

BENJAMIN FARJEON

A SECRET INHERITANCE.
VOLUME 2 OF 3

Benjamin Farjeon

**A Secret Inheritance.
Volume 2 of 3**

«Public Domain»

Farjeon B.

A Secret Inheritance. Volume 2 of 3 / B. Farjeon — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

BOOK I (Continued)	5
CHAPTER XIV	6
CHAPTER XV	11
CHAPTER XVI	14
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	20

Benjamin Leopold Farjeon

A Secret Inheritance (Volume 2 of 3)

BOOK I (*Continued*)

THE RECORD OF GABRIEL CAREW

CHAPTER XIV

"I travelled for many months alone. I made acquaintances which never ripened into friendships, and seldom did twenty-four hours pass without my thoughts wandering to Silvain. Thinking it not unlikely that one or both of the brothers had returned to their home in Germany, I wrote several letters to them there, without receiving an answer. This portentous silence increased rather than diminished my interest in the man I loved as a brother. In speaking of him in these terms I am but giving faithful expression to the feelings I entertained for him; up to that time I had never met a human being, man or woman, who had so entirely won my affectionate regard.

"Family circumstances rendered me more than ever my own master; I was free to go whithersoever my inclination led me, and certainly my inclination pointed clearly to that part of the world where I should be most likely to find my dear friend. But I had no clue to guide me; to turn east, west, north, or south, in search of him would have been a hap-hazard proceeding, and to hope for success in so unintelligent a search would have been the hope of a madman. My anxiety with respect to the fate of Silvain and Kristel never deserted me, but it was many years before I was enabled to take up the links in the chain.

"During those years a great and happy change occurred in my own life. I interrupt the course of my narrative here to remark that it is singular I should be relating this history fully, for the first time, within a comparatively short distance of places in which the most pregnant-and indeed terrible-incidents in the career of the twin brothers were brought to my knowledge. My wife is acquainted with some portions of this history, but not with all. The lighthouse in which Avicia was born is within a hundred miles of this spot. Indirectly it led me to the acquaintance of the lady who became my wife, and to as great a happiness as any man can hope to enjoy.

"Nerac is not my birthplace, and it was in passing through the lovely village on one of my visits to the village by the sea-visits made in the vain hope of obtaining intelligence of Silvain-that I was introduced to her. I pass over the records of a time which lives in my remembrance as a heavenly summer. Happy is the man who has enjoyed such a season. Happier is the man to whom such a season is the harbinger of such home joys as have fallen to my lot.

"When I first made the acquaintance of my wife, and for some years afterwards, her parents were alive, and I saw that it would be cruel to ask her to leave them. I did not put her love to such a test. I settled in Nerac, and married there.

"It is a solemnly strange reflection by what chance threads we are led to our destiny-a destiny which may be one of honour or shame, and which may bring a blessing or a curse into the lives of others whom, but for the most accidental circumstance, we should never have seen. The doctrine of responsibility is but little understood. Thus, had it not been for my chance meeting with Silvain in London, I should never have known my wife, and it seems to me impossible that I should have been a happy or a good man without her. Such women as she keep men pure.

"Midway between Nerac and the village by the sea to which Kristel led his brother in his pursuit of the girl who was to bring them to their doom lies a forest of great extent, and it was in this forest, after a lapse of four years, that I came once more into association with Silvain and Avicia. I was called in that direction upon important business; at that period of my life I was an ardent pedestrian, and if the opportunity offered, was glad to make my way on foot, without respect to distance. I may confide to you that I was in the habit of taking a great deal of exercise because I was afraid of growing fat.

"I was unacquainted with the locality, and I took a short cut, which proved a long one. When darkness fell I found myself entrapped in the forest amidst a wilderness of trees. Never shall I forget the night and the day that followed. It was such a night as that upon which you, my friend, were lying helpless in the woods near Nerac. Not relishing the idea of passing a number of lonely

hours in such a place and under such circumstances, I made a vigorous effort to escape from the gloomy labyrinth. I did not succeed, and it was one o'clock in the morning by my watch before I made up my mind like a sensible person to rest till daylight. So I sat me down upon the trunk of a tree, and made the best of matters. Fatigued with my exertions I dozed for a few moments, then started up with a vague feeling of alarm, for which there was no cause, then dozed again and again, with repetitions of similar uneasiness; and finally I fell fast asleep.

"It was full daylight when I awoke. I arose refreshed, and gazed around with smiles and a light heart, despite that I was hungry and that there was no water in sight. I had no doubt that I should soon find myself in some place where I could obtain food. Resolving upon my course I set forward in the direction of rising ground, from the summit of which I should be able to overlook the country. In one part of the forest I was traversing the trees were very thickly clustered, and it was here I chanced upon the forms of a man and a woman lying on the ground asleep. The circumstance was strange, and I leant over the sleeping persons to see their faces. I could scarcely repress a cry of astonishment at the discovery that the man was Silvain and the woman Avicia. It was from an impulsive desire not to disturb them that I uttered no sound, for truly their appearance was such as to excite my deep compassion.

"Avicia's head was pillowed upon Silvain's right arm, and his left hand was clasped in hers. In complete ignorance of what had brought them to this miserable position, there was, to my mind, in this close clasping of his hand in hers, a kind of protection, as though she were making an instinctive effort to shield him from a hidden danger. The faces of both were wan with suffering, and their clothes were poor and ragged. I trembled to think that they might be in want of food.

"As I gazed in pity and apprehension Silvain moved. A spasm of fear passed across his face, and he exclaimed in terror, 'Avicia! Avicia! He is coming nearer-nearer! We must fly!'

"Before the words were uttered she was awake and on her feet. She saw me without recognising me, and she sank to the ground again, with a piercing scream which curdled through my veins, so much of fear and terror did it express. Dazed, and not yet fully awakened, Silvain threw himself before her in an attitude of protection.

"'Silvain!' I cried; 'do you not know me?'

"He looked up with a shudder, and passed his hand across his eyes. It was like the look of an intelligent animal who is being hunted to his death. But a softer expression came slowly into them as he gazed upon me and saw that it was a friend and not an enemy who stood before him. I spoke no further word at the moment, for the tears were running down his haggard face; his overcharged heart had found relief, and I turned from him.

"Presently I felt his hand upon my arm.

"'It is really you?' he said in a broken voice.

"'No doubt of that, Silvain,' I said in a cheerful tone, purposely assumed to put him at his ease, 'unless life is a delusion.'

"'Would it were!' he muttered, 'would it were!' And then, suspiciously, 'Did you come to seek me?'

"'No, Silvain; it is pure accident, if there be such a thing as accident.'

"'There is not,' he said; 'all is ordained.'

"'One of our old arguments, Silvain,' I said, still with a cheerful air; I would not humour his gloomy mood.

"'Do not mock me;' and he spread his hands, with upturned palms. 'Can you not see?'

"'I can see that you are in bad trim, which can easily be set right. Silvain,' I said reproachfully, 'this is not as we used to meet. I come to you with open arms, and you receive me with doubt and suspicion. Are we not, as we always were and always shall be, friends staunch and true? You are the same Silvain; I am the same Louis; unchanged, as you will find me if you care to prove me.'

"Avicia had risen and crept close to my side.

"'Friends staunch and true,' she said, echoing my words. 'You are not mocking him?'"

"'Indeed, no.'"

"'Then give us food,' she said."

"At this appeal I felt my pretended cheerfulness deserting me, but I caught the would-be runaway, and held it fast."

"'Food!' I exclaimed, rattling some money in my pocket. 'Would that I knew where to obtain it! Here am I, starving, lost in the woods last night, and with not an idea now how to get out of them. Can you show me the way?'"

"'Yes,' she replied eagerly."

"'Then I am fortunate, indeed, in lighting on you, and I bless the chance. Ah, Silvain, how I searched for you! To leave me, without ever a word-I would not have believed it of you. It was as though you doubted my friendship, which,' I added, 'is as sincere at this moment as ever it was in the years gone by.' Here there was a little choking in my throat because of the tears which again flowed from his eyes. 'I went to the village three times to get news of you, and had to come away unsatisfied. I wrote to your home in Germany, and received no reply. We have much to tell each other. But I am forgetting. You are faint and weary, and so am I. Can you take us to an inn where we can put some cheerful life into our bodies?'"

"I addressed this last question to Avicia, and she answered 'Yes,' and was about to lead the way when Silvain stopped her."

"'Is it on our road?' he asked."

"'Yes,' she answered, 'it is on our road.'"

"He motioned to her to proceed, and she stepped forward, Silvain and I walking side by side in the rear. This companionship was of my prompting, for had I not detained him he would have joined Avicia. I was burning with curiosity to learn what had befallen my friend during the last few years, but I restrained myself from asking questions which I felt he was not in the proper frame of mind at present to answer. Therefore as we walked onwards it was chiefly I who had to beguile the way. I told him all that had passed since we last met, narrated adventures which in former times would have interested him, and spoke freely of my settlement in life and of the happiness of my home. He acknowledged my efforts in monosyllables, but volunteered nothing of himself or Avicia. At the end of about an hour's walk we arrived at a village, in which there was one poor inn, and there we halted. Before we entered Silvain said,

"'A word first. I have been seemingly churlish and ungrateful, but I am not so. My heart is overflowing with thankfulness; presently, perhaps, I may have courage to unbosom myself. You are as you were; life is fair and sweet to you.'"

"It was only because he paused here that I spoke: 'And will be to you, Silvain.'"

"'Never again,' he said. 'I am followed by a relentless spirit; I have been pursued for years by one who was heart of my heart, soul of my soul, but who now, from feelings of revenge, and as he believes of justice, is my bitter enemy.'"

"'Dare I mention his name, Silvain?'"

"'I will do so. My brother Kristel. It is of him I wish to say a word to you before I partake of your charity.'"

"'Silvain!' I cried, in remonstrance."

"'Forgive me. I am tormented because of my condition, because of Avicia's misery. Answer me honestly. Is it really true that you came upon us by chance in the woods?'"

"'It is really true.'"

"'Kristel did not send you?'"

"'I have not seen Kristel since you and I last met.'"

"'Nor heard from him?'"

"'Nor heard from him.'"

"He took the hand I held out to him, and we followed Avicia into the inn, where, very soon, we were seated at a table with a modest meal before us. The food was poor enough, the wine was thin and common, but we could scarcely have enjoyed a grand banquet more. I speak not alone for myself, but for Silvain and Avicia; it was evident to me that they had not had many full meals lately. Avicia especially ate ravenously, and with a perfect sense of animal enjoyment, and it was only when she had finished that a certain terror, which I had observed in both her and Silvain, again asserted itself.

"Remain here a while, Avicia,' said Silvain, at the end of the meal; 'I wish to speak to our friend alone.'

"Are we safe?' she asked.

"I think so; I hope so. Sleep; it will do you good.'

"Thank you, Silvain.'

"She was seated on a hard bench, not conducive to repose; nevertheless she closed her eyes, and was almost immediately asleep.

"Poor girl!' said Silvain, with a sigh, 'she has suffered much-and in a few weeks will become a mother.'

"We strolled up and down outside the inn and conversed.

"You have behaved to us with true friendship,' he said; 'and yet you can see we are beggars. Are you prospering?'

"I am not rich,' I replied, 'but I can spare to a friend.'

"We are making our way to Avicia's home, to the lighthouse upon which I saw her for the first time otherwise than in my dreams. I doubt whether you can turn aside the finger of Fate as I behold it, pointing downwards to a grave, but you can perhaps help us to cheat it for a short time.'

"You speak strangely, Silvain; the ominous fears which oppress you may be bred by a disordered fancy.'

"In our former intercourse,' was his reply, 'was my fancy ever disordered? I advanced nothing that was not afterwards proved; I made no pretence of accounting for the warnings I received; I make none now. I shudder to think of the future, not so much for my own sake as for Avicia's. Helpless, penniless, without a friend-'

"You are forgetting me, Silvain?'

"Ah, yes, my friend, as you still declare yourself to be; I cannot but believe you. But Avicia-'

"I am her friend as well as yours.'

"For God's sake, do not speak lightly! You do not know to what a pass I am driven.'

"You shall enlighten me, and I maybe able to counsel you. Do not think I am speaking lightly, As I am your friend, so am I Avicia's. As I will stand by you, so will I stand by her.'

"In perfect faith, Louis?'

"It was the first time he had uttered my name, and I held it as a sign that I had dispelled his distrust. I replied, 'In perfect faith, Silvain.'

"I accept it so. When I am gone, she will not be quite alone in the world. And now, will you give me a little money? I do not ask you to lend it to me, for I have no expectation of being able to repay you. I will briefly explain the necessity for it. We are bound for the lighthouse. It is our only refuge, and there our child will be born. May it prove a comfort to the mother! We have fifty miles to go, and Avicia is not strong enough to walk-'

"Say no more,' I interrupted, 'of the necessity for such a trifle; I can spare you more than sufficient for your purpose.'

"I took from my purse what was requisite for my immediate needs, and pressed the purse with the coins that remained into his hand. He took it in silence, and his emaciated form shook with gratitude.

"You ask no questions about these,' he said, pointing to his rags.

"'Why should I?' I asked in return. 'But there are one or two points upon which you might satisfy me.'

"'I cannot go into my history, Louis. If you will give me your address I will send it to you before the week is out. Indeed, after your noble promise with respect to Avicia, it is yours by right. It will not only enlighten, it will guide you.'

"'I will wait for it, and will make an opportunity of seeing you soon after I have read it. The points I wish to mention are these: While you and Avicia were sleeping in the forest, and I stood looking down upon you, you cried-not because of my presence, of which you were ignorant, but because of some disturbing dream-"He is coming nearer-nearer! We must fly!" To whom did you refer?'

"'To my brother Kristel. He is pursuing us.'

"'To your hurt?'

"'To my destruction.'

"'Then you have seen him?'

"'I have not seen him. I know it through my dreams, as of old. You could not doubt their truth when we travelled together-ah, those happy days! – you cannot doubt it now.'

"'Then, what was love between you has turned to hate?' The words escaped me unaware; I repented of them the moment they were spoken.

"'Yes,' said Silvain, in a tone of deepest sadness, 'what was love between us is turned to hate. Ask me no more questions-in pity!'

"'But one, Silvain. Have you any children?'

"'None. The babe that Avicia will soon press to her breast will be our first-born.'

"To matters upon which I saw he was then unwilling to converse, I made no further reference. He engaged a light cart and horse, and a man to drive them to the village by the sea. Then he woke Avicia, and I said farewell to them, and gazed after them till they were out of sight.

"As he had promised, I received from him before the end of the week a statement of his adventures. It is now among my papers in Nerac, and I remember perfectly all the salient particulars necessary to my story, which is now drawing to a conclusion. I will narrate them in my own way, asking you to recall the day upon which the brothers were last seen in the village by the sea."

CHAPTER XV

"Silvain, Kristel, and Avicia, accompanied by her father, rowed from the lighthouse to the shore. The villagers saw but little of them; they passed out of the village, and Avicia's father returned alone to the lighthouse. Kristel loved Avicia with all the passion of a hot, imperious, and intense nature. He looked upon her as his, and had he suspected that Silvain would have fallen in love with her, it can readily be understood that he would have been the last man to bring them into association with each other. But so it happened.

"When Kristel and Avicia met in the Tyrol, Kristel was buoyed up with hopes that she reciprocated the love she had inspired in his breast. He had some reason for this hope, for at his request, when he asked her to become his wife and said that he could not marry without his father's consent, she had written home to *her* father with respect to the young gentleman's proposal, thereby leading him to believe that she was ready to accept him. It appeared, however, that there was no real depth in her feelings for him; and, indeed, it may be pardoned her if she supposed that his fervid protestations were prompted by feelings as light and as little genuine as her own. Unsophisticated as she was in the ways of the world, the fact of his making the honourable accomplishment of his love for her dependent upon the fiat of another person could not but have lessened the value of his declarations-more especially when she had not truly given him her heart. It was given to Silvain upon the occasion of their first meeting, and it was not long before they found the opportunity to exchange vows of affection-a circumstance of which I and every person but themselves were entirely ignorant. But love is cunning.

"It was because of Avicia's fear of her father that this love was kept secret; he held her completely in control, and-first favouring Kristel and then Silvain, playing them against each other, as it were, to his own advantage in the way of gifts-filled her with apprehension.

"Looking back,' Silvain said in his statement to me, 'upon the history of those days of happiness and torture, I can see now that I was wrong in not endeavouring to arrive at a frank understanding with my brother; but indeed I had but one thought-Avicia. As Kristel believed her to be his, so did I believe her to be mine, and the idea of losing her was sufficient to make my life a life of despair. And after all, it was for Avicia to decide. Absorbing as was my love for her, I should have had no choice but to retire and pass my days in misery had she decided in favour of Kristel.'

"The base conduct of Avicia's father was to a great extent the cause of turning brotherly love to hate. Seeing their infatuation, he bargained with each secretly, saying, in effect, 'What will you give me if I give you my daughter's hand? – for she will not, and cannot, marry without my consent.'

"And to the other, 'What will *you* give me?'

"He bound them to secrecy by a solemn oath, and bound his daughter also in like manner, promising that she should have the one she loved. Silvain was the more liberal of the two, and signed papers, pledging himself to pay to the avaricious father a large sum of money within a certain time after his union with Avicia. So cunningly did the keeper of the lighthouse conduct these base negotiations, that, even on that last day when they all rowed together to the village, neither of the brothers knew that matters were to be brought then and there to an irrevocable end.

"The village by the sea lay behind them some six or eight miles. Then, upon a false pretext, Avicia's father got rid of Kristel, sending him on an errand for Avicia which would render necessary an absence of many hours. That done, he said to Silvain and Avicia, 'Everything is arranged. This day will see you man and wife. Come with me to the priest.'

"'But where is Kristel?' asked Silvain, his heart throbbing with joy. 'Does he not know?'

"'Yes, he knows,' replied Avicia's father, 'but, as you are aware, he had a sneaking regard himself for my daughter, and he thought he would feel more comfortable, and you and Avicia too, if he were not present at the ceremony. He bade me give you his blessing.'

"Satisfied with this-being, indeed, naturally only too willing to be satisfied-the marriage ceremony took place, and Silvain and Avicia became man and wife. They departed on their honeymoon, and instructed the keeper of the lighthouse to inform Kristel of their route, in order that he might be able to join them at any point he pleased.

"Then came the interview between Avicia's father and Kristel, in which the young man was informed that he had lost Avicia. Kristel was dismayed and furious at what he believed to be the blackest treachery on the part of his brother. He swore to be revenged, and asked the road they had taken. Avicia's father sent him off in an entirely opposite direction, and he set out in pursuit. Needless to say that he soon found out how he had been tricked, and that it infuriated him the more. Not knowing where else to write to Silvain, he addressed a letter to him at their home in Germany; he himself did not proceed thither, judging that his best chance of meeting the married couple lay near the village by the sea, to which he felt convinced Silvain and Avicia would soon return. Therefore he lurked in the vicinity of the village, and watched by day and night the principal avenues by which it was to be approached. But his judgment was at fault; they did not return.

"In the meantime the lovers were enjoying their honeymoon. In order to keep faith with Avicia's father in the bargain made between him and Silvain-which rendered necessary the payment of a substantial sum of money by a given time-it was imperative that Silvain should visit his boyhood's home, to obtain his share of the inheritance left to him and Kristel by their father. The happy couple dallied by the way, and it was not until three months after their marriage that they arrived at Silvain's birthplace.

"Perhaps we shall meet Kristel there,' said Silvain.

"Instead of meeting his brother, Silvain received the letter which Kristel had written to him. It breathed the deepest hate, and Silvain had the unhappiness of reading the outpourings of a relentless, vindictive spirit, driven to despair by disappointed love.

"You have robbed me,' the letter said; 'hour by hour, day by day, have you set yourself deliberately to ensnare me and to fill my life with black despair. Had I suspected it at the time I would have strangled you. But your fate is only postponed; revenge is mine, and I hold it in my soul as a sacred trust which I shall fulfil. You shall die by my hands. Never in this world or in the next will I forgive you! My relentless hate shall haunt and pursue you, and you shall not escape it!'

"And then the writer recorded an awful oath that, while life remained within him, his one sole aim should be to compass his revenge. It was a lengthy letter, and strong as is my description of it, it falls short of the intense malignity which pervaded every line. Kristel launched a curse so terrible against his brother that Silvain's hair rose up in horror and fear as he read it. These are Silvain's own words to me:

"After reading Kristel's letter,' he said, 'I felt that I was accursed, and that it was destined that he should kill me.'

"How to escape the terrible doom-though he had scarcely a hope of averting it-how to prevent the crime of blood-guiltiness lying upon Kristel's soul: this was thereafter the object of Silvain's life. It afforded him no consolation to know that for the intense hate with which Kristel's heart was filled Avicia's father was partly responsible.

"In its delineation of the trickery by which Kristel had been robbed of Avicia the letter was not truthful, for there had occurred between the brothers a conversation in which Silvain had revealed his love for her. Kristel's over-wrought feelings probably caused him to forget this-or it may have been a perversion of fact adopted to give sanction to hate.

"Kristel's letter was not the only despairing greeting which awaited Silvain in the home of his boyhood. By some unhappy means the inheritance left by his father had melted away, and he found himself a beggar. Thus he was unable to carry out the terms of the bargain Avicia's father had made with him. This part of his misfortune did not greatly trouble him; it was but a just punishment

to a grasping, avaricious man; but with beggary staring him in the face, and his brother's curse and awful design weighing upon him, his situation was most dreadful and pitiable.

"It was his intention to keep Kristel's letter from the knowledge of Avicia, but she secretly obtained possession of it, and it filled her soul with an agonising fear. They decided that it was impossible to return to the village by sea.

"It is there my brother waits for us,' said Silvain.

"So from that time they commenced a wandering life, with the one dominant desire to escape from Kristel.

"I cannot enter now into a description of the years that followed. They crept from place to place, picking up a precarious existence, and enduring great privations. One morning Silvain awoke, trembling and afraid. 'I have seen Kristel,' he said.

"She did not ask him how and under what circumstances he had seen his brother.

"He has discovered that we are here, and is in pursuit of us,' Silvain continued. 'We must fly without delay.'

"This was an added grief to Avicia. The place in which Silvain's dream of his brother had been dreamt had afforded them shelter and security for many weeks, and she had begun to indulge in the hope that they were safe. Vain hope! They must commence their wanderings again. From that period, at various times, Silvain was visited by dreams in which he was made acquainted with Kristel's movements in so far as they affected him and Avicia and the mission of vengeance upon which Kristel was relentlessly bent. They made their way to foreign countries, and even there Kristel pursued them. And so through the days and years continued the pitiful flight and the merciless pursuit. In darkness they wandered often, the shadow of fate at their heels, in Avicia's imagination lurking in the solitudes through which they passed, amidst thickets of trees, in hollows and ravines, waiting, waiting, waiting to fall upon and destroy them! An appalling life, the full terrors of which the mind can scarcely grasp.

"At length, when worldly circumstances pressed so heavily upon them that they hardly knew where to look for the next day's food, Avicia whispered to her husband that she expected to become a mother, and that she was possessed by an inexpressible longing that her child should be born where she herself first drew breath. After the lapse of so many years it appeared to Silvain that the lighthouse would be the likeliest place of safety, and, besides, it was Avicia's earnest wish. They were on the road thither when I chanced upon them in the forest."

CHAPTER XVI

"After reading Silvain's letter I lost as little time as possible in paying a visit to the village by the sea. I took with me some presents for the villagers, who were unaffectedly glad to see me, and not because of the gifts I brought for them. There I heard what news they could impart of the history of the lighthouse since I last visited them. The disappointment with respect to the money he expected from Silvain had rendered the keeper more savage and morose than ever. For years after the marriage of his daughter he lived alone on the lighthouse, but within the last twelve months he had sent for a young man who was related to him distantly, and who was now looking after the lights. This young man was deaf and dumb. What kind of comfort the companionship of a man so afflicted could be in such a home it is difficult to say, but the new arrival came in good time, for two months afterwards Avicia's father slipped over some rocks in the vicinity of the lighthouse, and so injured himself that he could not rise from his bed. Thus, when Silvain and Avicia presented themselves he could make no practical resistance to their taking up their abode with him. However it was, there they were upon my present visit, and I went at once to see them.

"They received me with a genuine demonstration of feeling, and I was pleased to see that they were looking better. Regular food, and the secure shelter of a roof from which they were not likely to be turned away at a moment's notice, doubtless contributed to this improvement. The pressure of a dark terror was, however, still visible in their faces, and during my visit I observed Silvain go to the outer gallery at least three or four times, and scan the surrounding sea with anxious eyes. To confirm or dispel the impression I gathered from this anxious outlook I questioned Silvain.

"I am watching for Kristel,' he said.

"It is scarcely likely he will come to you here,' I said.

"He is certain to come to me here,' said Silvain; 'he is now on the road.'

"You know this from your dreams?"

"Yes, my dreams assure me of it. What wonder that I dream of the spirit which has been hunting me for years in the person of Kristel. I think of nothing else. Waking or sleeping, he is ever before me.'

"Should he come, what will you do, Silvain?"

"I hardly know; but at all hazards he must, if possible, be prevented from effecting an entrance into the lighthouse. It would be the death of Avicia.'

"He pronounced the words 'if possible' with so much emphasis that I said:

"Surely that can be prevented.'

"I cannot be on the alert by night as well as by day,' said Silvain. 'My dread is that at a time when I am sleeping he will take me unaware. Hush! Avicia is coming up the stairs; do not let her hear us conversing upon a subject which has been the terror of her life. She does not know that I am constantly on the watch.'

"In this belief he was labouring under a delusion, for Avicia spoke to me privately about it; she was aware of the anxiety which, she said, she was afraid was wearing him away; and indeed, as she made this allusion, and I glanced at Silvain, who was standing in another part of the lighthouse, I observed what had hitherto escaped me, that his features were thinner, and that there was a hectic flush upon them which, in the light of his tragic story, too surely told a tale of an inward fretting likely to prove fatal. She told me that often in the night when Silvain was sleeping she would rise softly and go to the gallery, in fear that Kristel was stealthily approaching them.

"I saw her father. He gazed at me, and did not speak-not that he was unable, but because it was part of the cunning of his nature. Silvain informed me that Avicia expected her baby in three weeks from that day. I had not come empty-handed, and I left behind me welcome remembrances, promising to come again the following week.

"I kept my promise. Upon seeing me, a woman of the village ran towards me, and whispered:
"Kristel is here."

"I followed the direction of her gaze, which was simply one of curiosity, and saw a man standing on the beach, facing the lighthouse. I walked straight up to him, and touched him with my hand. He turned, and I recognised Kristel.

"I recognised him-yes; but not from any resemblance he bore to the Kristel of former days. Had I met him under ordinary circumstances I should not have known him. His thin face was covered with hair; his eyes were sunken and wild; his bony wrists, his long fingers, seemed to be fleshless. I spoke to him, and mentioned my name. He heard me, but did not reply. I begged him to speak, and he remained silent. After his first look at me he turned from me, and stood with his eyes in the direction of the lighthouse. I would not accept his reception of me; I continued to address him; I asked him upon what errand he had come, and why he kept his eyes so fixedly upon the lighthouse. I gave him information of myself, and said I should be pleased to see him in my home-with a vague and foolish hope that he would accept the invitation, and that I might be able to work upon his better nature. And still no word came from him. I did not dare to utter the name of either Silvain or Avicia, fearing that I should awake the demon that had taken possession of his soul.

"By the time that I had exhausted what I thought it wise and good to say, I found myself falling into a kind of fascination, produced by his motionless attitude, and the fixed gaze in his unnaturally brilliant eyes. It was a bright day, and I knew that my imagination was playing me a trick, but I saw clearly with my mind's eye, the outer gallery of the lighthouse, and the figure of Avicia standing thereon, with her hair hanging loose, and a scarlet covering on her head. Was it a spiritual reflection of what this silent, motionless man was gazing upon? I shuddered, and passed my hand across my eyes; the vision was gone-but he gazed upon it still.

"I was compelled at length to leave him standing there upon the beach, and he took no notice of my departure.

"Others were observing him as well as I, and had watched me with curiosity during the time I stood by his side. When I was among them they asked if he had spoken to me.

"No," I replied, 'I could get no word from him.'

"Neither has he spoken to us," they said. 'Not a sound has passed his lips since his arrival.'

"When did he arrive?" I inquired.

"Yesterday," they answered, 'and our first thought was that he would want a boat to row to the lighthouse, but he did not ask for it. Surely he must wish to see his brother! There is something strange about him, do you not think so? One of our women here insists that he is dumb.'

"He must be dumb," said the woman; 'else why should he not speak?'

"There was a jealousy between him and his brother," said an elderly woman, 'about Avicia.'

"What has that to do with it?" exclaimed the woman who pronounced him dumb. 'Jealousy, like love, does not last for ever. She is not the only woman in the world, and men have eyes. They must have made up their quarrel long ago. Besides, if he *was* jealous still, which isn't in the least likely, that would not make him dumb! His tongue would be all the looser for it.'

"More terrible," thought I, 'is the dread silence of that motionless man than all the storms of wrath his tongue could utter.'

"From what the villagers said, I knew that they were in ignorance of the hatred which filled Kristel's heart, and I debated within myself what it was best to do. That the simple men of the village would not voluntarily make themselves parties to any scheme of blind vengeance on the part of one brother against another I was certain, but I was not satisfied that it would be right to give them my whole confidence, and tell them all I knew. At the same time it would not be right to allow them to remain in complete ignorance, for by so doing they might be made unwittingly to further Kristel's designs upon his brother's life. There was a priest in the village, and I went to him, and under the seal of secrecy revealed something, but not all, of the meaning of Kristel's appearance.

"'Come with me,' he said.

"I accompanied him, and once more stood by the side of Kristel. The priest addressed him, counselled him, exhorted him, and, like myself, could obtain no word from him. Kindlier speech I never heard, but it made no impression upon Kristel.

"'He *must* be dumb,' said the priest as we moved away.

"'Not so,' I said earnestly; 'were he dumb, and unable to hear what is said to him, he would certainly indicate by some kind of sign that speech addressed to him was falling upon ears that were deaf. He is possessed by a demoniac obduracy, and his apparent indifference is but a part of a fell design to which I should be afraid to give a name.'

"The priest was impressed by this view of the matter, which could not but appeal successfully to a man's calm reason.

"'What can I do?' he asked. 'If a man is determined not to speak, I have no power to compel him.'

"'It is in your power,' I said, 'to prevent bloodshed.'

"'Bloodshed!' he echoed, in a startled tone.

"'Nothing less, I fear,' I said. 'Lay an injunction upon the villagers not to lend that man a boat, and not, under any pretext, to row him to the lighthouse.'

"'What dreadful thoughts do your words suggest!' exclaimed the priest. 'They alarm and bewilder me.'

"'I am not at liberty to say more at the present moment,' I said. 'I shall not leave the village to-day. I myself will see that man's brother, and will obtain permission from him to reveal all I know. Meanwhile give not that soul-tossed wretch the opportunity of carrying out a scheme of ruthless vengeance which he has harboured for years.'

"'Tell me explicitly what you wish me to do.'

"'I have already told you. That man, with the connivance or assistance of any person in this village, must not be enabled to get to the lighthouse.'

"'He shall not,' said the priest.

"And he mixed with the villagers, men and women, and laid upon them the injunction I desired. With my mind thus set at ease for at least a few hours, I engaged a couple of boatmen to row me to Silvain. I half expected that Kristel would come forward with a request, made if not in speech in dumb show, to be allowed to accompany me, and I had resolved what action to take; but he made no step towards me. He gave no indication even of a knowledge of what was taking place within a dozen yards of him, although it was not possible that the putting off of the boat from the shore could have escaped his observation.

"'If he is not deaf and dumb,' said one of the rowers, 'he must have gone clean out of his senses.'

"'Neither one nor the other,' thought I; 'he is nursing his vengeance, and has decided upon some plan of action.'

"Silvain and Avicia were on the outer gallery, and when I joined them Silvain drew me aside.

"'You have news of Kristel,' he said. I nodded, and he continued: 'I know without the telling. He is in the village.'

"'Who informed you?' I asked.

"'No human,' he replied, with a sad smile. 'I see him standing upon the beach, looking towards us.'

"In truth that was a physical impossibility, but I needed no further proof of the mysterious insight with which Silvain was gifted. I related to him all that had passed between me and Kristel and the priest, and of the precautions taken to keep from Kristel the means of reaching the lighthouse.

"That will not prevent him from coming, said Silvain; 'he is a fine swimmer. I myself, were I desperately pushed to it, would undertake to swim to the village. You hold to your promise. You hold to your promise, Louis, with respect to Avicia?"

"It is binding upon me,' I replied; 'my word is given.'

"Faithful friend! Neither will my child be left without a counsellor. Louis, I shall never see the face of my child-I shall never feel his little hands about my neck!"

"Were it not for the tender sympathy I have for you,' I said in a tone of reproof, 'I should feel inclined to be angry. Did you not confess to me in former days that you could not see into the future? And here you are, raising up ghosts to make the present more bitter than it is. No, no, Silvain. Black as things appear, there are bright years yet in store for you.'

"I cannot help my forebodings, Louis. True, I cannot, nor can any man, see into the future, but what can I do to turn my brother's hate from me?' It was a cry of anguish wrung from his suffering heart. 'I think of the days of our childhood, when we strolled in the woods with our arms round each other's necks, I think of the dreams we mapped of the future. Running water by the side of which we sat, bending over to see our faces, and making our lips meet in a shadowed kiss, flowers we picked in field and meadow, errands of mercy we went upon together, twilight communings, the little sweethearts we had-all these innocent ways of childhood rise before me, and fill me with anguish. What can I do? – what can I do to bring him back to me in brotherly love? Louis, I have a fear that I have never whispered to living soul. It is that Avicia may have twin children, as Kristel and I are, and they should grow up to be as we are now! Would it not be better that they should be born dead, or die young, when their souls are not stained with hatred of each other and with evil thoughts that render existence a curse?"

"We were alone when he gave expression to his agonised feelings; Avicia had left us to attend to domestic duties. I could say nothing to comfort him; to harp upon one string of intended consolation to a man who is in no mood to accept it becomes, after a time, an oppression. He paced up and down, twining his fingers convulsively, and presently said,

"It would be too much, Louis, to ask you to remain with me a little while?"

"No,' I replied, 'it would not. Indeed, it was partly in my mind to suggest it. The crisis you have dreaded for many years has come, and if you wish me to stop with you a day or two I will willingly do so. It may be-I do not know how-that I can be of service to you. The boatmen are waiting in the boat below. I will write a letter to my wife, and they shall post it, informing her that I shall be absent from home perhaps until the end of the week, by which time I hope the cloud will have passed away. No thanks, Silvain; friendship would be a poor and valueless thing if one shrank from a sacrifice so slight.'

"I wrote my letter, and despatched it by the boatmen. Then we waited for events; it was all that it was in our power to do.

"Avicia was very glad when she heard of my intention to remain with them a while.

"Your companionship will do him good,' she said. 'He has no one but me to talk to, and he speaks of but one subject. If this continues long he will lose his reason.'

"The day passed, and night came on. There was but scanty living accommodation in the lighthouse, but a mattress was spread for me upon the floor of the tiny kitchen; and there I was to sleep. Avicia and Silvain wished me to occupy their bed, but I would not have it so. Before retiring to rest, Silvain and I passed two or three hours in converse; I purposely led the conversation into foreign channels, and when I wished him good-night I was rejoiced to perceive that I had succeeded for a brief space in diverting his mind from the fears which weighed so heavily upon him.

"Nothing occurred during the night to disturb us; I awoke early, and lay waiting for sunrise; but no light came, and when, aroused by Silvain, I left my bed and went to the outer gallery, I was surprised to see that all surrounding space was wrapt in a thick mist.

"A great storm will soon be upon us,' said Silvain.

"He was right; before noon the storm burst, and the sea was lashed into fury. It was a relief to see the play of lightning upon the angry waters, but it was terrible too, and I thought how awful and joyless a lone life must be when spent in such a home. This second day seemed as if it would never end, and it was only by my watch that I knew of the approach of night. With the sounds of the storm in my ears I lay down upon my mattress and fell asleep.

"I know not at what time of the night I awoke, but with black darkness upon and around me, I found myself sitting up, listening to sounds without which did not proceed from the conflict of the elements. At first I could not decide whether they were real or but the refrain of a dream by which I had been disturbed; soon, however, I received indisputable evidence that they were not the creations of my fancy.

"Kristel! For God's sake, listen to me!"

"The voice was Silvain's, and the words were uttered in outer space. When I retired to rest I had lain down in my clothes, removing only my coat, and using it as a covering. I quickly put it on, and lit a lamp, to which a chain was attached, by which means it could be held over the walls of the lighthouse. The lamp was scarcely lighted, when Avicia, but half dressed, rushed into the little room.

"Silvain!" she cried. "Where is Silvain?"

"Her eyes wandered round the room, seeking him. At that moment the voice from without pierced the air.

"Kristel! Oh, my brother, listen to me!"

"I threw my arms round Avicia, and held her fast.

"Why do you hold me?" she screamed. 'Are you, too, leagued against us? Silvain! Silvain!'

"It needed all my strength to restrain her from rushing out in her wild delirium, perhaps to her destruction. I whispered to her hurriedly that I intended to go to the outer gallery, and that she should accompany me; and also that if she truly wished to be of assistance to her husband she must be calm. She ceased instantly to struggle, and said in a tone of suppressed excitement,

"Come, then."

"I did not quit my hold of her, but I used now only one hand, which I clasped firmly round her wrist, my other being required for the lantern. The next moment we were standing upon the gallery, bending over. It was pitch dark, and we could see nothing; even the white spray of the waves, as they dashed against the stone walls, was not visible to us; but we heard Silvain's voice, at intervals, appealing in frenzied tones to Kristel, who, it needed not the evidence of sight to know, was holding on to the chains and struggling with his brother. How the two came into that awful position was never discovered, and I could only judge by inference that Kristel, in the dead of this deadly night, had made his way by some means to the lighthouse, and was endeavouring to effect an entrance, when Silvain, awakened by his attempts, had gone out to him, and was instantly seized and dragged down.

"So fearful and confused were the minutes that immediately followed that I have but an indistinct impression of the occurrences of the time, which will live ever within me as the most awful in my life. I know that I never lost my grasp of Avicia, and that but for me she would have flung herself over the walls; I know that the brothers were engaged in a struggle for life and death, and that Silvain continued to make the most pathetic appeals to Kristel to listen to him, and not to stain his soul with blood; I know that in those appeals there were the tenderest references to their boyhood's days, to the love which had existed between them, each for the other, to trivial incidents in their childhood, to their mother who worshipped them and was now looking down upon them, to the hopes in which they had indulged of a life of harmony and affection; I know that it struck me then as most terrible that during the whole of the struggle no word issued from Kristel's lips; I know that there were heartrending appeals from Avicia to Kristel to spare her husband, and that there were tender cries from her to Silvain, and from Silvain to her; I know that, finding a loose

chain on the gallery, I lowered it to the combatants, and called out to Silvain-foolishly enough, in so far as he could avail himself of it-to release himself from his brother's arms and seize it, and that I and Avicia would draw him up to safety; I know that in one vivid flash of lightning I saw the struggling forms and the beautiful white spray of the waves; I know that Silvain's voice grew fainter and fainter until it was heard no more; I know that there was the sound of a heavy body or bodies falling into the sea, that a shriek of woe and despair clove my heart like a knife, and that Avicia lay in my arms moaning and trembling. I bore her tenderly into her room, and laid her on her bed.

"The storm ceased; no sound was heard without. The rising sun filled the eastern horizon with loveliest hues of saffron and crimson. The sea was calm; there was no trace of tempest and human agony. By that time Avicia was a mother, and lay with her babes pressed to her bosom. Silvain's fear was realised: he was the dead father of twin brothers.

"The assistant whom Avicia's father had engaged rowed me to the village, and there I enlisted the services of a woman, who accompanied me back to the lighthouse, and attended to Avicia. The mother lived but two days after the birth of her babes. Until her last hour she was delirious, but then she recovered her senses and recognised me.

"My dear Silvain told me,' she said, in a weak, faint voice, 'that you would be a friend to our children. Bless the few moments remaining to me by assuring me that you will not desert them.'

"I gave her the assurance for which she yearned, and she desired me to call them by the names of Eric and Emilius. It rejoiced me that she passed away in peace; strange as it may seem, it was an inexpressible relief to her bruised heart that the long agony was over. Her last words were,

"I trust you. God will reward you!"

"And so, with her nerveless hand in mine, her spirit went out to her lover and husband.

"We buried her in the village churchyard, and the day was observed as a day of mourning in that village by the sea.

"I thought I could not do better than leave the twin babes for a time in the charge of the woman I had engaged, and it occurred to me that it might not be unprofitable to have some inquiries and investigation made with respect to the inheritance left by their grandfather to his sons Kristel and Silvain. I placed the matter in the hands of a shrewd lawyer, and he was enabled to recover a portion of what was due to their father. This was a great satisfaction to me, as it to some extent provided for the future of Eric and Emilius, and supplied the wherewithal for their education. It was my intention, when they arrived at a certain age, to bring them to my home in Nerac, and treat them as children of my own, but a difficulty cropped up for which I was not prepared and which I could not surmount. Avicia's father, learning that I had recovered a portion of Silvain's inheritance, demanded from me an account of it, and asserted his rights as the natural guardian of his grandchildren. There was no gainsaying the demand, and I was compelled reluctantly to leave Eric and Emilius in his charge. I succeeded, however, in prevailing upon him to allow them to pay me regular visits of long duration, so that a close intimacy of affectionate friendship has been established between them and the members of my family. Here ends my story-a strange and eventful one, you will admit. I often think of it in wonder, and this is the first time a full recital of it has passed my lips."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.