

into their apartment. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes gleamed with more than usual fire.

"Beautiful! beautiful! was it not?" she cried.

"What was so beautiful, Edna?" said Sir Urban.

"Why! the music to be sure!" said the little girl, with animation. "The beautiful music from the organ. You heard it of course."

Urban Ashford shook his head.

"You did not hear it!" asked Edna, astonished. "That's very odd! I thought the sound must have gone through the whole house. As I came through the long gallery I thought I saw a lady in the dress of the beautiful Lady Arethusa, only faintly shining, as if in moonlight, sitting before the organ. But it was very dark, you know, and I could not distinguish well. The music, however, was very fine—so fine, it made me tremble with delight. It seemed to sing a Christmas welcome to us all—to you, papa, and to mamma, and me, and all our guests—a welcome to Ashford Hall!"

"You had better not speak of these things before our company, dear," said Lady Ashford.

"Why not if they are true?" said her child, doubtfully.

"They may not care to hear them, darling."

"How odd the world must be," muttered Edna. Then with sudden animation, urged by that spirit of restlessness which is the attribute of childhood, she suddenly cried, "I will go down into the Judgment Hall and see that all looks pretty for the company," and before her parents could interfere, she darted out of the room and sped down the winding staircase to the place where the Christmas Eve supper was to be spread.

As the child descended the last stairs she became aware that the hall was lighted with a strange phosphoric glare, through which the illuminated sconces on the walls gleamed luridly. As she came further down she distinctly saw that the supper table was already fully occupied by unexpected visitants. But Edna experienced no feeling of surprise, not the remotest spasm of terror, as she recognized in the assembled party the forms of the ancestors of the House of Ashford, so intimately known to her by the portraits in the great gallery. She had no reason for fear. Were they not her old familiar friends? There was Sir Eustace, and there Sir Hubert, and there again Sir Reginald, and all her acquaintances down to Sir Ronald with his pretty wife.

The child had almost advanced to greet them as living creatures, when her attention was arrested by the sight of one figure unknown to her. It stood on the further side of the table facing her, and was in the attire of the day. Pale, and wan, and haggard, and aghast stood his form! Suddenly the thought crossed Edna's mind that, on this holy eve of Christmas, the race of Ashford, as the legend had taught her, sat to hold its tribunal in the Judgment Hall to pronounce the "doom of shame" on one who had cast a "stain on proud Ashford's name"—to judge, to condemn, or to acquit.

Edna drew back. To intrude on that solemn tribunal would have seemed to be an act of almost blasphemous

irreverence. And yet she thought, was she not an Ashford? could her presence be a vile intrusion in the councils of her family? She stood, half-concealed by the entrance, and listened with the devotion of a worshipper on the threshold of a temple. What she heard, or dreamed she heard, was this:

"Randolph Ashford," said the figure of Sir Eustace, who, as the eldest of his race, seemed to preside over the tribunal, in solemn tones, "what have you to say that the doom of shame should not be pronounced on you by your injured and offended race? Your brother Emeric fell foully slaughtered by *your* hand? What have you to say?"

"He provoked me with bitter and insulting words," said the form of Sir Randolph faintly, with sunken head. "I struck him; but I did not mean to deal a fatal blow. I have expiated the deed by the bitterest remorse."

"But you allowed a false accusation to fall upon the innocent."

"I wrote a full confession of my crime."

"Which you concealed where none could find it."

"I hoped it would be placed in Urban's hands before my death. Fate willed it otherwise. My confession still lies yonder."

The form of Sir Randolph raised its arm toward a carved oak cabinet, which stood on one side of the hall.

"Thou hast been cruel, cowardly, unjust," spoke the figure of Sir Eustace. "Thou hast sealed thine own doom. Is it not so?" The other figures bowed their heads. "Go, unworthy Ashford, to thy eternal fate. The doom of shame is on thee—Cain! Cain! Cain!"

The form of Sir Randolph uttered a faint wail of despair and disappeared.

Edna slowly returned up the winding staircase to the drawing room, appalled but nothing terrified. The guests were already assembled, having been ushered in by the main staircase from the entrance hall. She heeded them not. She went straight to Sir Urban.

"Father!" she said, in eager but solemn tones, "the tribunal of your ancestors has sat in the Judgment Hall; and you, my good, poor innocent father, have been acquitted of all crime. Come! come! and learn yourself!"

"Hush! hush! my child! we cannot speak of these things now," said Sir Urban, in much embarrassment; "there are strangers here."

"Come, father! come!" was all the child would answer, taking her father's hand to lead him away.

Sir Urban and Lady Ashford looked at one another, troubled and bewildered. The child still clung to her father and pulled him forward.

"Pardon me," said Sir Urban to his guests, "my little child here is somewhat singular; you cannot understand her ways. Will you permit me to precede you to the hall, and will you kindly follow me?"

It was vain for the father to moderate the eagerness of his excited child. Led on by her, he descended the winding staircase with his wife, to the hall where the supper was prepared.

"Do you not see them? They are all there!" said Edna, pointing to the visions still clear to her eyes.