

Chapter 22

The Enchantress—Lady Blanche

**DEPARTURE FOR CALCUTTA—MR DUDLEY'S ELEVATION—
FATAL GIFT OF OCCULT SIGHT—VISITED BY THE
PHANTOM OF THE ENCHANTRESS—EVIL SPIRITS**

The time was fast approaching when I had resolved I would make a complete change in my mode of life and the sphere of its action. Eight years had passed away since I left England, and I had grown so weary of military life beneath the burning sun of Hindostan, that I seriously contemplated a change of service which would enable me to return to my own country and scenes more congenial to my early education; I did not venture to suggest these proposed changes to my Hindoo connections, who built largely upon my continuance amongst them, as a means of aggrandizing their own power and improving my fortunes.

My relatives exalted my slight successes beyond their true worth, and the mere hint of my wish to return to Europe was met with strenuous opposition. I had another object in view, too, and one that was far more congenial to me than any earthly chances of achieving fame or fortune, and this was the prospect of soon completing my term of initiatory probation in a society of extremely antique origin, with which it had been my passionate yearning to become affiliated. It little matters to my readers where the locale of this society is to be found, or of what its rites and exercises consist.

The nineteenth century is perhaps the very coldest possible culmination of the materialistic philosophy, which has been growing up like a fungus upon the civilization of the last five hundred years; so the nineteenth century is the last which could appreciate the objects of an association contemplating amongst other ideas, the reversal and obliteration of all theological myths, and the inauguration of a true spiritual kingdom, in which truth itself will be the Bible, God the high-priest, ministering spirits the acolytes, and occult science the connecting link between the past and the present, the spiritual and the natural world. The very few that in this generation are fitted for affiliation with this society will be called, as I was, without any previous knowledge of its existence; the rest of the world may and will seek it in vain.

I had been called, I repeat, and was obliged to join its ranks, but I had to undergo a long and painful series of probations ere I could hope to arrive at all that that society could confer upon me. I had labored and suffered for it, abnegated self, and given up for its sake much that renders life beautiful, cheerful, and happy. I had given up my very body and soul to gain what I sought, and soon, very soon, I was to be rewarded.

As the time for complete realization approached, my intense devotion to the idea before me deepened, and it was only by a great effort that I could bring myself to fulfill the daily cares that pressed upon me, and combine together the meshes of the various activities I had undertaken, so as to be ready when the time should come to devote myself wholly to the work before me, and quit the land of Hindostan without one feeling of compunction for duties unfulfilled or actions which I could look back upon with regret.

All was progressing under my silent and secret purpose, when a day arrived—a day ever memorable to me, as that which was to usher in an episode of my life's history, the shadow of which I darkly felt, but the form whereof I could not discern.

"My dear friend, I must start for Calcutta immediately—this packet of letters compels my departure at once; yet how I grieve to leave you and the delightful quarters you have afforded me, I can never fully express."

"Wait till to-night, Graham, and I shall be your traveling companion to Calcutta, for thither I, too, must go as soon as possible."

This was the conversation that passed between myself and my friend Graham at our breakfast table, as we sat reading our letters on the day which succeeded the visit recorded in the last chapter. Besides the business matters which summoned me to Calcutta, I found a strong impelling motive in a letter just received from my esteemed friend, John Dudley, but one which for some unexplained reason I ought to have had many months before. By a perusal of its contents I learned that Mr. Dudley had succeeded to the earldom of D _____, in consequence of the demise of the intervening heirs. His elevation to the peerage was entirely unexpected, and seemed to have had no effect in changing the hearty and affectionate cordiality of my friend's character, nor had it, as he emphatically assured me, wrought any alteration in the feelings of his "dear girls, except some little astonishment at their awakening one fine morning to hear themselves called the Ladies Sophia, Edith, and Blanche." He frequently alluded to his experiences amongst the Spiritualists of America; his unquenched enthusiasm for "the cause," and his abiding faith that I should keep my promise and revisit his family at the expiration of ten years from the time of my departure.

He reminded me that the ten years would soon elapse now, adding that I should have a good excuse for returning to England, were it only to escort back his best-beloved child, the Lady Blanche Dudley, who, as he informed me, had been induced to accompany her aunt, Lady Emily R _____, to India for a visit of two years. Lady Emily, the Sister of the new Countess of D _____, had, in my absence, espoused her cousin, the Viscount R _____, whom I should remember, said the writer, "as a sour, unspiritual relative" of his family, one between whom and the Dudleys no great intimacy had ever been maintained. My friend continued thus: "Now, Emily was just one of the best and most genial of human beings, besides being a capital medium, which is better than all, you know. What under the sun could induce this dear sister-in-law of mine to wed a prig of a Scotch viscount, and a Presbyterian to boot, none can say except those who are more versed in the mysteries of woman-kind than I am.

"The fact is, I suppose, poor Emily grew tired of lone widowhood, and as my lord was appointed to a high position in India, and offered my dear relative a handsome establishment and all the privileges of Begumship, etc., etc., the thing was too much for the aforesaid womankind, and dear Emmy consented to become the Viscountess R _____, and depart with her yellow-visaged spouse to India forthwith. But that isn't the whole or the worst of it, Louis. Would you believe it? They have actually carried my little Blanche, the 'very light of

my harem' and the apple of my eye, along with them. Of course you will wonder how such a miracle could have come about, and to tell you the truth, I have not got over my own astonishment in the matter, even now that she has been gone—my precious darling! more than two months. All I can do is to tell you the way the thing came around.

"Emily received a splendid settlement in her marriage; and as she is not very likely to bring her noble spouse any heirs, she, with his full consent, offered to adopt my Blanche as her heiress, provided she were permitted to accompany her on her two years' mission to, Calcutta. You know that Blanche was always her aunt's favorite, as she was mine and everybody else's. Well, I don't know how they arranged it all, but they made out that as my two boys would have the bulk of the estate, and the girls had but little prospect beyond slim settlements, or rich marriages, of course this offer of my lady the viscountess was far too magnificent to be slighted. Thus they got it all settled to their satisfaction, and I verily believe had fitted my little fairy out with all the gauzes and finery proper on such occasions, when suddenly they bethought, them of coming to ask my consent to my darling's abstraction. Now, Louis, you know me well enough to be aware how hard it would be for me to oppose one woman at a time; but when I tell you they came in a band, and asked me en masse to consent to what they had already fully made up their minds to do, you may 'guess,' as our American cousins have it, what sort of a chance I stood amongst them.

However, I thought I would just try it on a little; so summoning up my most potential air of authority, I stated my decided objection to any child of mine taking up her residence amongst lions and tigers, snake charmers and charmeresses; but before I could get out another word—rap, rap, rap! comes 'the spirits,' and instantly my whole band of feminines set to work spelling out communications from what I was informed was the spirit of a 'fakir' who had lived six thousand years ago, and who peremptorily commanded that the Lady Blanche Dudley should proceed forthwith to India, 'to meet her fat.'

"'Meet her fat!' I exclaimed. 'In heaven's name, why should she go so far to meet fat? That fakir doesn't know much about my family arrangements, I take it'

"'May it not be to make her fat?' suggested my wife.

"But no, the spirits wouldn't have it that way, either; then, after a considerable amount of bungling, the fakir corrected his spelling, and the sentence read thus: 'To meet her fate,'

"Well, when a body of women, backed up by a man six thousand years old, undertake to have their own way, Louis, rely upon it, the best thing one can do is to make a virtue of necessity and give the consent they'd just as soon do without; and so, to make a long story short, she sailed away last March, Louis, and the sunlight of my life sailed with her. That's all."

"Now, my dear fellow," continued my friend, "don't think I want to tax your good nature or impose any burdens upon you in the philandering line, but what I would say is this: See my little Sunshine, and just find out, as you can do if you choose, if she is happy; whether she wants to return to her old father, or whether she would rather stay till my lord's term expires. Which ever it is, Louis, I give you carte blanche to act as if she were your own child, or, for the matter of that, your grandchild. If she prefers her native moon, that is, the moon of her native land, to that blazing old luminary you keep for warming purposes in Hindostan, take her away in her father's name. Pack her up, with a legion of Ayahs to wait on her, and a regiment of Sepoys to escort her, and I'll pawn my earldom but I'll recompense you, if her transit home costs a king's ransom."

Such was the substance of my old friend's letter, and though I was vexed enough to find

it ought to have been delivered to me so many months ago, I still hoped to be in time to ascertain how far the fair Lady Blanche had become reconciled to meeting "her fate" in India, or whether she might not wish to return to her native land. Devoting the next hour to writing explanatory letters to my old friend, and the rest of the day to my preparations for departure, I was ready to set out that night with Graham for Calcutta, which "City of Palaces" we reached in due time, and after taking a cordial leave of each other, we departed to our separate destinations,

I took an early opportunity after my arrival to call at the Viscount R_____ 's residence, to inquire for his wife and niece. The ladies were away at their country seat, I was informed, but would return tomorrow. I left cards for them, but none for the Scotch dignitary. The next morning, however, brought the viscount's servant to my residence with his master's card, and a singularly cordial invitation to dine en famille at his house the next day, when his wife and niece would have returned to the city. At the appointed time, and whilst I was preparing for my visit, Capt. Graham entered my room with his usual unceremonious frankness, and tendering me a highly perfumed and extravagantly embossed billet, accompanied it by the urgent request that I would oblige him by accepting the invitation it contained, which was nothing less than to attend a fashionable entertainment at the residence of Madame Helene Laval, the widow of an eminent East Indian nabob, and the reigning queen of a certain class of fashionable society, for that season, at Calcutta.

When Graham first tendered me the scented piece of frivolity that conveyed this invitation, I was half angry with him, and despite the sincere regard we entertained for each other, I was somewhat hurt that he should have so far mistaken me as to imagine that I should be willing to spend my time in assemblies of mere fops and flirts. He knew that I was often compelled to take part in stately ceremonials or social gatherings, but he also knew that in my most charitable moods, I could not regard what is popularly called "society" with toleration; how, then, could he expect me I asked coldly, to make one of the gilded butterflies whom a vain and ambitious woman gathered around her for the sake of exhibiting the homage offered up at her shrine?

Poor Graham bore my reproaches very patiently, but would not yield his point nevertheless. He said la belle Helene was, like myself, a "mystic" and devoted "occultist;" she had long known me by reputation as a student of her favorite sciences, and was eager to meet me; that it was no gilded butterflies, but profound thinkers, grave reformers, and speculative metaphysicians who were in the habit of attending her soirees. Some rank and fashion of course, was permitted to exhibit there, but for the most part it was to be an assembly of those whom I should acknowledge to be "the best people in the city." Graham added, with an earnestness peculiarly irresistible to me, his attached friend, "But it is not for the society's sake I urge you, Chevalier, it is for my own that I plead; there will be one person there to-night, whom I entreat you to meet, to look upon and speak to, if for no other purpose, at least to oblige the friend who would never refuse anything you could ask."

"Enough!" I replied, "you wish me to see your enchantress, Graham. As soon as I can extricate myself from the dinner engagement I am about to fulfill, I will meet you at Madame Laval's,"

On arriving at Viscount R_____ 's, I was received by him with much more cordiality than he had deigned to bestow on the German mystic of olden times, but his fair wife, now in the full blush of her Hindoo dignities expanded into portly, magnificent "Begum," greeted me with all the affectionate interest of our former acquaintance. By her side, and almost overshadowed in the amplitude of her gorgeous robes, stood her beautiful niece, not the

little Blanche of old; no more the merry, light-hearted "little Sunshine" of her doting father's home, but the graceful and distingue Lady Blanche Dudley, somewhat grown, it is true, but still petite, slight, fragile—ethereal perhaps, would be the better word—and beautiful; heavens! what a wondrously beautiful creature she was! All the poet's ideals of sylphs, undines, or fairy beings, "too fair for earth, too frail for heaven," would have paled and grown cold, plain, and insignificant before the beauty of this wondrous, unearthly-looking girl. I gazed at her as I would have done at the cunning workmanship of an Apelles, a Phidias, or an Angelo.

At that time, at least, I regarded her more as a marble goddess than a very lovely mortal. Her beauty had a touch of sadness quite unlike the Blanche of old, and there was so much dignity in the turn of her graceful form, veiled by masses of golden ringlets, that I stood like a worshiper of the beautiful in art, as I have ever been, and I suppose stared at her in equal surprise and admiration ere I had the sense or good breeding to greet her. She was as much changed in manner as appearance, I found, for though she met me with kindness and empressment, there was a womanly reserve and a far-off, dreamy air of abstraction about her which completely removed her from my memory as the merry, laughing girl I had parted with eight years before.

Ever a dreamer, a vision arose in my mind of the many hearts that would ache, and the many gallants that would sigh in vain for this creature of light and ether, this peerless Undine, and that, too, in a city where the tropic skies and burning sun kindle up warmer emotions than in any other fashionable capitol of the known world. And this was all, absolutely all, that I thought about the Lady Blanche Dudley during the many succeeding months that I became her constant attendant, escorting her in her rides and drives, waiting upon her in her uncle's stately official entertainments, listening to her thrilling voice, sweeter than the fabled syren's, as she accompanied herself with masterly skill on the harp; watching crowds of adorers hovering around her, and the richest and noblest in the land emulating each other for the honor of winning one glance from her wonderful violet eyes. And all this I watched, and looked upon her meanwhile as I would upon a beautiful and ingenious piece of mechanism, or as those of my comrades who knew me best, affirmed, "like an Arctic iceberg, reflecting back the rays of a Southern sun, but never melting beneath them." And this fair Lady Blanche never changed the soft, white, fleecy gauzes in which she veiled her exquisite form for any other dress, and never substituted the fresh flowers and leaves which constituted her only ornaments for the radiant jewels and burnished gold that flashed on every side around her. Who can wonder that she moved in the midst of India's highest magnates like a descended star of light and purity?

Who can wonder that she became the cynosure of all admiring eyes, save mine? For her father's sake, and because I remembered how tenderly in times gone by, the kind-hearted little one had wept in sympathy with my strange afflictions, I devoted to her now all the spare time I had to give, and delighted to escort her and her good-natured aunt to those scenes of ancient art and antique splendor with which Hindostan abounds, but in which so few of the fashionable crowds around them took the deep interest they appeared to do.

Sometimes I wondered at this fair creature's beauty; sometimes lifted one of her golden curls to kiss, or placed choice flowers amongst them. She never raised her eyes to mine, scarcely ever looked at or spoke to me, and yet I knew this was not unkindness.

On the evening of my first visit to the viscount's I informed my friends that I must leave them soon after dinner, as I had resolved to keep tryst with poor Graham. We did not dine until 10 p.m., so that it was midnight before I was free. I then stated the nature of my engagement, and

prepared to take my leave. Great was my surprise, however, when the viscount asked me if I would take his place as an escort to his wife and niece who were also engaged to attend Madame Laval's entertainment, from which he should still be detained for an hour or so.

"Are you then acquainted with this lady?" I asked of the viscountess, as we drove to Madame Laval's residence.

"Oh, yes," replied Lady Emily, "of course we are. Helene is our Blanche's dearest friend; in fact, they are almost inseparable; besides," she added, lowering her tone mysteriously, "she is one of our sort, you know, Chevalier; a mystic and a medium, and all that sort of thing, and of course, we are delighted to cultivate her, with our present terribly materialistic surroundings. She reads the stars, too, distils potions, and--"

"Dearest aunt," interposed Blanche, "do not suffer yourself to speak so wildly of Helene. She is a woman far beyond her surroundings, Chevalier," she added, turning to me, and blushing in the warmth of her friend's defence.

"Why don't you call me Louis, as you used to do?" I asked.

"Is it because I am now expected to address you as Lady Blanche Dudley?"

"Louis!" she said in an accent so pathetic that it rings in my ears to this day. "Louis, then, now and forever!"

Of Madame Laval's entertainment, her royal and distinguished guests, and the splendor which flashed through her salons at every turn, it would require a writer more skilled and interested in such scenes than myself to dilate on. It is enough to say that as we entered the principal salon, Lady Blanche, in defiance of all etiquette, left me, and hastened forward to greet her beloved friend with a sister's kiss, and then returned leading that friend, with something like her old look of girlish impulse through the gay crowds, to present to me. As she approached, I saw that she led in triumph and obvious delight, a tall, graceful, splendid brunette, with large, searching, oriental eyes, heavy masses of raven hair, glittering with diamonds, a majestic presence, fascinating smile, and--the impersonation of the horrible vision I had beheld when psychometrizing Graham's talismanic package!

This lady, whom I subsequently found had been named in the fashionable circles that thronged around her, "the enchantress," received me with marked prestige. She held my hand in hers some time longer than was necessary for the formalities of presentation; informed me I was no stranger to her, though she, of course, she said, was unknown to me; told me she had seen me at _____, and here she named several scenes of my public life when I might have been in presence of many persons of whom I knew nothing; that she had followed my career with the deepest interest, sympathized with certain of those pursuits, which vulgar rumor attributed to me, and was especially delighted to meet me on account of her darling friend--here she glanced patronizingly down upon Blanche--and finally she released my hand, but not before she had given me the peculiar grip accompanied by the sign of a certain society to which I belonged, but to which I never knew that any ladies had been admit. Before I had time to breathe or recover from the shock her identification with my vision occasioned me, still less to follow the drift of her many complimentary remarks and the extraordinary signs of understanding she gave me, she again claimed my attention for the purpose of presenting her brother, Monsieur Paul Perrault, a tall, handsome Frenchman, who strongly resembled his sister, but the touch of whose ungloved hand sent a thrill through mine which reminded me of nothing so much as plunging my hand into a nest of crawling adders.

Oh, fatal gift of occult sight! Oh, ban of mortal life—that power which pierces the veil, wisely, providentially, hung before the holy of holies in each one's secret nature! That fatal occult sight was mine from the moment that woman fixed her talismanic eyes upon me. That veil was lifted instantly as I beheld her standing side by side with her obsequious brother. Near them gleamed the snow-white, misty robes of the golden-haired Blanche, and above their heads grinned and chattered a triad of hideous elementaries, invisible to all but me, yet graphically revealing the characteristics of the couple to whom they were attracted as attendant spirits, and glowering at the unconscious Blanche like the demons of some hideous rite, to whom she, the pure victim, was to be offered up as a sacrifice.

Near this group stood my friend Graham, and I was fairly shocked by the look of pain and anxiety with which he was scrutinizing me as I endured this introduction. I have often marveled why the exercise of spiritual insight is so seldom accompanied by the power to use it. The seer is compelled to behold the innermost of natures all masked to others, yet the cramping bonds of society interpose to neutralize the value of what he discovers.

Had I obeyed the monitions which my spiritual perceptions suggested at that moment, I should have spurned, aye, spat upon that brother and sister instead of bowing before them and suffering them to touch my shivering hand; I should have shut them out from all that was good and fair and beautiful; above all, I should have laid that golden-headed Blanche low in the quiet grave ere I had suffered their baleful presence to come like a blight between her and the sunlight of her young life. As it was, the shadow of the future clung around me like a cold, damp shroud, and as I caught the eye of poor Graham, I felt giddy, lost, wretched, and he knew I understood that the original of the vision stood before me. When the host and hostess left me to pay their compliments to others, Graham approached and said earnestly: "You have my secret, Chevalier, and see my enchantress. You cannot wonder at my fascination, nor do I marvel at yours." He glanced as he spoke at the fair Blanche. "Oh!" I said as if waking from a dream, "I have no fascination here, Graham, These scenes are hateful to me, and the atmosphere is so unendurable I can stay no longer." As I spoke, the Viscount R_____ and a party of his friends entered the salon. Pleading the indisposition I really felt, I hastened to resign my charge to him, and left the place.

It was towards the close of the same night, just as the first faint streaks of dawning light had begun to dispel the darkness, that I awoke with an indescribable sense of mental oppression. I felt as if all that was good and true had abandoned me and I was left in the toils of some foul and hateful captivity. As I started up from my pillow, determined to shake off this terrible nightmare by exercise, I saw distinctly, standing between me and the faintly illumined sky as it gleamed through the open glass doors of my chamber, the figure of Madame Helene Laval—graceful, beautiful, and commanding as a Pythoness, a veritable Medea, though but little of a woman. In one hand she held a short curl of black hair, in the other a square case, the nature of which I could not at first discern. Her voice, which though deep, was singularly sweet and sympathetic, sounded a long way off as she said: "Do not seek to fly me! I love you, have long loved and followed you. Give me your affection or—yourself, and I will worship you. Reject me, and I will destroy all you love best."

She then raised the square case she held in her hand, and I saw it was an ivory miniature, a likeness of myself, that Mr. Dudley had caused to be taken before I left England. I was not informed how this portrait was to be disposed of, but I was under the impression that it belonged to the family generally.

Without any definite idea of what I was going to do, I sprang from my bed and grasped the figure I beheld by the arm, endeavoring at the same time to seize the portrait she held.

What I touched gave me the impression of being a substance like stiff gauze, or lace inflated by air; but instantly, beneath my hand, this substance began to recede, the figure collapsed, shrank together, and melted down to the floor. The last portion I saw of it was a pair of black, long, almond-shaped eyes, gleaming at me with an expression I would fain blot out from my memory forever.

I have often touched the "atmospheric spirit" or Doppel Ganger of others, my own included, and felt a sense of resistance like the application of my hand to a body of compressed air, but I never before experienced such a concrete mass of materialized life essence as this terrible wraith displayed. It vanished, however, though from that time forth it haunted me day and night for many a long month.

When my phantom visitor disappeared, I mechanically raised my hand to my head, and discovered where a lock of hair had been cut away from the back; but how or when was as much a mystery as how it had come into the visionary hand where it had just been displayed.

It was about a week after this occurrence, and when I was engaged to dine at Viscount R_____s, that on entering his drawing-room, I saw Lady Emily standing looking out of the window with her back towards me. She was alone. I knew her impressibility, and had but to exert my will for one instant to place her under its psychological influence. I then caused her to turn around, sit down on an ottoman before me, and answer the following questions:

"Lady Emily, tell me truly, to whom was my portrait given after I left England?"

"To Blanche, my niece."

"For what reason?"

"She asked permission of her mother to copy it, as a work of art."

"For whom?"

"For herself. She confided to me her wish to possess a copy, and I agreed that it should be asked for in my name."

"Where is that copy now?"

Lady Emily began to tremble violently as she answered, though with great apparent reluctance, "In the possession of Helene de Laval."

"How came it there?"

"Helene asked Blanche for it, with the expressed wish of copying it, and Blanche, who can refuse Helene nothing, was obliged to comply."

"How did Madame Laval know Blanche possessed such a picture?"

"O heavens! that woman knows everything. She has a complete mastery over Blanche, and can read the inmost secrets of her heart."

"And yours also, Lady Emily."

"Not so well. She has never magnetized me, but she has Blanche."

"Can you not interpose your authority to prevent the continuance of this intimacy?"

"I will try, but I am afraid of Helene. She can come and go as a spirit, whenever and wherever she pleases,"

"Have you ever seen her as a spirit?"

"Many times; coming out of Blanche's apartments."

"Have others seen her?"

"Certainly. Blanche's maid, also the viscount and my housekeeper."

"Why did she desire to have my picture?"

I felt condemned as I asked this question, and the self-reproach that arose in my mind, occasioning a feeling of irresolution, evidently shook my rapport with the somnambulist. I saw that she, too, was irresolute and doubtful. I immediately closed the seance, therefore, and, demagnetizing my kind subject, presented myself before her as if I had just entered the drawing-room. Lady Emily started, and holding out her hand, exclaimed: "Why, Louis! is it possible you have found me napping? I believe I am hardly awake yet, for I am strangely sleepy."

For many months I was detained by the duties of my position in the vicinity of Calcutta, and during the constant intimacy I maintained with my English friends, I discovered three well-marked features of our relative situations. The first was that Blanche Dudley was completely infatuated by, and in the power of, Madame Helene Laval. Next, that the lady's brother, M. Perrault, was equally infatuated with the beautiful English lady; and despite the fact that his rivals were, some of them, native princes and nobles of the highest rank and official distinction in Hindostan, he had conceived the audacious design of appropriating this precious prize, despite all odds against him. That he was weaving a spell around this beautiful creature by aid of other arts than those of his own personal attractions was a fact of which I became more and more distressingly conscious every day; whilst the third and most repulsive idea which ranged itself before me in the category of certainties, was that his magnificent sister was directing a battery of the same magical character against myself; furthermore, that it required all the knowledge of occultism that I possessed, to baffle and thwart the arts she employed to fascinate me.

Not an hour of the day or night passed, during which I disposed myself to slumber, that I did not awaken to find her "atmospheric spirit" hovering over me. Exorcism, concentrated will, all were in vain to banish this dreadful haunting. The terrible wraith could neither touch nor magnetize me, but she was herself so powerful an adept and so reckless in her alliance with the most potential of elementaries, that the best I could do was to guard myself during my waking hours against the mighty spells she used to subdue me. There were means by which I could have utterly broken those spells, and cast them back upon herself; but in this case I must have left the unfortunate Lady Blanche an unprotected prey to the arts of this vile woman and her bad brother; and for the sake of the innocent girl herself, no less than in my steady friendship for her excellent father, I silently, secretly vowed myself to her

defence against her unprincipled assailants. The problematical part of this network of evil lay in the fact that Blanche had become completely spell-bound before my arrival in Calcutta. When I attempted to modify her unlimited confidence in Helene, she expressed the utmost regret and astonishment at my aversion for so charming a person, and asked mournfully why I wished to take from her, her only friend.

"Has she told you she was your only friend, Blanche," I asked—"you, who are surrounded, not with friends alone, but with positive worshipers?"

"What are they all to me?" replied the poor girl, in a pleading, bewildered tone. "One true friend is worth a legion of interested acquaintances. Helene is true. She alone understands me. Whom else can I trust?"

"Can you not trust me, Blanche?" I inquired, though with much hesitation.

Flushing instantly to the hue of the crimson roses which adorned her white dress, she answered evasively: "Helene told me before you came hither, you would cruelly misunderstand her, and warn me against her. She knew this by aid of those powerful spirits who surround her. She told me, too, the hour would come when I should have no one to rely upon but her. Is it not come now?"

There was an air of utter desolation in the accents of this young and beautiful creature, which formed a strange contrast between the splendor of her surroundings, the attractions which brought half a kingdom to her feet, and the forlorn expression with which she clasped her little hands and gazed into the far-off distance, like a hunted deer seeking for shelter.

The piteous though unspoken appeal made its way into the depths of my heart, and would certainly have enchained me in the bonds I so much dreaded, had not a happy alternative suggested itself. I suddenly remembered her good father's letter, and knew how much he would at that moment have felt indebted to me if I assumed his office, and urged upon the poor, bewildered girl an immediate return to his paternal care and protection.

I knew the fearful peril in which she stood, and though I could never make her pure and innocent nature comprehend the force of evil spells or the actual potency of psychological arts, I succeeded in impressing her with the dangers she incurred by subjecting herself any longer to the possibility of a controlling influence from her friend, Helene, in favor of her audacious brother, Paul Perrault.

I found here that I had touched a chord, to which every fibre in the refined and high-toned lady's being instantly responded. She truly loved Helene, but detested her brother. She perfectly understood his pretensions, but never for one moment believed that even Helene's influence could convert her loathing for Perrault into toleration. From this source, she said, she expected no other result than the pain she felt in inflicting pain on her friend. My arguments, however, proved resistless. I brought such an array of reasons before her to show why she should return, for her father's sake, her own, and—alas! more potential than all—for mine, that, putting both her hands into mine, and fixing her wonderfully lovely eyes upon me with the devotion of a saint for a deity, she murmured: "Order my destiny as you will; I obey." Hating myself for my resolution to send her away, yet more resolved than ever to remove her from scenes and places where there was not one human being worthy of her, least of all myself, I left her, having undertaken the very difficult, very ungracious, and certainly untruthful task of persuading her aunt and uncle that she was pining to return to her home, wearying for the society of her own family, and must be sent back by the very next ship that sailed.