directly. I was anxious to get away before the question that I had seen more than once shaping itself on the old woman's trembling lips was put and answered—the question whether I was Sidney Grant or not.

"Well, Mrs Martin, I must be going," I said, rising and tying on my hat. "I'm so glad to have seen you again. But you haven't told me where you are living now."

"I bide at Perth. I'm housekeeper to a gentleman there," she replied, "a doctor that's a widower and has nae family."

That was enough for me. I knew where to find Mrs Martin if I should want her, and somehow I had more confidence in her than in her brother. I believed that if ever she were brought into a court of law she would speak the truth.

I bade good-bye to the old lady in the chimney corner, and Mrs Martin accompanied me as far as the house door.

"Mrs Martin," I said, as I took her hand in mine at parting, "if you have anything that belonged to my father or mother—anything, no matter how trifling it may be—an old letter, a book, an old photograph, I do wish you would let me have it. I have hardly anything that belonged to either my father or my mother. Will you look among your old things, and see if you cannot find anything that belonged to one or other of them?"

She shook her head, and withdrew her hand from mine.

"There is no time now," I went on, "but perhaps if I came down this afternoon you would be willing to tell me more about them—about their life in Australia, and how they died—"

The woman started, and a shudder ran through her gaunt, bony frame, while an indescribable change came over her face. It turned an ashy grey.

With a strong effort she controlled herself.

"If you tak' my advice, Miss Grant, you'll let your faither an' your mither bide still in their graves. Don't seek to meddle with what does not concern you. Let the past bury its dead, as the Scripture says, and never more speak the name of your faither or your maither."

With these strange words sounding in my ears I left the house.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABYSS OF THE PAST.

My mind was in a tumult as I made my way back to the Castle, but my chief feeling, I think, was one of bitter disappointment. I had thought that I was getting on so well—I had in fact discovered more than at one time I had thought possible; and now the end had come! Nothing could be more certain than that exposure must come, and that quickly. The McPhail family would naturally talk about me, and almost immediately they would discover that the factor, his wife and mother supposed me to be Sidney Grant, while his sister knew that I was another woman altogether. Then, of course, the factor would tell his employer that he was sheltering an imposter under his roof.

Thinking over this I came to the conclusion that the best thing I could do was to forestall McPhail, and tell Mr. Mitchell at once who I was, and the reason I had had in passing myself off for my sister.

The knowledge that I was approaching a crisis in my life made me grave and silent during luncheon. I shrank from meeting Mr. Mitchell's eye. When the meal was over I followed him into his own room, and asked him if he could spare me half an hour. He frowned, but pointed to a seat, and I sat down opposite him. It was not an easy task to begin, and I thought the best way was to go to the root of the matter at once.

"I have seen Mrs. Martin, McPhail's sister, to-day," I said, "and I knew her at once. She is the woman I used to live with in London."

Mr. Mitchell stared at me, and his jaw dropped in pure astonishment.

"But—but you never were in London!" he gasped out.

"Yes. I lived in Brixton with Mrs. Martin before I went to school. You are thinking of my sister—Sidney Grant."

The man's face turned grey. His eyes never left off staring at me. He tried to speak, and could not. His hand went up to his collar as though he had been choking, and at length the words came, almost in a whisper.

"Are you not Sidney Grant? You said you were!"

"I think not. You supposed me to be Sidney, and I did not contradict you. But it comes to much the same thing."

"Who are you, then?"

"I am Sybil Grant, James Grant's youngest daughter."

"Nonsense! The child died years and years ago!"

"That can hardly be, seeing that I am alive now. I am Sybil Grant."

"You'll have to prove it!"

"Nothing easier."

I spoke with a quiet confidence that I was very far from feeling, but the effect on Alexander Mitchell was remarkable. He shrank back into himself, as it were, and glanced at me in a furtive way. Anyone looking on would have supposed that it was he that was the culprit, that it was he that had to fear exposure, not I. But in a few seconds he had to some extent recovered himself, and began to bluster.

"And you've been living here all this time under false pretences! Do you know, young woman, that I could send for the police and have you sent to gaol for that?" His courage rose with the sound of his own voice. "Answer me! Are you aware that it rests with me whether you sleep to-night in the lock-up at Dunolly or not?"

"I think, Mr. Mitchell, the less said about prisons the better—for your sake as well as mine."

The shaft struck home. I saw that, in spite of the torrent of indignant utterance that struggled to his lips, he was ill at ease—that, in a word, if I had cause to fear him, he had as great or greater reason to fear me.

"I am perfectly ready to go before a magistrate at once," I said, to put an end to his threats. "But you need not suppose that I will be silent as to the reason I had for what I have done. I will tell the world that you brought me up in secret, pretending that I was dead, and never allowing me to know who my relations were. I managed to get your address—never mind how—and came here determined that, if possible, I would find out the truth. McPhail's mother took me for my sister. Till that hour I did not so much as know that I had a sister, or that I had any right to the name I bear."

"Neither you have!" he broke in. You are ——"

"Stop!" I cried. "Before you say anything to cast a slur on my mother's memory you may as well know that I have consulted a lawyer in Glasgow, and he will make sure that there is no record of a second marriage."

Once more Mr Mitchell's eyes dropped before mine, but he still blustered.

"Much good it will do you! You will only publish your own shame! And this is what one gets for befriending an orphan! Pretty gratitude! McPhail was quite right—I should have left you to take your chance out in Australia."

"And why did you not leave me in Australia, Mr Mitchell?" I asked coolly. "If you mean that your sole motive was pity for a friendless orphan, I can only say that I have a difficulty in believing you. For, in that case, what reason had you for hiding me away so carefully from the world, and giving out that I was dead?"

The man's brow darkened, and the hand outstretched across the table trembled visibly. He was evidently thinking whether he should say something or not; and in spite of my brave words my heart sank, for fear of what he might say next.

He rose and rang the bell.

"Ask Miss Dalrymple to step here a moment," he said to the man who answered it. We sat in silence till Miss Dalrymple's thin flushed face appeared in the doorway.

"I call you to witness, Anne," Mr Mitchell said excitedly, the instant the door had closed, "that it is not of my own choosing that I say what I am about to say. She has brought it upon herself. It seems" (turning to me) "that this young lady is not Sidney Grant, as we all imagined her to be."

(Miss Dalrymple's face was a study at that moment.) "She admits as much herself."

He paused, and in a cold, hard voice very unlike my own I owned that what he said was true.

"She says she is Sidney Grant's younger sister, Sybil. Supposing that she is, I don't know what claim she has on me, but it is true that if she is James Grant's daughter, I paid for her education—and this is how she repays me!"

"'But,' she says, 'you have a motive in bringing me up in ignorance of my parentage, and letting the world suppose that I was dead.' True, I had a reason, and she little supposes what that reason was. Else she would not have provoked me into telling her. She would have remained quiet—in the background—and if she had wanted help, I, who have already spent pounds and pounds upon her, would have been ready to give it. But she has no gratitude, not a spark. She comes here under a false name, and forces me in self-defence to tell her the truth."

Here he broke off, and turned fiercely upon me, like a wild beast turning on its prey. "I'll give you one more chance," he said, viciously. "Will you go away, and trouble us no more?"

"No, I will not!" I cried, involuntarily rising to my feet. "Whatever you have to tell me I can bear it. But I do not believe ——"

"You do not believe!" he sneered. "You will believe nothing on my word. Well, here are the papers—it is lucky that I kept them." He unlocked a drawer in his writing-table as he spoke, and after a little search brought out a bundle of old newspapers, tied together with tape. These he laid on the table before me. "You can take them away and study them if you have a mind," he said, with a cruel smile, "and when you have read them you can come and tell me whether I was right in concealing your existence from the world or not."

"What do you mean?" I asked stupidly.

"Mean! I mean that your mother was a murderess! She was charged with the murder of your father, and she would have been hanged for the crime if she had not died in prison before her trial."

Something seemed to give way or break in my head. I could not see, and stretched out my hands like a blind man groping his way—and I remember nothing more.

(To be Continued.)