

## TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.

## PART II.

IT is to be hoped that there is truth in the hypothesis that a worthy end justifies questionable means, else the myriads of small deceits and fabrications of which Allan Kirke was guilty during those days of his patient's convalescence will tell against him with old St. Peter, and lessen his chances of slipping past that argus-eyed gate-keeper into the portals of Paradise.

"Now, Hannah," he said to his sister, one morning when the new year was about two weeks old, "I shall bring her home with me to-day. Have the south chamber warm and everything in readiness for her by 11:00 o'clock."

"Don't be too confident, Allan, she may refuse to come with you, and insist on going straight to him."

"No, it is all arranged. I talked with her last night, and convinced her that the excitement of seeing him before she had fully recovered was liable to bring on a relapse. She has received the impression that her removal here is to be a sort of test of her strength, and that if she bears it well she will be allowed to go to him in a few days. Oh, Hannah, I feel at times as if I were almost as despicable a villain as he, for deceiving her so. Yet, I honestly believe that, had I acted otherwise, she would not have survived the blow. How she will meet and bear the disclosure, even now, God alone can tell. I never, in all my life, dreaded anything as I dread the moment when I must undeceive her. It does not seem possible that I can ever look into those innocent, confiding eyes and deal her such a blow. And yet, I suppose it is a thing that has got to be done."

Poor Doctor Kirke! He was not a man to shirk a disagreeable responsibility simply because it was disagreeable, nor to weakly procrastinate where no good was to be attained thereby. Yet all that day, and during the four days following the advent of Leonie Desmond into his household, he wandered about the premises constantly, but aimlessly, like a miserable spirit of unrest, dreading the task that lay before him, wishing it were accomplished and the worst well over, yet praying in his soul for some Providential interference by which he might be spared the ordeal. During that time he avoided his patient as much as he could, paying only a brief little morning and evening visit, and growing so nervous and constrained in her presence, that, could she have spared a thought for him, she must have seen that he was enduring mental torture of some kind. But she, loyal and single hearted, had few thoughts for any but the loved one whose features, flushed with fever and distorted

with pain, haunted her every hour. Her one longing by day and dream by night was to be with him, to cool his throbbing temples with her own hands, to soothe his troubled spirit with the voice he had once told her was the sweetest voice in all the world to him.

Meantime she grew stronger with every hour that passed, and pleaded earnestly to be allowed to go to her husband; and finally, on the morning of the fifth day of her stay with them, Doctor Kirke, feeling that the crisis could no longer be staved off, braced himself as best he could for the ordeal, and started to go to her apartment; but at that moment the door bell sounded, and an importunate messenger demanded the doctor's immediate attendance at the bedside of a patient.

"Go to her, Hannah," he said, as he took his hat to obey the summons. "Tell her I was just going to her, and that she may expect me the moment I return," then he went away, all unconscious that fate was, after all, going to be merciful to him and spare him the task he so dreaded.

Kind-hearted Hannah went dutifully to bear her brother's message, taking her sewing along, with the kindly intention of sitting and chatting a while with the unfortunate young creature, over whom her heart yearned in anxious solicitude.

It so chanced—if there really be such a thing as chance in all the universe—that the good lady's sewing, on this occasion, was a bit of mending on one of the doctor's coats, and as she sewed and rocked and talked, she failed to observe that an envelope worked its way, slowly but surely, out of one of the breast pockets of the cumbersome garment and slid softly to the carpeted floor, where it lay, still unnoticed, when she completed her task and took her departure from the room, twenty minutes later.

It was probably half an hour afterward that Doctor Kirke returned, and with the face of a brave man advancing on the scathing fire of a battery, went up stairs and entered the "south chamber," and there, stretched rigid and lifeless on the floor, he found Leonie Desmond. Clutched tightly in the cold fingers of one hand was the letter that Arthur Desmond had written him in the hour of his shameful flight, while near her, on the carpet, lay the letter from Australia that had proven the lode-stone he could not resist.

One quick malediction on himself for not having taken better care of the fatal missives, then all else was forgotten by Allan Kirke in his earnest, almost frantic, efforts to restore her to consciousness. But all in vain; for, though life returned to her, consciousness did not for many a weary night and day thereafter.