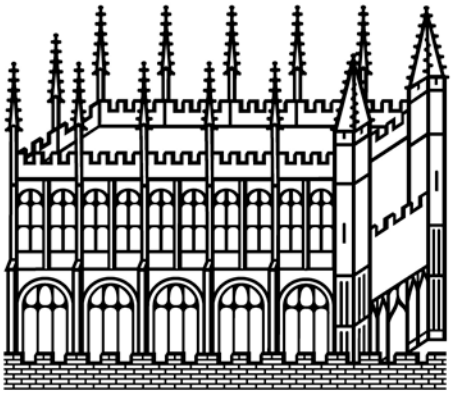

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The Witch's Head

by

H. Rider Haggard

HEAD

AGGARD,

DAWN.'

EE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
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THE WITCH'S HEAD

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD,

AUTHOR OF 'DAWN.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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'Swell out sad harmonies,
From the slow cadence of the gathering years,
For Life is bitter-sweet, yet bounds the flood
Of human fears.
A death-crowned queen, from her hid throne she scatters
Smiles and tears

Until Time turn aside,
And we slip past him toward the wide increase
Of all things beautiful, then finding there
Our rest and peace ;
The mournful strain is ended. Sorrow and song
Together cease.' — *A. M. Barber.*

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THE WITCH'S HEAD.

CHAPTER I.

ERNEST'S APPEARANCE.

'COME here, boy, let me look at you.'

Ernest advanced a step or two and looked his uncle in the face. He was a noble-looking lad of about thirteen, with large dark eyes, black hair that curled over his head, and the unmistakable air of breeding that marks Englishmen of good race.

His uncle let his wandering glance stray round him, but wandering as it was, it seemed to take him in from top to toe. Presently he spoke again.

'I like you, boy.'

Ernest said nothing.

'Let me see—your second name is Beyton. I am glad they called you Beyton; it was your grandmother's maiden name, and a good old name too. Ernest Beyton Kershaw. By the way, have you ever seen anything of your other uncle, Sir Hugh Kershaw?'

The boy's cheek flushed.

'No, I have not; and I never wish to,' he answered.

'Why not?'

'Because when my mother wrote to him before she died'—and here the lad's voice choked—'just after the bank broke and she lost all her money, he wrote back and said that because his brother—I mean my father—had made a low marriage, that was no reason why he should support his child and widow; but he sent her five pounds to go on with. She sent it back.'

'That was like your mother, she always had a high spirit. He must be a cur, and he does not speak the truth. Your mother comes of a better stock than the Kershaws. The Carduses are one of the oldest families in the Eastern Counties. Why, boy, our family lived down in the Fens by Lynn there for centuries, until your grandfather, poor weak man, got involved in his great law-suit and ruined us all. There, there, it has all gone into the law, but it is coming back, it is coming back fast. This Sir Hugh has only one son, by the way. Do you know that if anything happened to him you would be next in the entail?—at any rate you would get the baronetcy.'

'I don't want his baronetcy,' said Ernest, sulkily; 'I will have nothing of his.'

'A title, boy, is an incorporeal hereditament, for which the holder is indebted to

nobody. It does not descend to him, it vests in him. But, tell me, how long was this before your mother died,—that he sent the five pounds, I mean?'

'About three months.'

Mr. Cardus hesitated a little before he spoke again, tapping his white fingers nervously on the table.

'I hope my sister was not in want, Ernest?' he said, jerkily.

'For a fortnight before she died, we had scarcely enough to eat,' was the reply.

Mr. Cardus turned himself to the window, and for a minute the light of the dull December day shone and glistened upon his brow and head, which was perfectly bald. Then before he spoke he drew himself back into the shadow, perhaps to hide something like a tear that shone in his soft black eyes.

'And why did she not appeal to me? I could have helped her.'

'She said that when you quarrelled with her about her marrying my father, you told her never to write or speak to you again, and that she never would.'

'Then why did you not do it, boy? You knew how things were.'

'Because we had begged once, and I would not beg again.'

'Ah,' muttered Mr. Cardus, 'the old spirit cropping up. Poor Rose, nearly starving, and dying too, and I with so much which I do not want! Oh boy, boy, when you are a man never set up an idol, for it frightens good spirits away. Nothing else can live in its temple; it is a place where all other things are forgotten—duty, and the claims of blood, and sometimes those of honour too. Look now, I have my idol, and it has made me forget my sister and

your mother. Had she not written at last when she was dying, I should have forgotten you too.'

The boy looked up puzzled.

'An idol!'

'Yes,' went on his uncle in his dreamy way—'an idol. Many people have them; they keep them in the cupboard with their family skeleton; sometimes the two are identical. And they call them by many names, too; frequently it is a woman's name; sometimes that of a passion; sometimes that of a vice, but a virtue's—not often.'

'And what is the name of yours, uncle?' asked the wondering boy.

'Mine; oh, never mind!'

At this moment, a swing-door in the side of the room was opened, and a tall, bony woman with beady eyes came through.

'Mr. de Talor, to see you, sir, in the office.'

Mr. Cardus whistled softly. 'Ah,' he

said, 'tell him I am coming. By the way, Grice, this young gentleman has come to live here; his room is ready, is it not?'

'Yes, sir, Miss Dorothy has been seeing to it.'

'Good; where is Miss Dorothy?'

'She has walked into Kesterwick, sir.'

'Oh, and Master Jeremy?'

'He is about, sir; I saw him pass with a ferret a while back.'

'Tell Sampson or the groom to find him and send him to Master Ernest here. That will do, thank you. Now, Ernest, I must be off. I hope that you will be pretty happy here, my boy, when your trouble has worn off a bit. You will have Jeremy for a companion; he is a lout, and an unpleasant lout it is true, but I suppose that he is better than nobody. And then there is Dorothy'—and his voice softened as he uttered her name—'but she is a girl.'

'Who are Dorothy and Jeremy?' broke in his nephew; 'are they your children?'

Mr. Cardus started perceptibly, and his thick white eyebrows contracted over his dark eyes till they almost met.

'Children,' he said sharply; 'I have no children. They are my wards. Their name is Jones'—and he left the room.

'Well, he *is* a rum sort,' reflected Ernest to himself, 'and I don't think I ever saw such a shiny head before. I wonder if he oils it. But at any rate he is kind to me. Perhaps it would have been better if mother had written to him before. She might have gone on living then.'

Rubbing his hand across his face to clear away the water gathering in his eyes at the thought of his dead mother, Ernest made his way to the wide fireplace at the top end of the room, peeped into the ancient ingle-nooks on each side, and at the

old Dutch tiles with which it was lined, and then lifting up his coat after a grown-up fashion, proceeded to warm himself and inspect his surroundings. It was a curious room in which he stood, and its leading feature was old oak panelling. All down its considerable length the walls were oak-clad to the low ceiling which was supported by enormous beams of the same material; the shutters of the narrow windows which looked out on to the sea were oak, and so were the doors and the table, and even the mantelshelf. The general idea given by the display of so much timber was certainly one of solidity, but it could scarcely be called cheerful—not even the numerous suits of armour and shining weapons which were placed about upon the walls could make it that. It was a remarkable room, but its effect upon the observer was undoubtedly depressing.

Just as Ernest was beginning to realize this fact, things were made more lively by the sudden appearance through the swing-door of a large savage-looking bull-terrier, which began to steer for the fireplace, where it was evidently accustomed to lie. On seeing Ernest it stopped and sniffed.

'Hullo, good dog!' said Ernest.

The dog growled, and showed its teeth.

Ernest put out his leg towards it as a caution to it to keep off. It acknowledged the compliment by sending its teeth through his trousers. Then the lad growing wroth, and being not free from fear, seized the poker and hit the dog over the head so shrewdly that the blood streamed from the blow, and the brute, loosing his grip, turned and fled howling.

Whilst Ernest was yet warm with the glow of victory, the door once more swung open, violently this time, and through it

there came a boy of about his own age, a dirty, deep-chested boy, with uncut hair, and a slow heavy face in which were set great grey eyes, just now ablaze with indignation. On seeing Ernest he pulled up much as the dog had done and regarded him angrily.

'Did you hit my dog?' he asked.

'I hit a dog,' replied Ernest politely, 'but—'

'I don't want your "buts." Can you fight?'

Ernest inquired whether this question was put with a view of gaining general information or for any particular purpose.

'Can you fight?' was the only rejoinder.

Slightly nettled, Ernest replied that under certain circumstances he could fight like a tom cat.

'Then look out; I'm going to make your head as you have made my dog's.'

Ernest, in the polite language of youth, opined that there would be hair and toe-nails flying first.

To this sally Jeremy Jones, for it was he, replied only by springing at him, his hair flying out behind like a Red Indian's, and smiting him severely in the left eye, caused him to measure his length upon the floor. Arising quickly, Ernest returned the compliment with interest; but this time they both went down together, pummelling each other heartily. With whom the victory would ultimately have remained could scarcely be doubtful, for Jeremy, who even at that age gave promise of the enormous physical strength which afterwards made him such a noted character, must have crushed his antagonist in the end. But while his strength still endured Ernest was fighting with such ungovernable fury and such a complete disregard of personal

consequences, that he was for a while, at any rate, getting the best of it. And luckily for him, while matters were yet in the balanced scales of Fate an interruption occurred. For at that moment there rose before the blurred sight of the struggling boys a vision of a little woman; at least she looked like a woman, with an indignant little face and an uplifted forefinger.

'Oh, you wicked boys!—what will Reginald say, I should like to know? Oh, you bad Jeremy!—I am ashamed to have such a brother. Get up!'

'My eye!' said Jeremy thickly, for his lip was cut, 'it's Dolly.'

CHAPTER II.

REGINALD CARDUS, ESQ., MISANTHROPE.

WHEN Mr. Cardus left the sitting-room where he had been talking to Ernest, he passed down a passage in the rambling old house which led him into a courtyard. On the further side of the yard, which was walled in, stood a neat red brick building one story high, consisting of two rooms and a passage. On to this building were attached a series of low green-houses, and against the wall at the further end of these houses was a lean-to in which stood the boiler that supplied the pipes with hot water. The little red brick building was Mr. Cardus' office, for

he was a lawyer by profession; the long tail of glass behind it were his orchid-houses, for orchid-growing was his sole amusement. The *tout ensemble*, office and orchid-houses, seemed curiously out of place in the grey and ancient courtyard where they stood, looking as they did on to the old old one-storied house scarred by the passage of centuries of tempestuous weather. Some such idea seemed to strike Mr. Cardus as he closed the door behind him preparatory to crossing the courtyard.

'Queer contrast,' he muttered to himself; 'very queer. Something like that between Reginald Cardus, Esquire, Misanthrope of Dum's Ness, and Mr. Reginald Cardus, Solicitor, Chairman of the Stokesly Board of Guardians, Bailiff of Kesterwick, etc. And yet in both cases they are part of the same establishment. Case of old and new style!

Mr. Cardus did not make his way straight

to the office. He struck off to the right and entered the long line of glass-houses, walking up from house to house till he reached the partition where the temperate sorts were placed to bloom, and which was connected with his office by a glass-door. Through this last he walked softly with a cat-like step till he reached the door, where he paused to observe a large coarse man who was standing at the far end of the room, looking out intently on the courtyard.

'Ah, my friend,' he said to himself, 'so the shoe is beginning to pinch. Well, it is time.' Then he pushed the door softly open, passed into the room with the same cat-like step, closed it, and seating himself at his writing-table took up a pen. Apparently the coarse-looking man at the window was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to hear him, for he still stood staring into space.

'Well, Mr. de Talor,' said the lawyer presently, in his soft, jerky voice, 'I am at your service.'

The person addressed started violently, and turned sharply round. 'Good 'eavens, Cardus, how did you get in?'

'Through the door, of course; do you suppose I came down the chimney?'

'It's very strange, Cardus, but I never 'eard you come. You've given me quite a start.'

Mr. Cardus laughed, a hard little laugh. 'You were too much occupied with your own thoughts, Mr. de Talor. I fear that they are not pleasant ones. Can I help you?'

'How do you know that my thoughts are not pleasant, Cardus? I never said so.'

'If we lawyers waited for our clients to tell us all their thoughts, Mr. de Talor, it would often take us a long time to reach

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the truth. We have to read their faces, or even their backs sometimes. You have no idea of how much expression a back is capable, if you make such things your study; yours, for instance, looks very uncomfortable to-day—nothing gone wrong, I hope.'

'No, Cardus, no,' answered Mr. de Talor, dropping the subject of backs, which was, he felt, beyond him; ''tis nothing much, merely a question of business, on which I have come to ask your advice as a shrewd man.'

'My best advice is at your service, Mr. de Talor—what is it?'

'Well, Cardus, it's this.' And Mr. de Talor seated his portly frame in an easy chair, and turned his broad vulgar face towards the lawyer. 'It's about the railway-grease business—'

'Which you own up in Manchester?'

'Yes, that's it.'

'Well, then, it ought to be a satisfactory subject to talk of. It pays hand over fist, does it not?'

'No, Cardus, that is just the point: it did pay, it don't now.'

'How's that?'

'Well, you see, when my father took out the patent, and started the business, his 'ouse was the only 'ouse in the market, and he made a pot, and I don't mind telling you I've made a pot too; but now, what do you think?—there's a beggarly firm called Rastrick and Codley that took out a new patent last year, and is under-selling us with a better stuff at a cheaper price than we can turn it out at.'

'Well!'

'Well. We've lowered our price to theirs, but we are doing business at a loss. We hoped to burst them, but they don't burst;

there's somebody backing them, confound them, for Rastrick and Codley ain't worth a sixpence; but who it is the Lord only knows. I don't believe they know themselves.'

'That is unfortunate, but what about it?'

'Just this, Cardus. I want to ask your advice about selling out. Our credit is still good, and we could sell up for a large pile, not so large as we could have done, but still large, and I don't know whether to sell or hold.'

Mr. Cardus looked thoughtful. 'It is a difficult point, Mr. de Talor, but for myself I am always against caving in. The other firm may smash after all, and then you would be sorry. If you were to sell now you would probably make their fortunes, which I suppose you don't want to do.'

'No indeed.'

'Then you are a very wealthy man; you

are not dependent on this grease business. Even if things were to go wrong you have all your landed property here at Ceswick's Ness to fall back on. I should hold, if I were you, even if it was at a loss for a time, and trust to the fortune of war.'

Mr. de Talor gave a sigh of relief. 'That's my view too, Cardus. You're a shrewd man, and I am glad you jump with me. Damn Rastrick and Codley, say I.'

'Oh yes, damn them by all means,' answered the lawyer with a smile, as he rose to show his client to the door.

On the further side of the passage was another door with a glass top to it, which gave on to a room furnished after the ordinary fashion of a clerk's office. Opposite this door Mr. de Talor stopped to look at a man who was within sitting at a table writing. The man was old, of large size, and very powerfully built, and dressed

with extreme neatness in hunting costume —boots, breeches, spurs and all. Over his large head grew tufts of coarse grey hair, which hung down in dishevelled locks about his face, giving him a wild appearance, that was added to by a curious distortion of the mouth. His left arm, too, hung almost helpless by his side.

Mr. Cardus laughed as he followed his visitor's gaze. 'A curious sort of clerk, eh?' he said. 'Mad, dumb, and half-paralysed—not many lawyers could show such another.'

Mr. de Talor glanced at the object of their observation uneasily.

'If he's so mad how can he do clerk's work?' he asked.

'Oh, he's only mad in a way; he copies beautifully.'

'He has quite lost his memory, I suppose,' said de Talor, with another uneasy glance.

'Yes,' answered Mr. Cardus with a smile, 'he has. Perhaps it is as well. He remembers nothing now but his delusions.'

Mr. de Talor looked relieved. 'He has been with you many years now, hasn't he, Cardus?'

'Yes, a great many.'

'Why did you bring him 'ere at all?'

'Did I never tell you the story? Then if you care to step back into my office I will. It is not a long one. You remember when our friend'—he nodded towards the office—'kept the hounds, and they used to call him "hard-riding Atterleigh"?'

'Yes, I remember, and ruined himself over them, like a fool.'

'And of course you remember Mary Atterleigh, his daughter, whom we were all in love with when we were young?'

Mr. de Talor's broad cheek took a deeper shade of crimson as he nodded assent.

'Then,' went on Mr. Cardus, in a voice meant to be indifferent, but which now and again gave traces of emotion, 'you will also remember that I was the fortunate man, and was, with her father's consent, engaged to be married to Mary Atterleigh so soon as I could show him that my income reached a certain sum.' Here Mr. Cardus paused a moment, and then continued: 'But I had to go to America about the great Norwich divorce case, and it was a long job, and travelling was slow then. When I got back Mary was—married to a man called Jones—a friend of yours, Mr. de Talor. He was staying at your house, Ceswick's Ness, when he met her. But perhaps you are better acquainted with that part of the story than I am.'

Mr. de Talor was looking very uneasy again now.

'No, I know nothing about it. Jones

fell in love with her like the rest, and the next I heard of it was that they were to be married. It was rather rough on you, eh, Cardus? but, Lord, you shouldn't have been fool enough to trust her.'

Mr. Cardus smiled, a bitter smile—'Yes, it was a little "rough," but that has nothing to do with my story. The marriage did not turn out well; a curious fatality pursued all who had had any hand in it. Mary had two children; and then did the best thing she could do—died of shame and sorrow. Jones, who was rich, went fraudulently bankrupt, and ended by committing suicide. Hard-riding Atterleigh flourished for a while, and then lost his money in horses and a ship-building speculation, and got a paralytic stroke that took away all his speech and most of his reason. Then I brought him here to save him from the mad-house.'

'That was kind of you, Cardus.'

'Oh no, he is worth his keep, and besides he is poor Mary's father. He is under the fixed impression that I am the devil; but that does not matter.'

'You've got her children 'ere too, eh?'

'Yes, I have adopted them. The girl reminds me of her mother, though she will never have her mother's looks. The boy is like old Atterleigh. I do not care about the boy. But, thank God, they are neither of them like their father.'

'So you knew Jones?' said de Talor sharply.

'Yes, I met him after his marriage. Oddly enough, I was with him a few minutes before he destroyed himself. There, Mr. de Talor, I will not detain you any longer. I thought that you could perhaps tell me something of the details of Mary's marriage. The story has a fascination for me, its results upon my own life have been

so far-reaching. I am sure that I am not at the bottom of it yet. Mary wrote to me when she was dying, and hinted at something that I cannot understand. There was somebody behind who arranged the matter, who assisted Jones's suit. Well, well, I shall find it all out in time, and whoever it is will no doubt pay the price of his wickedness like the others. Providence has strange ways, Mr. de Talor, but in the end it is a terrible avenger. What! are you going? Queer talk for a lawyer's office, isn't it?'

Here Mr. de Talor rose, looking pale, and merely nodding to Mr. Cardus, left the room.

The lawyer watched him till the door had closed, and then suddenly his whole face changed. The white eyebrows drew close together, the delicate features worked, and in the soft eyes there shone a look

of hate. He clenched his fists, and shook them towards the door.

'You liar, you hound,' he said aloud. 'God grant that I may live long enough to do to you as I have done to them. One a suicide, and one a paralytic madman; you, you shall be a beggar if it takes me twenty years to make you so. Yes, that will hit you hardest. Oh, Mary! Mary! dead and dishonoured through you, you scoundrel! Oh, my darling, shall I ever find you again?'

And this strange man dropped his head upon the desk before him and groaned.

CHAPTER III.

OLD DUM'S NESS.

WHEN Mr. Cardus came half-an-hour or so later to take his place at the dinner-table, for in those days they dined in the middle of the day at Dum's Ness, he was not in a good mood. The pool into which the records of our individual existence are ever gathering, and which we call our past, will not often bear much stirring, even when its waters are not bitter. Certainly Mr. Cardus' would not. And yet that morning he had stirred it violently enough.

In the long oak-panelled room, used indifferently as a sitting and dining-room,

Mr. Cardus found 'hard-riding Atterleigh' and his grand-daughter, little Dorothy Jones. The old man was already seated at table, and Dorothy was busying herself cutting bread, looking as composed and grown-up as though she had been four-and-twenty instead of fourteen. She was a strange child with her assured air and woman's ways and dress, her curious thoughtful face, and her large blue eyes that shone steady as the light of a lamp. But just now the little face was more anxious than usual.

'Reginald,' she began as soon as he was in the room (for by Mr. Cardus' wish she always called him by his Christian name), 'I am sorry to tell you that there has been a sad disturbance.'

'What is it?' he asked with a frown; 'Jeremy again?' Mr. Cardus could be very stern where Jeremy was concerned.

'Yes, I am afraid it is. The two boys—'

but it was unnecessary for her to carry her explanations further, for at that moment the swing-door opened, and through it appeared the young gentlemen in question, driven in like sheep by the beady-eyed Grice. Ernest was leading, attempting the impossible feat of looking jaunty with a lump of raw beefsteak tied over one eye, and presenting a general appearance that suggested the idea of the colours of the rainbow in a state of decomposition.

Behind him shuffled Jeremy, his matted locks still wet from being pumped on. But his wounds were either unsuited to the dreadful remedy of raw beefsteak, or he had adopted in preference an heroic one of his own, of which grease plentifully sprinkled with flour formed the basis.

For a moment there was silence, then Mr. Cardus with awful politeness asked Jeremy what was the meaning of this.

'We've been fighting,' answered the boy sulkily. 'He hit—'

'Thank you, Jeremy, I don't want the particulars, but I will take this opportunity to tell you before your sister and my nephew what I think of you. You are a boor and a lout, and what is more, you are a coward.'

At this unjust taunt the lad coloured to his eyes.

'Yes, you may colour, but let me tell you that it is cowardly to pick a quarrel with a boy the moment he sets foot inside my doors—'

'I say, uncle,' broke in Ernest, who was unable to see anything cowardly about fighting, an amusement to which he was rather partial himself, and who thought that his late antagonist was getting more than his due, 'I began it, you know.'

It was not true except in the sense that

he had begun it by striking the dog, nor did this statement produce any great effect upon Mr. Cardus, who was evidently seriously angry with Jeremy on more points than this. But at least it was one of those well-meant fibs at which the recording angel should not be offended.

'I do not care who began it,' went on Mr. Cardus, angrily, 'nor is it about this only that I am angry. You are a discredit to me, Jeremy, and a discredit to your sister. You are dirty, you are idle, your ways are not those of a gentleman. I sent you to school—you ran away. I give you good clothes—you will not wear them. I tell you, boy, that I will not stand it any longer. Now listen. I am going to make arrangements with Mr. Halford, the clergyman at Kesterwick, to undertake Ernest's education. You shall go with him; and if I see no improvement in your ways in

the course of the next few months, I shall wash my hands of you. Do you understand me now?'

The boy Jeremy had, during this oration, been standing in the middle of the room, first on one leg, then on the other. At its conclusion, he brought the leg that was at the moment in the air down to the ground and stood firm.

'Well,' went on Mr. Cardus, 'what have you to say?'

'I have to say,' blurted out Jeremy, 'that I don't want your education. You care nothing about me,' he went on, his grey eyes flashing, and his heavy face lighting up; 'nobody cares about me except my dog Nails. Yes, you make a dog of me myself; you throw things to me as I throw Nails a bone. I don't want your education, and I won't have it. I don't want the fine clothes you buy for me, and I won't wear

them. I don't want to be a burden on you either. Let me go away and be a fisher lad, and earn my bread. If it hadn't been for her,' pointing to his sister, who was sitting aghast at his outburst, 'and for Nails, I'd have gone long ago, I can tell you. At any rate, I should not be a dog then. I should be earning my living, and have no one to thank for it. Let me go, I say, where I sha'n't be mocked at if I do my fair day's work. I'm strong enough; let me go. There! I've spoken my mind now;' and the lad broke out into a storm of tears, and turning, tramped out of the room.

As he went Mr. Cardus' wrath seemed to leave him.

'I did not think he had so much spirit in him,' he said aloud. 'Well, let us have our dinner.'

At dinner the conversation flagged, the

scene that preceded it having presumably left a painful impression; and Ernest, who was an observant youth, fell to watching little Dorothy doing the honours of the table: cutting up her crazed old grandfather's food for him, seeing that everybody had what they wanted, and generally making herself unobtrusively useful. In due course the meal came to an end, and Mr. Cardus and old Atterleigh departed back to the office, leaving Dorothy alone with Ernest. Presently the former began to talk.

'I hope that your eye is not painful,' she said. 'Jeremy hits very hard.'

'Oh no, it's all right. I'm used to it. When I was at school in London I often used to fight. I'm sorry for him though—your brother, I mean.'

'Jeremy! oh yes, he is always in trouble, and now I suppose that it will be worse than

ever. I do all I can to keep things smooth, but it is no good. If he won't go to Mr. Halford's I am sure I don't know what will happen,' and the little lady sighed deeply.

'Oh, I dare say that he will go. Let's go and look for him, and try and persuade him.'

'We might try,' she said doubtfully. 'Stop a minute, and I will put on my hat, and then if you will take that nasty thing off your eye we might walk on to Kesterwick. I want to take a book, out of which I have been teaching myself French, back to the Cottage, where old Miss Ceswick lives, you know.'

'All right,' said Ernest.

Presently Dorothy returned, and they went out by the back way to a little room near the coach-house, where Jeremy stuffed birds and kept his collections of eggs and butterflies; but he was not there. On

inquiring of Sampson, the old Scotch gardener who looked after Mr. Cardus' orchid-houses, she discovered that Jeremy had gone out to shoot snipe, having borrowed Sampson's gun for that purpose.

'That is just like Jeremy,' she sighed. 'He is always going out shooting instead of attending to things.'

'Can he hit birds flying, then?' asked Ernest.

'Hit them!' she answered, with a touch of pride; 'I don't think he ever misses them. I wish he could do other things as well.'

Jeremy at once went up at least fifty per cent. in Ernest's estimation.

On their way back to the house they peeped in through the office window, and Ernest saw 'hard-riding Atterleigh' at his work, copying deeds.

'He's your grandfather, isn't he?'

'Yes.'

'Does he know you?'

'In a sort of a way; but he is quite mad. He thinks that Reginald is the devil, whom he must serve for a certain number of years. He has got a stick with numbers of notches on it, and he cuts out a notch every month. It is all very sad. I think it is a very sad world,' and she sighed again.

'Why does he wear hunting-clothes?' asked Ernest.

'Because he always used to ride a great deal. He loves a horse now. Sometimes you will see him get up from his writing-table and the tears come into his eyes if anybody comes into the yard on horseback. Once he came out and tried to get on to a horse and ride off, but they stopped him.

'Why don't they let him ride?'

'Oh, he would soon kill himself. Old Jack Tares, who lives at Kesterwick and

gets his living by rats and ferrets, and used to be whip to grandfather's hounds when he had them, says that he always was a little mad about riding. One moonlight night he and grandfather went out to hunt a stag that had strayed here out of some park. They put the stag out of a little grove at a place called Claffton, five miles away, and he took them round by Starton and Ashleigh, and then came down the flats to the sea, about a mile and a half below here, just this side of the quicksand. The moon was so bright that it was almost like day, and for the last mile the stag was in view not more than a hundred yards in front of the hounds, and the pace was racing. When he came to the beach he went right through the waves out to sea, and the hounds after him, and grandfather after them. They caught him a hundred yards out and killed him, and then grand-

father turned his horse's head and swam back with the hounds.'

'My eye!' was Ernest's comment on this story. 'And what did Jack Tares do?'

'Oh, he stopped on the beach and said his prayers; he thought that they would all be drowned.'

Then they passed through the old house which was built on a little ness or headland that jutted beyond the level of the shore-line, and across which the wind swept and raved all the winter long, driving the great waves in ceaseless thunder against the sandy cliffs. It was a desolate spot, nude of vegetation, save for rank rush-like grass and plants of sea-holly, that the grey and massive house, of which the roof was secured by huge blocks of rock, looked out upon. In front was the great ocean, rushing in continually upon the sandy bulwarks, and with but few ships to break

its loneliness. To the left as far as the eye could reach ran a line of cliff, out of which the waves had taken huge mouthfuls, till it was as full of gaps as an old crone's jaw. Behind this stretched mile upon mile of desolate-looking land, covered for the most part with ling and heath, and cut up with dykes, whence the water was pumped by means of windmills, that gave a Dutch appearance to the landscape.

'Look,' said Dorothy, pointing to a small white house about a mile and a half away up the shore-line, 'that is the lock-house where the great sluice-gates are, and beyond that is the dreadful quicksand in which a whole army was once swallowed up, like the Egyptians in the Red Sea.'

'My word!' said Ernest, much interested; 'and, I say, did my uncle build this house?'

'You silly boy, why it has been built for hundreds of years. Somebody of the name

of Dum built it, and that is why it is called Dum's Ness; at least, I suppose so. There is an old chart that Reginald has, which was made in the time of Henry VII., and it is marked as Dum's Ness there, so Dum must have lived before then. Look,' she went on, as turning to the right they rounded the old house and got on to the road which ran along the top of the cliff, 'there are the ruins of Titheburgh Abbey,' and she pointed to the remains of an enormous church with a still perfect tower, that stood within a few hundred yards of them, almost upon the edge of the cliff.

'Why don't they build it up again?' asked Ernest.

Dorothy shook her head. 'Because in a few years the sea will swallow it. Nearly all the graveyard has gone already. It is the same with Kesterwick, where we are going. Kesterwick was a great town once.

The kings of East Anglia made it their capital, and a bishop lived there. And after that it was a great port with thousands upon thousands of inhabitants. But the sea came on and on and choked up the harbour, and washed away the cliffs, and they could not keep it out, and now Kesterwick is nothing but a little village with one fine old church left. The real Kesterwick lies there, under the sea. If you walk along the beach after a great gale you will find hundreds of bricks and tiles washed from the houses that are going to pieces down in the deep water. Just fancy, on one Sunday afternoon in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, three of the parish churches were washed over the cliff into the sea.'

And so she went on telling the listening Ernest tale after tale of the old town than which Babylon had not fallen more completely, till they came to a pretty little

modern house bowered up in trees,—that is, in summer, for there were no leaves upon them now,—with which Ernest was destined to become very well acquainted in after years.

Dorothy left her companion at the gate whilst she went in to leave her book, remarking that she would be ashamed to introduce a boy with so black an eye. Presently she came back again, saying that Miss Ceswick was out.

'Who is Miss Ceswick?' asked Ernest, who at this period of his existence had a burning thirst for information of every sort.

'She is a very beautiful old lady,' was Dorothy's answer. 'Her family lived for many years at a place called Ceswick's Ness; but her brother lost all his money gambling, and the place was sold, and Mr. de Talor, that horrid fat man whom you saw drive away this morning, bought it.'

'Does she live alone?'

'Yes; but she has some nieces, the daughters of her brother who is dead, and whose mother is very ill; and if she dies one of them is coming to live with her. She is just my age, so I hope she will come.'

After this there was silence for awhile.

'Ernest,' said the little woman presently, 'you look kind, so I will ask you. I want you to help me about Jeremy.'

Ernest, feeling much puffed up at the compliment implied, expressed his willingness to do anything he could.

'You see, Ernest,' she went on, fixing her sweet blue eyes on his face, 'Jeremy is a great trouble to me. He will go his own way. And he does not like Reginald, and Reginald does not like him. If Reginald comes in at one door Jeremy goes out at the other. And beside he always flies in

Reginald's face. And, you see, it is not right of Jeremy, because after all Reginald is very kind to us, and there is no reason he should be, except that I believe he was fond of our mother; and if it was not for Reginald, whom I love very much, though he is curious sometimes, I don't know what would become of grandfather or us. And so, you see, I think that Jeremy ought to behave better to him, and I want to ask you to bear with his rough ways and try and be friends with him and get him to behave better. It is not much for him to do in return for all your uncle's kindness. You see, I can do a little something, because I look after the housekeeping; but he does nothing. And first I want you to get him to make no more trouble about going to Mr. Halford's.

'All right, I'll try; but, I say, how do you learn; you seem to know an awful lot?'

'Oh, I teach myself in the evenings. Reginald wanted to get me a governess, but I would not. How should I ever get Grice and the servants to obey me if they saw that I had to do what a strange woman told me? It would not do at all.'

Just then they were passing the ruins of Titheburgh Abbey. It was almost dark, for the winter's evening was closing in rapidly, when suddenly Dorothy gave a little shriek, for from behind a ruined wall there rose up an armed mysterious figure with something white behind it. Next second she saw that it was Jeremy, who had returned from shooting, and was apparently waiting for them.

'Oh, Jeremy, how you frightened me. What is it?'

'I want to speak to *him*,' was the laconic answer.

Ernest stood still, wondering what was coming.

'Look here! You told a lie to try to save me from catching it this morning. You said that you began it. You didn't; I began it. I'd have told him too,' and he jerked his thumb in the direction of Dum's Ness, 'only my mouth was so full of words, I could not get it out. But I want to say I thank you, and here, take the dog. He's a nasty-tempered devil, but he'll grow very fond of you if you are kind to him,' and seizing the astonished Nails by the collar, he thrust him towards Ernest.

For a moment there was a struggle in Ernest's mind, for he greatly longed to possess a bull-terrier dog; but his gentleman-like feeling prevailed.

'I don't want the dog, and I didn't do anything in particular.'

'Yes, you did though,' replied Jeremy, greatly relieved that Ernest did not accept his dog which he loved, 'or at least you did more than anybody ever did before; but I tell you what, I'll do as much for you one day. I'll do anything you like.'

'Will you though?' answered Ernest, who was a sharp youth, and opportunely remembered Dorothy's request.

'Yes, I will.'

'Well then, come to this fellow Halford with me, I don't want to go alone.'

Jeremy slowly rubbed his face with the back of an exceedingly dirty hand. This was more than he had bargained for, but his word was his word.

'All right,' he answered, 'I'll come.' And then whistling to his dog he vanished into the shadows. And thus began a friendship between these two that endured all their lives.

CHAPTER IV.

BOYS TOGETHER.

JEREMY kept his word. On the appointed day he appeared ready, as he expressed it, to 'tackle that bloke Halford.' What is more, he appeared with his hair cut, a decent suit of clothes on, and, wonder of wonders, his hands properly washed, for all of which he was rewarded by finding that the 'tackling' was not such a fearful business as he had anticipated. It was moreover of an intermittent nature, for the lads found plenty of time to indulge in every sort of manly exercise together. In winter they would roam all over the wide marsh lands in search of snipe and wild

ducks, which Ernest missed and Jeremy brought down with unerring aim, and in summer they would swim, or fish and bird-nest to their hearts' content. In this way they contrived to combine the absorbtion of a little learning with that of a really extended knowledge of animal life and a large quantity of health and spirits.

They were happy years those, for both the lads, and to Jeremy, when he compared them to his life as it had been before Ernest came, they seemed perfectly heavenly. For whether it was that he had improved in his manners since then, or that Ernest stood as a buffer between him and Mr. Cardus, it certainly happened that he came into collision with him far less often. Indeed, it seemed to Jeremy that the old gentleman (it was the fashion to call Mr. Cardus old, though he was in reality only middle-aged) was more tolerant of him than

formerly, though he knew that he would never be a favourite. As for Ernest, everybody loved the boy, and then as afterwards he was a great favourite with women, who would one and all do anything he asked. It was a wonder that he did not get spoilt by it all; but he did not. It was not possible to know Ernest Kershaw at any period of his life without taking a fancy to him, he was so eminently and unaffectedly a gentleman, and so completely free from any sort of swagger. Always ready to do a kindness, and never forgetting one done, generous with his possessions to such an extent that he seemed to have a vague idea that they were the common property of his friends and himself, possessing that greatest of gifts, a sympathetic mind, and true as steel, no wonder that he was always popular both with men and women.

He grew into a handsome lad too, did

Ernest, as soon as he began to get his height, with a shapely form, a beautiful pair of eyes, and an indescribable appearance of manliness and spirit. But the greatest charm of his face was always its quick intelligence and unvarying kindliness.

As for Jeremy, he did not change much; he simply expanded, and to tell the truth expanded very largely. Year by year his form assumed more and more enormous proportions, and his strength grew more and more abnormal. As for his mind, it did not grow with the same rapidity; and was loath to admit a new idea. But once it was admitted it never came out again.

And he had a ruling passion too, this dull giant, and that was his intense affection and admiration for Ernest. It was an affection that grew with his growth till it became a part of himself, increasing with the increasing years, till at last it became nearly pathetic

in its entirety. It was but rarely that he was away from Ernest, except indeed on those occasions when Ernest chose to go abroad to pursue his study of foreign languages of which he was rather fond. Then and then only Jeremy would strike. He disliked parting with Ernest much, but he disliked—being intensely insular—to cohabit with foreigners more, so on these occasions, and these only, for a while they parted.

So the years wore on till, when they were eighteen, Mr. Cardus after his sudden fashion announced his intention of sending them both to Cambridge. Ernest always remembered it, for it was on that very day that he first made the acquaintance of Florence Ceswick. He had just issued from his uncle's presence, and was seeking Dolly, to communicate the intelligence to her, when he suddenly blundered in upon

old Miss Ceswick, and with her a young lady. This young lady to whom Miss Ceswick introduced him as her niece at once attracted his attention. On being introduced, the girl, who was about his own age, touched his outstretched palm with her slender fingers, throwing on him at the same moment so sharp a look from her brown eyes that he afterwards declared to Jeremy that it seemed to go right through him. She was a remarkable-looking girl. The hair, which curled profusely over a shapely head, was like the eyes, brown: the complexion olive, the features small, and the lips full, curving over a beautiful set of teeth. In person she was rather short, but squarely built, and at her early age her figure was perfectly formed. Indeed she might to all appearance have been much older than she was. There was little of the typical girl about her. Whilst he was still observing

her, his uncle came into the room and was duly introduced by the old lady to her niece, who had, she said, come to share her loneliness.

'And how do you like Kesterwick, Miss Florence?' asked Mr. Cardus, with his usual courtly smile.

'It is much what I expected—a little duller perhaps,' she answered composedly.

'Ah, perhaps you have been accustomed to a gayer spot.'

'Yes, till my mother died we lived at Brighton; there is plenty of life there. Not that we could mix in it, we were too poor; but at any rate we could watch it.'

'Do you like life, Miss Florence?'

'Yes, we only live such a short time. I should like,' she went on, throwing her head back, and half-closing her eyes; 'to see as much as I can, and to exhaust every emotion.'

'Perhaps, Miss Florence, you would find some of them rather unpleasant,' answered Mr. Cardus with a smile.

'Possibly, but it is better to travel through a bad country than to grow in a good one.'

Mr. Cardus smiled again, the girl interested him rather.

'Do you know, Miss Ceswick,' he said, changing the subject, and addressing the stately old lady who was sitting smoothing her laces, and looking rather aghast at her niece's utterances, 'that this young gentleman is going to college, and Jeremy, too?'

'Indeed,' said Miss Ceswick; 'I hope that you will do great things there, Ernest.'

Whilst Ernest was disclaiming any intentions of the sort, Miss Florence cut in again, raising her eyes from a deep contemplation of that young gentleman's long shanks, which were writhing under her keen

glance, and twisting themselves serpent-wise round the legs of the chair.

'I did not know,' she said, 'that they took *boys* at college.'

Then they took their leave, and Ernest stigmatized her to Dorothy as a 'beast.'

But she was at least attractive in her own peculiar fashion, and during the next year or two he got pretty intimate with her.

And so Ernest and Jeremy went up to Cambridge, but did not set the place on fire, nor were the voices of tutors loud in their praise. Jeremy, it is true, rowed one year in the 'Varsity Race, and performed prodigies of strength, and so covered himself with a sort of glory, which personally being of a modest mind, he did not particularly appreciate. Ernest did not even do that. But somehow, by hook or by crook, they, at the termination of their collegiate career,

took some sort of degree, and then departed from the shores of the Cam, on which they had spent many a jovial day—Jeremy to return to Kesterwick, and Ernest to pay several visits to College friends in town and elsewhere.

And so ended the first little round of their days.

CHAPTER V.

EVA'S PROMISE.

WHEN on leaving Cambridge Jeremy got back to Dum's Ness, Mr. Cardus received him with his usual semi-contemptuous coldness, a mental attitude that often nearly drove the young fellow wild with mortification. Not that Mr. Cardus really felt any contempt for him now, he had lost all that years ago when the boy had been so anxious to go and 'earn his bread,' but he could never forgive him for being the son of his father, or conquer his inherent dislike to him. On the other hand, he certainly did not allow this to interfere with his treatment of the lad; if

anything indeed it made him more careful. What he spent upon Ernest, that same sum he spent on Jeremy, pound for pound, but there was this difference about it, the money he spent on Ernest he gave from love, and that on Jeremy from a sense of duty.

Now Jeremy knew all this well enough, and it made him very anxious to earn his own living, and become independent of Mr. Cardus. But it is one thing to be anxious to earn your own living and quite another to do it, as many a poor wretch knows to his cost, and when Jeremy set his slow brain to consider how he should go about the task it quite failed to supply him with any feasible idea. And yet he did not want much; Jeremy was not of an ambitious temperament. If he could earn enough to keep a cottage over his head, and find himself in food and clothes, and

powder and shot, he would be perfectly content. Indeed there were to be only two *sine quâ non*'s in his ideal occupation; it must admit of a considerable amount of outdoor exercise, and be of such a nature as would permit him to see plenty of Ernest. Without more or less of Ernest's company, life would not, he considered, be worth living.

For a week or more after his arrival home these perplexing reflections simmered incessantly inside Jeremy's head, till at length, feeling that they were getting too much for him, he determined to consult his sister, which, as she had three times his brains, he would have done well to think of before.

Dolly fixed her steady blue eyes upon him, and listened to his tale in silence.

'And so you see, Doll'—he always called her Doll—he ended up, 'I'm in a regular

fix. I don't know what I'm fit for unless it's to row a boat, or let myself out to bad shots to kill their game for them. You see I must stick on to Ernest; I don't feel somehow as though I could get along without him; if it wasn't for that I'd emigrate. I should be just the chap to cut down big trees in Vancouver's Island or brand bullocks," he added meditatively.

'You are a great goose, Jeremy,' was his sister's comment. He looked up, not as in any way disputing her statement, but merely for further information.

'You are a great goose, I say. What do you suppose that I have been doing all these three years and more that you have been rowing boats and wasting time up at college? *I* have been thinking, Jeremy.'

'Yes, and so have I, but there is no good in thinking.'

'No, not if you stop there; but I've been

acting too. I've spoken to Reginald, and made a plan, and he has accepted my plan.'

'You always were clever, Doll; you've got all the brains, and I've got all the size,' and he surveyed as much as he could see of himself ruefully.

'You don't ask what I have arranged,' she said sharply, for in alluding to her want of stature Jeremy had touched a sore point.

'I am waiting for you to tell me.'

'Well, you are to be articled to Reginald.'

'Oh Lord!' groaned Jeremy, 'I don't like that at all.'

'Be quiet till I have told you. You are to be articled to Reginald, and he is to pay you an allowance of a hundred a year while you are articled, so that if you don't like it you needn't live here.'

'But I don't like the business, Doll; I hate it; it is a beastly business; it's a devil's business.'

'I should like to know what right you have to talk like that, Mr. Knowall! Let me tell you that many better men than you are content to earn their living by lawyer's work. I suppose that a man can be honest as a lawyer as well as in any other trade.'

Jeremy shook his head doubtfully. 'It's blood-sucking,' he said energetically.

'Then you must suck blood,' she answered with decision. 'Look here, Jeremy, don't be pig-headed and upset all my plans. If you fall out with Reginald over this, he won't do anything else for you. He doesn't like you, you know, and would be only too glad to pick a quarrel with you if he could do it with a clear conscience, and then where would you be I should like to know?'

Jeremy was unable to form an opinion as to where he would be, so she went on—

'You must take to it for the present, at

any rate. And then there is another thing to think of. Ernest is to go to the Bar, and unless you become a lawyer, if anything happened to Reginald, there will be nobody to give him a start, and I'm told that is everything at the Bar.'

This last Jeremy admitted to be a weighty argument.

'It is a precious rum sort of lawyer I shall make,' he said sadly, 'about as good as grandfather yonder, I'm thinking. By the way, how has he been getting on?'

'Oh, just as usual, write, write, write all day. He thinks that he is working out his time. He has got a new stick now, on which he has nicked all the months and years that have to run before he has done, little nicks for the months and big ones for the years. There are eight or ten big ones left now. Every month he cuts out a nick. It is very dreadful. You know he thinks

that Reginald is the devil, and he hates him too. The other day, when he had no writing to do in the office, I found him drawing pictures of him with horns and a tail, such awful pictures, and I think Reginald always looks like that to him. And then sometimes he wants to go out riding, especially at night. Only last week they found him putting a bridle on to the grey mare, the one that Reginald sometimes rides, you know.

'When did you say that Ernest was coming back,' she said, after a pause.

'Why, Doll, I told you—next Monday week.'

Her face fell a little. 'Oh, I thought you said Saturday.'

'Why do you want to know?'

'Oh, only about getting his room ready.'

'Why, it is ready, I looked in yesterday.'

'Nonsense, you know nothing about it,' she answered, colouring. 'Come, I wish

you would go out, I want to count the linen, and you are in the way.'

Thus adjured, Jeremy removed his large form from the table on which he had been sitting, and whistling to Nails, now a very ancient and preternaturally wise dog, set off for a walk. He had mooned along some little way with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes on the ground, reflecting on the unpleasant fate in store for him as an articled clerk, continually under the glance of Mr. Cardus' roving eye, when suddenly he became aware that two ladies were standing on the edge of the cliff within a dozen yards of him. He would have turned and fled, for Jeremy had a marked dislike to ladies' society, and a strong opinion, which, however, he never expressed, that women were the root of all evil; but thinking that he had been seen, he feared that retreat would appear rude. In one of the

young ladies, for they were young, he recognized Miss Florence Ceswick, who to all appearance had not changed in the least since, some years ago, she came with her aunt to call on Dorothy. There was the same brown hair, curling as profusely as ever, the same keen brown eyes and ripe lips, the same small features and resolute expression of face. Her square figure had indeed developed a little. In her tight-fitting dress it looked almost handsome, and somehow its very squareness, that most women would have considered a defect, contributed to that air of power and unchanging purpose that would have made Florence Ceswick remarkable among a hundred handsomer women.

'How do you do?' said Florence, in her sharp manner. 'You looked as though you were walking in your sleep.'

Before Jeremy could find a reply to this

remark, the other young lady, who had been looking intently over the edge of the cliff, turned round and struck him dumb. In his limited experience he had never seen such a beautiful woman before.

She was a head and shoulders taller than her sister, so tall indeed that only her own natural grace could save her from looking awkward. Like her sister she was a brunette, only of a much more pronounced type. Her waving hair was black, and so were her beautiful eyes and the long lashes that curled over them. The complexion was a clear olive, the lips like coral, and the teeth small and regular. Every advantage that Nature can lavish on a woman she had endowed her with in abundance, including radiant health and spirits. To these charms must be added that sweet and kindly look which sometimes finds a home on the faces of good women, a soft voice, a quick

intelligence, and an utter absence of conceit or self-consciousness, and the reader will get some idea of what Eva Ceswick was like in the first flush of her beauty.

'Let me introduce my sister Eva, Mr. Jones.'

But Mr. Jones was for the moment paralysed, he could not even take off his hat.

'Well,' said Florence, presently, 'she is not Medusa; there is no need for you to turn into stone.'

This woke him up—indeed Florence had an ugly trick of waking people up occasionally—and he took off his hat, which was as usual a dirty one, and muttered something inaudible. As for Eva, she blushed, and with ready wit said that Mr. Jones was no doubt astonished at the filthy state of her dress (as a matter of fact Jeremy could not have sworn that she had one on at all, much less its condition). 'The fact is,' she

went on, 'I have been lying flat on the grass and looking over the edge of the cliff.'

'What at?' asked Jeremy.

'Why, the bones.'

The spot on which they were standing was part of the ancient graveyard of Tithe-burgh Abbey, and as the sea encroached year by year, multitudes of the bones of the long dead inhabitants of Kesterwick were washed out of their quiet graves and strewed upon the beach and unequal surfaces of the cliff.

'Look,' she said, kneeling down, an example that he followed. About six feet below them, which was the depth at which the corpses had originally been laid, could be seen fragments of lead and rotting wood projecting from the surface of the cliff, and what was a more ghastly sight, eight inches or more of the leg bones of a man, off which the feet had been washed away. On a

ledge in the sandy cliff, about twenty-five feet from the top and sixty or so from the bottom, there lay quite a collection of human remains of all sorts and sizes, conspicuous among them being the bones that had composed the feet that belonged to the projecting shanks.

'Isn't it dreadful?' said Eva, gazing down with a species of fascination; 'just fancy coming to that. Look at that little baby's skull just by the big one. Perhaps that is the mother's. And oh, what is that buried in the sand?'

As much of the object to which she pointed as was visible looked like an old cannon ball, but Jeremy soon came to a different conclusion.

'It is a bit of a lead coffin,' he said.

'Oh, I should like to get down there and find out what is in it. Can't you get down?'

Jeremy shook his head. 'I've done it as a boy,' he said, 'when I was very light, but it is no good my trying now, the sand would give with me, and I should go to the bottom.'

He was willing to do most things to oblige this lovely creature, but Jeremy was above all things practical, and did not see the use of breaking his neck for nothing.

'Well,' she said, 'you certainly are rather heavy.'

'Fifteen stone,' he said, mournfully.

'But I am not ten, I think I could get down.'

'You'd better not try without a rope.'

Just then their conversation was interrupted by Florence's clear voice.

'When you two people have quite finished staring at those disgusting bones, perhaps, Eva, you will come home to lunch. If you only knew how silly you look,

sprawling there like two Turks going to be bastinadoed, perhaps you would get up.'

This was too much for Eva, she got up at once, and Jeremy followed suit.

'Why could you not let us examine our bones in peace, Florence?' said her sister, jokingly.

'Because you are really too idiotic. You see, Mr. Jones, anything that is old and fusty, and has to do with old fogies who are dead and gone centuries ago, has the greatest charms for my sister. She would like to go home and make stories about those bones, whose they were, and what they did, and all the rest of it. She calls it imagination, I call it fudge.'

Eva flushed up, but said nothing, evidently she was not accustomed to answer her elder sister, and presently they parted to go their separate ways.

'What a great oaf that Jeremy is!' said

Florence to her sister on their homeward way.

'I did not think him an oaf at all,' she replied, warmly; 'I thought him very nice.'

Florence shrugged her square shoulders. 'Well, of course, if you like a giant with as much brain as an owl, there is nothing more to be said. You should see Ernest, he is nice if you like.'

'You seem to be very fond of Ernest.'

'Yes, I am,' was the reply; 'and I hope that when he comes you won't poach on my manor.'

'You need not be afraid,' answered Eva, smiling; 'I promise to leave your Ernest alone.'

'Then that is a bargain,' said Florence, sharply. 'Mind that you keep to your word.'

CHAPTER VI.

JEREMY FALLS IN LOVE.

JEREMY for the first time for some years had no appetite for his dinner that day, a phenomenon that filled Dorothy with alarm.

'My dear Jeremy,' she said afterwards, 'what *can* be the matter with you, you had only one helping of beef and no pudding?'

'Nothing at all,' he replied sulkily, and the subject dropped.

'Doll,' said Jeremy presently, 'do you know Miss Eva Ceswick?'

'Yes, I have seen her twice.'

'What do you think of her, Doll?'

'What do you think of her?' replied that cautious young person.

'I think that she is beautiful as—as an angel.'

'Quite poetical, I declare! what next? Have you seen her?'

'Of course, else how should I know that she was beautiful?'

'Ah, no wonder you had only once of beef!'

Jeremy coloured.

'I am going to call there this afternoon, would you like to come?' went on his sister.

'Yes, I'll come.'

'Better and better, it will be the first call I ever remember your having paid.'

'You don't think she will mind, Doll?'

'Why should she mind? Most people don't mind being called on, even if they have a pretty face.'

'Pretty face! she is pretty all over.'

'Well then, a pretty all over. I start at three, don't be late.'

Thereupon Jeremy went off to beautify himself for the occasion, and his sister gazed at his departing form with the puzzled expression that had distinguished her as a child.

'He's going to fall in love with her,' she said to herself, 'and no wonder; any man would, she is "pretty all over," as he said, and what more does a man look at? I wish that *she* would fall in love with him *before Ernest comes home*,' and she sighed.

At a quarter to three Jeremy reappeared, looking particularly huge in a black coat and his Sunday trousers. When they reached the cottage where Miss Ceswick lived with her nieces, they were destined to meet with a disappointment, for neither of the young ladies was at home. Miss Ceswick, however, was there, and received them very cordially.

'I suppose that you have come to see my newly imported niece,' she said, 'in fact I am sure that you have, Mr. Jeremy, because you never came to call upon me in your life. Ah, it is wonderful how young men will change their habits to please a pair of bright eyes.'

Jeremy blushed painfully at this sally, but Dorothy came to his rescue.

'Has Miss Eva come to live with you for good?' she asked.

'Yes, I think so. You see, my dear, between you and me, her aunt in London, with whom she was living, has got a family of daughters, who have recently come out. Eva has been kept back as long as possible, but now that she is twenty it was impossible to keep her back any more. But then, on the other hand, it was felt, at least I think that it was felt, that to continue to bring Eva out with her cousins would be to quite

ruin their chance of settling in life, because when *she* was in the room, no man could be got to look at *them*. And so you see Eva has been sent down here as a penalty for being so handsome.'

'Most of us would be glad to undergo heavier penalties than that if we could only be guilty of the crime,' said Dorothy, a little sadly.

'Ah, my dear, I dare say you think so,' answered the old lady. 'Every young woman longs to be beautiful and get the admiration of men, but are they any the happier for it? I doubt it. Very often that admiration brings endless troubles in its train, and perhaps in the end wrecks the happiness of the woman herself and of others who are mixed up with her. I was once a beautiful woman, my dear—I am old enough to say it now—and I can tell you that I believe that Providence cannot

do a more unkind thing to a woman than to give her striking beauty, unless it gives with it great strength of mind. A weak-minded beauty is the most unfortunate of her sex. Her very attractions, which are sure to draw the secret enmity of other women on to her, are a source of difficulty to herself, because they bring her lovers with whom she cannot deal. Sometimes the end of such a woman is sad enough. I have seen it happen several times, my dear.'

Often in after life, and in circumstances that had not then arisen, did Dorothy think of old Miss Ceswick's words, and acknowledge their truth; but at this time they did not convince her.

'I would give anything to be like your niece,' she said bluntly, 'and so would any other girl. Ask Florence, for instance.'

'Ah, my dear, you think so now. Wait till another twenty years have passed over

your heads, and then if you are both alive see which of you is the happiest. As for Florence, of course she would wish to be like Eva; of course it is painful for her to have to go about with a girl beside whom she looks like a little dowdy. I dare say that she would have been as glad if Eva had stopped in London as her cousins were that she left it. Dear, dear, I hope they won't quarrel. Florence's temper is dreadful when she quarrels.'

This was a remark that Dorothy could not gainsay. She knew very well what Florence's temper was like.

'But, Mr. Jeremy,' went on the old lady, 'all this must be stupid talk for you to listen to; tell me, have you been rowing any more races lately?'

'No,' said Jeremy; 'I strained a muscle in my arm in the 'Varsity race, and it is not quite well yet.'

'And where is my dear Ernest?' Like most women, of whatever age they might be, Miss Ceswick adored Ernest.

'He is coming back on Monday week.'

'Oh, then he will be in time for the Smythe's lawn-tennis party. I hear that they are going to give a dance after it. Do you dance, Mr. Jeremy?'

Jeremy had to confess that he did not; indeed, as a matter of fact, no earthly power had ever been able to drag him inside a ball-room in his life.

'That is a pity; there are so few young men in these parts. Florence counted them up the other day, and the proportion is one unmarried man, between the ages of twenty and forty-five, to every nine women between eighteen and thirty.'

'Then only one girl in every nine can get married,' put in Dorothy, whose mind had a trick of following things to their conclusions.

'And what becomes of the other eight?' asked Jeremy.

'I suppose that they all grow into old maids like myself,' answered Miss Ceswick.

Dorothy again following the matter to its conclusion, reflected that in fifteen years or so there would, at the present rate of progression, be at least twenty-five old maids within a radius of three miles round Kesterwick. And much oppressed by this thought, she rose to take her leave.

'I know who won't be left without a husband, unless men are greater stupids than I take them for, eh, Jeremy?' said the kindly old lady, giving Dorothy a kiss.

'If you mean me,' answered Dorothy bluntly, with a slightly heightened colour, 'I am not so vain as to think that anybody would care for an undersized creature whose only accomplishment is housekeeping; and

I am sure it is not for anybody that I should care either.'

'Ah, my dear, there are still a few men of sense in the world, who would rather get a *good* woman as companion than a pretty face. Good-bye, my dear.'

Though Jeremy was on this occasion disappointed of seeing Eva, on the following morning he was so fortunate as to meet her and her sister walking on the beach. But when he got into her gracious presence, he found somehow that he had very little to say; and the walk would, to tell the truth, have been rather dull, if it had not occasionally been enlivened by flashes of Florence's caustic wit.

On the next day, however, he returned to the charge with several hundredweight of the roots of a certain flower which Eva had expressed a desire to possess. And so it went on till at last his shyness wore

off a little, and they grew very good friends.

Of course all this did not escape Florence's sharp eyes, and one day, just after Jeremy had paid her sister a lumbering compliment and departed, she summarised her observations thus :

'That mooncalf is falling in love with you, Eva.'

'Nonsense, Florence ; and why should you call him a mooncalf. It is not nice to talk of people so.'

'Well, if you can find a better definition, I am willing to adopt it.'

'I think that he is an honest gentleman-like boy, and even if he were falling in love with me, I do not think that there would be anything to be ashamed of—there !'

'Dear me, what a fuss we are in. Do you know I shall soon begin to think that you are falling in love with the "honest gentle-

man-like boy?" yes, that is a better title than mooncalf, though not so nervous.'

Here Eva marched off in a huff.

'Well, Jeremy, and how are you getting on with the beautiful Eva?' asked Dorothy that same day.

'I say, Doll,' replied Jeremy, whose general appearance was that of a man plunged into the depths of misery, 'don't laugh at a fellow; if you only knew what I feel, inside, you know, you wouldn't—'

'What! are you not well? have some brandy?' suggested his sister in genuine alarm.

'Don't be an idiot, Doll, it isn't my stomach, it's here,' and he knocked his right lung with his great fist under the impression that he was indicating the position of his heart.

'And what do you feel, Jeremy?'

'Feel!' he answered with a groan, 'what

don't I feel? When I am away from her, I feel a sort of sinking, just like one does when one has to go without one's dinner, only it's always there. When she looks at me I go hot and cold all over, and when she smiles it's just as though one had killed a couple of woodcocks right and left.'

'Good gracious, Jeremy!' interposed his sister, who was beginning to think he had gone off his head; 'and what happens if she doesn't smile?'

'Ah then,' he replied sadly, 'it's as though one had missed them both.'

Though his similes were peculiar, it was clear to his sister that the feeling he meant to convey was genuine enough.

'Are you really fond of this girl, Jeremy dear?' she said gently.

'Well, Doll, you know, I suppose I am.'

'Then why don't you ask her to marry you?'

'To marry *me!* Why, I am not fit to clean her shoes.'

'An honest gentleman is fit for any woman, Jeremy.'

'And I haven't got anything to support her on even if she said yes, which she wouldn't.'

'You may get that in time. Remember, Jeremy, she is a very lovely woman, and soon she is sure to find other lovers.'

Jeremy groaned.

'But if once you had secured her affection, and she is a good woman, as I think she is, that would not matter, though you might not be able to marry for some years.'

'Then what am I to do?'

'I should tell her that you loved her, and ask her, if she could care for you—to wait for you awhile.'

Jeremy whistled meditatively.

'I'll ask Ernest about it when he comes back on Monday.'

'If I were you I should act for myself in the matter,' she said quickly.

'No good being in a hurry, I haven't known her a fortnight—I'll ask Ernest.'

'Then you will regret it,' Dorothy answered almost passionately, and rising, left the room.

'Now what did she mean by that?' reflected her brother aloud; 'she always is so deuced queer when Ernest is concerned.' But his inner consciousness returned no satisfactory answer, so with a sigh the love-lorn Jeremy took up his hat and walked.

On Sunday, that was the day following his talk with Dorothy, he saw Eva again in church, where she looked, he thought, more like an angel than ever, and was quite as inaccessible. In the churchyard he did, it is true, manage to get a word

or two with her, but nothing more, for the sermon had been long, and Florence was hungry, and hurried her sister home to lunch.

And then, at last, came Monday, the long-expected day of Ernest's arrival.

CHAPTER VII.

ERNEST IS INDISCREET.

KESTERWICK was a primitive place, and had no railway station nearer than Raffham, four miles off. Ernest was expected by the midday train, and Dorothy and her brother went to meet him.

When they reached the station the train was just in sight, and Dorothy got down to go and await its arrival. Presently it snorted composedly up—trains do not hurry themselves on the single lines in the Eastern counties—and in due course deposited Ernest and his portmanteau.

'Hullo, Doll, so you have come to meet me. How are you, old girl?' and he

proceeded to embrace her on the platform.

'You shouldn't, Ernest, I am too big to be kissed like a little girl, and in public too.'

'Big, hm, Miss five feet nothing, and as for the public, I don't see any.' The train had gone on, and the solitary porter had vanished with the portmanteau.

'Well, there is no need for you to laugh at me for being small, it is not everybody who can be a May-pole like you, or as broad as he is long, like Jeremy.'

An unearthly view halloo from this last-named personage, who had caught sight of Ernest through the door of the booking-office, put a stop to further controversy, and presently all three were driving back, each talking at the top of his or her voice.

At the door of Dum's Ness they found Mr. Cardus apparently gazing abstractedly

at the ocean, but in reality waiting to greet Ernest, to whom of late years he had grown greatly attached, though his reserve seldom allowed him to show it.

'Hullo, uncle, how are you? you look pretty fresh,' sung out that young gentleman before the cart had fairly come to a standstill.

'Very well, thank you, Ernest. I need not ask how you are. I am glad to see you back. You have come at a lucky moment too, for the "Batemania Wallisii" is in flower, and the "Grammatophyllum speciosum" too. The last is splendid.'

'Ah!' said Ernest, deeply interested, for he had much of his uncle's love for orchids, 'let's go and see them.'

'Better have some dinner first; you must be hungry. The orchids will keep, but the dinner won't.'

It was curious to see what a ray of light

this lad brought with him into this rather gloomy household. Everybody began to laugh as soon as he was inside the doors. Even Grice of the beady eyes laughed when he feigned to be thunder-struck at the newly-developed beauty of his person, and mad old Atterleigh's contorted features lit up with something like a smile of recognition when Ernest seized his hand and worked it like a pump-handle, roaring out his congratulations on the jollity of his looks. He was a bonny lad, the sight of whom was good for sore eyes.

After dinner he went with his uncle, and spent half an hour in going round the orchid-houses with him and Sampson the gardener. The latter was not behind the rest of the household in his appreciation of 'Meester' Ernest. ''Twasn't many lads,' he would say, 'that knew an "Odontoglossum" from a "Sobralia,"' but Ernest

did, and what was more, knew whether it was well-grown or not. Sampson appreciated a man who could discriminate orchids, and set his preference for Ernest down to that cause. The dour-visaged old Scotchman did not like to own that what really charmed him was the lad's open-handed, open-hearted manner, to say nothing of his ready sympathy and honest eyes.

Whilst they were still engaged in admiring the lovely bloom of the Grammatophyllum, Mr. Cardus saw Mr. de Talor come into his office, which was, as the reader may remember, connected with the orchid-blooming house by a glass door. Ernest was much interested in observing the curious change that this man's appearance produced in his uncle. As a peaceful cat dozing on a warm stone in summer, becomes suddenly changed into a thing of bristling wickedness and fury by the vision of the most inoffen-

sive dog, so did the placid bald-headed old gentleman, glowing with innocent pleasure at his horticultural masterpiece, commence to glow with very different emotions at the sight of the pompous De Talor. The ruling passion of his life asserted its sway in a moment, and his whole face changed; the upper lip began to quiver, the roving eyes glittered with a dangerous light; and then a mask seemed to gather over the features, which grew hard and almost inscrutable. It was an interesting transformation.

Although they could see De Talor, he could not see them, so for a minute they enjoyed an undisturbed period of observation.

The visitor walked round the room, and casting a look of contempt at the flowers in the blooming-house, stopped at Mr. Cardus' desk, and glanced at the papers lying on it. Finding apparently nothing to interest

him he retired to the window, and putting his thumbs in the armholes of his waiscoat, amused himself by staring out of it. There was something so intensely vulgar and insolent in his appearance as he stood thus that Ernest could not help laughing.

'Ah!' said Mr. Cardus with a look of suppressed malignity, half to himself and half to Ernest, 'I have really got a hold of you at last, and you may look out, my friend.' Then he went in, and as he left the blooming-house Ernest heard him greet his visitor in that suave manner, with just a touch of deference in it, that he knew so well how to assume, and De Talor's reply of ''ow do, Cardus, 'ow's the business getting on?'

Outside the glass houses Ernest found Jeremy waiting for him. It had for years been an understood thing that the latter was not to enter them. There was no particular reason why he should not; it was

merely one of those signs of Mr. Cardus' disfavour that caused Jeremy's pride such bitter injury.

'What are you going to do, old fellow?' he asked of Ernest.

'Well, I want to go down and see Florence Ceswick, but I suppose you won't care to come.'

'Oh yes, I'll come.'

'The deuce you will! well, I never. I say, Doll,' he sung out to that young lady as she appeared upon the scene, 'what has happened to Jeremy,—he's coming out calling?'

'I fancy he's got an attraction,' said Miss Dorothy.

'I say, old fellow, you haven't been cutting me out with Florence, have you?'

'I am sure it would be no great loss if he had,' put in Dorothy, with an impatient little stamp of the foot.

'You be quiet, Doll. I'm very fond of Florence, she's so clever, and nice-looking too.'

'If being clever means being able to say spiteful things, and having a temper like—like a fiend, she is certainly clever enough, and as for her looks, they are a matter of taste, not that it is for *me* to talk about good looks.'

'Oh, how humble we are, Doll; dust on our head and sackcloth on our back, and how our blue eyes flash!'

'Be quiet, Ernest, or I shall get angry.'

'Oh, no, don't do that, leave that to people with a temper "like—like a fiend," you know. There, there, don't get cross, Dolly, let's kiss and be friends.'

'I won't kiss you, and I won't be friends, and you may walk by yourselves,' and before anybody could stop her she was

gone. Ernest whistled softly, reflecting that Dorothy was not good at standing chaff. Then, after waiting awhile, he and Jeremy started to pay their call.

But they were destined to be unfortunate. Eva, whom Ernest had never seen, and of whom he had heard nothing beyond that she was 'good-looking,' for Jeremy, notwithstanding his expressed intention of consulting him, could not make up his mind to broach the subject, was in bed with a bad headache, and Florence had gone out to spend the afternoon with a friend. The old lady was at home, however, and received them both warmly, more especially her favourite Ernest, whom she kissed affectionately.

'I am lucky,' she said, 'in having two nieces, or I should never see anything of young gentlemen like you.'

'I think,' said Ernest, audaciously, 'that

old ladies are much pleasanter to talk to than young ones.'

'Indeed, Master Ernest, then why did you look so blank when I told you that my young ladies were not visible?'

'Because I regretted,' replied that young gentleman, who was not often at a loss, 'having lost an opportunity of confirming my views.'

'I will put the question again when they are present to take their own part,' was the answer.

When their call was over, Ernest and Jeremy separated, Jeremy to return home, and Ernest to go and see his old master, Mr. Halford, with whom he stopped to tea. It was past seven on one of the most beautiful evenings in July when he set out on his homeward path. There were two ways of reaching Dum's Ness, either by the road that ran along the cliff, or by walking on

the shingle of the beach. He chose the latter, and had reached the spot where Titheburgh Abbey frowned at its enemy, the advancing sea, when he suddenly became aware of a young lady in a shady hat and swinging a walking-stick, in whom he recognized Florence Ceswick.

'How do you do, Ernest?' she said, coolly, but with a slight flush upon her olive skin, that betrayed that she was not quite so cool as she looked; 'what are you dreaming about? I have seen you coming for the last two hundred yards, but you never saw me.'

'I was dreaming of you, of course, Florence.'

'Oh, indeed,' she answered, drily; 'I thought perhaps that Eva had got over her headache—her headaches do go in the most wonderful way—and that you had seen her, and were dreaming of *her*.'

'And why should I dream of her, even if I had seen her?'

'For the reason that men do dream of women—because she is handsome.'

'Is she better-looking than you then, Florence?'

'Better-looking, indeed! I am not good-looking.'

'Nonsense, Florence, you are very good-looking.'

She stopped, for he had turned and was walking with her, and laid her hand lightly on his arm.

'Do you really think so?' she said, gazing full into his dark eyes. 'I am glad you think so.'

They were quite alone in the summer twilight; there was not a single soul to be seen on the beach, or on the cliffs above it. Her touch and the earnestness of her manner thrilled him; the beauty and the

quiet of the evening, the sweet freshness of the air, the murmur of the falling waves, the fading purples in the sky, all these things thrilled him too. Her face looked very handsome in its own stern way, as she gazed at him so earnestly; and remember, he was only twenty-one. He bent his dark head towards her very slowly, to give her an opportunity of escaping if she wished, but she made no sign, and in another moment he had kissed her trembling lips.

It was a foolish act, for he was not in love with Florence, and he had scarcely done it before his better sense told him that it was foolish. But it was done, and who can recall a kiss?

He saw the olive face grow pale, and for a moment she raised her arm as though to fling it about his neck, but next second she started back from him.

'Did you mean that,' she said wildly, 'or are you playing with me?'

Ernest looked alarmed, as well he might; the young lady's aspect at the moment was not reassuring.

'Mean it?' he said; 'oh yes, I meant it.'

'I mean, Ernest,' and again she laid her hand upon his arm and looked into his eyes, 'did you mean that you loved me, as—for now I am not ashamed to tell you—I love you?'

Ernest felt that this was getting awful. To kiss a young woman was one thing—he had done that before—but such an outburst as this was more than he had bargained for. Gratifying as it was to him to learn that he possessed Florence's affection, he would at that moment have given something to be without it. He hesitated a little.

'How serious you are,' he said at last.

'Yes,' she answered, 'I am. I have been serious for some time. Probably you know enough of me to be aware that I am not a woman to be played with. I hope that you are serious too; if you are not, it may be the worse for us both,' and she flung his arm from her as though it had stung her.

Ernest turned cold all over, and realized that the position was positively gruesome. What to say or do he did not know, so he stood silent, and as it happened, silence served his turn better than speech.

'There, Ernest, I have startled you. It is—it is because I love you. When you kissed me just now, everything that is beautiful in the world seemed to pass before my eyes, and for a moment I heard such music as they play in heaven. You don't understand me yet, Ernest—I am fierce, I know—but sometimes I think that

my heart is deep as the sea, and I can love with ten times the strength of the shallow women round me; and as I can love, so I can hate.'

This was not reassuring intelligence to Ernest.

'You are a strange girl,' he said feebly.

'Yes,' she answered, with a smile, 'I know I am strange; but while I am with you I feel so good, and when you are away all my life is a void, in which bitter thoughts flit about like bats. But there, good night. I shall see you at the Smythes' dance to-morrow, shall I not? You will dance with me, will you not? And you must not dance with Eva, remember, at least not too much, or I shall get jealous, and that will be bad for us both. And now good night, my dear, good night,' and again she put up her face to be kissed.

He kissed it; he had no alternative; and

she left him swiftly. He watched her retreating form till it vanished in the shadows, and then he sat down upon a stone, wiped his forehead, and *whistled.*

Well might he whistle.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GARDEN IDYLL.

ERNEST did not sleep well that night, the scene of the evening haunted his dreams, and he awoke with that sense of oppression that impartially follows on the heels of misfortune, folly, and lobster salad. Nor did the broad light of the summer day disperse his sorrows; indeed, it only served to define them more clearly. Ernest was a very inexperienced youth, but inexperienced as he was, he could not but recognize that he had let himself in for an awkward business. He was not in the smallest degree in love with Florence Ceswick; indeed, his predominant feeling towards her

was one of fear. She was, as he had said, so terribly in earnest. In short, though she was barely a year older than himself, she was a woman possessed of a strength of purpose and a rigidity of will that few of her sex ever attain to at any period of their lives. This he had guessed long ago; but what he had not guessed, was that all the tide of her life set so strongly towards himself. That unlucky kiss had, as it were, shot the bolt of the sluice-gates, and now he was in a fair way to be overwhelmed by the rush of the waters. What course of action he had best take with her now it was beyond his powers to decide. He thought of taking Dorothy into his confidence and asking her advice, but instinctively he shrank from doing so. Then he thought of Jeremy, only however to reject the idea. What would Jeremy know of such things? He little guessed that Jeremy

was swelling with a secret of his own, of which he was too shy to deliver himself. It seemed to Ernest, the more he considered the matter, that there was only one safe course for him to follow, and that was to run away. It would be ignominious it is true, but at any rate Florence could not run after him. He had made arrangements to meet a friend, and go for a tour with him in France towards the end of the month of August, or about five weeks from the present date. These arrangements he now determined to modify; he would go for his tour at once.

Partially comforted by these reflections, he dressed himself that evening for the dance at the Smythes, where he was to meet Florence, who, however, he gratefully reflected, could not expect him to kiss her there. The dance was to follow a lawn-tennis party, to which Dorothy, accom-

panied by Jeremy, had already gone, Ernest having, for reasons best known to himself, declined to go to the lawn-tennis, preferring to follow them to the dance.

When he entered the ball-room at the Smythes, the first quadrille was in progress. Making his way up the room, Ernest soon came upon Florence Ceswick, who was sitting with Dorothy, whilst in the back-ground loomed Jeremy's gigantic form. Both the girls appeared to be waiting for him, for on his approach Florence, by a movement of her dress, and an almost imperceptible motion of her hand, at once made room for him on the bench beside her, and invited him to sit down. He did so.

'You are late,' she said; 'why did you not come to the lawn-tennis?'

'I thought that our party was sufficiently represented,' he answered lamely, nodding

towards Jeremy and his sister. 'Why are you not dancing?'

'Because nobody asked me,' she said sharply; 'and besides I was waiting for you.'

'Jeremy,' said Ernest, 'here is Florence says that you didn't ask her to dance.'

'Don't talk humbug, Ernest, you know I don't dance.'

'No indeed,' put in Dorothy, 'it is easy to see that; I never saw anybody look so miserable as you do.'

'Or so big,' said Florence, consolingly.

Jeremy shrank back into his corner and tried to look smaller. His sister was right, a dance was untold misery to him. The quadrille had ceased by now, and presently the band struck up a waltz, which Ernest danced with Florence. They both waltzed well, and Ernest kept going as much as

possible, perhaps in order to give no opportunity for conversation. At any rate no allusion was made to the events of the previous evening.

'Where are your aunt and sister, Florence?' he asked as he led her back to her seat.

'They are coming presently,' she answered shortly.

The next dance was a galop, and this he danced with Dorothy, whose slim figure looked, in the white muslin dress she wore, more like that of a child than a grown woman. But child or woman, her general appearance was singularly pleasing and attractive. Ernest thought that he had never seen the quaint puckered little face, with the two steady blue eyes in it, look so attractive. Not that it was pretty—it was not, but it was a face with a great deal of thought in it, and moreover it was a face through

which the goodness of its owner seemed to shine like the light through a lamp.

'You look so nice to-night, Doll,' said Ernest.

She flushed with pleasure, and answered simply, 'I am glad you think so.'

'Yes, I do think so; you are really pretty.'

'Nonsense, Ernest. Can't you find some other butt to practise your compliments on? What is the good of wasting them on me? I am going to sit down.'

'Really, Doll, I don't know what has come to you lately, you have grown so cross.'

She sighed as she answered gently, 'No more do I, Ernest. I did not mean to speak crossly, but you should not make fun of me. Ah, here come Miss Ceswick and Eva.'

They had rejoined Florence and Jeremy. The two ladies were seated, whilst Ernest

and Jeremy were standing, the former in front of them, the latter against the wall behind, for they were gathered at the topmost end of the long room. At Dorothy's announcement both the lads bent forward to look down the room, and both the women fixed their eyes on Ernest's face anxiously, expectantly, something as a criminal fixes his eyes on the foreman of a jury who is about to pronounce words that will one way or another affect all his life.

'I don't see them,' said Ernest, carelessly. 'Oh, here they come. *By George!*'

Whatever those two women were looking for in his face, they had found it, and, to all appearance, it pleased them very little. Dorothy turned pale, and leant back with a faint smile of resignation; she had expected it, that smile seemed to say; but the blood flamed like a danger flag into Florence's haughty features—there was no

resignation there. And meanwhile Ernest was staring down the room, quite unaware of the little comedy that was going on round him; so was Jeremy, and so was every other man who was there to stare.

And this was what they were staring at. Up the centre of the long room walked, or rather swept, Miss Ceswick, for even at her advanced age she moved like a queen, and at any other time her appearance would in itself have been sufficient to excite remark. But people were not looking at Miss Ceswick, but rather at the radiant creature who accompanied her, and whose stature dwarfed her, tall as she was. Eva Ceswick, for it was she, was dressed in white *soie de Chine*, in the bosom of which was fixed a single rose. The dress was cut low, and her splendid neck and arms were entirely without ornament. In the masses of dark

hair, which was coiled like a coronet round her head, there glistened a diamond star. Simple as was her costume, there was a grandeur about it that struck the whole room; but in truth it sprang from the almost perfect beauty of the woman who wore it. Any dress would have looked beautiful upon that noble form, that towered so high, and yet seemed to float up the room with the grace of a swan, and sway like a willow in the wind. But her loveliness did not end there. From those dark eyes there shone a light that few men could look upon and forget, and yet there was nothing bold about it. It was like the light of a star.

On she came, her lips half-parted, seemingly unconscious of the admiration she was attracting, eclipsing all other women as she passed, and making their beauty, that before had seemed bright enough, look

poor and mean beside her own. It took but a few seconds, ten perhaps, for her to walk up the room, and yet to Ernest it seemed long before her eyes met his own, and something passed from them into his heart that remained there all his life.

His gaze made her blush a little, it was so unmistakeable. She guessed who he was, and passed him with a little inclination of her head.

'Well, here we are at last,' she said, addressing her sister in her musical pure voice. 'What do you think, something went wrong with the wheel of the fly, and we had to stop to get it mended?'

'Indeed!' answered Florence; 'I thought that perhaps you came late in order to make a more effective entry.'

'Florence,' said her aunt reprovingly, 'you should not say such things.'

Florence did not answer; but put her

lace handerchief to her lip. She had bitten it till the blood ran.

By this time Ernest had recovered himself. He saw several young fellows bearing down upon them, and knew what they were after.

'Miss Ceswick,' he said, 'will you introduce me?'

No sooner said than done, and at that moment the band began to play a waltz. In five seconds more she was floating down the room upon his arm, and the advancing young gentlemen were left lamenting, and, if the truth must be told, anathematising 'that puppy Kershaw' beneath their breath.

There was a spirit in her feet; she danced divinely. Lightly leaning on his arm, they swept round the room, the incarnation of youthful strength and beauty, and as they passed, even sour old Lady Asteigh

lowered her ancient nose an inch, or more, and deigned to ask who that handsome young man dancing with the 'tall girl' was? Presently they halted, and Ernest observed a more than usually intrepid man coming towards them, with the design, no doubt, of obtaining an introduction, and the promise of dances. But again he was equal to the occasion.

'Have you a card?' he asked.

'Oh, yes.'

'Will you allow me to put my name down for another dance; I think that our steps suit?'

'Yes, we get on nicely. Here it is.'

Ernest took it. The young man had arrived now, and was hovering around and glowering. Ernest nodded to him cheerfully, and 'put his name' very much down, indeed for no less than three dances and an extra.

Eva opened her eyes a little, but she said nothing; their steps suited so very well.

'May I ask you, Kershaw—' began his would be rival.

'Oh, certainly,' answered Ernest benignly, 'I will be with you presently,' and they floated off again on the rising wave of the music.

When the dance ended, they stopped just by the spot where Miss Ceswick was sitting. Florence and Dorothy were both dancing, but Jeremy, who did not dance, was standing by her, looking as sulky as a bear with a sore head. Eva stretched out her hand to him with a smile.

'I hope that you are going to dance with me, Mr. Jones,' she said.

'I don't dance,' he answered curtly, and walked away.

She gazed after him wonderingly, his manner was decidedly rude.

'I do not think that Mr. Jones is in a good temper,' she said to Ernest with a smile.

'Oh, he is a queer fellow, going out always makes him cross,' he answered carelessly.

Then the gathering phalanx of would-be partners marched in and took possession, and Ernest had to retire.

The ball was drawing to its close. The dancing-room, notwithstanding its open windows, was intensely hot, and many of the dancers were strolling in the gardens, amongst them Ernest and Eva. They had just danced their third waltz, in which they had discovered that their steps suited better than ever.

Florence, Dorothy, and her brother were also walking all three together. It is curious how people in misfortune cling to one another. They walked in silence;

they had nothing to say. Presently they caught sight of two tall figures standing by a bush, on which was fixed a dying Chinese lantern. It is sometimes unfortunate to be tall, it betrays one's identity; there was no mistaking the two figures though it was so dark. Instinctively the three halted. And just then the expiring Chinese lantern did an unkind thing, it caught fire and threw a lurid light upon a very pretty little scene. Ernest was bending forward towards Eva with all his soul in his expressive eyes, and begging for something. She was blushing sweetly and looking down at the rose in her bosom: one hand too was raised, as though to unfasten it. The light was for a moment so strong that Dorothy afterwards remembered noticing how long Eva's curling black eyelashes looked against her cheek. In another moment it had flared out, and the darkness

hid the sequel; but it may here be stated that when Eva reappeared in the ball-room she had lost her rose.

Charming and idyllic as this *tableau très vivant* of youth and beauty, obeying the primary law of nature, and making love to one another in a garden of Eden illumined with Chinese lanterns, undoubtedly was, it did not seem to please any of the three spectators.

Jeremy actually forgot the presence of ladies, and went so far as to swear aloud. Nor did they reprove him, probably it gave their feelings some vicarious relief.

'I think that we had better be going home; it is late,' said Dorothy, after a pause. 'Jeremy, will you go and order the carriage?'

Jeremy went.

Florence said nothing, but she took her fan in both her hands and bent it slowly,

so that the ivory sticks snapped one by one with a succession of sharp reports. Then she threw it down, and set her heel upon it and ground it into the path. There was something inexpressibly cruel about the way in which she crushed the pretty toy, the action seemed to be the appropriate and unconscious outcome of some mental process, and it is an odd proof of the excitement under which they were both labouring, that at the time the gentle-minded Dorothy saw nothing strange about it. At that moment the two girls were nearer each other than they ever had been before, or ever would be again; the common stroke of a misfortune for a moment welded their opposite natures into one. At that moment, too, they knew that they both loved the same man; before they had guessed it, and had not liked each other the better for it, but now that was forgotten.

'I think, Florence,' said Dorothy, with a little tremor in her voice, 'that we are "out of the running," as Jeremy says. Your sister is too beautiful for any woman to stand against her. He has fallen in love with her.'

'Yes,' said Florence, with a bitter laugh and a flash of her brown eyes; 'his highness has thrown a handkerchief to a new favourite, and she has lost no time in picking it up. We always used to call her "the sultana,"' and she laughed again.

'Perhaps,' suggested Dorothy, 'she only means to flirt with him a little; I hoped that Jeremy—'

'Jeremy! what chance has Jeremy against him? Ernest would make more way with a woman in two hours than Jeremy would in two years. We all love to be taken by storm, my dear. Do not deceive yourself. Flirt with him! she will

love him wildly in a week. Who could help loving him?' she added, with a thrill of her rich voice.

Dorothy said nothing, she knew that it was true, and they walked for a few steps in silence.

'Dorothy, do you know what generally happens to favourites and sultanas.'

'No.'

'They come to a bad end; the other ladies of the harem murder them, you know.'

'What *do* you mean?'

'Don't be frightened, I don't mean that we should murder my dear sister. What I do mean is, that I think we might manage to depose her. Will you help me if I find a plan?'

Dorothy's better self had had time to assert itself by now, the influence of the blow was over, and their natures were wide apart again.

'No, certainly not,' she answered. 'Ernest has a right to choose for himself, and if your sister gets the better of us, it is the fortune of war, that is all—though certainly the fight is not quite fair,' she added, as she thought of Eva's radiant loveliness.

Florence glanced at her companion contemptuously.

'You have no spirit,' she said.

'What do you mean to do?'

'Mean to do!' she answered, swinging round and facing her; 'I mean to have my revenge.'

'Oh, Florence, it is wicked to talk so. Who are you going to be revenged on—Ernest? It is not his fault if—if you are fond of him.'

'Yes, it is his fault; but whether it is his fault or not, he shall suffer. Remember what I say, for it will come true; he shall suffer. Why should I bear it all alone?

But he shall not suffer so much as she. I told her that I was fond of him, and she promised to leave him alone—do you hear that?—and yet she is taking him away from me to gratify her vanity—she, who could have anybody she likes.'

'Hush, Florence, don't give way to your temper so, or you will be overheard. Besides, I dare say that we are making a great deal out of nothing; after all she only gave him a rose.'

'I don't care if we are overheard, and it is not nothing. I guessed that it would be so, I knew that it would be so, and I know what is coming now. Mark my words, within a month Ernest and my sweet sister will be sitting about on the cliff with their arms round each other's necks. I have only to shut my eyes and I can see it. Oh, here is Jeremy! Is the carriage there, Jeremy? That's right;

come on, Dorothy, let us go and say good night and be off. You will drop me at the Cottage, wont you?'

Half an hour later the fly that had brought Miss Ceswick and Eva came round, and with it Ernest's dog-cart. But as Miss Ceswick was rather anxious about the injured wheel, Ernest, as in duty bound, offered to see them safe home, and ordering the cart to follow, got into the fly without waiting for an answer.

Of course Miss Ceswick went to sleep, but it is not probable that either Ernest or Eva followed her example. Perhaps they were too tired to talk, perhaps they were beginning to find out what a delightful companionship is to be found in silence, perhaps his gentle pressure of the little white gloved hand that lay unresisting in his own was more eloquent than any speech.

Don't be shocked, my reader, you or I would have done the same, and thought ourselves very lucky fellows!

At any rate that drive was over all too soon.

Florence opened the door for them, she had told the servant to go to bed.

When Eva reached the door of her room she turned round to say good night to her sister, but the latter, instead of contenting herself with a nod, as was her custom, came and kissed her on the face.

'I congratulate you on your dress and on your conquest,' and again she kissed her and was gone.

'It is not like Florence to be so kind, reflected her younger sister. 'I can't remember when she kissed me last.'

Eva did not know that as there are some kisses that declare peace, and set the

seal on love, there are others that announce war, and proclaim the hour of vengeance or treachery. Judas kissed his Master when he betrayed him.

CHAPTER IX.

EVA FINDS SOMETHING.

WHEN Ernest woke on the morning after the ball it was ten o'clock, and he had a severe headache. This—the headache—was his first impression, but presently his eye fell upon a withering red rose that lay upon the dressing-table, and he smiled. Then followed reflections, those confounded reflections that always dog the heels of everything pleasant in life, and he ceased to smile.

In the end he yawned and got up. When he reached the sitting-room, which looked cool and pleasant in contrast to the hot July sunshine that beat upon the little

patch of bare turf in front of the house, and the glittering sea beyond, he found that the others had done their breakfast. Jeremy had gone out, but his sister was there, looking a little pale, no doubt from the late hours of the previous night.

'Hulloa, Doll! good morning.'

'Good morning, Ernest,' she answered rather coldly. 'I have been keeping your tea as warm as I can, but I'm afraid it is getting cold.'

'You are a good Samaritan, Doll. I've got such a head, perhaps the tea will make it better.'

She smiled as she gave it to him; had she spoken what was in her mind, she would have answered that she had 'such a heart.'

He drank the tea, and apparently felt better for it, for presently he asked her, in comparatively cheerful tones, how she liked the dance.

'Oh, very well, thank you, Ernest; how did you like it?'

'Oh, awfully. I say, Doll!'

'Yes, Ernest.'

'Isn't she lovely?'

'Who, Ernest?'

'Who! why, Eva Ceswick, of course.'

'Yes, Ernest, she is very lovely.'

There was something about her tone that was not encouraging; at any rate he did not pursue the subject.

'Where is Jeremy?' he asked next.

'He has gone out.'

Presently Ernest, having finished his second cup of tea, went out too, and came across Jeremy mooning about the yard.

'Hulloa, my hearty! and how are you after your dissipations?'

'All right, thank you,' answered Jeremy, sulkily.

Ernest glanced up quickly. The voice

was the voice of Jeremy, but the tones were not his tones.

'What is up, old chap?' he said, slipping his arm through his friend's.

'Nothing.'

'Oh yes, there is, though. What is it? Out with it. I am a splendid father confessor.'

Jeremy freed his arm, and remained sulkier than ever. Ernest looked hurt, and the look softened the other.

'Well, of course, if you won't tell me there is nothing more to be said,' and he prepared to move off.

'As though you didn't know!'

'Upon my honour I don't.'

'Then if you'll come in here I will tell you,' and Jeremy opened the door of the little outhouse, where he stuffed his birds and kept his gun and collections of eggs and butterflies, and motioned Ernest majestically in.

He entered and seated himself upon the stuffing-table, gazing abstractedly at a bittern that Jeremy had shot about the time that this story opened, and which was now very moth-eaten, and waved one melancholy leg in the air in a way meant to be imposing, but only succeeding in being grotesque.

'Well, what is it?' he interrogated of the glassy eye of the decaying bittern.

Jeremy turned his broad back upon him, he felt that he could speak better on such a subject with his back turned, and addressing empty space before him, said—

'I think it was precious unkind of you.'

'What was precious unkind?'

'To go and cut me out of the only girl—'

'I ever loved,' suggested Ernest, for he was hesitating.

'I ever loved,' chimed in Jeremy; the phrase expressed his sentiments exactly.

'Well, old chap, if you would come to the point a little more, and tell me who the deuce you are talking about—'

'Why, who should I be talking about? there is only one girl—'

'You ever loved?'

'I ever loved.'

'Well, in the name of the Holy Roman Empire, who is she?'

'Why, Eva Ceswick.'

Ernest whistled. 'I say, old chap,' he said, after a pause, 'why didn't you tell me? I didn't even know that you knew her. Are you engaged to her then?'

'Engaged! no.'

'Well, then, have you an understanding with her?'

'No, of course not.'

'Look here, old fellow, if you would just slew round a bit and tell me how the matter stands, we might get on a little.'

'It doesn't stand at all, but—I worship the ground she treads on; there!'

'Ah,' said Ernest, 'that's awkward, for so do I—at least I think I do.'

Jeremy groaned, and Ernest groaned too by way of company.

'Look here, old chap,' said the latter, 'what is to be done? You should have told me, but you didn't, you see. If you had I would have kept clear. Fact is, she bowled me over altogether, bowled me clean.'

'So she did me.'

'I tell you what, Jeremy; I'll go away and leave you to make the running. Not that I see that there is much good in either of us making the running, for we have nothing to marry on, and no more has she.'

'And we are only twenty-one. One can't marry at twenty-one,' put in Jeremy, 'or

one would have a large family by the time one's thirty. Fellows who marry at twenty-one always do.'

'She's twenty-one; she told me so.'

'She told me too,' said Jeremy, determined to show that Ernest was not the only person favoured with this exciting fact.

'Well, shall I clear? we can't jaw about it for ever.'

'No,' said Jeremy slowly, and in a way that showed that it cost him an effort to say it, 'that would not be fair; besides, I expect that the mischief is done; everybody gets fond of you, old chap, men or women. No, you shan't go, and we won't get to logger-heads over it either. I'll tell you what we will do—we will toss up.'

This struck Ernest as a brilliant suggestion.

'Right you are,' he said, at once producing a shilling; 'singles or threes?'

'Singles, of course, it's sooner over.'

Ernest poised the coin on his thumb. 'You call. But, I say! what are we tossing for? We can't draw lots for the girl like the fellows in Homer. We haven't captured her yet.'

This was obviously a point that required consideration. Jeremy scratched his head.

'How will this do?' he said. 'The winner to have a month to make the running in, the loser not to interfere. If she won't have anything to say to him after a month, then the loser to have his fling. If she will, loser to keep clear.'

'That will do. Stand clear; up you go.'

The shilling spun into the air.

'Tails,' howled Jeremy.

It lit on the beak of the astonished bittern and bounded off on to the floor, finally rolling

under a box full of choice specimens of the petrified bones of antediluvian animals that had been washed out of the cliffs. The box was lugged out of the way with difficulty, and the shilling disclosed.

'Heads it is!' said Ernest exultingly.

'I expected as much; just my luck. Well, shake hands, Ernest. We won't quarrel about the girl, please God.'

They shook hands heartily enough and parted, but from that time for many a long day there was an invisible something between them that had not been there before. Strong indeed must be the friendship of which the bonds do not slacken when the shadow of a woman's love falls upon it.

That afternoon Dorothy said that she wanted to go into Kesterwick to make some purchases, and Ernest offered to accompany her. They walked in silence as far as Titheburgh Abbey, indeed they both

suffered from a curious constraint that seemed to effectually check their usual brother-and-sister-like relations. Ernest was just beginning to feel the silence awkward when Dorothy stopped.

'What was that?' she said. 'I thought I heard somebody cry out.'

They listened, and presently both heard a woman's voice calling for help. The sound seemed to come from the cliff on their left. They stepped to the edge and looked over. As the reader may remember, some twenty feet from the top of the cliff, and fifty or more from the bottom, there was at this spot a sandy ledge, on which were deposited many of the remains washed out of the churchyard by the sea. Now this particular spot was almost inaccessible without ladders, because, although it was easy enough to get down to its level, the cliff bulged out on either side of it, and

gave for the space of some yards little or no hold for the hands or feet of the climber.

The first thing that caught Ernest's eye when he looked over was a lady's foot and ankle, which appeared to be resting on a tiny piece of rock that projected from the surface of the cliff; the next was the imploring face of Eva Ceswick, who was sprawling in a most undignified position on the bulge of sandstone, with nothing more between her and eternity than that very unsatisfactory and insufficient knob of rock. It was evident that she could move neither one way nor the other without being precipitated to the bottom of the cliff, to which she was apparently clinging by suction like a fly.

'Great God!' exclaimed Ernest. 'Hold on, I will come to you.'

'I *can't* hold much longer.'

It was one thing to say that he would

come, and another to do it. The sand gave scarcely any foothold; how was he to get enough purchase to pull Eva round the bulge? He looked at Dorothy in despair. Her quick mind had taken in the situation at a glance.

'You must get down there above her, Ernest, and lie flat and stretch out your hand to her.'

'But there is nothing to hold to. When she puts her weight on to my hand we shall both go together.'

'No, I will hold your legs. Be quick, she is getting exhausted.'

It took Ernest but two seconds to reach the spot that Dorothy had pointed to, and to lay himself flat, or rather slanting, for his heels were a great deal higher than his head. Fortunately, he discovered a hard knob of sandstone against which he could rest his left hand. Meanwhile, Dorothy,

seating herself as securely as she could above, seized him by the ankles. Then Ernest stretched his hand downwards, and, gripping Eva by the wrist, began to put out his strength. Had the three had any time to indulge their sense of humour, they might have found the appearance they presented intensely ludicrous; but they had not, for the very good reason that for thirty seconds or so their lives were not worth a farthing's purchase. Ernest strained and strained, but Eva was a large woman, although she danced so lightly, and the bulge over which he had to pull her was almost perpendicular. Presently he felt that Dorothy was beginning to slip above him.

'She must make an effort, or we shall all go,' she said, in a quiet voice.

'Drive your knees into the sand, and throw yourself forward, it is your only

chance,' gasped Ernest to the exhausted woman beneath him.

She realized the meaning of his words, and gave a desperate struggle.

'Pull, Doll, for God's sake pull; she's coming.'

Then followed a second of despairing effort, and she was beside him on the spot where he lay; another struggle, and the three sank exhausted on the top of the cliff, rescued from a most imminent death.

'By Jove!' ejaculated Ernest, 'that was a near thing.'

Dorothy nodded, she was too exhausted to speak. Eva smiled and fainted.

He turned to her with a little cry, and began to chafe her cold hands.

'Oh, she's dead, Doll,' he said.

'No, she has fainted. Give me your hat.'

Before he could do so she had seized it,

and was running as quickly as her exhaustion would allow towards a spring that bubbled up a hundred yards away, and which once had been the water supply of the old abbey.

Ernest went on rubbing for a minute or more, but without producing the slightest effect. He was in despair. The beautiful face beneath him looked so wan and death-like; all the red had left the lips. In his distress, and scarcely knowing what he did, he bent over them and kissed them, once, twice, thrice. This mode of restoration is not recommended in the medicine chest 'guide,' but in this instance it was not without its effect. Presently a faint and tremulous glow diffused itself over the pale cheek; in another moment it deepened to a most unmistakable blush. (Was it a half-consciousness of Ernest's new method of treatment, or merely the returning blood, that produced

that blush? Let us not inquire.) Next she sighed, opened her eyes, and sat up.

'Oh, you are not dead.'

'No, I don't think so, but I can't quite remember. What was it? Ah, I know,' and she shut her eyes, as though to keep out some horrid sight. Presently she opened them again. 'You have saved my life,' she said. 'If it had not been for you, I should have now been lying crushed at the foot of that dreadful cliff. I am so grateful.'

At that moment Dorothy came back with a little water in Ernest's black hat, for in her hurry she had spilt most of it.

'Here, drink some of this,' she said.

Eva tried to do so; but a billycock hat is not a very convenient drinking-vessel till you get used to it, and she upset more than she swallowed. But what she got down did her good. She put down the

hat, and they all three laughed a little; it was so funny drinking out of an old hat.

'Were you long down there before we came?' asked Dorothy.

'No, not long, only about half a minute on that dreadful bulge.'

'What on earth did you go there for?' said Ernest, putting his dripping hat on to his head, for the sun was hot.

'I wanted to see the bones. I am very active, and thought that I could get up quite safely; but sand is so slippery. Oh, I forgot, look here,' and she pointed to a thin cord that was tied to her wrist.

'What is that?'

'Why, it is tied to such an odd lead box that I found in the sand. Mr. Jones said the other day that he thought it was a bit of an old coffin; but it is not, it is a lead box with a rusty iron handle. I could not move it much; but I had this bit of cord

with me—I thought I might want it getting down, you know—so I tied one end of it to the handle.'

'Let us pull it up,' said Ernest, unfastening the cord from Eva's wrist, and beginning to tug.

But the case was too heavy for him to lift alone ; indeed it proved as much as they could all three manage to drag it to the top. However, up it came at last. Ernest examined it carefully, and came to the conclusion that it was very ancient. The massive iron handle at the top of the oblong case was almost eaten through with rust, and the lead itself was much corroded, although, from fragments that still clung to it, it was evident that it had once been protected by an outer case of oak. Evidently the case had been washed out of the churchyard where it had lain for centuries.

'This is quite exciting,' said Eva, who

was now sufficiently interested to forget all about her escape. 'What can be in it? —treasure or papers, I should think.'

'I don't know,' answered Ernest; 'I should hardly think that they would bury such things in a churchyard. Perhaps it is a small baby.'

'Ernest,' broke in Dorothy, in an agitated way, 'I don't like that thing. I can't tell you why, but I am sure it is unlucky. I wish that you would throw it back to where it came from, or into the sea. It is a horrid thing, and we have nearly lost our lives over it already.'

'Nonsense, Doll, whoever thought that you were so superstitious. Why, perhaps it is full of money or jewels. Let's take it home and open it.'

'I am not superstitious, and you can take it home if you like. I will not touch it; I tell you it is a horrid thing.'

'All right, Doll, then you sha'n't have a share of the spoil. Miss Ceswick and I will divide it. Will you help me to carry it to the house, Miss Ceswick? that is, unless you are afraid of it, like Doll.'

'Oh, no,' she answered, 'I am not afraid; I am dying of curiosity to see what is inside.'

CHAPTER X.

WHAT EVA FOUND.

'YOU are sure you are not too tired?' said Ernest, after a moment's consideration.

'No, indeed, I have quite recovered,' she answered, with a blush.

Ernest blushed too, from sympathy probably, and went to pick up a bough that lay beneath a stunted oak tree which grew in the ruins of the abbey, on the spot where once the altar had stood. This he ran through the iron handle, and directing Eva to catch hold of one end, he took the other himself, and they started for the house, Dorothy marching solemnly in front.

As it happened, Jeremy and Mr. Cardus were strolling along together smoking, when suddenly they caught sight of the cavalcade advancing, and hurried to meet it.

'What is all this?' asked Mr. Cardus of Dorothy, who was now nearly fifty yards ahead of the other two.

'Well, Reginald, it is a long story. First we found Eva Ceswick slipping down the cliff, and pulled her up just in time.'

'My luck again,' thought Jeremy, groaning in spirit. 'I might have sat on the edge of that cliff for ten years, and never got a chance of pulling her up.'

'Then we pulled up that horrid box, which she found down in the sand, and tied a cord to.'

'Yes,' exclaimed Ernest, who was now arriving, 'and would you believe it—Dorothy wanted us to throw it back again.'

'I know I did, I said that it was unlucky, and it is unlucky.'

'Nonsense, Dorothy, it is very interesting. I expect that it will be found to contain deeds buried in the churchyard for safety and never dug up again,' broke in Mr. Cardus, much interested. 'Let me catch hold of that stick, Miss Ceswick, and I dare say that Jeremy will go on and get a hammer and a cold chisel, and we will soon solve the mystery.'

'Oh, very well, Reginald, you will see.'

Mr. Cardus glanced at her. It was curious her taking such an idea. Then they proceeded to the house. On reaching the sitting-room they found Jeremy already there with his hammer and chisel. He was an admirable amateur blacksmith, indeed there were few manual trades of which he did not know a little, and placing the case

on the table, he set about the task of opening it in a most workmanlike manner.

The lead, though it was in places eaten quite away, was still thick and sound near the edges, and it took him a good quarter of an hour's hard chopping to remove what appeared to be the front of the case. Excitement was at its height as it fell forward with a bang on to the table; but it was then found that what had been removed was merely a portion of an outer case, there being beneath it an inner chest, also of lead.

'Well,' said Jeremy, 'they fastened it up pretty well,' and then he set to work again.

This inner skin of lead was thinner and easier to cut than the first had been, and he got through the job more quickly, though not nearly quickly enough for the impatience of the bystanders. At last the front fell out, and disclosed a small cabinet made of solid pieces of black oak, and having a hinged

door, which was fastened by a tiny latch and hasp of the common pattern, that is probably as old as doors are. From this cabinet there came a strong odour of spices.

The excitement was now intense, and seemed to be shared by everybody in the house. Grice had come in through the swing door, and stationed herself in the background; Sampson and the groom were peeping through the window, and even old Atterleigh, attracted by the sound of the hammering, had strolled aimlessly in.

'What can it be?' said Eva with a gasp.

Slowly Jeremy extracted the cabinet from its leaden coverings, and set it on the table.

'Shall I open it?' he said, and suiting the action to the word, he lifted the latch, and placing his chisel between the edge of the little door and its frame, prized the cabinet open.

The smell of spices became more pro-

nounced than ever, and for a moment the cloud of dust that came from them as their fragments rolled out of the cabinet on to the table, prevented the spectators who, all but Dorothy, were crowding up to the case from seeing what it contained. Presently, however, a large whitish bundle became visible. Jeremy put in his hand, pulled it out and laid it on the top of the box. It was heavy. But when he had done this he did not seem inclined to go any further in the matter. The bundle had, he considered, an uncanny look.

At that moment an interruption took place, for Florence Ceswick entered through the open door. She had come up to see Dorothy, and was astonished to find such a gathering.

'Why, what is it all about?' she asked.

Somebody told her in as few words as possible, for everybody's attention was

concentrated on the bundle, which nobody seemed inclined to touch.

'Well, why don't you open it?' asked Florence.

'I think that they are all afraid,' said Mr. Cardus with a laugh.

He was watching the various expressions on the faces with an amused air.

'Well, I am not afraid at any rate,' said Florence. 'Now, ladies and gentlemen, the Gorgon's head is about to be unveiled. Look the other way, or you will all be turned to stone.'

'This is getting delightfully ghastly,' said Eva to Ernest.

'I know that it will be something horrid,' added Dorothy.

Meanwhile Florence had drawn out a heavy pin of ancient make, with which the wrapping of the bundle was fastened, and begun to unwind a long piece of discoloured

linen. At the very first turn another shower of spices fell out. As soon as these had been swept aside, Florence proceeded slowly with her task, and as she removed fold after fold of the linen, the bundle began to take shape and form, and the shape it took was that of a human head.

Eva saw it, and drew closer to Ernest. Jeremy saw it, and felt inclined to bolt. Dorothy saw it, and knew that her presentiments as to the disagreeable nature of the contents of that unlucky case were coming true. Mr. Cardus saw it, and was more interested than ever. Only Florence and Hard-riding Atterleigh saw nothing. Another turn or two of the long winding-sheet, and it slipped suddenly away from whatever it enclosed.

There was a moment's dead silence, as the company regarded the object thus left open to their gaze. Then one of the women

gave a low cry of fear, and actuated by some common impulse, they all turned and broke from the room in terror, and calling, 'It is alive.' No, not all. Florence turned pale, but she stood there by the object, the winding-sheet in her hand, and old Atterleigh also remained staring at it, either paralysed or fascinated.

It too seemed to stare at him, from its point of vantage on the oak chest, in which it had rested for so many centuries.

And this was what he saw there upon the box. Let the reader imagine the face and head of a lovely woman of some thirty years of age, the latter covered with rippling brown locks of great length, above which was set a roughly-fashioned coronet studded with uncut gems. Let him imagine this face, all but the lips, which were coloured red, pale with the bloodless pallor of death, and the flesh so firm and fresh-looking that

it might have been that of a corpse not a day old; so firm indeed, that the head and all its pendant weight of beautiful hair could stand on the unshrunken base of the neck which, in some far past age, cold steel had made so smooth. Then let him imagine the crowning horror of this weird sight. The eyes of a corpse are shut, but the eyes in this head were wide open, and the long black lashes, as perfect now as on the day of death, hung over what appeared, when the light struck them, to be two balls of trembling fire, that glittered and rolled and fixed themselves upon the face of the observer like living human eyes. It was these awful eyes that carried such terror to the hearts of the onlookers when they cast their first glance around, and made them not unnaturally cry out that it was alive.

It was not until he had made a very

careful examination of these fiery orbs, that Mr. Cardus was afterwards able to discover what they were; and as the reader may as well understand at once that this head had nothing about it different from any other skilfully preserved head, he shall be taken into confidence without delay. They were balls of crystal fitted, probably with the aid of slender springs, into the eye-sockets with such infernal art that they shook and trembled to the slightest sound, and even on occasion rolled about. The head itself, he also discovered, had not been embalmed in the ordinary fashion, by extracting the brain and filling the cavity with spices or bitumen, but had been preserved by means of the injection of silica, or some kindred substance, into the brain, veins, and arteries, which, after permeating all the flesh, had solidified and made it like marble. Some brilliant pigment had been

used to give the lips their natural colour, and the hair had been preserved by means of the spices. But perhaps the most dreadful thing about this relic of forgotten ages, was the mocking smile that the artist who 'set it up' had managed to preserve upon the face, a smile that just drew the lips up enough to show the white teeth beneath, and gave the idea that its wearer had died in the full enjoyment of some malicious jest or triumph. It was a terrible thing to look on, that long dead, beautiful face, with its abundant hair, its crowning coronet, its moving crystal eyes, and its smile; and yet there was something awfully fascinating about it; those who had seen it once would always long to see it again.

Mr. Cardus had fled with the rest, but as soon as he got outside the swing-door his common sense reasserted itself, and he stopped.

'Come, come,' he called to the others, 'don't be so silly; you are not going to run away from a dead woman's head, are you?'

'You ran too,' said Dorothy, pulling up and gasping.

'Yes, I know I did; those eyes startled me; but of course they are glass. I am going back; it is a great curiosity.'

'It is an accursed thing,' muttered Dorothy.

Mr. Cardus turned and re-entered the room, and the others, comforting themselves with the reflection that it was broad daylight, and drawn by their devouring curiosity, followed him. That is, they all followed him except Grice, who was ill for two days afterwards. As for Sampson and the groom, who had seen the sight through the window, they ran for a mile or more along the cliff before they stopped.

When they got back into the room, they found old Atterleigh still standing and staring at the crystal eyes, that seemed to be returning his gaze with compound interest, while Florence was there with the long linen wrapper in her hand, gazing down at the beautiful hair that flowed from the head on to the oak box, from the box to the table, and from the table nearly to the ground. It was, oddly enough, of the same colour and texture as her own. She had taken off her hat when she began to undo the wrappings, and they all noticed the fact. Nor did the resemblance stop there. The sharp fine features of the mummied head were very like Florence's; so were the beautiful teeth and the fixed hard smile. The dead face was more lovely indeed, but otherwise the woman of the Saxon era—for to judge from the rude tiara on her brow, it was probable that she was

Saxon—and the living girl of the nineteenth century might have been sisters, or mother and daughter. The resemblance startled them all as they entered the room, but they said nothing.

They drew near, and gazed again without a word. Dorothy was the first to break the silence.

'I think she must have been a witch,' she said. 'I hope that you will have it thrown away, Reginald, for she will bring us bad luck. The place where she was buried has been unlucky; it was a great abbey once, now it is a deserted ruin. When we tried to get the case up, we were all very nearly killed. She will bring us bad luck. I am sure of it. Throw it away, Reginald, throw her into the sea. Look, she is just like Florence there.'

Florence had smiled at Dorothy's words, and the resemblance became more striking

than ever. Eva shuddered as she noticed it.

'Nonsense, Dorothy,' said Mr. Cardus, who was a bit of an antiquarian, and had now forgotten his start in his collector's zeal, 'it is a splendid find. But I forgot,' he added, in a tone of disappointment, 'it does not belong to me, it belongs to Miss Ceswick.'

'Oh, I am sure you are welcome to it, so far as I am concerned,' said Eva hastily. 'I would not have it near me on any account.'

'Oh, very well. I am much obliged to you. I shall value the relic very much.'

Florence had meanwhile moved round the table, and was gazing earnestly into the crystal eyes.

'What are you doing, Florence?' asked Ernest sharply, for the scene was uncanny, and jarred upon him.

'I?' she answered with a little laugh, 'I am seeking an inspiration. That face looks wise, it may teach me something. Besides it is so like my own, I think she must be some far distant ancestress.'

'So she has noticed it too,' thought Ernest.

'Put her back in the box, Jeremy,' said Mr. Cardus. 'I must have an air-tight case made.'

'I can do that,' said Jeremy, 'by lining the old one with lead, and putting a glass front to it.'

Jeremy set about putting the head away, touching it very gingerly. When he had got it back into the oak case, he dusted it and placed it upon a bracket that jutted from the oak panelling at the end of the room.

'Well,' said Florence, 'now that you have put your guardian angel on her pedestal, I

think that we must be going home. Will any of you walk a little way with us?'

Dorothy said that they would all come, that is, all except Mr. Cardus, who had gone back to his office. Accordingly they started, and as they did so, Florence intimated to Ernest that she wished to speak to him. He was alarmed and disappointed, for he was afraid of Florence, and wished to walk with Eva, and presumably his face betrayed what was in his mind to her.

'Do not be frightened,' she said with a slight smile; 'I am not going to say anything disagreeable.'

Of course he replied that he knew that she never could say anything disagreeable at any time, at which she smiled again the same faint smile, and they dropped behind.

'Ernest,' she said presently, 'I want to speak to you. You remember what happened between us two evenings ago on this

very beach,' for they were walking home by the beach.

'Yes, Florence, I remember,' answered Ernest.

'Well, Ernest, the words I have to say are hard for a woman's lips, but I must say them. I made a mistake, Ernest, in telling you that I loved you as I did, and in talking all the wild nonsense that I talked. I don't know what made me do it, some foolish impulse, no doubt. Women are very curious, you know, Ernest, and I think I am more curious than most. I suppose I thought I loved you, Ernest—I know I thought it when you kissed me; but last night, when I saw you at the Smythes' dance, I knew that it was all a mistake, and that I cared for you—no more than you care for me, Ernest. Do you understand me?'

He did not understand her in the least, but he nodded his head, feeling vaguely

that things were turning out very well for him.

'That is right; and so here, in the same place where I said them, I renounce them. We will forget all that foolish scene, Ernest. I made a little mistake when I told you that my heart was as deep as the sea; I find that it is shallow as a brook. But will you answer me one question, Ernest, before we close this conversation?'

'Yes, Florence, if I can.'

'Well, when you—you kissed me the other night, you did not really mean it, did you? I mean you only did so for a freak, or from the impulse of the moment, not because you loved me? Don't be afraid to tell me, because if it was so, I shall not be angry; you see you have so much to forgive me for. I am breaking faith, am I not?' and she looked him straight in the face with her piercing eyes.

Ernest's glance fell under that searching gaze, and the lie that men are apt to think it no shame to use where women are concerned, rose to his lips. But he could not get it out; he could not bring himself to say that he did love her—so he compromised matters.

'I think you were more in earnest than I was, Florence?'

She laughed, a cold little laugh, that somehow made his flesh creep.

'Thank you for being candid: it makes matters so much easier, does it not? But, do you know, I suspected as much, when I was standing there by that head to-day, just at the time that you took Eva's hand.'

Ernest started visibly. 'Why, your back was turned,' he said.

'Yes, but I saw what you did reflected in the crystal eyes. Well, do you know, as I stood there, it seemed to me as though

I could consider the whole matter as dispassionately and with as clear a brain as though I had been that dead woman. All of a sudden I grew wise. But there are the others waiting for us.'

'We shall part friends, I hope, Florence,' said Ernest, anxiously.

'Oh yes, Ernest, a woman always follows the career of her old admirer with the deepest interest, and for about five seconds you were my admirer, when you kissed me, you know. I shall watch all your life, and my thoughts shall follow your footsteps like a shadow. Good night, Ernest, good night'—and again she smiled that mocking smile that was so like that on the features of the dead woman, and fixed her piercing eyes upon his face. He bade her good night, and made his way homewards with the others, feeling an undefinable dread heavy on his heart.

CHAPTER XI.

DEEP WATERS.

IN due course Jeremy duly fitted up the 'witch,' as the mysterious head came to be called at Dum's Ness, in her air-tight cabinet, which he lengthened till it looked like a clock-case, in order to allow the beautiful hair to hang down at full length: retaining, however, the original door and ancient latch and hasp. His next step was to fit the plate-glass front, and exhaust the air as well as was feasible from the interior of the case. Then he screwed on the outside door, and stood it back on its bracket in the oak-panelled sitting-room, where, as

has been said, it looked for all the world like an eight-day clock-case.

Just as he had finished the job, a visitor —it was Mr. de Talor—came in, and remarked that he had made a precious ugly clock. Jeremy, who disliked *the* de Talor, as he called him, excessively, said that he would not say so when he had seen the works, and at the same time unhasped the oak door of the cabinet, and turned the full glare of the dreadful crystal eyes on to his face. The results were startling. For a moment de Talor stared and gasped: then all the rich hues faded from his features, and he sank back in a sort of fit. Jeremy shut up the door in a hurry, and his visitor soon recovered; but for years nothing would induce him to enter that room again.

As for Jeremy himself, at first he was dreadfully afraid of 'the witch,' but as time went on, for his job took him several days,

he seemed to lose his awe of her, and even to find a fearful joy in her society. He spent whole hours as he sat in his workshop in the yard, tinkering at the air-tight case, in weaving histories in which this beautiful creature, whose head had been thus marvellously recovered, played the leading part. It was so strange to look at her lovely, scornful face, and think that long ages since, men had loved it, and kissed it, and played with the waving hair.

There it was, this relic of the dead, preserved by the consummate skill of some old monk or chemist, so that it retained all its ancient beauty long after the echoes of the tragedy with which it must have been connected, had died out of the world. For as he wrought at his case, Jeremy grew certain that it was the ghastly memento of some enormous crime; indeed, by degrees, as he tacked and hammered at the lead lining, he

made up a history that was quite satisfactory to his mind, appealing on doubtful points to the witch herself, who was perched on the table near him, and ascertaining whether she meant 'yes' or 'no,' by the simple process of observing whether or not her eyes trembled when he spoke. It was slow work getting the story together in this fashion, but then the manufacture of the case was slow also, and it was not without its charm, for he felt it an honour to be taken into the confidence of so lovely a lady.

But if the head had a fascination for Jeremy, it had a still greater charm for his grandfather. The old man would continually slip out of the office and cross the yard to the little room where Jeremy worked, in order to stare at this wonderful relic. One night, indeed, when the case was nearly finished, Jeremy remembered that he had not locked the door of his

workshop. He was already half-undressed, but slipping on his coat again, he went out by the back door and crossed the yard carrying the key with him. It was bright moonlight, and Jeremy, having slippers on, walked without noise. When he reached the workshop, and was about to lock the door, he thought he heard a sound in the room. This startled him, and for a moment he meditated retreat, leaving the head to look after itself. Those eyes were interesting in the day-time, but he scarcely cared to face them alone at night. It was foolish, but they did look so very much alive. After a moment's hesitation, during which the sound, whatever it was, again made itself audible, he determined to compromise matters by going round to the other side of the room and looking in at the little window. With a beating heart he stole round, and quietly peeped in. The moonlight was

shining bright into the room, and struck full upon the long case he had manufactured. He had left it *shut*, and the head inside it. Now it was open, he could clearly see the white outlines of the face, and the direful glitter of the trembling eyes. The sound too—a muttering sound—was still going on. Jeremy drew back, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and for the second time thought of flight. But his curiosity overcame him, and he looked again. This time he discovered the cause of the muttering. Seated upon his carpentering bench was his grandfather, old Atterleigh, who appeared to be staring with all his might at the head, and muttering incoherently to himself. This was the noise he had heard through the door. It was an uncanny sight, and made Jeremy feel cold down the back. Whilst he was still contemplating it, and wondering what

to do, old Atterleigh rose, closed the case, and left the room. Jeremy slipped round, locked up the door, and made his way back to bed much astonished. He did not, however, say anything of what he had seen, only in future he was careful never to leave the door of his workshop open.

At last the case was finished, and for an amateur, a very good job he made of it. When it was done he placed it as already narrated, back on the bracket, and showed it to Mr. de Talor.

But from the day when Eva Ceswick nearly fell to the bottom of the cliff in the course of her antiquarian researches, things began to go wrong at Dum's Ness. Everybody felt it except Ernest, and he was thinking too much of other things. Dorothy was very unhappy in those days, and began to look thin and miserable,

though she sturdily alleged, when asked, that she never had been better in her life. Jeremy himself was also unhappy, and for a good reason. He had caught the fever that women like Eva Ceswick have it in their power to give to the sons of men, badly enough. His was a deep, self-contained nature, very gentle and tender, not admitting many things into its affections, but loving such as were admitted with all the heart and soul and strength. And it was in the deepest depths of this loyal nature that Eva Ceswick had printed her image; before he knew it, before he had time to think, it was photographed there upon his heart, and he felt that there it must stay for good or evil: *that* plate could never be used again.

She had been so kind to him; her eyes had grown so bright and friendly when she saw him coming. He was sure that

she liked him (which indeed she did), and once he had ventured to press her little hand, and he had thought that she returned the pressure, and had not slept all night in consequence.

But perhaps this was a mistake. And then, just as he was getting on so nicely, came Ernest, and scattered his hopes like mists before the morning sun. From the moment that those two met, he knew that it was all up with his chance. And next, to make assurance doubly sure, Providence itself, in the shape of a shilling, had declared against him, and he was left lamenting. Well, it was all fair; but still it was very hard, and for the first time in his life he felt inclined to be angry with Ernest. Indeed, he was angry, and the fact made him more unhappy than ever, because he knew that his anger was unjust, and because his brotherly love condemned it.

But for all that, the shadow between them grew darker.

Mr. Cardus, too, had his troubles, connected, needless to say—for nothing else ever really troubled him—with his monomania of revenge. Mr. de Talor, of whose discomfiture he had at last made sure, had unexpectedly slipped out of his power, nor could he at present see any way in which to draw him back again. Consequently he was distressed. As for Hard-riding Atterleigh, ever since he had found himself fixed by the 'witch's' crystal eye, he had been madder than ever, and more perfectly convinced that Mr. Cardus was the devil in person .Indeed Dorothy, who watched over the old man, the grandfather who never knew her, thought that she observed a marked change in him. He worked away at his writing as usual; but it appeared to her with more vigour, as though it were

a thing to encounter, and get rid of. He would cut the notches out of his stick calendar, too, more eagerly than heretofore, and altogether it seemed as though his life had become dominated by some new purpose. She called Mr. Cardus' attention to this change; but he laughed, and said that it was nothing, and would probably pass with the moon.

But if nobody else was happy Ernest was, that is, except when he was sunk in the depths of woe, which was on an average about three days a week. On the occasion of the first of these seizures, Dorothy, noting his miserable aspect and entire want of appetite, felt much alarmed, and took an occasion after supper to ask him what was the matter. Before many minutes were over she had cause to regret it; for Ernest burst forth with a history of his love and his wrongs that lasted for an hour. It

appeared that another young gentleman, one of those who danced with the lovely Eva at the Smythes' ball, had been making the most unmistakable advances; he had called—three times: he had sent flowers—twice (Ernest sent them every morning, beguiling Sampson into cutting the best orchid blooms for that purpose); he had been out walking—once. Dorothy listened quietly, till he ceased of his own accord. Then she spoke.

'So you really love her, Ernest?'

'Love her! I'—but we will not enter into a description of this young man's raptures. When he had done, Dorothy did a curious thing. She rose from her chair, and coming to where Ernest was sitting, bent over him, and kissed him on the forehead, and as she did so he noticed vaguely that she had great black rings round her eyes.

'I hope that you will be happy, my dear

brother. You will have a lovely wife, and I think that she is as good as she is beautiful.' She spoke quite quietly, but somehow her voice sounded like a sob. He kissed her in acknowledgment, and she glided away.

Ernest did not think much of the incident, however. Indeed in five minutes his thoughts were back with Eva, with whom he really was seriously and earnestly in love. In sober truth, the antics that he played were enough to make the angels weep to see a human being possessing the normal weight of brain making such a donkey of himself. For instance, he would promenade for hours at night in the neighbourhood of the Cottage. Once he ventured into the garden to enjoy the perfect bliss of staring at six panes of glass, got severely bitten by the house-dog for his pains, and was finally chased for a mile or more by both the dog and the policeman, who, having heard of the

mysterious figure that was to be seen mooning (in every sense of the word) round the Cottage, had lain up to watch for him. Next day he had the satisfaction of hearing from his adored's own lips the story of the attempted burglary, but as she told it there was a smile playing about the corners of her mouth that almost seemed to indicate that she had her suspicions as to who the burglar was. And then Ernest walked so very lame, which, considering that the teeth of a brute called Towzer had made a big hole in his calf, was not to be wondered at.

After this he was obliged to give up his midnight sighing, but he took it out in other ways. Once indeed without warning he flopped down on to the floor and kissed Eva's hand, and then, aghast at his own boldness, fled from the room.

At first all this amused Eva greatly.

She was pleased at her conquest, and took a malicious pleasure in leading Ernest on. When she knew that he was coming she would make herself look as lovely as possible, and put on all her pretty little ways and graces in order to more thoroughly enslave him. Somehow, whenever Ernest thought of her in after years as she was at that period of her life, his memory would call up a vision of her in the pretty little drawing-room at the Cottage, leaning back in a low chair in such a way as to contrive to show off her splendid figure to the best advantage, and also the tiny foot and slender ankle that peeped from beneath her soft white dress. There she sat, a little Skye-terrier called 'Tails' on her lap, with which his rival had presented her but a fortnight before, and—yes—actually kissing the brute at intervals, her eyes shining all the time with innocent coquetry. What

would not Ernest have given to occupy for a single minute the position of that unappreciative Skye-terrier. It was agony to see so many kisses wasted on a dog, and Eva, seeing that he thought so, kissed the animal more vigorously than ever.

At last he could stand it no longer. 'Put that dog down,' he said peremptorily.

She obeyed him, and then, remembering that he had no right to dictate to her what she should do, made an effort to pick it up again; but 'Tails,' who, be it added, was not used to being kissed in private life, and thought the whole operation rather a bore, promptly bolted.

'Why should I put the dog down?' she asked, with a quick look of defiance.

'Because I hate to see you kissing it, it is so effeminate.'

He spoke in a masterful way; it was a touch of the curb, and there are few things

a proud woman hates so much as the first touch of the curb.

'What right have you to dictate what I shall or shall not do?' she asked, tapping her foot upon the floor.

Ernest was very humble in those days, and he collapsed.

'None at all. Don't be angry, Eva' (it was the first time that he had called her so, till now she had always been Miss Ceswick), 'but the fact was I could not bear to see you kissing that dog; I was jealous of the brute.'

Whereupon she blushed furiously and changed the subject. But after a while Eva's coquettishness began to be less and less marked. When they met she no longer greeted him with a smile of mischief, but with serious eyes that once or twice, he thought, bore traces of tears. At the same time she threw him into despair by her coldness. Did he venture a tender

remark, she would pretend not to hear it; —alas that the mounting blood should so obstinately proclaim that she did! Did he touch her hand, it was cold and unresponsive. She was quieter too, and her reserve frightened him. Once he tried to break it, and began some passionate appeal, but she rose without answering and turned her face to the window. He followed her, and saw that her dark eyes were full of tears. This he felt was even more awful than her coldness, and fearing that he had offended her, he obeyed her whispered entreaty and went. Poor boy! he was very young. Had he had a little more experience he might perhaps have found means to brush away her tears and his own doubts. It is a melancholy thing that such opportunities should, as a rule, present themselves before people are old enough to take advantage of them.

The secret of all this change of conduct was not far to seek. Eva had played with edged tools till she cut her fingers to the bone. The dark-eyed boy who danced so well and had such a handsome, happy face had become very dear to her. She had begun by playing with him, and now, alas, she loved him better than anybody in the world. That was the sting of the thing; she had fallen in love with a *boy* as young as herself—a boy too who, so far as she was aware, had no particular prospects in life. It was humiliating to her pride to think that she, who had already, in the few months that she had been 'out' in London, before her cousins rose up and cast her forth, had the satisfaction of seeing one or two men of middle age and established position at her feet, and the further satisfaction of requesting them to kneel there no more, should in the

upshot have to strike her colours to a boy of twenty-one, even though he did stand six feet high, and had more wits in his young head and more love in his young heart than all her middle-aged admirers put together.

Perhaps, though she was a woman grown, she was not herself quite old enough to appreciate the great advantage it is to any girl to stamp her image upon the heart of the man she loves whilst the wax is yet soft and undefaced by the half-worn-out marks of many shallow dies; perhaps she did not know what a blessing it is to be able to really *love* a man at all, young, middle-aged, or old. Many women wait till they cannot love without shame to make that discovery. Perhaps she forgot that Ernest's youth was a fault that would mend day by day, and he had abilities, which, if she would consent to inspire them,

might lead him to great things. At any rate, two facts remained in her mind after much thinking; she loved him with all her heart, and she was ashamed of it.

But as yet she could not make up her mind to any fixed course. It would have been easy to crush poor Ernest, to tell him that his pretensions were ridiculous, to send him away, or to go away herself, and so to make an end of a position that she felt was getting absurd, and which we may be sure her elder sister Florence did nothing to make more pleasant. But she could not do it, that was the long and short of the matter. The idea of living without Ernest made her feel cold all over, it seemed to her that the only hours that she really did live were the hours that they spent together, and that when he went away he took her heart with him. No, she could not make up her mind to that, the thought was too

cruel. Then there was the other alternative, to encourage him a little and become engaged to him, to brave everything for his sake. But as yet she could not make up her mind to that either.

Eva Ceswick was very loving, very sweet, and very good, but she did not possess a determined mind.

CHAPTER XII.

DEEPER YET.

WHILE Ernest was wooing and Eva doubting, Time, whose interest in earthly affairs is that of the sickle in the growing crop, went on his way as usual.

The end of August came, as it has come so many thousand times since this globe gave its first turn in space, as it will come for many thousand times more, till at last, its appointed course run out, the world darkens, quivers, and grows still; and behold, Ernest was still wooing, Eva still doubting.

One evening—it was a very beautiful evening—this pair were walking together

on the sea-shore. Whether they met by appointment or by accident does not matter; they did meet, and there they were, strolling along together, as fully charged with intense feeling as a thunder-cloud with electricity, and almost as quiet. The storm had not yet burst.

To listen to the talk of these two, they might have met for the first time yesterday. It was chiefly about the weather.

Presently, in the course of their wanderings, they came to a little sailing-boat drawn up upon the beach—not far up, however, just out of the reach of the waves. By this boat, in an attitude of intense contemplation, there stood an ancient mariner. His hands were in his pockets, his pipe was in his mouth, his eyes were fixed upon the deep. Apparently he did not notice their approach till they were within two yards of him. Then he turned, 'dashed' himself, and

asked the lady, with a pull of his grizzled forelock, if she would not take a sail.

Ernest looked surprised.

'How's the wind?' he asked.

'Straight off shore, sir; will turn with the turn of the tide, sir, and bring you back.'

'Will you come for a bit of a sail, Eva?'

'Oh, no, thank you. I must be getting home; it is seven o'clock.'

'There is no hurry for you to get home. Your aunt and Florence have gone to tea with the Smythes.'

'Indeed I cannot come; I could not think of such a thing.'

Her words were unequivocal, but the ancient mariner put a strange interpretation upon them. First he hauled up the little sail, and then, placing his brown hands against the stern of the boat, he rested his weight upon them, and caused her to travel far enough into the waves to float her bow.

'Now, miss.'

'I am not coming, indeed.'

'*Now*, miss.'

'I will *not* come, Ernest.'

'Come,' said Ernest, quietly holding out his hand to help her in.

She took it and got in. Ernest and the mariner gave a strong shove, and as the light boat took the water the former leaped in, and at the same second a puff of wind caught the sail and took them ten yards out or more.

'Why, the sailor is left behind,' said Eva.

Ernest gave a twist to the tiller to get the boat's head straight off shore, and then leisurely looked round. The mariner was standing as they had found him, his hands in his pockets, his pipe in his mouth, his eyes fixed upon the deep.

'He doesn't seem to mind it,' he said, meditatively.

'Yes, but I do; you must go back and fetch him.'

Thus appealed to, Ernest went through some violent manœuvres with the tiller, without producing any marked effect on the course of the boat, which by this time had got out of the shelter of the cliff, and was bowling along merrily.

'Wait till we get clear of the draught from the cliff, and I will bring her round.'

But when at last they were clear from the draught of the cliff, and he slowly got her head round, lo and behold, the mariner had vanished.

'How unfortunate!' said Ernest, getting her head towards the open sea again; 'he has probably gone to his tea.'

Eva tried hard to get angry, but somehow she could not, she only succeeded in laughing.

'If I thought that you had done this on

purpose, I would never come out with you again.'

Ernest looked horrified. 'On purpose!' he said, and the subject dropped.

They were sitting side by side in the stern-sheets of the boat, and the sun was just dipping all red-hot into the ocean. Under the lee of the cliff there were cool shadows, before them was a path of glory that led to a golden gate. The air was very sweet, and for those two all the world was lovely, there was no sorrow on the earth, there were no storms upon the sea.

Eva took off her hat and let the sweet breeze play upon her brow. Then she leant over the side, and, dipping her hand into the cool water, watched the little track it made.

'Eva.'

'Yes, Ernest.'

'Do you know I am going away?'

The hand was withdrawn with a start.

'Going away! when?'

'The day after to-morrow, to France.'

'And when are you coming back again?'

'I think that depends upon you, Eva.'

The hand went back into the water. They were a mile or more from the shore now. Ernest manipulated the sail and tiller so as to sail slowly parallel with the coast-line. Then he spoke again.

'Eva.'

No answer.

'Eva, for God's sake look at me!'

There was something in his voice that forced her to obey. She took her hand out of the water and turned her eyes on to his face. It was pale, and the lips were quivering.

'I love you,' he said, in a low, choked voice.

She grew angry. 'Why did you bring

me here? I will go home. This is nonsense, you are nothing but a boy!'

There are moments in life when the human face is capable of conveying a more intense and vivid impression than any words, when it seems to speak to the very soul in a language of its own. And so it was with Ernest now; he made no answer to her reproaches, but if that were possible, his features grew paler yet, and his eyes, shining like stars, fixed themselves upon her, and drew her to him. And what they said she and he knew alone, nor could any words convey it, for the tongue in which they talked is not spoken in this world.

A moment still she wavered, fighting against the sweet mastery of his will with all her woman's strength, and then—oh heaven! it was done, and his arms were round about her, her head upon his breast,

and her voice was lost in sobs and broken words of love.

Oh, radiant-winged hour of more than mortal joy, the hearts where thou hast lit will know when their time comes that they have not beat quite in vain!

And so they sat, those two, quite silent, for there seemed to be no need for speech; words could not convey half they had to say, and indeed, to tell the honest truth, their lips were for the most part otherwise employed.

Meanwhile the sun went down, and the golden moon arose over the quiet sea, and turned their little ship to silver. Eva gently disengaged herself from his arms, and half rose to look at it; she had never thought it half so beautiful before. Ernest looked at it too. It is a way that lovers have.

'Do you know the lines?' he said; 'I think I can say them.'

With a swifter motion,
Out upon the ocean,
Heaven above and round us, and you alone with me;
Heaven around and o'er us,
The Infinite before us,
Floating on for ever, upon the flowing sea.'

'Go on,' she said, softly.

'What time is it, dear, now?
We are in the year now
Of the New Creation, one million, two or three:
But where are we now, love?
We are as I trow, love,
In the Heaven of Heavens, upon the Crystal Sea.'

'That is how I hope it may be with us, dear,' she said, taking his hand as the last words passed his lips.

'Are you happy now,' he asked her.

'Yes, Ernest, I am happy indeed. I do not think that I shall ever be so happy again; certainly I never was so happy before. Do you know, dear, I wish to tell you so, that you may see how mean I have been; I have fought so hard against my love for you?

He looked pained. 'Why?' he asked.

'I will tell you quite truly, Ernest—because you are so young. I was ashamed to fall in love with a boy, and yet you see, dear, you have been too strong for me.'

'Why, there is no difference in our ages.'

'Ah, Ernest, but I am a woman, and ever so much older than you. We age so much quicker, you know. I feel about old enough to be your mother,' she said, with a pretty assumption of dignity.

'And I feel quite old enough to be your lover,' he replied impertinently.

'So it seems. But, Ernest, if three months ago anybody had told me that I should be in love to-day with a boy of twenty-one, I would not have believed them. Dear, I have given you all my heart, you will not betray it, will you? You know very young men are apt to change their minds.'

He flushed a little as he answered, feeling that it was tiresome to have the unlucky fact that he was only twenty-one so persistently thrust before him.

'Then they are young men who have not had the honour of winning your affections. A man who had once loved you could never forget you. Indeed, it is more likely that you will forget me; you will have plenty of temptation to do so.'

She saw that she had vexed him. 'Don't be angry, dear; but you see the position is a very difficult one, and if I could not be quite sure of you, it would be intolerable.'

'My darling, you may be as sure of me as woman can be of man; but don't begin your doubts over again. They are settled now. Let us be quite happy just this one evening. No doubt there are plenty coming when we shall not be able to.'

And so they kissed each other and sailed

on, homewards, alas! for it was getting late, and were perfectly happy.

Presently they drew near the shore, and there at the identical spot where they had left him stood the Ancient Mariner. His hands were in his pockets, his pipe was in his mouth, his eyes were fixed upon the deep.

Ernest grounded the little boat skilfully enough, and jumping over the bow he and the Mariner pulled it up. Then Eva got out, and as she did so she thought, in the moonlight, she noticed something resembling a twinkle in the latter's ancient eye. She felt confused—there is nothing so confusing as a guilty conscience—and to cover her confusion plunged into conversation—while Ernest was finding some money to pay for the boat.

'Do you often let boats?' she asked.

'No, miss, only to Mr. Ernest in a general

way' (so that wicked Ernest had set a trap to catch her).

'Oh, then, I suppose you go out fishing?'

'No, miss, only for rikkration, like.'

'Then, what do you do?'—she was getting curious on the point.

'Times I does nothing; times I stands on the beach and sees things; times I runs cheeses, miss.'

'Run cheeses!'

'Yes, miss, Dutch ones.'

'He means that he brings cargoes of Dutch cheeses to Harwich.'

'Oh!' said Eva.

Ernest payed the man, and they turned to go. She had not got many yards when she felt a heavy hand laid upon her shoulder. Turning round in astonishment she perceived the Mariner.

'I say, miss,' he said in a hoarse whisper.

'Well, what?'

'*Niver you eat the rind of a Dutch cheese.* I says it as knows.'

Eva never forgot his advice.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. CARDUS UNFOLDS HIS PLANS.

'ERNEST,' said Mr. Cardus on the morning following the events described in the previous chapter, 'I want to speak to you in my office, and you too, Jeremy.'

They both followed him into his room wondering what was up. He sat down and so did they, and then, as was his habit, letting his eyes stray over every part of their persons except their faces, he began:

'It is time that you two fellows took to doing something for yourselves. You must not learn to be idle men, not that most young men require much teaching in that way. What do you propose to do?'

Jeremy and Ernest stared at one another rather blankly, but apparently Mr. Cardus did not expect an answer; at any rate he went on before either of them could frame one.

'You don't seem to know, never gave the matter any consideration probably; quite content to obey the Bible literally, and take no thought for the morrow. Well, it is lucky that you have somebody to think for you. Now I will tell you what I propose for you both. I want you, Ernest, to go to the Bar. It is a foolish profession for most young men to take to, but it will not be so in your case, because, as it happens, if you show yourself capable, I shall by degrees be able to put a good deal of business in your hands—Chancery business—for I have little to do with any other. I daresay that you will wonder where the business is to come from. I don't seem to do very much here,

do I? with a mad old hunting man as a clerk, and Dorothy to copy my private letters; but I do for all that. I may as well tell you both in confidence that this place is only the head centre of my business. I have another office in London, another at Ipswich, and another at Norwich, though they all carry on business under different names; besides which I have other agencies of a different nature. But all this is neither here nor there. I have communicated with Aster, the great Chancery man, and he will have a vacancy in his Chambers next term. Let me see—Term begins on November 2nd; I propose, Ernest, to write to-day to enter you at Lincoln's Inn. I shall make you an allowance of three hundred a year, which you must clearly understand you must not exceed. I think that is all I have to say about the matter.'

'I am sure I am very much obliged to

you, uncle,' began Ernest, fervently, for since the previous evening he had clearly realized that it was necessary for him to make a beginning of doing something.

But his uncle cut him short.

'All right, Ernest, we will understand all that. Now, Jeremy, for you. I propose that you shall be articled to me, and if you work well and prove useful, it is my intention in time to admit you to a share of the business. In order that you may not feel entirely dependent, it is my further intention to make you an allowance also, on the amount of which I have not yet settled.'

Jeremy groaned in spirit at the thought of becoming a lawyer, even with a 'share of the business,' but he remembered his conversation with Dorothy, and thanked Mr. Cardus with the best grace that he could muster.

'All right then; I will have the articles prepared at once, and you can take to your stool in the office next week. I think that is all I have to say.'

Acting on this hint, the pair were departing, Jeremy in the deepest state of depression, induced by the near prospect of that stool, when Mr. Cardus called Ernest back.

'I want to speak to you about something else,' he said, thoughtfully. 'Shut the door.'

Ernest turned cold down his back, and wondered if his uncle could have heard anything about Eva. He had the full intention of speaking to him about the matter, but it would be awkward to be boarded himself before he had made up his mind what to say. He shut the door, and then walking to the glass entrance to the orchid blooming house, stood looking at the flowers, and waiting for Mr. Cardus to

begin. But he did not begin, he seemed to be lost in thought.

'Well, uncle,' he said at last.

'It is a delicate business, Ernest, but I may as well get it over. I am going to make a request of you, a request to which I beg you will give me no immediate answer, for from its nature it will require the most anxious and careful consideration. I want you to listen, and say nothing. You can give me your answer when you come back from abroad. At the same time, I must tell you, that it is a matter that I trust you will not disappoint me in; indeed, I do not think that you could be so cruel as to do so. I must also tell you that if you do, you must prepare to be a great loser, financially speaking.'

'I have not the faintest idea what you are driving at, uncle,' said Ernest, turning from the glass-door to speak.

'I know you have not. I will tell you. Listen; I will tell you a little story. Many years ago a great misfortune overtook me, a misfortune so great that it struck me as lightning sometimes does a tree; it left the bark sound, but turned the heart to ashes. Never mind what the details were, they were nothing out of the common; such things sometimes happen to men and women. The blow was so severe that it almost turned my brain, so from that day I gave myself to revenge. It sounds melodramatic, but there was nothing of the sort about it. I had been cruelly wronged, and I determined that those who had wronged me should taste of their own medicine. With the exception of one man they have done so. He has escaped me for a time, but he is doomed. To pass on. The woman who caused the trouble—for wherever there is trouble, there is generally a woman who

causes it—had children. Those children are Dorothy and her brother. I adopted them. As time went on, I grew to love the girl for her likeness to her mother. The boy I never loved; to this hour I cannot like him, though he is a gentleman, which his father never was. I can, however, honestly say that I have done my duty by him. I have told you all this in order that you may understand the request which I am going to make. I trust to you never to speak of it, and if you can to forget it. And now for the request itself.'

Ernest looked up wonderingly.

'It is my most earnest desire that you should marry Dorothy.'

His listener started violently, turned quite pale, and opened his lips to speak. Mr. Cardus lifted his hand and went on:

'Remember what I asked you. Pray say nothing; only listen. Of course I cannot

force you into this or any other marriage. I can only beg you to give heed to my wishes, knowing that they will in every way prove to your advantage. That girl has a heart of gold; and if you marry her you shall inherit nearly all my fortune, which is now very large. I have observed that you have lately been about a great deal with Eva Ceswick. She is a handsome woman, and very likely has taken some hold upon your fancy. I warn you that any entanglement in that direction would be most disagreeable to me, and would to a great extent destroy your prospects, so far as I am concerned.'

Again Ernest was about to speak, and again his uncle stopped him.

'I want no confidences, Ernest, and had much rather that no words passed between us that we might afterwards regret. And now I understand that you are going abroad

with your friend Batty for a couple of months. When you return you shall give me your answer about Dorothy. In the mean while here is a cheque for your expenses, what is over you can spend as you like. Perhaps you have some bills to pay.'

He gave him a folded cheque, and then went on.

'Now leave me, as I am busy.'

Ernest walked out of the room in a perfect maze. In the yard he mechanically unfolded the cheque. It was for a large sum—two hundred and fifty pounds. He put it in his pocket, and began to reflect upon his position, which was about as painful as a position can well be. Truly he was on the horns of a dilemma; probably before he was much older, one of them would have pierced him. For a moment he was about to return to his uncle and tell him all the truth, but on reflection he could not see

what was to be gained by such a course. At any rate it seemed to him that he must first consult Eva, whom he had arranged to meet on the beach at three o'clock; there was nobody else whom he could consult, for he was shy of talking about Eva to Jeremy, or Dolly.

The rest of that morning went very ill for Ernest, but three o'clock came at last, and found him at the trysting-place.

About a mile on the further side of Kesterwick, that is, two miles or so from Titheburgh Abbey, the cliff jutted out into the sea in a way that corresponded very curiously with the little promontory known as Dum's Ness, the reason of its resistance to the action of the waves being that it was at this spot composed of an upcrop of rock of a more durable nature than the sandstone and pebbles of the remainder of the line of cliff. Just at the

point of this promontory the waves had worn a hollow in the rock, that was locally dignified by the name of the cave. For two hours or more at high tide this hollow was under water, and it was therefore impossible to pass the headland except by boat, but during the rest of the day it formed a convenient grotto or trysting-place, the more so, as anybody sitting in it was quite invisible either from the beach, the cliff above, or indeed, unless the boat was quite close in shore, the sea in front.

Here it was that Ernest had arranged to meet Eva, and on turning the rocky corner of the cave he found her sitting on a mass of fallen rock waiting for him. At the sight of her beautiful form he forgot all his troubles, and when rising to greet him, blushing like the dawn, she lifted her pure face for him to kiss, there was not a happier lad in England. Then

she made room for him beside her—the rock was just wide enough for two—and he placed his arm round her waist, and for a minute or two she laid her head upon his shoulder, and they were very happy.

'You are early,' he said at last.

'Yes; I wanted to get away from Florence and have a good think. You have no idea how unpleasant she is; she seems to know everything. For instance, she knew that we went out sailing together last evening, for this morning at breakfast she said in the most cheerful way that she hoped that I enjoyed my moonlight sail last night.'

'The deuce she did; and what did you say?'

'I said that I enjoyed it very much, and luckily my aunt did not take any notice.'

'Why did you not say at once that we were engaged? We *are* engaged, you know.'

'Yes—that is, I suppose so.'

'Suppose so! There is no supposition about it. At least, if we are not engaged, what are we?'

'Well, you see, Ernest, it sounds so absurd to say that one is engaged to a boy. I love you, Ernest, love you dearly, but how can I say that I am engaged to you?'

Ernest rose in great wrath. 'I tell you what it is, Eva, if I am not good enough to acknowledge, I am not good enough to have anything to do with. A boy indeed; I am one-and-twenty; that is full age. Confound it all, you are always talking about my being so young, just as though I should not get old fast enough. Can't you wait for me a year or two?' he asked, with tears of mortification in his eyes.

'Oh, Ernest, Ernest, do be reasonable, there's a dear; what is the good of getting angry and making me wretched? Come

and sit down here, dear, and tell me, am *I* not worth a little patience? There is not the slightest possibility, so far as I can see, of our getting married at present, so the question is, if it is of any use to trumpet an engagement that will only make us the object of a great deal of gossip, and which perhaps your uncle would not like.'

'Oh, by Jove!' he said, 'that reminds me,' and sitting down beside her again he told her the story of the interview with his uncle. She listened in silence.

'This is all very bad,' she said when he had finished.

'Yes, it is bad enough, but what is to be done?'

'There is nothing to be done at present.'

'Shall I make a clean breast of it to him?'

'No, no, not now, it will only make

matters worse. We must wait, dear. You must go abroad for a couple of months, as you had arranged, and then when you come back we must see what can be arranged.'

'But, my dearest, I cannot bear to leave you; it makes my heart ache to think of it.'

'Dear, I know that it is hard, but it must be done. You could not stop here now very well without speaking out about our—our engagement, and to do that would only be to bring your uncle's anger on you. No, you had better go away, Ernest, and meanwhile I will try to get into Mr. Cardus' good graces, and if I fail, then when you come back we must agree upon some plan. Perhaps by that time you will take your uncle's view of the matter, and want to marry Dorothy. She would make you a better wife than I shall, Ernest, my dear.'

'Eva, how can you say such things; it is not kind of you?'

'Oh, why not? It is true. Oh, yes, I know that I am better looking, and that is what you men always think of, but she has more brains, more fixity of mind, and perhaps, for all I know, more heart than I have, though for the matter of that, I feel as if I was all heart just now. Really, Ernest, you had better transfer your allegiance. Give me up, and forget me, dear; it will save you much trouble. I know that there is trouble coming; it is in the air. Better marry Dorothy, and leave me to fight my sorrow out alone. I will release you, Ernest,' and she began to cry at the bare idea.

'I shall wait to give you up until you have given me up,' said Ernest, when he had found means to stop her tears; 'and as for forgetting you, I can never do that.

Please, dear, don't talk so any more, it pains me.'

'Very well, Ernest; then let us vow eternal fidelity instead; but, my dear, I *know* that I shall bring you trouble.'

'It is the price that men have always paid for the smiles of women like you,' he answered. 'Trouble may come, so be it, let it come, at any rate I have the consciousness of your love. When I have lost that, then and then only shall I think that I have bought you too dear.'

In the course of his after life these words often came back to Ernest's mind.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOOD-BYE.

THERE are some scenes, trivial enough very likely in themselves, that yet retain a peculiar power of standing out in sharp relief, as we cast our mind's eye down the long vista of our past. The group of events with which these particular scenes were connected may have long ago vanished from our mental sight, or faded into a dim and misty uniformity, and be as difficult to distinguish one from the other as the trees of a forest viewed from a height. But here and there an event, a sensation, or a face will stand out as perfectly clear as if it had been that moment

experienced, felt, or seen. Perhaps it is only some scene of our childhood, such as a fish darting beneath a rustic bridge, and the ripple which its motion left upon the water. We have seen many larger fish dart in many fine rivers since then, and have forgotten them, but somehow that one little fish has kept awake in the storehouse of our brain, where most things sleep, though none are really obliterated.

It was in this clear and brilliant fashion that every little detail of the scene was indelibly photographed on Ernest's mind when, on the morning following their meeting in the cave, he said good-bye to Eva before he went abroad. It was a public good-bye, for, as it happened, there was no opportunity for the lovers to meet alone. They were all gathered in the little drawing-room at the Cottage: Miss Ceswick seated on a straight-backed chair in the bow-window, Ernest on

one side of the round table, looking intensely uncomfortable, Eva on the other, a scrap-book in her hand, which she studiously kept before her face, and in the background, leaning carelessly over the back of a chair in such a way that her own face could not be seen, though she could survey everybody else's, was Florence. Ernest, from where he sat, could just make out the outline of her olive face, and the quick glance of her brown eyes.

And so they sat for a long time; but what was said he could not remember, it was only the scene that imprinted itself upon his memory.

And then at last the fatal moment came —he knew that it was time to go, and said good-bye to Miss Ceswick, who made some remark about his good fortune in going to France and Italy, and warned him to be careful not to lose his heart to a foreign

girl. Then he crossed the room and shook hands with Florence, who smiled coolly in his face, and read him through with her piercing eyes; and last of all came to Eva, who dropped her album and a pocket-handkerchief in her confusion as she rose to give him her hand. He stooped and picked them up—the album he placed on the table, the little lace-edged handkerchief he crumpled up in the palm of his left hand and kept; it was almost the only souvenir he had of her. Then he took her hand, and for a moment looked into her face. It wore a smile, but beneath it the features were wan and troubled. It was so hard to go.

'Well, Ernest,' said Miss Ceswick, 'you two are taking leave of each other as solemnly as though you were never going to meet again.'

'Perhaps they never will,' said Florence,

in her clear voice; and at that moment Ernest felt as though he hated her.

'You should not croak, Florence; it is unlucky,' said Miss Ceswick.

Florence smiled.

Then Ernest dropped the cold hand, and turning, left the room. Florence followed him, and snatching a hat from the pegs, passed into the garden before him. When he was half-way down the garden walk, he found her ostensibly picking some carnations.

'I want to speak to you for a minute, Ernest,' she said; 'turn this way with me,' and she led him past the bow-window, down a small shrubbery-walk about twenty paces long. 'I must offer you my congratulations,' she went on. 'I hope that you two will be happy. Such a handsome pair ought to be happy, you know.'

'Why, Florence, who told you?'

'Told me! nobody told me. I have seen it all along. Let me see, you first took a fancy to one another on the night of the Smythes' dance, when she gave you a rose, and then next day you saved her life quite in the romantic and orthodox way. Well, and then events took their natural course, till one evening you went out sailing together in a boat. Shall I go on?'

'I don't think it is necessary, Florence. I am sure I don't know how you know all these things.'

She had stopped, and was standing slowly picking a carnation to pieces leaf by leaf.

'Don't you?' she answered, with a laugh. 'Lovers are blind; but it does not follow that other people are. I have been thinking, Ernest, that it is very fortunate that I found out my little mistake before you discovered yours. Supposing I really had

cared for you, the position would have been awkward now, would it not?'

Ernest was forced to admit that it would.

'But luckily, you see, I do not. I am only your true friend now, Ernest; and it is as a friend that I wish to say a word to you about Eva—a word of warning.'

'Go on.'

'You love Eva, and Eva loves you, Ernest, but remember this, she is weak as water. She always was so from a child; those beautiful women often are; nature does not give them everything, you see.'

'What do you mean?'

'What I say, nothing more. She is very weak, and you must not be surprised if she throw you over.'

'Good heavens, Florence! why, she loves me with all her heart!'

'Yes; but women often think of other things beside their hearts. But there, I

don't want to frighten you, only I would not quite pin *all* my faith to Eva's constancy, however dearly you may think she loves you. Don't look so distressed, Ernest; I did not wish to pain you. And remember that, if any difficulty should arise between Eva and you, you will always have me on your side. You will always think of me as your true friend, won't you, Ernest?' and she held out her hand.

He took it. 'Indeed I will,' he said.

They had turned now, and again reached the bow-window, one of the divisions of which stood open. Florence touched his arm and pointed into the room. He looked in through the open window. Miss Ceswick had gone, but Eva was still at her old place by the table. Her head was down upon the table, resting on the album he had picked up, and he could see from the motion of her shoulders that she was sobbing

bitterly. Presently she lifted her face—it was all stained with tears—only, however, to drop it again. Ernest made a motion as though he would enter the house, but Florence stopped him.

'Best leave her alone,' she whispered; and then, when they were well past the window, added aloud, 'I am sorry that you saw her like that; if you should never meet again, or be separated for a very long time, it will leave a painful recollection in your mind. Well, good-bye. I hope that you will enjoy yourself.'

Ernest shook hands in silence — there was a lump in his throat, that prevented him from speaking—and then went on his way, feeling utterly miserable. As for Florence, she put up her hand to shade her keen eyes from the sun, and watched him till he turned the corner with a look of intense love and longing, which slowly

changed into one of bitter hate. When he was out of sight she turned, and making her way to her bedroom, flung herself upon the bed, and burying her face in the pillow to stifle the sound of her sobbing, gave way to an outburst of jealous rage that was almost awful in its intensity.

Ernest had only just time to get back to Dum's Ness, and go through the form of eating some luncheon, before he was obliged to start to catch his train. Dorothy had packed his things, and made all those little preparations for his journey that women think of, so, after going to the office to bid good-bye to his uncle, who shook him heartily by the hand, and bade him not forget the subject of their conversation, he had nothing to do but jump into the cart and start. In the sitting-room he found Dorothy waiting for him, with his coat and gloves, also

Jeremy, who was going to drive to the station with him. He put on his coat in silence; they were all quite silent; indeed, he might have been going for a long sojourn in a deadly climate, instead of a two months' pleasure tour, so depressed was everybody.

'Good-bye, Doll dear,' he said, stooping to kiss her, but she shrank away from him. In another minute he was gone.

At the station a word or two about Eva passed between Jeremy and himself.

'Well, Ernest,' asked the former nervously, 'have you pulled it off?'

'With her?'

'Of course; who else?'

'Yes, I have. But, Jeremy—'

'Well.'

'I don't want you to say anything about it to anybody at present.'

'Very good.'

I say, old fellow,' Ernest went on, after a pause, 'I hope you don't mind very much.'

'If I said I did not mind, Ernest,' he answered, slowly turning his honest eyes full on to his friend's face, 'I should be telling a lie. But I do say this. As I could not win her myself, I am glad that you have, because next to her I think I love you better than anybody in the world. You always had the luck, and I wish you joy. Here's the train.'

Ernest wrung his hand. 'Thank you, old chap,' he said, 'you are a downright good fellow, and a good friend too. I know I have had the luck, but perhaps it is going to turn. Good-bye.'

Ernest's plans were to sleep in London, and to leave on the following morning, a Wednesday, for Dieppe *viâ* Newhaven, which place he expected to reach about five

or six in the afternoon. There he was to meet his friend on Thursday, when they were to start upon their tour through Normandy, and thence wherever their fancy led them.

This programme he carried out to the letter, at least the first part of it. On his way from Liverpool Street Station to the rooms where he had always slept on the few occasions that he had been in London, his hansom passed down Fleet Street, and got blocked opposite No. 19. His eye caught the number, and he wondered what there was about it familiar to him. Then he remembered that 19, Fleet Street, was the address of Messrs. Goslings and Sharpe, the bankers on whom his uncle had given him the cheque for £250. Bethinking himself that he might as well cash it, he stopped the cab and entered the bank. As he did so, the cashier was just leaving his desk, for

it was past closing hour; but he courteously took Ernest's crossed cheque, and though it was for a large sum, cashed it without hesitation. Mr. Cardus' name was evidently well known in the establishment. Ernest proceeded on his journey with a crisp little bundle of Bank of England notes in his breast-pocket, a circumstance that, in certain events of which at that moment he little dreamed, proved of the utmost service to him.

It will not be necessary for us to follow him in his journey to Dieppe, which very much resembled other people's journeys. He arrived there safely enough on Wednesday afternoon, and proceeding to the best hotel, took a room, and inquired the hour of the *table-d'hôte*.

In the course of the voyage from Newhaven, Ernest had fallen into conversation with a quiet foreign-looking man, who spoke

English with a curious little accent. This gentleman, for there was no doubt about his being a gentleman, was accompanied by a boy about nine years of age, remarkable for his singularly prepossessing face and manners, whom Ernest rightly judged to be his son. Mr. Alston, for such he discovered his companion's name to be, was a middle-aged man, not possessed of any remarkable looks or advantages of person, nor in any way brilliant-minded. But nobody could know Mr. Alston for long without discovering that, his neutral tints notwithstanding, he was the possessor of an almost striking individuality. From his open way of talking, Ernest guessed that he was a colonial, for he had often noticed at college that colonials are much less reserved than Englishmen proper are bred up to be. He soon learnt that Mr. Alston was a Natal colonist, now, for the first time,

paying a visit to the old country. He had, until lately, held a high position in the Natal Government Service; but having unexpectedly come into a moderate fortune through the death of an aged lady, a sister of his father in England, he had resigned his position in the service; and after his short visit 'home,' as colonists always call the mother country, even when they have never seen it, intended to start on a big game shooting expedition in the country, between Secocœni's country and Delagoa Bay.

All this Ernest learnt before the boat reached the harbour at Dieppe and they separated. He was, however, pleased when, having seen his luggage put into his room, he went into the little courtyard of the hotel and found Mr. Alston standing there with his son, and looking rather puzzled.

'Hullo!' said Ernest, 'I am glad that you have come to this hotel. Do you want anything?'

'Well, yes, I do. The fact of the matter is, I don't understand a word of French, and I want to find my way to a place that my boy and I have come over here to see. If they talked Zulu or Sisutu, you see, I should be equal to the occasion; but to me French is a barbarous tongue. Here is the address, 36 Rue Saint Honor.'

'St. Honoré,' suggested Ernest. 'I can talk French, and if you like, I will go with you. The *table-d'hôte* is not till seven, and it is not six yet.'

'It is very kind of you.'

'Not at all. I have no doubt that you would show me the way about Zululand, if ever I wandered there.'

'Ay, that I would, with pleasure;' and they started.

It was with considerable difficulty that Ernest discovered the place, for the address that Mr. Alston had, had been written down a dozen years before, and in France, the land of revolutions, streets often change their names once or twice in a decade. Finally, however, he found it; it was now called the 'Rue de la Republique,' which republic does not matter. It was a quaint, out-of-the-way little street, an odd mixture of old private houses and shops, most of which seemed to deal in the carved ivory ware for which Dieppe is famous. At last they came to No. 36, a grey old house standing in its own grounds. Mr. Alston scanned it eagerly.

'That is the place,' he said; 'she often told me of the coat-of-arms over the doorway—a mullet impaled with three squirrels; there they are. I wonder if it is still a school.'

Ernest crossed the road and asked an old bourgeois, who was standing in the doorway of his shop, taking the air after his day's labour, if the house opposite was a school.

"But certainly not, Monsieur; it is a convent; the holy sisters lived there. But stop, Monsieur had reason; it used to be a girls' school before the last revolution. Monsieur could, no doubt, see over the old place; the holy sisters were hospitable, oh, most hospitable.'

Armed with this information, Ernest returned to his friends; and in due course they were admitted to the place, and allowed to wander round the ancient walled garden, with every nook of which Mr. Alston seemed to be perfectly acquainted.

'There is the tree under which she used to sit,' he said sadly, to his boy, pointing out an old yew-tree, under which there stood a rotting bench.

'Who?' asked Ernest, much interested.

'My dead wife, that boy's mother,' he said with a sigh. 'There, I have seen it. Let us go.'

CHAPTER XV.

ERNEST GETS INTO TROUBLE.

WHEN Mr. Alston and Ernest reached the hotel, there was still a quarter of an hour to elapse before the *table-d'hôte*, so after washing his hands and putting on a black coat, Ernest went down into the salon. There was only one other person in it, a tall fair Frenchwoman, apparently about thirty years of age. She was standing by the empty fire-place, her arm upon the mantelpiece, and a lace pocket-handkerchief in her hand; and Ernest's first impression of her was that she was handsome and much overdressed. There was a Figaro upon the mantelpiece, which he desired

to get possession of. As he advanced for this purpose, the lady dropped her handkerchief. Stooping down, he picked it out of the grate and handed it to her.

'Mille remercîments, Monsieur,' she said, with a little curtsey.

'De tout, Madame?'

'Ah, Monsieur, parle français?'

'Mais oui, Madame.'

And then they drifted into a conversation, in the course of which Ernest learnt that Madame thought Dieppe very dull; that she had been there three days with her friends, and was nearly dead *de tristesse;* that she was going, however, to the public dance at the Entertainment Rooms that night. 'Of course Monsieur would be there;' and many other things, for Madame had a considerable command of language.

In the middle of all this the door opened,

and another lady of much the same cut as Madame entered, followed by two young men. The first of these had a face of the commonplace English type, rather a good-humoured face; but when he saw the second Ernest started, it was so like his own, as his would become if he were to spend half a dozen years in drinking, dicing, late hours, and their concomitants. The man to whom this face belonged was evidently a gentleman, but he looked an ill-tempered one, and very puny and out of health, at least so thought Ernest.

'It is time for dinner, Camille,' said the gentleman to Madame, at the same time favouring Ernest with a most comprehensive scowl.

Madame appeared not to understand, and made some remark to Ernest.

'It is time for dinner, Camille,' said the gentleman again in a savage voice. This

time she lifted her head and looked at him.

'*Din-nare, dinnare*, qu'est que c'est que *din-nare?*'

'Table-d'hôte,' said the gentleman.

'Oh, pardon,' and with a little bow and most fascinating smile to Ernest, she took the gentleman's extended arm and sailed away.

'Why did you pretend not to understand me?' Ernest heard him ask, and saw her shrug her shoulders in reply. The other gentleman followed with his companion, and after him came Ernest. When he reached the *salle-à-manger* he found that the only chair vacant at the table was one next to his friend of the salon. Indeed, had he thought of it, it might have struck him that Madame had contrived to keep that chair vacant, for on his approach she gathered together the folds of her silk dress, which

had almost hidden it, and welcomed him with a little nod.

Ernest took the chair, and forthwith Madame entered into a most lively conversation with him, a course of proceeding that appeared to be extremely distasteful to the gentleman on her right, who pished and pshawed and pushed away his plate in a manner that soon became quite noticeable. But Madame talked serenely on, quite careless of his antics, till at last he whispered something to her that caused the blood to mount to her fair cheek.

'Mais tais-toi donc,' Ernest heard her answer, and next moment—the subsequent history of our hero demands that the truth should be told—it was his turn to colour, for, alas, there was no doubt about it, he distinctly felt Madame's little foot pressed upon his own. He took up his wine and drank a little to hide his confusion, but

whether he had or had not the moral courage to withdraw from the situation by placing his toes under the more chilly but safe guardianship of the chair legs, history sayeth not; let us hope and presume that he had. But if this was so or no, he did not get on very well with his dinner, for the situation was novel and not conducive to appetite. Presently Mr. Alston, who was sitting opposite, addressed him across the table.

'Are you going to the Assembly Rooms here to-night, Mr. Kershaw?'

To Ernest's surprise the gentleman on the other side of Madame answered with an astonished look—

'Yes, I am going.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Alston, 'I was speaking to the gentleman on your left.'

'Oh, indeed, I thought you said Kershaw!'

'Yes, I did, the gentleman's name is Kershaw, I think.'

'Yes,' put in Ernest, 'my name is Kershaw.'

'That is odd,' said the other gentleman, 'so is mine. I did not know that there were any other Kershaws.'

'Nor did I,' answered Ernest, 'except Sir Hugh Kershaw,' and his face darkened as he pronounced the name.

'I am Sir Hugh Kershaw's son, my name is Hugh Kershaw,' was the reply.

'Indeed! Then we are cousins, I suppose, for I am his nephew, the son of his brother Ernest.'

Hugh Kershaw the elder did not receive this intelligence with even the moderate amount of enthusiasm that might have been expected, he simply lifted his scanty eyebrows, and said, 'Oh, I remember, my uncle left a son;' then he turned

and made some remark to the gentleman who sat next him that made the latter laugh.

Ernest felt the blood rise to his cheeks; there was something very insolent about his cousin's tone.

Shortly afterwards the dinner came to an end, and Madame, with another fascinating smile, retired. As for Ernest, he smoked a pipe with Mr. Alston, and about nine o'clock strolled over with him to the Assembly Rooms or Casino, a building largely composed of glass, where thrice a week, during the season, the visitors at Dieppe adjourned to dance, flirt, and make merry.

One of the first sights that caught his eye was a fair creature in evening dress, and with conspicuously white shoulders, in whom he recognized Madame. She was sitting near the door, and appeared to be

watching it. Ernest bowed to her, and was about to pass on; but, pursuing her former tactics, she dropped the bouquet she was carrying. He stooped, picked it up, returned it, and again made as though he would pass on, when she addressed him, just as the band struck up.

'Ah, que c'est belle la musique! Monsieur, valse n'est ce pas?'

In another minute they were floating down the room together. As they passed along Ernest saw his cousin standing in the corner looking at him with no amiable air. Madame saw his glance.

'Ah,' she said, 'Monsieur Hugh ne valse pas, il se grise; il a l'air jaloux, n'est ce pas?'

Ernest danced three times with this fair enslaver, and with their last waltz the ball came to an end. Just then his cousin came up, and they all, including Mr. Alston,

walked together down the street, which was now quite deserted, to the door of the hotel. Here Ernest said good night to Madame, who extended her hand. He took it, and as he did so he felt a note slipped into it, which, not being accustomed to such transactions, he clumsily dropped. It was the ball programme, and there was something written across it in pencil. Unfortunately he was not the only one who saw this; his cousin Hugh, who had evidently been drinking, saw it too, and tried to pick up the programme, but Ernest was too quick for him.

'Give me that,' said his cousin, hoarsely.

Ernest answered by putting it into his pocket.

'What is written on that programme?'

'I don't know.'

'What have you written on that programme, Camille?'

'Mon dieu, mais vous m'ennuyez!' was the answer.

'I insist upon your giving me that,' with an oath.

'Monsieur est "*gentleman.*" Monsieur ne la rendra pas,' said Madame, with a meaning glance, and then turning she entered the hotel.

'I am not going to give it you,' said Ernest.

'You shall give it to me.'

'Is this lady your wife?' asked Ernest.

'That is my affair; give me that note.'

'I shall not give it to you,' said Ernest, whose temper was rapidly rising. 'I don't know what is on it, and I don't wish to know; but whatever it is, the lady gave it to me, and not to you. She is not your wife, and you have no right to ask for it.'

His cousin Hugh turned livid with fury. At the best of times he was an evil-tem-

pered man, and now, inflamed as he was by drink and jealousy, he looked a perfect fiend.

'D—— you,' he hissed, 'you half-bred cur, I suppose that you get your —— manners from your —— of a mother.'

He did not get any further, for at this point Ernest knocked him into the gutter and then stood over him, very quiet and pale, and told him that if ever he dared to let a disrespectful word about his mother pass his lips again, he (Ernest) would half kill him (Hugh). Then he let him get up.

Hugh Kershaw rose, and turning, whispered something to his friend who had sat next him at dinner, a man about thirty years of age, and with a military air about him. His friend listened and pulled his large moustache thoughtfully. Then he addressed Ernest with the utmost politeness.

'I am Captain Justice of the — Hussars. Of course, Mr. Kershaw, you are aware that you cannot indulge yourself in the luxury of knocking people down without hearing more about it, especially,' he added, with emphasis, 'on this side of the water. Have you any friend with you?'

Ernest shook his head as he answered: 'This,' indicating Mr. Alston, who had been an attentive observer of everything that had passed, 'is the only gentleman I know in the town, and I cannot ask him to mix himself up in my quarrels.' Ernest was beginning to understand that this quarrel was a very serious business.

'All right, my lad,' said Mr. Alston, quietly, 'I will stand by you.'

'Really, I have no right,' began Ernest.

'Nonsense, it is one of our colonial customs to stick by one another.'

'Mr. Justice—'

'Captain Justice,' put in that gentleman with a bow.

'Captain Justice, my name is Alston, I am very much at your service.'

Captain Justice turned to Hugh Kershaw, whose clothes were dripping from the water in the gutter, and after whispering with him for a moment, said aloud, 'If I were you, Kershaw, I should go and change those clothes, you will catch cold;' and then, addressing Mr. Alston, 'I think the smoking-room is empty; shall we go and have a chat?'

Mr. Alston assented, and they went in together. Ernest followed, but having lit his pipe, sat down in a far corner of the room. Presently Mr. Alston called him.

'Look here, Kershaw, this is a serious business, and as you are principally concerned, I think that you had better give your own answer. To be brief, your cousin,

Mr. Hugh Kershaw, demands that you should apologize in writing for having struck him.'

'I am willing to do that if he will apologize for the terms he used in connection with my mother.'

'Ah!' said the gallant Captain, 'the young gentleman is coming to reason.'

'He also demands that you should hand over the note you received from the lady.'

'That I certainly shall not do,' he answered, and drawing the card from his pocket, he tore it into fragments, unread.

Captain Justice bowed and left the room. In a few minutes he returned, and addressing Mr. Alston and Ernest, said—

'Mr. Kershaw is not satisfied with what you offer to do. He declines to apologize for any expression that he may have used with reference to your mother, and he now

wishes you to choose between signing an apology which I shall dictate, or meeting him to-morrow morning. You must remember that we are in France, where you cannot insult a man on the payment of forty shillings.'

Ernest felt the blood run to his heart. He understood now what Captain Justice meant. He answered simply—

'I shall be very happy to meet my cousin in whatever place and way you and Mr. Alston may agree upon,' and then he returned to his chair, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of his pipe and an entirely new set of sensations.

Captain Justice gazed after him pityingly. 'I am sorry for him,' he said to Mr. Alston; 'Kershaw is, I believe, a good shot with pistols. I suppose you will choose pistols, it would be difficult to get swords in such a hurry. He is a fine young fellow, took it

coolly, by George! Well, I don't think that he will trouble the world much longer.'

'This is a silly business, and likely to land us all in a nasty mess. Is there no way out of it?'

'None that I know of, unless your young friend will eat dirt. He is a nasty-tempered fellow, Kershaw, and wild about that woman, over whom he has spent thousands. Nor is he likely to forgive being rolled in the gutter. You had better get your man to give in, for if you don't Kershaw will kill him.'

'It is no good talking of it. I have lived a rough life, and know what men are made of. He is not of that sort. Besides, your man is in the wrong, not that boy. If anybody spoke of my mother like that *I* would shoot him.'

'Very good, Mr. Alston. And now about the pistols; I have none.'

'I have a pair of Smith and Wesson revolvers, that I bought yesterday to take out to Africa with me. They throw a very heavy bullet, Captain Justice.'

'Too heavy. If one of them is hit anywhere in the body—' He did not finish his sentence.

Mr. Alston nodded. 'We must put them twenty paces apart, to give them a chance of missing. And now about the place and the time.'

'I know a place on the beach, about a mile and a half from here, that will do very well. You go down that street till you strike the beach, then turn to your right, and follow the line of the sea till you come to a deserted hut or cottage. There we will meet you.'

'At what time?'

'Let me see! shall we say a quarter to five? It will be light enough for us then.'

'Very good. The Newhaven boat leaves at half-past six. I am going to see about getting my things ready to go to meet it. I should advise you to do the same, Captain Justice. We had better not return here after it is over.'

'No.'

And then they parted.

Luckily, the manager of the hotel had not gone to bed, so the various parties concerned were able to pay their bills and make arrangements about their luggage being sent to meet the early boat without exciting the slightest suspicion. Ernest wrote a note, and left it to be given to his friend when he should arrive on the morrow, in which he stated mysteriously that business had called him away. He could not help smiling to himself sadly when he thought that his business might be of a sort that it would take all eternity to settle.

Then he went to his room and wrote two letters, one to Eva, and one to Dorothy. Mr. Alston was to post them if anything happened to him. The first was of a passionate nature, and breathed hopes of reunion in another place—ah, how fondly the poor human heart clings to that idea!—the second collected and sensible enough. The letters finished, he, following Mr. Alston's advice, undressed and took a bath, then he said his prayers—the prayers his mother had taught him—put on a quiet dark suit of clothes, and went and sat by the open window. The night was very still, and fragrant with the sweet strong breath of the sea. Not a sound came from the quaint town beneath, all was at peace. Ernest, sitting there, wondered whether he would live to see another night, and if not, what the nights were like in the land whither he was journeying.

And as he thought of it the grey damps that hide that unrisen world from our gaze, struck into his soul and made him feel afraid. Not afraid of death, but afraid of the empty loneliness beyond it—of the cold air of an infinite space in which nothing human can live. Would his mother meet him there, he wondered, or would she put him from her, coming with blood upon his hands? And then he thought of Eva, and in his solitude a tear gathered in his dark eyes. It seemed so hard to go to that other place without her.

CHAPTER XVI.

MADAME'S WORK.

PRESENTLY the eastern sky began to be barred with rays of light, and Ernest knew that the dawn was near.

Rising with a sigh, he made his last preparations, inwardly determining that if he was to die, he would die in a way befitting an English gentleman. There should be no sign of his fears on his face when he looked at his adversary's pistol.

Presently there came a soft knock at the door, and Mr. Alston entered with his shoes off. In his hand he held a case containing the two Smith & Wessons.

'We must be off presently,' he said. 'I

just heard Captain Justice go down. Look here, Kershaw, do you understand anything about these?' and he tapped the Smith & Wessons.

'Yes; I have often practised with a pair of old duelling pistols at home. I used to be a very fair shot with them.'

'That is lucky. Now take one of these revolvers; I want to give you a lesson, and accustom you to handle it.'

'No, I will not. It would not be fair on the other man. If I did, and killed him, I should feel like a murderer.'

'As you like; but I am going to tell you something, and give you a bit of advice. These revolvers are hair-triggered; I had the scears filed. When the word is given, bring the barrel of your pistol down till you get the sight well on to your antagonist somewhere about his chest, then *press* the trigger, do not pull it, remember that. If

you do as I tell you, he will never hear the report. Above all, do not lose your nerve; and don't be sentimental and fire in the air, or any such nonsense, for that is a most futile proceeding, morally, and in every other way. Mark my words, if you do not kill him he will kill you. He intends to kill you, and you are in the right. Now we must be going. Your luggage is in the hall, is it not?'

'All except this bag.'

'Very good; bring it down with you. My boy will bring it to the boat with my own. If you are not hit, you will do well to get out of this as soon as possible. I mean to make for Southampton as straight as I can. There is a vessel sailing for South Africa on Friday morning; I shall embark in her. We will settle what you are to do afterwards.'

'Yes,' said Ernest with a smile, 'there is no need to talk of that at present.'

Five minutes afterwards they met in the hall, and slipped quietly out through the door that always stood open all night for the accommodation of visitors addicted to late hours. Following the street that Captain Justice had pointed out, they soon reached the beach, and turning to the right, walked along it leisurely. The early morning air was very sweet, and all nature smiled dimly upon them as they went, for the sun was not yet up; but at that moment Ernest did not think much of the beauty of the morning. It all seemed like a frightful dream. At last they came to the deserted hut, looming large in the grey mist. By it stood two figures.

'They are there already,' said Mr. Alston.

As they approached the two figures lifted their hats, a compliment which they returned. Then Mr. Alston went to Captain Justice and fell into conversation with him,

and together they paced off a certain distance on the sand, marking its limits with their walking-sticks. Ernest noticed that it was about the length of a short cricket-pitch.

'Shall we place them?' he heard Captain Justice say.

'Not just yet,' was the reply; 'there is barely light enough.'

'Now, gentlemen,' said Mr. Alston, presently, 'I have prepared in duplicate a paper setting forth as fairly as I can the circumstances under which this unhappy affair has come about. I propose to read it to you, and to ask you all to sign it, as a protection to—to us all. I have brought a pen and a pocket ink-pot with me for that purpose.'

Nobody objected, so he read the paper. It was short, concise, and just, and they all signed it as it stood. Ernest's hand shook a good deal as he did so.

'Come, that won't do,' said Mr. Alston encouragingly, as he pocketed one copy of the document after handing the other to Captain Justice. 'Shake yourself together, man!'

But for all his brave words he looked the more nervous of the two.

'I wish to say,' began Ernest, addressing himself to all the other three, 'that this quarrel is none of my seeking. I could not in honour give up the note the lady wrote to me. But I feel that this is a dreadful business, and if you,' addressing his cousin, 'are ready to apologize for what you said about my mother, I am ready to do the same for attacking you.'

Mr. Hugh Kershaw smiled bitterly, and turning, said something to his second. Ernest caught the words 'white feather.'

'Mr. Hugh Kershaw refuses to offer any apology; he expects one,' was Captain Justice's ready answer.

'Then if any blood is shed, on his head be it,' said Mr. Alston, solemnly. 'Come, let us get it over.'

Each took his man and placed him by one of the sticks, and then handed him a revolver.

'Stand sideways, and remember what I told you,' whispered Mr. Alston.

'Are you ready, gentlemen?' asked Captain Justice presently.

There was no answer; but Ernest felt his heart stand still, and a mist gathered before his eyes. At that moment he heard a lark rise into the air near him and begin to sing. Unless he could get his sight back he felt that he was lost.

'*One!*' The mist cleared away from his eyes; he saw his adversary's pistol-barrel pointing steadily at him.

'*Two!*' A ray broke from the rising sun, and caught a crystal pin Hugh Kershaw

incautiously wore. Instinctively he remembered Mr. Alston's advice, and lowered the sight of his long barrel till it was dead on the crystal pin. Curiously enough it reminded him at the moment of the eyes in the witch's head at Dum's Ness. His vital forces rose to the emergency, and his arm grew as steady as a rock. Then came a pause that seemed hours long.

'*Three!*' There was a double report, and Ernest became aware of a commotion in his hair. Hugh Kershaw flung up his arms wildly, sprang a few inches off the ground, and fell backwards. Great God, it was over!

Ernest staggered a moment from the reaction, and then ran with the others towards his cousin—nay, towards what had been his cousin. He was lying on his back upon the sand, his wide-opened eyes staring up at the blue sky, as though to trace the

flight of the spirit, his arms extended. The heavy revolver ball had struck near the crystal pin, and then passed upwards through the throat and out at the base of the head, shattering the spinal column.

'He is dead,' said Captain Justice, solemnly.

Ernest wrung his hands.

'I have killed him,' he said—'I have killed my own cousin.'

'Young man,' said Mr. Alston, 'do not stand there wringing your hands, but thank Providence for your own escape. He was very near killing you, let me tell you. Is your head cut?'

Instinctively Ernest took off his hat, and as he did so some fragments of his curly hair fell to the ground. There was a neat hole through the felt, and a neat groove along his thick hair. His cousin *had* meant to kill him; and he *was* a good shot, so

good that he thought that he could put a ball through Ernest's head. But he forgot that a heavy American revolver, with forty grains of powder behind the ball, is apt to throw a trifle high.

And then they all stood silent and looked at the body; and the lark that had been frightened by the noise began to sing again.

'This will not do,' said Mr. Alston, presently. 'We had better move the body in there,' and he pointed to the deserted hut. 'Captain Justice, what do you intend to do?'

'Give myself up to the authorities, I suppose,' was the gallant captain's scared answer.

'Very well; then there is no need for you to be in a hurry about that. You must give us time to get clear first.'

They lifted the corpse, reverently bore it into the deserted hut, and laid it

on the floor. Ernest remained standing looking at the red stain where it had been. Presently they came out again, and Mr. Alston kicked some sand over the stain and hid it.

'Now,' he said, 'we had better make an addition to those documents, to say how this came about.'

They all went back to the hut, and the addition was made, standing there by the body. When it came to Ernest's turn to sign, he almost wished that his signature was the one missing from the foot of that ghastly post-scriptum. Mr. Alston guessed his thoughts.

'The fortune of war,' he said, coolly.

'Now, Captain Justice, we are going to catch the early boat, and we hope that you will not give yourself up before midday, if you can help it. The inquiry into the affair will not then be held before to-morrow; and by eleven to-morrow morning

I hope to have seen the last of England for some years to come.'

The Captain was a good fellow at bottom, and had no wish to see others dragged into trouble.

'I shall certainly give myself up,' he said; 'but I don't see any reason to hurry about it. Poor Hugh! he can well afford to wait,' he added, with a sigh, glancing down at the figure that lay so still, with a coat thrown over the face. 'I suppose that they will lock me up for six months—pleasant prospect. But I say, Mr. Kershaw, you had better keep clear; it will be more awkward for you. You see, he was your cousin, and by his death you become, unless I am mistaken, next heir to the title.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' said Ernest, vaguely.

'Come, we must be off,' said Mr. Alston, 'or we shall be late for the boat,' and bowing to Captain Justice, he left the hut.

Ernest followed his example, and when he had gone a few yards glanced round at the hateful spot. There stood Captain Justice in the doorway of the hut, looking much depressed, and there, a few yards to the left, was the impress in the sand, that marked where his cousin had fallen. He never saw either the man or the place again.

'Kershaw,' said Mr. Alston, 'what do you propose doing?'

'I don't know.'

'But you must think; remember you are in an awkward fix. You know by English law duelling is murder.'

'I think I had better give myself up like Captain Justice.'

'Nonsense; you must hide away somewhere for a year or two till the row blows over.'

'Where am I to hide?'

'Have you any money, or can you get any?'

'Yes, I have nearly two hundred and fifty pounds on me now.'

'My word, that is fortunate! Well, now, what I have to suggest is, that you should assume a false name, and sail for South Africa with me. I am going up-country on a shooting expedition, outside British territory, so there will be little fear of your being caught. Then in a year or so, when the affair is forgotten, you can come back to England. What do you say to that?'

'I suppose I may as well go there as anywhere else. I shall be a marked man all my life, anyhow. What does it matter where I go?'

'Ah, you are down on your luck now; by-and-by you will cheer up again.'

Just then they met a fisherman, who gazed at them, wondering what the two

foreign gentlemen were doing out walking at that hour; but concluding that, after the mad fashion of Englishmen, they had been to bathe, he passed them with a civil 'Bonjour.' Ernest coloured to the eyes under the scrutiny; he was beginning to feel the dreadful burden of his secret. Presently they reached the steamer, and found Mr. Alston's little boy, Roger, who, though he was only nine years old, was as quick and self-reliant as many English lads of fourteen, waiting for them by the bridge.

'Oh, here you are, father; you have been walking so long that I thought you would miss the boat. I have brought the luggage down all right, and this gentleman's too.'

'That's right, my lad. Kershaw, do you go and take the tickets, I want to get rid of this;' and he tapped the revolver-case, that was concealed beneath his coat.

Ernest did so, and presently met Mr.

Alston on the boat. A few minutes more and, to his intense relief, she cast off and stood out to sea. There were not very many passengers on board, and those there were, were too much taken up in making preparations to be sea-sick to take any notice of Ernest. And yet he could not shake himself free from the idea that everybody knew that he had just killed a man. His own self-consciousness was so intense that he saw his guilt reflected on the faces of all he met. He gazed around him in awe, expecting every moment to be greeted as a murderer. Most people who have ever done anything they should not, are acquainted with this sensation. Overcome with this idea, he took refuge in his berth, nor did he emerge therefrom till the boat put in at Newhaven. There both he and Mr. Alston bought some rough clothes, and to a great extent succeeded in disguising

themselves; and then made their way across country to Southampton in the same train, but in separate carriages. Reaching Southampton without let or hindrance, they agreed to take passages in the Union Company's R.M.S. 'Moor,' sailing on the following morning. Mr. Alston obtained a list of the passengers; fortunately there was nobody among them whom he knew. For greater security, however, they took steerage passages, and booked themselves under assumed names. Ernest took his second Christian name, and figured on the passenger list as E. Beyton, whilst Mr. Alston and his boy assumed the name of James. They took their passages at different times, and feigned to be unknown to each other.

At last the vessel sailed, and it was with a sigh of relief that Ernest saw his native shores fade from view. As they disappeared, a fellow-passenger, valet to a

gentleman going to the Cape for his health, politely offered him a paper to read. It was the 'Standard' of that day's date. He took it and glanced at the foreign intelligence. The first thing that caught his eye was the following paragraph, headed 'A fatal duel.'

'The town of Dieppe has been thrown into a state of consternation by the discovery of the body of an English gentleman, who was this morning shot dead in a duel. Captain Justice of the —— Hussars, who was the unfortunate gentleman's second, has surrendered himself to the authorities. The other parties, who are at present unknown, have absconded. It is said that they have been traced to Newhaven; but there all trace of them has been lost. The cause of the duel is unknown, and in the present state of excitement it is difficult to obtain authentic information.'

By the pilot who left the vessel, Ernest despatched two letters, one to Eva Ceswick, and the other—which contained a copy of the memoranda drawn up before and after the duel, and attested by Mr. Alston—to his uncle. To both he told the story of his misfortune, fully and fairly, imploring the former not to forget him, and to wait for happier times, and asking the forgiveness of the latter for the trouble that he had brought upon himself and all belonging to him. Should they wish to write to him, he gave his address as Ernest Beyton, Post-office, Maritzburg.

The pilot-boat hoisted her brown sail with a huge white P. upon it, and vanished into the night; and Ernest, feeling that he was a ruined man, and with the stain of blood upon his hands, crept to his bunk and wept like a child.

Yesterday he had been loved, prosperous,

happy, with a bright career before him. To-day he was a nameless outcast, departing into exile, and his young life shadowed by a cloud in which he could see no break.

Well might he weep; it was a hard lesson.

END OF VOL. I.

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