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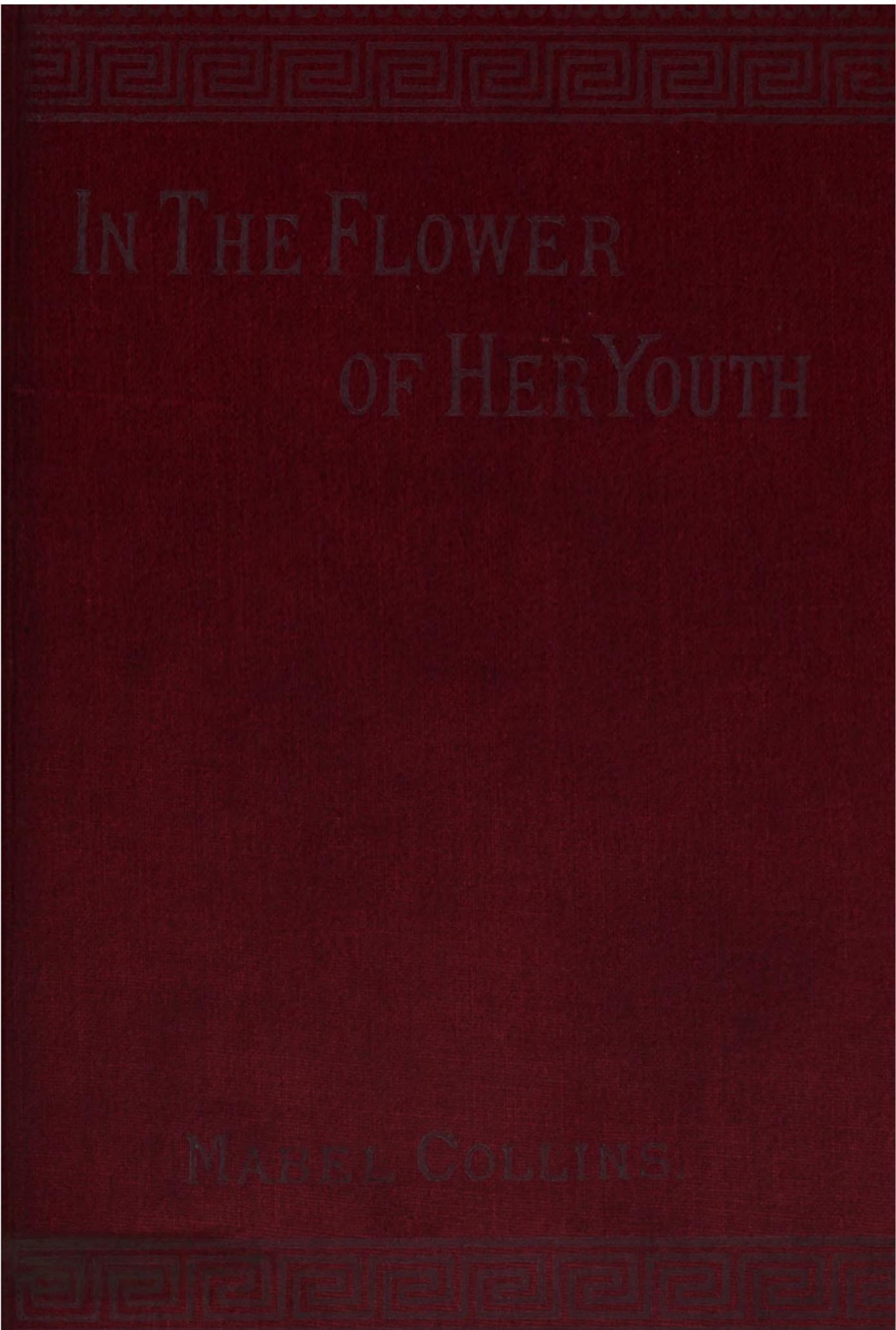
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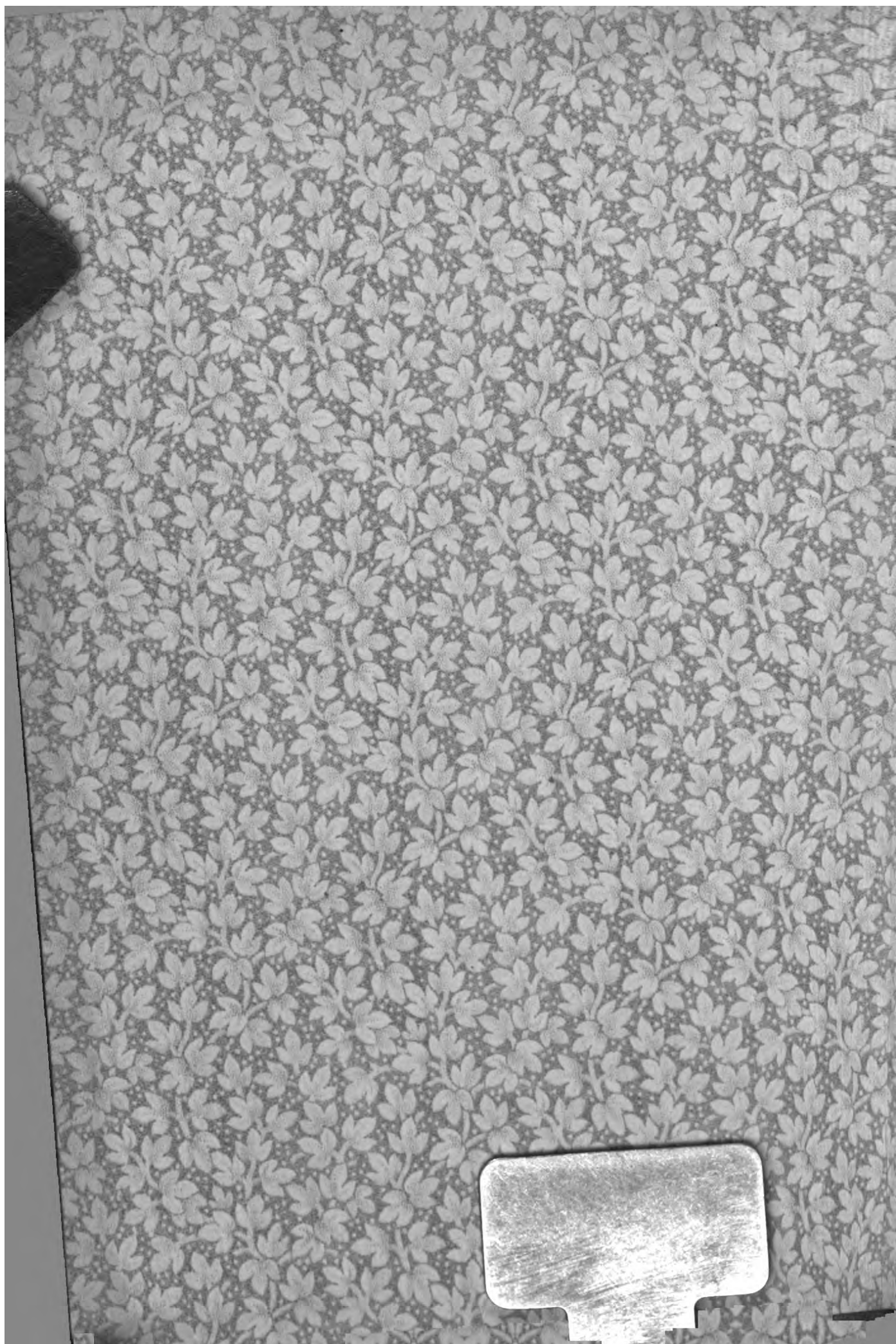


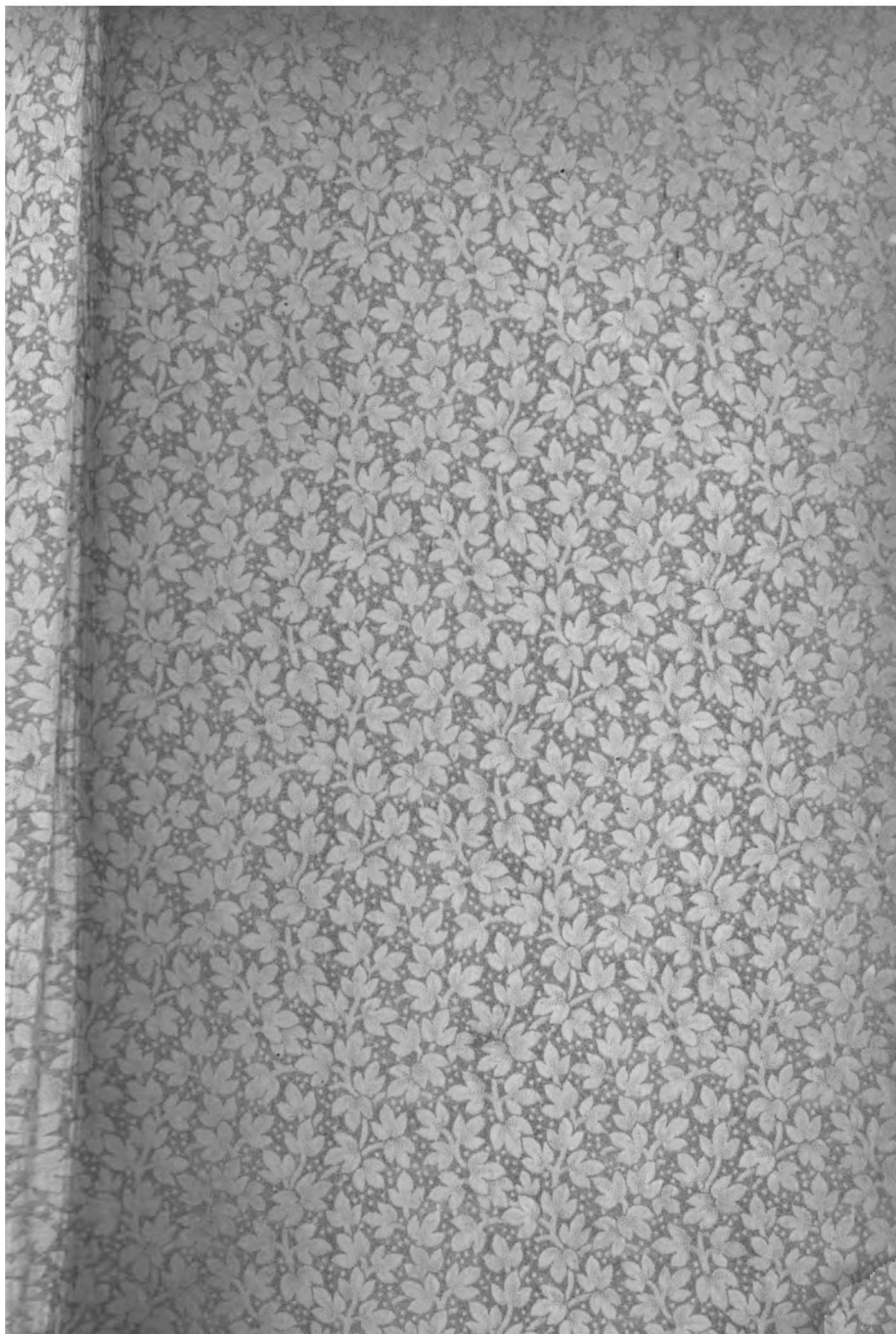
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IN THE FLOWER  
OF HER YOUTH

MABEL COLLINS.







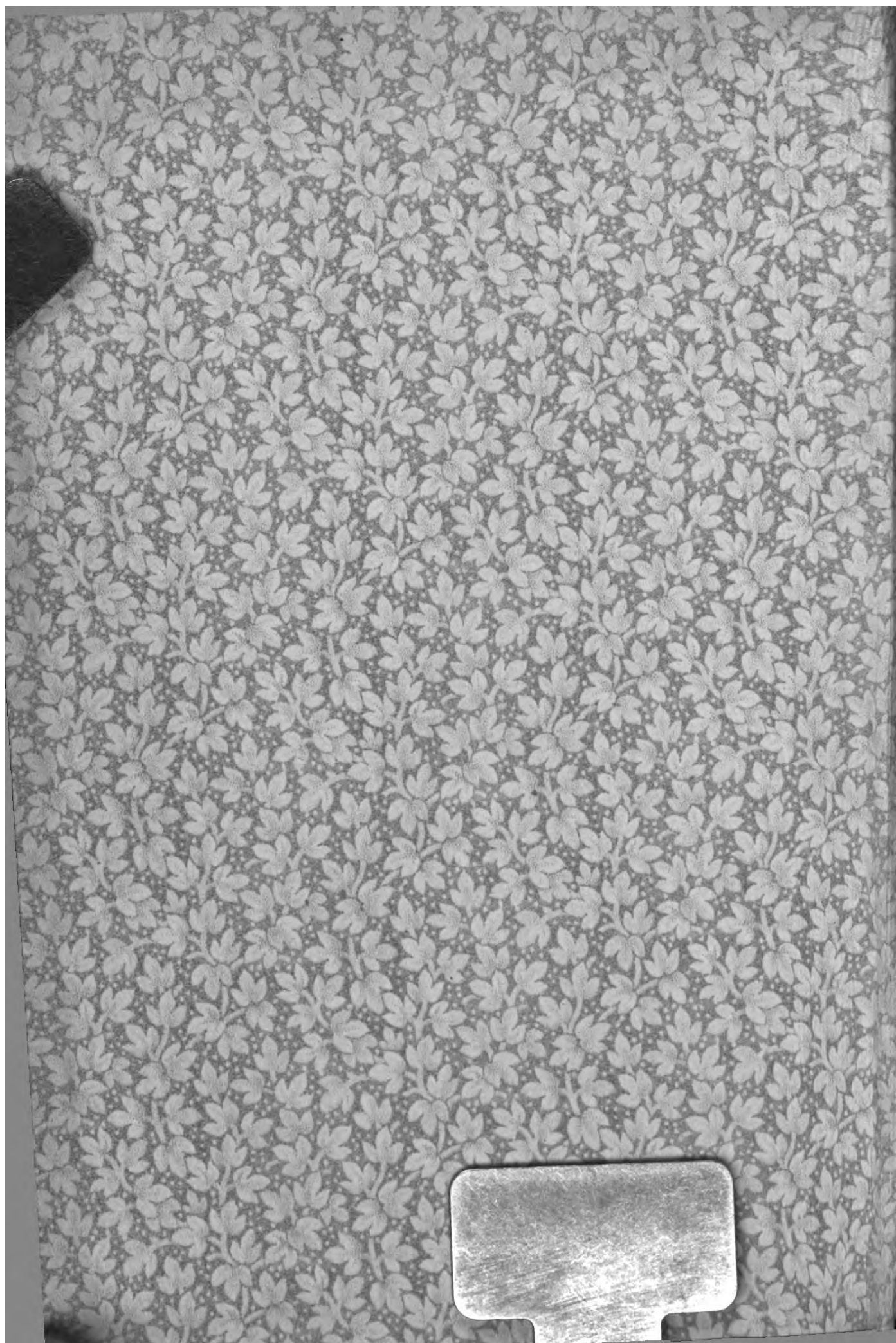
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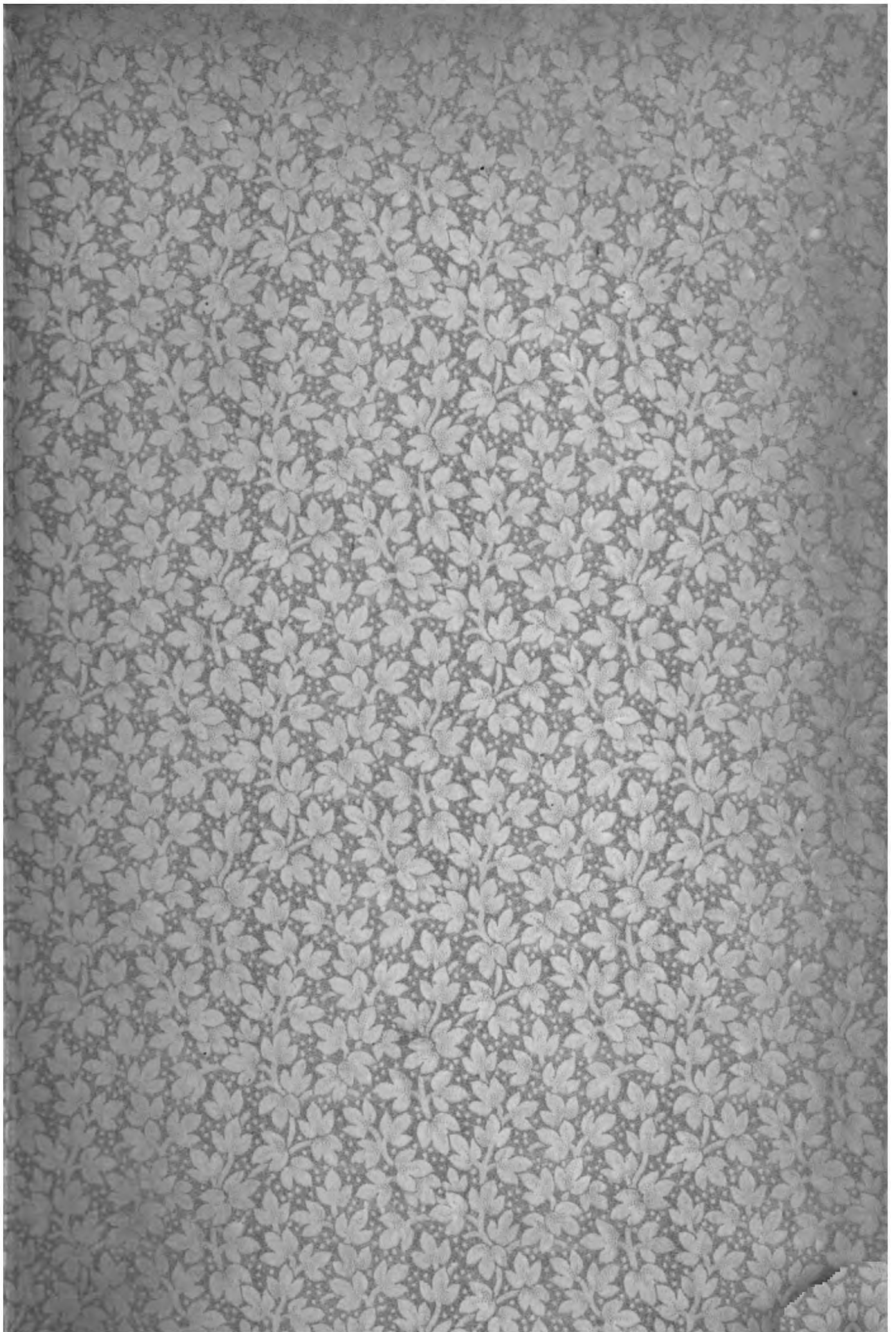


**IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.**

# In the flower of her youth

Mabel Collins







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IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

# AN INNOCENT SINNER.

By MABEL COLLINS.

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# IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

A Novel.

By MABEL COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "TOO RED A DAWN," "AN INNOCENT SINNER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

*VOL. III.*

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# IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

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## CHAPTER I.

**E**DMUND LAURENCE, among his numerous avocations, was editor of a dramatic paper. He had a sanctum at the office where he transacted a great deal of his business, and where, as it was a very pleasant room, he often made appointments.

On a certain afternoon he sat here correcting proofs, and waiting for an expected visitor.

A knock came at the door. "Punctual, at all events," he said to himself.

His office boy appeared. "A lady, sir; says she has an appointment with you."

"Show her in," said Laurence, promptly, pushing his papers aside. A lady came into the room, very quietly, and stood beside his table. She had a roll of manuscript in her hand.

"Miss Winter, I suppose," said Laurence, looking keenly at her. He could not help being curious about this lady of whom Brough had spoken with so much interest.

"Yes," was the reply, "I am Miss Winter, and have brought you the plot of your drama. I feel ashamed of having kept it so long, for I am afraid I can do nothing with it."

"Mr. Warrington almost led me to expect you to say this," said Laurence; "don't give it up all at once. I really want some one to help me. And Mr. Warrington seems convinced you could be of great assistance to me if you would. You have often helped him?"

"Oh, yes; but I have recently been very ill, and, though I must obtain work in order to live, I feel that this work of yours is beyond me. It is a fine plot, and it requires admirable working out in all the details. I am not equal to it."

"So you think it a good plot," said Laurence, taking his manuscript tenderly into his hands and opening it.

"Oh, you know it is," said Miss Winter, speaking with some animation; "and then that woman's character, and the situations in which you place her!"

"Good, eh?" said Laurence, a faint smile of pleasure creeping over his face.

"But no one except yourself could write up to those scraps of dialogue," said Miss Winter. "Look at the wonderful one between the woman and her husband—this one, I mean," and she repeated from memory as much of it as Laurence had written. "No one could finish that but yourself."

"And yet you enter into it so thoroughly," said Laurence, regretfully.

"Ah, that is different!" said Miss Winter, "this woman's character is enough to fire anyone. What a soliloquy that is you give her at the end of the first act."

"Which one?" said Laurence, pretending he could not find it. Miss Winter watched him a minute, and then began to repeat it. As she spoke the words in a low voice of intense feeling, her eyes flashed brilliantly through the dark veil she wore.

Laurence leaned back in his chair.

"I should like to have you act in this," he said.

"Like to have me—*what?*"

"Act—act in this. You understand that woman's character so well, and there is hardly an actress on the boards who will not make her something different from what I intended. You say you must work; why not go on the stage?"

"Because it is impossible," said Miss Winter, rising. She spoke very coldly, but there was a little tremble of excitement in her voice.

"Nothing is impossible," said Laurence. "Are you going? and are you convinced you cannot undertake to help me in this play?"

"Yes, I am sure I could not satisfy you or myself."

"Then think about what I say, and study for the stage. It is the best profession in the

world for a woman with talent. And I am sure you would do my heroine justice, for you utter her words as if they were your own."

"Oh," said Miss Winter, "that is because I know so well what she would feel and say!" and then she stopped herself quickly, said good-bye, and was gone.

"Know so well what she would feel and say," repeated Laurence. "By Jove, it's a queer thing if she does. My unfortunate heroine who rebels against the base protection of the laws is not so very common a character. Besides, her special red rag is marriage status, when separated from marriage love; can this brilliant-eyed young lady have fallen foul of the chains? I must ask Warrington. She interests me; there is something mysterious about her."

With which he plunged once more into his work and forgot Miss Winter for the time being. But he remembered her again, when, in the afternoon, he met Brough walking down the Strand.

"I say, Warrington," he exclaimed, all his curiosity re-awakening at the sight of the man who might gratify it, "tell me something about Miss Winter. She gives one a most mysterious feeling. Who is she? what's her story? for she has one I'm sure."

"Well, yes, she has," admitted Brough, reluctantly. "But—it's a secret, and I don't want her talked about. Would you mind not

saying anything about her, especially at my house?"

Laurence looked at him with an odd expression in his eyes, the meaning of which was very unmistakable.

"O, that's it, is it!" he said, and turned as if to go on; but Brough caught him, took his arm, and walked by his side.

"You're quite at sea, my dear boy; that isn't it, whatever it is that you're guessing at. Miss Winter's story is a strange one; one you would never guess. It is a secret which I cannot tell to you; but I can ask you, as a good fellow, to say as little about her as possible to anybody, and nothing at all to any of my friends."

"All right," said Laurence, "you may trust me. But I can't help her, unfortunately, because she won't work with me. Why don't you make her go on the stage? She spoke some of my lines magnificently."

"Go on the stage," repeated Brough, as if it were the most extraordinary idea that had ever been brought before his notice. And so it was, under the circumstances.

"She's got it in her," said Laurence; "that I'm sure of. At all events we might get a more experienced opinion than mine. But if she would go in for it, I would help her into an engagement when she is ready."

"You're a good fellow," said Warrington; "but I'm afraid it's impossible."

"Oh, nonsense," said Laurence, who had a constitutional disbelief in impossibilities, "you talk to her, and think it over. She has interested me; her appearance is fascinating with her pale face and brilliant eyes. I could help her better on the stage than anywhere else."

"I must think about it," said Brough, quite taken aback with this new idea.

"If you can persuade her into it," said Laurence, "come to me; I'll tell you where she must go to study."

"Thanks," said Brough. "Good-bye, old fellow; I have an appointment. I daresay I shall look in on you to-morrow."

Having parted with Laurence, Brough turned back and went down Cecil Street, which they had just passed. He went to the very end of the street and then, with a covert glance back at the Strand to see that no one he knew was passing by, he knocked at a door.

At the top of this house, in two little rooms, lived Miss Winter. She was in of course; she was doing nothing. She sat by the table, her head upon it, and her hands clasped tight over her head. Her figure was worthy of William Blake at the moment. She looked the picture of despair. Brough stood and observed her. Presently he touched her. She raised her head slowly and looked at him. She had not been crying. Her eyes were dry, her face was white and stony.

"My child," he said, very seriously, "you will go mad if you do not work."

"Let me go into a shop then!" she answered, "or out as a servant. I want to work, you know it, but I cannot write. When I sit down alone and quiet, I see nothing but my own despair."

"You cannot go into a shop;" he said, "you know they won't take ladies who know nothing of the work. You would get no one to engage you as a servant; you do not look like one."

She sighed wearily; she had forgotten she had any "looks."

"You would be a stage waiting maid, in a cap and apron," said Brough; "no lady would dare to engage you. What do you think of Laurence's idea, by the way."

"What idea?"

"Why, the stage."

"O, ridiculous. Surely you don't entertain it for a moment. When I want to hide myself under the very earth, to go and exhibit myself to the public every night! Ridiculous."

"But," said Brough, "there is something in this, that to go boldly forth is the very way to avoid being suspected. No one would dream that a person who desired to hide would go on the stage. I believe it would be a far safer plan than hiding. Remember Edgar Poe's story of the Purloined Letter."

Her only answer was an impatient movement and a sigh. But he went on.

"Remember too," he said, "the power of disguise you have there. You can make it a certainty that you will not be recognised. And it will appear the most natural thing in the world that you should make yourself up, even off the stage, for they all do it! Upon my word I believe this which seemed at first sight the most absurd thing imaginable is the most sensible. You must employ yourself; and you will not write. What will you do?"

"Anything, scrub floors, I want to tire myself out, to forget myself."

"Nonsense," said Brough impatiently, "that is not the way to do it for a creature made on the plan you are. You can't still your nerves by scrubbing. You want to use them, and then they'll be quiet. Come, now, couldn't you enter into Laurence's heroine?"

"Oh, yes," she said, raising her head quickly.

"And forget yourself in her?"

"Almost, yes."

"You only want to forget yourself in her entirely, and you will succeed. Come, you shall try this at all events. I will not have you going mad from idleness, when you are full of powers that only want exercise."

She sighed and submitted. That was all she could do in return for his love and infinite kindness.

"Laurence will tell me where you should go to study," said Brough; "I will find out all about it to-morrow. You shall have the best lessons."

"But that will cost money," said she, "and I have cost you too much already."

Brough pulled a wry face at first, but a moment after he cheered up. "Never mind," he said, "I'll get it somehow or other, even if I have to pawn myself. I'll manage that, don't bother yourself, but make up your mind to the attempt."

"If it will please you, papa; but it seems to me the very last thing I should undertake."

He left her, resolved to carry out his plan. "Scrub floors, indeed!" he growled to himself, as he walked back into the Strand. He came close behind Laurence who was on his way back to his editorial work. Brough touched him on the shoulder.

"I've been talking to Miss Winter since I saw you," he said, "and I think I've persuaded her. You said you would tell me where she should study."

"Do you want to know?" said Laurence, "really?"

"Yes, I'm in earnest."

"Come with me then," said Laurence. He turned and went back a short distance to the door of a dingy little tavern; he pushed it open and looked in. He soon saw the person he

wanted among the group of men drinking and laughing. Jack Percival was not easily overlooked in a crowd ; here he was the central figure, round whom the others clustered. His haunts were well known to all lovers of good stories, and his noticeable form was a sort of candle for listeners to gather round like moths. He worked harder than many young men, yet always had time to tell a witty story. He was tall, largely-formed, with a dignified bearing ; his perfectly gray hair showed his age, his face was strongly featured and powerful, very easily capable of expressing fury, but sometimes lit up by a wonderfully sweet smile.

He had just told a story, and, having delivered the point of it, raised his glass to his lips, while the men about him roared with laughter.

“By Gad, sir,” he said, putting his glass down, “that reminds me when I was travelling with Macready in America ; such a fearful thing happened ; you know his language was something tremendous when he was put out, though he did turn so religious before he died—Ah, Mr. Laurence, how do you do, sir. You gave me a good notice the other day.”

“You always earn good notices, Mr. Percival ; we’re obliged to give them to you. Are you very busy now, or can you take a new pupil?”

“Oh, I can take a new pupil ; I’ve got nearly as much as I can do ; I’m working too hard,

but I won't refuse any pupil you may bring me, Mr. Laurence."

"It's a lady; when shall she come to see you?"

"To-morrow, two sharp, at my rooms round the corner; you know them. Is she good looking?"

"That she certainly is," said Laurence; "you must find out if she has talent."

"That I'll do, sir; but mind ye, I can't put it in if it isn't there. Good-bye, won't you have anything? No? Yes, I'll have another glass. Well, as I was saying, when I was travelling with Macready in America ——."

Those were the last words they heard as they came out of the tavern.

"That man," said Laurence, "is one of the best story tellers alive; and I doubt whether there's another man in England knows his Shakespeare as he does. Let her go to him. He'll bring her capacities out as no one else can. He's rough; she must be prepared for that; he comes of the old school of actors and actresses who lived a hard life. You must tell her not to mind being sworn at now and then."

"I don't think she'll mind that," said Brough, thinking to himself that Lil was hardly likely to complain of such a hardship. Those who have really suffered, learn to overlook trifling annoyances.

The next day Brough went down and told

Lil what she had to do. Without remonstrance she obeyed and presented herself at the house where Mr. Percival gave his lessons. He was waiting for her, and when she came quietly in, looked keenly at her from beneath his formidable eye-brows.

"Take off your veil," he said, "let me have a look at ye. That's an advantage we old men have; we may look at ye without offence. So you want to study for the stage, Miss Winter?"

"My friends want me to," said Miss Winter, faintly.

"Your friends, humph. Well, you look as if you had something in you. Learn a part and then come to me again. What are you going in for, comedy I suppose?"

"I suppose so," said Miss Winter, with the strangest feeling at her cold heart. Comedy!

"You don't mean to go in for tragedy, I presume," said he, knitting his fierce brows. "Lady Macbeth and that sort of thing. That wants force, you know, force, and plenty of it."

"I don't know that I have any," was Miss Winter's not very hopeful reply.

"Well, you can try comedy. Get *As You Like It*, and learn Rosalind. When you're letter-perfect come to me again. Don't come to me till you are. It makes me mad to have a woman coming here that doesn't know her words."

Miss Winter went back to her rooms, having bought the acting copy of *As You Like It*, on her way. She was anxious to do anything which would please her father; she realised more and more, as her mind re-awakened, how much he had done for her. Yet she would far rather have taken a floor to scrub than this delicious comedy to study. It seemed to her that the delicate love story, in its romantic setting, was so alien to any life possible to her, that its study could only be a torment. It was out of her power to imagine herself Rosalind, that gay, charming creature, whose every word is full of wit and wisdom. Nevertheless, she set herself to accomplish her task as speedily as might be; she could, at least, commit the words to memory. When Brough came in the next afternoon to have a brief look at her, he found her pacing the room, in the full tide of the dialogue with Orlando in the forest.

"Why, child, you look almost yourself again!" exclaimed Brough, in real surprise.

A faint smile came on her face.

"Yes, it has done me good, papa. I could never feel myself to be Rosalind now; I could never act it, but the words are so beautiful they do one good."

"In fact you are taking a mental tonic. When will you have got the part by heart?"

"I will give myself two days more," she said; "I will not go to Mr. Percival till I am

perfect." She spoke with an air of resolution such as she had not worn since the day when she had, as it were, passed through the grave into another life. Brough went out, hilarious; he blessed his stars for the happy thought with which Laurence had inspired him. The nightmare was lifting. He strode down the street rejoicing; and everyone who met him this day saw with delight that dear old Brough Warrington was getting over his fit of the blues, and was recovering his own riotous, genial humour.



## CHAPTER II.

**T**HE part of Rosalind really mastered, Miss Winter presented herself once more at Mr. Percival's rooms. The old actor was a thorough martinet, and simply would not attempt to teach an idle pupil. He took Miss Winter half through the play before he relaxed his severe aspect at all. "Come, come," he said, then, "you'll do. You know your words, and you've some idea of how to say them. That's more than most actresses have when they begin, I can tell you!"

This was all the encouragement she got that time; but she caught up what was, to her, quite a fresh and vivid idea of the action of the play. She went home and repeated a dozen times all the words she had gone through with her master, in order to engrave upon her memory the emphasis which he had taught her. She did this from interest in the beautiful language. She soon found she must do it, for Mr. Percival lost all patience if he had to tell her anything twice.

At her next lesson she half expected a

little praise for having remembered all she had been told, but she did not get it. Mr. Percival was too taken up with teaching her all the business of the play; and he expected so much of her that, in spite of herself, she was put upon her mettle. She actually forgot her miserable self in the novel sensations of this new work. When the lesson was over it was like a heavy cloud re-settling upon her, to remember that she was Miss Winter, and not Rosalind! Mr. Percival noticed the complete change in her face, but said nothing. He paid her a business-like compliment with the idea of raising her spirits.

"You'd look Lady Teazle to admiration," he said, "with those fine eyes of yours!"

"Shall I learn it?" said Miss Winter. Compliment had no effect upon her now.

"Yes, do; you may as well see what you can make of it, but I doubt your doing the serious part in the screen scene. If you could manage that, you would look the character admirably."

"Shall I study it for the next lesson?"

"Yes," said Mr. Percival, "only, mind ye, don't bring it unless you're perfect."

She bought the *School for Scandal* going home, and set herself down to it at once. A curious feeling came over her as of having tasted of new life. There was a peculiar pleasure in taking up a fresh part and picturing herself in a fresh character. There

was a certain sense of enjoyment in appropriating Sheridan's brilliant dialogue and making it her own. Nothing reveals the innate value of a writer so thoroughly as what actors call study. No reading equals it. It is almost impossible to deliver a speech properly unless you know its meaning; and in Shakespeare obscure meanings become clear when the words have become as familiar as though they were your own, and when you have begun to believe yourself the character which speaks them. And Shakespeare becomes infinitely more beautiful with familiarity; the perfection of his work then appears visible. For, when you have taken into yourself the whole of a part, you discover that the writing which appears so natural is like a perfect mosaic, the character is revealed in the first spoken sentence and developed with every line. The close study of Shakespeare is exhilarating; of a second-rate playwright it is deeply dispiriting, and, strange fact, the majestic verse of Shakespeare is not only easy to remember, but difficult to forget; whereas, second-rate twaddle, where the words are all limp and the sentences unstarched, evaporates from the memory as soon as something else is put there. Lil had not yet been tried with rubbish. Sheridan's brilliance sticks in the mind when once it has been well studied. She sat up through the night, patiently learning her words; put her

book under her pillow, and had it out as soon as she was awake in the morning. She did not put it out of her hand all that day, and by the evening she had almost conquered it. The screen scene filled her with anxiety, Mr. Percival having spoken of it as being beyond her powers. She determined to make the words her own, at all events ; and, as a final resort, sat down and copied them out half-a-dozen times. Half that night she was awake recalling the acting of the piece as she had seen it performed. Her copy of the *School for Scandal* was quite worn when she came to Mr. Percival, a couple of days later, for her lesson. She began the dialogue briskly, proud of being perfect in it, and was stopped forthwith. "Too fast, too fast, my child—bring your words out half as quick—there, that's it. Keep at that pace and we may get through all right."

There is a great deal of "business" to learn in the *School for Scandal*; but Lil had seen it well done, and quickly took the hints given her. And so they came to the screen scene. At "Hear me, Sir Peter, I do not expect you to credit me," Mr. Percival took up his position grimly on the hearth-rug, and eyed his pupil with a terrible glance. He gave her no hint, or help, but waited to see what she could do ; and so she simply followed her natural mode of delivering such a speech. That she could rise to

the excitement of an emotional speech she found plainly enough, for at her last word she sank into a chair trembling and overcome. Positively, she had fancied herself Lady Teazle for the moment. Poor child, it was her first effort of the kind, and she was startled by her own earnestness. Mr. Percival stood still a moment, the open book in his hand. Then he crossed the room to where she sat, before he spoke to her, and his voice was so gentle that it quite surprised her. It was the first time he had spoken gently to her.

“My child,” he said, “you can play a serious part; you spoke that beautifully. I couldn’t have told you how to say a word of it better. It was beautiful. Yes, yes, you can play a serious part. I didn’t think you had it in you.”

Quite excited and stirred by his discovery of an embryo tragedian, for he had the true actor’s contempt for comedy, the old man walked about the room without saying any more to her. During these few moments she awoke to reality. She remembered that she was Miss Winter, a woman without hope, without a place in the world. O, if she had been what she once was, how proud she would have been of this praise! Now it fell upon a cold heart. There was no one to tell it to—no one to be proud of her. Even Brough, her dear old boy, could only be glad

over any deed of hers in a sort of secret, guilty way. Still, he would be glad. But for him, and the wish to please him, she would never have carried her effort so far as this.

"Of course," she said, quietly, "I should far prefer tragedy, if I have the power for it."

"You would!" said Mr. Percival, wheeling round suddenly to have a good look at her, "why didn't you say so before?"

"I was afraid you would think me too ambitious," said she, adding with a sigh, "indeed, I am not that. I have no faith in myself. But, if I am to study, I would prefer tragedy."

"Why do you say 'if'?" he asked her, still studying her face and trying to understand it.

"Oh, because I do not see any future before me. I am not studying to please myself, but my friends."

"Well, I tell ye there is a future before you," said Mr. Percival, misunderstanding her meaning, "and, damn it, why can't you believe what I tell ye? There is the stuff in you. It will be your own fault if you don't take a high position. Now, what will you study?"

"Mr. Laurence has a character for me," said Lil; "but then, the play is not written yet."

"Then you can't learn it yet. In the meantime—"

"I should like to study 'Lady Macbeth,'" said Lil, summoning her courage.

"By Jove, yes!" exclaimed Mr. Percival; "study it, and let's see what we can make of it. I have always maintained that 'Lady Macbeth' should be acted by a young woman—an old, grizzled virago would have no influence over the man—much he would care for her scolding. No, no, it should be a young woman, and a handsome one, too. Get it, my child, and if you feel it's too much for you, we'll read it through next time, before you say the part."

Lil thought she knew "Macbeth," that she had nothing to discover in that play, at least. She read it through as soon as she was back in her rooms, and saw at once that there was a whole world of sentiment and feeling in it, which she had hardly guessed at. She knew by experience now, that this would all gradually unfold itself to her as she learned the words; and so, with a sense almost of pleasure she turned back to Lady Macbeth's entrance, and the strange words of Macbeth's letter, which strike at once the keynote of the whole tragedy: "They met me in the day of success; and I have learned by the perfectest report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge." She read on, aloud, to the end of Lady Macbeth's grand invoca-

tion to the evil spirits ; and then she dropped the book upon her lap, and, for the first time, a faint feeling of ambition rose within her. Her own life was dead—destroyed by her own deed. Would it not be a new life to enter into the character of this fierce, ambitious woman, and repeat again and again this extraordinary tragedy, with its tremendous picture of the justice-dealing power of nature? She could sympathise with this woman, who, on the very threshold of her greatness, stood aghast at the vision of her coming deeds, and trembled in horror at her own thoughts, and who yet had vigour enough to silence her own conscience and that of her husband also. The fever of ambition, the lust of power, gives her an unnatural determination, a horrid fortitude, such as we all have faint inklings of when we are fighting for success and struggling to take a foremost place in the world.

Lil became so fascinated by this picture of a miserably proud woman, urged on to the destruction of all her peace and joy in life by these “metaphysical aids,” these personified temptations, which fill so strange a place in Macbeth’s tragedy, that she could not lay the book aside. She entered into the story as she had never done before ; she forgot everything else ; for the time being she hoped and feared, sinned and suffered with Lady Macbeth. It was late at night when she began

to study the sleep-walking scene. She lit all her candles and placed them by a long mirror which she had in her room, and then, watching herself as she spoke, endeavoured to realise this terrible scene and speak it in good earnest. O, how like it seemed to the agony of midnight hours which she herself had passed, when she had started from her sleep to find herself exhausted and worn out with re-enacting her own miserable tragedy! As this memory started up within her, and the remembrance of her own pain made her heart bleed afresh, the face she watched in the mirror before her grew wild and unnatural with a mad look upon it which Brough alone had ever seen there—the sigh she heaved over the visionary blood-stains came indeed from her heart. She saw reflected in the mirror a being whom she had never seen before—no longer Lil—no one she had ever known, but a woman driven wild by misery, changed by dread acquaintance with despair, whose fixed eyes looked wildly upon the ghost of her dead happiness. Terrified by her own impersonation, she rushed away from the glass and throwing herself upon her bed in a sudden panic of unaccountable terror, lay there trembling, her face hidden, lest, if she looked up, she should see her awful self again.

### CHAPTER III.

**B**ROUGH WARRINGTON was a great deal more like himself again ; but still he walked upon thorns.

Lady Warrington, immediately upon her marriage, had elected herself purse-bearer. She would stand no nonsense about money-matters for she found it required not only her own income, but all that Brough earned besides, to keep up the position and appearance which her heart was set upon.

Brough could never keep money in his pocket ; he was the most hopelessly extravagant fellow. He appeared to have no power of retaining gold and silver about his person ; it slid away invisibly, as though some malicious fairy had turned it into dried leaves. He was well aware of this strange inability of his to keep that which he had ; he knew he was incurable in the matter, for no past poverty had taught him any better. Something was lacking in his brain—he could not grasp the fact that individual coins were valuable and must be treasured, hard though he worked for them. He was delighted when anybody would take care of his money and

himself, and leave him free to write and think. He was charmed when he found his wife eager to undertake the responsibility so objectionable to himself. He gave her all the money he received, with alacrity, bargaining only that he should be supplied with pocket-money, half-a-crown at a time. He had never been more delighted in his life than when this arrangement was made, and Lady Warrington took upon herself all the management of his affairs; and he had never regretted it, for the money he earned was now really turned to some account. He would rattle a couple of shillings in his pocket with just as much pride and pleasure as he would have felt in handling a thousand pounds' worth of bank notes. Money had no innate value to him, as it has to most people. But now he found himself in an unexpected and disagreeable dilemma, and his path was decidedly thorny.

If Lil had been fit to write, he could have got her work at once, and she would have been able to do something towards her own support. But he saw it was impossible to compel her to undertake such work. It would be a cruelty, and one to which he could not bring himself. Her mind was too fevered, too entirely cut adrift from all safe moorings, for healthy creation to be possible to her.

He was intensely grateful to Laurence for having suggested this other career which

already had strengthened her by its absorbing interest. Too keenly strung and harassed in mind for it to be possible for her to create, the necessity for losing her own individuality in the creations of others, had saved her from madness.

So far, his hopes had been exceeded and the experiment had satisfied him to the full. But, in the meantime, Lil had to be kept, and her lessons paid for. And there was no one but himself to help her; no other creature would hold out a hand to keep her head above water or save her from any fate which might fall upon her.

He must devise some mode of deceiving the purse-bearer, that was clear; and the consideration of how to do this safely occupied his mind a great deal. When first he wanted to take Lil some money, he had simply given her a cheque which he received from one of the newspapers for which he wrote; and when Lady Warrington inquired after it he adopted a sorry shift which had served him on some former occasions, and said it had not been paid to him. This device was feeble enough, but he could hit upon no better one. He had very little of the true secretive faculty, although when in a dilemma his imaginative powers would come out strong; in other words he could tell a fib neatly. Lady Warrington took little or no interest in his work, but she knew all about its marketable

value, where it was sold, when it should be paid for, and, indeed, all that seemed to her of importance concerning it. Like a large well-trained dog, he dutifully brought her what she desired. If he had had the habit of secrecy so common with some ordinary types of men, he might very easily have done as he chose with his own. But, as it was, he found it no light task to hoodwink her about this regular drain upon his purse. Lil's own expenses were small enough; but her lessons cost more than she was aware of. Nevertheless she was not so much absorbed in her own despair as to forget these things.

One day he came straight into her rooms from a newspaper office, with a cheque in his hand. He put it down on the table.

"I don't want any money yet, papa," said she.

"Keep it," he said; "you will want it soon. And I would rather not take it home. Her ladyship would get it out of me."

("Her ladyship," was a sort of nickname between them for his wife.)

Lil did not reply immediately. She understood from the way he spoke that he was bothered. She knew every tone of his voice; she knew just the meaning of the queer sort of frown of disgust which he wore when life was troublesome, and "cakes and ale" insufficiently abundant.

"This must not go on, papa," said Lil, after

a silence, during which she had been looking at the cheque, and Brough had been walking about the room, with a frown on his forehead. "This must not go on, papa. If I am really to live, I must get work which will enable me to do so without worrying you like this. I wish I had never begun to study for the stage! It is perfect madness, when I desire above all things to hide myself, to train for the most public of all lives! I only did it to please you. Now, let me give it up and attempt something more reasonable."

"You like it—it interests you?" asked Brough, facing round upon her with a fiercer frown than ever.

"Yes," admitted Lil.

"Are you afraid of coming to grief—of failing in it?"

"No, strange to say, I am not much afraid of that. I shall never, I believe, be the actress I should like to be; but I fancy the excitement would carry me over without any failure. Strange! I could never have supposed excitement of any sort would affect me again!"

"What a little fool you are!" exclaimed Brough. "Here you have got the one thing that interests you—you feel you will succeed—Percival told Laurence the other day that you would succeed!—and yet you want to give it all up. What will you do instead?" he inquired, savagely. "Scrub floors or serve

behind a counter? I thought there was more of the artist in you!"

"Surely I have suffered enough to kill all the artist in me—to kill all but the capacity for suffering."

"Rubbish! an artist should have no feelings, except for his work. Come, child, you are strong enough to forget yourself and live in your ambition."

"Yes—yes—almost! But, papa, if it were anything but this. What madness to go upon a stage and show myself at large when I should be in my grave! I am a ghost. What business has a ghost to appear in the full light of public life?"

"You really run no risk," said Brough. "I do not believe he—anyone who had known you—would recognize you with that black hair and your altered face. I think you are handsomer than you used to be; but you are a changed woman. You must learn to make your face up well; acquire a perfect indifference as to any chance of being recognised; and I think you are safe. These people whom you most fear, talk, I heard the other day, of living altogether in Italy when—" He was on the verge of saying, "When they are married," but he could not. And Lil had risen and put out her hand as if to stay him from giving her some blow.

"But, papa," she said, "there are others who know me—who might suspect—who might betray—!"

"I have it!" exclaimed Brough; "I've got an idea. Come now, let us try the experiment on her ladyship!"

"What experiment?" asked Lil, with a face full of apprehension.

"Whether she knows you!"

"Oh, no, I dare not. I dare not! It is too terrible a risk."

"Now, don't be a little fool, but listen to me," said Brough, holding up his forefinger with a dogmatic air of much wisdom which he sometimes assumed. You are making two great mistakes. You are supposing that the generality of men and women possess brains, which they don't, and that they are always on the look-out for being taken in, which they are not. How would swindlers and card-sharpers exist if it were so? How should we have got so far in this gigantic fraud of yours, if it were so? Believe me, to deceive most people is as easy as lying. Then, too, there is a strong prejudice in favour of a person who has died and been buried, being dead and buried. If you wore your own bright hair, and if you looked the same woman that you used to look, you would probably frighten her ladyship into a fit if you walked into her bedroom at night; she would take you for a ghost: but meet her in broad sunlight and stare her in the face without flinching, and I'll lay any odds she will only say, 'What an extraordinary likeness!'

I should not wonder, altered as you are, that with the clear fact of your being quite a person of the past in her mind, she might not even notice the likeness. Come, risk it. Should she suspect, and you get frightened, I'll get you out of it—I'll swear you are as much like yourself as I am like—Othello. So come, trust to me and try it. You will have twice as much confidence afterwards, and by degrees you will become careless who you meet. It is hard to die; and it is hard to come to life again!"

"I tremble at the idea," said Lil, "so much is at stake. But if you feel sure you can silence her suspicions if they are aroused—"

"Trust me for that," cried Brough. "I was not born yesterday!"

"But how can we manage it?" asked Lil. "It must be done soon, if at all, or all my courage will go again!"

"Come up to Hyde Park to-morrow afternoon; I will get her to go out with me and we will meet you there. Take a book and sit reading on one of the chairs under the trees by Rotten Row. If she notices you and the game seems dangerous, we will go straight on; if I find it is safe, or if she has not observed you, we will sit down near you. Then you come and walk past us slowly. Will you be there at three?"

"Yes," said Lil, almost inaudibly. The thought of how great a risk she was about to

run took away her breath. But, recovering herself with an effort, she said: "Then, do you propose, if we find I am not recognized, that I should try to get some small part to play—in the country, perhaps? I have no pride left, I believe: I should resent nothing. I would be a walking lady, with pleasure, if walking ladies get enough to live upon!"

"I don't think they do," remarked Brough, drily; "at least not by their profession. No, my child, you won't do for a walking lady. You must fly higher."

"That is what Mr. Percival says," replied Lil, with a sigh; "but that means waiting a long time for an opportunity."

"Not necessarily," said Brough, cheerfully. "Laurence will help you when you are ready. He often asks how you are getting on, and I think he is quite set upon your acting his heroine if you are up to the mark when his play is written."

"Nevertheless," said Lil, resolutely, "I must try to get something in the meantime. Your having to bring me money is dangerous; it makes it harder to keep my secret."

"That's true," said Brough, ruefully, "and if her ladyship did get on the scent, she might take it into her head that it was a case for jealousy, and we should be up a tree then with a vengeance; we should have to let her suppose what she liked and pitch into me as much as she chose."

"Dear me," said Lil, "that is a nice prospect! Let us try this experiment, by all means, if, as it seems to be, it is the first step towards my having a chance of independence."

"Well, then, three o'clock to-morrow afternoon," said Brough. "I'm infernally glad you're going to try it, for you won't be such a little coward afterwards. Good-bye, baby."

"You dear old boy," exclaimed Lil, standing on tip-toe to kiss him. As he had been all her world, when she was a child—her guide, critic, friend—so he was now in her womanhood. This careless good-fellow—this Pagan without a creed—this lover of cakes and ale—this rebel against forms and conventionalities—was to her the one steady reality in her life, to which she might cling without fear.

All that night she dwelt with terror upon the dangerous experiment she was about to make. No budding actress ever thought more of a first appearance behind the footlights than did Lil of this meeting in Hyde Park. She dreaded it as a hunted animal might dread the moment when he should be brought to bay and stand "staring upon the hunters." There was no especial terror of Lady Warrington in her mind; but there was a very vivid terror of coming face to face with anyone belonging to her old life. She felt herself an outcast, a

wretch, with no world to live in. She was indeed, Lil, Charlie Newman's wife. Yet she was not. Lady Warrington had that which now seemed to Lil a greater, grander privilege than any other granted in the light of the sun!—She was herself, she owned to her own name, she was not ashamed of that which she was. Could it be that only a short time ago she, Lil Newman, was as free, as unconstrained, as innocent of secret or of fear as any other woman? No, no, it could not be. It must have been centuries ago, that she was free, happy, fearless, with a name and a right to live! She had left all that behind her so far that she could not recall it. Through all the night, whether she waked or slept, she enacted the scene of the morrow when she was to meet boldly one out of that century-past-life. Would Lady Warrington scream, cry, start, exclaim, "This is Lil—Lil is alive?" Would she gaze coldly at her and see nothing? Was it possible that a mere certificate of death could make an individuality unrecognisable?

The night passed, as we know the night will, though it appear an eternity of silent darkness. Lil looked at the sunshine in amazement. Was it possible that in this brightness and amid all this gaiety of sunlit air she was to experience so strange and ghostly a trial? She could not work all the morning; she was paralyzed by the one

thought that to-day she was going to peril her secret.

So the hour approached ; she scarcely could dress herself, she trembled so. Yet she persevered. She darkened her eyebrows, and put some faint delicate lines about her mouth to alter its expression ; she had ruthlessly stained her hair nearly black, and let it grow in thick curls low on her forehead.

“I shall understand ‘making up,’ when I want it !” she said to herself, with a kind of desperate humour, when she had done and stood surveying herself in the glass. She had a strange and terrible feeling upon her of not knowing herself—of becoming bewildered—of forgetting who she was, or what this woman might be who looked at her from the mirror. With this mood on her perhaps she might face Lady Warrington safely ! A wild influx of courage came into her heart, and with sudden resolution she started on her way. She took her play-book with her discreetly disguised in a demure green cover. It had become her companion, her friend, her one absorbing interest, and she could hardly imagine going out without it.

It was a lovely day, and a dim far-off sense of physical pleasure came upon her as she walked. But she could not shake off the fancy that the people who stared at her and sometimes turned to look after her did so because she was a ghost and had no right to

be out in the sunshine. Sometimes this feeling came upon her so suddenly and heavily that she stopped and hesitated as to whether she had not indeed best return and hide herself again.

But she could not disappoint Brough. A woman may break her promise to a lover and think little of it; but such a father as dear old Brough no woman with an atom of heart could be traitor to, even in a trifle.

And so she persevered, walking through the crowded streets, absolutely isolated; her interest in all bright and general life gone; her mind fixed on her ghastly fate, her strange future.

"In my life what comfort, when I am dead to my husband?" says Imogen, whose fate was less hard than Lil's in that her husband still loved her. Love being the most living of all facts in this mortal world, leaves the keenest blank of all when it is given over to death.



## CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE air was fresh and sweet, even to Lil's weary sense ; for it was one of those racy days when the clouds seem to have holiday in the sky and the strong breeze is gay even in London. She walked slowly from Apsley House down the path at the side of the Row. She started at every figure on the horizon, and trembled at the mere thought of those familiar eyes she was so soon to meet. How unconscious, and ordinary, and collected all these people were whom she passed as she walked on ! Why should she alone be full of a sense of overpowering terror and guiltiness, while yet she was innocent as any of her fellow-creatures ? Was she innocent ? She had sinned against the laws, rather than sin against her own soul. At last she grew so nervous, so apprehensive, that she could walk no longer. She determined to wait for the ordeal, not go on to meet it. She sat down beneath a shady tree, and opening her book, fixed her eyes upon its pages. Could she but forget what she was here for ! Could she but occupy her mind with her work ; then her heart might

not beat so wildly, nor her whole frame tremble so with terror. It was impossible—the effort was beyond her. She read the words on the page before her over and over again, uselessly. She could attach no meaning to them. They stood there, mere arbitrary arrangements of letters, without thought or feeling conveyed in them; and this because her own fear, her own feeling of the moment was so vivid and overpowering that it paled all else.

She put down her book impatiently at last, and raised her eyes. They met Lady Warrington's gaze, full upon her face.

Among the passers-by, her father and his wife had approached her without her observing it. They must have been silent, or their familiar voices would have penetrated to her ear. Brough, as Lil could see without looking at him, was walking at Lady Warrington's side, his eyes steadily fixed upon the horizon. But Lady Warrington stared full in Lil's face, with a look of curiosity and polite interest. Lil, fascinated by the extraordinary situation, could not take away her own eyes, but returned the gaze with an amazement all her own. Was it possible that she was unrecognised, indeed?

Then she saw Lady Warrington touch Brough's arm, and speak to him. He turned and stared in an opposite direction quite away from Lil; but she knew that he had been told to look at her. For a moment she felt as if

her heart would stand still with terror. What had Lady Warrington said? Was she saying, "There is Lil!" But directly afterwards she saw there was no danger. Brough walked to a seat and sat down, and Lady Warrington followed him. That meant that she was to walk past them. Would her limbs bear her? Was it possible that she still had the strength to move? She resolutely made the effort, for she knew what Brough wanted her to do. Strange it seemed to her that by some mechanical process she found herself rising and walking into the very teeth of danger. There sat Lady Warrington; there must Lil go; walk up to the very mouth of discovery, and face it out. She did it. Walked quietly passed them as they sat, both now observing her. She could not look at them; her eyes seemed attached to the ground at her feet! but she moved quietly, determined to give Lady Warrington time to look at her. When she had passed them for a moment a panic fell upon her—a sick horror, that she would find Lady Warrington close beside her; that she would run after her, and cry, "Lil, Lil, it is you! you are not dead!" She dared not look behind her; she was terrified. She could only concentrate her mind upon the endeavour not to run away; not to stagger with nervousness; only to walk straight on, like any other woman.

It seemed to her that she had walked a long,

long way—in reality it was not many yards—when she heard a voice close beside her.

“It is Miss Winter? I have been wishing so much to see you and ask how you are getting on with your study?”

She stopped then, with a queer feeling that she might have gone on till she dropped if somebody had not stayed her, and looked up. It was Edmund Laurence.

She tried to speak, and could not. Her lips opened and shut, but her voice appeared to die away in her throat.

“You are tired,” he said, “I believe you have been working too hard. Forgive me, Miss Winter, but you positively must come and sit down here in the shade, you look as if you were going to faint.”

Lil knew he was right, so she quietly obeyed him. But she was petrified by terror; she was well aware that Lady Warrington knew Edmund Laurence. What would be the result of this unfortunate meeting? Why had she been so reckless as to run this risk? Laurence did not speak immediately, for he saw she was overcome by something, though he could not guess by what. At last she made an effort to see how great her danger was. She raised her eyes and looked back to where the Warringtons had been sitting. They were not there—she looked on—far away up the path she saw them, Brough walking off at no end of a pace and “her ladyship” doing her best to keep up

to him. He, too, had seen the danger and made all haste out of it. With a sigh of relief Lil leaned back in her chair. What would have become of her if her father had not saved her? Intimate as Laurence and Brough were, it would have puzzled Lady Warrington very much if they had not spoken. Lil did not know whether Laurence would have any idea of the difficulty of the situation—and she herself—she must have played her part well, indeed, to get through such a meeting safely. She felt that she did not know her part well enough, and that she was not actress enough to play it, yet!

At last she made an effort, and turned to Laurence. "How kind you are," she said, "to let me recover so quietly; I suppose the sun was too much for me. I have not been out in the sunshine for a long time. I suspect you are right; I have been working too hard."

"What are you learning?" he asked, with a curious glance at the book in her hand.

"Lady Macbeth," she answered. "I learned it, as it seems to me, a lone time ago; and I thought then that I could catch the spirit of it at once; and now, in despair, I have taken to reading it, in the hope of finding out what it all means!"

Edmund Laurence laughed with an air of great amusement. "You are an artist," he said. "Most actresses think Lady Macbeth is an elderly scold, and so disgust themselves

and everybody else with her. Even Mrs. Siddons did not grasp her at all points; her rendering was grand, but too stern. Lady Macbeth was many-sided, as Shakespeare's women and those of real life generally are. She was credulous and sceptical, stern and tender, a scold and a cajoler, a fury and a coward, all in a breath; conscienceless yet conscience-stricken, a very lioness outside and a thorough chicken at heart. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes," said Lil, half a smile stealing over her face, "and so I think I ought to understand her, for I can seldom guess what my mood will be the next moment; and when I determine to do anything I have to hold myself well in hand in order to do it. I waver a hundred times a day about this work of mine. I like it, I do not deny that it interests me; but it fills me with a humiliating sense of incapacity. I want to give it up now—to give it up altogether. I regret intensely having ever begun it."

"That is so like an artist," said Laurence, with his cool amused laugh, "to get disgusted and despondent just when beginning to be able to do a thing. In that mood the male artist perseveres all the more, the female artist gives in. That is why women, cram full of ability, sit about doing nothing."

Lil gave him a side-long, curious glance.

"I shan't sit about doing nothing!" she said.

"I never said you would," he answered,

quietly, "but you are very likely not to do the very thing you can do best, because you will give in to this mood of unbelief in yourself."

"You want to provoke me," she said, pausing a moment to wonder that anyone should care to talk to a ghost like this!—almost as if she were a real living woman and it mattered what she did!

"Of course I do," he answered, "to provoke you into doing your best. The stage sadly wants an artist upon it; you will be that artist if you will go on. We are eaten up with Russians and French women, who coolly come over and whistle Shakespeare at us, safe in the knowledge that there isn't an English actress on the boards who can speak her own language with half the intelligence they manifest. Come, there is a place for you; you must fill it!"

"Ah," said Lil, "if you knew ——" Her head was bent low; she did not look up, and left her sentence unfinished. It meant, "if you knew all my misery! If you knew the danger, the risk, the almost impossibility of such a career for me!"

Laurence understood it to mean something very different.

"Oh, I do know," he answered, "we all know something of it. There is always an ideal beyond us which we cannot reach; once take away that yearning and we become mere handicraftsmen. The artist's life is one of

progress : there is always a hill ahead of him which he wants to get over, but which it appears quite impossible for him even to climb. This naturally makes him feel unhappy and inclined to curse the fate that made him so. But it's a waste of breath ; better go on climbing the hills, one after another. I dare say when you began studying you had not dared to think of Lady Macbeth, and now you are disgusted because you can't do it all at once?"

"You are much too wise," said Lil, the half-smile coming back on her lips.

"I can guess at the meaning of your face, sometimes," he answered, "but there is a great deal there that I cannot read. You have a more mysterious expression than any woman I ever encountered."

Startled, Lil turned her face and looked at him. Was he trying to read her secret in her face? She felt as if a detective were at her side ready to seize her and bring her back to her old self. But his gaze disarmed her, softened her, startled her anew. He was looking at her very intently, with curiosity, perhaps ; with keen interest, certainly ; but, above all, and very positively, with a vivid and evident admiration.

"*What!*" exclaimed Lil, in her heart. "Is this thing possible? • That look ! the man is mad. I am dead—I am a ghost—I am a living lie. He is deceived by this sunshine and the

fresh air into fancying me something different from what I am ! ”

She shuddered, spite of the sunshine, as though she were indeed in the chill of the tomb.

“ You are wonderful,” he said, in a low voice, almost as if he thought she did not hear him, and still intently watching her ; “ you change so much ; you are a different woman at one moment from what you are the next ; you are so suggestive in your expression, as though you hid your thoughts instead of speaking them ; you look so much more than you say.”

Lil changed now, under his gaze ; a minute since she had been like one in a grave : now suddenly she grew hot and fierce. “ Forgive me ! ” she exclaimed, “ but I don’t want to be criticised just now, it is a waste of valuable matter ; keep it till I am on the stage and you can all say what you like of me in the newspapers.”

“ You are not angry ? ” he said ; “ you change so quickly, I cannot follow your mood ! ”

“ No, I am not angry,” she answered. His eyes were still on her ; their gaze did not hurt her. Lawrence had blue eyes, large and clear and honest, and much given to sturdy inspection of anything which interested him. There was a great charm in these blue eyes, for they could hold within them a smile. They did so now ; a smile which no woman could mistake.

It suddenly became plain to Lil that she was no ghost to this man, no dead woman without an individuality, but simply Miss Winter, a remarkable-looking girl, apparently quite alone in the world; the thought of it amazed her. She rose quickly.

“Good-bye,” she said, “I must make haste home. I did not mean to stay here so long.”

And Laurence, quite taken aback by this particularly abrupt change of mood, found himself staring after a slim-figured woman, who was walking very rapidly away from him.

“I should like to follow her and see where she lives,” said he to himself, “but it wouldn’t be fair. She is a lady, whatever else she is; and, if she doesn’t want me to know where she lives, I won’t go prying after her like a knight of the pavement.”

With which laudable resolution Lawrence turned in the other direction to keep an appointment for which he was now some half-an-hour late.



## CHAPTER V.

**H**IL awaited the postman's visit next morning, in a fever of anxiety. Brough had promised to write to her.

There was the big square envelope, with the quaint, familiar hand-writing, wonderfully small and delicate, as sometimes happens with men who write constantly, with an extraordinary clearness, acquired by frequently writing Greek, and with an occasional bit of *bizarre* extravagance in it, when native character asserted itself. As, for instance, the W, of Miss Winter was a thing to make one wonder, and the C, of Cecil Street embraced half the address.

"All right, baby, her ladyship didn't spot you, though she had two jolly good stares. She only said, when we had passed you, 'That girl is like you, Brough, about the eyes.' I thought, on that, I might venture to sit down, and let her look again. 'There,' "she said, as you went by us, 'don't you see she is like you? and she walks like you, too.' I was rather surprised at this, but you see it is all right. I made haste out of the way, when I saw that

fellow Laurence coming along. I expected he would stop you. He admires you very much, and is sure to help you on when there is a chance."

Lil sat thinking over this letter for some time. She thought about her position, and got herself into so unhappy a state, that she had forgotten it was the day for the lesson with Mr. Percival, until just the time. She started up and hurried away, resolved to ask him for some good advice. She was rather late, and consequently found him in an ill humour. Unless he were served with rather more exactness than if he had been the manager of a theatre and paid his pupils to come to him, he became ferocious, somewhat after the fashion of a surly lion. Lil saw it was no time to air any views of her own, they would have been quenched with great promptness. Therefore she set to work at once without any unnecessary delay, in the hope that she might bring back his good humour. But he was in one of his stern moods, when, perhaps, his pupils gained most from him. So far, he had seemed surprised at her success in *Lady Macbeth*. To-day he listened quietly, and only gave praise in this form ;

"Well, I can't understand how it is that you do some of it so well, and in other parts you seem quite out of it."

"This won't do," he said, throwing down

the book in disgust at the end of the banquet scene ; “I don’t know what’s the matter with you, but you’re all unequal. Some speeches you say beautifully, and then every now and then, you go all to pieces, and don’t seem to have any idea of what you’re doing. Why is it? Can you tell me?”

“No,” said Lil, who had sat down in an attitude of extreme dejection, which looked very like one of despair, “but I know that I am ready to give up these heavy parts which are so difficult. I shall never play them ; it is delightful work learning them, but it is impractical. I must find a way to earn something. I do not care what I do! Let me study some waiting-maid’s part, and try to get any small engagement.”

Mr. Percival turned round upon her, with his thick brows knotted into a fierce frown. But it had no effect upon Lil. She was already too downcast to feel it.

“Oh,” he said, “you’ll be wanting me to teach you burlesque next. No, I don’t teach waiting-maids. Now, look here, believe what I tell you, that you will succeed in these parts ; or else give it up and go to somebody you can believe in. I’ve done with ye, if you can’t believe what I tell ye. You’re all abroad with Lady Macbeth to-day, but that’s no reason why you should play waiting-maid. At all events, I can’t teach you that. I don’t know why you don’t get on with

Lady Macbeth ; you must give it up, if you can't do it."

He crossed the room and sat down in a chair at the other side with an air of indifference. It was no affectation ; he had, for the moment, lost his interest in her. If she was going to prove a failure, after all, she would become nobody to him, but would have to be buried away, among the many other failures he had encountered in the course of a long theatrical life. Lil saw this, and saw it was no good then to ask him for any help or advice.

She went home, sad indeed, and went to bed that night, with no result as far as rest was concerned. She could not sleep, she only lay still, with wide eyes, thinking and thinking about Lady Macbeth, and wondering where she had failed. A dozen times she went over the play, word by word, endeavouring to understand why she had pleased in one place and not in another. She saw the thing at last ; it came to her all in a moment. Her delivery of every word of the soliloquies absolutely satisfied Mr. Percival ; the moment Macbeth was "on," she came to grief altogether, and every word was a difficulty.

"The fact is," said Lil, to herself, "I can recite very nicely ; but I don't know how to act !"

Having made this discovery, and satisfied

herself of its truth, by going through the play in her mind once again, she lay more still than ever, feeling as if she would never rise from her bed. Had she so studied and hoped, all for this? Why had he not told her she could not act before?

"I suppose," thought she, "he expects something more of me, now he knows I can deliver the words; I have to take a new step, if I am to go on, and begin to act. But what a cruel thing, instead of telling me what I lacked, to leave me to find it out, all by myself like this! But I'll be revenged on him! I'll astonish him next time. I can do it, if I try; I'm certain I can!"

Roused and stung into action, she started from her bed without caring whether it was time to rise or no, and began her studies. She soon found out that Macbeth's entrance invariably changed his wife's mood; from a woman afraid of herself, her deed, her ill conscience, she became a fury, confident, indomitable. She knew that she dared never falter or hesitate, before this man, "too full o' the milk of human kindness," or, if she did, all would be lost.

She hardly knew how the time passed until her next lesson. The dramatic fever had seized her. She had discovered what was required of her and she was resolved to rise to it. The real power which Mr. Percival had over her, showed itself in the fact that

she looked forward with as great an inward trembling, yet exultation, to showing him what she could do, as though he were a theatre full of critics.

At last, with eyes more aflame than Miss Winter's had as yet ever been, she went to her appointment, her tattered copy of *Macbeth* in her hand. Mr. Percival did not appear very glad to see her; he was not in the best of humours.

"Well," he said, taking her book from her, "have you found out what was wrong last time? You were all abroad, you know."

"I think so," said she, "I have thought of nothing else, ever since."

"Come on then, let's hear it," said Mr. Percival. "I'll sit down to-day, my child, and just give you the cues. I'm tired."

"Very well," said Lil, and began. Mr. Percival sat grimly eyeing her as she spoke; at last something began to light in his face. There was an earnestness about her to-day which roused him; he forgot he was tired, and before Lady *Macbeth's* soliloquy was finished, Lil saw him fling down the book and rise from his chair. This gave her new courage; she had already succeeded so far, that she had interested him into acting with her, instead of merely listening to her words.

The first scene over, Mr. Percival sat down, apparently for the purpose of staring at her.

"My God," he said, "and you talked about

playing waiting-maids, last time. You need only study and think, use your brains, as you have used them now, and you will step into a high position."

"But," said Lil, very softly—she was wondering at a sudden sense of pleasure that these words gave her—"I shall have to work a very long time before I can get any tragedy to play; I have so much to learn."

"Of course you have," interrupted Mr. Percival; "I know that, but you won't learn it by playing chamber-maids."

"No, no," said Lil, "I don't suppose I should, but I don't think you understand that I am very, very poor; as poor as anyone can be who has nothing."

Mr. Percival had many expressions, and his features, fine and very flexible, were almost transformed by their changes. When Lil had first come in he was cross, he had had a stupid pupil with him for an hour, and he was utterly out of sorts with everything. The expression he wore made him seem nothing but an old man, tired of the world, weary of life, lacking interest in everything. Then Lil's real acting had stirred him, roused him as the sounds of war rouse an old war-horse, and he entered into Macbeth. When he spoke to her about herself, there had come upon his face a smile, which he only wore in his best moments, which made his face wonderfully handsome, and full of fine meaning. Then he was the

actor, living in the art he loved, full of keen appreciation. Posterity can never guess how handsome such a man is, for these expressions defy photography, and, as a rule, evade portrait painters.

Now, as Lil spoke, the smile faded from his face, and an earnestness half kind, half weary, came into it instead. He had seen this struggle, before now, in the course of his long life. It was no new story to him.

"Well, well, my child," he said, "I can't give you up, you are getting on too well for me to let you go. Never mind about the lessons; if that troubles you, you must get into my debt."

Lil crossed the room to him and held out her hand. He understood and accepted her dumb thanks. Then she sat down near him and began to speak again, her eyes on the ground.

"It is not only that, Mr. Percival," she said, "it is so difficult to explain to you a position so difficult as mine! I must indeed get some work to live upon. I—I am living now, really it is no better, on charity. I ought not to take what I do. I am ashamed to. Oh, I must find some work!" she added, almost vehemently. As a rule she was so cold, so quiet, that this manner startled her hearer.

"Women are always so infernally impatient!" he said, rubbing his brow in a perplexed way.

"I do not think I am impatient," said Lil, quietly; "I do not desire to make any high flight. I want only some simple work, something to do which will enable me to live."

"Then don't let it be on the stage," said Mr. Percival, very decidedly; "you will get discouraged, and never take the high place which you will reach if you aim for that alone."

Lil saw there was nothing more to be obtained from him; he would not help her. She rose, with a sigh, put on her bonnet and went away. He watched her as she left him, the absorbed, far-away, habitual look having returned to her face.

"No," he said to himself, "I can't make her out; I've had a pretty large experience of women in my time, and I've met a good many queer ones, but this is a new sort."

With which he walked off to solace himself at a familiar haunt, where certain boon companions welcomed him with glee. He was soon lost in some rattling good story of the past, and in the memories of Macready and Fechter, soon forgot the mystery of his strange pupil.

And she, Lil, went to her lodging, very hopeless, very tired at heart. She dreaded, more and more, every day, bringing her father into some trouble. She could see plainly that it was getting more and more difficult for him to supply her with funds. She could not endure the thought of being a distress to

the one person who had been her constant real friend. "If I am doomed to bring him into trouble," said she, to herself, "my fate is set upon making a fool of me! But I will not endure it. I will not always be a trial to those I love. I will take fortune by the throat."

So saying, she fell into a fit of hard thinking; she was abstracted, and walked about the room. She looked at herself in the glass, pushed the black hair off her forehead, and gazed at her face. Had she still got good looks? Dared she take her fortune boldly by the hand? She stared at her face but saw no beauty in it, yet others appeared to find something either of beauty or of interest there. "If so, then, perhaps, she might venture. And how?"

She thought over all the theatres and the managers that she knew anything about. One manager she remembered to have seen. Brough had pointed him out to her. She thought he looked a gentleman. She had heard of his having country theatres as well as the one he had in town. "Should she try him first? Yes. And how?"

Why, go and see him of course.

She knew he would be at the theatre in the evening. He acted in the first piece, and would, she imagined, be free after that was over. She had acquired an unconscious, mechanical habit, of reading play-bills, when

she passed them, and of noting what the actors were doing. She waited, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, and an overpowering sense of timidity and fear upon her, until it was late enough to start. Then she quickly dressed and walked away through the crowded streets. She had to be quick, for did she pause or linger, she would infallibly turn back and give up her expedition, out of sheer cowardice.

She went straight to the stage door of the theatre in question. A friendly looking man was standing at it; this doorkeeper did not alarm her, as did a very golden-haired young lady, who stood behind him, and who was talking, with the most vulgar accent imaginable, to a man lounging and smoking a cigar, in the street outside. With her heart in her mouth, Lil, looking as cool as possible, went up to the doorkeeper and asked, "If it was possible to see Mr. Dare."

"I don't think it at all likely that you can, Miss," said the man, civilly enough, "but if you wish it, I'll send in and ask. Who shall I say?"

"Oh, he wouldn't know," said Lil, conscious of the curious, insolent stare of the golden-haired young lady; "only say a lady wants to see him, just for a moment."

"Step inside, Miss," said the man taking her to a little wooden place about six feet square, which appeared to be his sanctum. He then

went through a door which slammed behind him, leaving Lil defenceless before the inquisitive glances of the young woman, who appeared to belong to the place, and yet to have nothing to do. But in a moment, the amiable door-keeper returned. "I've sent in," he said, re-assuringly to Lil. There was nowhere to sit down in the little, wooden room, so Lil stood there with a sensation as if she were standing on a volcano. If Mr. Dare was a rough man, he might tell her she was ridiculous, to come there wasting his time, a mere novice, with no experience, no recommendation. She wondered whether she dared mention Mr. Percival, or whether he would be angry with her if she did, when he so strongly disapproved of her beginning too soon? She hoped Mr. Dare would be kind; he had looked so; and then perhaps she need not run the risk of annoying Mr. Percival. Oh, if he would only come, so that she might get it over. How long would it be possible for her to stand there waiting?

At last some one came through the door, which again slammed noisily. Some one came to the little room where Lil stood, and looked in. Her heart appeared to stand still, but she found strength to look up. It was not Mr. Dare, it was a stout, florid man, with a look as of much drinking and smoking being habitual with him; he wore long, fierce, black moustachios, he had one hand full of papers, which somehow gave him an air of

being busy and in a hurry; he sturdily kept his hat on, as though there could be no possibility of encountering ladies at a stage door. He eyed Lil all over, and made her feel about half her usual size.

"Was it you that wished to see Mr. Dare?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Lil.

"Can you tell me your business?" he said, with an air which said, if you do so, you must do it quickly. Lil looked at him and made up her mind.

"No," she said, "I am sorry, but I cannot."

"Well," said the man of the moustachios, with quiet insolence, "you can't expect to see Mr. Dare without you have an appointment with him and he knows who you are. You must understand, of course, that he has a great many persons wishing to see him," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, which showed that he could guess very well what she had come about. An acting manager knows the look of one who wants to get on the boards, as a publisher's clerk is acquainted with the 'paper-stainer,' and the picture dealer's man with the dauber of canvas. And these underlings of the middle men have a magnificent manner, all their own, of treating aspiring artists.

Lil felt that she was looked through and through, and mentally ticketed by the man of the black moustachios, "novice, no ex-

perience." She was resolved not to confide in him; he was just a degree too practical.

"Thank you," she said, "good-night, I am sorry to have troubled you."

She walked quietly out and away through the streets with a heart so heavy she scarcely knew how to carry it.

These first, ignorant struggles are so hard and so dispiriting.



## CHAPTER VI.

**L**IL found herself unable to study next morning for thinking of her adventure. Evidently that was not the way to go to work. If only Brough would help her, he could give her introductions. If only Laurence would help her, he could do it at once. But these two, like Percival, were set upon her waiting and working. Brough and herself alone knew what this meant ; she appreciated to the utmost his efforts to help her. But she feared that his cheery good nature and sanguine temperament led him to under-rate the increasing difficulty of keeping up her supplies. He always refused, partly on principle and partly from disposition, to look into the future or apprehend any troubles. He insisted upon letting the future take care of itself, while he enjoyed himself as well as he could in the present. Lil had seen him get into trouble many a time through this too easy disposition. And even he had evidently regarded the prospect with some dismay, should Lady Warrington get a clue to his secret. Lil became the more rest-

less, the more she thought of it. She must help herself; there was no one to help her. She must find out the right way of doing it. She remembered a theatrical "agency," which she had noticed in a street not very far from her lodgings. She would go there and see if they understood how to get at managers. She had just started up to go on her errand when she heard a familiar, heavy step on the stairs, and Brough pushed open the door and came in. She saw in a moment that he had something on his mind. He laughed, and greeted her in his usual boisterous fashion; but he was never a good hand at making believe to be jolly when he was not. There was a tameness and artificiality about it. Besides, that frown of annoyance was on his forehead.

"What is it, papa?" she inquired.

"What is what?" he asked, rather savagely.

"Why, I don't know; but you look disgusted."

"Do I?" and he walked to the glass over the mantel-shelf and inspected himself. "I think I look charming," he said, after a moment, turning round to her. He had made a considerable attempt to smooth out his forehead.

"So do I," said Lil; "but tell me what is the matter? You know, papa, it's no

good trying to make up a face for me ; you never could take me in. Have you some bad news?"

"No, baby, I don't think I have."

"You don't know if the news is good or bad? you are doubtful what I shall think of it? Then I know; they are married."

Brough looked hard at her as she spoke. Where had she found all this extraordinary strength of hers?

"Yes," he said, "you are right."

"How—how long is it since—since I died!" she said, with a sort of hysterical laugh, which seemed to catch her suddenly.

"For God's sake, don't laugh, child!" exclaimed Brough, quickly. "Six months—it is six months."

"What," she said, looking at him strangely; "not six ages, not six whole eternities, only six months! And do you mean to say," she went on, with a sudden change of manner, "that I have borne this for six long months, and in silence! Well, it is over now. The last cut of the knife has been given. I am, indeed, dead!"

She stood perfectly still for a little while, and neither spoke. Brough tipped his chair back reflectively and watched her, waiting to see how her mood would change. He knew of nothing to say. He had no consolation to offer her. The position in which she was placed was one quite out of any

experience of his, and he had learned to follow her moods and simply do his best to prevent their injuring her, rather than to lead her in any way. He had felt of late, more than ever, that women are unintelligible beings.

At last she spoke again, and now very quietly, very earnestly.

“Papa, this is terribly serious now. You must forget me. I must forget myself. Do not call me by the old names any longer. Remember we shall stand momentarily in danger of something too ghastly to be thought of! It is terrible to realise the power that lies between us, to know what a heavy secret ours is. Think of what he is doing, of what I have made him do! Think of her! oh, papa, she is so good, she is so innocent. She is pure as snow. She is like an angel. What have I done? I dare not think! But it is done. It is too late, it is all over. And now I have but one career, to forget, to die, indeed, to the past. I am no longer your child, I am no longer Lil, I am Miss Winter only. Remember that, help me to remember that!”

She went away from him, and sat down, her face hidden. He began to wonder whether she was ever going to speak again. It was worse than wild words, this silence. He knew what she was about when she was talking, though she talked ever so

madly. But silence leaves too much room for the imagination's play. At last he rose and went to her. He touched her.

"Child," he said, "shake this off. You have only to persevere and your future lies before you, a great future; Percival says so. Laurence says so. Forget the past, as you say; live for your new work."

"Where are they going to live, do you know?" she asked, without turning her head.

"Of course I know. I have found that out. I was not born yesterday. They are going to live at Florence for some time, then, I believe, at Genoa; at all events they intend to find a villa somewhere in Italy, probably in Tuscany, where they will settle down; the house in London is to be let. They are gone already."

"Thank God," said Lil, "I can breathe more freely. Yes, I will work, believe me. And I will live. I must, you know. It is evidently hard to kill me, or I should surely have died before this!"

"I want you to let Laurence come and see you," said Brough. He wants to talk to you a little about this play of his. Let him come. He will be sure to help you; he is the best fellow in the world."

Lil said nothing. She only thought of Laurence, at the moment, as one of those who would help her, perhaps, but only in

the future. She wanted real work, at the moment. Perhaps she was impatient. In truth she was thirsting for something to fill all her time and thoughts, which would leave her no chance to think of that past, that secret, which now she dared hardly name to herself.

"I will do as you like, papa, in anything that will please you. I wish I could learn not to call you that! I am terrified that the very walls will hear us. We two have such a horrible responsibility."

"Call me, 'old boy,' as you used to do when you were a baby," said Brough, cheerfully; "I rather prefer it. That will be quite safe. And what will you be called?"

"'Something that hath a reference to my state!' Call me Aliena."

"Aliena Winter does not sound very well," remarked Brough.

"What does that matter?" she answered.

"It will matter very much when you come out," said Brough.

"'Come out,'" echoed Lil. "What an idea; I—that am a ghost! Do not talk of it like that. I can just picture myself personating a murderess, a miserable woman, a wretched outcast, but I cannot imagine myself as a new actress, making a first appearance! No, don't talk of it like that, and Aliena will do. Now, go away and forget me; I must work. I must work and

forget myself, or my thoughts will drive me mad."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Brough.

"Oh, I hardly know," she answered, "but I must lose myself in one of these plays." She took up some of a small collection of play-books which lay together, and threw them down one after the other.

"I don't think I can endure any one of them, to-day!" she said. "My own tragedy is so terrible that it sickens me for these. But don't look like that at me, dear old boy! I will go out and get some air, only I must not go with you, so good-bye."

He took his hat and walked off rather dolefully. He did not understand this new mood at all. She took the thing in a different way from what he expected. Had she something in her mind that she would not tell him? He had only one anxiety, one suspicion that haunted him sometimes, and that was, that even now she might destroy herself if her solitude and her memories became unbearable. He determined to go back again later in the afternoon and take Laurence with him; between them they might cheer her up. Sincerely, at this moment, he wished Charlie Newman and Adelaide anywhere out of the way. But in the way they must ever remain, while they continued to be in the world. Occupying the same planet

with them, Lil could never again be herself. This fact had to be faced very clearly, and Brough resolved it should also be braved out as cheerfully as might be. So he went walking away down the Strand with his long stride, challenging the notice of passers-by, through his sheer length and breadth and his natural happy aggressiveness. And Lil, at the same time, was walking quickly in the other direction determined to regard herself as Miss Winter, pure and simple : a woman alone in the world, wanting work. What else was she, indeed? nothing. She walked in at the doorway of the theatrical "agency," and went up the broad stone stairs to the office. It all seemed very cold and hard and dirty. The office itself was a degree less dispiriting. It was comfortable enough, and the walls were covered and made gay by photographs of innumerable actors and actresses. The play bills of country theatres fluttered here and there, showing how such a notable actor from a certain theatre in London was performing a new and original play, supported by a "powerful company." Lil read some of these as she stood there; for a clerk who was writing at the desk only looked at her and then went on with his work. In a moment, however, a man came out of an inner room and stared at her interrogatively. She saw that to him she was to address herself.

So she explained her business in as few words as possible. "Oh, I see," he said, interrupting her, "you want to put your name down in our books. Just read this paper, and you will see what our terms are." So saying, he handed her a printed slip, and walked away. The purport of the printed slip was that the fee for putting an aspirant's name on the books was five shillings, that an engagement was not guaranteed, and that, if one was obtained, Mr. Young, the agent, claimed the first week's salary as his commission. All this interested Lil very much, and it seemed to her sufficiently reasonable. She had long ago discovered that nothing is to be got in this world without paying for it. And five shillings, which she had often paid at a servant's registry office in order to get a cook or a housemaid, seemed little enough to pay in order to get an engagement for herself! So she followed the man who had given her the paper, and told him she would like to put her name on the books. He took up a form and looked inquiringly at her.

"What style of thing do you go in for? Comedy?"

"I suppose so," said Lil, feeling it very difficult to appraise herself. To talk of the tragic parts she had studied would have been impossible with this man's eyes upon

her. Why, she could not have said, though she guessed the reason when she had seen Mr. Young on one or two other occasions. He was small, dark haired, with large dark eyes capable, apparently, of but one expression ; complete and absolute boredom and indifference. The man, though well-mannered enough, had no pretensions to be a gentleman ; he was inferior to many who came to him in search of work. But he had seen life for so many years from his one standpoint, that he seemed to have become incapable of any other view than that which he had from his desk. His name appeared to be a sort of sarcasm ; he was young in years, and in name ; but his expression and manner were those of an ancient, world-weary cynic, who for the last hundred years had been engaged in valuing persons of artistic and ambitious temperament, at " thirty shillings a week," or " two guineas a week, and pay your own travelling expenses," or " two and a half guineas a week, and dress yourself." He looked sadly at Lil when she made this doubtful answer, and said :

" What experience have you had ? "

" None," replied Lil, boldly.

" None ? ah, I see, a novice ! " and he proceeded to write this down.

" I want to get my experience," remarked Lil.

"Yes, exactly," said Mr. Young, in the tone of a man who had been bored with some two thousand novices who wanted to get their experience.

"Do you want to go into the country?" he asked. "Most of the companies going out now were made up two or three months ago."

"I should prefer the country," said Lil; "at least, I think so; but what I most want is to get something immediately."

"Ah, I see. Well, if you are ready to go on in a small part, perhaps, without having anything to say there might be an opening.

"Oh, certainly," said Lil; "I wish to begin in something very small."

"Well that is to your advantage," said Mr. Young, with languid approval; "all the ladies who come here want to play leading parts; and, really, you know that is impossible. And, as a rule, they are not at all nice looking; your appearance is in your favour, and, if you are willing to take something small, I have no doubt we can find you an engagement."

"Oh, yes;" said Lil, a little amused now by his dry manner; "I am not at all proud!"

"Proud!" repeated Mr. Young, and he gave a strange sort of little contemptuous laugh. "No. There's not much pride about this profession! Miss Aliena Winter, novice,

comedy. Should you object to going to an East End theatre? No. Would you go on in burlesque? Don't think you'd do for it? That's all, I think, thank you."

The last words applied to the five shillings which he took and dropped into a till. Miss Winter saw she was disposed of. She wished Mr. Young good afternoon, and received a somewhat absent-minded nod in reply. This young man, in the course of his professional career, appeared to have out-grown all the ordinary sentiments of the human breast. When he saw a really handsome woman, it was not with the eyes of admiration, but he ticketed her mentally as being worth so much more a week; and, as a rule, he informed her with smileless stolidity that she was decidedly superior to the general run of young women in the profession. He had ticketed Miss Winter; she was done with; so he gave her a nod, and proceeded to read aloud a letter which he had held in his hand all the time, and which he wanted the clerk to explain to him. It contained the descriptions of various ladies. Lil hurried away, and when she got out into the air felt as if she had escaped from some terrible place. Mr. Young, without making any effort, or being in the smallest degree rude or disagreeable, had the most remarkable power of "flattening"

any enthusiasm that might be lurking in the dramatic breast. He viewed it all from one stand-point, that of mere business ; and he imparted a sense of desolation to any one who was disposed to regard the profession as something artistic and interesting. Lil felt herself to be so very much in need of air after this little experience, that she went down on to the embankment and walked up and down by the dusky river. She had one remarkable quality ; the more circumstances suppressed her, the more she rose against them and rebelled. In prosperity she was capable of being a very idle, perhaps a positively indolent, woman. Adversity, disappointment, misery, these things roused the force and the fierceness of her character. The fact that she found herself ranged among the most unimportant dregs of her new profession stirred in her a passionate desire to rise to the surface by her own strength. At last, when her restless walk had converted an irritability, which was painful, into a resolution which gave her courage, she turned back to go to her lodgings. She meant to cheer herself by going over all her most ambitious parts.

As she turned down Cecil Street, she met her father and Edmund Laurence.

“ We have been down to see you,” said Brough. “ Have you been for a walk ? ”

"May I come another day?" asked Laurence; "I want to know how you are getting on."

"Not very fast," said Lil; she was tired, and felt, indeed, as if she were getting on very slowly. "And you? That play is not written?"

Laurence laughed.

"No, it is not written, it has got no farther than when you saw it. Do you think I am idle? No. I am overworked, you know. I wanted you to help me write it, because I was too busy to do it myself. Never mind, it will be ready when you are ready to play the heroine. I promise you, no one else shall have that part while there is a chance of your taking it."

"Thank you," said Lil, rather absently. She had lost the elasticity which is a part of youth, and which enables one to believe in the future, to wait for it, to long for it. She had courage, resolution, power. But she wanted to work now! She could not wait.



## CHAPTER VII.

**S**HE worked on, week after week, trying to keep her courage alive. She had to take her father's money; she half-starved herself in the endeavour to use as little of it as possible. Semi-starvation is not a good thing to work on. But she managed to do it and to work well. Only she longed to hear from the "Agency" of something which she might do.

She had got quite a number of parts in her head now. Even Mr. Percival was secretly a little surprised at the rapidity with which she learned; she was what he would have described as an "extraordinary quick study." The truth was she never dared stay to think: she snatched up her book the moment her thoughts wandered away. It was madness to look back—worse still for one instant to let her mind look towards the man she still loved; and towards the woman who now held her place, to whom indeed she had given it, and given it unlawfully.

But the tension was awful, and sometimes she would break down and sob wildly for a while, quite suddenly and seemingly without

provocation. But not often—for she fought against these fits of grief and passion with all her strength. They exhausted her too terribly; they were too expensive. But this was, altogether, a period as difficult to endure as any she had lived through. Mr. Percival began to see, as the weeks went on, that she was growing more haggard, more spiritless.

“Do not work too hard,” he said, one day, to her. No pupil had ever heard such words from him before!

“I cannot help it,” she said; “I cannot stop; I dare not.”

At last, after exercising her patience to the utmost, she determined to go and see the dry and arid Mr. Young once more. He welcomed her in a characteristic manner.

“Ah, Miss Winter—I think you’re on our books. I suppose you’ve come with the idea of giving us a good blowing up? We’re accustomed to that. But you know it’s no good—we can’t do anything if you don’t ever come here and show yourself. Appearance is everything.”

“I only came in to see if you had anything for me,” said Lil, meekly.

“Well,” he said, “I think perhaps we have. Just come into the inner room.”

“Was it possible! Lil felt a momentary thrill of excitement. What joy it would be to have some real work and no longer be a burden to her dear old boy! She followed

Mr. Young into another room ; here he hunted about among some letters until at last he found what he wanted.

"Here," he said, "is a letter from a manager, Mr. Allen, who wants a leading lady. He has bought the right to play certain high-class modern comedies in the small towns of England. He is coming here to-morrow ; and, as yet, I have no ladies to meet him. I think you would be very likely to suit him. Of course he would only pay a small salary."

"What do you call a small salary ? " asked Lil.

"Oh, two guineas a week. He won't give more than that, I feel sure."

"I will come to meet him," said Lil, "if you think he would take a novice."

"Oh, he's obliged to sometimes," said Mr. Young, who evidently thought as little of managers as of actors. "Of course you would have to go down for a week's rehearsals before you began to play. Will you be here at eleven to-morrow to meet him ?"

"Yes," said Lil. "Could I get the plays at French's to look at ?"

"No, you can't ; they are reserved. We can lend them to you, but not unless you are engaged to play in them."

"That is rather hard," said Lil, "for I cannot guess what parts I should be wanted to play."

"Oh, you can do them," said Mr. Young, with an air of consummate information, "they are heavy parts, but if you are a quick study, as you say you are, that is no trouble. You have the appearance, and that is the great point."

Mr. Percival had been telling Lil a story, but the day before, illustrative of how even a positively ugly woman may hold her own upon the stage by force of genius. She found it impossible to reconcile these two views, so gave it up and went away.

The next morning, punctual to her hour, she re-appeared at Mr. Young's office. The manager had not arrived, so she sat down and looked at the photographs and the play-bills. In a few minutes a cheerful looking young man came in—not the manager; no, evidently on the same errand as herself. Presently came another, and the two eyed each other askance. Then came a third; a very cheerful one, plainly under the impression that he had the "fatal gift of beauty," and was bound to get on in consequence thereof. Then came a shabby, shabby, seedy old man. The young ones greeted the agent with a slightly nervous audacity, as if they were quite sure of good engagements and he knew it; they all said "How d'ye do, Young. Nice morning, isn't it?" But the seedy old man seemed too low down in the world to have the courage for this pretence. He stood

humbly in the middle of the room, apparently so convinced of his unimportance that he did not think it worth while to take his hat off, as did the others when they saw Lil. She sat watching this poor, dirty old fellow. He interested her. Another lady came in now, and sat down; and then two more young men. All these were evidently expected. But the shabby old man was not, and presently Mr. Young went and spoke to him. It turned out that he wanted to put his name down on the books. He was plainly afraid of Mr. Young.

This indeed was the dregs of the profession! Small wonder, if Mr. Young saw many such specimens as this, that he despised it!

While the old man was paying his five shillings, in walked a tolerably gentlemanly looking man, who wore quite a different air in entering the room from all the others; he nodded to Mr. Young and went straight in to the inner sanctum—the manager, clearly. All the young actors looked admirably indifferent. Mr. Young handed the shabby old fellow over to the clerk and took Lil into the inner room. She wondered much why she was taken first, but was silently grateful. The truth was that Mr. Young, despite his cool contempt for managers and actors, had a kind of dim idea that he had encountered something to be treated with a little consideration when, as but very rarely happened to him, he met with a lady.

The manager looked hard at Lil as only managers can look. Even an insignificant unheard-of country manager looks at a woman in a way that belongs to his business and to none other.

"You've come for an engagement?" he said slowly and reflectively, "and you are a novice—never been on the boards at all?"

"I have been studying for a long time under Mr. Percival."

"Ah," said the manager, "theatrical tuition is a mere waste of time. What you want is experience."

"Just so," said Mr. Young, drily, "these theatrical masters pocket a lot of your money, and what can they do for it afterwards? Get you one engagement, perhaps."

It struck Lil, who was listening very quietly, that the fact that the master could get a pupil an engagement at all was the very reason why Mr. Young disapproved of him. But the manager puzzled her a good deal more. She looked from Mr. Young to him and found he was regarding her earnestly.

"Of course," said Mr. Allen, "if Mr. Percival had brought you out at a *matinée*, for instance, and could say you had been successful, I could make a different offer for you. As it is, your experience has to be gained."

"Just so," said Lil; "and I should prefer to gain it in the country before Mr. Percival

brings me out. I suppose all novices suffer stage-fright, and I would rather go through that where a mistake would be least noticed."

"Oh, I can promise you, no one will know what mistakes you may make, except the manager—myself in fact," said Mr. Allen, with a laugh of contempt which included all his audiences. Lil began to feel as if this public career must have something strange about it to produce so much cynicism.

"Well, I should like you to come," said Mr. Allen; "you have the appearance and height for Pamela, the character which I want you to take. You will also have to play an old lady. You won't object to that, I suppose?"

"Not at all," said Lil, apparently much to his surprise and a little to his relief. He was accustomed to deal with young women who demanded before all things that they should always have a chance of looking pretty.

"Pamela is a heavy part," said Mr. Allen, "and a showy one; you will want very handsome dresses for it. The old lady also requires good dressing. I shall want you to join me at Chester; you must give a month's rehearsals without pay, of course; and after that you will have thirty shillings a week and your travelling expenses."

"During this month," said Lil, "I shall only be expected to rehearse?"

"Oh, I may put you on sometimes," said

Mr. Allen, as if he was conferring a great favour.

"You will, then, have the lady with you who plays Pamela for you, now?"

"N—no," admitted Mr. Allen, somewhat reluctantly. Lil looked at Mr. Young and saw a smile in his eyes. She understood then that she would have to play during this month for nothing. However, it was clear that as a novice, she could not expect to be paid immediately.

"Can I give you my answer to-morrow?" said Lil; "I must think about it."

"Certainly," said Mr. Allen. And so the interview ended. Lil went away, determined to go, but resolved, first of all, to ask some advice. She had a kind of trembling fear, despite all she had gone through, at the thought of leaving the few who knew her. Misfortune had not hardened her. She dreaded going among a set of people who would regard her merely as "a novice—at thirty shillings a week." This, however, she resolved to keep to herself. She determined to go and ask Mr. Percival's advice. To-morrow, at a certain hour in the morning, she knew she might catch him; she decided to be guided by what he should say.

She passed a restless night, wondering whether she had the courage to go through her noviciate, despising herself because she

feared it, yet longing, as all people of excitable temperament do, to take work at once and face its difficulties. Her two great terrors were stage-fright, and the personal curiosity about herself of the other actors and actresses. In small country towns, she thought, surely the audience would not terrify her much; and as to the people with whom she would have to associate, she must simply seclude herself from them, if that were possible. The idea of having real work to do—something which would give her a place in the world, however unimportant a one, delighted her. She had begun, as a natural result of the long strain of waiting and studying in solitude, to have a morbid idea that she was veritably an outcast from life and altogether useless.

In the morning she received a letter in a writing unfamiliar to her. She soon discovered it was from Mr. Allen. He evidently wanted her to join his company. This pleased her. It was so new an idea to her, now, that anybody should really want her for her value!

“Theatre Royal, Littletown.

“DEAR MADAM,

“I think you would be better pleased if you got your dresses in London. Being modern, they are left to the idea and taste of the actress. I will give you an idea of the

kind of things you require. For the old lady, rich black silk or velvet with white lace, etc., bonnet with white feathers, lace, etc.; third act, deep mourning. For Pamela, in the first act, morning dress of the most fashionable style, hat and sunshade; second act, evening dress, striking and rich; third act, another morning dress of an effective kind. You will see by my letter of agreement that I require you to *play or to understudy* for one month gratis and that I shall ask you, if I think fit, to sign an engagement with me as soon as I can see what you can do, so that it will be easy for me to see other ladies and rehearse them before your month expires. Please send me a copy of agreement in your own handwriting.

“Yours, A. ALLEN.”

“Letter of agreement between A. Allen and Miss Winter. A. Allen engages you, Miss Winter, as a member of my company to play or to understudy the Dowager and Pamela, for one month beginning immediately; after that month to receive thirty shillings a week, should arrangements be come to. To find your own dresses, which are to be in keeping with the characters you represent. I, for my part, undertaking to rehearse, and teach you the business required and to pay your railway fares from place to place.

“P.S.—You may be required to play at

once—that is, after one or two rehearsals, so please be letter perfect in both pieces. It is most important that the words are at your fingers' ends."

Lil read this letter over several times, with a sense of satisfaction. It seemed to her real business. She longed to get her new parts and begin to study them at once. But still she determined to see what Mr. Percival thought of it. She took the letter with her and went round to the street which had now become so familiar to her that it was as much like home as any place she knew. Mr. Percival was there, having a brief interval of relaxation, enlivened by a cigar and some raw whiskey. He welcomed Miss Winter very heartily. Notwithstanding her strange reserve, her lack of joyousness, her uniform quietness of manner, she was a favourite of his. She had a smack of the real capacity in her which delighted him.

"I have come for some advice, Mr. Percival," said Lil.

"Well, my dear, what is it? I'll sit down and smoke my cigar, if you've no objection, while you tell me. Now then?"

Lil told her tale and read him the letter.

"No, my dear, it's not good enough. You get no real experience in those small country towns. If it were Birmingham or Liverpool it would be another thing. But at these little

places you have no proper stage management, no properties; the other actors are utterly inferior, and, in fact, it isn't acting at all. You would come back as bad as you are—or worse—and have spent a lot of money on it. It would cost you forty or fifty pounds to knock about with him for a month. And then your salary—when you get it; do you suppose that will cover your expenses? Not a bit of it! Even if he pays you at all, which is very doubtful.”

“But,” said Lil, “surely forty or fifty pounds!—not so much as that! I should live very cheaply.”

“My dear child,” said Mr. Percival, “you don't know what it means. You can't live cheaply when you are doing this sort of thing. You will travel all day and get in late; you must go to the first hotel you come to and pay them anything they ask you. If you can get yourself some food and get dressed in time for the performance, you have done well. You can't go about finding cheap places to lodge in. No, no; you must make up your mind to spend money, if you go, there's no doubt about that. Then you will learn nothing; you will have to act with a rowdy set of men and you will probably get thoroughly disgusted with the profession.”

Lil sat sorrowfully regarding the letter in her hand. “I don't mind all that,” she said; “that is nothing to me, because all I want

is work and to get my independence. But if you really think it would cost me so much!"

"Think," echoed Mr. Percival, "I know it. And don't you imagine you could live on thirty shillings a week, even if you could feel sure that Allen would pay it you."

"Oh, Mr. Percival," said Lil, "how hard it is to make a beginning—how hard it is to get anything to do!"

"You are in such a hurry, my dear," said Mr. Percival, "go on working; you are worth more than this."

Lil rose with a sigh. "Thank you," she said. "I will tell Mr. Allen I have given up the idea."

"Well, I think you'd be throwing money and time away to go. Then, you need quite a wardrobe for it. There's an expense to start with!"

"Good-bye," said Lil, with a sigh, and went dolefully down stairs and through the streets, hardly seeing where she went. Her eyes were full, not of actual tears, but of a dimness. How difficult it is to make a commencement in any career without someone to "back you up," only those who, like Lil, have tried it, can tell.

She went home and wrote to Mr. Allen that she could not accept his proposal. She went out and posted the letter, to get it off her mind; and then she sat down in her room in a fit of hopelessness. What was she to do?

Go on working at her new studies, as if she were sixteen and it was her father's duty to educate her? Oh, impossible. She began to walk restlessly about, in a mood of wild impatience. Just then the maid came to the door of her room and said Mr. Laurence wished to see her. "Show him up," said Lil, and then stood for a moment, wondering—should she ask him to help her now, give her an introduction, assist her to some small engagement? While she wondered, he entered the room, and she met his straight-gazing blue eyes. Yes, she would ask him. He inspired her with confidence.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, "I want so much to speak to you."

A vivid smile came upon his face.

"That is charming of you," he said. "What is it? Tell me; is it something I can do?"

"It is something I am going to ask you to do," she said, "because I know you have influence at some of the theatres. Mr. Laurence, I cannot wait for an opportunity to come out in tragedy, nor can I even wait until your play is written! I am living on money which is almost charity—it is given me by one who can ill afford to spare it. I have been trying to get an engagement in the country; I asked Mr. Percival's advice before deciding, and he assured me I could not live on the salary, and in fact that I should have to spend quite a great deal of money! So I have

just written and refused to go. This has made me wretched, because I thought I had found an opening. Mr. Percival says I am in too great a hurry; from his point of view, as a master, I know he is right; I am no actress yet. But I shall go mad if I am to be fevered by this delay; I want a small engagement which will enable me to just live and be independent while I study. Tell me, is it possible to get such a thing in London—to go on as a waiting-maid, or something of that sort. There, I have poured my troubles at your feet. Do not blame me—you looked so kind, I could not help it.”

Laurence sat still a moment or two, looking at her. She puzzled him beyond words. Here was a young and handsome woman, apparently quite alone in the world, living in lodgings, on what she called charity, studying for the stage, with seemingly no one who even knew her but Brough Warrington, not the least fast of Bohemians. Yet this woman had a something about her, a natural dignity in the midst of her humiliating confessions, which shewed her to be a lady, and that she had no idea but that she would be treated as such, just as much as though she spoke in her own drawing-room. This fascinated Laurence. It seemed to him extraordinary that a woman could preserve such a manner, keep such an atmosphere about her, while situated as was Miss Winter.

"Blame you," he said, at last, "you honour me by speaking to me like this. It is easy enough for me to get you some very small part; the only difficulty is that you are too distinguished-looking for a waiting-maid. You would find it very difficult to make up for one; and the leading actress would infallibly be jealous of your appearance."

Lil looked at him in gentle surprise. "My appearance!" she repeated, in a low voice, and sighed. It was a mystery to her how she could have any appearance left. She felt herself to be such a ghost that she fancied people would scarcely see her. She felt faded—worn out—a thing of the past. But, suddenly, she again encountered Laurence's eyes with that look in them which had startled her when they met in the park. Evidently, to him, she was not a thing of the past! She recovered herself, with an effort.

"Indeed," she said, "you don't do me justice. Let me but have the chance, and I could make up into a very decent waiting-maid. Or I should delight in playing an old lady—that is what I should really like."

"Dear me," said Lawrence, "you love art for art's sake, even more than I supposed. But, seriously, Miss Winter, I will speak to some of the managers I know, and see what openings they have."

"Oh, thank you—thank you," said Lil.

“How I shall bless you if you can find me some work.”

“Shall you?” said Lawrence, and the smile came upon his face again. Then he began to talk to her about her work, about his unwritten play; and, when he left her, she had a new feeling of hope. The kindly smile of those blue eyes seemed to linger with her and cheer her.



## CHAPTER VIII.

**L**AURENCE devoted a good deal of his valuable time (already too full of engagements) to walking about among his friends the managers during the next few days. All he could hear of, for some time, was that at one theatre they wanted a number of attendants—speechless walking ladies, that is. They were paid little, indeed; but their dresses would be provided. He did not care to go to Miss Winter with nothing better than this. At last he discovered just the thing she had talked about, “second waiting-maid” wanted, in an old English comedy, played by a bright little company. It seemed to him ludicrous for Miss Winter, who looked Lady Macbeth or Imogen, to take such a place upon a stage! but he knew the thing would please her, so he took it to her.

She was overjoyed.

“Oh, Mr. Lawrence,” she said, “you are indeed a friend; you cannot guess how happy it will make me to have something to do in good earnest. Am I to go and see if the manager thinks I shall do?”

“Yes, to-morrow, at twelve. He is a good fellow, fortunately, and a gentleman. I am glad you should be with him, as he is to have my play when it is written. But, Miss Winter, if you take this engagement you must keep it dark; old Percival won’t like one of his pet pupils to play this sort of thing.”

“I shall tell him, and get him to teach me the business of the part.”

Laurence laughed aloud. “Fancy Jack Percival teaching a waiting-maid! Well, I dare say he’ll do it for you. He certainly wouldn’t for anyone else. Now, Miss Winter, do you mind going to see this manager? Shall I—” he was about to say shall I go with you, when it occurred to him that she might not think that any advantage.

“Mind going?” said she, with a look almost of amusement, “I have outlived that sort of thing. But I am infinitely obliged to you for giving me the opportunity.”

Laurence found that she grew, apparently without being aware of it, uneasy if he stayed long with her. The truth was that the interest with which his eyes dwelled upon her face affected her as something unnatural and altogether misplaced. She was glad to see him, yet she very soon wished him away. He felt this, and made his visits very brief. But he was glad indeed when he could find an excuse to make one. He came the next

afternoon to hear how she had succeeded with the manager.

"Oh, well!" cried she, as delighted as if she had an offer to play a leading part at fifty pounds a night; "he has actually engaged me, and I am to go to rehearsal to-morrow. Oh, I am so glad. I began to think a beginning was the very thing one could never, never get! Oh, you may laugh at me, Mr. Laurence. I have told you before to make up your mind that I am not a real artist. I have no true ambition—I might have had, but it lies dead within me!—what I do desire is to earn my living. A guinea a week is not much, but it is something to be thankful for, when just now I had nothing."

"I am glad, if you are glad," said Laurence. "After all, it is a good thing for you to get used to the stage and the foot-lights and the look of the house, before you make a big attempt. You will overcome stage-fright, which is a thing to be dreaded. I'll set to work and get this play written. You shall act that heroine of mine; I wouldn't let them have the play for that woman who is playing lead with them now."

"Miss Chichester? why not?"

"Oh, she hasn't an atom of sympathy. She is effective, but without variety. She laughs and makes play with her eyes just the same in all her characters. I liked her when she

first came out, but now I am tired of her. She has no depth."

"As you will be tired of me when I have been 'on' a little while."

"Oh, no, you are all depth. There is no sounding you; deeps lie below, however far one touches. That is a fascination which never palls. And so you go to rehearsal to-morrow?" he said, hastily changing his subject, for he saw a look of reserve and surprise coming into her face. "Well, you will soon find out what Miss Chichester is like. She has a sweet temper, and she doesn't think any living woman but herself should be good looking. Her jealousy is the worst thing at that theatre."

"I shall not arouse it," answered Lil, with the quietness of conviction. Laurence did not answer her with words, but he looked the more.

To-morrow came, and Lil went to her first rehearsal.

The Favourite theatre, one of the prettiest and most comfortable in the "front," is very ugly and uncomfortable "behind." Once in at the stage door you seem to have engaged upon an undertaking in which you are doomed to lose life or limb. Up and down small and perilous flights of stairs, through unexpected doorways, past precipitous descents, into gloomy recesses stowed full of stage furniture, the way wanders on in most

bewildering fashion. Lil followed the door-keeper, who condescended to guide her for this first time; and she felt afraid continually of losing him and then herself. But suddenly and unexpectedly she was on the stage. The door-keeper deserted her, and Lil found herself standing alone, and very bewildered in the midst of a scene quite strange to her. The theatre looked extremely dark and dismal; stalls and dress circle were all encased in brown holland pinafores. One great flaring jet of gas took the place of the footlights, and threw a strong, rather uncomfortable light upon the stage. Lil saw at once that she was unnoticed; she was among a group of others, all of whom seemed as vague as herself. There was another group at the opposite wings. The stage was at present given up to two persons; a lady sitting on a broken chair, wrapped in a fur cloak and looking very cold and unhappy; and a gentleman who appeared to be talking to her rather inaudibly. Lil at last caught a few words he was saying. She turned then to a girl who stood near. "This is not the *Interloper* being rehearsed, is it?" she asked.

"No," said the girl, "it is *Romeo and Juliet*. Don't you know the governor has engaged Madame Alandine for an afternoon performance?"

"Oh, yes, I saw that," said Lil, "but I

thought the *Interloper* was to be rehearsed now."

"So it is; but they haven't got through *Romeo and Juliet* yet; and they must get that done first. Mr. Bellair is being such a bother; he keeps wanting the scenes altered for him. They've had the carpenter on four times. Alandine doesn't look much in love, does she! and yet Romeo is being as affectionate as he can. This is the balcony scene, you know—that broken chair has to do for the balcony!"

Lil looked on with fresh interest. Alandine was one of the few actresses whom she admired with enthusiasm. And so this was Alandine in the morning! Small, pale, with an expression of discomfort on her face, she nursed herself, rocking backwards and forwards on her broken chair, and mumbling out her words. But every now and then she would wake up and speak a few lines with sudden fire and amazing vigour. Romeo, with his hat on the back of his head, his trousers turned up as he had worn them in the muddy streets, making ardent love, looked as funny as can well be imagined. To Lil he seemed vulgar, exaggerated, too pronounced in his style. She found afterwards that this was the result of the absence of the proper surroundings. When she saw him again with his beautiful dress, with the scenery, the footlights, the audience, the exaggeration

became only just proportion. And this little lesson in acting she never forgot. Alandine did not trouble herself to do more than say the words, except just now and then; and Lil was amazed to find that she did not know her lines. She herself would never have dared to say a part so imperfectly to Mr. Percival as Alandine was now saying Juliet, only two days before it was to be given! But, when the poison scene came, Alandine stepped out on to the stage and gave the whole thing in all the power of her voice. It was strange to see her there, with the empty theatre, going through this great scene with scarcely a listener; for most of the others were whispering and laughing together, not noticing anything until it came to their own business; and even the wonderful shriek which Alandine gave at "Stay, Tybalt, stay!" failed to startle or rouse any one but Lil.

At last *Romeo and Juliet* was done with; Juliet put on her hat and went off arm-in-arm with Romeo. The calls were now for the characters in the *Interloper*; the stage manager, his hat very much on the back of his head, and an air of distraction on his face, took up his place by the flaring gas jet by the side of the prompter. None appeared to know their parts; everybody carried a book of the play, and read his or her lines therefrom; so Lil did not feel ashamed to carry

hers and consult it. Now appeared Miss Chichester, wrapped in majestic furs, and with an air of great hauteur about her. She had been smoking cigarettes in her dressing-room, and abusing Alandine to a sympathetic friend. Miss Chichester could not speak two lines of Juliet, and knew it; therefore, with great fervour, she hated Alandine, who had an abundance of what actors call "force."

Lil got through her little part in the *Interloper* very well. She had not above a dozen lines to say. Still, there was a certain excitement to her in speaking these in their proper places. She summoned all her courage, and remembered all she had learned from Mr. Percival, and so got over her business without giving any trouble to the stage-manager. Miss Chichester patronised her, called her "my dear," offered her gratuitous information as to her "business," whenever they had anything to do together; but this only amused Lil; she accepted it with all politeness. She was well aware that a waiting-maid must expect to be patronised by the leading lady.

The next day she had to tell Mr. Percival. "Well, my dear," said he, "of course if you are driven to it, you must do it. Only, don't get discouraged; there's nothing so disheartening as doing inferior work on the stage. Remember there's good stuff in you. But remember,

too, an actress must be what she acts. Forget all your good style now, and make yourself into a pert waiting-maid. Even the smallest part may be played properly. I shan't come to see you in this; it's not worthy of you, and you'll do me no credit. When you come out properly, though, I will."

"This will cure me of one thing, won't it, Mr. Percival?" said Lil; "when you do bring me out I shan't be too frightened to speak—which I really believe I might be, otherwise. I cannot tell you how often I have wakened myself at night with a horrible dream of walking on to a stage and just uttering Lady Macbeth's first three or four words, "They met me in the day of success," and then my breath going away from fear. Fancy, standing there before the house, speechless!"

"Oh, you'd go on if you'd once begun," said Mr. Percival. "I brought out a woman once who did stand speechless; but then she never got a word out. She'd been studying with me a long time; she got on very well, but she always said she would be nervous. But I thought nothing of it; I can't see how anyone should be afraid of an audience—it seems to me the public is made up of fools. Well, I brought her out in the country, in *Othello*. I shall never forget it. You know when Brabantio appeals to the duke in the court, Othello sends for Desdemona. Well, we got to it: 'Enter Desdemona.' We

waited a bit—at last she came on. I gave her her cue—"Do you perceive in all this noble company, where most you owe obedience?" She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. I went over to her and gave her her words; I thought perhaps she'd forgotten them. She went on opening and shutting her mouth, but never a sound did she make. This went on for some minutes. It was perfectly awful. We had to let the curtain down and give the people back their money. She was simply speechless from fright."

"What became of her?" asked Lil.

"Oh, she never came out. She died soon afterwards."

"What a dreadful story!" exclaimed Lil.

"I shall think of that when I have to go on—I hope I shan't be as nervous as that!"

"You're not nervous in that sort of way, my child. Now, I'll tell you about another woman, a Spaniard, whom I taught; she came out with some amateurs. It is ruin to begin with amateurs; enough to discourage any actor, for they never know their business properly. She also came out in *Desdemona*. I knew she wasn't afraid, so I didn't go to the hall where they were acting till late in the evening, when I just went in to see how they were getting on. They had got to the last act, and *Desdemona* was lying in her bed, and *Othello* was talking of killing—of course, like a fool and an amateur, to the

audience, instead of to Desdemona. When I came to the wings he was standing with his back turned to her; and never shall I forget what I heard her say: 'I fear you, for you are fatal, when your eyes roll so; at least, I should if I could see them. I suppose they are rolling, but of course I can't tell when you turn your back to me.' Lord! Lord! what a noise there was. The audience hissed him off, and applauded her to the echo; oh, they appreciated it. That was nerve, not nervousness, eh?"

"I'm afraid I haven't that sort of nerve," said Lil. "But I couldn't stand speechless, either, it would feel so absurd. I think I should walk off."

"What! like Miss N—. When she came out she really was scared, for she had never had the chance of even rehearsing on a stage; she had only just learned her part in this room with me. She actually did turn round and walk off. She tried it on several times; but I stood in the wings and shook my fists at her. It was just which she was most afraid of—me or the audience. I won—she was afraid to pass me—she dared not; indeed, I believe I should have murdered her if she'd really tried to—so she went back and spoke her part!"

"You are terrifying me!" said Lil, "I declare I shall be afraid to go on even in my little waiting-maid part."

“Nonsense—what have you got to say when you come on—‘Madame, Lord Peter is at the door.’ When you’ve once said that you’ll never feel afraid again. You will find the glare of the footlights prevents your seeing the people in the stalls—the back of the house is just a mass of faces—and when you are once used to the look of it you’ll never think much about it again, I assure you. What is there to be afraid of? The public! Why, probably there’s not a person in the house knows half as much as you do. And certainly there’s not likely to be one who knows as well as you how your part should be acted.”

Mr. Percival’s contempt for the public was something prodigious. It amused Lil, and gave her courage, though she did not sympathise with it. Mr. Percival sometimes made her laugh now with one of his witty stories. He was an inexhaustible mine of good things and queer anecdotes, and had so much humour in him that he re-awakened the sense in her. Brimful of strange tales, and with a wonderful gift of telling them, Mr. Percival was the idol of green-room gatherings. He was irrepressible, and would sometimes tax the powers of younger actors by finishing a funny story at the very moment when the curtain was about to rise upon a tragic scene, or even telling one upon the very stage itself, in an inaudible aside, at some

moment when to seem to be talking would be appropriate. This manner, as if the stage was no more terrible a place to strut on than one's own hearthrug, and the public a mere body of unimportant puppets, seemed very strange to an absolute novice like Lil. But it gave her courage. Another thing which gave her courage, too, was the sense of loneliness she had upon her. No one would know her ; no one would think much about it if she did fail. If she stood speechless, some other small actress would be put in her place. As to the audience, if Brough were not there, they were no more to her than a body of people from another planet. She was no one to them. She had no friends, no acquaintances, no relations, enemies, or lovers to laugh or cry at her failure. The thought of this settled in upon her mind and gave her a strange hard sort of courage, born of misery.

Brough was evidently pleased at what she had done ; and this was a great relief to her. The truth was, though he did not tell her so, he was most thankful to see her do something herself, take a step in her own career without urging. He thought it showed that her mind was recovering its balance.

She took great pains with her dress, and one day made herself up for Brough's edification, to see if her disguise was good.

"Oh, you are safe, child!" he exclaimed,

when she came in. "Those black eyebrows make a regular little virago of you; your own mother wouldn't know you. There's no fear—you are as completely hidden in that dress and make up as if you were buried several times over."

"That's all right!" said Lil, thankfully. "But promise not to come to the theatre, papa. It will frighten me to see you. I shall feel better if there is no one who knows me as anything but Miss Winter. You know the consciousness of my secret gives me a nervousness which is worse than stage-fright; and sometimes the sight of your familiar face, with the look of recognition in it, terrifies me. I am scared if I see you in the street. I fancy people must know who I am, if they know you!"

"What an absurd child you are," growled Brough. "Well, if I mayn't come, I suppose I mayn't." But he mentally resolved to go all the same, and look at her without her seeing him. He saw that it would unnerve her if she felt his presence.

He did go, on the evening when she entered upon her new life. From the back of a box he looked on, in wonder, whenever a certain black-haired, rosy-cheeked, brisk little waiting-woman appeared upon the scene. Lil had indeed buried herself in her character.

He waited for her at the stage door to tell

her so ; he would not go into the green-room for fear of frightening her. He did startle her as it was, for when she came quickly out intent upon getting home unnoticed, she was seized upon tempestuously by a big, unexpected man. But she recognised his hug immediately. "By Jove, baby, I'm proud of you," said he. "It takes a decent actress to be so absolutely unlike herself as you were to-night. Bravo ! there are great things before you."

For a moment a flicker of real fiery enthusiasm and ambition arose within her. But it died away all too soon, and left in her heart only the deathly sickness of despair which had grown so cruelly familiar there. What use was a hope—a future—success—to a woman alone for ever in the world, isolated and shut away into her own narrow being ?

"Oh, papa," she exclaimed, "but for you I should die. Your sympathy is all I live on, I verily believe. I am so glad when I please you !"

"Well, you have pleased me to-night," said he, taking no notice of the first part of her speech.



## CHAPTER IX.

**L**IL'S life became now so full of work that she could almost entirely prevent herself from thinking. She had sufficiently recovered to be aware that this was her only chance. The keenness of her suffering was no less; only she had strength enough now to hold it at bay, to refuse to face it, to pass by it continually with shut eyes. It is strange to have an ever-present place in your life that you dare not look at, dare not even remember, except to avoid it. So it was now with her. As the weeks lengthened into months, and the months passed by, she grew to dread, more intensely than ever, the merest thought or remembrance of those two in Italy. Amid the loveliest scenery in the world, their loves had become one—had, by now, become accustomed, domestic. The idea was madness to Lil. She knew of it, knew it was in her mind, as we know of the horrors of a nightmare; but she never opened her eyes upon it for one instant. She wondered that the human being can suffer so long; that her pain should thus have gathered greater strength, instead of wearing itself out; and she turned

herself wildly away from herself. She worked incessantly; as some drink to drown their thoughts, so she worked. At the Favourite Theatre she was now regarded as a regular member of the company; she filled one small part after another. She never worried the manager to give her a better part; she always knew her business, and did it well. And she was thoroughly grateful for a small salary, so that she held her place very quietly. Miss Chichester would have been amazed, indeed, had she heard that Miss Winter was studying heavy parts, and intending to make her appearance in them. However, Miss Winter never talked about herself, so no one knew of her private dreams and ambitions. For, slowly and surely, the fever of ambition, which was indeed a part of her temperament, arose within her. As she grew accustomed to the stage and its "business" and learned to measure her own powers, she became possessed of a burning desire to produce an electric effect, to thrill the hearts of an audience and make them vibrate to her touch. She went on studying under Mr. Percival; and she worked so hard, she put her brains so into the work, that he told her one day it was a real pleasure to him to teach her. One after another she took up the standard heavy parts of the stage, and conquered them. She lived in them, thought of them, dreamed of them at night, and so succeeded in almost completely forgetting

herself and that agony which lay hidden away at her heart.

Laurence met Jack Percival sometimes, in certain haunts which they both frequented, and he always asked him how was Miss Winter getting on? "I tell you, sir," Percival would say, "she's the very thing we want, and have not got, a tragic actress. She'll be *the* tragic actress when she's on. She has the power, the intensity, the fire; and the dramatic instinct is strong in her. She will live to bless the day you sent her to me."

Then Laurence would go in to see Miss Winter for a few minutes, and tell her this. He loved to repeat Percival's praise to her; nothing else ever brought the colour into her face, but this did. For Percival seldom said anything encouraging to her now; she only guessed what he thought of her powers, by the parts he chose for her. He was always a rough master, and no respecter of persons; she knew very well that, did she fail or break down, he would throw her over at once. This made her value his approval the more. And then, too, his judgment was different from that of the public. Every part he gave her to study he had seen played by the best actresses during his career. He knew just how every speech had been delivered, and every point made by actresses of unforgotten genius. He measured her against her peers, not merely as does the public, and as too often

do the critics, by personal like or dislike. Perhaps, after all, the audience, as a mass, deserved Mr. Percival's vast contempt. He would always say he never looked at the house except to count it, and practice had taught him to do that in a very few minutes.

Brough was delighted with her industry, and his boyish spirits came back in full force. He thought that now, at last, Lil was fairly launched on a new career, which, after all, might be a comparatively happy one. He forgot one thing, which men do very often forget—women cannot find all their life and satisfaction in brain work. It may interest them, fire them, but it cannot feed them. A woman must have love, or she must die. Perhaps this is the reason why women cannot really do as much brain work as men, though sometimes gifted with great ability; it is an absolute necessity of their being to give a great part of their life to loving and being loved. They have a different, a greater capacity in this way; a husband and half-a-dozen children seem hardly enough sometimes to satisfy a very ordinary woman. And, in Lil, all this power and passion was shut up within herself, caged, put by, never again to be looked at. Only in her brain work might she live henceforward. Brough, seeing her always busy, often cheerful, certainly now never wild or desperate, forgot that to keep herself on this level, under such unnatural

conditions, was a heavy, an incessant, a terrible strain. She, herself, scarcely realised how great the tension was upon her. But sometimes, she would wake in the night, and in that solitary, unexpected moment, in the darkness, she would start up with always the same cry—

“Can I go on living?”



## CHAPTER X.

**H**IL hardly realised at the time, grateful though she was for what he had done for her, how much trouble Edmund Laurence had taken to obtain her engagement. She was so intensely desirous of getting some work, that she had appealed to him and taken his help, with the feeling upon her that she could not afford to throw away any opportunity or chance of aid. When she was settled into her work and had grown intimate with the daily life of the stage, she saw how hard, how desperately hard, was the struggle for a first opportunity. And then she saw, too, how quietly, and with how much good feeling, Laurence had helped her over this most difficult step. He had secured her engagement simply by the exertion of his own influence. She found herself always raised a step in the estimation of those about her, by the invariable courtesy and respect with which Laurence treated her. As he had got her the engagement by which she lived, he might very easily have thought himself justified in patronising her. The fact that he did not, that he considered her in a thousand ways,

and made her difficult position easier for her, that he had apparently forgotten all he did for her as soon as it was done ; these things filled Lil with gratitude whenever she thought of them. Laurence had been to her a true friend, had helped her into the path which she desired to enter, and had smoothed its rough places for her. Only a woman, in as lonely, desolate, and despairing a position as Lil's, could understand how sweet, how delicious, was the sense of such real kindness as this. What to one, in a safe and secure place in life, is mere ordinary politeness, seems to one, isolated and outcast, like a taste of divine love. But Laurence's had been more than ordinary politeness ; it was consistent, genuine, unobtrusive good feeling. In truth, Miss Winter was to him a lovely, mysterious enigma, the more fascinating by reason of this mysteriousness. He saw in her many qualities which attracted him and which claimed his respect. He could not but treat her with all the gentleness of his nature, for she, by her mere presence, called it forth. Her situation, alone, apparently friendless, was an endless source of perplexity to him, yet he had never shown, in the remotest manner, any curiosity or desire to probe her mystery. This gave her a sense of security in his society, a sense which was to her most comforting. She dreaded intensely the cross-examination to which idly inquisitive people would sometimes

subject her; it made her feel like a hunted thing.

She had fancied that she could never have any friend again, except her father, that she could desire none other. But, by degrees, Laurence crept into a place very near Brough's; and Lil had two friends. At the theatre she dared make none; she hardly made acquaintances. She did her utmost to carry out Laurence's advice, and to make no enemies by being "stand-off-ish." But beyond that she could not go. Prudence and inclination for once sided together. The young women who form the second rank of the theatrical profession, may be charming creatures enough, but they cannot be called, as a rule, very ladylike; even Miss Chichester, clever actress as she was, did not take the trouble to hide her feelings in private life, as a lady would. Thus Lil found no temptations to form friendships, and her extreme timidity at the idea of anyone knowing her well enough to be curious or ask questions, prevented her from trying to overlook the defects in her acquaintances. But, with every day that passed, she appreciated more Edmund Laurence's real kindness and the gentlemanliness which made him avoid showing the faintest desire to know, what did indeed puzzle him so much, the reason of her strange isolation, and the true connection which existed between her and Brough Warrington.

It became very clear to him, notwithstanding the anxious care taken by both, that something more than ordinary friendship united these two. There was an indescribable change of voice, when either spoke of the other, a tenderness which came into it, not as of love only, but of intense respect and passionate devotion. It was evident that Brough thought Miss Winter unlike all other women in the world, and that Lil regarded him as a man alone, one whose individuality could never be approached in strength or charm, by any other. To a keen observer, such as Laurence, this became very perplexing. He hesitated for a little while on the brink of that conclusion which Brough had once said Lady Warrington would come to—that it was a love affair. But he never really accepted it, and eventually he put it aside altogether. There was something in the way the two met, touched hands, and smiled in each other's eyes, such as he had never seen before ; it baffled him, and he put it down as part of the general mysteriousness which surrounded Miss Winter. He recognised her as a lady, and one not isolated by reason of any shame of her own. He was certain of this, he told himself; he was too good a judge of character to be mistaken.

She was very much harassed by a new anxiety about her father. She saw a change in him, which, apparently, no one else saw.

He got more easily tired by exercise of any sort ; he seemed to suffer, though he said nothing about it. She could not guess what was the matter with him ; but she often noticed that he came up the stairs to her rooms with quite a different step from that which had so cheered her when she first went to live there alone. He did not appear to lose his breath, but he seemed exhausted, and would sit down directly he reached the room. But, in another moment, he had risen and gone to the window for air. He always did this now, and Lil watched him most anxiously. She wondered, many a time, whether Lady Warrington observed the change in him. But he seemed to work just as hard as ever, to go about just as much. Indeed, he was still a young man, not yet fifty, and so full of self-assertive vigour, that no one would think of his being ill unless he complained. And that he never did. He hated being ill, and tried to ignore anything that was the matter with him, as long as possible ; when he had to break down, he grumbled enough for two or three people. He had scarcely ever had any illness, and patience was a quality left out of his composition. Some years before this he had had rheumatic fever and Lady Warrington never forgot what a trouble he was to nurse. He rebelled so much against losing his strength all at once, and being dependent on other people, that it was difficult indeed to

manage him. Now it appeared to be going slowly, almost imperceptibly ; at least, so Lil thought, and it filled her with anxiety.

"Papa," she would often say, "how do you feel? Are you quite well?"

"Never was better in my life," was Brough's invariable off-hand answer. He always regarded it as a sort of insult to be asked how he was. Of course he was quite well ; who should be, if he wasn't?

This went on for some time, and Lil grew more and more anxious. The symptoms of lack of strength, which she had noticed, did not go away, but seemed slowly to increase. She wished, intensely, that she could discover any way of finding out whether Lady Warrington had noticed it, whether she was taking care of him. It seemed to Lil that he was working harder than he ought. She saw his clever bits of gay verse in the comic and society papers every week ; she knew he still wrote leading articles for the dailies ; and, worse, that these things were thrown off at spare moments, while his day and most of his night was devoted to heavy literary work. Surely, he could be spared some of this, if any one with the right to interfere noticed his condition. Should she write an anonymous letter to Lady Warrington? No, it would probably lead to trouble between her and Brough, for she might well be puzzled at anybody, with so much interest in Brough's wel-

fare, finding it necessary to use the screen of an anonymous letter. She turned over many useless plans in her mind, before she thought of what appeared, at once, to be the right way out of the difficulty. It seemed as if Laurence was always the one able to help her. He knew Lady Warrington, he visited at the house. Of course he could find out for her what she desired to know.

He sometimes came into the green-room of the theatre. To-night, Lil spent all her spare moments in that room looking for him. It was not a very attractive place, being furnished in a rather shabby fashion. Its principal feature was a large, full-length mirror with lights on each side of it. To this mirror, walked straight every actor or actress who entered the room; and no one smiled, as would have been the case anywhere else, at what would seem like very candid and open vanity. It was a matter of mere ordinary business to put the last finishing touches to the neck-tie, or wig, in this big mirror, to take a look all over, and see that the dresser had done his or her duty properly.

Lil sat down in a corner, during all her "waits," determined to lose no chance of seeing Laurence. At last she heard Miss Chichester, coming off the stage, burst out into her mechanically merry laugh, as she approached the door of the green-room. "Always paying compliments," she

said, and entered, in her bewitchingly pretty dress, a smile on her scarlet lips, her dark eyes darker and bigger than in the daylight, throwing back seductive glances from below the light flossy fringe of her flaxen wig. It was Laurence who followed her close, for she carried her train on her arm. All the actresses made eyes at Laurence, for he was a powerful dramatic critic, as well as a playwright. Lil marvelled as she heard Miss Chichester speak—"always paying compliments"—she had never heard him pay one, and then she recalled herself to herself. Of course she, a ghost, a dead, blighted woman, would never see him in the mood which a gay, brilliant creature, like Miss Chichester could call forth. She rose from her seat and advanced a step that he might see her. She saw him look inquiringly all round the room. The moment his eye rested on her, he turned from Miss Chichester with some light remark, and came across. A thunder-cloud descended on Miss Chichester's face, and she bit her lips as fiercely as she dared, with the fact before her that she had to go on the stage again. It always made her furious to see the way in which "that Miss Winter, a mere walking lady, playing chamber-maids," commanded a respect which she could not obtain herself, though she was leading lady and a beauty. She was shrewd enough to see it; though Miss Winter did not gather to herself many

admirers, yet the men, one and all, treated her with the courtesy which a lady can always call forth wherever she goes. Sometimes Miss Chichester suspected, in her heart of hearts, that the men, who surrounded her, laughed at her for her ignorance and despised her for her temper. But she was too lazy to remedy the first defect, and she knew of no way of holding her own save by indulging in the second. She indulged in it now, and snapped up the next person who was unfortunate enough to speak to her soon after Laurence had walked away to Lil.

Lil's face was full of earnestness. He saw in a moment she had something to say to him. They drew back and sat down on a little cushioned seat in a corner.

"What is it, Miss Winter?" he asked. "There is something that troubles you."

"Yes," said Lil. "It has troubled me for some time, but only to-day did I think of asking you to help me. You have always been so kind, I thought I might venture, though it seems a strange request, but I am sure you are fond of Mr. Warrington, too, as indeed everyone must be."

"Is it about him?" asked Laurence.

"Yes," said Lil. "Have you not noticed, lately, how ill he has looked? and, when I look back, it is not only quite lately; I should have noticed it before, but that I was too absorbed; I had other things to think of."

“Poor old Warrington. But what can I do?”

“Well, Mr. Laurence, my trouble is this; he is working, I can see, as hard as ever; indeed, I sometimes think harder. I don’t know why he should, it hardly seems necessary, but, of course, I do not know his affairs. What I really fear is that this weakness has grown upon him so imperceptibly that those in his home have not observed it. I—I do not visit Lady Warrington; I do not know anyone who does, but you; do you think, Mr. Laurence, you could find out whether she has noticed the difference in him? she is—she may be selfish, or unobservant: oh, I want so much to know whether he is taken care of!”

The pleading in her face was even greater than in her words, for, as Laurence had told her, she always looked more that she spoke. Now gazing into her eyes, he wondered more than ever what bond existed between these two. It was romantic, it was passionate, it was fixed as the stars in heaven; there was about it none of that ephemeral character which attaches to most love-affairs; it was all deep earnest devotion. It baffled him as completely as ever.

“He will tell me nothing, you know,” went on Lil; “he never would; his invariable answer is, ‘Never was better in my life,’ and he scorns the idea of being taken care of.

But, oh, I can see how much he needs it."

"I will call on Lady Warrington to-morrow," said Laurence, "and will find out all I can for you."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Lil; "you cannot imagine how anxious I am about him. Why, he does not walk one bit as he used to, he gets tired, and coming upstairs seems to exhaust him; why, I can remember——"

She stopped and flushed a little. She often found herself on the verge of betraying something to Laurence; he inspired her with such entire confidence. But her secret was one which must be guarded on every side, which could never be hinted at to any one, and this, not for her own sake, but for the sake of those others! The thought of this always started up before her in time, and saved her from revealing any part of that past which was dead to her, and must be dead also to everyone else.

"You know, Mr. Laurence," she said, quickly, "he has told me that he had an attack of rheumatic fever about two years ago. I fancy, from what he says, that he has never been quite the same since."

"I will find out all Lady Warrington knows," said Laurence. "Poor old boy, I hope there's nothing much the matter with him. I don't know what we should do without him, if he

were to fall ill. Shall I come to you or meet you here to-morrow night?"

"I shall be here, of course," said Lil, "but do as you like." By which he understood he was not to come to her. She had grown a little more shy of his visits of late, though she leaned upon him so. Indeed, she was afraid of becoming too intimate even with him in whom she had such confidence, afraid, for her secret's sake—afraid of revealing something if she spoke to anyone too often.



## CHAPTER XI.

**L**AURENCE had found out a great deal by the next evening. He wondered as he came into the green-room of the theatre how much to tell Lil. All the little things which he had gathered from Lady Warrington and from Brough himself grouped themselves under two broad facts : that, undoubtedly, Lady Warrington had seen Brough's weakness ; but that it was most necessary that he should work hard, for they had got behind hand in their affairs. Laurence began by not telling Lil this latter part of his information ; but she saw he had got more to tell her, and succeeded in getting it out of him. When she had heard all, she sat for a long time silent, her hands in her lap, her eyes on the ground. Laurence watched her face, wondering what she was thinking. At last she looked up at him.

“ Mr. Laurence,” she said, “ are you working at your play ? I do so long to get on !—to have a chance.”

This quite took him aback. It was so little what he expected from her. It was so strange to him that from her anxiety about Brough

she should suddenly drop into this seemingly selfish thought. He had no clue to the track her mind had followed. The idea that Brough was in want of money cut her to the heart. How much she had taken from him!—and even now he still helped her. The thought was dreadful. Surely she should be able to earn her entire independence, even if it was hopeless, yet, to think of restoring to him any of what she had had. This thought was what prompted her to speak as she did.

“Well,” said Laurence, “I don’t fancy it will come on, till next season, even if I got it ready. When Harmer asked me for it he wanted Miss Chichester to play in it; but that I will not have, and her engagement is made now until next season.”

“Every thing takes so long!” said Lil, sorrowfully; “what a weary world this is, where one has to climb so slowly!”

“I think, Miss Winter, you have got on very fast. Most actresses would think it so, at all events.”

“Perhaps,” said Lil; “but then you see I began so much older than most do, and I have so strong a reason for desiring to get on. I am altogether dependent on myself, and—well, I may as well tell you the truth, Mr. Laurence,” she said, suddenly meeting the puzzled gaze of his smiling blue eyes; “the fact is Mr. Warrington has been very kind, and has lent me money when it was a great

help to me. He has been, oh ! so good to me ; and you must understand what you tell me makes me very sad that I cannot get on faster."

"I am sorry I told you," said Laurence, ruefully, yet at the same time with a look of relief on his face. He had begun to think he had been mistaken after all in his analysis of this character which so interested him ; but now he found it intelligible again.

"No, no," said Lil, feverishly, "it is good for me, it has been good for me all the time, nothing else would make me work !"

"What !" exclaimed Laurence, in real surprise, "not work ! with your talent, and your power of work ?"

"Oh, one must have a purpose to work for, as well as ability," said Lil. "One must be young, to feel real ambition. Do not look at me like that, I know I am not old, except—except in heart ! and in heart I am worn out—dead—broken. The little ambition that sometimes arises in me dies out almost as soon as born. Don't look so puzzled, Mr. Laurence, don't wonder what I mean ! It is not worth knowing. I am foolish to talk about myself. Only you must not be surprised if I am inconsistent. I cannot rouse myself to true ambition, and yet I am so anxious to get on. I wonder whether Mr. Harmer would give me a larger part now, for he seems satisfied with me ; or whether I had better try at another theatre ?"

"I think Harmer will do his best for you if you stick to him," said Laurence; "you know there is always a long hill to climb in every profession. Shall I speak to him for you?"

"Oh, Mr. Laurence, I cannot let you do so much for me," said Lil, "you will grow weary of heaping kindnesses."

"I cannot grow weary of anything where you are concerned," said Laurence, hastily; "you repay me all I do very easily, by merely letting me talk to you sometimes."

"I begin to understand now what Miss Chichester said the other day—'always paying compliments.' I had never heard you pay them then. I do not like them."

"I will do nothing you do not like," said Laurence, remorsefully, "but there is Harmer, I will go and catch him, and ask him about you."

It was impossible for her to resent anything from a man who made himself so noble a slave as Laurence did, especially when she was in so much need of help. And Laurence's offences never exceeded such a remark as that which he had just made. Sometimes when he said these things, Lil grew uneasy and wondered if such a strange thing could happen, as for a living man to really admire a dead woman!—but she shut her eyes to the possibility, and relied upon Laurence's good taste and good feeling, whatever might happen. She could not afford to cast away such a friend as this.

He caught Harmer and button-holed him. A manager is a terrible person at all times; not to be approached on a first night of a performance; on an ordinary night irascible. But every one smiled on Lawrence; and even Harmer submitted with a good grace to be button-holed.

Laurence came back to Lil with no very cheerful expression of face.

"Harmer can do nothing for you at present," he said, "though he is very well satisfied with you. When Miss Creswick's engagement is over, in about two months, you may try to take her parts. If you succeed at rehearsal you would be engaged in her place. I daresay he would like you to understudy her soon."

"Two months," said Lil, "that is reasonable enough, but it is a long time under the circumstances, isn't it, Mr. Laurence? But I suppose you would advise me to stay here?"

"I really do not think you would get anything better at another theatre, until you have been longer on the stage, or have made a hit in some leading part. Miss Creswick is third lead here, and her parts will give you the chance of distinguishing yourself. If you—and I think you easily will—if you should manage to outshine the leading lady, your position is made."

"I will follow your advice," said Lil; "I will do as you tell me. Indeed, I have no one else to advise me, except Mr. Warrington, and

I am very anxious not to worry him just now. It is cruel—cruel! that he should have to work as he does. Oh, it is heart-rending. I think I could steal money to-night, if I were tempted! that I might pay him back my debt, at least!”

“Let me lend you some,” said Laurence, quickly; “you can easily repay me when you are in a good position on the stage.”

“No, no!” said Lil, “that is too much. No, don’t say another word about it. I have said more than I should, that is evident. Thank you a thousand times, but don’t say any more to me!”

“I think,” said Laurence, “I might ease matters a little on our paper for Warrington. He is very highly valued there, and I think they would give him a holiday and go on paying his salary for a time. They would not know how to get on if he fell ill, so that the suggestion of such a calamity would probably make them generous. I will speak to the chief about it.”

At this moment a group of laughing, chattering actors and actresses came into the room. Laurence stopped speaking, but he did not leave Lil’s side. He considered it better for her sake to make no secret of his friendship with her; it looked less like an intrigue. They sat silent a few minutes, while Lil thought of what he had said, and wondered if there could be another man in the world so full of

delicate kindness! The room got crowded now, as it would, quickly, every now and then during the waits; it was full of noise and nonsense. Laurence got up.

"I must go;" he said, "I have already overstayed an engagement."

Lil held out her hand to him saying only "I thank you." But the eyes she raised to his were so tender, so full of feeling, that he carried that look away with him, and it was a sweet memory in his mind for days.

Lil, meantime, full of trouble at her heart, went on with her work, miserable and distressed; but she had the true gift of the actress; she could go on and laugh, make her jokes for the fiftieth time as freshly as the first, and please the house as well as though she were the most light-hearted thing alive. She always got good notices, in her small parts; sometimes she had a speech long enough to attract the house, and give her a chance of a round of applause. And she always got it. But the manager dared not give her too many of these opportunities while she was only a *soubrette*, or the leading ladies would have been jealous, and have made his life miserable.

She was very wretched to-night about her position and its consequences. Those she had desired to benefit had reaped the benefit to the full. So long as her secret was safe between her and Brough, she had no fear for them. But she felt keenly how helpless she

was with regard to her own people. For a long time her old grandmother, who lived on in spite of age and infirmities, had been suffering a great deal. She had gathered this from what Brough had told her. He went sometimes at long intervals to see the old lady; she had no one but servants to attend upon her, and Lil who had learned now what loneliness meant, felt very sorry that she must not go near her. But that was bearable, though, had it been possible, she would have gone and nursed her Granny; still, she was not sure that she might not unintentionally make the narrow-minded old lady angry even on her death-bed.

But that Brough, her dear old boy, who had been father and mother to her, who had proved himself more faithful than husband, truer than any friend—that he should suffer and be ill, and she not dare to do anything for him! it was intolerable. And, above all, that she should have been so heavy a trial, so great an anxiety to him, when his strength was failing; that she should have thrown herself upon him and let him do so much for her, when his own affairs were proving too much for him; this was terrible! She suffered keenly all that night; when she went home from the theatre, she could neither eat nor sleep. In the morning she slept a little and woke to a sense of misfortune which weighed upon her so heavily that she could not shake

it off. She could not take up her studies, or apply herself to anything ; the morning hours passed over her, and she sat in her room looking out at the dark heavily-rolling river. As a rule she dared not yield herself to idleness like this, but resolutely kept herself at her work. To-day, she was so puzzled, so wretched, that she was obliged to give way. Never, until now, had she realised how painful might be some consequences of her desperate act. At last she snatched up "Cymbeline." She was studying Imogen, and she resolved to launch herself upon the extraordinarily difficult speeches of this character and so forget herself. She was walking up and down her little room, book in hand, and in the full tide of eloquence, when she heard footsteps on the stairs. Was it her dear Brough? Was it Laurence? Which was it? One of the two it must be, for she had no other visitors. But it was early in the day for Brough. Instantly she wondered, was anything the matter with him; was he feeling worse? There came a tap at the door—then it was not Brough, for he never tapped at doors. The door opened, and the landlady put her head in.

"A gentleman, Miss Winter, wishes to see you."

"A strange gentleman?" asked Lil, her heart beginning to beat furiously with apprehension. "What is his name."

But the landlady disappeared, apparently

to give way to someone behind her. A tall, broad-shouldered man had pushed her aside and now entered the room.

"Dr. Swift!" exclaimed Lil, turning perfectly white; "I did not expect to see *you*!"

"And you do not appear very glad to see me," said Dr. Swift, with his rough, easy manner. "I am not a ghost, that you should turn white as a winding sheet at sight of me. Honour bright, I'm flesh and blood. Had you heard I was drowned, that you stare at me so?"

"I did not think you could be home so soon," stammered Lil.

"Oh, I've left the service. It was such cursed slow work on that ship. And I wanted to see you again. I can't live away from you, Lil, I've tried it now, fairly."

"Don't call me that!" cried Lil, with a horror-struck face.

"I forgot—you are Miss Winter now. You have turned spinster again. Well, that's the right thing to do, I suppose, for the stage. But what is your new Christian name?"

"How do you come to know all about me?" asked Lil, with feelings half made up of fear, half of indignation.

"Easily enough. Your father—or I suppose I should say your friend, Mr. Warrington, hesitated a good deal about giving me the opportunity of claiming the rights of old acquaintance with you, but when I gently

indicated that I intended to find you out, and that he might as well make it easy for me instead of driving me into making a fuss and running the risk of letting the cat out of the bag—why, he gave in elegantly. Like a true man of the world, he offered me the hand of good fellowship.”

“Which means,” thought Lil, “that I had better do the same.” But she stood silent a moment regarding this man with an unconquerable loathing and fear. She hated him; she had always hated him. And yet it seemed as if all her life he had had some hold over her, some power of compelling her to treat him well. Now, she knew, she was at his mercy. His power over her was absolute. He had her secret. But, at the same time—and a creeping hope of freedom came into her heart—the secret was as important, in another way, to him, as to herself.

“You would never do that,” she said, “you would not risk your reputation by telling what you did!”

Dr. Swift laughed.

“That depends,” said he, coolly, “upon what I might expect to get by it, and whether I had a reputation to risk. I will see how I get on. If I get tired of London, as I do of most places; if I find nothing which makes it worth my while to keep silent, I might be tempted to blab; there’s somebody who would be glad enough to pay my passage out, as

hush-money ; and perhaps a trifle over for odd expenses."

"For God's sake, Dr. Swift, don't talk like that!" Lil's words were so full of agony that she startled him. She was standing perfectly still, where she stood when he had entered ; her hands were clasped tight over the book which she had been studying ; her head was thrown forward in an attitude of extreme fear, and her dilated eyes were fixed on him as though he were some thing of horror. She was a strange contrast to this physically-cheerful, bronzed, hearty-looking man.

"All right," said he "I won't if you don't like it. And remember, *you* can easily buy my silence ; you have only to be kind to me. Don't welcome me like a tragedy-queen. You have not reached that eminence yet, though I hear you are being very successful, and will soon enter the first rank."

Lil sat down, and tried to recover herself. But every word of his fell like a weight of lead upon her heart. Had she, indeed, no means of ridding herself of this man, whose presence was so horrible to her ? None. She was powerless. She sat silent, dumb with apprehension. Dr. Swift, meantime, talked on, easily enough, about all sorts of things. He, at least, suffered from no embarrassment. Lil succeeded at last, in forcing a few words out. She saw that she must be civil. She tried to be, and partially succeeded. At last he rose

to go, and told her that her dark hair became her wonderfully.

"You are very much altered," he said, regarding her thoughtfully. "I should not have known you had I met you in the street. But I knew your voice when you spoke, and your eyes cannot change. I must say, though, that, altered as you are, you are handsomer than ever, you belong to that splendid type of womanhood that gains instead of losing, with growing to maturity."

Lil resented this sort of speech intensely. He adopted a way of speaking as if she were his property in some sense or other, and he had a right to criticise her as freely as he chose. She looked away, out of the window, at the sullen river, and made no answer. At last, to her relief he was gone.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she cried, aloud. "How am I to escape? I cannot endure it, if this man is to come here and terrify me! Oh, what must I do?"

She sat still and silent, after this, thinking. She did not resume her work. She had a feeling that her sense of misfortune had been prophetic—that this man's appearance was a real and terrible calamity to her. Brough came in later in the afternoon, and found her like this.

"Papa!" she said, "I am terrified. I am indeed! That man has been here—Dr. Swift. Could you not have refused to tell him where I was."

"It would have been madness to run such a risk," said Brough. "The fellow is a scoundrel. That is how he gets the whip-hand of us. If he had a position in London, or a reputation to lose, he would be safe as the grave; but, unless something good turns up for him which will make him want to stay here, he will not care a jot. No, baby, you have put your foot in it; there's no making out that you haven't. What you must do is to keep Swift in a good temper; and I must see if I can use any influence to help him on. What I fear is his making up his mind to go to the Colonies; he likes rough life."

"Why do you fear that?" asked Lil; "that would release us."

"Yes, but if he does that, he may go to Charlie Newman first, and get hush-money out of him."

Lil shrieked—the name cut her heart like a knife—it had never been mentioned in her hearing since the day when she gave up her own name; she gasped, and turned white to her lips.

"Are you going to faint," cried Brough, coming over to her in a hurry; "I beg your pardon, child, but I was obliged to tell you what I see before us. You have so difficult a course to steer; I could not let you go on without warning you. Don't faint, baby, that's a good child!"

"No—no—no—I'm not going to faint,"

gasped Lil, "but, oh, how awful. Oh, papa, how awful."

After a little while she spoke again, and now she had almost recovered herself.

"What must we do to silence this man?"

"God knows," said Brough, with the frown of worry down his forehead. "I don't. We can pay him, bribe him, be on as good terms as we can with him."

Lil flung herself down and clung to her father's knees in a perfect passion of tears.

"Pay him! bribe him!" she cried. "Oh, papa, I am helpless—and you—oh, you are overworking yourself already I know. My God, how I wish I was in that grave! why did I not die! I have no right to live, to be a burden, an anxiety to you who are so good, who have too much to do without me. Oh, papa, why did I not die——?"

"Child," he said, interrupting her outburst, "all this is bad, but there is worse. It is evident that this fellow has conceived one of those deep-rooted passions for you which are sometimes to be met with in a harsh nature like his. I suspected it before; I am certain of it now. How you are to meet this, I do not know."

Lil rose from her knees and looked at him.

"What can I do?" she cried.

"We must wait and see," said Brough, with a manner strangely grave for him, "but I know you have deep waters to wade through."

## CHAPTER XII.

**H**IL went to her work that evening in a pitiable frame of mind. Her anxiety for Brough was almost forced out of her mind by her fear of Dr. Swift. She knew not what she had to look forward to. Her heart trembled with apprehension. She thought over every word Brough had said. It was so seldom he spoke in that way; as a rule he made light of all difficulties, and refused to regard them seriously. But now he seemed to be really afraid for her. Yet all the counsel he could give her was: "Do not offend Dr. Swift."

Not offend him! This might prove a harder task than it seemed at first sight.

She had never found it so difficult to dress as on this evening. She was thoroughly unnerved. Her fingers trembled, her heart shivered within her. Sometimes she paused in front of her glass and leaned her head on her hands, wondering whether, after all, she had not better take the means, perhaps, she should have taken before. Yet "gainst self-slaughter,

"There is a prohibition so divine  
As cravens my weak hand."

And even amid trouble and pain it is hard for the young and strong to die. And now it would grieve Brough if she should grow desperate like that, after all he had done for her! No—she could not so disturb and distress him. She must fight it out, whatever might come to her.

It was harder work than usual to go through her part successfully. She had a miserable feeling, that among that blur of faces behind the foot-lights was probably the one face from which she shrank. Every now and then the thought of this almost took her speech away. But she saw no one whom she recognised, she had no real reason to believe that Dr. Swift was in the theatre, and so she succeeded in quieting herself sufficiently to accomplish her tasks. But it was not easy, she was so filled with apprehension.

When she went off the second time and looked into the green-room, Laurence was there. He was speaking to no one, but standing alone, looking about him rather moodily. His face brightened all over when he saw her. He came to meet her.

“I began to think you were not coming in here, to-night,” he said, “and I always fear you are ill, when you go straight to your dressing-room.”

“No,” she said, “but sometimes I cannot bear all the nonsense that goes on in this room. At other times it amuses me.” She entered as

she spoke, and sat down on a divan. Laurence took his seat beside her.

"I think I have arranged that matter for Warrington at the office," he said. "Even the chief thought he had been looking ill lately."

"Does every one notice it?" exclaimed Lil, in a low voice. "Oh, what shall I do if he gets worse!"

Laurence looked at her with eyes full of tenderness; he was longing to say something, to offer her some comfort. But he positively dared not. He kept it back. She was a mystery too great for him.

"I thought he looked better to-day," he said, after a moment.

"Oh, did you?" said Lil, "I am so glad if you did. But I also saw him to-day—well, perhaps, I did not notice, though that seems strange. But we had so many things to talk of. How thankful I should be if he did indeed get better. Oh, how can I talk like that? He must, he will, of course. He is young yet, and so strong."

"Certainly," said Laurence, "there is little reason to fear for him, in any ordinary illness, because he is enormously strong, and of such active habits."

"You told me," said Lil, "that Lady Warrington had got him to see a doctor, but you did not tell me who he was, or what he had said."

“He is a man I know slightly; I will meet him soon, and find out from him all I can about our friend, and what he thinks ails him. A good holiday might save him from an illness.”

The room contained several groups of talkers, most of them in costume for the stage, but some few gentlemen were visitors; there were constantly people passing in and out, so that Lil had no reason to look up, when, just then, another gentleman, in ordinary evening dress, entered. But she did—and once her eyes were upon him, they remained fixed, while her colour vanished altogether, leaving her parted lips white. Laurence observed this change with some amazement; and following the direction of her eyes observed a tall, rather handsome, florid man making his way through the scattered talkers. He came towards the divan upon which Lil was seated. He approached close to her, and Laurence, looking back at her, saw that she had shrunk up into herself as it were. She seemed to have grown smaller in the last moment, and to have set her face as if to endure some unbearable thing as stoically as might be.

“I could not help coming behind to find you out and congratulate you, Miss Winter,” said Dr. Swift, in his easy manner. “I think your performance to-night was admirable. You ought soon to have a leading part. You will excuse an old friend for offering these humble criticisms.”

This last was for Laurence's benefit; that gentleman evidently regarding the new-comer with very doubtful favour.

"I am glad you were pleased," said Lil, making a resolute effort to conquer herself and be polite. "Do you like this theatre? It has a very small green-room, unfortunately."

Laurence rose, and with a bow, as low as though Lil had been a duchess in her own drawing-room, moved away a little. He began to talk to an actor who was inspecting his ruffles and patches in the long mirror; and in this mirror he could watch Lil's face and that of her companion.

"How she fears that man!" said Laurence, to himself. "She looked, when he came to her, as if she expected him to strike her. What can her mystery be? He is in it, at all events. She is cruelly afraid of him. And what a brute he is. He loves his power over her."

Swift, seated at Lil's side, looked up several times at Laurence's handsome figure. He put him down at once as a lover. People can but judge according to their lights; he argued that, because he himself was made of certain stuff, everybody else, including Lil, was made of the same. He was pleased that he had surprised this fellow at her side; he imagined that now he understood her game, as he called it to himself.

Presently, Laurence came across to say a

parting word to Lil; he had to go away, yet somehow he hated to leave her with this "old friend." At all events, he must say one more word to her. Lil gave him her hand in farewell, with a trembling look of trust. She gathered confidence from only looking into his eyes. How kind they were! Dr. Swift rose and stood on the other side of her, staring at Laurence, who, having said his good-bye, turned and faced him. In that moment they took each other's measure and contracted a fierce dislike. Though no words had passed between them, those men could never meet on any terms of friendliness.



## CHAPTER XIII.

“**IS** he going to follow me to the theatre? Is he going to haunt me? What shall I do? How shall I escape?”

All the night, and for many nights to come, these questions filled Lil's mind. But there was no escape; and her anxiety about Brough gradually re-asserted itself, and came uppermost in her mind. She saw plainly that his weakness was increasing, and the thought of this almost stifled other fears. She redoubled her industry. She had given up her lessons with Mr. Percival, but he promised to coach her whenever she had an important part to play, whether he was busy or no. She was glad to feel herself a favourite with him. She continued, nevertheless, to study serious parts as steadily as though she were working for him; and she also understudied Miss Creswick in all her parts, so as to be ready whenever she should be called to rehearsal. She did all she could in order to be ready for any opportunity which might come to her. Real need now made her entertain hopes—which, not long since, would have seemed to her like madness—that if she cultivated herself to the

utmost, she might find an opportunity for seizing upon the public favour. Oh, if she could do this in time to be able, perhaps, to help Brough if, as she began to fear in her heart, his health was indeed failing, and his work becoming too heavy for him ! She positively refused now to take a farthing from him, but resolutely lived and dressed herself on her salary. This is never an easy task for young actresses, and often drives them to accept help which they might otherwise refuse. Brough had saved her from a very difficult position so far. Now she resolved to face her situation unaided. It was the easier that she was not now paying for lessons, and that she had a good many stage dresses. But still it was no light task to live and dress decently in London on what she earned. Dr. Swift soon saw what her struggle was, for he peered into every bit of her life. He called on her at all hours ; met her in the street, and walked with her to the theatre ; he came to talk to her in the green-room ; he seemed to fill the very atmosphere : wherever she went, there was Swift. To all this she submitted as patiently as she could. Only one thing she would not allow—he should not go home with her from the theatre. She said so, decidedly, one night when he waited for her ; and he wished her good-bye, and left her so quietly, that she was surprised at the effect of her words. She did not know, she did not, at any

time, realise, how immense her influence over him was. Had it not been so strong, he would never have developed the passion for her which made him love her and torment her at once. Her strength attracted him. When she spoke seriously, as she did now, and the fire rose up in her eyes, he obeyed without hesitation. Had she but known this, she need not have feared him as she did; though, doubtless, if she had asserted her power over him, his native meanness would have led him to get the whip-hand of her again by the force of the secret he kept. As it was, he terrified her, and realised his power every hour of the day; while she had but to speak resolutely about some matter and he gave in.

But this seldom happened—she feared him too much. It was necessary to really rouse her before she dared defy him. Laurence soon saw plainly that she was being persecuted. His blood boiled at the thought of it. But he was powerless. He was outside her secret. This man was evidently in it. It was maddening to him to see Swift coolly take possession of the field. It made his own position much harder to bear; for he could see, by a thousand signs, how Lil suffered. It made him furious. Dr. Swift loved to stroll in by her side, when she came to rehearsal, or in the evening, with the easy smile on his mouth of the man who is in his right; he liked everybody to see him with

her. Lil endured a martyrdom from this incessant companionship ; but she dared not rebel against it.

For some time past, Swift had been in a good humour ; he did not threaten her now ; he was looking about for a practice in London ; he talked of buying one in a pleasant part of the town, and settling down. Lil listened to his plans with a quaking heart.

Brough sometimes dropped into the theatre of an evening, but not very often. Lil was always nervous when he spoke to her among other people, lest some tenderness or familiarity of speech should escape them ; so that, as a rule, he avoided the green-room. But, one evening, when he was in the front, he thought her gaiety less natural than usual. He went round to see her when the act was over. As he entered the green-room, he saw her standing between Laurence and Swift. Both men looked murderous. Evidently, she had a more difficult part to play off the stage than on it. Brough went up to her.

“Good evening, Miss Winter,” he said, holding out his hand to her. She put hers into it, and felt a strange sense of happiness from that tender contact. She prevented herself with difficulty from flinging herself into his arms, and sobbing out all her sorrows there, as though she were a child again. But she had learned to act ; and no one could have

divined that such an impulse had arisen in her breast, as she stood quietly amid the three men. Brough greeted the other two in very different fashions. He treated Dr. Swift with studied politeness. Laurence noted this with wonder. He could not treat Swift politely, try how he might. Having spoken a few words to both of them, Brough drew her away from them into a quiet corner.

"Baby," he said, very seriously, looking into her eyes, "how long can you bear this? Shall I shoot that man Swift before he kills you?"

Lil began to tremble, and she clung to Brough's arm.

"Don't talk like that," she said; "I can bear it—I can bear anything while I have you. It is hard, indeed, to endure his persecution, his attentions—the whole thing is terrible—but, papa, I can bear it. Don't fret about me. Do take a holiday, and forget me; you look tired."

"Yes, baby, I am tired. I begin to think my time's about up. Don't be frightened, little woman; but I fancy I shall 'kick the bucket' before very long. I can't leave you at the mercy of that scoundrel. I feel I ought to shoot him while I have the chance. But I suppose I had better not. At all events, remember this, child—trust Laurence; he is a gentleman, and will help you, whatever happens. Go to him, if ever I am out of the way."

“Ah! don't talk like this!” cried Lil, great sobs beginning to rise in her breast. “I cannot bear it! What makes you think like this? It is all wrong—you are quite young—you are so strong—you have your best work yet to do. Oh, I have to go on again; I dare not cry! Help me, help me to control myself! Hold my wrists tight; do something for me!”

“Poor baby, I had forgotten you have to go on again. A nice sort of fellow I am! Laurence, go and get some wine for Miss Winter, there's a dear boy.”

Laurence had been watching the talk between them—had seen Lil's agitation—had crossed the room to them. He hurried away now as quickly as possible, while Lil sat down in a chair, with her back to the others. “For God's sake, don't let them think I am ill—Dr. Swift, above all,” whispered Lil. Dr. Swift was at the other side of the room flirting with Miss Chichester. Laurence hurried away, and it was not long before he returned with some wine for Lil. Lil gave him a look of intense gratitude. She felt, to her very soul, all the unobtrusive reality of his kindness. He, for his part, was scared by the pain in her face. He felt that there was trouble, of which he knew nothing, and he turned away and left them.

“Do you think,” said Lil, “you could come home with me to-night; or would you come early to-morrow? I feel as if I could give

anything to have an hour or two—not a minute or two—all alone with you.”

“I will come to-morrow, then, child; I have promised to be home in good time to-night.”

“And Lady Warrington would be anxious; for she knows you feel ill. No; I will not ask you to stay to-night. Good-bye, darling; there is my call.”

She went on, feeling hardly able to speak. But necessity is a powerful stimulant. In her small part she got, as usual, some applause. What a strange, dreamlike scene it was to her, all this outward gaiety of speech and manner; the house rippling with laughter at her own and the other actors' funny speeches, while, within, her heart seemed to be breaking.

When she came off the stage, she sank on to a chair in the green-room, perfectly exhausted. Laurence was gone; Swift was still there. Laurence carefully avoided annoying her by his love of her society. Even though he had been so much to her, and when he was doing his utmost to aid her, he would manage so that their friendship seemed the most natural and easy thing in the world, born of mere green-room meetings. He had never met her in the street, or offered to accompany her anywhere, so that she was never seen alone with him; and at the theatre, though he would often have a long talk with her, he contrived to do so generally when the room

was full, and he did not wait till she came off again, as though it were she he came to see. For all this consideration Lil was grateful beyond words. Dr. Swift adopted exactly the opposite course. He admired her; he was proud of his power over her; above all, he loved her with all the coarse fierceness of his nature. He liked everyone to see that she did not reject his attentions. He constantly accompanied her in the streets; he hung about the green-room of an evening, openly, for the purpose of talking to her in her waits, and glaring at anybody else who ventured to address her. Fortunately, there were not many; for most of the men were afraid of Lil. If she had had any admirers less considerate than Laurence, Dr. Swift would have found an opportunity for picking a quarrel with them. But Laurence did his best not to provoke him, simply for Lil's sake. He had gone away to-night with a miserable feeling that Swift meant to wait for her; as, indeed, he did. He came and sat by her when she sank wearily down.

"You are tired to-night," said Swift; "I believe your friend, Mr. Warrington, has been frightening you. I think he's afraid I shall blab. I know he hates me; but I'll be silent as the grave while you are kind to me. Only I wish you'd be a little kinder still."

Lil became dimly aware that Swift spoke rather differently from usual; and, gradually,

it dawned upon her that he had decidedly too much to drink.

"You're awfully tired," he said; "too tired to speak to a fellow."

"Don't talk so loud," said Lil, entreatingly.

"All right," he said complaisantly enough; "but I don't like to see you like this, you know. It's nice to see you on the stage; but you're too devilish fine a woman to go on working so hard. You know your virtue's a regular sham; you don't believe the marriage law righteous; no more do I. Chuck it over then; come and live with me. I'm a clever fellow; I can make lots of money if I've anyone to work for."

"Spare me," said Lil; "here, at least." She was too worn out to do more than pray for mercy.

"Come," he went on; "give up your nonsense; you always were so devilish stuck-up. I believe I like it in you, too. But it's time all that should be over now. Every actress has her lover, as a matter of course; why not you?"

"Excuse me," said Lil, very quietly; "that is not true. It is an old-fashioned idea that actresses are all alike. There are ladies on the stage as well as off it."

"Bless me," said Swift, with a somewhat stupid stare of admiration; "you always had a capacity for putting a fellow down; and it's grown bigger than ever. Curse me," he went

on, in a sudden change of mood, "I believe this is all play-acting, and that fellow Laurence is your lover after all. I've watched you like a spy, to try and find out. I began to think it was all a mistake, and that you were only playing with him as you play with me. But I can't trust my own eyes with you; you're such a damned clever little actress. Look here, Miss Winter; I was your first lover—I mean to be your last. If you are deceiving me, and favouring Laurence, I'll find it out yet; and, by heaven, I'll not spare you one moment longer."

All this was said in a very low voice, with the intensely earnest manner of semi-drunkenness. No one could hear what he was saying, Lil felt sure; and yet many inquiring glances were thrown towards them. Her white face, and his flushed one, formed a sufficient contrast in themselves to attract attention. Lil felt that this must not go on a moment longer.

"I must go home, Dr. Swift," she said. "I am worn out. If you want to talk like this, you must do it at some other time, when I am better able to bear it. Good night." She rose and went away to her dressing-room. Desperation had made her adopt the decisive manner which always had an effect upon Swift. He did not attempt to prevent her leaving him. He sullenly picked up his hat and left the green-room, stumbling down the dangerous passages to the stage-door of the theatre.

## CHAPTER XIV.

LIL had scarcely finished her breakfast the next morning, "Cymbeline" propped up against the coffee-pot as companion, when she heard a familiar step on the stairs. It used to be light and quick; now it was slow and heavy. She ran to the door and opened it. Yes, indeed it was Brough.

"Kept my promise, little girl, haven't I?" he said. Lil put her biggest chair by the window for him, and let in all the air she could; that was what he always needed now. There was a faint shade of blue upon his face this morning that alarmed her more than ever. He leaned upon the left arm of his chair and seemed to find difficulty in breathing.

"How do you feel, papa," she said, anxiously, "what is it, where is it?"

"Here," he said, putting his hand on his heart, "something seems to stop. But never mind, baby. Whatever happens, all's well. I believe I've seen about the best of this world. I am ready for a ramble in a new place, a 'walk among the back stars,' as I heard a clever fellow say the other day. Ah, but there'll be some grand strolls to take on

beyond. I almost think, baby, that I feel about ready for it, though I might have expected a score more years on this delightful planet."

"But, papa," said Lil, "why do you talk as if you were really ill? What do the doctors say?"

"Oh, hang the doctors," said Brough, with a touch of his old cheerful irascibility. "They don't know anything. There's a whole region of heaven and earth that they can't reach with their science. They say that infernal rheumatic fever has left a weakness which is increasing. But I should get over that if the Creator meant me to go on living here. He doesn't; he's told me so. He's got something for me to do somewhere else. Only I shall stipulate for a good long walk through the universe before I begin. I feel as if I wanted a little more air than we've got in this world."

"But, papa," said Lil, "your book; there is so much you should do, you have not reached your prime, you have not begun your best work."

"My dear infant, work doesn't amount to anything; I am convinced its principal result is in the development of the author thereof. My books have done more for me than for anybody else; and, when I look at works of art, they appear to me more like footprints, steps by which the artists raised themselves, than any realised result for the world. Without work

we should turn dizzy, and lose ourselves; we should be appalled by the weight of our own individuality, without something to wreak it upon. It is an awful fact, you know, baby, that one is oneself; and it would crush us, if we were not too busy climbing up the divine staircase of accomplishment to think overmuch about it. My ambition is stronger than ever, I believe that I shall carry it with me and by its power begin upon the level which I have attained here."

Lil's heart stood still within her. She could not shed any tears to relieve it, she could only listen silently. It was strangely solemn to hear him talk in this easy, cheerful way of the unknown future.

"Papa," she said at last, "don't die; I cannot bear it!"

"Why, baby," he said, "what nonsense. If I do kick the bucket, yours is only a very little pail to upset; you will soon come after me." He put his arms round her as he spoke, and, as he did so, out of the pocket of his loose velvet coat, dropped the *Times* rolled up tight. He took his arm away from her and stooped hastily to pick it up.

"Won't you leave it for me, papa, if you have read it," asked Lil.

One of Brough's morning duties was reading the *Times* and one or two other papers right through from end to end. A journalist must know everything. Lil knew his habit, and

often begged a paper when he had one with him ; she knew he had done reading them by the time he came to see her. And she had no stray coppers to spend upon news.

"Not to-day, baby," said Brough. "I want to keep it myself; I meant to leave it at home."

He put it back in his pocket and then leaned heavily over on the left arm of his chair. Talking evidently tired him. Lil sat down on the ground and put her head against his knees.

"Papa," she said, "let us imagine it is old times, and that I am sixteen again. We are down by the river with the dogs. I need only shut my eyes, and I am back there. And yet, no, I am not. That is a dream, a picture ; I cannot forget what has happened since. I can never feel young any more. Do you expect to feel young again in the beyond ?"

"Youth is divine," said Brough, "therefore God has it in his gift. 'Whom the gods love die young.' It is impossible to grow old if we are climbing up into stronger life and stronger light. Age is decay. You are not old within, or you would have committed suicide before now. Instead of that you determined to live, spite of all that distressed you. Your body is perhaps wearied too early, its nerve-life has been over-taxed. But you will fling it aside, as I shall, and find you are in possession of your internal youth. The gods love those who have power

and gifts. Men and women of brains and nerve force never really grow old ; even if they live on to old age in this world, they are always charming and young. But you and I, baby, are not of the sort that live to old age. We live fast, take up our experiences rapidly. We soon run through the life of this planet."

"Thank heaven for that," said Lil ; "I will fight on here, while I must, but I think I am ready for 'a walk among the back stars' too."

"We shall meet there, you may be sure, baby, in some nice little corner where cakes and ale are kept for lazy fellows like you and me, who want to look round and think about things a bit. There are many little matters I am anxious to inquire into, that no one understands here. But, baby, beware of that fellow Swift, when I'm out of the way ; I wish to heaven you had never put yourself in his power."

"I am not afraid," said Lil, quietly. "Remember, only a man such as he is would have done what I wanted. I suppose he looked forward to the power it would give him in the future. We must not regret it now. I acted with my eyes open. Sometimes I am very much afraid of him ; but, I believe, if I give my mind to it I can just keep him in good humour ; I am hoping he will buy a practice and settle down."

While they were speaking, there were steps up the stairs, and now came a tap at the door.

A moment, and the door opened, admitting Dr. Swift in person. He looked wonderfully bright and well-contented with himself this morning. He had not drunk too much, according to his ideas of right quantity, last night; only enough to be well slept off.

Brough was civilly polite to him. After a few common-place remarks had been exchanged between these three who held among them the secret of Lil's life, Brough grew restless. He got up and walked about the room, and looked out of the window. He was sorry to leave Lil alone in this man's society, yet he always found it a hard task to remain in the same room with him; he did so long to kick him down stairs. While he was standing gazing out of the window at the river, Swift drew a folded *Times* from his pocket and handed it to Lil. It was folded so that the births, marriages and deaths came uppermost; and there was a pencil mark at one of the births. Lil took it mechanically and glanced at the announcement which was marked. Her eyes became riveted. Brough was startled, an instant later, by an inarticulate cry as of one in physical pain. He turned round and saw the position in a moment. He snatched the paper from Lil; but she had seen enough.

"You brute," he said, to Swift, "you cowardly hound, to hurt her like this. My God, I should like to shake the soul out of your body. Miserable cur!"

Swift knew of no such thing as fear ; he was one of those men who are hard as nails all over, and afraid of nothing. But he stepped back before Brough's wrath, it was so tremendous. Lil had but twice in her life seen her father in a rage before. It was terrible then, now it was really awful. All his hatred and contempt for Swift flew into his face and eyes ; he rose to his full height and looked gigantic ; his hands quivered with the longing to seize upon the man before him ; his very lips were white with passion. Lil conquered her own emotion, and, rising, came between them.

"Don't, papa!" she said, "don't notice him. I must have known it, I must have heard of it. And it is right I should, for this must make us all feel that it is a sacred duty to that boy who is born to them to carry my secret to the grave, without one whisper of suggestion or of doubt. Remember that!" she said, and turned from Brough, to face Dr. Swift.

"Oh, hang sacred duties," said he, "what do I care about the brat? But I tell you what, this will make our friend much more anxious to have this blessed secret of yours kept safe, if he ever does get an inkling of it."

Lil was about to reply, and angrily too, for she was roused to furious indignation, when her attention was attracted by Brough. He slipped

back and sank into a chair. His face had changed. The blue shade had crept over it again, and he leaned heavily over on his left side.

"Baby," he said, "will you get a cab for me? I must go home, I must go at once, or I may be too ill to get away from here, and that would never do."

"Oh, papa, papa!" cried Lil, in terror and apprehension, "stay here, let me nurse you."

"Child," he said, speaking with an effort, "you know that is a risk we must not run. How could you prevent Lady Warrington coming here? how could you baffle all her inquiries; nonsense, send for a cab."

Lil obeyed silently. When it was ready, Brough took her arm and leaned heavily on it down the stairs.

"Good-bye, little woman," he said, as he got into the cab, "take care of yourself, and don't lose your head, whatever happens. Good-bye."

The cab drove away up the street and Lil turned back and climbed the stairs to her room. Dr. Swift was looking out, and drumming on the window panes.

"Will you kindly leave me for a little while, Dr. Swift," said Lil, with her quiet dignity. "This scene has exhausted me, and I have a rehearsal this afternoon."

He took up his hat and went obediently.

Lil watched with anxiety to see if he was going to take his *Times* with him. No ; he left it. The instant he was gone she snatched it up and read over again a dozen times the announcement of "Adelaide, wife of Charles Newman, of a son, at Genoa."



## CHAPTER XV.

**L**IL did not see her father for two or three days. She became miserably anxious about him. She began to realise more fully than ever the difficulty and painfulness of her false position. She dared not send to the house in any way to ask for him. She had no means of discovering how he was, except through Laurence. But Laurence came less often to the theatre since Swift's presence had become so incessant; and she did not see him, though she stayed in the green-room all through her waits, in the hope that he would come in. At last, one evening he appeared. Swift was sitting at Lil's side, and a thunder cloud descended on his face when she started up and quickly crossed the room to Laurence.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, "I want so to hear how Mr. Warrington is. Do you know?"

"No," said Laurence, "I have not seen him for several days."

"Then he must be very ill," said she; "he left my rooms one day in a dreadful state; oh, Mr. Laurence, can you find out? I do not know how to, and I am consumed with anxiety."

"I will know to-morrow evening, Miss Winter," he answered, "if I do not meet him anywhere, I will go down to his house."

"Thank you, oh, thank you," said Lil, wondering how she was to wait until to-morrow evening! But wait she must. She could do nothing herself.

A great deal that Swift said to her in these days of anxiety passed through her ears unheard. Probably Swift thought he was getting on rapidly since she took all his insinuations and suggestions so quietly. What she realised was merely that he dogged her, harassed her, terrified her; that she knew not how to escape from him.

The next day she did not see Laurence at all; but a note was brought to her just as she was getting ready to go home from the theatre in the evening. Laurence had sent it over from his office, where he was very busy, as it was the night when the newspaper work was heavy.

"DEAR MISS WINTER,

"I went down to Warrington's house to-day. He is ill in bed. He has every attention, two clever doctors and a nurse; and Lady Warrington is in great concern about him. He whispered me to tell you not to be anxious as he is 'all serene.' I will find out how he is to-morrow, and let you know.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"EDMUND LAURENCE."

Lil went home crying her eyes out. It seemed too cruel that he should be really ill, and that she must not go near him! that she dared not even ask after him herself. All night long she thought of him. He had hardly ever been ill in his life, and it was so unlike him to give in and take to his bed. He must be suffering a great deal to make him do this. These ideas haunted her. In the morning she thought of something which she might send, as a sort of little message. She went up into Covent Garden, and bought some exquisite white rose-buds; these she carried to Laurence's office, meaning to ask him to take them with him to Brough and tell him they were from her. But Laurence had not come yet; so she pencilled a little note and laid it with the flowers on his desk.

When Laurence arrived they were the first thing he noticed. He read the note and looked at the flowers.

"How devoted she is to him," he said, to himself. "What can it all mean? Her history is romantic, I am certain of that; but probably I shall never know it, unless ——"

He did not finish the sentence; but turned over the other letters, and then started off at once in a hansom to Warrington's house; he was determined to take the roses with the freshness on them.

The servant who opened the door had been crying, and did not seem able to speak; but

she let him in. The next thing he saw was Lady Warrington sitting on the stairs perfectly drenched in tears. All her fine ladyism had gone like starch; she resembled a delicate piece of lace in a draggled condition. She looked a poor little heart-broken woman. She held out her hand to Laurence; in it was a paper which she seemed to mean him to read. It was a note from one of the doctors, telling her what he had not had the courage to say to her face, for he was a personal friend of Brough's and loved him as all his friends did; it told her that her husband could not live more than two or three days. There was no hope. He was dying of endocarditis, dating from the rheumatic fever, but aggravated, so the doctors considered, by mental anxiety or over-exertion and want of care. Lady Warrington was speechless; notwithstanding her pretty tyrannies, though she had made him work harder than he need, and made of him more or less of a slave, she adored Brough. She had so leaned upon his great strength that her imagination could not picture the thought of its giving way. She had always fancied him strong enough to live for ever. After some attempts to console her, which were evidently wasted, Laurence passed her by and went up to Brough's room. He was admitted by the nurse.

"He won't know you, I think, sir," she said, "he has been delirious all to-day. He will

have the *Times* to read though he can't hold it, or keep his head up to look at it, and he keeps talking about some article that he can't get done in time for the paper unless we let him sit up and write."

True: Brough did not seem to know him. The blue shade had deepened all over his face, and he looked very strange, with the dim look in his eyes. Laurence laid the roses upon the pillow, and, leaning over, whispered, "From Miss Winter." The name seemed to arouse Brough, and give him momentary intelligence.

"Is it you, old fellow?" he said, "and are these from the little girl? Be kind to her, when I'm gone——"

"Warrington," whispered Laurence, after looking round, and seeing that the nurse had left the room; "can I do anything for her to make things easier? can I get rid of that man that haunts her?"

"Swift, do you mean?" said Brough, quickly, "no, don't offend him. But don't believe any harm of her because he dogs her; he is a scoundrel, but I tell you she is the best little girl that ever lived, as good and pure as an angel should be, if there are any angels: I suppose I shall know soon. No," he repeated, making another effort, "promise me never to believe harm of her. I know the dear child; she has had a cruel life. Befriend her for my sake; you're a good fellow, Laurence. Did she send these roses?"

He shut his eyes and moaned. When he opened them again he did not know Laurence. After waiting some time in hope of another word, Laurence went away. He found Lady Warrington outside the door of Brough's room; the nurse would not let her in while she cried so desperately. He could not make up his mind to tell Lil all this, so he wrote a line again saying that Brough was still in bed, that he was no better, and that he had been delighted with the roses. With this scant intelligence Lil had to be content. She wished now that Laurence would come and see her, for Swift's unsympathetic presence drove her almost mad. But it prevented her giving way to her anxiety, which was perhaps a good thing, for she had to save her strength for her work. There was rehearsal now in the day as well as the performance at night. She was rehearsing Miss Creswick's parts, and expected soon to play them.

The next day when she went to rehearsal, with Swift of course at her heels, she fancied she caught sight of Laurence in the theatre. But the flaring gas jet made very deceptive shadows. If it was Laurence, he had gone round to the stalls, which was not his habit at rehearsal; and it was strange, too, that he did not speak to her? Was he avoiding her? The actors and actresses kept dropping in, and gradually all gathered on the stage. Some who were new to their parts had

play-books in their hands ; others came in with a newspaper, looking easy and indifferent. One of the men who had a paper in his hand said as he came up to the group, "Have you seen about poor old Warrington?"

As the words entered her ears, Lil became aware that Laurence was there, and had now come close beside her. He tried to attract her attention, to lead her away from the group. "Yes, I will come," she said, "but first let me hear."

"What, Brough Warrington? capital fellow he is," said one of the others, "what is it about him?"

"It's in the second edition of the *Globe*," said the first speaker, relishing his piece of news, "and placarded about everywhere."

"What?" asked several.

"He died this morning. It's sad, for the poor fellow was too young to die; hulloa! what's the matter?"

It was Miss Winter who had swooned away, and was lying on the dusty boards of the stage. Two men rushed to pick her up, and reached her the same moment. Laurence flung Swift's hands away from her.

"You shall not touch her!" he said.

"Damn it all," cried Swift, "may I ask what right *you* have to touch her?"

The two men stood upright again and faced each other across poor Lil's unconscious body. The others stood silent, startled, puzzled by

the scene, and the sudden hot words, and wondering much what was to come next. Laurence recovered himself first.

"None," he said, "except that I am her friend," and, stooping down, he raised Lil and put her into a big arm-chair (the stage throne), which was close by. Some of the more good-natured of the girls clustered round Lil now and did what they could for her.

"What an extraordinary thing, though," said one of them presently, "what was Mr. Warrington to her?"

"He had been very kind to her, I know," said Laurence, gravely, "always a good friend, as he has been to many others."

Lil was recovering now; and her first thought was one of fear, lest she had betrayed anything. She glanced round anxiously; but she saw nothing to excite her alarm.

"You must come home," said Swift, who was standing beside her; "you can't rehearse after this."

"I shall try," said Lil, "I dare not let them see what it is to me!"

"I can't understand your being so astonished," said Swift; "I could have told you the other day that he had but a short time to live."

"Why didn't you?" asked Lil.

"Oh, I thought you knew," said Swift; "besides I had had enough of telling you things for one day, you had made it so hot for me."

Lil turned away her head and said nothing. This man was like iron. It was terrible to touch upon him and feel how cold, how utterly unresponsive he was. And yet he was capable of passion. Lil had not guessed the key-note to his nature ; pure selfishness.

She actually made an effort to go through with the rehearsal, but it was more than human nature could manage. Harmer, the manager, interfered, at last, and told her she must go home. He was kind to her, for he thought she had considerable promise, and moreover she had never failed at rehearsal before ; so it ended in Swift taking her home in a cab. Laurence did not dare to interfere again for he remembered Brough's words. But he determined as soon as it was possible to take a step which he had long desired to take. He longed to be able to shield her from the persecution of this man whom she so evidently feared.

He did not like to go and see her immediately. Her grief had impressed him so much that he felt afraid to approach her. But he called and inquired for her, and left her flowers. At last one day the servant said, when he came, that Miss Winter would like to see him if he had time to go up. He was very glad of this ; for one thing he felt sure that Swift was not with her, as she wished him to go in ; and he had so strong a personal dislike to Swift, that he avoided meeting him.

He went upstairs, the flowers in his hand which he had intended to leave for her. Lil seemed to him very white and quiet. She was dressed in black. She took the flowers and thanked him for them, laying them, as she spoke, against her pale face.

"I have wanted so to thank you," she said, "for all your kindness to me, especially while Mr. Warrington was ill. I am, indeed, most grateful. Do not be surprised that I wear this dress for him at home, I like to. Indeed, I know black is not what we should wear for those who are gone on to another life ; I wear it for myself. You can never know what Mr. Warrington was to me. More than father ! more than any friend. I am really alone in the world now he is gone. Forgive me for talking about myself, Mr. Laurence. Your kindness always tempts me to speak out. Ah, I did not believe it possible I could live on, after he was dead. But I am doing so, you see. How strong we are ! I am to begin playing Miss Creswick's parts one night this week. Perhaps I shall earn some success, now there is no one to care for it. This world is managed so strangely."

All these sentences came out separately, dropped one after another ; while Laurence sat watching her nervous expressive face.

"But," said he, when she had done speaking, "that is not true, you are not correct. Remember how intense an interest I have taken

in your career ever since I first knew you." Lil started and looked at him, then turned a little away. "Your success will be a great deal to me, more than you think. Mr. Warrington told me on his death-bed to be your friend always; I want to be more than that, much more." He saw her turn further away, and he began to speak quickly. "Miss Winter, I have loved you since the first day we met, and I have desired many times to speak to you. But your reserve inspires a certain fear. I could not. But I will wait no longer. I do not know whether it is wrong to speak when your grief is so new, but I cannot bear to hear you talk of yourself as alone in the world! I have to confess to such a passion for you, as I never supposed any woman could inspire in me. Will you be my wife?"

He leaned across and took her hand. A long, trembling shudder, as of one in mortal fear and anguish, passed through her frame. Her hand, which lay in his a moment, vibrated with this terrible shudder. Then she moved, took her hand away, rose, and faced him.

"It is impossible," she said.

"Impossible," he repeated, "don't use such a word, it's a word I hate. Do you not like me, can you not love me?"

"Don't ask me," she said, hurriedly; "God knows what I say is true. I cannot be your wife."

"Are you in earnest?" he said, passionately.

"Can you not see that I am?" she answered, and stood there trembling, yet resolute, with the strangest look upon her face. Laurence regarded her, and read "impossible" in her quivering features.

"You will me let be your friend still?" he said, "just the same?"

"Yes," she said; "yes."

"You will trust me just the same."

"Mr. Laurence," she said, "I trust you absolutely. I implore you to be my friend, and to forget this."

"I will try," he said, "but it is hard. It cannot be irrevocable."

"It is," she said, dropping the words steadily like two heavy blows upon some nail of desperate decision. She put her hand to her throat. A terrible lump seemed to be there, something which would, in another instant, catch her breath altogether. Her face terrified Laurence. He caught her in his arms and put her in a chair. He opened the window wide and then stood silently by her. He could not leave her while she was like this.

Lil covered her eyes with her hands and cowered into the cushions of the chair. She knew that now she must have tasted her bitter cup to the full. She had discovered, during the last few minutes, that all Laurence's gentle kindness, his tender consideration, his real loveliness, had taught her to love him. Not, perhaps, with the young freshness of her love

for Charlie Newman, but with a strong passionate affection. He had crept into her heart all unawares. She had never thought of him but as a friend, and now she found her heart yearned and ached because she must needs push back this gentle love that was offered her. She was alone, absolutely alone, now, in the wide, weary world, yet she must reject this.

Must she? For one wild moment, as she sat there, she thought of it all, how Charlie was happy with his wife and child. In that moment it seemed but right that she should take her happiness too. Whom would she offend by doing so?

But no, it was impossible; she used the same words to herself that she had used to Laurence. She was bound in links of iron, invisible though they were. What Charlie had done, he had done in ignorance. What she did, she would do knowingly. She recognised instantly that she could not do it. No; Lil Newman was dead to all intents and purposes. Yet the fact that Charlie Newman still lived was enough to take away from her all thought of love, all hope of happy living, or any joy. She must go on, alone, until she might go to Brough on the other side.

And yet, oh how the strong fire of her vigorous nature beat against the bars that held her down! Unquenched in her was the great woman's capacity to love and be loved.

She put her hand fiercely upon her beating heart as if to silence its sudden life.

Just then Laurence knelt down beside her and took the other hand very gently from her face.

"Do not answer me if I am cruel," he said, "but I so wish to know why it is impossible? I might help you, even yet, out of this mesh of troubles which, I am very sure, surrounds you."

She met his clear, honest eyes a moment and then spoke.

"Perhaps I owe it to you to tell you," she said, "at all events, I can trust you with a secret. I am married."

At that moment there was a noise on the stairway, and Swift's voice was heard speaking to the servant. Laurence started up.

"Not to him!" he said, in a sort of fury.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a quick gesture of horror.

"My God," said Laurence, "if I had but the right to shield you from him. Good-bye." He put her hand for one instant to his lips, then quickly took his hat and was on the staircase before Swift had reached the door of the room. He passed him by without any greeting.

"Nice manners, that friend of yours has!" said Swift, as he came in. "By the way, what's he coming here again for? I don't like it."

But Lil made no reply.

## CHAPTER XVI.

**S**HE plunged now into heavier work than ever. It was her only source of comfort. It gave her nerves occupation, without which they would have torn her to pieces. For she was now sorely beset; perhaps her daily trial was greater than ever. She met Laurence constantly, and felt, whenever she met him, how gentle and considerate his love for her was. She had to fight bitterly with the yearning for love which arose in her heart. Sometimes she told herself that she was foolish to fight so, clinging to a mere legal fiction. She and her husband were dead to each other, literally. Could she not take this man's love? No; she knew as soon as she had faced the thought that she could not take it and keep her self-respect. She remembered Brough's words, "don't lose your head whatever happens." Could he have foreseen this heavy tax upon her weary spirit? Perhaps he did, and dared not warn her more definitely for fear of making matters worse. At all events, she cherished what he had said, and made a desperate effort to keep her mind clear, to do nothing which would stain her

path, and add remorse to her many sufferings. "It is impossible." She had to say this to herself sometimes, when Laurence stood by her, when he touched her hand, when he did for her some little act of kindness, which made her feel how lovable he was and how faithful.

Dr. Swift became by degrees a less acute torment to her. He found, at last, that she was resolute in pursuing her own career, that not even threats would frighten her into accepting his overtures, which he made in a sufficiently intelligible manner, and that no love-making of his, however ardent, called forth any response from her. She dared not reply rudely or even indignantly, as she sometimes was disposed to, but preserved an invariable civility towards him. She kept him always at a certain distance. It was hard work for her—wearing work. It enraged him, and he often ground his teeth under it, and looked as if he longed to catch her in his arms and kiss her against her will. But he had never yet ventured beyond words; though he had taxed his wits in every way to exhaust her patience. He could not; it was inexhaustible. She had so much at stake that it enabled her to keep her temper with him. To end the battle by giving way never even occurred to her. It was hardly likely that it should when she resisted even her love for Laurence. Finding her immovable, and that he had

progressed no farther in her affections than when he first came home, Dr. Swift turned his attention more to his own affairs. He obtained a practice which suited him, settled in a good house in a fashionable medical street, and all at once transformed himself into a most respectable member of society. As he was a very clever man he soon began to make a footing and build up a position. But even most respectable members of society like to go behind the scenes sometimes and take a look at a theatre from the wings; so Dr. Swift did not think it necessary to make any difference in the frequency of his visits to the green-room of the Favourite Theatre. He knew that he was understood to be Miss Winter's lover; he delighted in having the reputation if he could not have the reality. He often told her this, and used it as an argument for his cause.

"I do not care what they believe," Lil said, one day. "My own conscience is all I have to follow. I know no other law. Outcast that I am, the opinion of society as to right or wrong, or the criticisms of a green-room, are nothing to me. Miss Winter is no one. If it pleases you to play with her name, do it. You know very well that you cannot play with the woman who hides behind that name."

She had grown a little less afraid of him since he had begun to form a good position, and she more often spoke out. The fact that he

was acquiring a reputation gave her a sense of security ; he would not care to throw it away all at once by revealing that matter of the false certificate.

So the months passed by, and Lil had grown almost accustomed to the absence of her dear Brough, and daily custom was making it possible to meet Laurence without a pang. She doubted sometimes whether, after all, she did love him ; her heart seemed literally to bleed within her whenever her mind turned for one instant to that husband who was hers no longer. Undoubtedly, that first love had a vigour none other could have. But still, she knew, and could not hide it from herself, that, had she been free to become Laurence's wife, she would not have hesitated. "Why was this—how was this possible?" she would sometimes pause to ask herself, "with the old love yet bleeding." In truth, she was a generous-natured woman ; her full, ripe womanhood craved for some life, some happy outlet. She could have made Laurence happy ; what a thought ! for he was very dear to her. Then, again, that other love, though so strong, had been so cruelly blighted within her, that this new tenderness amid her desert life was inexpressibly sweet to her. The man that was her husband had now a wife that was his ideal, and their love was knitted together as his and Lil's had never been, by the

growing life of a child. She knew all this. She turned from the agony of that thought, and her heart leaped out towards Laurence. She met him very often now, for he was working hard to get his play ready for the coming season, and he brought the acts, as he finished them, for Lil to read. The play was wanted early for rehearsal, as Harmer, though well pleased with Miss Winter's playing of the parts he had lately given her, yet wished to see her in this character soon enough for him to secure someone else for it, if she did not seem sufficiently strong. She had never yet had a part which really required "force." Lil was so anxious to fulfil Laurence's idea, and to do justice to his heroine, that it filled her mind. She felt that this was the only chance she would probably ever have of pleasing him in anything. She fully realised how much it is to an author to have his principal characters well understood, and rendered as he intends them to be rendered. When there were a couple of acts completed she learned her part, and went to Mr. Percival for some lessons in it. He was very much interested in her idea of the character, and evidently considered this to be her real first appearance.

"My dear," he said, "they've seen you only in light comedy, and very nicely you do it. But they won't know you in a part like this, where you can show the stuff you are made of."

This wants force, and you have it. Besides, you understand the character. I expect your appearance in this to be a brilliant thing, and I tell you I'm never mistaken."

Jack Percival was just the same as ever, just as kindly, just as full of ripe stage knowledge and tradition, of confidence in his own opinion, of witty stories, brimming over with humour and appreciation of it. But his face settled down into another form when they took up the work of this serious part. It grew stern and set, as if he himself were about to perform the character. And, indeed, it was a part of his power in teaching that he went over every word, entered into every emotion of the part he taught.

While Lil was thus working, steadily progressing towards the fulfilment of her ambitions, and apparently full of her art, it was in reality with a double motive. The steady straining of the nerves, the taxing of the brain, served to hide from her eyes two pictures that would rise before her. One was of the happiness that might have been with Laurence, who grew daily dearer to her heart; the other, of that happiness which had been hers, yet now was hers no longer. Another picture, the happiness of Charlie and Adelaide, she dared not face at all; she fancied it brilliant and glowing. In reality, it was even more brilliant and glowing than her imagination pictured it.

Upon the blue, glorious Mediterranean, near that Spezzia sacred to Shelley lovers, lay a yacht. The sea was like a dream, still, even to unreality. The vessel was motionless, save for a gentle swaying. But in that vessel was enough, so far, to satisfy at least some of those who passed the golden days upon her deck.

In a low deck-chair sat a woman, beautiful as the sea around her, rich as the warm country whose shore it washed. A creature of radiant skies and smiling seas, Adelaide seemed to be a part of the nature amid which she was so content. Loving art as she did, she loved nature more; she had such a wealth of quiet, easeful joy in her flower-like temperament, that she could rest in a heaven of bliss amid its beauty. Now it seemed as if her content were too great for speech or thought; she held her child in her arms and gazed upon him in a silent delight. The two formed a picture as perfectly lovely as any glory of that fairest sea in the world, amid which they floated. So thought Charlie Newman, who, in the course of a constant walk up and down the deck, paused every now and then to look at them. Whenever he passed her, Adelaide raised her deep eyes to him with a lovely smile.

Presently he made a longer pause than usual, and then came and leaned against the side of the boat close to Adelaide.

"Do you know," he said, "I think this life is too luscious. I feel as if I were eating too much fruit. After all, one wants something besides happiness. I think my brain must be stagnating."

"You want to be among people again, I suppose," said Adelaide, in her rich voice, which had a yet deeper note of sympathy in it than of old.

"I suppose so," said Charlie. "I am a restless being. I think you would rest contented anywhere, Adelaide."

"Yes," she answered, "with you."

"Well, then," he said, "will you plunge with me once more into that horrible London?"

"Willingly," she said. "Ah, there is mamma. I am sure she will be glad if we go."

Mrs. Mainwaring had found her daughter's marriage a terrible trial, and had not seen anything of her for some time afterwards. But when Adelaide's child was born, Mrs. Mainwaring came and nursed her, and she had not left her since, but had waited upon her devotedly, watching her return to health. She was a very charming mother-in-law when once she had made up her mind, and an excellent traveller, so that even Charlie liked to have her with them. And, as yet, she had settled upon no home for herself.

"You will like to go to London, will you

not, mamma, if we go? Charlie is getting restless."

"Oh, I should like it," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "If we went early in the season, that is. But I am not sure I shall not settle in England. I have never cared for Italy as you do, Adelaide."

Adelaide cast an eloquent glance at the great blue flame which quivered above her, and thought of the gray cloudiness which in England we call a sky.

Nothing more was said about it at the moment. But Charlie went below, and wrote some letters home. One was to the housekeeper in charge of the London house, telling her to get in readiness for them. He had never let it, as Brough had heard; the idea was talked of but never carried out.

Through the long sweet night the yacht lay becalmed, and Charlie walked the deck, longing for movement and for change. His nervous irritability, born of dull living and overwork, had long left him. He was sun-burnt, strong-looking, and had a look of pleasure in his eyes. But the native restlessness of his temperament was the same. He quickly exhausted one form of life and longed to enter upon another.

As he walked about the deck that night he thought of many things. He thought of his poems, which had now been published a little while. They had been very well noticed, and


it was a trifle of personal vanity which helped to attract him to London. He wanted to mix among literary people, and feel that he had accomplished something to win their regard.

He thought of Adelaide, who lay in the cabin below in a deep, calm sleep like a closed flower; her child lay beside her as beautiful and as still. He would steal down to the cabin every now and then to look at the picture. It was a constant wonder to him that these two were all his own.

But never a still night like this passed over him without his thoughts going back to Lil, fair Lil, faithful Lil. When he looked at the child, he wondered would Lil have lived and been happy had a child come to her. When he had grown used to her death, and taken his new happiness, he grieved for her even more than at first. For then he forgot that he had been bound to her when he longed to be free—he only remembered how much she had been to him, how fair their love once was.



## CHAPTER XVII.

NE afternoon, Lil, coming out at the stage door, after rehearsal, met with a shock which all but took her breath away.

Yet she only came into rather close contact with a gentleman who was finding his way in through the narrow passage. He looked hard at her, and passed on.

She had recognised him on the instant. It was Alfred Davies.

She hurried out into the air, feeling as if her heart had stopped beating and would never begin again. Dr. Swift had come to meet her, as he often did, at the stage door. He grew more proud of his power over her with every step she took in her profession. He saw from what Laurence and Harmer said that she was really expected to make a success in this new play of Laurence's. He clung to her all the more tenaciously for this. It was delightful to him, the thought that, however she got on, however popular she became, she never could escape from his power. Lil thanked heaven whenever she came out into the street alone, and did not meet him on her way. She never expected to be free; only she

was thankful when she was at peace for a moment. But to-day she was so startled, so trembling, that she could hardly walk; and when she met Swift and he turned to walk at her side, she took his arm without a word. This surprised him very much; as a rule she gave him the idea that she would not touch him with a pair of tongs. But it was evident that she could hardly walk, and also that she was anxious to go on and hide her weakness.

Meantime, Davies, having gone a few steps, turned back and came to the stage door. He had been struck with something—he knew not what—about the woman he had met, and particularly by a kind of quiver which passed over her face as he looked at her. His was a mind which was intensely curious. Most men would have wondered and gone their way. He turned back.

“Who is that lady,” he asked of the door-keeper, “going down the street?”

“That’s Miss Winter, our second lead, rehearsing for lead, now, I believe,” said the man, who knew all the gossip of the stage.

Just then Lil met Dr. Swift, who turned back with her. Alfred Davies uttered a little exclamation of surprise, which attracted the man’s attention again.

“Ah,” he said, drily, “that’s her particular friend. Don’t he dance attendance on her, too?”

“By Jove,” said Alfred Davies to himself,

“I’ve met that man, somewhere. I must see these people again.”

He hurried down the opposite side of the street. He had long legs, and was a quick walker, while the others did not go very fast, because Lil could not. Thus he managed to go innocently over a crossing, pause a moment as if he did not know the way, and let them slowly pass him. Lil had recovered herself now. She remembered that she looked the most unlike her old self with her eyes lowered, so she kept them on the ground. Davies looked hard at her, then hard at Swift, who returned the gaze, but without remembering the face that he looked at. But Davies, as he stared, suddenly recalled where he had once seen that man—on the steps of the station near Charlie’s old home. He had seen him dimly, also, in the road, when Swift had been talking to Lil under the trees in the dusk. He recollected that she did not say who had been with her then. He remembered, afterwards, when they met on the stairway, Swift had been to see her. He recalled the suspicions that these incidents had awakened in him about Charlie Newman’s fair-haired young wife. He watched the man as he went down the street: he watched the woman who leaned on his arm.

“Who is that woman?” he said to himself, “or whom does she remind me of?”

Puzzled and abstracted, he turned back, half hesitating whether to follow them any

further. But a certain little actress who had newly come to the theatre to take the waiting-maid parts, which Lil had formerly filled, was expecting him to fetch her; and it made her very cross to be kept waiting. So he hurried back. He found the lady in question at the stage door, cooling a pair of very high heels and looking very cross.

"If you're after that Miss Winter," she said, "you won't find it any too easy; she's as stuck up as she can be, and that gentleman of hers could knock you into the middle of next week any day. But if you *are* after her, just say so, instead of playing me tricks like this."

"She reminded me of somebody, but I can't think who it is," said Davies, humbly enough; "but tell me what do you know about her; what is she like?"

"Nobody knows anything about her, except Dr. Swift, who comes after her nearly all the time, and Mr. Laurence, who comes after her when Dr. Swift doesn't. She'll hardly speak to anybody else, so I'm sure they ought to be satisfied. That's all I can tell you."

The young lady was getting restive under all this talk about another young lady, so Davies gave up the subject and carried her off to be solaced as soon as possible by champagne.

"Can't we get a cab?" said Lil, as soon as they had passed Davies, "I can walk no further."

Swift hailed a passing hansom, and put Lil

into it. When they had started off he looked at her again.

"What on earth is the matter?" he said; "you look as if you had seen a ghost."

"So I have," she answered; "a ghost from the past. I do not think I can ever be so frightened again. But I had begun to feel secure, and the sight of that man's face terrified me."

"Who was he?" said Swift. "Now you speak of it, I believe I've seen him somewhere."

Lil's mind flew back to that day, in the long, long ago, when she had left Swift under the trees, and walked home with Davies to the cottage. Charlie was waiting at the gate for her; he was anxious because he had not found her in the house! Ah, what happy, sweet, loving days those were! And now, this man, Swift, who even then she dreaded, had become her constant companion, while those she loved she was isolated from. A sudden rush of tears was all the answer Swift got. She leaned back in the cab and let the tears rain down. Indeed she could not stay them. That face had brought back with it so many bitter-sweet memories of the far-off past.

For some days she did not recover from this fright, and went to the theatre in terror. But she had to face her danger, for the new play was called for rehearsal. These rehearsals were almost happy hours to her, when she could forget herself in her work. Laurence

was nearly always there ; he led most of the actors and actresses a life of it, by criticising their performances, and often altering or even re-writing their parts. One day he said to one of them, "you must say so and so."

"But," said the actor, in righteous indignation, "it's not in my part."

"Oh, isn't it," said Laurence, coolly, "well, I'll put it in then."

His idea enlarged, as he thought it over, and he gave the unfortunate actor another long speech to learn.

With Lil he was always satisfied. She had understood the character from the first, and he had altered it to please her, in several places, during their private readings of it. She flung herself into it and acted for him. Mr. Percival would look in sometimes when he had time, and then Lil really exerted herself. She knew he was proud of her now, and meant to claim her for his pupil. The play was half-rehearsed when Laurence and Harmer decided that one act must be entirely re-written ; so the rehearsals were off for a week to give him time to do it. This was a great relief to Lil, for she trembled every time she left the stage door lest she should meet Davies again. She was glad when she heard the arrangement made ; but an instant after she felt as if fate were pursuing her, for turning round she saw Davies on the stage, close beside her, steadily regarding her. Now she knew that she must

use all her powers. She summoned her strength, and quietly walked past him, looking him in the face without even a quiver of the eyelids. She went straight on, and out at the stage door, without looking back. That day Swift was not there. She went quickly down the street, with a feeling as if she were running away from some terrible thing. It was not very far from the theatre to her rooms, and she almost always walked. To-day she went quickly on over the accustomed way, with only one desire—to get safe into her rooms. Then she paused, and thought, How foolish! What was she running from? She turned to look behind her; her instinct had been true. Davies was quietly following her down the street. Her heart began to beat wildly as she hurriedly went on again. Why was he following her? What did he suspect. She was passing a shop where she sometimes bought gloves. She turned in, and asked for some. A long time she took over her choice, that day. At last she felt she must go on again. She was stronger now, not so terrified. She had taken a fixed resolution while turning over those gloves in the box. Come what might, she could deny her identity. If he should challenge her with it, she could deny it. All that she needed was to keep herself cool, not to lose her head, as Brough had told her.

Strengthened by this resolution, she went out of the shop and walked steadily home.

Davies was waiting for her, and followed her. He evidently meant to find out where she lived.

But he, too, had taken a resolution while the gloves were being bought. He quickened his pace when Lil turned down Cecil Street, and he saw she was probably near her home. As she reached the door, while her hand was on the knocker, he came close to her.

"Excuse me, Miss Winter," he said, "but have we not met before?"

Lil turned and faced him, all her native spirit roused within her at this emergency.

"You have the advantage of me," she said, and without any further word turned away.

The door was opened for her at that moment, and she went in. The maid did not shut it immediately after her, yet she did not look invitingly at Davies. It was for someone else she was waiting. Davies looked round; Dr. Swift was approaching the door. Davies walked away up the street, struggling desperately with his memory. "The man I remember well enough," he said to himself, "but the woman! she told a lie; I have seen her somewhere. It can't be a resemblance. The familiarity is too strong; and yet there is no feature distinctly that I can recall. It is rather the walk, the voice, the look in the eyes, the way of drawing up the head."

He went home in a dream, utterly puzzled. His house was not an over-comfortable place

to go to, nor exactly the one to dream in. It was noisy with growing boys and hearty babies. It was evidently wanting in many things which can only be got with money. The fact was that though Davies had plenty of children, he had very few briefs. Mrs. Davies had pretty well succumbed before these combined facts. She had grown fat, lazy, untidy. With some women poverty and difficulties act as stimulants. Not so with Mrs. Davies. She liked good living and comfort, and when she had them was cheerful enough. Without them she was cross and spiritless; and, having lost what appearance she had, was no longer a very attractive object. She might have been still considered a fine woman had she flourished under the sun of prosperity. But, as it was, it was small wonder, considering Davies's character, that he spent a little spare cash occasionally on champagne for the lady of the high-heeled boots. Her frothy impudence refreshed him.

The obtaining of money had now for the best part of Davies' life been his one desire and object; yet he had not obtained it in any sufficient quantity. He now desired it more than ever. Indeed it was becoming more necessary than ever with all these growing boys and girls about him.

Perhaps he did not work hard enough, for he was not without brains. But he hated work, and there is no other road to success.

He liked better to idle about town than stick at his dingy chambers, reading law, and waiting for those briefs which did not come.

To-day he walked home, went into his drawing-room, not much less dingy than his chambers, and sat down in the first arm-chair he came to. He shut his eyes and appeared to be asleep. Mrs. Davies came into the room soon after, and as she much objected to anybody besides herself being lazy in the afternoon, she promptly roused him.

"Don't, my dear," he said, "I am thinking."

As he spoke very snappishly, and used the *my dear* with the same sort of emphasis as Sir Peter Teazle, Mrs. Davies said no more, but sat down on the opposite side of the room with a baby in her arms. The baby cried, but this did not appear to disturb its father's thoughts. He had grown accustomed to the sound, and perhaps thought better with it than without it. At all events he presently sprang to his feet with an oath, and an ejaculation so violent that it startled Mrs. Davies considerably.

"I've hit it," he cried; "by Heaven I've got their secret. Oh, Lord, Lord, this is rare."

"What on earth are you talking about, Alfred?" inquired Mrs. Davies. "Are you gone mad?"

"Not yet," said her husband, "and shan't, till I've tracked this down. There isn't time to go mad in. Oh Lord, it's rare!"

His discovery, whatever it might be, seemed

to have restored him to good humour. He went about chuckling and rubbing his hands. Indeed the idea he had got hold of seemed to increase in richness with the passage of time, and every now and then he would slap his leg and laugh with delight, until Mrs. Davies really began to fear for his wits and to wonder what would become of herself and her babies if he lost them altogether.

He woke up in the middle of the night and exclaimed out loud, "No, it's impossible, it can only be a likeness!"

He could not sleep again for thinking of the extraordinary discovery which he believed himself about to make. The middle of the night is a good time for the memory; we can often dig deeper into the past than in the day-time when the present is active. Davies thought of many things as he lay in the dark. He recalled Lil's face during different phases of her career. No; he concluded that it was not her face which he recognised. That was very much altered. It was "a something about her," as he expressed it to himself.

Swift's evident connection with her afforded him abundant food for thought. He remembered to have heard of some affair between them before Lil's marriage. Swift had always assumed the air of an old lover, too! Then there were those stolen meetings after her marriage. And then, suddenly, he remembered Lil's inquiries into the divorce law, just before

her sudden death. He had not believed at the time that she wanted this information for her writing; she was too intently in earnest about it. He went over that talk he had had with her, trying to bring back every word she had said. He remembered most of it. He fastened all that he could recollect deep in his memory. Every detail would be of use to him.

For, if this were true, that he suspected, that boy of Charlie's was illegitimate, and, after all, he would be next heir! That changed the future for him, and the present, for he could borrow money and get into debt again, on the strength of it. And then, too, he might extract hush-money from Charlie himself, if it came to that; or perhaps from Lil, for she would soon be in clover, with her increasing popularity.

And so at last Davies fell into that sleep which is only supposed to be the sleep of the righteous—deep and contented.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

**A**LFRID DAVIES now for some days led an unusually active life. Lil soon saw that he suspected something, that he was on her track. He was evidently determined to meet her, as she saw with a sense of agony. For it showed that her little piece of acting—her denial, had not convinced him at all.

She felt like a hunted creature, brought to bay. And her stake was so great! Not her life, *that* might easily have been given up. No hunted creature quaked as she did when she came face to face with Alfred Davies at the theatre every evening. She felt as if her secret was being snatched away from her. And he came, every evening, professedly to see the lady who played waiting-woman. But, in reality, his purpose was to see Lil, and she knew it. He went to the front when she was on the stage; she felt that he was there. He came to the green-room and took every opportunity of standing near her or of speaking to her. Lil decided that her best course was to notice him as little as possible; to treat him with quiet indifference. She managed to do this, though her heart fluttered like a frightened

bird whenever he came near. This conduct puzzled and baffled Davies. He expected to frighten her ; but, though he did frighten her, she would not show it. Sometimes she was so scared that she would make plans for escaping—leaving London—hiding herself once more. But her first thought was of Laurence and his play. She would not desert him now, after all his care and anxiety, and when he based such high hopes on her representation. The second thought that struck her was that this course would be, practically, confession. Davies evidently suspected who she was ; did she run away from him, and at such a moment, when her success was at hand, he would be convinced.

Better stand at her post and bear the brunt herself than leave this man in possession of her secret. Indeed, she saw it was her only course. She must stand her ground and face out whatever might happen.

Contact with Lil made Davies, though sometimes he was sorely puzzled, grow gradually convinced that his suspicion was correct. But he failed to startle any confession from her, though he often referred to his conviction that he had met her before. Lil used all her strength in her endeavour to disguise her terror ; but she tried, without letting him see it, not to be alone with him. He found this out directly. She encouraged Swift to come to the theatre for her now, so that she should

not be in the street alone ; if he was not there, she went in a cab from the door. She lived in terror. Davies discovered that she avoided him, though she hid it so carefully, and that gave him confidence.

One night he came into the wings, where he knew she came off. She must pass him. He was standing alone. She saw him waiting for her, and swerved an instant ; but her stage training kept her steady. If she went off at another wing she would interfere with someone else. So she went straight on, and passed him. He caught her arm. A thrill of fear went through her.

"Do you mean to tell me you are not Lil Newman," he said into her ear.

"Take your hand from my arm ! I do not know what you are talking about," she said, steadily facing him. Then she turned angrily, and walked quickly away to her dressing-room. Once there, she locked the door, and sank down, clasping her hands upon her beating heart as if to keep it in her body.

He went away, out of the theatre, and walked about the streets, thinking.

"She's no good," he said to himself. "If 'tis she, she's too clever for me."

The next day he went and called professionally on Dr. Swift. A guinea was but little to pay for such information as he desired to extract from him. But he did not extract it. Dr. Swift knew there was danger, directly he

saw who his patient was. He did not want to let this secret out, now that he had a position worth preserving. At all events, if it was ever told it should be for his own purposes, not for another man's. So he told Davies nothing, and amused himself by writing him a very nasty prescription. Davies revenged himself, as soon as he was outside, by tearing it up and scattering it on the doctor's doorstep.

He was quite puzzled how next to act. At last he bethought him of Lady Warrington; perhaps she might know more of Lil than he did. She might give him a clue. So he dressed with care, and started off to see her.

Lady Warrington had recovered her butterfly graces, and wore her second widowhood with as much grace as her first; though she did very deeply regret her dear big Brough. She felt, and told everybody, that she should never meet such another man. So it was understood among her friends that she did not intend to marry again. She was not as well off as she had been before her marriage; for she had once or twice trenched upon her capital when they had got into difficulties. She was living very quietly in a few rooms of their London house; as soon as she could let it she meant to go into a cottage in the country, and retire for ever from the gay world. Her old friend, Dr. Swift, had found her out; but though she was herself again, he thought her getting a

little too old to be amusing ; so she did not see much of him.

Alfred Davies she but faintly remembered, as a decidedly vulgar young man. She put up her eye-glasses to look at him, and concluded that he was still vulgar, and therefore not interesting. But Davies was clever enough for such a conversation as this ; he managed to suggest some little mystery about Lil Newman which had just come to light ; he would not even hint at his cherished secret that he believed her to be yet living. But a mystery before her death was enough to excite gossip-loving Lady Warrington. Then he spoke of Dr. Swift and asked her, with an air of serious sorrow, whether she had ever really thought there was anything between them.

“Oh, la, la !” cried Lady Warrington. “Why, I did my best, I told the girl before her wedding-day that she ought to tell the whole thing to Charlie Newman. Why, it was dreadful. But then she was a mere hoyden ; she had no proper training. She never had anyone to teach her anything but her father, and he had very odd ideas, even for a man, poor dear. She lost her mother when a baby ; I’m sure I don’t know if that was any loss from what old Mrs. Warrington has told me. And that old lady, too ! Well, I don’t know what effect she had on the child, but she used to make even me feel inclined to do something dreadful, out of sheer contrariness. She was so funny !

I daresay the girl had some excuse, with such a bringing up ; but still I must say I should be surprised at nothing I heard about her. She was always most ill-regulated, and capable of doing anything wild."

All this pleased Davies very much, as it confirmed his own opinions. But he did not discover anything of actual use to him from Lady Warrington, because she knew nothing. He was glad he had talked to her, for he saw she would be admirably useful if he wanted a rumour started. At present, however, he was determined to tell her nothing ; he left her gently excited over an untold mystery. She asked him to come again and tell her more when he knew more. She was very busy, she said, but would gladly see him.

She was, indeed, very busy. She had been busy ever since she recovered from Brough's death, hunting over his manuscripts and selling them to the very best account. She had got down to the bits and scraps of verse now. But still she persevered. The editors were beginning to be afraid of her, and she to fancy herself quite literary now that she had corrected so many proofs. She always used to suppose that Brough was doing nothing when he was correcting proofs, and that she might talk to him. But she had begun to find out her mistake.

Davies went away home, having hit upon a plan which he fancied was the best he had

thought of yet. It seemed clear that he could get no certain information, and that Miss Winter would not be terrified into confession. Charlie Newman would pooh-pooh such an extraordinary suggestion, unsupported by facts, or even by probabilities.

But his wife! she might be more easily frightened. She would not like such a scandal to arise, her marriage and her child's legitimacy called in question. She was the person to go to, undoubtedly.

He had heard from Charlie Newman that he expected to come home, with his wife, soon. He walked away, directly he remembered this, to their house, and made inquiries. They were expected daily, in fact at any time. All was ready for them.

He went the next day and heard that they had arrived early that morning, and were very tired; but would receive any visitors in the evening. So he said he would call again.

Adelaide he had never seen, and he was a little curious to see Charlie Newman's second wife. He had heard that she was a beauty.

He found them in the very drawing-room where he had had that talk with Lil about the divorce law. It was a double room, and as Davies entered, the scene came back to his memory more vividly; she had led him over to the further fire, and by that they had sat and talked, just out of ear-shot of Mrs. Davies. How clearly it all came back to him! No doubt

she wanted to escape from her position, and be free to go to her old lover, Swift. And, seeing that the law would give her no help without a public scandal, she had acted, as he would have advised her to, without consulting the law. It all seemed to him as clear as possible.

Charlie came forward to greet him ; and a moment later Adelaide came out of that inner room. She was looking lovely ; dressed in a quiet, rich style, all her own, and with a ripe beauty on her face as though she had carried away with her some of the very spirit of beauty which glorifies a Tuscan harvest. Davies sat and talked to them a little, and wondered, as he looked from one to the other, how he could get Adelaide by herself. It was not so easy at any time, for Charlie had no particular occupations to call him from her. Therefore it did not seem much use to ask her when she would be alone. Besides, she had never seen him before, and might naturally be much puzzled by such a request. It might rouse Charlie's curiosity, too.

Should he keep coming to the house till he got an opportunity? He was very impatient ; he had a fear sometimes that Lil would get too frightened, and escape him. He determined, at all events, to try his luck as soon as chance favoured him. That favour came sooner than he expected. Before he left some other visitors came in ; they were friends of Charlie's, and he became engaged in talk

with them, leaving Adelaide and Davies rather out of the conversation, at opposite sides of the circle. Presently Adelaide rose, and seemed to hesitate between coming to talk to Davies where he was, or going away into the other room. Davies seized his chance very quickly by rising and joining her. She went back to her seat in the inner room, and Davies sat down opposite her. It was almost exactly as he had sat with Lil. But he had no sentiment about him; all he felt was that his memory was getting clearer, his conviction stronger.

They talked about trifles for a little while. Presently Davies asked Adelaide where she had first met Charlie. He knew all about it, but he wanted gradually to approach the subject of the first wife.

A second wife or husband has always a difficult task in speaking of a first one; especially if they have been known to each other. Adelaide felt no hesitation in speaking of Lil to anyone except Charlie. Between them she had never been mentioned since their marriage.

"I met him in Rome," she answered. "I was living there with mamma, and he was travelling with his wife. I was very fond of her. She was a beautiful, a most lovable woman."

Adelaide spoke very earnestly. Indeed she wanted everyone who had known Lil to know how much she, too, loved and admired her. Davies was a little perplexed. He did

not understand her feeling, and he fancied she was playing some game.

"Of course you knew her very well," said Adelaide. "You have seen a good deal of Charlie, always, I suppose."

"Yes, until he went abroad. Travelling has done him a world of good. He looks quite a different sort of fellow. He used to be melancholy. I chaffed him about his poetic temperament."

"He is melancholy sometimes, now," said Adelaide, simply.

"And he still writes poetry?" said Davies, with the faintest suspicion of contempt in his voice; had Charlie not been a man of property that suspicion would have broadened into a certainty. As it was, Adelaide caught it and took a slight dislike to Davies. But he saw his mistake, and quickly mended it by speaking of the favourable reception which Charlie's book had met with.

Gradually he led the conversation back to Lil again; he hinted that he fancied she had been very unhappy for some time before her death. Naturally this drove a pang into Adelaide's heart. "Oh, I hope not!" she said. "What makes you think so?"

He hinted that Lil had told him things which made him think so. He let fall suggestions, half-said things, which frightened and excited Adelaide. She looked round once, for Charlie, thinking that perhaps she ought

not to hear these things in his absence. But he was busied with the other visitors. What Davies suggested to her by his words was that Lil had really been desiring a separation or divorce. He did not deliberately say this, but he contrived to impart the idea to her. Now Adelaide had always a very tender place in her conscience about Lil. She could not hide from herself that, however they endeavoured to disguise it, Charlie and herself had awakened to the absorbing passion which eventually drew them together, when first they met. She had often wondered, with fear and trembling, whether Lil had observed this; indeed she felt almost certain she had, when she remembered many incidents of their travel together. But surely this could be known but to herself and Charlie. Surely Lil had never revealed this, a thing which Adelaide hardly dared think of!

"Tell me plainly what you mean," she said at last to Davies. "I don't wish to go on talking about others, in this way; but you owe it to me, having hinted at so much, to tell me the truth plainly. If I am to live here among people who knew her, it is better I should understand all this. Do you mean that she wished to leave Mr. Newman; to obtain a divorce?"

"I believe so," he answered.

"But why should she?" asked Adelaide. "I am sure they were very much attached! What do you mean?"

“Well,” said Davies, hesitatingly, “I believe there was an old lover of hers—a man with whom she was entangled before her marriage, who came to see her afterwards—in fact, I think she wanted her freedom.”

“Good God! How dare you malign the dead like this?” exclaimed Adelaide, white with indignation. “I do not believe a word you say. It is false! False or true, why should you tell me such scandalous tales?” She paused a moment, to recover herself; Davies did not speak; he was thinking. He had made her very angry. Perhaps she would not see him again if he left her in this mood. He must cast his die at once.

“I think,” said Adelaide, half-rising, “we had better put an end to this conversation, Mr. Davies. I wish to hear no more. I cannot understand your bringing me this detestable scandal on my very first evening in England. I suppose you have some purpose in your conduct.”

“I have,” said Davies, leaning forward and preventing her from stepping out of the corner in which she had been sitting; at least, she could not pass without brushing roughly by him. “I have a purpose. It is to warn you. It is indeed. I would not have interfered, I would have said nothing, had you not won my interest and sympathy at once. There is a danger to you in this country which I feel I must warn you of.”

Adelaide moved and looked round as if to call Charlie to her. Davies understood her gesture, and, putting up his hand, arrested her.

"He must not know," he said, "at least not at once, not abruptly; you must think about it; I feel sure when you use your judgment about it, you will not tell him. Remember, though I am a stranger to you, I am his cousin, his oldest friend and companion; I have his interests at heart."

"For God's sake, speak, and tell me what you mean," said Adelaide, fixing her eyes fearfully upon him. "I cannot imagine what secret, unknown trouble, can descend upon us like this. Will it hurt Charlie? Will it hurt my child?"

"Both, I fear, unless you are very cautious," said Davies.

"Speak! and quickly!"

"I told you of this old lover of Mrs. Newman's."

"Yes."

"I saw him once or twice with her, after her marriage; I know him slightly. He entirely disappeared after her supposed death." Davies said this slowly, that its meaning might be clear to her. "I did not see him for a year at least. A little while ago I saw him again. I have seen him several times. I have always seen a lady with him. I thought I recognised her the first time; I have since become con-

vinced that she is——” He hesitated, watching her face.

“Well?” came through Adelaide’s lips, parted in suspense.

“Mrs. Newman.”

For a few moments Adelaide stared at him, a puzzled frown on her beautiful brow. Then she said—

“Please repeat that—I don’t think I understand.”

He repeated his words to her. While he spoke she gradually sank back upon the couch, a stricken look coming over her face.

“Oh, my kind Father in heaven,” she whispered, “spare me!”

She sat quite still and said no more, though her lips moved, perhaps in prayer. She was stunned. Davies drew his chair nearer to her.

“You are not faint? Can you listen to me, if I speak?”

She bent her head a little, but still with the fixed, stricken look of amazement on her face.

“I am sure you will see what madness it would be to tell Charlie this until it can no longer be avoided,” said he. “He is a sensitive fellow, and really the position he would be placed in would be hard for a man of iron temperament. She has disgraced him, and he has unknowingly betrayed you. And then your child! We must shield Charlie from all knowledge of the affair as long as possible. Of

course, your one desire will be to prevent this terrible thing becoming known ; so long as it is a secret, your marriage will be all right, and your child will inherit ; the disgrace of this must, at all hazards, be averted from you, and the dishonour from him, poor little fellow. You know, I suppose, I am Charlie's heir, if he had no child, so that this fact should show you my advice is disinterested. You understand me ? Well, what I propose is that you entrust the matter to me ; I will protect you from all disgrace, or risk of this shameful thing being exposed, if man can do it. Of course, you will understand that I shall have to devote time and attention ; I am, as things stand, a poor man, though, under these circumstances, I hardly need be. But if you would use your influence over Charlie, to induce him to will his property—well, we will be fair, and say will half of it to my children, while your boy has the other half—come, that's generous, eh ? under the circumstances, and if you got him to hand me over a nice little cheque now and then, for I have a large family and many expenses, if you could manage this, as I've no doubt you could, I would guarantee the secret should be kept for you."

He expected her to say, "I will do all, anything, if you will keep the secret and save me from this shame !"

Adelaide realized nothing but the suggestion that Lil was not dead ! all else Davies said had

over her unheard. Her old faith in Lil made his insinuations useless.

She did not speak at once ; but, after a moment's silence, she seemed to arouse herself.

"Lil Newman alive!" she said, "and I in her place! I must find her; I must see her; I must know the whole truth. If you know where she is, take her to me. I must find her—ah! how she must have suffered!"

Davies puckered his brow, and stared at her. Certainly women were unreasoning beings. And he had thought this woman looked sensible; now, what nonsense was she talking, instead of replying to a fair—in fact, generous—business offer! This impulse of hers he did not at all like; he had no idea of letting her come face to face with Lil; he wanted to hold the situation himself.

"No, don't be rash," he said, quickly; "you must not try to see her! I can't let you do that!"

Adelaide turned and looked at him.

"I insist upon it," she exclaimed. "You know where she is, if you know anything! I don't believe you do! It is all false together. I should never have listened to you. I will tell all to Charlie, and let him sift it. He will not allow scandal to be talked about his dead wife, whom he loved and respected."

She was full of passion and emotion. She made a quick movement forward as though to go at once to the other room. Davies was

scared by her impulsiveness. He was not at all prepared to bring this before Charlie. His case was not good enough, while Lil denied her own identity. A man would naturally demand proofs at once. He had none : nothing but his own conviction. He had no real hope of convincing Charlie and coming to any good terms with him about the property, or about immediate hush-money ; he feared that even if Lil were personally assailed, she might prove herself too clever for him, as she had already done, and then his whole case was gone. For he had no case ! except, indeed, he got her grave opened ; but even if that were empty it would not prove that Miss Winter was the Lil he wanted, or that Lil was still alive. All this he had clearly before him. He had hoped to simply frighten the woman through danger of disgrace on herself and her child ; he had calculated on her yielding, without demanding proofs, to the mere thought of so terrible a prospect. But Adelaide's intensely romantic nature carried her into the same attitude which a practical person would have taken up. She took no heed of these proposals of Davies—she hardly thought of her own social disgrace ; all that would instantly have occurred to her mother, never occurred to her at all. She only felt that she was an unwitting participator in some terrible tragedy ; that she was in a false position ; that a woman who had been dear to her, and loved by

Charlie, had been forced into some strange and terrible action. She must have light upon it all—she must find this woman—she must escape from that position which was not hers, if indeed it was not hers!

Davies stopped her again, as she was about to pass him.

“Don’t be rash, I entreat you,” he said, “I will show her to you if you insist upon it. Meet me alone some time to-morrow, and I will manage it.”

“Are you in earnest?” exclaimed Adelaide.

“Indeed, I am,” he answered; and looking at his face, she believed him.

“When would be best?” she asked.

Davies considered a moment. “Meet me at the end of this street about half-past two.”

“I will come,” she answered, and then sank back, her heart beating at the thought of what she had engaged to do. To go alone, with this man she had never met before, to see—what?—a woman living, whom she believed dead; a woman, whose existence, if a fact, took from her all she had! “And I must not tell him!” she said, half to herself, half to Davies.

“Do you not yourself think that he is the last person in the world to tell?” asked Davies, watching her face as he spoke. Its expressions were absolutely mysterious to him.

“It may be so,” said Adelaide, with a heavy

sigh of perplexity. "At least, I will wait until I am certain ; that at least I will do."

Davies had to be contented with this. He left her now ; said good-night with a very fair imitation of sympathy, and went away, leaving her there, just in the same place, her eyes still full of expressions which he could not fathom.



## CHAPTER XIX.

**T**HE next morning Adelaide moved about in a dream of wonder and terror. She professed to be very tired, in order to avoid going over the house with Charlie. She felt as if that would be an unbearable ordeal. What had that unhappy woman been driven to do, who should be here in her place, mistress of this house? She kept in her own room, restlessly walking about it, all the morning; and got away from the lunch table before the others had done, saying she wished to go out alone to make some purchases for herself.

Charlie stared. "Why, you will lose your way," he said.

"Nonsense," said she. "I do know London a little, mamma, don't I?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "but I don't feel sure you know it well enough to go out alone."

"Oh, I will show you that I do;" said Adelaide, "and if I lose my way I can take a cab and come home. This is not like Siena, where, when I lost my way, I found there were no cabs! That was alarming, I allow." And so she escaped, and hurried upstairs for

her bonnet. Davies was waiting for her at the end of the street.

"You are a little late," he said. "Never mind; I have a cab waiting, and I think we shall be in time."

Adelaide wondered in time for what? But she said nothing; only got quietly in and sat down in the hansom, while Davies told the man to go to a certain street, to stop at a certain corner, and to stand there till told to go on. The man grinned, and drove off. He evidently thought he had got a queer fare.

Davies knew that Lil was daily rehearsing Laurence's play; and that she generally went home about three, from the theatre. He calculated that they were just in time to see her walk away from the stage door. He thought that was better than letting Adelaide see her come or go from her own home; he relied on Adelaide's being too timid to make inquiries at the theatre.

Lil was a little late in coming out from rehearsal to-day; Laurence was talking to her about his re-written act. They kept themselves strictly to business, now, these two, and so got on very well indeed. He came out with her at the stage door intending only to walk a few paces at her side, just to finish what he was saying. When they had walked a little way down the street, Lil, raising her eyes, saw a hansom standing at the other side of the road. Davies had got the driver

to turn round so that Lil, walking in her usual direction, should not see who sat in the cab; and he had drawn the curtains across the little side windows, intending Adelaide only to peep through. But Adelaide dragged the curtain back to look the better, and Lil saw at the window a face, excited and strangely familiar. She was frightened instantly, and walked on more quickly. A moment after, she heard a hansom-door violently thrown back—she looked round—a lady was in the road, rapidly coming towards her. She knew her then—that walk, that exquisite bearing—it was Adelaide. She put her hand on Laurence's arm. "Come quicker," she said, "and, for heaven's sake, hail a cab, at once—ah, there is one——"

A cab had stopped at the kerb, and Lil sprang in. "Tell him, down to the Strand—quickly," she said; "don't wait to give him the address!"

Laurence told him and jumped in after her. The cab drove off, leaving Adelaide a few yards behind, just defeated of her purpose—which was to look this woman in the face, speak to her, find out what it all meant.

"Do not be so rash," cried Davies, who had followed her. "How can you put yourself in her power, like this? It will suit her admirably to have you know she is alive—she will make you pay dearly for it!"

Adelaide looked at him, but made no reply.

Instead, she turned and walked straight to the stage door of the theatre. Davies followed her, aghast at her determination. She asked the door-keeper whether he would give her the address of the lady who had just gone out.

"What, Miss Winter?" he said. "No, I oughtn't to." But he looked hesitatingly at Adelaide's beautiful, pleading face. Adelaide quickly caught at the name.

"I am her friend," she said, "but, of course, if you mustn't do it, I must wait till I meet her again. I am an old friend of Miss Winter's, and she doesn't know I am in England."

Of course it ended in the man telling her the number in Cecil Street at which Lil lived. Davies stood by, fuming. He mentally concluded that Adelaide was a fool and of no use to him. He determined to let her go her own way, and himself attack Charlie. He began to think that though he might not get proofs together, yet he might be able to frighten Charlie into making some reasonable terms. "After all," he said to himself, "women are always fools at business; I had better have taken my chance with Charlie, at first."

Laurence, when he got into the cab by Lil's side, looked at her terrified face, in amazement.

"Forgive me for coming," he said; "I did not like to leave you, you look so strange."

"Ah!" said Lil; "no wonder if I do; I

am being hunted." And she drooped her head. After a moment she said: "What shall I do?"

"Surely," said Laurence; "no one can hurt you?"

He remembered Brough's dying words about her; surely this woman had nothing to *fear*?

Lil looked strangely at him.

"No," she said; "Perhaps not—but they can hurt themselves! Oh, how terribly! No, no, no, it must not be! I must escape?"

She leaned wearily against the side of the cab, and her eyes looked dazed with the difficulties they saw. Laurence, after a moment's pause, spoke very gently.

"You will not misunderstand me—you will know I do not mean to insult or hurt you—when I say, trust me—and let me take you away—to Australia, if you like! We will both disappear from this side of the world; we will awake again in a new country. We should be married, in God's sight, of that I am sure. You would escape from this misery which I believe is killing you, I would shield you from everything."

Lil looked up into his eyes with almost an awe for his generosity of love. "What," she said; "leave your work, throw up your position, sacrifice your career!—and all for me! Your love is grand. I feel nobler now that you have offered it me. But no; I cannot do

this with my eyes open ; I know that I am married—he did not.”

These words, and the tone in which they were uttered, shed a new light into Laurence’s mind.

“ Ah ! ” he said, “ he has married again ! ”

“ Yes,” said Lil wondering at herself that it should be so great a relief to her heavy heart to utter these quiet words. “ I left him that he might marry again. I suppose I did a wicked thing. I do not know. You will not judge me hardly—God will not, I think—the world would, if it could know ! He loved her, and was killing himself in the effort to kill his passion. Perhaps I was proud—perhaps I was wild—I don’t know ! but I know that I loved them both ; ay, and do ! Could I stand between them and separate them ? But I slipped away unseen ; and left him free ! While he knows nothing, he is innocent—that is my comfort—while the world knows nothing, she and her child are safe ! I have told you enough now ; you can imagine how deep my trust in you is, when I confide so much of my secret to you. I know you will try to find out no more ; I know you will be silent as to what I have told you, even when I am dead. I felt you ought to know a little more ; I have longed for you to understand me a little better ! ”

“ Your secret is as safe with me as with yourself,” said Laurence ; “ so far as you will

let me, so far will I shield you, now and always. But, Miss Winter, why not escape and come away from all this? Looking at it, I cannot see that you would do any wrong, situated so strangely as you are."

Lil thought for a moment. "Yes," she said; "I should be doing wrong. Whether myself I do not know. My life has been so full of strange experiences, that I cannot always discover now what is right and wrong. The world's morality is very perplexing to me. I could not degrade myself worse than if I had remained with a man who was weary of me. To take what you offer me, by comparison with that, would seem to me an honest, righteous act. But I suppose I must be wrong, and the world must be right! I cannot do it. I cannot altogether escape from the influence of the world's opinion. I should doubt myself and be wretched."

They had been driving slowly down the Strand, and now were at Cecil Street. Laurence stopped the cab and they got out.

"There are other reasons, too," said Lil, as they turned down the street.

"And those are——?"

"One, that I cannot be so cowardly as to run away, now I have been suspected. I should leave a terror behind me. No, I must face it out. *She* has seen me now; that man Davies, who has been dogging me lately, had brought her there, I suppose. He has some

purpose—money, I should think. He prepared her to see me, so that it would have been hard for me to pass unrecognised. To one who never imagines but that I am dead, it is another matter; the idea does not suggest itself. I saw agony in her face to-day—can I go and leave her with that agony? No; I must avoid her, naturally, if possible; but to run away would be confession.”

“Have you yet another reason?”

“Yes,” said Lil, her manner changing suddenly. All the tenderness of her generous nature arose towards him. He felt it; the warmth of her spirit thrilled him. “Yes, the play. We cannot leave that! it is all that we shall ever be united in! Let us forget all other dreams and live in our work.”

They had reached Lil’s door now. Laurence took her hand in his to say good-bye.

“Do you not feel we could not leave it?” asked Lil, looking up into his face

“It would be hard,” he answered; “but it is as hard to stay—and lose you!”

“But you know! she said,” “you know I could not go with you! You know I should be wretched; you would regret it!”

“I suppose you are right,” he said.

“The circumstances of my life have shut me out from all such fair possibilities,” she said. “I may not love—I may not be loved. Good-bye!”

“Good-bye,” he said; “if you are driven

too hard—if you want help, send for me.  
Let me be always your friend.”

With a smile for all her answer, she left  
him and went in.



## CHAPTER XX.

**A**GAIN, the next day Adelaide went out alone. Charlie was rather surprised at her sudden desire to explore London shops by herself; but he let her go very easily as he had found enough to do in looking over his affairs. He had begun, too, to turn out letters and papers, partly his own and partly Lil's, which he had not had the heart to look through before he left England. These he would probably not have touched had Adelaide desired his society, but, as she evidently did not, he thought he might as well put these old letters in order and get them out of the way. It was a strange occupation to him. When he shut up the house, he had gathered up a quantity of letters and papers which he found in the drawers of Lil's writing-table, and, putting them into his own bureau, locked them away. It seemed to him, then, almost impossible ever to look them through. It was not difficult now, though a strange sad memory came from the past. Among Lil's letters he found one or two from Lady Warrington. He did not remember these; the others he knew well; they were

almost entirely from her father. Lil habitually destroyed letters when she had received them ; all except her father's. Charlie was surprised to see that she had kept Lady Warrington's, and read them to discover the reason. The first he took up was very old ; written to Lil in her early married life ; warning her not to offend Dr. Swift and speaking of him as an old lover. It was one which had made Lil very angry when she received it. She had not shown it to Charlie simply because she felt ashamed of Lady Warrington, who, after all, was her father's wife. Charlie read this through very thoughtfully.

"No," he said to himself ; "she was mistaken. Lil never cared for that man. She told me so ; and she was true as the heavens above."

While Charlie was dwelling thus amid the memories of his dead wife, Adelaide was engaged in actual pursuit of her. She drove straight down to Cecil Street, and, going to the house, asked for Miss Winter. Lil had gone to rehearsal, so that the errand was fruitless.

Adelaide came back dispirited. She found Davies was at the house. He was with Charlie downstairs ; but he evidently wanted to speak to her and made some excuse to do so, for she had no sooner gone into the drawing-room, where she sat down to try and think how next she could act, than he joined her.

She looked apprehensively at him as he entered.

"You do not trust me," he said, sitting down by her; "that is foolish. I am your best friend. I have told Charlie nothing. I have kept the secret, though you have treated me very ill. You need not disturb yourself as you do; if you will agree to the terms I proposed to you, I will see that she and Dr. Swift leave the country; and you shall never be in any danger of their re-appearance. I assure you this is a generous offer; if I chose to expose the matter I should stand in a very different position. But I am anxious to shield you."

"I want to see her," said Adelaide. "All that you say is wasted on me. Do not speak, but help me to find her! Surely she cannot escape me, if she is really alive! But I am very uneasy about it. She will hide herself again—she will go away—I shall lose her, and yet I shall know, as one knows in a nightmare, that she is somewhere in the world!"

"No, I don't think that," said Davies, with a half-smile. He partly guessed how much there was to keep Lil at her post. Besides, he judged others from his own standard.

"Do you not see?" he went on, "she will not go away now, because she has you in her power. People, in your position, will be expected to pay anything to avoid such a scandal."

"I am not afraid," said Adelaide, looking steadily at him ; "I do not believe my child would be judged illegitimate, born under these extraordinary circumstances ; my husband and I are innocent ; our marriage must be as good as any other ! You think of nothing but money ; and I can see, even in the confusion and distress, that you are trying to terrify me for your own purposes. I am not terrified, Mr. Davies ; I am not one of those women who fear scandal or undeserved shame above all other things. What I do dread is the discovery that a woman has suffered what I dare not think of—a woman whose rightful place I have held, while she has gone struggling out into the world. Whether this is true or no, I am determined to discover. And if it be true, I will also discover what caused her to take such an awful step. My instinct tells me that you wrong her, if alive. I will meet her face to face, and that, without your help, if you will not give it."

Davies rose, white with anger.

"Very well," he said, "I see you are incapable of understanding the sentiments of virtuous society on such matters. You are insensible of the shame of being a wife, yet no wife ; you complete your character by pursuing your husband's true wife, who is enjoying the companionship of the lover she always preferred. You were brought up in Italy, it is true ; perhaps you learned morality

from the Venetian women. But I hope to protect a respectable English family from such disgrace. Charlie is my cousin; I have no wish to see him figure before the world as a bigamist."

Davies, having relieved his feelings by revealing his underlying brutality, left the room quickly. Adelaide stood, like a statue, silent and white. But when he was gone she raised her trembling hands as if in mute prayer.

"What will he do?" she exclaimed. Then she sat down and began to think of the extraordinary events which had come upon her.

Davies had begun by suggesting that Lil was yet alive; he now spoke of her as a living person, with a certain positiveness and familiarity which carried conviction with it. He had pointed out to her, walking through the street, in the sunshine, a well-dressed lady, whom she was to accept in the place of a dead woman lying cold in her grave. A certain strange familiarity about this woman's air and walk had seized upon her imagination; and she had half-believed that Lil it was who stood there and then drove away, out of her reach. But now, a great, natural incredulity was settling upon her mind. The thing was impossible. "Banquo's buried; he cannot come out of his grave!" This was in truth the only argument that rose to her mind. But it was a strong one. She had been accustomed for a long

time to regard Lil as dead—buried—a thing of the past, tenderly and gently folded away in the memory of those who had loved her. A deep distrust of Alfred Davies helped her back to her old attitude of mind. Lil was dead, of course; her father had seen her buried; Charlie had seen her grave. Davies was trading upon some strange resemblance between Lil and Miss Winter in order to get money out of his rich cousin, or his rich cousin's wife. The thing seemed to her plain as possible, and she wondered at herself for a foolish dupe. Why, thought Adelaide, some doctor who was a friend, or acquaintance, had attended her, and had actually seen her die—suddenly. Then she started up again from the chair in which she had sat down to think. Started as though a word had been spoken in her ear and terrified her. She had remembered, without any search for it, the name of that doctor—it had come naturally into her mind, as one of the details of that past event—and she recognized in a sudden fever and terror, the name which Davies had used but just now. Dr. Swift! the man who was now seen with Miss Winter; the man who was said to have been Lil's old lover.

Adelaide stood trembling and full of a horrible fear. This lent a ghastly probability to the story. Could it be? could that Lil who had seemed so devoted to Charlie—who

looked so fair, so true, so honest; could she have been this base thing, a hypocrite, a double-hearted woman? Then came another thought; Adelaide, honest as true souls are, dared not hide from herself that the passion which existed between herself and Charlie had become at one time beyond control—must have been visible to Lil. She saw again that white face of pain which Lil had worn through those terrible days at Siena. In Lil, Adelaide had always recognised an extraordinary fund of rich, silent romance. She was one of those rare women capable of Quixotic deeds. Was it possible that, suffering as she did, and seeing others suffer, she took the old mad way which women have so long been driven to; flung herself blindly into the care of a lover who was ready to lead her from misery into shame? An agony of remorse rushed in upon Adelaide's heart—all the sympathy of her tender being rose up and roused her.

"I must find this Miss Winter and discover the truth," she exclaimed; "she cannot deceive me when I am face to face with her."

Action was necessary to her, for she was in a fever of fear and apprehension. She went out alone, and drove again to Cecil Street. Miss Winter was not at home. Lil had begged her landlady to say this to everyone for to-day. In truth she was packing her boxes upstairs. To-morrow Miss Winter would be gone—no address left. Lil was terrified to distraction

by the discovery that Adelaide was actually pursuing her.

Wearied out, Adelaide went home again, with no idea what to do. On the way she thought of something and directed the cabman to go to the stage door of the theatre. She went and spoke to the friendly door-keeper.

"Miss Winter will be here to-night?" she said, inquiringly. She knew nothing of the ways of theatres, and had an idea that it might be a very dreadful deed to penetrate a stage door. Yet she determined to do even that, if she could discover at what hour it might be possible to meet Miss Winter. She began to feel for her purse as she spoke. She must win even this door-keeper. But, to her surprise and disappointment, he shook his head in reply.

"No," he said, "Miss Winter ain't very well, and she arranged to-day to have her place taken for a night or two. She's coming out in a leading part and wants to be at her best I suppose."

Adelaide felt utterly disconcerted by this. "When will she appear in that leading part?" she asked, after a moment.

"It's advertised all about, Miss," said the man, pointing to some big play-bills which adorned the door-way. Adelaide went and looked at them. Yes, Miss Winter was advertised in large letters to appear as Amy

Davenant, the one important female character in "a new and original drama, by Edmund Laurence."

Adelaide got into her cab and drove home. While she was thus uselessly trying to carry out her own plans, Davies was forming a new one, and putting it into action. He saw that he could do nothing with Adelaide; he did not understand her. She seemed to him to be stupid. He determined to risk Charlie's incredulity and common-sense; he knew well how sensitive men are about the honour of the women immediately connected with them. On this characteristic, which he felt sure was strong in Charlie Newman, he depended for a foot-hold. Charlie might disbelieve him—might even believe and yet have no fear of any actual punishment or disgrace—and yet he would shrink from the exposure of his first wife's inexplicable desertion of him—from having the doubtful position of his second wife publicly discussed. Davies thought he saw his way to representing himself as the possessor of this secret, able either to disclose, or hide it: thus he would still hold the position.

He went to see Lady Warrington again, and left her burning with desire to tell someone the new-old scandal confided to her keeping. He would not tell her positively that he believed Lil to be alive; that fact he wanted for his own use. But he suggested the possi-

bility and hinted enough to drive Lady Warrington nearly wild with excitement.

The very next day he went to see Charlie again. Adelaide was out. "She has taken quite a craze for shopping," said Charlie; "I suppose women are all alike; but I really had no idea she cared for such things."

Adelaide had said, with a face that for the moment grew scarlet, that she found so much shopping to do in London; and then hurried away. She was not clever, as common-place women so often are, at telling little lies; and she feared lest Charlie should suspect that something lay behind her words. In reality, she was searching for Miss Winter; using her utmost ingenuity to try and discover her, and meet her.

Lil knew this; she had heard of Adelaide's inquiries at her lodgings, at the theatre. She sat in her new rooms, trembling at every knock lest it should be Adelaide's. She said she would be at home to no one, to make herself safe: and yet she longed to see Laurence. Since Brough died, in him alone could she trust or feel any comfort. But he did not come that day. She sat trembling alone, each moment fancying she heard Adelaide's step on the stairs and wondering a thousand times how she should face her. Would all the actress's art desert her in that awful moment? She sat still, her book before her, trying in vain to nerve herself to study.

In the afternoon there was a dress-rehearsal of the new play. She sent for a cab, and got into it with a feeling of horror that Adelaide might be in the street, watching to see her! She hoped Laurence would come in to the rehearsal; in fact, she felt sure he would. But he was not there; and she realized how much she had learned to care for him, for without him the theatre seemed empty.

Lady Warrington had two visitors that day and was a little excited by both; for each had a strange though very different interest in her new piece of scandal. She was essentially one of those women, too often to be met with, who glory in having "something to tell."

The first one was Charlie Newman. He went straight to see her directly after lunch, which meal he enjoyed alone with Mrs. Mainwaring. Adelaide had not come in. This annoyed Mrs. Mainwaring, who was utterly mystified by these excursions from which she was excluded. But Charlie hardly seemed to notice Adelaide's absence. He was absorbed. Certain sentences which Davies had uttered that morning, and which at the time seemed to be utter madness, now began to sing in his head and fasten themselves in his mind. "I saw a woman the other day, so amazingly like your first wife. It was curious that she was with Dr. Swift, who, I daresay, you remember as having been an old admirer of your wife's."

That was the first speech which fastened in Charlie's mind. Davies dropped it gently on to him. Then he went on to talk about Dr. Swift. He did not dare to insinuate anything about Lil's connection with him; but, after talking about him a little while, he assumed a sudden air of seriousness, dropped his voice, and asked Charlie if he saw Lil in her coffin. Charlie wheeled round in his chair and stared at Davies.

"I can't make out what you are driving at, Davies. What is it? No, I did not see her; she was buried when I reached the place."

"Ah—h—," said Davies, looking with a mysterious expression into the crown of his hat; much as men do when they first go into church. In fact, Davies having learned to do it there, had got rather into the habit of associating the action with serious moments.

"What on earth do you mean by this?" asked Charlie; "speak up and have done with it."

"Well—that fellow Swift has made a position now—but he is, and was, a scoundrel; I'm hanged if I'd have trusted his certificate of death."

Charlie stared blankly for a minute. Then he said, "I'm still in the dark."

"Well, doctors do write false ones sometimes," suggested Davies, meekly.

"False ones," echoed Charlie; "but what should be his purpose?"

“Ah!” said Davies, rising, “that I’d rather not say. It’s a delicate matter. If you want to know about that, go and ask Lady Warrington what she has to say about the old connection between her step-daughter and Dr. Swift. We all know in what sort of a way Brough Warrington’s daughter was likely to have been brought up. All I say is that this woman, whom I have seen with Dr. Swift several times, bears a most extraordinary resemblance to her. But I believe no one else has seen her, that knows you, and I am no gossip-monger.”

When Davies spoke of Lady Warrington, Charlie’s right hand had mechanically reached up on to his writing-desk and closed upon some letters which lay there. They were those from Lady Warrington to Lil. But he did not move his eyes from Davies’s face. Now he rose, white, with a sudden heat.

“Be kind enough to remember,” he said, “that Brough Warrington’s daughter was my wife, and keep your insinuations to yourself.”

“I do not forget it, I assure you,” said Davies very clearly. “Good-bye, old fellow,” he added, moving to the door; “I know when you have thought it over you will see how distinctly I have considered your interests in speaking to you first.”

He was gone, leaving Charlie standing there, his hand on the letters. He was utterly bewildered. He turned and looked

at the letters, took them up and read them again. Then he locked them away—safely—wishing he could lock his thoughts with them. But he could not. The lunch-bell rang. He went in to lunch, carrying his thoughts with him. They grew wilder with every passing moment. Before the meal was over, he had resolved to go and see Lady Warrington. He started up and went off, without explanation.

Mrs. Mainwaring began to think she would take a house of her own.



## CHAPTER XXI.

**T**HE next day, in the morning, Laurence came to Lil's new lodgings. He was told she was not at home. "Tell her it is Mr. Laurence," he said. The maid came back to show him up.

Lil was walking up and down the room, speaking Laurence's own words. On the next evening she was to make her first appearance in the new play ; and sometimes she almost began to fear lest her own troubles and torments should drive the words out of her head. She paused and held out both her hands as he came in, with almost a smile on her face. "Why, what is the matter," she exclaimed, directly she saw him. He seemed uneasy, grave ; and there was a new, questioning look in his eyes. It reminded her of her early acquaintance with him, when he was in doubt about her ; she had seen it there then, sometimes, but never of late.

"Nothing," he said ; "nothing is the matter ; at least, nothing that concerns me. And yet ; I cannot help thinking of it."

"It is something about me," she cried, suddenly; "I can see it in your eyes!"

"I am afraid it is," he answered, "and yet I don't know, it may not be, and I find it so hard to believe."

"Tell me what it is!" said Lil, steadily, now, but with her heart beating wildly with fear; "you know something of the danger I stand in, Mr. Laurence. It is kindest to tell me all of anything you may hear about me!"

"It was not about you," he said, "not directly. It was about Dr. Swift."

"What!" she exclaimed; "Speak! tell me!"

"There is a scandal about him," said Laurence; "that he did something very queer a year or two ago, that he and a married woman, whose lover he had been, went through some farce of her being ill and dying, in order that they might get away quickly together. It is said that she has been seen in London with him; that she is now an actress!"

Lil had turned white under his gaze. But she stood steadily, looking at him with her clear eyes.

"Who told you this?" she asked.

"Are you determined to know?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Lady Warrington."

"My God!" cried Lil, and sank into a

chair, helplessly, as if under a sudden blow. "Thank God my father is dead," she said; "he would have gone wild to hear her say that!"

"It is false, then!" exclaimed Laurence.

"Mr. Laurence," said Lil, quickly, "she did not tell you who that married woman was; did not mention her name?"

"No, no," he said.

"How could she suppose you knew Dr. Swift?" said Lil, anxiously.

"I think that gossip, Davies, had told her of it," said Laurence.

"He is at the bottom of it all," said Lil, in a tone of conviction; "but still it is strange she should talk to you about Dr. Swift—only that she is such a scandal-lover."

"And then she had just been talking to some one else about it when I went in," said Laurence; "a gentleman was with her; they had been talking about it. Her mind was full of it."

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Lil, turning white again; "oh, is she circulating this infamous lie? Can you tell me what he was like?"

"I did not notice him particularly; a handsome fellow, I remember."

"You did not hear his name?" asked Lil, in nervous anxiety. Every incident filled her with fear now.

"She called him something; what on

earth was it," said Laurence, trying to recollect. "He was very much upset about this affair, it seemed to me; he went directly I came, and she followed him to the door, saying, 'I'm really sorry you should have heard about this, Charlie;' ah, that was it; she called him Charlie."

Lil started to her feet and came close to him.

"Are you positive?" she said. "You are not mistaken?"

"Mistaken?" he repeated, in perplexity.

"What punishment!" she cried, suddenly, and seeming to grow taller as each wild word came out; "what retribution should come to that man who has followed me and been my evil fate, followed me with his loathly protestations of love, used his cruel power over me, and made me a by-word! I have tried to forgive him until now, but now they, the only people in the world who know me, whose respect or opinion I value, they have heard this tale, born of men's evil minds, based on that man's persecution of me! Oh, heaven punish him! make him suffer as I have suffered!"

Laurence was absolutely terrified by her manner, and the wild look in her eyes. But at this moment an interruption stayed the torrent of her words. The door was opened, and Dr. Swift stood on the threshold. She had not dared to hide herself from

him, or to bid them say "not at home." He had already been to see her in her new rooms, and now came in again.

She turned and flew at him almost like a wild creature. He fell back before her fury. She hurled her anger at him.

"I will bear it no longer," she cried, "go, and let me never see you again. My tongue is loosed, at last ; you have made me suffer like a slave ! I will bear it no longer. Go and tell what you choose, I can kill myself and would do that sooner than be subject to such base slanders. What ! you my lover ! I leave my home and a husband I respected for *you* ! The first rough man in the streets would have more humanity in him than to persecute a miserable, lonely woman, and advertise himself, falsely, her lover, until the hideous lie reaches the ears of those whose respect she values. You have brought this misery, this humiliation, this last, final, unbearable sting upon me ; you, with your hated company, your loathed attentions. Go and tell what you choose, I am strong enough to deny it. But you will not tell the truth ! you are afraid ! I know you are a sneak and a scoundrel, though you set up in a grand house and pretend to be respectable and honest. I could tell the world what a cruel tyrant, what a false wretch you can be. *You*, my lover ! Oh, heavens, this

is the utmost insult, the heaviest cruelty, the world has for me. Go, I defy you, I am no longer your slave, afraid of you! No! I will defend myself. Go, and let me never see you again!"

Her passion was so tremendous that Swift, who was always afraid of her in his heart, retreated as she advanced and so backed out of the door. She pointed to the stairway as she spoke, with a gesture so resolute, so unmistakable, that he obeyed without a word and went away. She watched him go, then shut the door, and coming back into the room fell upon her knees. The tears came suddenly and relieved her frenzy. She knelt there, sobbing wildly. Laurence could bear it no longer. He came to her, lifted her up, and held her in his arms. At last her sobs ceased, and her head dropped.

"My darling," he said, "you cannot bear this. You are killing yourself. Come away with me, out of it all, and let me save your dear life!"

She disengaged herself slowly, and looked into his face.

"What," she said, "and let them believe that! Let them think I was all they say I am, that I was afraid of being found out and had run away because of *that*! No, I would much rather die. I cannot bear that. I will live it down."

She stepped back and sat down, a little away from him. There was an intense resolution on her face. Presently she held out her hand to him.

“Dear Edmund,” she said, “I hate that man; I love you! But the world only judges by appearances. It will couple my name with his, it will never know how I have been tempted by your dear love! But, thank God, I have loved you too well to let you sacrifice yourself to a wretched, disgraced woman, as I should have been, had the temptation been too strong for me. Those invisible bonds that have eaten like iron into my soul, I have not tried to break them! In this, at least, I have not offended against the morality of the world. I shall die easier for that, dear! How tired I am!”

She leaned back her head, and seemed almost to sleep, so great was her exhaustion. He looked anxiously at her; and then, kneeling down by her, took her hand and laid his cheek upon it. He knew, instinctively, how his touch, his presence, the mere consciousness of that tender love of his in which she could so deeply confide, soothed her.



## CHAPTER XXII.

**C**HARLIE NEWMAN went that same evening to find out old Mrs. Warrington. It had occurred to him that she was still living and might know something of this strange and terrible thing which had risen like an embodied horror from his past.

He found the old lady living in a quiet suburban cottage, and dying very, very slowly, of old age. It was quite surprising, considering how clear she was on the subject of her own salvation and the definiteness with which she anticipated heavenly joys, that she should have so strong a hold on life below and surrender it so slowly. She was very deaf and did not always know people. At first she took Charlie for somebody quite different, and he was about to go away in despair when, suddenly, she remembered who he was. She immediately began to abuse Lil, using all her old formulas, which she had applied to Lil ever since the child had been old enough to be scolded. She evidently forgot that Lil was dead. This came strangely upon Charlie in his present state of mind. He leaned

forward close to her. "Has she been to see you lately?" he asked.

"No, no," said the old lady, "she's an undutiful child, given up to heathen doings, like her father before her. But, Mr. Newman, what are you thinking of? My grandchild Lil's not living now; she died in her sins, poor child, spite of all my earnest prayers, and has gone to eternal flames and everlasting damnation."

One would scarcely have thought this to be a cheering reflection; yet Charlie gave a sigh of relief. But still he was not satisfied.

"I dare say you will think it very strange of me to ask you such a thing," he said, "but I have heard lately some insinuations about Lil, which I cannot believe—about Lil and Dr. Swift, and I want very much to ask you whether you believe them, as I do, to be false."

The old lady shook her head very solemnly.

"He was a bad fellow that Swift," she said, emphatically. She looked very witch-like when she spoke like this, for her nose and chin nearly met now. "He was a bad fellow, and I never could understand how Lil could like him. But there's no accounting for tastes. He led her into sad mischief, and I say to you, what I wouldn't say to everyone, that it was not right for a young

married woman to have him to the house as she did. I saw him come, I saw her send him away, because I was there, and I never forgave her for it. I gave her my mind then and never altered ; I don't forgive easily," and the old lady bridled up with a vivid consciousness of uprightness and virtue, and heavenly rewards in store. Alas, poor Lil !

"Then you really think there was something between them?" said Charlie, sadly.

"*Think!*" said the old lady, putting all that volume of meaning into the word which old ladies can put into a single syllable, "I don't think about it ; I grieve to say I know the girl was fond of him before her marriage. It was an unfortunate affair ; she never should have seen him afterwards. But she did."

Charlie did not say anything for a minute. Then he began, hesitatingly,

"But you don't think she would have done anything rash, positively wild, you know."

The old lady interrupted him by holding up her hands, just as she used to when she saw Lil romping on the lawn with the dogs. She had begun with one fixed idea when Lil was born ; that "the little thing would be sure to be queerly brought up," and, therefore, wicked ; and that idea had never altered. The little thing *was*

queerly brought up ; according to Gran's notions, therefore, was wicked.

" My dear friend," she said, solemnly, holding her hands high in holy horror. " don't ask me. I don't wish to speak ill of the dead. But I must confess that Lil was a very foolish, headstrong, young woman. Nothing you tell me of her would surprise me. Her father would never listen to advice or counsel, nor would she. I tried in vain to guide or help her in the right path."

Granny paused. In the silence that followed, Charlie only sighed, a little out of disappointment, a little out of the feeling that Lil had been, indeed, a friendless girl, if this old lady's was the only mother's love she had known.

Mrs. Warrington was tired with talking so much. She shook her head, half of purpose, but partly from weakness. Presently Charlie heard her saying something indistinctly.

" She would not listen nor give heed to Moses and the prophets ; Jehovah is just ; he will punish her and chastise her for her sins. She will be devoured by eternal flames, without a drop of water to cool her burning tongue."

Charlie rose abruptly to take his departure. In his present excited state of mind this sort of thing preyed upon his nerves ; and he saw that he could obtain nothing more from the old lady. Indeed, she was wandering in mind again ; and, when her mind was clear, he doubted if her

word was worth much. She had not a good one to say for Lil; but he began to see that this was really because she had always been prejudiced against her. Still, what she had said had made a strong impression on his mind, as words will when one is in a state of great uncertainty. He began to remember how unconventional Lil really was; how little afraid of consequences. After all, she might have been tempted to some desperate act, for he had not forgotten what a miserable time it was just before her death or disappearance.

He went home perfectly miserable. Mrs. Mainwaring had not been out to take a house, but had sat at home all the afternoon wondering what had come over these two. She saw at once that Charlie was in as unpromising a state of mind, for any social purposes, as when he went out.

"Charlie," she said to him, suddenly, "what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," he said, and went away. Presently Adelaide came in. Mrs. Mainwaring put the same question to her and got the same reply.

"I believe you are both out of your minds," said Mrs. Mainwaring, with decision; "I should go away, only I begin to think someone ought to be here to look after you."

"Why," said Adelaide, turning quickly, "is there anything wrong with Charlie?"


"Look at him at dinner," was Mrs. Mainwaring's reply. Adelaide followed this advice, forced back her own thoughts, and watched him carefully. Mrs. Mainwaring went away to her own room after dinner, leaving the two alone; indeed, they were not very exhilarating company.

Adelaide went straight to him and touched him with her soft warm hand. "I have heard it too," she said.

He started and looked up into her face; she was regarding him with steady, fearless eyes. She had a power over him, which Lil never had after the enthusiasm of their first early love was dead. Adelaide, by her peculiar quiet warmth of character, stilled his nervous irritability of temperament, when Lil would only have suffered from contact with it. Adelaide exercised this power now. He felt strengthened by her sympathy. But, while he looked in her face, he remembered what all this might mean to her, and he could not talk to her of it. He kissed the hand she had laid on his, and then went away, without a word, out of the room, out of the house, into the street, that the cold air might stir and revive him.

Adelaide, meantime, sat down alone a little while, but, after a few minutes, the solitude proved unbearable. She went upstairs, and wept hot tears upon her baby's pillow.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

N the following day Charlie and Adelaide again went out separately. Mrs. Mainwaring saw that the mysterious cloud was still over them and asked no questions. Adelaide was pursuing her old search. She went to the stage-door once more and tried to get Miss Winter's new address from the door-keeper. But he had promised Miss Winter, and as that lady was a favourite with him, he resisted Adelaide's entreaties and bribes. Then she went round to the box-office intending to take tickets for the evening. She must see this woman, if only on the stage.

Every seat in the house taken a week ago ! Laurence was a favourite and successful dramatist, with great influence, and the management had supported Miss Winter with an admirable company. Everybody meant to be at the first night of this new play.

Disappointed to the last degree, Adelaide went home. She found Charlie had just come in.

He, too, was disappointed. He had been awake all night thinking over this extraordinary thing. As the morning came he un-

derwent a revulsion of feeling. It appeared that all this was a nightmare, a thing which had fastened on his brain in the dark hours. It was impossible—it was a mad fancy. He went, immediately after breakfast, to tell Lady Warrington that he utterly disbelieved the whole thing, that, the more he thought of it, the more his knowledge of Lil's character convinced him this scandal was untrue; he wanted to implore her to contradict it. Lady Warrington was out. Disappointed there, he went to find Davies. He was not to be found. He went home, resolving to write to them both. While he sat at his table, his head on his hands, Adelaide came in, and, with a gentle touch, expressed her silent sympathy. He turned and looked into her face, and saw a new look of misery and anxiety there.

He held out his arms to her.

"I do not believe it!" he said, emphatically.

There was a knock at the door. A moment and Alfred Davies was announced. Charlie rose and walked towards him.

"I am glad you have come," he said. "I shall repeat what I have just said—what I came to you this morning to say. I do not believe it!"

"Oh, you don't?" said Davies, with a slightly contemptuous tone, veiled under a sort of sympathetic air. "I am glad of that."

Adelaide rose to leave the room. Charlie stayed her by a gesture.

"Don't go away," he said. "No," he went on, turning again to Davies, "I do not believe it, and I've been thinking this morning what purpose you can have had in concocting such a villainous affair. You primed Lady Warrington very well, but you have not taken me in; you told her all she knows. You have always been desirous of getting into my shoes; I suppose you are jealous of my boy now. That child is my rightful heir, Alfred; this lie of yours will not help you."

Davies had lost his temper, but he was determined not to show it. His game was to be as angelic as possible.

"Don't use strong language," he said, gently, "till you are sure you are in the right."

"In the right?" said Charlie, angrily. "I know I am! You are a wretch to start a base slander against a dead woman who cannot defend herself. But she has left a memory behind her. She was my wife, and I know she was a true woman. Adelaide knew her, and knew her to be a lady in the highest sense. She would never have put herself in the power of that scoundrel Swift,—she could not have loved a fellow like that. Men, like you, who are everlastingly mixed up with fast women, believe they are all alike. I tell you, you are wrong. If you can't keep your

scandalous tongue quiet, leave the dead alone. Lil was a pure woman, beyond your understanding. There's the door, Alfred; I'm sorry to have to do this, but it can't be helped."

Davies did not go. He stood still, giving an uneasy look at Adelaide. She saw he wanted her away and this determined her, notwithstanding the painfulness of the scene, to stay. Presently, he said, without looking at Charlie, "Will you go to the theatre with me to-night, old fellow? This thing's harassing your mind, and you don't know what you're at."

Charlie deigned no reply, but turned on his heel and walked away. It seemed to him mere frivolity, this speech.

But, to his surprise, Adelaide exclaimed, "What theatre, Mr. Davies?"

Charlie turned back to look at her in amazement. He had imagined she did not care for theatres.

Davies did not answer, so Charlie spoke again.

"This is nonsense," he said, impatiently. "I don't want to go to the theatre—certainly not."

"But," said Davies, "this might interest you."

"Mr. Davies," cried Adelaide, "do tell me what theatre it is."

"The *Favourite*," said Davies, reluctantly.

"I thought so," said Adelaide. "You must take me. I must go. I have tried to get

seats to-day, and every seat in the house was taken."

"I have had this a week," said Davies.

"Is it a box, then?" exclaimed Adelaide.

"Oh, then you can take me. Yes, yes, we will go."

"What does all this mean?" said Charlie, in increased amazement. "You have been trying to get seats for this theatre, Adelaide? What for, may I ask?"

"Because—" said Adelaide, "there—she—"

"What!" cried Charlie, in sudden excitement, "the one Davies has seen——?"

"Yes," said Davies.

"Good God!" said Charlie, "does she act there?"

"Yes," said Davies. "Will you go?"

"Yes," was all Charlie's answer. He put his arm round Adelaide and drew her towards him. It seemed as though they must help each other through this coming ordeal. Then he rang the bell. "I will tell them what time to have the carriage ready," he said, in a sort of feverish impatience. "What time is the play?"

"Eight o'clock," said Davies. "Good-bye; I will meet you at the theatre."

He took his departure, feeling a strong disposition to vent his ill-humour on the servant he met in the hall. He would have liked to kick him down the steps. But it would be better not to. Never mind; he told himself

that there was no doubt about this Miss Winter being Lil ; at all events, the likeness was strong enough to startle any one to whom the idea was already suggested. He promised himself he would not spare Charlie when once he had frightened him—he would put the screw on then !

It seemed to these two, Charlie and Adelaide, that the dinner lasted an interminable length of time this evening. Neither could eat, but they tried to, and tried also to talk to Mrs. Mainwaring. But it was evident to her that they had a trouble which they did not choose to confide to her. She accepted the situation as graciously as might be, like a woman of the world.

At last the carriage was announced. Adelaide drew on her cloak, and put a trembling hand under Charlie's arm. They got into the carriage in silence, and drove through the lighted streets in silence. Adelaide leaned back in her corner with a strange and heavy feeling of coming misfortune upon her. It was impossible to rouse herself to any ordinary thoughts, the experience before her was so extraordinary.

Davies was waiting for them on the steps of the theatre. He had not wanted Adelaide, because he felt he could play better upon Charlie without her influence. But he had summoned all his politeness now ; he felt he must not make an enemy of her. And it occurred to

him that her presence might serve as an excuse for not attempting to go behind or see Miss Winter any closer.

If these three could but have looked in on the actress, the Miss Winter who was the heroine of the evening, as she sat in her dressing-room! Shivering, pale with fear, her ambition, her dread of an audience, her terror of the critics, all drowned by another greater, more absorbing emotion, by a more overpowering fear. Of what!—of her pursuers. Here she was, preparing herself to face the public, knowing that those who were following her, making themselves her terror, might be at any time a portion of this public. She knew this only too well. When another actress would have awakened at night seeing herself successful—or failing—Lil had started from her dreams seeing before her one known face among an audience of strangers, a face too terribly familiar—the face of her husband. For nights this sight had haunted her as if some warning were given her. But that warning was in vain. She must keep to her post. A dozen reasons held her fast. Last, but not least, of these reasons had come the dogged determination to deny the scandal which connected her name with Swift. That Lil, whom she had once been, that Lil, honoured and loved by her friends, should not suffer by so base, so ugly a calumny. She knew too well that innocent

women, who struggle against cruel circumstances, are credited on the least doubtfulness of appearance with frailty. Her pride rose furious against the thought that Charlie, to whom she had given her life, that Adelaide, for whom she had sacrificed herself, should be made to believe so horrid a lie. She could see, as she thought of it, how credible the thing might be made to seem to them. This thought gave her strength, gave her power to conquer her fears.

This woman, who suffered so—who shrank from her pursuers like a hunted criminal—what was she? One who had given up her all to make those she loved happy. And this terrible, humiliating fear was what the world had to reward her with!

At last she was dressed. She had completed the very last touches when she was called. One look into the glass—no, this was not Lil. It was a new being, it was Amy Davenant, the suffering, heroic, wretched wife, the heroine whom Laurence had conceived, and she had completed. She felt her own individuality pass away and this other rise up within her. At that call to the stage, all the actress rose within her, strong, full of her art, determined to conquer. She left her dressing-room and walked forward to the wings, with a strange feeling that here she was in her place, that here she was proud, fearless. The faces in the house became one great blur in her eyes,

the footlights at her feet bounded her world. But that world, how large it was! On those boards she had the drama, she had the range of her art. She felt inspired and enlarged as she stepped forward to speak those words which, until now, had been doubly dear to her as Laurence's—now suddenly had become something greater, a medium for her own expression.

What the audience saw was an actress who singled herself out instantly from all the others on the stage, whose low, penetrating voice thrilled the house with the emotion in it; whose every gesture was full of meaning. At once she seized the whole attention of the house and held it fast. The other actors about her suddenly became mere adjuncts. She had so taken the character she acted into herself, she so completely understood it, and all the emotions of a crushed, bruised, deserted love, that, in the first few moments of her entrance, everyone, even those who had rehearsed with her, became aware that she had taken a great step on this evening, and placed herself in the front ranks of her art.

Upon the occupants of a certain box the entrance of this actress had an extraordinary effect. Adelaide and Charlie both sat perfectly still, paralyzed, scarcely able to breathe. Both knew in an instant that this was the woman upon whom the extraordinary suspicion rested. There was no mistaking her. Something in the

carriage and delicate quick movements unquestionably suggested Lil. But when they had realized this there came a strange sensation upon both. This was nothing more than a likeness, a resemblance such as might be met with any day. And each experienced an immediate incredulity of Davies's belief. So completely changed was Lil's general appearance by dress, make up, and cultivation of manner, that Charlie looked at her in perplexity that any one should have entertained such an idea as that she was Lil. But still he was spell-bound by the strange experience which he was undergoing. And Adelaide was incapable of speech or motion. Only Davies watched the stage with any general or ordinary interest.

Gradually Adelaide became aware of the action of the story. Lil's passionate, heart-felt acting aroused her to a sense of what this acting meant. Lil had to tell the story she was best fitted to tell, to express the agony of a wife, whose husband—the husband she still loves with all the tenacity of a faithful heart—wearies of her. Her sense of degradation, her wounded pride, when she gradually realised that her love was wasted, unfelt, unappreciated, when she saw that the man to whom she was bound by law and love had no longer eyes or thought for her—all this was depicted with a startling reality. Then came a terrible and powerful speech, in which the

unhappy wife suddenly rages against the law which makes it her duty to follow out what seems to her the lower and more selfish instinct of her nature, to hold her husband, to demand his love, to deny him his freedom. Here the actress rose tremendous, and became more than the actress—became the real woman, impassioned by wrongs which have seared her own life.

Charlie, listening so intently that he forgot all else, was startled by a sudden touch. It was Adelaide. He was amazed to look in her face. The tears were running down it.

“I am going,” she said. “I cannot bear it. I shall make a scene. I will go home. I will take the carriage and send it back; do not move.”

But he would go with her. He was frightened by her face. Just then the curtain fell, and it was easy to take her down and call for the carriage. She clung tremblingly to him. “I will come home with you,” he said.

“No, no!” she answered. “See it out, and see her closer if you can. Promise me that. I am going that I may not be in the way, for I am unnerved to-night, and all that seems like a picture of her sufferings—oh! so terrible.”

“Do not be foolish, dear child,” he said. “Davies is mistaken. It is only a resemblance.”

“Do you think so?” said Adelaide, eagerly. “I think so, too; but yet I cannot bear to see

that strange likeness and to hear those terrible words of pain from her. There is the carriage ; I am glad, for I can hardly stand. I shall not be asleep when you come home ; I shall wait to hear if you have seen her closer."

The carriage drove away, and Charlie went slowly back into the theatre and to his box. He felt like a man in a dream. The people he met appeared as though they were phantoms. What world was he living in ?

The curtain had risen, and Amy Davenant was again on the stage. She seized upon the audience again with the same electric power ; thrilled them, wrung tears from them. Charlie sat through the act, scarce knowing what he listened to or what he saw. It was all a wonder to him with this strange resemblance bewildering his mind.

But, as the curtain fell, he leaned back and said to Davies, " It is not she." He spoke with an air of such conviction that Davies could not keep the disappointment out of his face. He looked away that Charlie might not see it.

" Never mind," he said to himself ; " if he is obstinate I must make them meet face to face."

In the meantime, an enthusiastic house was calling for Miss Winter. She came out on the opposite side of the curtain and moved towards the box in which Charlie and Davies were sitting. Charlie leaned right forward to look at

her. He was very near the stage. As she paused to bow to the house, she raised her eyes and met his full upon her.

For a long instant that look was interchanged. It was the strangest instant either ever lived through. Lil was absolutely paralysed. She had not seen him before—she had no idea of his presence. Suddenly, she met his eyes straight looking into hers. It took consciousness away from her. The actor who had come in front of the curtain with her took her hand and led her off, else she might have remained there like one petrified.

Charlie, when she had gone, leaned back like one utterly exhausted, completely amazed.

He had seen the flash of recognition in those eyes. He had felt the familiarity of those dark eyes, unchangeable by any disguise. Those were Lil's eyes. He was convinced of it—more, he knew it. He could not speak—he could hardly breathe. Before he could in any degree collect himself, the curtain rose again. By the exercise of tremendous will-power Lil had nerved herself, and stepped on to the stage once more as Amy Davenant. She alone could guess what this cost her, and she guessed it but dimly. She was using her very nerve life, exhausting the fountain of her being.

The third act was a very heavy one for her. She had to kill herself in order to liberate her

husband, and it was a scene which only an actress of the first rank could render properly. But Lil went through it like a genius on fire. The whole story and agony flamed in her mind, and she gave it out in searching words and burning glances. At last the house rose at her, thundering its applause; and, meantime, Amy Davenant, lying a corpse, dead by her own hand, when the curtain fell on her, lay motionless, as though really dead. The other actors executed a little spontaneous dance of delight when the curtain fell and concealed them from the applauding audience, but Lil lay still and motionless. She was called for—shouted for—she did not move. At last, when she heard her name repeated again, she started from the ground and ran to her dressing-room, where she fell, utterly exhausted.

The manager followed her. "You must go on!" he said. "They will have it."

She only moaned, and buried her face in the cushions. Laurence had come to the door of her room, and was about to plead for her. But at that moment he heard his name called as well as hers. "Author! Author!" rang out from the house.

"I will go on," he said, hurriedly. "If they call for her I shall tell them she is ill."

But Laurence's appearance satisfied them for the moment. He bowed to vociferous applause. When he had come off, cries for Miss

Winter were raised again, but they gradually died away, cooled down perhaps by the rapid putting out of the gas in the cheaper parts of the theatre, a trick in which subordinates seem to delight.

Charlie, meantime, had caught Davies by the arm.

"We must get behind," he said. "I must see her close!"

Davies looked at him, and thought it better to say nothing, but quietly lead on. He knew the way very well, though he did not choose to say so. Charlie was intensely excited, too much so to ask any questions. He only felt that he must meet this woman, and he hurried out of the box, intending to ask the way. But Davies went straight to a certain door, and asked an attendant who stood near to unlock it for him. The girl hesitated.

"It is all right," said Davies. "I am going to congratulate Miss Winter; she knows me very well."

The girl unlocked the door, with a smile. Davies walked through some narrow passages, Charlie following him. Suddenly they emerged upon the stage. Then Davies turned quickly, and went up two or three steps. They were at a closed door.

"What is this?" asked Charlie.

"Her dressing-room," answered Davies.

Charlie immediately went up a step or two to get close to it, pushing him aside. Voices

were heard inside. Suddenly the door opened, and one of the other actresses came quickly out, followed by the manager. They had all thought Miss Winter was dying, but she had partially recovered, and now they were intent upon getting ready to leave the theatre. In the doorway stood two figures. One was Lil, still in her stage-dress, though she had thrown off the wig which had hidden her black hair. Beside her, a little out of sight, stood Laurence. Charlie advanced a step; Lil turned and faced him, eye to eye. It was an extraordinary experience. Charlie forgot everything but that Lil, his old, well-loved, brown-eyed Lil, stood before him! He became unconscious of where they stood, of the presence of any others—the years had vanished—other ties had vanished!

“You are Lil,” he said.

She stood like one whose very breathing was frozen. A strange trance or delusion appeared to her to be upon her. Before her stood her husband, the man whom now, she realised, she still loved best, as faithful hearts always cling to their earliest love. Here was Charlie, her lover, her husband, her own! To her, too, the years had vanished. Why did she not fling herself into his arms, nestle into her old place, rest once more in that dear rest that was her own?

Her hand had been on Laurence's arm when Charlie spoke. Suddenly, Laurence felt it con-

tracted so that he could scarcely bear the pressure. Lil had remembered, with a sensation as of a stab in her heart, that, though united by love, by familiarity, by religious bonds, by links of iron, to this man before her, she was a stranger to him.

"Excuse me," she said. "I do not understand. You are under some strange mistake."

She turned back into the room, took up a large hooded cloak which lay on a chair, wrapped it round her, and drew the hood over her head.

"Good-night," she said to Laurence. Then she passed the others, giving Davies an icy bow, as slight as possible. She walked away alone across the stage, leaving the three men standing there. Laurence stepped down past the other two. Charlie touched him as he went by.

"Tell me, in God's name, if you know, who is that lady?"

Laurence looked at him—looked beyond him at Davies.

"You are very mysterious and melodramatic, sir," he answered. "That lady is Miss Winter, from to-night one of the most popular actresses on the stage."

Without another word, Charlie turned and walked away in the direction which Miss Winter had taken. Laurence looked after him, and wondered what to do. His heart

ached for this defenceless woman. He guessed that this man was her husband, he could see that the ordeal she had had to undergo was too great for her strength. As a woman, he loved her; as an artist, he adored her. He longed to shield her from these torments which shook her whole being and wore out her strength. Ah, if he might but take her home, and shut her door in the face of everyone else! If he might but protect her from all that disturbed her! What could he do?—nothing.

He walked moodily out of the theatre, and through the streets. He hardly knew where he was going; he was absorbed in thought.

But, presently, he found himself standing—listening—looking. What did he hear? What did he see? He was gazing at a house, of which two windows on the ground floor were brilliantly lit. One of these windows were wide open to admit the heavy night air. He heard voices, and one of them went to his heart. Its low, penetrating tones pierced his being. He detected the suffering which underlay the subdued accents of that voice.

His feet had carried him to the house where Miss Winter lived. In that lighted room her maid had prepared her coffee and some slight supper. It all stood untasted. The actress had not come home to rest. She was still acting. She was using all her powers.

Laurence crossed to the side of the road

farthest from the house. From there he could see her. She was standing with one hand on the mantel-shelf, her head turned over her shoulder to speak to some one who seemed to be moving about the room. Suddenly, this other person came in the range of Laurence's vision. It was Charlie Newman. "Poor child!" escaped involuntarily from Laurence's lips. From the depths of his soul he pitied her. He understood now that look on her face, a proud, strange look, as of a queen who denies her right.

She was speaking now with that expression on her lips. Charlie turned suddenly away with a violent gesture. Laurence saw her whole face melt and change—an agony come into it—a despairing, yearning, hungry look, as of a creature starved. For one wild instant she stretched out her hands passionately, entreatingly, then hastily covered her face with them.

Laurence heard a sound; the house door opened and shut quickly. He indistinctly saw Charlie Newman striding down the street.

He could restrain himself no longer. He crossed and knocked gently at the door. The maid, who was waiting up to help Lil undress, opened it. She was a new servant, whom Lil had engaged when her salary increased sufficiently. But she had been with her long enough to know Mr. Laurence was a friend.

"Sir," she said, "I am afraid Miss Winter

is ill. I don't know what to do. Come in and see her. I think I must go for a doctor."

Without answering, he strode across the hall and went into the room where Lil was. She had fallen upon her knees, and was leaning on a chair, her hands pressed tight against her side. She seemed unable to speak—hardly to breathe.

"What do you feel?" asked Laurence.

"This pain here," she said, feebly. "I have had it before, but not so badly. It is killing me!"

"What do you mean!" exclaimed Laurence. "Killing you?—nonsense—yes, go for a doctor," he said, turning to the maid, who instantly left the room.

"No, no," said Lil. "It is not worth while—I know I am dying."

Laurence raised his hands and shook them wildly, as though menacing the fate which pursued her.

"Why could you not have loved me and lived for me?" he cried, desperately. "God! that a woman like you should die in such a way! It makes me mad!"

"I am dying," repeated Lil, faintly. "I have done my best. Oh! that I had his forgiveness—for one word of love from him before I die!"

Laurence would have done anything for her at that moment.

"Let me fetch him back," he said, leaning

over her to hear her indistinct words. But she suddenly grew distinct.

“What! waste the agony of this last hour, in which alone, face to face with my husband, whom I have loved, whom I still love, to whom I have sacrificed my life, and to whom I have been true to the last—waste the torture of this hour, in which, alone with him and under the eye of God, I told the one lie of my life, and swore that I was not myself!—swore it, that he might still be happy—that his wife might—oh, God!—no, no—I have lived without him—I can die without him!”

She had half risen from her knees with the excitement of her words. Now she fell forward, speechless and exhausted. She seemed to Laurence to be dying before his eyes. He grew wild with the sense of impotence. He knelt beside her, kissed her hands and her hair. Suddenly she roused herself, and spoke again.

“Edmund,” she said, “you have learned my secret; keep it, if you love me. Swear, that when I am in my grave, it shall be safe as though you did not know it.”

“I swear it,” he answered, solemnly.

A smile slowly came upon her lips. Her deep confidence in him gave her a sense of happiness. Suddenly, a cry broke from her lips. “Ah, the pain!” She stretched out her hands to him with a look of agony in her eyes. There was a little foam on her

lips. He wiped it away, and held her head against his breast. At this moment the servant came back with a doctor.

The doctor took her from Laurence, and laid her down on the floor, with a cushion under her head. He loosened her dress, and then asked for some brandy. While the maid got it, he was examining Lil attentively. When the girl came with the brandy he poured some out, and put into it a few drops from a bottle he had with him.

“What is that?” asked Laurence.

“Laudanum,” he answered, as he put some between her lips. “It will ease the pain a little for her. I can’t do more for her than that; but that is something.”

“What!” cried Laurence. “What do you mean? Can you not save her?”

The doctor only shook his head, and went on administering his laudanum and brandy. Presently, Lil opened her eyes and looked at Laurence. He saw in the earnest gaze of those beautiful brown eyes, something which he had never seen in human eyes before. It was farewell. In that look there was love, confidence, trust. She was passing away into the eternal, knowing that she left upon earth this one man who would be faithful to her trust, who would respect her memory.

She closed her eyes again with a faint moan. The doctor went over and watched her face awhile. Presently he looked up to Laurence.

“She is gone,” he said.

Laurence turned his eyes upon the motionless form, but he could not see it. What he saw was that last gaze of the escaping spirit. There was a tie now between this man in the finite, and that unknown world of the infinite beyond. Somewhere, that sweet spirit still looked to him to love her, to be true to her.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

**A**BOUT ten o'clock the next morning Charlie Newman knocked at the door of the house which he had visited so late last night. He had not slept in the interval; and with the morning his own conviction grew in strength, and he disbelieved what he had been told. He came, as early as was just decent, to once more tax this woman with being something other than she claimed to be, and resolute to force the truth from her lips.

He looked up, noticing that all the blinds were down. "She is late this morning," he thought. "Never mind, I will wait till she is ready to see me."

The maid opened the door, looking worn out with the experiences of the past night. Charlie asked for Miss Winter. The girl admitted him into the hall and shut the door before she answered.

"She is dead, sir," she said. "She died suddenly last night, after you had gone. We got a doctor, but it was no use."

Charlie stood still a moment or two, completely staggered. But, presently, he recovered himself sufficiently to speak. "Do

you think I might see her," he said, hesitatingly. "I should like to, very much."

The maid turned, opened a door very gently, and went inside. He heard her whisper with someone. Then she came out and said, "Yes, sir; in here."

He followed her; she showed him into a dim-lit room and then went out herself. He stood a moment, confused. It was the same room he had been in last night. How changed—how different!

Something white lay on the table; in the midst of it he could discern the outline of a form; that sharp, clear outline which only a dead form can make. It was half hidden by white flowers. Laurence had been laying them there. He stood at the other side of the table. He drew back now and went to the window.

Charlie approached the table very slowly. For a moment he felt unnerved by the position. A horror came upon him of that grim death, which had snatched away this woman at the supreme moment of her success, with an untold secret in her bosom.

He conquered himself, and, leaning over the table, gently drew back the cloth which covered her face. Ah, how beautiful it was, with that smile, so infinitely sweet, upon her lips. How like Lil now!—for the dead face had taken on a look of youth. Charlie was appalled, spell-bound.

“Can it be!” he said to himself. “Is it possible!” He longed to kiss her face, but dared not; he wanted to kiss it for Lil’s sake; but this motionless form, with the mysterious smile upon its lips, terrified him. If this was not Lil’s form, how strange, how terrible the likeness!—if it was, how much more terrible the reality! He shuddered as he stood gazing on the silent, beautiful face. The dead lay motionless for ever, the life-secret safe and unrevealed.

He lifted a lock of the dark hair and put it to his lips. He had forgotten Laurence’s presence in the room; did not know how keenly he was being watched.

Very gently, Charlie put back the cloth over the fair dead face and left the room. He could bear it no longer.

No word passed between the two men. But when Charlie had gone, Laurence came back, drew off the cloth and passionately kissed the white forehead.

“My darling!” he said, “how I could have hurt him had I chosen to speak. But I will keep your secret and bring it safe to you when we meet again.”

Four days after that there was a quiet little funeral at the Brompton Cemetery, where so many favourites of the stage lie stilled for ever.

Laurence had managed it, and refused to announce the hour in order to prevent the

crowd of outside admirers from coming to gaze on the coffin of the great actress snatched away at the very hour when her genius became visible. But the affair had naturally created a good deal of excitement, and, notwithstanding all Laurence's care, there were many strangers in the churchyard. The coffin was an absolute mass of flowers; those flowers which should have fallen on the stage at her feet were sent to cover her dead form.

Laurence, as he approached the grave, saw another man draw close to it. He recognised Swift; and for a moment felt an intense desire to tell him not to insult the dead by his presence. But another glance silenced him. Swift's face was working with emotion. The rough, harsh nature had been cut painfully by the death of this woman, for whom he had always entertained an extraordinary feeling, whose hold over him had been lifelong. Though, with his native cruelty, he had embittered her existence, yet, at her grave he stood, undoubtedly, a genuine mourner.

It fulfilled the character of the latter part of this unhappy woman's life that the only two who felt a right to approach her grave were two men utterly unconnected with her by any tie.

When the ceremony was over, two other persons came close, while those scattered about the cemetery gathered a little nearer

to see the earth thrown in upon the flowers which lay so thick over the coffin.

Laurence recognised, in one of these persons, Alfred Davies; the other was a lady, with a veil on her face.

Davies stood morosely gazing into the grave. The game was played out; the dead had won, and he had lost! He had no proof that this new-made grave contained the body of Lil Newman, instead of that other made long ago!

The outer circle of mourners were watching sadly the earth as it was shovelled in. It seemed a cruel, a horrible thing to them that the fair, brilliant actress, burning with genius, should die at the very moment when her glory was commencing.

Suddenly, Adelaide put back her veil and came close to Laurence. She saw that he held some relation to the dead woman which none of the others had. A sudden impulse made her speak.

"In the name of heaven," she said, "tell me, if you know, who was this woman that lies buried here?"

Davies and Swift drew closer when they saw her movement. Laurence found himself in the midst of a little circle. He looked round at the faces about him before he spoke.

"I can only tell you that she was an actress who would have been great had she lived ;

and that she was a brave and virtuous woman. The world is cruel ; and, perhaps, it is best that she was cut down on the very eve of her career, and in the flower of her youth. No more can be said ; let us leave, reverently, the grave of a pure woman and a true heart."

Adelaide, looking in his face, read there that he had spoken his last word. She turned away, her heart sick with fear and wonder.

Swift gave a gesture of impatience, and hastily walked out of the cemetery. The motives of the dead woman's actions had always been a mystery to him ; they were so, still.

Davies paused a moment, and smiled as he looked down in the grave. "Bah," he said to himself, "if people are such fools as not to know how to sin within the law—why, they must suffer."

The grass grows green over that grave now. The white cross which stands at its head bears the name of a forgotten actress, who died too young for fame.

THE END.





