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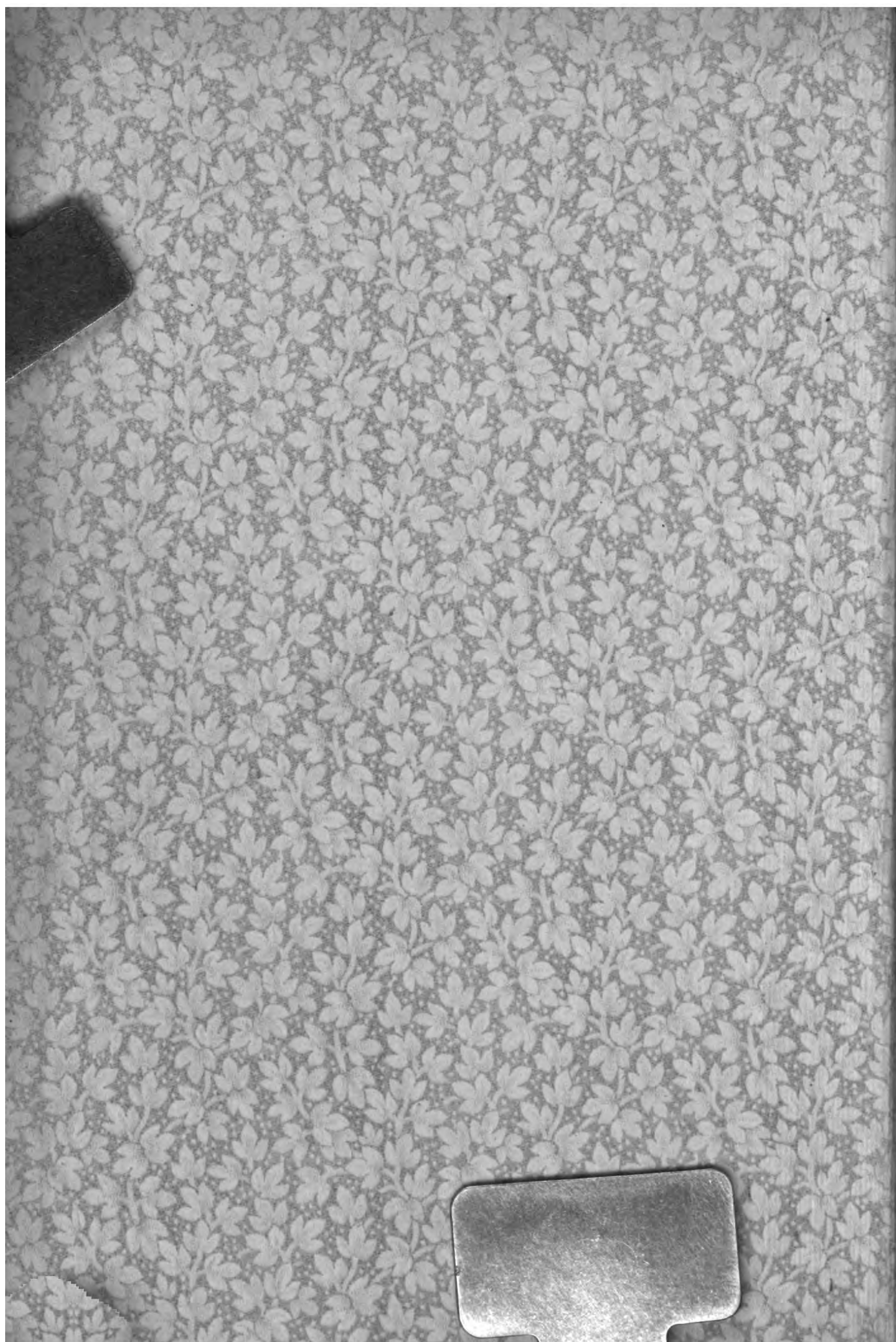


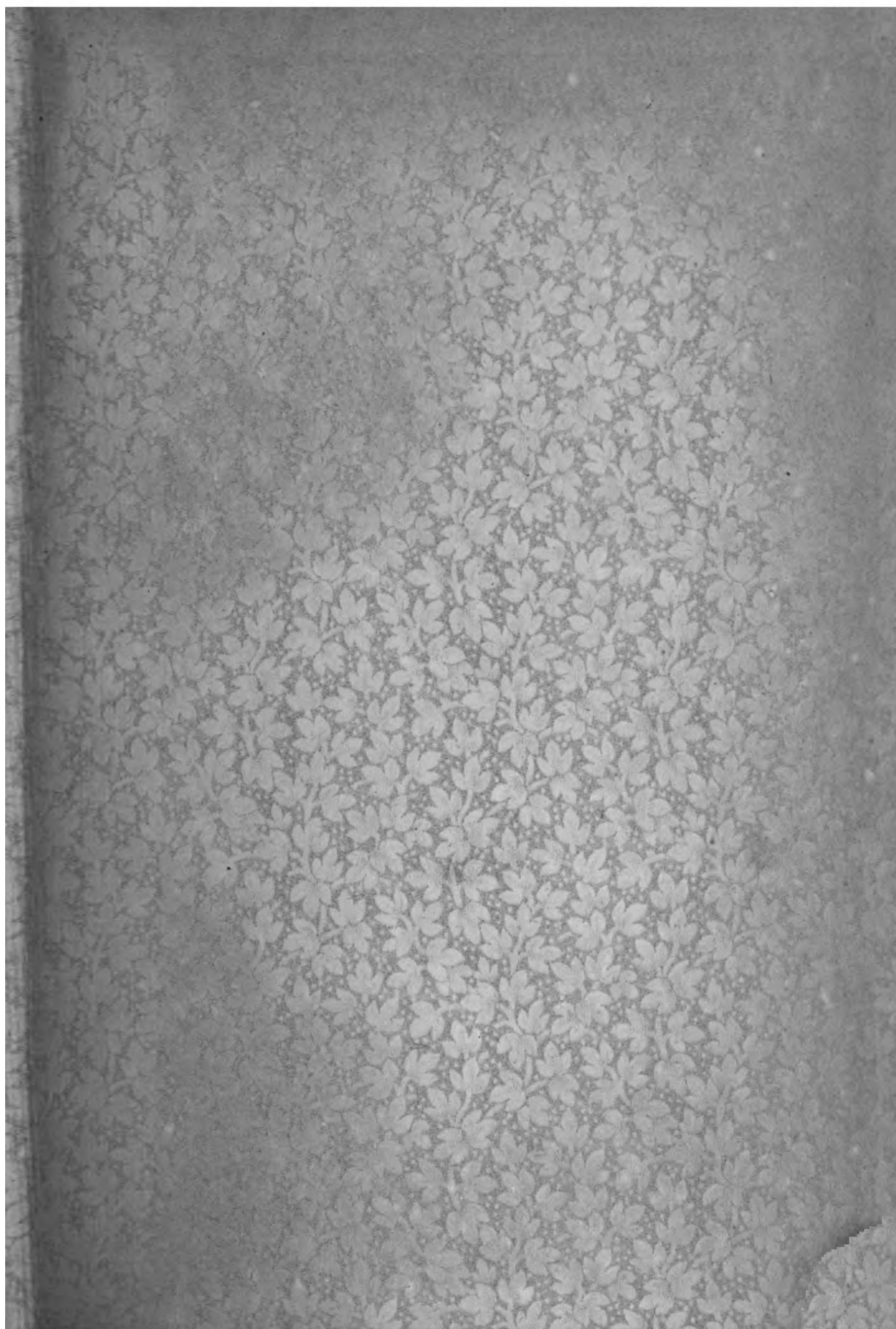
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IN THE FLOWER
OF HER YOUTH

MABEL COLLINS.









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IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

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. II.

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IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

CHAPTER I.

ALMOST every day Charlie and Lil went somewhere with the Mainwarings, or visited them at their rooms.

It was an intimacy which could not but increase rapidly. Mrs. Mainwaring liked new faces, loved to live in public, enjoyed going about a great deal. She was interested in Lil, partly for her own sake, partly for her father's. She always cultivated artistic and literary society, for Adelaide preferred it, and was best appreciated in it; and she thought that, when in London, she would like to know the Warringtons.

This made the intimacy easy. But whatever difficulties there might have been, the forces which were at work would have overcome them. One of the great mysterious laws of human life was in action, unseen, in the midst of this little group of people all ignorant and unconscious. Perhaps when the science of sociology has reached its positive

stage, we shall not be so easily surprised by the phenomena which occur amongst us.

In the beautiful city where a life-time of enjoyment and study is all too short, this little group of pleasure-seekers passed the sunny days, driving and walking, laughing and happy. The only one whose laughter was sometimes forced, whose face was often sad, and her step weary, was Lil. For she saw, or thought she saw, the impending hand of fate; the black shadow which it cast, fell upon her before it touched any one else. She could not but see it, for she knew Charlie's face by heart; the meaning of each change of expression was familiar to her.

Jack Poynings guessed something of what was going on, and consequently did not often join the party. For Adelaide ignored him very easily when she had a more sympathetic companion; as she had now. And, though he admired Lil, he did not care for the society of a woman who scarcely noticed his existence; and he began to think Lil's bright hair and vivid face a delusion and a snare, when he found that she could not be induced to flirt or to chatter nonsense.

For, indeed, Lil had never felt so silent as now. She had been startled by the sad reality of life, when she felt how ill and weary Charlie was, and she had no money or power to help him. But now she felt that something

far more real than that byegone trouble was close at hand.

That trouble was indeed gone! Not only were they in the midst of the beauties of art and nature, revelling in sunshine and enjoying each hour of the day, but all this, or something else—had at last done its work. Charlie was himself again. His spirits were inexhaustible; he never appeared tired, or out of sorts. His interest in art had been thoroughly re-awakened by Adelaide's society, and he was never weary of visiting the various galleries. His step had recovered its buoyancy, his eyes had caught their old fire. But Lil knew that all this was not merely the result of change of air! That light in Charlie's face was simply reflected from Adelaide's. When he left her, it was exactly as if the sun had set. When the party separated, his face faded; when it was again united he seemed to spring to life again. The whole man changed in Adelaide's presence. Lil grew accustomed to silence when she was alone with him; she did not care to break it only to meet with a cold and indifferent answer. He did not know he was cold or indifferent; he only felt tired, and indisposed to speak. The sun had gone from his sky; his instinct was to be dormant till it should rise again.

The truth was that he was Adelaide's slave, and followed her with his whole being, just as the sunflowers lean to the light. He was in

the strong current of an irresistible passion which swept him along so swiftly that he had no time to realise its immense power. But there came a moment when he must struggle and awake!—or be sucked under and succumb, losing all hold upon himself.

It came, that dreadful moment.

Three weeks after that never-to-be-forgotten visit to the Ludovisi Gardens, Mrs. Mainwaring proposed to go again. She had an order which would admit them all; and the weather was still perfect.

“Yes, let us go,” said Adelaide, in her low, languid voice. She was always languid; but her repose was so generous and full of latent life that it stirred and aroused those about her.

Her words decided the plans always; for Charlie cared not where they went so that he might follow her, might hear her speak, might watch her dreamlike face. Mrs. Mainwaring, up to a certain point, obeyed any whim of her daughter’s. And as for Lil, she had surrendered all desires of her own, any preference for one place over another. What was the majesty of the Pantheon, the splendour of the Sistine Chapel, to her? Once, an age ago, as it seemed—really but a strangely short time—these objects of art had been a deep excitement to her; now they had become removed from her and she could not turn her mind upon them. They appeared re-

mote and inaccessible as the universe of stars ; for straight before her eyes, perceptible to her every sense, was taking place something which absorbed the attention of her whole being.

It is very strange to go to a place, of which you have dreamed all your life, and to find it blotted out from your vision by an occurrence in your own personal career. It is very strange to visit something, which in itself you imagined must be productive of happiness, and to find yourself, spite of all that surrounds you, absolutely miserable.

All this Lil was experiencing. Rome was no longer to her the city of art ; it was the scene of the strangest phase of life she had ever lived through. The Ludovisi Gardens were not to her the most beautiful gardens in Rome ; they were the place where first Charlie and Adelaide had met.

For a moment, when she had heard Mrs. Mainwaring suggest spending an afternoon there, she thought of saying she would rather not go. But in another moment she had silenced herself. Why make a difficulty ; why take the trouble to speak or attract attention to herself ? Surely these gardens could have no more terrible associations for her than the streets of the city ?

And yet she felt as they drove up to the gates that day, as if she could scarcely breathe, as if the life were dying away within her.

It seemed to her that holding herself so forcibly in check must stop her breath soon!

And so it must, if it could have been maintained.

There were the peacocks, gorgeous as ever, stalking in their stately fashion about the gateway. There was the long cypress avenue—everything was as perfectly beautiful as ever. Charlie thought the whole effect even more exquisite than when he first saw it.

They turned into the Casino to look at the sculpture, before going on into the gardens.

“You told me I should have looked at the Juno,” said Charlie to Adelaide. These two led the way as usual. He did not complain now that the gallery was cold or dreary; he took his warmth, his sunshine, with him when he entered. Lil’s heart sank till it seemed to her too heavy to carry with her—surely she must sink under such a weight!—as she watched his face and saw how different was its expression from that day when they had visited this place together.

“There is the Juno,” said Adelaide, as they passed into the inner room. “She appears expressionless at first, I know very well. But, as you approach, you see that this results from a great stillness, a quiet, so intense that it covers all else and subdues the separate emotions into a whole of perfect consciousness. Consummation, complete knowledge, complete experience, is written in every line of that

sublime face." She caught her breath suddenly in a sort of awe and added, "Enthusiasm itself seems petty here."

She stopped speaking, and they stood there in silence; Charlie's eyes wandered from the marble face to the living one. At some moments there was an air of abstraction and rapture upon Adelaide's countenance which gave her face a grandeur. She seemed to forget herself entirely in her enthusiasm. Presently she spoke again in her low voice, which was never raised, however intense her interest in what she was speaking of.

"To touch upon such a state as that of this conscious and perfected Juno, passions and emotions must all be set aside, and life be realised as a broad stream which flows on towards a divine state, spite of all small obstacles or momentary pains. Ah! but we can never reach this condition, can we, Mrs. Newman? A great poet may rise above his own emotions and view them from a superior platform; but we, who are only women, cannot hope to rise out of the passions of the hour."

"It is impossible," said Lil; "we cannot escape from ourselves. That is not the face of a woman, but of the beyond which may come after a woman's life. The Juno has escaped from herself and reached heaven."

There was something strange in the sound of Lil's voice, quiet though it was. Adelaide turned and looked at her.

"Mrs. Newman, you are as pale as the statues! This place is too cold, let us go out into the sunshine."

But Charlie lingered. He could not feel that the gallery was cold; he was impervious to such sensations. And he loved to hear Adelaide talk out her thoughts, as she would do sometimes, seeming to need no hearer. She seldom would speak in the sunshine.

He paused before the "Telemachus leaving Penelope."

"Sad Penelope!" said Adelaide; "the light in her face is that of mother-love, as she looks down upon his lesser form. How beautiful that look of passionless affection is!"

Lil had gone out into the garden with Mrs. Mainwaring.

They were alone, these two; no one else was in the gallery but the custodian who stood at the door.

"But not so beautiful," said Charlie, "as the love that has passion in it!"

Adelaide did not reply; but she looked at him to better understand his meaning; for there was something which startled her in his tone. She met his eyes and did not immediately withdraw her gaze. It seemed as though each looked into the other's soul in that strange moment. It appeared to them both as if some event were occurring. Adelaide's face changed; she grew a shade paler; without a word she turned away and went out into the garden.

The others had walked on and were only just in sight. Adelaide followed them ; Charlie kept at her side. In absolute silence they walked on through the lovely garden, unconscious of its beauty, unconscious of the golden sunshine which made the world that day all glorious, and but very dimly conscious of what was happening within themselves.

A strange sweet dream had fallen upon them, and in their shy unacknowledged joy of mutual sympathy there was something too wonderful, too absorbing, to admit of any other thought or feeling.

Through the paths hidden by tall hedges, through the avenue of medlars where the scent of the sweet blossoms made the air heavy, through the whole length of this walk the intoxication of a marvellous passion was upon Charlie. He had looked into her eyes and met their answering gaze. It seemed as if he stood alone in the world of flowers and sunshine, with this woman. She was a flower herself—a poem—a being made to live out the poem of love—and in the depth of her eyes he had seen awake a passionate sympathy. His yearning look had called it forth !

It was but a few moments walk through the high hedges and the sweet avenue. During those few moments these two, in whose hearts the brilliant star of love had arisen, seemed to themselves to be alone in the universe. They knew of none other life but their own. For

those few moments they obeyed their own natures as simply as the flowers amid which they walked.

Mrs. Mainwaring and Lil were standing at the end of the avenue. Mrs. Mainwaring was looking at the cones upon a magnolia tree and admiring the colours in them. But Lil stood like a statue, her face towards the two who approached her. Both walked with their eyes upon the ground. There was something in those faces which struck her to the heart like a death chill. She looked wildly from one to the other.

"Shall we go into your favourite ilex grove, Adelaide?" said Mrs. Mainwaring, as she heard the footsteps on the gravel path beside her.

"No, not there," cried Lil, almost violently; "at least, I will not go! I cannot bear it!"

Her check upon herself had given way at last. She felt the demon of jealousy rise furious within her.

Mrs. Mainwaring turned, surprised at her manner. She was startled by her face.

"Mrs. Newman, you are ill!" she exclaimed.

"No, I am not ill," said Lil, with a sort of sullenness such as she had never exhibited before. The simple passions sometimes appear to touch ground in our natures and rouse the very animal upon which our better self is built. Lil, stung, wounded, furious, felt at that moment as if she could bite a tender hand that touched her.

Charlie looked at her. It seemed to him as if he had been to sleep—dreaming—and suddenly had been awakened. He saw where he was—in the very midst of the current—in danger of going under and yielding up himself to the passion that was on him which the existence of social law rendered akin to madness.

For this woman before him, with the white face and trembling lips, whom he once had loved—this woman claimed him. He was bound to her by links of iron, as firmly as though he loved her still! He had enough affection for her even yet to feel suddenly how cruel a thing it was for her to have to stand there with a pain upon her face which turned its brightness into pallor.

“You are very tired,” he said, gently; “we will go home.” He drew her hand under his arm as he spoke. “Do not you come yet unless you are tired, Mrs. Mainwaring,” he said, turning to her; “I will find a cab outside and take Mrs. Newman home.”

“Take the carriage,” said Mrs. Mainwaring; “I insist upon it; it will hardly be a quarter of an hour in going to your hotel and coming back again, and I daresay we shall stay an hour longer. Don’t run the risk of waiting at the gates, for Mrs. Newman looks quite worn out.”

Adelaide stood back, dumb and frightened. She had, so far, been an innocent child in her

delight, given up to pleasure too deep, too natural, for thought. Suddenly, a pang of fear and shame shot through her, giving her a horrible consciousness of wrong. There, in that golden sunshine, amid the fragrant garden, came upon her a feeling unknown in her innocent life; a sense as of sinfulness.

"You are very kind," said Charlie, with a strange guilty feeling of not deserving to be well treated. Then he turned and walked away with Lil, without having dared to raise his eyes again to Adelaide's face. He had forgotten when he took that look of love from her eyes, innocent as a child, that he was bound in links which made those glances guilty. How could he meet those eyes again till he had burned out the memory of having but for a moment insulted this being, pure as the snow fresh from heaven!

The scent of the Japanese medlars had no sweetness for Lil, it made her faint with its heaviness. Never again could that scent seem sweet to her. It must always recall to her the first agony of loneliness, the intolerable bitterness which falls upon a woman when a love she has once had, and which she still returns, is taken from her.

Silently they walked on in the long slanting rays of the sun. Lil's head was bent; she looked at the ground. She had no word to say. A commonplace was impossible to her just now. The mask had been thrown off;

she could keep silence, but she could no longer pretend to be happy. And she would not condescend to reproach a man whom she loved, because another woman was fairer in his eyes than herself. Not so low as that, she whispered in her heart ;—I have not fallen so low as that !

But she was sinking fast towards that level. Misery crushes like a heavy stone. The spirit must be richly sweet which will yield sweetness out of pain as crushed flowers do.

The stone is heavy upon Lil's heart—soon its whole weight must press upon it !

CHAPTER II.

ADELAIDE ! her existence was a new light in Charlie's life ; though he started in horror when he found himself betrayed into loving her, yet he could not help turning his face towards the flame of her being. His passion for her was unlike any other emotion he had ever experienced.

Lil had been his second self. Adelaide was a revelation, a fresh glory as of the sun new risen in the sky.

Lil was like himself. She was similar in type and temperament, and being intensely sympathetic by nature, she was swayed by his moods. Adelaide was utterly foreign to anything with which he was familiar. She was languid and warm as a rich summer noon, and he had no power to chill her or change her glow into gloom. She lived in a sphere of feeling remote from his, and her look of love had come to him from out that far off region. He understood Lil, and had always done so from the first stages of their connection. Adelaide was a mystery to him. He could not always reach her ; indeed,

she sometimes seemed to him to be totally inaccessible. This arose from their vital difference of disposition. She was to him an undiscovered country, and had that fascination which ever belongs to the unknown.

He was absorbed in the inner contest. All that night he was haunted by Adelaide's face with its sweet unconscious smile. He scarcely knew when he dreamed or when he was awake ; for still she was before him.

Lil had hidden herself in a silence which he had not the courage to disturb. A fever seemed to be upon her which held her from sleep or from rest ; she could not read or distract her thoughts, her mind was too full of an intolerable fire. She longed to be entirely alone, since she could no longer be loved. But that was impossible. She looked from her window into the street. So many houses !—so many homes !—and only one place for her. That place was by the side of a man who was weary of her, to whom her presence was a bitter reminder of the chain by which he was bound to her.

She made no mistake in this, she told herself, as she tried to hold her beating heart still. She had seen his face change and fall when his eyes fell on her in the gardens. Her presence was bitter to him then. He had done all in his power to

hide it; he had done all in his power to help and shield her at the cruel moment. She recognised this and felt that in doing that he had claimed her generosity. She had nothing—nothing—to reproach him with. But she knew, too well, that her image and her actual presence were to him the reminders that he must put aside for ever the cup he longed to taste.

To a proud woman, the burning humiliation of becoming an unloved burden is beyond all other shame.

In the morning Mrs. Mainwaring called, herself, to ask after Lil. She was kindness personified when her sympathy was aroused; and Lil's white face had alarmed her.

Lil left the sitting-room when she heard Mrs. Mainwaring's voice outside. "Tell her I am ill—anything," she said, in a sort of wild appeal to Charlie; "I cannot go out to-day!"

Charlie told Mrs. Mainwaring that his wife was ill. He did not know what else to say.

"I was afraid of it, when I saw how white she got yesterday," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "I hope she is not going to have the fever. It really is not safe to let one's-self get low in Rome. It is dreadfully unhealthy, unless one can eat and drink a great deal and never get into low spirits, you know, Mr. Newman; when we drove to Tivoli, the

other day, we were too late coming home. I saw that horrible blue mist rise on the Campagna, and it made me very uneasy, though I said nothing. Everybody has told me long ago we ought to be so careful about getting home before sunset."

"I dare say Mrs. Newman will be better in a day or two," said Charlie, hardly knowing how to answer.

"I am sure I hope so, for if not she will be seriously ill, and when once that fever gets hold of you it is not so easy to shake it off. One of my friends suffered from the effects of it for a year, and another died of the weakness, after having left Rome. I am afraid we were out too late ; but I don't think Rome suits Mrs. Newman. I have noticed how pale she has looked for some days. And to tell the truth I am anxious about Adelaide. She does not look like herself at all to-day. I don't think it's any use to stay in Rome if one feels ill ; it is dangerous. We have lived here for some years without a serious illness by carrying out that plan. Directly Adelaide looks pale we go away. I think I shall arrange to go away now, for Adelaide looked strange and miserable this morning ; and I advise you to leave Rome if Mrs. Newman is at all feverish. I have a perfect horror of the Roman fever ; it is most weakening. I will go back to Adelaide now ; we shall stay at home to-

day—but, if you like to call in this afternoon, I shall be very glad to hear how your wife is.”

Lil came back into the sitting-room and returned to the place she had left: she leaned her head back upon her chair and closed her eyes. She had no plan, no idea, no light. There was nothing to be done but to suffer as silently might be.

And this she did. Charlie walked about restlessly for a little while, and then he said to her, “Would you not feel better if you came out into the sunshine?”

“No,” she answered, very quietly, “I am too tired.”

They dared not meet each other’s eyes. The fiction of her illness must be preserved between them, else the whole fabric of their association would crumble away, leaving merely the bonds which held them.

Neither dared risk the destruction of the house of cards in which they lived. It seemed to them both that a glance of the eye was too great a risk to run; both looked away and took refuge in commonplace phrases when they spoke.

“Can I not get you anything?” asked Charlie, with a miserable guilty feeling of “making believe.”

“Nothing, thank you,” said Lil. He took his hat and went out without any further words. When the door had shut behind

him, Lil changed from a statue to a living fury. She tore at the neck of her dress as if she were suffocating. She pulled the pins from her hair with a passionate feeling that any fastening was intolerable.

She was sitting like this, her loose hair about her face, her bosom heaving as if some agony were hidden there too great to be contained, when Jack Poynings, with a slight tap at the door, walked in. He had often done this before ; the hotel door stood open and the servants knew him as a frequent visitor. But now he felt instantly, at the first sight of Lil's quickly uplifted face, that he had done wrong.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "a thousand times. I ought not to have come in like this. But—is anything the matter?"

"Yes," said Lil, feeling how impossible it was to say no, when he had surprised such a look upon her face, "I am ill."

"Good heavens," he exclaimed, "you are indeed ! Does Newman know it ? Is he out ? May I fetch a doctor ?"

"No, no," said Lil, "I only want perfect rest, I am over tired ; I want to be quiet !"

Such an expression came into her face, as she said this, that Jack felt half afraid. He was in the presence of some feeling deeper than he could understand.

"I will leave you to be quiet," he said, "will you send for me if I can serve

you in any way. I may come to ask how you are to-night? Be careful, Mrs. Newman; beware of the Roman fever!"

"The Roman fever!" repeated Lil, when he was gone. "What is it? Have I got it, I wonder? My veins are full of fire, my head burns. Has Charlie got it? has *she* got it? Are we all sick with the Roman fever, or are we all mad? I think it is that! Surely this madness can be stopped! Surely we can all be sane again, like other people! No; not now! never can it be the same again. We cannot go back and forget. I am afraid to go on living. I have such a terror of what the coming days will bring!"

While Lil, alone, tried in vain to calm herself, and walked her room wildly from end to end, Charlie was walking through the streets with the same vain purpose. He wandered through the Ghetto, and found in that dark quarter nothing which fixed his interest; he went through the dirty, picturesque streets of the populace; he walked till he was weary; but he was no calmer!

It seemed as if a steam engine had got inside his head. He could not think with that intolerable thud, thud going on, he said to himself. Yet he must think! he must decide, before he returned, how best to conduct himself between these two women -- both of whom he loved.

By degrees he began to see that there lay the point of his agony. If a man has grown weary of his wife he most often learns to dislike her and is careless whether his conduct offends her or no. But, though he had no longer any passion for Lil, he could not harden his heart towards her. For the years of their life together she had been his invariably gentle and loving companion. Never by any word or act had she given him cause for any feeling but love towards her. It was as impossible to think of hurting her as to take the unoffending life of a favourite thrush, because your fancy has led you to like better the song of the nightingale !

He saw this clearly. He knew that Lil had already guessed too much. He knew that he must hide from her all that he could in order to avoid wounding that tender nature. He knew that her sympathy with him was so keen, her love for him so strong, that it would be a hard battle to hide any feeling of his from her.

But it must be done : not only for her sake, but for Adelaide's. Adelaide, who, with all her rich development and warm womanhood, was as innocent as a child. Adelaide, who was guarded by a mother whose moral standard was that of conventional right and wrong.

He dared not think of Adelaide,—“that way madness lies.” He must concentrate his

mind on the one course open to him, concealment.

He had arrived at this conclusion half-a-dozen times, and was beginning to be too tired to walk, when he suddenly realised that he was in the Via Condotti, just outside the house in which the Mainwarings lived. He looked at his watch; it was late in the afternoon! He must have walked for hours, and that steam engine was still in his head!

He had a vague remembrance that Mrs. Mainwaring had asked him to go in in the afternoon. Was Adelaide ill, and might he not even ask how she was?

He could no more have resisted the attraction which drew him to the house than a stone thrown idly into the air can rebel against the force of gravitation.

"Yes, Mrs. Mainwaring was at home." He was shown in to the pretty rooms where Adelaide held her little court. There were no courtiers now; no admirers, no chattering friends.

Adelaide was sitting alone; her head drooped, her hands in her lap, making no pretence of occupation. She rose up at the sight of him like a pale ghost. He had no idea himself how disturbed and worn he appeared. Silently, for a strange second, they stood looking into each other's sad faces.

Heaven knows how that silence would

have been broken, had not Mrs. Mainwaring come through the doorway from another room. She was a little startled to find Charlie Newman standing speechless there and Adelaide with her eyes fixed on him.

"Oh, Mr. Newman," she said, "I am so glad to see you; I have been feeling so anxious about your wife! You look very disturbed; tell me, is she worse?"

"I—I really don't know," said Charlie, appalled by recollecting that he had indeed not seen Lil since Mrs. Mainwaring had been at their hotel in the early morning.

"I have been out all day," he went on, feeling as if some explanation were necessary; "Lil seemed to prefer to rest quiet."

"Yes, I dare say rest is very good for her," said Mrs. Mainwaring; "but I don't think she ought to be alone. You don't look at all well yourself; sit down."

"The fact is," said Charlie, "I have got a frightful headache; I don't think I know exactly what I am doing; I have got such an intolerable thumping in my head."

"Oh, good gracious, Mr. Newman, we really are all going to have Roman fever!" exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring; "that is just like Adelaide; she has not been able to hold her head up all day. See, here is a bottle of Eucalyptus tonic; it is said to be the best thing for the fever. Take it home and both of you take some; and pack up your things."

I am quite decided to leave Rome ; it is thought to be the healthy time now, but I've no confidence in the place ever being healthy. Adelaide insists upon passing a great part of the year here, and, of course, in some respects it is very charming and like no other place in the world. But it seems to me, after all, to be nothing but a horrid old graveyard ; there are dead people everywhere, not to mention that dreadful malaria. In two days we shall be off to Paris. Take my advice, and do the same."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Mainwaring," said Charlie, humbly accepting the bottle of Eucalyptus ; "I dare say you are right. Good-bye, I won't take up your time, for I am sure you will have plenty to do if you are going so soon."

"Yes, we really shall be very busy," said Mrs. Mainwaring ; "we are not just travellers like you ; this is more our home than any other place. I do hope you will find Mrs. Newman better."

Charlie went away, having received nothing from Adelaide but the strange look when he entered, and a bow, with averted eyes, when he left.

A blank, immovable wall had risen between them. Never again could they enjoy each other's society, innocently, as they had done until yesterday. Never again ! They were separated now as by an angry sea.

Charlie walked quickly the few steps from the Via Condotti to the Bocca di Leone. He hastily entered his hotel, and ran up the stairs. He so much lacked courage that he dared not delay. He had left Lil too long, he had been cruel to leave her alone like this when she was ill. He knew very well that she could not speak sufficient Italian to make herself understood, that she had no money—that, in fact, however ill she might be, she was helpless. And he could not conjecture in what mood he would find her. He felt as if she had a right to be furious, or to be cold. For the first time in his life he was afraid of her.

He found her very quiet, lying on a sofa. She had worn out all the fury she had to expend for that day, at least. But she was really feverish; her hands were burning hot, and her eyes glittered strangely.

"You are indeed feverish," said Charlie, as he felt the hand which she held out to him, though without a smile. "Mrs. Mainwaring has sent you this Eucalyptus tonic; you must take some."

"She is very kind," said Lil, quietly. A stab went straight to her heart when she found he had been there; but she was too proud to show her jealousy.

"She is very kind; I will take some. But, Charlie, I do feel ill; I think Rome does not

suit me ; may I go home ? I could travel very well alone now I know the way."

"Mrs. Mainwaring has been advising me so strongly to take you away from Rome that I had quite decided to do so. We will pack our trunks and look up the trains."

"Thank God," said Lil, to herself ; "but Charlie," she said, aloud, "must you go ? There is still so much to see here."

"I am quite ready to go," said Charlie. He knew that Rome would be a barren wilderness to him without Adelaide. He was afraid to tell Lil that the Mainwarings were leaving ; the reason of his own readiness would seem too horribly obvious. He busied himself with any details, thankful for occupation, spite of the thud, thud of the steam engine in his head, which even dinner, that best enemy of headaches, did not drive away. He hunted up time-tables, planned different routes home ; insisted upon packing portmanteaus and making every sort of preparation that he could think of. All this served to brace him a little. He grew stronger as he realised that they were really leaving the city of delights ; that soon they must return to London and take up their position there. He remembered that Lil was his wife, the faithful friend of his poverty, and now the sharer of his good fortune and the mistress of his new home. He knew

that he had many small matters to attend to in connection with that fortune ; that already he had neglected business long enough. He saw that at home, entering upon their new possessions and mixing in the society which would come about them, they would find duties which would help to restore a right feeling. He desired above all to do his duty to Lil, for he was touched to the heart by her gentleness and quiet. Home would be the place for him to do his duty best, where the circle of friends, who knew them of old, would impress upon him the feeling that Lil, and Lil only, was the woman he must be satisfied by.

He resolved never to see Adelaide again ; unless, it might be, in his own house, where his position and Lil's would add a multitude of safeguards and help him to suppress his emotions.

This resolution quieted him more than anything else ; it brought him some sleep. Lil had none ; she lay still with wide eyes looking into the darkness. She was silent, but she had a sensation as if she were weeping inwardly, and weeping her very strength away.

And so it seemed ; for in the morning she could hardly stand. Mrs. Mainwaring, who was always out early, called again and asked for her. Lil was in the sitting-room, and this time she made no attempt to escape. Mrs.

Mainwaring was shocked at the sight of her face and the new lines of pain upon it.

“Why, you hardly look fit to travel,” she said, “but still, you must go. You must not be here an hour longer than you can help. This air is not only poisonous, it is very relaxing. I believe the best plan would be to go to a mountain town from here and get some clear air before starting on the long journey to Paris. We think of staying at Siena; what do you say to travelling with us? It is always easier and pleasanter for a large party than a small one; we can often get a carriage to ourselves if there are enough of us. Besides, neither you or Adelaide to-day look fit to be left alone at all, and there is so much to do on a journey. I would look after your wife and Adelaide and see them into the trains you know, Mr. Newman, while you attended to the luggage; then, if you would arrange with those dreadful *cocchieri*, who always cheat me, I would choose the rooms at the hotels. Quite a blessing it would be to divide the labour; and I am sure I could make things easier for poor Mrs. Newman, who really scarcely looks fit to take care of herself at all.”

Lil sank into a chair while Mrs. Mainwaring was speaking, and covered her face. This one ignorant member of the party—was she the instrument of the horrible fate which was upon them all? Lil felt as if

she were in the agony of a nightmare. She saw Charlie was helpless. He could not politely refuse such a proposal, even if he desired to do so ; and she did not know that he did so desire.

But he, knowing how firm his resolve had been, seeing with how slight a touch his destiny could utterly destroy it, felt for the first time that he was utterly powerless in the stream of circumstances which shaped his life. He turned pale as he stood there when he heard Mrs. Mainwaring begin to make her proposal ; but, before she had finished, when he saw how impossible it would be for him to refuse, he felt the warm blood thrill through all his veins. He was to see Adelaide, he could not avoid it ; he was to travel with her ; to watch her fair, soft face through the long days.

Oh ! how he loved her ! What a burning passion it was which leaped with new vigour into consciousness within him !

It was all settled in a few words ; and Mrs. Mainwaring sat down, on the instant, and wrote to a *pension* which she knew of in Siena, to engage rooms for them all for two or three days.



CHAPTER III.

ADELAIDE sat in her room, watching her maid who was busy packing. She made no comment, gave no orders, took no part in what was going on. She seemed quite careless what was done with herself or her belongings. It appeared to her as if she would never again take any interest in daily life.

Something had happened to her. She knew it only too well, yet dared not confess it even to her own heart.

She had been raised to the height of emotion, and flung again, suddenly, to the ground, all in one terrible and breathless moment.

Adelaide Mainwaring—whom no offers could tempt to marriage, who chilled off her admirers by her indifference, who scarcely seemed to distinguish one from another, but had moved on in her own orbit undisturbed by her satellites; this Adelaide had been roused at last, and shaken to the very depths of her nature, only to realise, at the same instant, that the volcano awakened within her must for ever remain hidden.

For the first time in her life, she felt the

strange sympathy which we call love. And, as she awoke to the divine joy of that sympathy, she awoke also to the agony of despair. Two cries had gone from her heart to heaven in one breath; the cry of the spirit of love starting into life, the shriek of grief with which that spirit fell back, and hid its face of unearthly beauty. For it had no place, no right in Adelaide's heart. It was a guilty and wretched thing, this shape of loveliness which had arisen in her. Amid her pain and suffering, she sometimes paused to wonder how a thing of flower-like loveliness and seemingly natural innocence should look like a thing of sin.

She, too, had found in the same resolution as that which Charlie had formed, the only comfort. She would never see him again.

Mrs. Mainwaring had been to do some shopping, and so make one or two other calls as well as that on the Newmans. She came in, bright and alert, all her business done.

"I believe I have settled everything, Adelaide," she said, cheerfully, sitting down, and carefully depositing various small parcels which she had brought in, on a table at her side. "I met Mr. Poynings just now, in the Spagna, and he seemed quite overcome at the idea of our going away. I should not wonder if he comes in and proposes to you again, to-night."

"Oh, mamma," said Adelaide, appealingly,

with a look at the maid who was smiling over her work.

“Well, my dear, I beg your pardon, I’m sure ; but I didn’t know there was any secret about Mr. Poynings and his attachment. He’s always telling people that you would talk him mad in a week about the Renaissance and the glory of art, and all the rest of it ; and yet he would resign himself to that if you would only marry him ; you will have to, in the end, I expect, if you so coolly refuse all the better offers you get. I wish I knew how high your ambition goes ; but I have some comfort in thinking that if you fail and have to come down to Jack, he’s got a very good income.

A sigh was all the answer Mrs. Mainwaring got this time. Adelaide knew by long experience that it was hopeless to try and persuade her mother that she had no secret ambition in the matter of marriage ; and equally hopeless to try and stem her eloquence. But the piteousness of the murmur to which she gave utterance, attracted her mother’s attention.

“Oh, I don’t want to annoy you, Adelaide, I’m sure,” she said, “and you never will talk sensibly on this subject ; we will say no more about it. I have made a capital arrangement while I’ve been out, which I think will be very pleasant for everybody. I really do think you will like it, as you seem to enjoy

the Newmans' society ; they are going with us to Siena for a few days, and very likely we shall all go to Paris together."

Adelaide sat still, and speechless.



CHAPTER IV.

SIENA, one of the most poetic spots imaginable, is fitted to be a very hothouse of romance. No love-born gallant, twanging a guitar, would appear out of place in these quaint old-world streets; a serenade is a natural thing where the men who saunter about in the moonlight are always singing. And those steep, narrow streets between the high, beautiful palaces are the very places for love meetings and love whisperings. No history or romance could find a background more beautiful for itself than in the marvellous scenery of Siena. And then the remoteness, the sense of distance which one has, from modern life. A different code of morals and of manners may be appropriate amid this garden-like Tuscany, in this old-world city, with its memories of past majesty. A man might woo quickly, stirred by the magic of this ruddy country; a girl might ripen suddenly into a very Juliet, with the strange stimulus of perfect beauty all about her.

The deep red-golden tints lay on the lovely land in all their marvellous richness; the olive

orchards gave their weird contrast of dim gray green ; the sun lay full upon it all, and called forth its utmost beauty when Adelaide looked out from the window of their *pension* that first morning in Siena.

Lil had refused to leave her room. She said she was worn out. Perhaps she was. The journey there had been one of those experiences which make a heavy mark upon the mind. All those long hours she had seen through the fringes of her half-shut eyes the tragedy progressing. Charlie was gentleness itself to her ; considerate and kind, he seemed a model husband. But she had seen how keenly the flame of his being leaned towards Adelaide, struggle though he might ; she had seen Adelaide waver between the double impulse of simultaneous passion and of shrinking terror.

She saw now when chance would have it that these two unfortunate beings must come in contact, the thrill of acute delight passed through both agitated frames. She saw how it was an event when their glances met, a thing to tremble at if their hands touched. She felt the chill, like ice, of Charlie's gentle manner towards herself ; for under that gentleness and visible through it, was a coldness, mastered by a tender conscience. He touched her as he might touch a statue. And she saw before her very eyes the passion, the warmth, that once had been hers, given to

another woman. And she saw that other woman tremble under it, vibrate with its touch.

Gradually jealousy grew all powerful within her. It blinded her eyes and hardened her heart. She hated them; these two who made her suffer.

Mrs. Mainwaring was with her in her room this morning, making some effort towards her comfort. And Lil, who longed only to be left alone, had to be grateful for the real kindness shown to her, yet she could not clearly see Mrs. Mainwaring in her present state; what she saw was Adelaide's mother, one who had helped to bring this hideous wretchedness upon her.

Adelaide looked out at the perfect landscape with a trembling delight in its beauty, for there was some one by her side who seemed now to enter into her every feeling yet whom she hardly dared speak to. They stood there silently looking at the beauty which lay so still in its richness.

Mrs. Mainwaring came into the room. "Are you not going out, Adelaide?" she said. "You have so desired to see Siena, I wonder you waste any time indoors."

"But you are coming, mamma?"

"No, dear; I agree with Mrs. Newman, a little rest is very necessary sometimes. Your enthusiasm carries you through anything, but I'm not artistic enough to go out when I am

tired, even to see Siena. I have no doubt Mr. Newman will take care of you ; surely you want to go out and see the pictures and all the rest of it. Don't you, Mr. Newman?"

"Oh, of course ; I shall be delighted to go with Miss Mainwaring," said Charlie, wondering as he spoke what was to become of them if this kind of thing was to go on. "Do you think," he added, making a feeble effort to draw back, "that I may leave Lil?"

"Oh! I will take care of her," said Mrs. Mainwaring, with hearty kindness; "I am sure she will let me look after her; you know, Mr. Newman, we have never been here before, we have often planned to come but something has prevented it. Adelaide has been most anxious to come and study Sodoma's pictures, and if you will take care of her my mind will be easy, and I shall be so thankful to rest."

In blank silence Adelaide left the room. Charlie wondered while he waited whether she had resolved not to go out, and if so what reason she would give. But, however she may have desired to do this, she evidently saw no way, for presently she returned in her walking dress, and they set out together without more words about it.

Lil heard them go out and, rising, looked from her window which opened on the street. She saw their retreating figures ; she saw them pause at the end of the street, looking,

apparently, at some approaching object. Lil soon saw what it was—two great white oxen, with their branching horns, were coming down the steep street; they drew a pretty basket-cart full of wood, and a handsome Tuscan peasant led them, walking in front with the cords over his shoulders and looking very much as if he were drawing the meek, slow, beautiful beasts after him.

Adelaide was in ecstasies over the picturesque group. Lil, from her high window, watched her rival's face with its changing wealth of expression.

And she hated it! She had fallen so low in the fury of jealousy and the sense of wrong that raged within her that, at this moment, she hated the face which but a short time ago had seemed so charming.

But when she found how fierce this feeling was, she shrank away from the window frightened at herself.

"Oh, I cannot have come to this!" she cried out. "Do I hate her—Adelaide, a creature tender and innocent enough to be an angel—a woman whose hurt to me is all unconscious; O, God, save me from myself!"

She was not really tired or desirous of quiet; indeed, she seemed possessed by an unnatural restlessness. She waited until Mrs. Mainwaring had settled down to read in her own room and then she dressed herself and

crept quietly out. She longed to be free of the house, to feel the fresh air and, above all, to be alone.

At the end of the street in which they lodged was an open space where stood a church. The peasants went in and out to their prayers. At the side of the church was a wide view over the country. Lil leaned her arm upon the wall and looked long at the wealth of loveliness before her. She knew how beautiful it was, that it was more beautiful than anything which she had ever seen. Imagination could never have brought before her mind such exquisite shades of colour as those which lay over this landscape.

Yet, though she recognised its glorious beauty, the scene was barren to her. It produced no glow, it called forth no delight, she had lost, for the moment, all power of appreciation. The bitter feeling which swelled her heart shut out all gentler emotions.

She thought of the two, now together, walking through this lovely romantic old city. She fancied them looking at the palaces, entering the churches, searching for the rare pictures. Surely, now they had not her presence to remind them of her existence, they would forget it; they would be happy together!

The thought was a pain to her like the pain of death, without the release that death would have brought. It was impossible but

that she must suffer like this ; her heart, her life, her very self was bound up in Charlie, was united with him absolutely. To detach her affection, her existence from him, was, indeed, a pain like that of death. If he had died, and she were weeping now over his grave, her grief would have been an easier one. She would have understood her sorrow ; she would have had the right to speak of it, to cry out aloud. She would have had sympathy. Now her suffering must be buried in her own heart ; no one dare offer her consolation even if any guessed her pain. And it seemed that God and man alike commanded by their laws that she should permit none to guess it. Her husband was dead to her ; she stood alone and unloved, but she must keep her desolation a secret within herself.

“I cannot !” she exclaimed, striking her hand violently upon the stone wall ; “I was not brought up in the conventionalities of society. What have I to gain by suffering in silence ? I will rebel. I will be free.”

Her action had been so rough and sudden that she had hurt her hand. This roused her, and looking round she found a group of peasants, who had just come out of church, were stopping to stare at her. She must have been speaking aloud in her excitement.

She did not wish to become the centre of attraction in the character of a mad English-woman. So she hastily walked away and

climbed one of the steep streets. Up one queer little crooked hill and down another and she found herself in the Piazza del Campo, immortalized by Dante. Its quaint shape and singular appearance arrested her attention. For the first time she recollected that she knew neither the street nor house in which she was staying. From here she felt she could find her way back, but it would not do to go any farther. It is a strange experience to wander about an unfamiliar town where you are unknown to all the inhabitants save those of one house and from that house to feel it better to be absent.

Mrs. Mainwaring, whom she had known about a month, was the one member of the party who could honestly be glad of her appearance. It was a mere make-believe, she told herself, that amiability of Adelaide's. Two women, placed as they were, must equally desire each a stiletto for the other. Not just now, perhaps, for surely Adelaide must be content when she had her admirer, her lover, as her companion! What matter if he were another woman's husband? She had all his sweetness, the tenderness which had once belonged to another woman.

Lil was startled at her own thoughts as they formed themselves in her mind. At one moment she thought these hideous things of Adelaide, at another reproached herself with being guilty of some insane injustice. But in

the end bitterness won the day, for she could find no way out of her gloomy and passionate mood.

After the long years of mutual dependence which she had lived with Charlie, it was an extraordinary experience this sensation of solitude, of suffering alone, with no one by her side to scold or sympathise. It came upon her as she walked, miserable and desolate, up and down the Piazza, that she had all but lost her individuality in this close association with the man she loved. She had to find it again now, and it was a pain to her like that of death or of birth.

As she walked, absorbed in her dismal wild feelings, there came a sudden sweet voice at her ear. It was Adelaide.

"It *is* Mrs. Newman! And alone too. Oh, where is mamma? Mrs. Newman, you look ill; you are white! Take my arm, you must not walk alone."

Lil had indeed turned white. It was no illness, but a mental shock. A minute ago, what had she thought of this woman? What fate had she wished for her? And now there was this fair, flower-like face close to her own, full of tenderness and warm affection.

Silently she submitted to be led home, her arm through that of the woman whom half-an-hour ago she had fancied stabbing with satisfaction. Charlie fell behind; he was suffering too, if not so keenly as Lil, and was

very glad to be unobserved for a little while.

The two women went back to the *pension* together. Adelaide talked about Sodoma's pictures, about the striped cathedral, about the beautiful palaces. She was evidently nervous and unnaturally excited; something had disturbed her. But she was capable of suppressing herself and endeavouring to make the strange position a shade less terrible to her rival. They went up the stairway of the old palace in which their *pension* was kept, and Adelaide made the way seem short with her quick, soft words. At last they reached the door of Lil's room. "Let me take off your cloak for you," said Adelaide; "you are so tired."

Lil did not resist her. It would have seemed like pushing back some tender bird that pressed its timid, downy breast to yours.

There was a couch in the room. Lil, really weary with emotion, sank down upon it, and Adelaide loosened her cloak. Lil lay back and watched her as she put the cloak aside, and, when Adelaide turned again, suddenly put out her arms to her. Adelaide fell on her knees by the couch and pressed her burning cheek against Lil's face. For a long, strange moment these two held each other in a warm embrace. When Adelaide stirred to move away, Lil held her for an instant closer, and kissed her passionately.

Adelaide returned these kisses and then quickly drew back and left the room. Charlie was pacing the corridor; he had seen Adelaide enter Lil's room and waited till she came away before he went in himself. Adelaide, apparently blind to his presence, hurried into her own room where she found her mother sitting reading. She sat down in a chair and swayed herself backwards and forwards as if to assuage some intolerable pain or restlessness.

"Why, child, what is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs Mainwaring, in alarm.

"Nothing," or "I don't know," were all Adelaide's answers, while she sat there pressing her hands to her head, with wild action, as if some strange things were within it.

And, indeed, strange things were there. Strange fancies, strange thoughts, and a terrible consciousness!



CHAPTER V.

MRS. MAINWARING passed a night of anxiety, such as she had never known before. Adelaide was always delicate, and, from her excitable temperament, a responsibility. But her mother had had some idea in former times of trouble, of what ailed her. Now she could not understand her condition. She was perplexed to the last degree by Adelaide's unaccountable restlessness, and by the strange, almost sullen, silence, she preserved in spite of it. But at last Adelaide slept; and Mrs. Mainwaring anxiously watching her sleep, till she felt certain it was assured, heard her whisper one word—one name—which made her start and quiver with amazement.

She went back to her own room buried in thought. She wondered a thousand times—could she have been mistaken? She doubted her ears, doubted her memory, as we do when some incredible thing has occurred.

Mrs. Mainwaring, so far, had been the only one of the party who was quite undisturbed by any strange feelings or unusual experiences. But the next morning, when she dressed to go to the breakfast table, she looked harassed

and uneasy. She had carried the others over all difficulties by her natural brightness and her social qualities. This morning it seemed as if these had deserted her. They all met at breakfast, except Lil, who pretended to be tired, and was in reality pacing her room like a caged animal. Several times, Charlie, looking up, found Mrs. Mainwaring's eyes fixed on his, with an expression in them quite new to him, and which disconcerted him strangely. But he did not understand it, fortunately for him ; probably, if he had not been innocent of what she suspected him of, he would have understood that questioning, uneasy look.

"Mamma, you are more tired this morning than if you had been to see those beautiful pictures yesterday," said Adelaide ; "you must come out to-day ; do let us all go together."

"I don't want to see any pictures," said Mrs. Mainwaring, irreverently ; "I'm not in the mood for them. But I should like a long drive ; shall we see if Mrs. Newman will go?"

"Let me go and ask her," said Adelaide, rising quickly.

She went to Lil's door and spoke to her. At the sound of Adelaide's voice, Lil came and opened it at once ; she was dressed, and Adelaide saw that her absence from the breakfast-room, did not mean she needed rest.

"Do come out with us, Mrs. Newman," said Adelaide ; "we are going for the loveliest

drive in the world ; you know it is a sacred duty to go out driving when one is in Siena ; will you go ? ”

“ I think I must indeed stay at home and write some letters,” said Lil, after a moment’s hesitation. In that moment, a rush of questions had swayed her this way and that. Could she endure to sit opposite Adelaide, and her husband, the man who once had loved her, and whom she still loved with all the foolish faithfulness of a devoted woman, and be unable to hide from herself the sight of the passion which existed between them ? No, it was impossible ; it would be unbearable. Yet she found it harder to refuse Adelaide than anyone else, as Adelaide had guessed instinctively.

“ No, I cannot go,” she said, with decision ; “ I have to write to papa. I think, Miss Mainwaring, it is a week since I wrote to him.”

“ Oh, then I will not persuade you any more,” said Adelaide ; “ yet, Mrs. Newman, the air of this place is so delicious ; think how much good it might do you ! ”

“ No, I cannot come,” said Lil, drawing back into the room, and pretending to turn to a table on which lay her writing materials. Adelaide went back to the breakfast-room. Lil listened to her footsteps passing away down the corridor. Hot tears had risen to her eyes, and in another moment, would have

been upon her cheeks—tears of rage and disappointment and burning jealousy. “Oh, they will be so much happier without me!” was the thought that repeated itself over and over in her head. But, on the instant, she heard Charlie’s voice and footsteps—and the tears sank back to her heart, unshed. Pride gave her a strong self-control. She sat down at her table, and when Charlie entered the room, was too busy writing, to all appearance, to pay him any attention. He very readily accepted the situation. Bitterly she thought to herself, how, a year ago even, he would have entreated her to go out—have declared that he would not go himself, unless she did. Then, he never would take a pleasure unless he shared it with her. Now, he was so easily put off—so readily content with any arrangement she might choose to make for herself.

The carriage had come; Adelaide and her mother went down the stone stairway. Adelaide was quiet, and Mrs. Mainwaring unusually grave. Lil listened to every sound with acute intelligence. They were in, and the horses started off, clattering up the stoned street. Lil rushed to the window to see them go; she could not resist it; there was fascination in this feeding of her agony. Charlie was leaning forward, speaking to Adelaide with that smile in his eyes, which, with him, existed only for the woman he loved. Oh, how well she knew that look! that look of tenderness.

She leaned out of her open window, confident that he would not see her, his eyes were so intently fixed upon Adelaide. But, suddenly, he leaned back and looked up, and in so doing caught sight of Lil's face, her figure stretching out into the sunshine. Such a stricken face—white, and stricken; was that indeed Lil? He almost uttered an exclamation, but checked himself in time. But he looked so startled that Mrs. Mainwaring asked him what was the matter. "Nothing," he said, and relapsed into a silence from which it seemed he could not rouse himself. He was aghast at what he had seen. Had Lil penetrated into his very soul? Was she aware of his every feeling that she should show such suffering on her face? Was it then impossible for him to baffle her insight?

The scenery around Siena is so exquisitely lovely, that it seems like sacrilege to talk of ordinary things when one is amid its glory. It is intoxicating to some natures, this rich beauty which lies in such abundant wealth upon every line of the landscape; to others it is quieting; it seems like something too beautiful, which one cannot rightly understand. The sense of beauty is stretched to its utmost and the whole being grows still and silently joyous, even when one is set upon cheerfulness; it is easy to be quiet amid these hills and valleys of Tuscany, where colouring has reached its climax, and where nature calls you

every moment to observe some delicacy which she has wrought. These three, each oppressed with a secret care and strange anxiety, drove on, as though they had got astray into fairyland, and could not yet rouse themselves from the dark and terrible dream of real life. For a long time no one spoke at all. They passed through the valley where tall, ghostly white poplars rose out of the hollow, and held their pale branches against the ruddy foliage of the rich hill-side. On over the hill into another and lovelier range of country, where the olive orchards gave the dim grayness which is so eerily beautiful.

Every now and then, Charlie found Mrs. Mainwaring's eye fixed upon him. She always looked away instantly, but after meeting this gaze once or twice he grew uneasy. He could not understand that new look. Why should she think of him instead of the lovely landscape? Adelaide never took her eyes from the distant hills. Why should Mrs. Mainwaring watch his face? What was she trying to read there?

While these three were passing through the beautiful country, separated, yet united by a common uneasiness, Lil at home, alone, shut in her room, was tearing her heart to shreds. "Hell has no fury like a woman scorned." The black rage of jealousy, which was rising within her, seemed to herself as if a mouth of hell had been opened and its

scorching fire had entered her very soul. She did not know herself; many times she put her hands to her head and stood still, trembling, trying to recall that woman which she once was—gentle and indisposed to anger; now she felt herself transformed, converted into something horrible. “Oh, if I had but a friend to speak to, it might help me to find myself again!” she cried aloud, as she struggled with her passion. But she was alone. She had to fight out the frenzy by herself, without any aid from outside her own breast.

A woman who loses her lover suffers, yet she is free to forget her pain; but a woman, whose husband wearies of her, is brought face to face with an insoluble problem, an unceasing agony.

Lil, as yet, could not think, she could only feel. She did not realise to the full her position. She only knew that the man who had loved her had taken the love of her life away from her before the fascination of another face. She could not yet grasp the full horror of the situation. She forgot that Adelaide might be more keenly hurt in the affair than herself, that Charlie, loving such a woman as this, could have no choice, but to repress his passion. All she saw yet, was herself, alone, neglected, though not openly; she wondered, would open neglect have been easier to bear? This was so trying, so cruel, because her husband

we go to the ... if you would.

The ... seemed ... He was never ... making a ... the effort was ... men ... overturned ... his.

"I will come if you will ... she could never have ... voice ... and cold ... den ... loved ... how gentle ... could be ... and hatred ... as her owl ... his mute ... must be some ... surely she had been ... nightmare.

But no, this was not ... from her chair without the ... year ago, it would have seemed so strange to forget; lately it had gone out of fashion.

tried his best to conceal it, and yet he was evidently helpless before the force of this new passion. For whom? A woman whom he had known a month. Lil looked back over the long years in which she had worked, denied herself, conquered her defects of character and education, surrendered her own ideal of life, desired none of the pleasures which were natural to her—all for love of him. And now in one short month of Adelaide's society, all the memory of this was swept away, and there was only left the ruins of a marriage. Its ruins! Is this what it always comes to? asked Lil of herself. Do people, after the first blush of their happiness has gone, live on amid such ruins as these? "Oh, I cannot do it!" she cried; "it is intolerable, I will not be tied to a man who is sick of me, the shame of it would kill me! I must find some way of escape."

How different was her picture of that drive from the reality! She pictured these two in a lovers' heaven, each drinking in the tender tones of the other; she saw Mrs. Mainwaring intent upon her own pleasure, indifferent, because ignorant. "Oh, I hate them all," she cried aloud, with hands tightly clenched. "I hate them that they can be so base, so treacherous, so false to me! I hate the mother for her blindness. Ah, well, she will be rewarded. She will be ashamed when she sees the position her daughter has placed herself in. Her

shame is greater than mine ; I am glad of that, —I am glad of that.”

It was a sort of madness that was on her, that made the blood seem fire in her veins, that made her heart seem black to herself, too black to contemplate without a shudder. Now she rose like an avenging fury, and shook her trembling hands, impotent in their wrath, as though she could scatter curses on the absent who tormented her ; now she shrank back, terrified and shuddering at her own wickedness.

It is the frenzy which drives men and women to murder. Jealousy, that black fever which runs so close upon the heels of love, the joyous madness ; it is a poison hard to get out of the blood ; it dims the eyes, and makes the world look different ; it takes the energy out of the mind ; it saps ambition at its root ; it kills the capacity for healthy pleasures. Here was Lil, amid the perfect wealth of nature and art, so changed by this fell disease, that she preferred to remain within four walls, to yield herself undisturbed to the agony which was upon her.

When she heard the carriage come clattering down the street—an unmistakeable sound, for, as a rule, only carts drawn by oxen passed beneath the windows,—she looked into the glass and was shocked at her face. She tried to recover her balance, to still her whirling brain, to call up a usual, a familiar expression

The effort was too great, she almost fainted under it. But she heard their voices on the stairs, Adelaide's low, rich laugh, and Charlie's voice speaking in tones of ordinary cheerfulness. The sounds went through her like stabs. She put her hand to her heart, as if physical pain were being inflicted there. She looked wildly round as if for escape. There was none. She must stand her ground. She must face these people, a rival, a false husband. Surely her pride could give her strength to hide the pain from them? Charlie's hand was on the very door, when suddenly she seemed to become transformed. She heard him say to Adelaide, as they stood in the corridor, "You are very tired, do not go to the cathedral now!" that was all, but oh, how well she knew every intonation of his voice. How clearly she heard the infinite tenderness expressed in those simple words. She hardened suddenly, her face changed and grew cold. Quickly she sat down to her writing-table and took up her pen; she had not written one word since she had been left alone in that room.

He came and put his hand on her shoulder. "Busy still?" he said. His voice startled her, there was something new in it, a tone which had never been used to her before. It was wonderfully gentle, but it sounded like the voice of a stranger; someone removed, and far away from her. "Will you not come, if

we go to the cathedral? I should be so glad if you would."

Lil turned and looked up at him, so surprised was she at the way he spoke. He seemed unconscious of it himself, he was only looking rather anxiously for her answer. He was very pale, and there was something, as it seemed to Lil, altogether unnatural about him. He was never good at concealment. He was making a fierce effort to master himself; and the effort was evident. Lil sat still for a moment, her hands on the table, her face upturned to him, her eyes trying to read his.

"I will come if you wish it," she said; and she could never have guessed how soft her voice sounded. The heart that lay all stiff and cold within her, was touched with a sudden warmth—this face, so familiar, so well loved, how full of pain it was, how appealing, how gentle! It seemed incredible that she could be cherishing within herself such wrath and hatred towards this man whom she loved as her own soul, and who came to her with his mute appeal in his eyes. Surely there must be some terrible hideous mistake; surely she had been dreaming—touched with nightmare.

But no, this was not so, for he turned away from her chair without the caress, which, a year ago, it would have seemed so strange to forget; lately it had gone out of fashion be-

tween them. But now if he had stooped to kiss her, she would have, indeed, fancied all her suffering to have been born of imagination. But no, he turned away and sat down, with a weary air, which reminded her of the miserable time at home before the money came. She leaned over her table again with a heavy sigh.

The walk to the cathedral was given up. Adelaide was in so strangely overwrought a state when she got to her room, that her mother would not let her leave it again. "Adelaide," she said, fixing her eyes upon her, "we will go straight on to Paris. This place does not suit you any better than Rome. It is very strange, for mountain air generally makes you strong and bright; but it is very evident that Siena is doing you no good."

Adelaide's only reply was an undistinguishable murmur. She was lying on a couch and had drawn a shawl about her. When her mother gave her that keen look, she put the shawl so that it covered her face. It seemed as if her strongest desire was to hide herself away. And, indeed, she knew of nothing else which she did desire. She had but one purpose—to keep her secret from everyone about her. She did not appear any more that evening; and when Lil saw her the next day, she looked broken and haggard as though she had been through a heavy illness.

Mrs. Mainwaring found her position a difficult one. She did not like to start for Paris while Adelaide looked so wan, for fear of wearing out her strength completely; and she could not exactly suggest to the Newmans that they should leave Siena. So it went on from hour to hour, from day to day, all the members of the party in a sort of despair, yet none of them knowing exactly how to act, how to break the horrid spell which seemed to lie upon them. Charlie, of course, should have been the one to act; he might have left Siena. But there is one thing in which our common nature is but weak, and that is in the resistance of temptation. It is surprising, how strong we can be sometimes, but too often that strength arises from our fear of consequences, our dread of disaster to ourselves or others, these terrors having more power over us than the temptation. So it was with Charlie Newman. His love remained mute, because he knew too well that the recognition of its existence would be pain to Adelaide, pain to Lil, pain to himself; therefore he resisted the incessant temptations which were about him, and preserved his silence. But the temptation to see her face, to hear her voice, to listen to her words, and drink in the light of her bright spirit—this he could not resist, for he did not see that any greater disaster could result from it, and therefore the temptation had its full sway

over him. He could not contemplate the idea of going away, of deliberately leaving this woman who had become the sunshine of his being, now that circumstances had thus thrown him so intimately into her society.

And so the bright days of brilliant sunshine succeeded one another, and these four people met incessantly, went out together, took refuge in small deceits to conceal the difficulties of their association.

Lil went out with them, and, indeed, went wherever Charlie wished her, for the pleading of his eyes was irresistible. And thus it was that gradually, a strange conviction was forced into her mind, something more incredible and terrible when first she began to realize it, than anything else which she had experienced.

Adelaide grew whiter and more fragile-looking with every successive day. Even Lil, who was not accustomed to her, could see that she was being consumed by some internal and tormenting fire.

The effort which Charlie was making momentarily to master himself, to keep within the limits which he had set himself, was gradually becoming written on his face in new lines and a changed expression. An overpowering weariness of life appeared to oppress him, save when Adelaide was near, and then he started strangely into animation; an emotion roused him which he had hidden, a joy awoke

within him which had to be disguised. But its existence could not be concealed from eyes like Lil's. His moods shook her, his passion swayed her, his pain cut her to the heart.

And, oh, that mute look in his eyes, as though he had resigned himself to live in silence, and speak out of his soul no more!

The sight of all this, gradually affected Lil so that her own frenzy grew still; she began to see the situation more clearly.

And the strange conviction which was forced into her mind, which rose like a hideous fact before her eyes, never again to be hidden away was this—

These two were sacrificing themselves for her. She, it was, who was the most considered, who was treated with an infinite tenderness and respect by both.

One day when Charlie spoke to Adelaide, Lil heard her reply in a manner which she could hardly have imagined her capable of. It was fierce, angry, almost rude. And then, seeing Lil near her, she changed suddenly, and a smile of angelic sweetness came upon her face. Lil was half frightened by the transition. What did it all mean?

That she, who was used by them both as if she were some tender thing, was in herself, the blank, immovable wall which separated them. And they, knowing what they did, with open eyes and bleeding hearts, yielded

up themselves before her rights, without a protest, but with a marvellous graciousness.

Immovable! Could it be? Was she indeed born, sent into the world to stand immovably where she was not wanted, to make others unhappy? And, above all, was it to those she loved, that she was doomed to bring pain, and disaster, and distress?

The thought was too ghastly.



CHAPTER VI.

MRS. MAINWARING, a woman who could not endure inaction, grasped the key to the situation forcibly at last. She told the Newmans that Adelaide appeared really ill. She thought, after all, it would be better for them to travel alone. She managed to do this without rudeness. True, Charlie was beyond recognising rudeness, he knew his unstable position too well, and Lil would not have blamed Mrs. Mainwaring, even if she had been rude.

Trains were looked up, portmanteaus strapped—the carriage came—and all at once the wrench was over.

“When shall we start?” said Charlie.

Siena had no attraction for him now; he could no longer see its beauty, and, as for Lil, she fancied she was growing blind to everything outside her own sensations.

It was a horrible condition to be in. “Surely,” she said to herself, “this cannot last! I must be able to end it, in some way. It is not possible to go on suffering like this to the end of my life!”

“I should like to go home, Charlie, if you would,” she said. So it was settled easily, for

to go was what he desired. They prepared to start as soon as possible, and were soon on their way, travelling night and day to London. Lil did not appear to feel fatigue; in truth her mind was too full of a thousand wild and terrible thoughts for any weariness of her body to make itself noticeable. In the long dark hours of the night, the tempting dream of suicide, which has fascinated so many of the weak and miserable, often came to her. It is so easy to think—one desperate act and I shall be free, I shall have put an end to all this. But her belief in her own immortality took away for her the charm of of this dream. When the mind is accustomed to regard death as the happy entrance into an improved state of existence, it is hard to reconcile oneself to appearing upon that new stage in a thoroughly undignified manner. "I might be no happier," thought Lil, "and how miserable I should make Charlie for ever so long. I dare say he would be glad if I died quietly and naturally, but if he thought he had driven me to suicide, it would haunt him. It would be a selfish thing to do, even if I was happier, for they would both be wretched. Besides, I don't want to die yet!"

Indeed she did not—she was young and ardent. Her whole nature rebelled so passionately against repression or unhappiness, that she certainly could not yet bring it to submit

to the idea of death. It was only in the stillness of the weary nights, with no sound in her ears but the ceaseless noise of the train, that this temptation became visible to her. She could not sleep; and she grew to fancy sometimes that she was already in another world, and was being punished for her sins by an eternal vibration. There was no object to distract her thoughts, but the weary, indifferent face opposite her. O, was it possible that all her life she was to be opposite that face, with that cold look upon it?—that never again was her presence to bring the old familiar light into those eyes? Ah, no! she could not live on, unloved, a burden, an obstacle! It was impossible. Love was her creed, her religion, her very life. She had no other faith to cling to, no other hope to live for. There was nothing which the dull years would lead her to, if love was denied her; there could be nothing to make the present moment precious if she was to be this hateful thing, a woman unloved. Ambition had become dormant in her since her marriage; she had given herself up so wholly to the labour and the pleasure of her domestic life, that she could not understand the possibility of living in any other interest. If Charlie did not want her—if she was not needed in her home—it seemed then as though the heavens and the earth had fallen away from her, and half-consciously she treasured the idea of self-destruction, putting

it far back in her mind as a course only to be taken when all else failed. She wanted to live—but in her present position life would become unbearable in time.

In Paris Charlie got a copy of the *Times*. He glanced it through, and then threw it aside, remarking that there was nothing in it.

Lil picked it up, and looked at it, without thought, without expecting to see anything which would interest her. Yet she had no sooner glanced at the page as she held it before her, than her eyes grew suddenly dim and her breath came quick and short, and then her heart seemed to die away within her with the pain of a new hope and a new fear.

It was but a brief report of a divorce case which so affected her. It was that one word—divorce—which rushed through her mind like a living flash of fire. Was the thing possible—did the laws, after all, leave a loophole of escape for miserable women like herself? She knew nothing about it; she was utterly ignorant of the law of divorce. It seemed to her as if the new thought had a hope in it! She determined, immediately that she should be at home, to learn all she could on the subject, and see what power she had.

So ignorant was she of the iron hold which the law keeps over the innocent, that she fancied here was hope!

CHAPTER VII.

AT home again. But a new home. It seemed to Lil that everything in her life now was new and strange and difficult to understand. Sometimes she longed for the old cottage—but not often; for she very quickly remembered that her life had not all been happiness there—that there were bitter memories attached to that place too. And the memories that were not bitter—could she bear them?—would they not cut and bite as only memories of dead things can?

But the dreariness—O, the dreariness—of that return home! Lil wondered sometimes what gave her the strength to live through it—and in silence. She forgot that she was young and full of dormant power that was roused by degrees as her life grew more difficult. She forgot it, because the loss she suffered from gave her a sense of death and despair, a feeling as of age and of desolation.

Ah, what a loss! Everything reminded her of it—she could find no rest anywhere. There was no grave where she might plant flowers and weep silently for the dead. Her dead were with her—her strangled love could

not be put away—she moved amid the corpses of the past, and if her happiness was dead, her agony was alive, preserved in life by an hourly, an intolerable irritation.

This house which every day grew more artistic and charming—it was no home to its master. He had one room in it which he called his study, and where he spent many hours alone. It seemed he was writing; but Lil, who once was too much a part of himself to be excluded from anything he did, now knew nothing of his work. He lived his life away from her. And when he did come to her in her drawing-room, where she too often sat for long hours buried in terrible and morose reverie, it was to suggest going out. He constantly asked visitors to the house; they seldom dined alone; and Lil knew very well that many of the people who came he did not care to associate with. Whether consciously, or whether unconsciously, she could not discover; but he evidently clung to anything which served to prevent their being alone together. If no one was with them in the evening, they went to the theatre as a matter of course.

Sometimes Charlie asked her when she intended to write her long-talked of play, and made a weak pretence that her interest in the stage was his reason for taking her so often to the theatre. Thus he would try sometimes to cover the ugly fact that he was glad to

go to any crowded place to find refuge from himself—from her ! It was a weak pretence, because both knew so well that only among a number of people were they at ease together. But Lil could not force herself to countenance the pretence by any actual work ; her whole mind was centred on her own immediate life, which contained in its inner places a tragedy more appalling and more terribly absorbing than any fiction could be. But she found in the theatre a certain excitement and interest which, for the moment, helped her to forget herself. She had a strong dramatic instinct, and even a mediocre performance interested her ; when a good actor was before her, her very breathing was swayed by his. She forgot her individuality, her suffering self ; and that moment of forgetfulness was to her an intoxication for which she learned to thirst.

All this time she avoided her father. He was very busy, so that this was easily done. Her wish was not to distress him unnecessarily ; but the mere sight of her face when she first came home from Italy told him that something was wrong. The unhappy pair acted their parts so quietly and well that he did not suspect the cause of her altered looks in the least. He believed her to be very ill ; but this she denied.

She cast about in her mind how to learn all about the law of divorce, and at last went

quietly to the British Museum, where she got out a legal handbook, and studied it. Amazement fell upon her soul as she read. She leaned her head on her hands to hide her burning face. She was sickened to discover what fearful bondage was that which she had blindly taken upon her !

Liberty ! Yes, there was liberty—offered at what price ? She might have it, perhaps, if she could disgrace herself, shame her womanhood, play false to the faithful love in her heart, and outrage her better nature. She might have it if she could make of herself a thing to be pointed at, and then stand in the common court for men to stare at her. She might have it if she would sacrifice all the sweetness of a sacred devotion ; if she could so shame herself as to bring shame on the man whom she still adored. It seemed all this ; all that was most horrible to her, for she had met with no temptation to unfaithfulness. Her love was still given utterly to this husband from whom she desired to be free !

There was no liberty for her while she was pure, while she was honest ! There is no liberty even for those who may be inconstant but cannot deceive.

It is only to the basest, she thought, to the most profligate, that liberty is to be given ; only to those who have no sense of shame, no delicacy, no gentleness. A woman who is

honest in every sense—who keeps vows when she has made them, who tells the truth, and has no dark places in her life, is a more absolute slave, a more helpless and hopeless prisoner in a loveless marriage, than any victim of Russian tyranny. He, at least, can ask for sympathy, can raise his voice, can protest against injustice. But she must be silent and endure without a sign the bondage which makes her days black instead of beautiful—else society will hold up hands of horror and alarm.

“O, pitiless laws!” cried Lil, in her heart. “Can it be possible that we, who do not desire to offend, are held in this grip of iron? that these links, these iron links, are only unloosed for those who respect neither themselves or others?”

Lil leaned back in her chair, and her eyes grew dim. The reading-room vanished; she saw no longer the students who sat by her; she breathed no longer the heavy air of the close room. She was back in the old island garden where her girlhood had blossomed; where she had lived innocent and ignorant; where she had loved as naturally as though she were a free bird of the air. No one had told her how terrible, how irrevocable were these bonds which her love must wear! Yet her own quick brain, taught to think for itself, had caught some dim idea of what these vows might bring. The sun was on her

head ; she heard the rush of the river in her ears, and the thrilling song of her father's well-loved thrush ; she felt the old hound's cold, friendly nose pressed against her hand. She was standing at her father's window, looking in at him as he sat at his writing-table.

"Papa, doesn't it seem rather rash to take a vow at seventeen which one has to keep all one's life !"

What a question ! And how her father's face altered as he listened to it. She could see the change of expression now ; she understood it, as she had not understood it then, spite of her questioning spirit. O yes, she understood it now. O, what a world ! where girls, ignorant, full of the faith and enthusiasm of youth, enter these iron bonds as if they took on them mere silken chains, easily snapped at any moment. Cruel—cruel—said Lil ! Why did he not tell me that men change—that they are inconstant—that the deepest affection wears itself out—and that then men and women are left chained together like prisoners !

"What good would it have done had he told me ?" she said, her heart rebelling instantly against any reproach to Brough ; "he would have frightened me ; and, if I had not married, what would that mean ? I should have lost those happy, happy years—that early time when life was all lovely—because *he* loved me."



Her eye fell again on the book—was there no mode of evading these laws?—no loophole whence there might be escape, however narrow and difficult the way?

Collusion—what did that word mean? Her eyes and hands fastened on the book—was there a way by which men and women did evade these laws. Yes—perhaps—and how! By swearing false oaths—by making false declarations—by paying witnesses to tell lies.

“A large proportion of the opposition so assiduously exhibited in the Divorce Court is advisedly simulated, in order to meet the requirements of a law which appears designed to encourage ingenuity, deceit and fraud.”

She shut the book, and put it aside—pushed it from her, as though it hurt her.

If you are not disposed to pay the heaviest price for your freedom, you may get it by a series of clever lies.

“Can all this be true?” said Lil, to herself, as she sat there with a feeling as if she were, indeed, the helpless victim of an unreasonable tyranny. Suddenly came a desperate hope. “Perhaps this book is not to be trusted! How can I find out without rousing any suspicions or making Charlie uneasy? I must think.”

Thoughtfully she went home, her mind full of perplexity. She did not know how to get

the sort of law-book she wanted ; she could not tell how to know when she had one which was reliable.

“ I have it ! ” she exclaimed, as she reached her own doorstep. “ Alfred Davies will be here to-night. I will get it out of him ; I have heard him say he has common law at his fingers’ ends. I will tell him—what shall I tell him—why, of course, that I am writing my play ! I want a plot ! Oh, I am so glad I thought of that. Even if Charlie hears, it will not trouble him, because he knows I really do mean to write a play.”

A sort of exhilaration came upon her now she had some plan. Positively she might learn something ! She was too ignorant to know what sort of escape she hoped for ; but she had a dim idea that it might be possible for a lawyer to show a way out of his own mesh !

Alfred and his wife were coming to dinner. Charlie asked them whenever there was no one else, and they seldom refused. Davies was not doing well, his own habits were incurably extravagant, and his wife loved dress better than her soul. He was one of those men who always feel that fortune goes in for favouritism ; he could never get over the idea that it was “ cursed hard ” that his uncle shouldn’t have left him even a few thousands. He looked at all Charlie’s investments in pictures or valuables with the critical eye of a future possessor ; he gave himself all the

privileges of the heir. At the same time he was careful to do this pleasantly, because he was always in want of money, and he found Charlie gave way invariably after a certain amount of importuning. He considered it only fair that he should have the run of the house and as many good dinners and as much champagne as might be; how could a poor devil of a barrister get decent dinners when he had boys to educate, feed, and clothe?

Lil tolerated these people. Mrs. Davies sat in the drawing-room with her after dinner, and talked about her servants, the fashions, admired any new thing which Lil wore, and insinuated, incessantly, the horrid contrast between the houses of the rich cousin and the poor one. Lil knew beforehand everything which she would say, as soon as the first words were out of her mouth. After all, it was, perhaps, better than being alone with her own terrible thoughts. She knew well enough that Charlie would not choose Davies's society, were it not that he must have some companion to save him from himself—or from her! Sometimes, as she thought of this, and noticed how long they stayed from the drawing-room, a wild feeling of anger against her husband would rise up in her heart, like some evil thing that had so strong a life it could not be quite killed. But most often her heart ached for him—she could not help grieving over

the ruins of his happiness, the total absence of all joy in his life! She loved him still, so well, that she could not but grieve over this, however bitterly she rebelled against her own position.

"Papa used to say," she thought as she sat at the dinner-table this evening, "that I was full of dramatic power. I don't believe it. I don't think I can act well enough to ask Alfred Davies to come up and talk to me, without showing my whole history in my face!"

Yet she did. She told him she had a plot in her mind for something she wanted to write, and would he come up before the evening was over, so that she might ask him about a few legal points? Her face and voice were quiet, though her heart was beating like a frightened bird.

"After all!" she thought, "I can act when I want to!" In the drawing-room she sat patiently listening to Mrs. Davies's aimless small talk, and even answering her correctly, while her mind was busy upon her device.

Presently Davies came in alone. "Now, Mrs. Newman, I am at your service." He saw her glance at the door behind him, and answered her unasked question, "Charlie has gone to his study: Mrs. D., you may sit and nod over the fire as you do at home, for we have business."

The drawing-room was a double one, and there were fires in both rooms. Leaving "Mrs. D." with a novel in her lap and a heap of papers beside her to amuse her, the others moved away to the second fire in the smaller room. The light there was dimmer. Davies made a step as if he would take one of the lamps in. "No, no," said Lil, "I like the soft light, if you don't mind."

She drew a chair close to the fire, and sat down with her back to the light. She had a fan in her hand, with which she sheltered her face from the fire.

"Charlie thinks I could write a play, Mr. Davies, because I am so fond of the theatre, and papa would like me to try, so I really am going to make an attempt. Of course the first difficulty is plot."

"More important in a play than any other sort of fiction," observed Davies.

"I know," said Lil, "that is why I am taking so much trouble about it. There is nothing like law for a plot."

"And nothing in which novelists and playwrights make such egregious mistakes."

"Exactly," said Lil, eagerly, "that is just why I am going to bother you. I don't want to make any mistakes, I want to know all about the law of marriage and divorce. I have been reading B——'s handbook, is that to be trusted?"

"Oh, not at all reliable!"

“Thank heaven,” said Lil in a low voice ; and then recovering herself, said quickly, “some of the statements there did not suit me at all, and I shall be glad if they are wrong !”

“But why choose such a subject ?”

The question startled her for a moment, but she quickly recollected herself.

“Well, you see, Mr. Davies, we are so accustomed to adaptations from French plays, which are all dependent for their interest on the law of marriage and divorce, that it seems quite the right thing to use for one’s plot. Besides,” she went on, with a sudden flutter of the heart at her own audacity, “from some articles I have noticed lately in the papers, and which I had not properly understood till I looked up the subject, it seems as if the difficulty of divorce may become a burning question.”

“Oh, there is nothing to be done, any access of freedom would be most dangerous. What is the use of ventilating such a hopeless subject?—and for fiction—forgive me, Mrs. Newman, but it really seems to me a loathsome one to choose.”

“Ah !” said Lil, “it may be loathsome, but whether it is or no, it becomes sometimes of vital interest !”

Her voice was so low and earnest that he looked up quickly ; Lil put up her fan to hide her face, while she took an instant to

draw breath. "How stupid I am," she said to herself, "I must remember I have no personal interest in this!"

"Well, that may be," admitted Davies, reluctantly, "when a question becomes vital, we hear enough of it, we need not hear of it before." Davies was a man of the world in the common-place sense of the word; he was full of "fast" proclivities; he loved licence. Such men hate free discussion of social problems.

"But, of course," went on Davies, after a moment's pause, "I will tell you anything you want to know, only—do keep out of the Divorce Court—let me entreat you to do that! It would be such a mercy if lady writers would keep out of the Divorce Court!"

"Oh, I have no idea of going into the Divorce Court, if I can help it!" exclaimed Lil. "No! no! what I want to know is whether there is any way of evading that terrible Court, or going quietly through it, so that no one need hear of it, or for people to live in different countries and under different laws be free of their marriage tie, or if, indeed, there is no way—no way—of escape for people who are once tied together, without sinning against themselves or any other!"

"None that I ever heard of," said Davies, coolly. "You will write something powerful if you put all this passion into it. How much

you are to be envied, you that are gifted with imagination, and can create such excitement for yourselves ! We poor, plodding commonplace fellows are out of all that ; and if I did not know you well, Mrs. Newman, I declare I should have supposed you were in earnest just now ! But, of course, that is absurd. What an excellent actress you would make ! ”

An excellent actress ! When she had so forgotten herself that she could not tell whether this man saw through her or not ! By one of those efforts which emergencies only make possible, she said, quietly :

“ I have often been told so. But, in truth, I am very interested in my plot, and in my characters, and sometimes I am carried away like this. Now, tell me, Mr. Davies, is it not the fact that the divorce law gives freedom only to those who have offended against the marriage law ? ”

“ Certainly, what it does is to give redress to the party injured, and to punish the offending party. ”

“ Then my poor heroine, who is as virtuous as a woman can be, has nothing to gain from the divorce law ? ”

“ If her husband has ill-used, deserted her, been faithless to her, she has everything to gain from it. ”

“ But he is my hero, and is incapable of committing any of these crimes. ”

“Then, if she is virtuous, she will desire to keep her vows.”

“But her husband is tired of her, and she desires to give him his liberty.”

“If neither of them will put themselves within the pale of the law, it cannot deal with them. Law has to do with the guilty.”

“But don’t people talk about what they call the liberty of the individual?”

“A married woman is not an individual, Mrs. Newman, according to law, and her husband is not supposed to desire to be free of her, because her children are his heirs. The law of marriage is intimately mixed up with the question of property. The laws do their best to protect the rights of the individual; his liberty must take care of itself.”

“Alas, yet there are people who want liberty, and do not care for property!”

“Then they are idealists, and I fear if you put them on the stage, they will call forth no sympathy.”

“Oh, Mr. Davies! how instantly the expression of genuine feeling calls forth a response in a theatre.”

“True; the common people are sentimentalists. But you have not given me the motive for your heroine’s desire for freedom. I suppose if her husband is tired of her, he wants to marry some one else?”

"I suppose so—Yes!" said Lil, while her heart gave a great leap within her.

"Bigamy is worn out, I fear," said Davies, "except as a melo-dramatic sort of crime, and you will get no sympathy for a woman who gives her husband the opportunity of committing bigamy; she makes herself odious at once by violating the laws and the usages of society. She would be an intolerable as well as an impossible heroine."

Lil gave a sigh so heavy, so sad, that it startled Davies and frightened herself. She rose abruptly, feeling that she ran too great a risk of betraying her bitter interest in this subject; she crossed to where Mrs. Davies sat in the other drawing-room. As she moved she thought with terror that no way was left her but that which seems to those who have never really considered it, so cowardly, which does, indeed, need so much courage—self-destruction. The temptation assailed her once again, for her difficulties were insurmountable. She whispered Cleopatra's words to herself as she crossed the room, with Davies close behind her.

"Patience is sottish; and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad; then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death
Ere death dare come to us?"

"Am I to be greater than Cleopatra?" she asked herself. "No, I am weaker; my loss is as great as hers, to me, yet I fear to enter

the next life uninvited!" But a sudden resolution took form in her mind. She would provide herself with a means of death, which she would always carry with her. She would not be quite helpless, absolutely without any way of escape!

She found Mrs. Davies deeply absorbed in a newspaper. "Have we not been talking a long time?" she said.

"Not long," said Mrs. Davies, "at least I think not. I have found this paper amusing. I don't seem to have time to read at home, and this is such an extraordinary idea about the Czar of Russia. Have you seen it? that he was not killed at all, but that he wanted to abdicate, and took the only means he had of doing it. It is suggested that he had a prisoner assassinated who was very like him, and that he has disappeared, leaving no trace of his existence. Perhaps he is living in London now, enjoying himself quietly. Why, Mrs. Newman, how white you are!"

"Yes, I am tired to-night," said Lil. "I have been reading at the British Museum, to-day, and the air there is very oppressive." She stood steadily and faced Alfred Davies as she spoke. She felt he was covertly watching her, and that he did not believe her paleness arose from so innocent a cause as the air of the Museum.

Mrs. Davies rose. "You must go to bed,"

she said. "You look quite tired out. Come, Alfred!"

They were gone. The door was shut, they had left the house. When she had heard the front door close, then only Lil had courage to put out her hand and take up this paper. She devoured the words, they seemed to her alive with meaning. If the Czar, the Emperor of all the Russias, could even be supposed to have done this, to have escaped from himself! to have kept his life, his individuality, yet to have disappeared from his surroundings, why might not an insignificant person, known but to a few people, instead of to a nation, actually accomplish it? The Czar must be known in all the civilized nations, thought Lil to herself. I am known in a certain square of London and a dozen houses! If it can be but suggested as even possible for him, surely it would be easy for me!

She fell into deep thought, standing there with the paper in her hand. She remembered to have read, but a few days before, of certain soldiers who had deserted many times over, and enlisted again under new names. That must mean that they had repeatedly destroyed their individuality, disappeared from among their friends, taken up new names and characters. How extraordinary it seemed to her! She began to tremble as she stood. Her eyes glittered as though

they burned with fever. A suggestion had come to her, which filled her with excitement. The law would not help her; the law compelled her to stand still and suffer. Why not step out out of the law? take help and guidance from the lawless?

“If I am driven to it, I will do that,” she whispered. “Courage! courage! I can do that! I should be dead—dead indeed! to everyone I have known and loved. I should have to learn how to live for myself then!”



CHAPTER VIII.

THE idea sown so unexpectedly in her mind clung there, and she went about in a dream, wondering if indeed she dare lose herself in the sea of life !

Her passionate desire for some sympathy—a friend in her need—grew stronger. She began to feel that she would have to go to her father in the end, but she resisted the impulse as long as possible.

Overpowered by this sense of loneliness, she one afternoon left the house which had begun to feel like a prison to her, and went to see old Mrs. Warrington.

The ancient lady looked very little changed since she had held up her hands in horror over Lil's wild girlish romps with the dogs. There comes a period in some people's lives, a starched condition of age, when nothing changes them but death. The years which had been such an experience for Lil, had seemed to the old lady but a brief time. She had long since done with all the emotions and excitements of this little life, and was busy laying up her stores in heaven.

Nevertheless, old worldly instincts were not

dead in her. She never forgot that Lil was now a rich woman. She no longer teased her about the price of coals or butter. But she very often reminded her of the camel and the eye of a needle. And she always had her best tea-set out now when Lil came, and treated her as a quite grown-up person.

Lil had tea with her and sat by her in a low chair, and wound some wool for the old lady's knitting, and told stories of her travels. She made herself as pleasant as she could, but all the while her thoughts were afar, wandering in dangerous, strange ways.

As she talked she watched the shrewd old face. After all, this woman must have the wisdom of experience. Something, no longer repressible, rose within her and made her speak.

"Granny," she said, "what ought a woman to do whose husband is tired of her?"

Granny dropped her knitting in her lap, adjusted her spectacles, and stared hard at Lil before she replied. Lil had prepared herself for this scrutiny; her chin was in her hand; her eyes were fixed on the fire; and she sat motionless.

"My dear," said Granny, "she must do her duty."

"Her duty?" said Lil, "and what is that?"

"Ah!" said Granny, her eyes becoming introspective; "I know what a task it may be for a woman to do her duty! What I suffered with your grandfather, my dear! He was,

without exception, the most trying man I ever met with. Your father has broken my heart with his godless ways ; but he has never worried and harassed me as my husband did."

"And you did your duty?" asked Lil, who knew, from experience, that Granny would not be shy in answering such a question.

"I endeavoured to walk in the straight path, my dear child, as is needful for one of the elect of the Lord."

"But, Granny, you have not yet told me what a woman's duty is."

"You must remember, my dear, that the state of marriage is a holy one. That which God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

"That bewilders me, Granny. Do you mean because people are married in church that God has joined them together?"

"You know I place no trust in the formal written prayers which the church-people use in their celebrations. But you have vowed before God to love, honour, and obey. He watches to see that you fulfil your vows."

"Granny," said Lil, "what does He expect people to do if the love dies away?"

"My dear, these are foolish questions. Married persons should not think of such things. A woman who respects herself and her husband will do her duty. It is sinful even to think or talk of such disobedience to God's written laws. God is not mocked ; he

has given us the Scriptures, child!" she said, with a sudden change of manner; "what makes you talk like this? You are not talking of yourself? That Swift has not come back again, has he?"

"Oh, Granny," said Lil, "what a question to ask!"

"Tell me, child, has he? Is he after you again?"

"I have not seen him for years," answered Lil, rising from her chair; "I must go now, Granny. What could make you think of that Dr. Swift? I had almost forgotten his existence."

"I am glad to hear it," said the old lady, still eyeing her with stern suspicion; "but remember the eye of the Lord is upon you!"

Lil put on her hat, and after an embrace, even more solemn and impressive than usual, went homewards, through the dusk. She found Charlie in the dining-room, sitting by the fire with the habitual look of weariness and disappointment on his face which seemed to have become a part of it, so constant was its presence. The despair in her own heart was so heavy that she did not feel as if she could make the least effort to move the cloud which hung between them. She sat down on a chair just inside the dining-room door. It did not appear to her to matter where she was, so long as she had somewhere to rest. She had no impulse to come to the fire, create a blaze, and

delight in the feeling of being at home. All that was past for her ; over, and dead. This house could never be a home to her. She had never felt herself its rightful mistress, and to-day she was so weary and dispirited, after her visit to her grandmother, that she felt more homeless than usual. After a moment, Charlie turned and looked at her ; but she did not raise her eyes to meet his.

“Will you not go and dress for dinner ?” he said, very gently. “I have tickets for the theatre to-night, to see the new American actor, as Iago. Will you go ?”

“Oh, yes,” said Lil, making an effort to find her voice ; “I shall like to very much.”

She rose and went slowly away upstairs to her dressing-room. Why was he so good—always gentle—always kind ? Why did he take so much pains that she should have all the amusement he had ? Why did he not go out alone, amuse himself with other women, take to his club ? Why did he so disarm and soften her, that instead of any anger against him she could only feel humbled and ashamed that she should be in his way, a burden which he must carry wherever he went ? He was the same man she had loved, and could not but love still ; the same, with the same gentle nature and lovable disposition. As she had said to Dr. Swift long ago, “my husband is a gentleman.” How true that was she felt now more than ever. As she dressed, she looked

critically in her glass. All this hidden emotion was telling upon her; it was beginning to make itself very visible in her face. No wonder her father thought she was ill; her looks suggested the existence of some hungry and exhausting disease.

"I must do something soon," she said to herself, "every day of this life is adding years to my age. Why should I grow haggard before my time? Why should I make *him* look as he does this evening? If *she* were there—if *she* had come into the room instead of me—how his face would have lightened. Oh! how much more misery must I suffer before I have courage?"

They drove away to the theatre as soon as dinner was over. Their stalls were near the front. When they entered, Iago was already on the stage, and Lil sat down with her eyes upon him. She never thought of looking round the house after the fashion of many theatre-goers; she forgot in the intensity of her interest that anyone else was there to witness the impersonation. At the end of the act, when the curtain dropped, she turned at last to speak to Charlie, but she forgot what she had intended to say, she was so startled by a change in his face; such a change! She only saw his profile; he was looking down as though nothing in the house interested him so much as the orchestra. But she saw an extraordinary expression beneath that pre-occupied air; some-

thing which could not be hidden from her. What was it? Quickly, she turned in her seat to look round the house; something, some one must be there—who——? She needed not to look far. Two or three stalls only separated them from Adelaide Mainwaring. She was sitting, still as a statue, her eyes upon the programme which she held in her gloved hand. Was she reading that programme, with those heavily drooped eyes? After all, was it Adelaide Mainwaring? Yes; but ah! how changed! The rich full blown rose had drooped—it looked as though nor sun nor rain had blessed it—as though the very sap of life were denied. The warm colour that used to come and go in her cheeks, it was gone! Her generous form was more slender; her very hand looked thinner; her head drooped as though out of sheer languor. Lil gazed in incredulity upon this changed woman. True, it was Adelaide. But what—*what* had changed her so! She did not move, and Lil still looked in wonder and with a horror growing in her heart, when Mrs. Mainwaring, who was sitting beyond Adelaide, caught sight of Lil. For a moment Lil did not see her; and Mrs. Mainwaring in her turn stared in surprise at Lil's face, where trembling emotion was visible. The rise of the curtain roused Adelaide, and Lil also; and then Lil called up a smile as well as she could, and bowed. But Charlie would not move. He knew all that happened without any need

to use his eyes. Lil saw that he would not look, and she dared not speak to him. Her pleasure in the play was gone. These misunderstandings with the hot-headed Moor; how easily might they have been prevented! In her tragedy no one was blind, no one was foolish; all were resolutely walking on straight with open eyes. What was it to be strangled by a jealous husband? What, indeed, to being treated so gently, so generously, by one who could not love! Death—why, if easeful death would come, all would be over—but now instead, the days must go on, each one more empty than the last! She, at least, did not feel that death would come easily to her, despite her haggard looks. She felt that she had a terrible power of suffering and living on ——, but Adelaide! She herself, in all her misery, was strong and bright by comparison with that faded rose, no longer red, but white. “And I that sit between them, here! am I to stand between them all my life? O, I cannot; a just God could not ask it; a merciful law-giver would not command it.” The words burned in her brain, and drowned Desdemona’s wail of death, and dazed her eyes so that she could not see Iago’s face of triumph. The moment the curtain had fallen, Lil drew her white cloak over her shoulders and moved towards Mrs. Mainwaring. That lady was not glad to see her; but she liked Lil personally very much and tried hard to seem pleased.

"Are you staying in London?" asked Lil.

"Only at an hotel, for a few days; we had to come over on business, and we are going back to Paris immediately."

"Where are you staying," said Lil; "may I not call?"

Thus "cornered," Mrs. Mainwaring gave her address; and then, saying Adelaide was tired, hurried away in no very good humour.

Lil said nothing to Charlie, who had been compelled to follow her and offer his civilities also. She sat in the carriage with closed eyes; and when they reached home went straight to her room.

Her purpose was growing strong within her. Its presence gave her strength; she was determined to do no terrible deed, rashly. She would see, to the full, with her own eyes, its necessity.

The next afternoon she went alone and called at the Mainwarings' hotel. They were at home. Mrs. Mainwaring was writing letters, Adelaide was sitting with a book on her lap, and her eyes fixed far away. She rose and greeted Lil with almost passionate affection; and then relapsed immediately into the same still mood. It seemed to have become habitual. Lil asked them to dinner the next evening. Mrs. Mainwaring immediately began to make excuses, but Lil interrupted her. "Dear Mrs. Mainwaring," she said, "you told me how much you would like to meet my father; well,

now there is the opportunity, don't refuse me. I am just going to make some calls, and will get a few really nice people to come."

Mrs. Mainwaring's society-loving spirit found this hard to resist. She hated hotel dinners and dull evenings, and hardly any of their friends knew them to be in town. Surely, at a dinner party, with a number of people there, there could be no harm?

She accepted. Lil rose to leave at once, for she had to go and secure her other guests. She kissed Adelaide when she went away, with the strangest feeling of awe and wonder at the thought of the future which lay before them. What would it be?

Lady Warrington was always most agreeable to Lil now. She had no engagement for the next evening and agreed at once to come and bring Brough with her, so Lil's mind was at rest on that point; Brough was certain to appear in time and with a necktie tied to perfection. When he went out on his own account, these details were matters of uncertainty.

Her other guests secured, she went home; there was a red spot on each cheek when she looked in her glass. What wonder! She had determined that to-morrow was to seal her doom.

What did she want?

To see them together again; to try once more whether she was deceived!

CHAPTER IX.

THE house looked charming on the evening of the dinner ; Lil had exercised all her artistic taste upon it. The rooms were beautiful in colour, and the air was sweet with the scent of flowers. As she went into the drawing-room to await her guest she paused a moment before a mirror, where she was reflected above a bank of ferns. She was dressed well ; her hair fell away from her forehead like sunny silk ; her cheeks were flushed. She looked her best, as she stood there, mistress of a beautiful home. "It is all mine," she thought, looking at the pretty room reflected in the glass. Just then she saw that Charlie came in at the door behind her. She did not move ; she looked still into the glass. "And he is mine !" she was saying to herself. He walked away from her, towards the fire ; and then she turned and covertly watched him, while she opened and shut her fan without noise, yet with a violence that bid fair to shatter the thin ivory. For the first time since her marriage she felt herself to be absolutely separated from this man. She had a purpose in her mind which he must never know ; which

must be hidden from him always. Never before had she kept a secret. She had thought it impossible. Impossible! What is impossible to a woman hard driven?

The guests came all in quick succession, while Lil's cheeks were still hot, and everyone told her how well she looked. She greeted her father with a surreptitious hug. What a delight it was to have this dear burly Bohemian to whom she might cling under all changes of sky. At least she could not be unfathered!

Brough was under orders to make himself agreeable, and to talk well; moreover he was in a good humour. He thought Lil looking well, her house charming, and the wine was good. There were some other good talkers there also, and the little dinner was one of those pleasantly merry ones where everyone is pleased and amused. There was a great deal of quiet laughter broken sometimes by a brief outburst from Brough; he never could reduce his laugh to the proper social level any more than his ideas.

After the first greeting Charlie and Adelaide never spoke, interchanged no glance. Both faces were masked, and the smiles upon them were as lifeless as those of masks. Lil observed them unceasingly from under her long lashes, with devouring eyes. O, what a watch both had set upon their own words and looks! Could it be maintained?

After dinner there was music. Lil had secured some distinguished amateurs. All the while she fulfilled her office as hostess and kept the ball rolling, she was watching—two people only! Adelaide sat alone. She no longer formed a centre round which admirers naturally gathered. She had shut up her charms; the attractions of her sweet voice and manner, and the wealth of her fertile mind, all were unseen, unheard. She seemed too languid to speak; and those who were drawn to her by her face, found only disappointment in store.

Charlie saw this, too—saw her sitting alone—though he never turned his eyes towards her. Lil, moving here and there, watched him—saw the irresistible magnetic power at work. It drew him steadily in one direction, draw back how he might. Lil, unseen, unnoticed, contrived to follow his course. When at last he was at Adelaide's side, she was standing behind them—not near enough to hear them speak, but near enough to watch their faces. She was hardly able to stand, yet her eagerness was so great she would not go back a step to find a chair. She was near the fire, and she put her hand on the mantelshelf to steady herself. Charlie sat down on the couch by Adelaide's side, and began to talk to her with his eyes on the ground; she replied without raising hers, and, apparently, with the most languid manner. But her hand

trembled so, Lil could see it, that suddenly, and without knowing that she did it, she dropped the fan which she held. Charlie stooped and picked it up, and gave it back to her. Something in this momentary contact broke the spell which seemed to be on them both—their eyes met—and for a long delicious moment the vivid fire of love lit those fervid glances. Words were not merely unnecessary, they would have been intrusive. When the emotions are instinct with life, they pour themselves through those “luminous windows.” To Lil it seemed as though some actual contact of soul with soul had taken place before her eyes; she felt more of an eavesdropper than if she had overheard actual words. Why, what a living fact was this, straight before her!

Charlie rose abruptly, and went away leaving Adelaide alone. Lil watched him as he crossed the room. He was pale, but there was a strange exhilaration in his face—a brightness as though for one sweet moment he had caught some heavenly warmth.

Lil put her hand to her head. Something was throbbing there wildly. What was she to do, alone, unadvised? Oh, it was impossible that she could carry out her difficult course unaided.

“I cannot do it alone,” she said to herself; “if I do not need an adviser, I must have an accomplice!”

She made an effort, steadied herself, and went across the room to her father.

"Papa," she said, "I want you to give me some hours all to myself one day very soon."

There was something in her voice which made the words sound like an appeal.

"Why, you little witch," he said, "you shall have them whenever you like. You know that, baby!"

"Not in your study," she said; "no, nor in your house; we might be interrupted."

"Why, this is quite exciting! Shall I come here?"

"Oh, no, no, not here! No, I think I should like to go out with you somewhere, into the country, where the air is fresh."

"All right, little woman, I'll manage it. Don't look so terribly in earnest, it shall be done. I must see what engagements I have, and then I'll take a morning and put it at your disposal."

"Soon, papa, very soon?" she said; and now her earnestness struck him more than ever.

"There's something wrong, child!" he said.

"Nothing," she answered. "Hush!" People were coming to her to say good-bye. Very soon everyone was gone, and Lil was left alone in her drawing-room. Charlie had gone downstairs; she knew very well he would not come back to her again. She was alone. Alone! could she ever be so again! Her

thoughts, the dark and horrid shapes of jealous rage and wild despair, which she kept at bay only by using all her strength—they were present, like living beings, whenever she was off her guard. They were there, with importunate voices. “Kill him—kill her—or do like other jealous wives—disfigure her—avenge yourself, and use all this wild force that is rising in you!”

“Ah!” she cried, aloud, as though real voices had spoken in her ears. “All that is old, stale, worn out! Those jealous women were unreasonable fools. What has Adelaide done to harm me! Nothing—except to kill herself, by inches, before my very eyes, out of suppressed love for my husband. She cannot help living, or loving! If I could kill that inhuman law which has made me into the hateful thing I am—a mere millstone round this man’s neck—why, I would do it. But I cannot! I am powerless. I must suffer. Only, great heavens!”—and in the intensity of her feeling she sank on her knees there in the middle of the room, and raised her hands in entreaty—“give me the strength to prevent their suffering too! Shall those two lives be killed for me? No, it shall not be, I will evade this hideous bondage.”

But how? It seemed impossible. Yet there was a thought forming, and growing more and more distinct.

“Make the door on a woman’s wit, and it

will out at the casement ; shut that, and 'twill out at the key-hole ; stop that, and 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney."

Like Rosalind, Lil was banished ; like Rosalind, she must learn the lightness and agility of a woman's wit. But she was leaving behind her the romance of her life. For her, there could never again be any thought of love. Stern deeds were all that lay before her. The cold resolute action of shutting a door which would bar all light and life from out her existence.

But she had drunk so deep of misery, that to feel there was a chance of shutting that door—of barring herself away from all she loved—excited her as though some long-looked-for release from prison were before her. She walked about the drawing-room as though it were her prison cell, and she had got a breath of coming freedom ! Ah, what dungeon of a Russian prison could be more terrible than this flower-scented drawing-room ? This unhappy prisoner stood there, fast bound by an iron law to preserve the appearance of love when love lay dead !—to look contented before the world, and to carry on the mockery of married felicity ! What physical bondage, she thought, can mark so deeply as one which hurts the very soul ?

Charlie stood immovable between these two women. He could not act if he would ; what could he do ! Such a woman as Adelaide

was unapproachable in any fashion which was possible to him! He knew, since he met her eyes, liquid with love, that she had given herself to him in spirit; that she, too, suffered. The sense of this was intoxicating; it went to his head like wine. But in the very midst of this fever of delight he was steadied by the consciousness—not to be ignored for a second!—that she was as far removed from him as the stars of heaven. Her own keen, subtle delicacy shrouded her like a veil; he knew that she would never let him look into her sweet eyes again, or see her fair face unhidden by a mask. She was as sweet and pure as mountain snow, and that purity which was her most fragrant charm was upheld by a steady strength of character. He could but stand aside and tremble at the consciousness that against his will he was momentarily wronging her in loving the sweet memory of her face. Then she was guarded by a mother who lived with the fear of the world before her eyes, and who watched her daughter with that suspiciousness born of a radical disbelief in human nature. She needed no Cerberus; her own strength and innocence were far more certain defenders; but still Cerberus was there.

Even if he had it in him to offend her by the sight of a love he was not free to offer her, Adelaide belonged to that order of women who are totally unapproachable save by a straight route.

So that he was powerless here. The only power he had was to wring his wife's heart; and this some men would have done remorselessly, and found in it some consolation for their own disappointment. But Charlie was made of different stuff from this. All the passion of his being was for Adelaide; but that could not destroy his tenderness for Lil. Until so lately how dear she had been to him! —it was difficult even now to separate her wholly from himself even in thought. Their beings had become so blended that it was strange to feel them pulling away from each other, and reaching out in different directions. Lil had no longer any power over him; the thought of her brought no gladness with it now, but only the heavy sense of a terrible blank. She had been his love; she was not now! Perhaps if she had only been his love, he might have turned against her, as men can against women whom once they have adored. But though love may become hatred, it is not so easy to convert friendship into enmity. Lil had been so much to him beside his wife. She had been his most intimate friend, his dearest and most congenial companion, his adviser, his cheerful and unfailing helper in all things large or small. Because he loved another woman with a passion more powerful than that which Lil had inspired in him, as a man's love is stronger than a boy's, was it possible he could forget the gentle comrade-

ship of years? If Adelaide's love had been given to him as freely as the scent of a flower, he would have turned from it rather than insult and wound his wife, endeared to him in so many ways. It was impossible for him to do a thing which would hurt her! Because he could not give her his love, it was all the more needful that he should give her what else he could. At least, he might save her from pain.

It was this resolution which made him shrink from being alone with Lil. He knew she must feel keenly that the old tie of love between them was gone. At the least, he could spare her this consciousness. At the least, he could avoid hurting her.

And so he left her alone with her own dark moods and wild thoughts. Furiously she battled with the worser nature which would arise in her, and which gave forth the old ugly cries of hatred and revenge! Till far into the night she walked about the drawing-room like some caged creature, battling with the cruel instincts within her, and clinging passionately to the nobler inspirations of her soul. While Charlie was sternly facing his task of passive submission, she was nerving herself for her daring deed by which she meant to overcome the laws which she saw crushing and oppressing her husband.

Her mind teemed with strange suggestions

to-night, her head was full of plans, her woman's wit was busy finding its way out of the difficulty.

And so, while her husband was steadily looking round his prison walls, and measuring his powers of endurance, she was reaching out her hand for the key which was to set him free.

Ah! if he could have guessed it!

The thoughts which made Lil's face white with pain when at last she slept, would have made his white with horror could he but have guessed them.

For her resolve was now made, and her determination fixed as adamant. She could suffer no more herself, she could no longer endure to witness the suffering caused by her existence. She thought she saw a chance of escape from prison; at all hazards, with all her skill, she would make the attempt. If she failed, she resolved, like many another unhappy prisoner, to take her own life rather than go back to her chains. Strange, now that her mind had absolutely accomplished this decision—and it is a frightful one for a human being to come to—she slept peacefully for the first time for a long while.

In the morning she went out immediately after breakfast. She went a long way from her home, and visited several chemists at considerable distances from each other. She

returned home weary but satisfied. She held a talisman in her hand ; if her desperate attempt should fail, she would fall asleep to wake no more upon this sad earth.



CHAPTER X.

TWO days elapsed before Lil heard from Brough—two days which, after this expedition among the chemists' shops, she spent either in walking her room from end to end, or sitting with her head in her hands. She thought hard during those two days. Her plan became definite.

On the evening of the second day she got a little note from her father. It was to say that he and Lady Warrington had an invitation, for the next day, to an "afternoon tea," on board a man-of-war. Lady Warrington hated being in a boat, but he enjoyed going on the water, and loved a ship. Would Lil go with him? They could go down to Gravesend, where the vessel was lying, on a river steamer, by which means they would get as many undisturbed hours out-of-doors as any young woman could possibly desire.

Lil approved of the plan ; it seemed natural, and she was very anxious not to arouse Charlie's suspicions as to her making any confidences to her father.

So she sent to say she would go. And she

passed an even more restless night than usual. Her brain seemed on fire. To-morrow she had to tell her tale, for the first time, to relieve her bursting heart; to explain and justify, to excuse and accuse!

For she had determined to confide fully in her father. As she said to herself, though she might do without friend or counsellor, she could not do without an accomplice! And oh, what a sensation of relief there would be in daring to speak of her misery! Secrecy was foreign to her whole temperament. She was essentially easy, light-hearted, friendly in disposition. Experience was teaching her, as it does most of us, that this is a hard world to live in, where light hearts may be out of place; and that though one may love one's friends, it will not do to lean upon them. She had succeeded in tearing herself away from her dependence on her husband; in standing alone, and taking her life into her own hands. Her father was her one other friend, and to him she was going with indeed a confidence—but, nevertheless, with a determination ready formed and immovable. She had not to ask his advice, she had only to tell him what she meant to do and ask him for his help.

She showed Charlie the note, which, fortunately, was so worded that it did not suggest any desire of her's, except for a day in the fresh air. They had to start early, and she came down to breakfast ready dressed in a

costume of dim green, which set off her bright hair and fair face wonderfully well.

She looked unusually handsome this morning; the fire of a desperate resolve was in her eyes; and her spirit alternately leaped up with the vigour of this piece of determination and melted with love towards the man for whom she meant to give up everything which she possessed. Charlie was startled by the brilliance of her eyes; he noticed how handsome she looked. He watched her, as she sat pretending to eat her breakfast, and the sight of her beauty and the sense of her gentleness filled him with a feeling of remorse. He tried to rouse himself—to be himself—to recall some of the cheerfulness which in the old, old days of happiness made their home-life charming. It was impossible—he could not struggle against an oppressive feeling of despondency and misfortune. The spirit which could kindle his, was not only away—separated—but drooping like an unwatered flower; it cut him to the heart every time Adelaide's wan face rose before his eyes. Not long ago it was Adelaide who bloomed, and Lil who was pale. What could be the secret of the change, he wondered? Lil could not hide the fire in her eyes, nor could he help noticing it.

“Have you got something particularly pleasant to look forward to, to-day, that you have not told me of?” he asked, at last. “It can't

only be going out with Brough that makes you look as you do!"

"Something pleasant!" she repeated; and she rose from the table as she said it. The words affected her as with a shock. Something pleasant!—what a mockery the words sounded in her ears! Should she ever be able to understand them again? Could she ever again be like other people, living in small enjoyments and natural pleasures? "Oh, yes, it is going out with papa—you know how I always enjoy that—and I have been feeling so ill lately, and the air may do me good."

"You have looked ill lately, but this morning you are different. Are you feverish? I can't make you out!"

"Perhaps I am," she answered. "My chest is oppressed—I feel, in this house, as if something was suffocating me! As if I were being crushed! I have always felt so here! It is worse this morning—I can hardly breathe—I am so glad I am going out!"

She hardly knew what she said—her words appeared to form themselves.

"And you have not touched your breakfast!" said Charlie, startled now by her excited manner; "you are not well. I believe you have never got rid of that horrible Roman fever."

Lil laughed—a laugh so unlike her own that it dismayed herself, and she checked it in alarm. "No," she said, "I don't think I ever

have got rid of that Roman fever. Perhaps it will kill me yet. Mrs. Mainwaring knew some one who never shook it off, and who died of it at last, long after the first attack."

Her eyes were fixed on him, and they glittered strangely; her breath came quick and short. No actress ever watched the effect of her words more anxiously.

"Lil," he exclaimed, "you are not fit to go out! Let me send and tell Brough you can't go."

"Nonsense!" she said; "I am all right with papa, and the air will do me good. Send for a cab for me, and I will go at once—good-bye!"

"Without any breakfast?"

"Oh, I cannot swallow anything," said Lil; "let me go!"

Charlie sent for her cab, and then waited for her to come down again, with an unusual feeling of anxiety about her. He could not understand the state she was in. She was back in a very few minutes, her costume complete, dressed in dim green to her fingertips. She had never looked prettier in her life. A spot of colour was in each cheek, a fierce light in her eyes.

"Are you sure you are fit to go out?" said Charlie, anxiously. "Well, if you will go, you must. I hope your father will look after you. Do tell him you have had nothing to eat! He will make you eat, I know, if any-

body can. Stay! you must have your fur cloak with you. Why, you are mad to think of going on the water this chilly weather with no wraps, and when you are so delicate!" He sent a servant for her cloak and put it into the cab with her.

"Goodbye!" she said, as the cab drove away. She was indeed in a state of unnatural excitement. It seemed to her that she was behind the slowest horse that had ever been between the shafts of a hansom. It appeared ages before she reached Brough's house. He was standing on the doorstep, looking out for her.

"That's right, baby," he said, in his big, jolly voice. "In plenty of time. Isn't it 'perfect weather?' and, by Jove, don't we look stunning to-day! Come in, Lady Warrington hasn't done breakfast yet—you know, we never are early. Come and have something; I guess you've done nothing but dash the hopes of the morning with a cup of warm coffee, as Thoreau puts it; women never understand the importance of eating. You may wait for us, cabby."

Brough had the remarkable faculty of making friends with everybody. He was always so hilarious, so genuinely jolly with any companion of the moment that even cabmen admired him—said he was a "gene'lman," and charged him too much, with an agreeable manner born of the conviction that they would

get what they asked. And so they did. Brough had never driven a bargain in his life. Financial matters were out of his mental grasp. Left alone, he got into debt, and paid too much for everything. It was absolutely necessary that he should have some one clever, like Lady Warrington, to arrange these little matters for him.

That lady was sitting over her chocolate in a very pretty morning costume. She gave Lil a frigid cheek to kiss. Though she viewed Lil in quite a different light since she had become an important person possessed of means, she had never really overcome a particle of her dislike of her, born of jealousy. She did not at all admire this arrangement, which Brough had shown unusual obstinacy in carrying out, of his going down the river with Lil. She must, herself, be all-important with any one for whom she cared ; and she felt very very angry when she found that it made a sort of highday and holiday for Brough, to take Lil out alone with him.

While he made his final preparations, which consisted in writing an urgent letter in a great hurry, and trying to decide which of two red-ribbed straw hats looked the cleaner, Lil sat and talked to Lady Warrington, answering her remarks rather at random.

“What’s the matter with the girl?” thought the shrewd little lady, “she is queerer than usual.”

At last, a general consultation having been held over the straw hats, and the letter sent to the post, Brough was ready. They got into the hansom and drove off for London Bridge. Lil slipped her hand through Brough's arm, and leaned back with a sigh of relief.

"When are you going to begin talking, baby?" asked Brough, presently.

"Not now," said Lil; "I want to think till we get on the boat."

"I don't think a woman could maintain the mental effort of thinking for such a long time as that," remarked Brough, gravely. "However, you can try, if you like."

Brough was in one of his happiest moods. He enjoyed everything.

"I love this dark old river," he said, as they went down to the steamer; "it has a charm all its own, here, where its waters are so muddy that the sun converts it into a sort of liquid gold. The busy life of the old river does me good, it smacks of the sea; there is a taste here of straightforward life amid the elements. Come, Lil, are you in a dream, or are you listening?"

"Both, papa," said Lil. Their friendship was one of those delightful ones which admit of such an answer. "Go on talking," she said, "I hear, and I enjoy, but I can't answer."

"Mysterious young woman!" said Brough, rubbing his nose, which was a habit of his

when perplexed. But he soon forgot Lil, in the delight of an idle morning, out in the sunshine, among the barges. How jolly, when the steamer was off, to know that there was nothing to do but sit i' th' sun, and look at the changing river banks and the manifold life on the stream. None but hard-working people know how to thoroughly enjoy such brief holidays. Brough could hardly keep still a minute. He was like a boy let out of school. He wandered from one side of the steamer to the other, leaning over to look at the boats and barges.

When, at last, they passed some big ships that had the air of wide ocean about them, he grew quite excited. There is something adventurous in the idea of a seafaring life which will excite the imagination of those to whom the reality would be intolerable.

At last it dawned upon him that Lil had become a statue—that she no longer listened to him—that something of which she was thinking made her blind and deaf. He came and sat down by her.

“Now, then, old lady,” he said, “I’ve worked off my effervescence and am ready to listen. Suppose you begin to talk.”

“I want to tell you a story, papa,” said Lil, in a low voice, “but I don’t know whether I can ever begin it!”

“Oh, yes; you’re a capital hand at a story. Let me light this cigar and get my hat at right

angles with this infernal wind, and then you must begin."

He lit his cigar, and settled himself down at her side.

"Now, baby, go ahead!"

Thus invited, Lil felt that her hour had indeed come. She clasped her hands tightly in her lap, as if their clasp could keep her voice steady, and began. At first she trembled and hesitated, but soon she gained strength.

She told him a story about two people who loved each other—who married young, and who lived many years of happiness together. By degrees, her story grew more detailed, more full of life. She showed how, as time passed on, the love which had bound them together had loosened and grown less. "They were too much alike, I think," she said, "too much alike! There was not enough of the unknown to keep alive the newness in their affection. It faded, and grew dim. They became more like an attached brother and sister than husband and wife. So far, this is no uncommon story, is it, papa?"

"Perhaps not," he said; "but go on."

She went on, and gradually he grew absorbed in listening. It is not often one hears a heart history from the lips of one who has suffered it. Lil's words were hot, and instinct with life as words of one under torture. She showed the growth of the new love in the man's heart—how the wife saw it—how she had battled

with the devil of jealousy—how she had fought it down, and then faced the position with something like cool judgment. She told how then this wife discovered that the others were suffering even more than she was; that their determination to respect her and themselves was sapping their very lives. She told how the wife, possessed by the new thought that she it is who is the one out of place—the one who creates the misery—wonders if she is to kill two lives? “No, rather kill myself!” she says; but then she does not want to die.

“Oh, papa,” said Lil, “why should a young woman, still full of life, have to surrender it because her husband is tired of her? Surely there is some other way of escape!”

She described how the idea of divorce occurred to this unfortunate woman; how she investigates the possibility of such release, and finds it impossible without such publicity and misery as no one of the three would willingly cause the others. Moreover, there was the appalling fact that the necessities of the divorce law put them outside its pale; no one of them was capable of giving that law any power over them.

“Oh, papa, is it not cruel,” she cried, “that such people as these I am talking of, have no redress, no chance of liberty, no escape from leading false lives! It is a hard law which gives freedom only to those who take licence?”

“Go on with your story,” said Brough, in a

very subdued voice. It quieted Lil, and she went on more steadily.

“She cannot kill herself—this woman—for many reasons. One is, that the commonplace expedient of suicide would be a cruel deed to do; it would remove her, certainly, but then it would distress these others who are so tender of her by showing them how she has suffered. It would poison their love with remorse and perhaps remove its sweetness for ever. This can only be the last resource, the result of absolute despair. For, strongest argument of all, the woman does not want to die—yet! She is too young and strong for that. But her pride will not let her live, a burden to the man who once loved her. Perhaps you will say she is too proud, papa, but can a woman be too proud? Why should she submit to this hideous position? People seem to think it very dreadful for a woman to let a man maintain her who loves her, but to whom she is not married; for my part it seems to me more wicked, more ghastly, for a woman to let a man keep her who does not love her, even if they were married twenty times over. I have thought—oh, how I have thought about it, night and day!—and I am sure it is the more wicked thing of the two.”

“Yes, I knew you would regret, some day or other, that you had ever learned to think,” remarked Brough, grimly. “But go on, I want the end.”

"There is no end yet—that is to come!" cried Lil. "Tell me what such a woman should do—a woman who cries out to Heaven against the injustice of her legal bondage to a man who is sick of her—a woman who only desires freedom, that she may live a life of her own, without a sense of sin and degradation upon her, without the knowledge that she is poisoning the lives of others whom she loves, who only wants to escape quietly, without distress or scandal, leaving her husband with room to breathe freely—what should this unhappy woman do?"

"Dramatically speaking, she has but little choice. She may kill the others, and be a murderess; kill herself, and be a suicide; or, if she objects to crime, she might efface herself."

"Ah!" cried Lil, with a wild, panting eagerness, like that of a terrified bird when it is caught and struggles in the hand of its captor, "that is the only way. Help me to do it, for I am that unhappy woman."

"You are not in earnest?" asked Brough, the strangest look on his face, the strangest sound in his voice.

"Cannot you see that I am in earnest?" cried Lil, in a kind of fury. "How can you ask me such a question?"

"Because I had a kind of forlorn hope that you might say no—that you had been trying your dramatic powers on me. Then is all this true, and of *yourself*?"

"It is, indeed," said Lil.

He looked at her face, which was bowed low. He saw something there which made him know she spoke the truth. He got up suddenly and walked away. He leaned against the side of the boat and groaned.

"Oh, Lord, Lord," he said aloud—he always very easily forgot the trifling fact of other people's existence—"why do such uncomfortable things happen?"

"What's the matter, sir?" asked a man who was close beside him. "Feel ill?"

"Feel ill? I should think so!" replied Brough, and walked away, leaving his sympathetic friend to gaze after him in amazement.

After a while of walking about, and giving vent to occasional groans, to the surprise and consternation of bystanders, he recovered himself sufficiently to go back to Lil. She was sitting motionless where he had left her.

"Now, baby," he said, "why have you told me all this after hiding it away for so long? What do you want?"

"To escape," she replied, without raising her head.

"But you cannot, and you know it! The thing is impossible! You promised to love, honour, and obey, and so on, and you've got to do it."

"I never promised to make my husband miserable by my existence, and to let him get thinner and more wretched every day, without

making an effort to save him! It is because I still love and honour him that I desire to escape and let him be free."

"But you cannot do it. Why worry yourself into fiddlestrings over an impossibility? You cannot set the man free except by dying, and you don't want to do that."

"I do not want to commit suicide; but why should I not die naturally?"

"What under heaven do you mean?" asked Brough, trying to see her face, which she still bent down.

"Why should not Mrs. Newman—Lil Newman—your daughter, and Charlie's wife, die naturally, and without any trouble? That would cause no great distress to anybody. Charlie will be very sorry at first, but he would soon get over it. There would be nothing to fill him with remorse; I know what tortures he would suffer if he thought he had driven me to suicide. And why should not this human organism which sits here beside you, after ceasing to be Lil, become somebody else altogether?"

"Oh, I see where you are," remarked Brough, and then was silent. After a minute or two he said—

"Have you realised what that means?—the dangers, the difficulties?—the giving up all your friends and connections?"

She looked up quickly.

"Your daughter would be dead! but this

poor little creature that sits here—would you not still be her friend?”

He put his big arm around her, and held her close to him, by way of reply.

“Then I don’t want anybody else,” said Lil, feeling herself fully answered.

“The assembled multitude think we are sweethearts,” said Brough, presently; “what a mockery! But, my dear little baby, my darling little Lil, you can’t really mean to carry this thing out?”

“I am absolutely determined,” “she said, raising her head and looking him straight in the face now. “I can live no longer in that house: I will not disgrace the name of love by continuing to be the wife of a man who loves another woman. The only doubt is, whether you will help me, or whether I shall do it alone? I think it will kill me if I do go out of my life quite alone!”

“You can never be alone while I live, baby; you know that. But this idea of yours, though it might do in a play, is utterly impossible in real life.”

“What else can I do? I cannot live with him any longer, as I have told you; my whole womanhood rebels against being the monstrous thing I am in his house. For love’s sake I would suffer anything; I would endure all changes with a man who loved me, but I cannot, and I will not, be the kill-joy to a man who does not. Think,” she said, with a sudden

softening of voice and manner, "how long I have had his love. Can I expect more? I do not, I cannot blame him. Perhaps if some other woman were in my place, I should say she ought to stay in it, and make three lives wretched for the sake of keeping the laws. But I am no heroine. I cannot do it, and I will not!"

Brough listened to this passionate outburst, and sat a moment in silence afterwards. Then he said, very earnestly—

"Child, you are over-excited; your imagination is hard at work, and makes things seem more terrible than they are. Your idea is one born absolutely of madness. If you will wait till your brain clears, and you are cool, you will thank me for telling you this."

"What!" exclaimed Lil, drawing back and looking fearfully into his face. "Are you going to desert me? A moment ago you said you would help me, and now you speak like this!"

"It will be the best help I can give you, child, to show you the common-sense view of the affair. You are married, and you can't help it. There's no getting out of the situation without flying in the face of society."

Lil turned on him with an expression, he, at least, had never seen on her face before.

"Who taught me to think for myself, and not to obey the dictates of society? You! Who told me that laws were made for the

convenience of men, not men to be broken by laws? You! Who showed me that the true way of living was to follow one's own highest standard of right and wrong without attending to conventionalities and common-place views? You! Perhaps," she went on, less vehemently, but more bitterly, "if I had been taught by women and learned that to be a capricious slave was my right vocation, I should submit to be the thing I am in Charlie's house. But you taught me that to be an honest rebel was more righteous. That is all I am now. I only ask for justice, for myself, for my husband."

"My child," said Brough, very gently, "you both married of your own free will."

"Our own free will!" repeated Lil. "How old was I? Seventeen! What did I know of the world, of life, of the changeableness of human nature? What right had I to take vows for a lifetime? If Charlie and I ever did wrong, it was in taking those vows before that altar; and for that I pray Heaven may forgive us!"

There was something in the tone in which she said these last words that gave Brough a heavier sense of how terribly in earnest she was, than anything else.

"But it is done," he said, after a moment's pause; "it cannot be undone. You cannot escape, so put the dangerous thought out of your mind."

"I will escape!" she said, doggedly. "I am driven by despair. You have seen many things, but, perhaps, you have never seen a desperate woman. To live as I have been living is far worse than death—it is committing moral suicide."

"Child," said Brough, in a voice of pain, "believe me, you are over-excited."

"That is possible," she answered, "but it does not alter the facts. Look here, papa; inside my dress I carry with me, fastened round my neck by a chain, a phial. It is more precious to me than all the money in the Bank of England would be, if that were mine. You can see in my face what it holds: it holds my death. I have sworn to myself by all that I hold sacred, that if I fail in my attempt to escape, I will die. I am absolutely desperate. I am prepared to drink this at any moment when I see I cannot struggle any longer against my hideous fate."

He looked at her in silence. Either this was not Lil, or he had never known his daughter until now. Lil's voice had lost its passion, her face its fire, when she spoke of this final resource of hers. Her voice was cold and steely; her face was pale and rigid. Icy, impassive, she sat there, her eyes on the deck, her hand resting on her bosom where her talisman was hid. A chill ran through Brough's veins—a chill of horror. He saw in that face, that attitude, something terrible.

He recognised that under pressure Lil was capable of becoming a criminal. She had an enormous capacity for love, for self-sacrifice ; she had abundance of courage, but she had not that passive endurance which enables women to become domestic martyrs. Lil was capable of being an heroic criminal, and she had reached the state in which the deed appeared easy. Brough saw that written in her cold face ; but he tried to shake off his consciousness of it.

“ You are talking terrible nonsense,” he said, roughly. “ My Lil is not the girl to do a cowardly act like that. Come, face it out, child—face it out ! The least wrong you can do in the position you are placed in will be by remaining quiet.”

“ But I cannot do that,” she answered, in the same impassive voice ; “ it is beyond my strength. Look at me, and see how it has aged me.”

“ You are ill, that is all,” said Brough, looking in bitter distress at her face ; “ miserably ill, and overwrought ! ”

“ I have borne all I can,” she went on, “ and I can bear no more ! A little while ago I thought I had not the courage to die—that I was too young !—but since I found a hope of escape, I knew that death would be easy by comparison with the life I have. I might have borne it a little longer if I had found no hope of escape—but now—oh ! impossible. If I fail, I die ! I am resolved.”

She raised her eyes now, and looked full at him. There was something in them as far removed from health as is insanity, and as dreadful. Brough shuddered. He would have been chilled to meet that look in the eyes of a woman on her way to be executed for the murder of her own child. In Lil's, it was awful! For some moments of a dreadful silence he sat still and numbed. He suffered as from a physical shock.

"Have you any plan?" he said, at last, in a voice so low as to be almost a whisper.

"Yes," she said, beginning to speak quickly. "You and I will have to go out of town together, on the idea that I am ill, and want change. A sudden attack of some kind can easily be simulated—such a death as Adelaide Neilson's, for instance. We should be obliged to take a doctor into our secret; for he would have to give a false certificate of death. If everything were hurried over, by the time Charlie was called on the scene, there might be only a coffin to show him, nailed up—or, safer still, a grave! He thinks I am ill—I see no reason why he should suspect false play."

The tears had rushed to her eyes now, and she was beginning to sob.

"Hush, dear little woman," said Brough, "you must control yourself! Do you not see we are close in? In a few minutes we shall be on the ship. For God's sake don't begin

to cry now. We won't stay long; the dear old Admiral, who was so anxious for me to come down, will give us something to eat and drink, and then, as soon as decency permits, we'll go home again. But you must keep your head till we've got through!"

They were, indeed, just in. There lay the gallant ship, her deck all covered with gay striped awning; and a boat in charge of a ship's officer was waiting to take the visitors on board. Lil controlled herself by a great effort.

"I am all right, papa," she said, "don't fear."

"Don't you see, baby, dear," said Brough, "that this doctor part of the business makes it impossible. No man would peril his reputation in that way; you couldn't get it done. It is impossible!"

Lil said nothing. That last word fell heavily; for she knew that Brough had seized upon the difficult point of the undertaking. She only repeated to herself, "Make the doors upon a woman's wit"—and, resolved to put all her thinking power upon that one point. At present the great thing was to appear as collected as possible; so she tried to rouse her spirit and look quietly round at the brilliant scene, as she followed Brough up the side of the ship.

It was wonderfully pretty, indeed, and for a moment it almost interested her. The deck

was all covered in with bright coloured awning, and over the exquisitely clean and beautiful floor was moving a crowd of ladies and gentlemen; most of the latter, ship's officers in uniform. At one side of the deck they were promenading; on the other, dancing; the band was invisible, being on the lower deck, but the music was good, and very inspiring in this gay oasis on the sunlit water. A crowd of the ship's men stood watching the dancing with most interested expressions on their hard faces.

"I expect the Admiral will be very comfortably out of the way of all this fuss, in his own rooms," said Brough. "Shall we go straight there—I know he's generally got some uncommon good wine—or shall we walk about and look at all these fellows first?"

"Oh, let us walk about a little first," said Lil, "I shall feel better able to talk naturally in a few minutes. The music does me good."

So they walked down the deck, through the promenaders. They attracted a great deal of attention. Brough was always stared at when he went among people; he was so handsome, so tall, with such a sparkle of wit in his eyes. He wore his accustomed black velvet coat (which even to please Lady Warrington he would not discard in the daytime) and the red-ribboned straw hat. With his buoyant stride and breezy air, this man of letters looked

a stalwart giant among the kid-gloved dandies, some of whom, ship's officers though they were, looked mere boy-butterflies. Lil, at his side, so like and so unlike him, such a charming figure in her green dress, with the sun on her bright hair, had a great deal of staring all for herself. She did not observe it. Oh, what a shock it would have given to that decent, gay, social gathering, if they could have guessed the thoughts which filled the minds of these two handsome new comers!

While Lil was looking at the people, Brough was watching her face.

"Baby," he said, suddenly, "we must act in some way, and at once! I do not like your look; you are over-strained."

"I know it, papa," said Lil; "I hardly thought I could live out the last two days."

After that they said no more, but walked quietly down through the laughing, chattering crowd, and back again. Brough had almost forgotten where he was, he was so buried in thought over this new and terrible revelation. Lil had a certain feeling of relief now that another shared her secret thoughts and fears. She breathed more freely than she had done for days, and she looked about her at the faces and the dancing with a certain languid interest. How remote she felt from all these people who looked so gay and content. It was strange to walk among them

and know how near to death and despair her own life lay.

Suddenly she started violently and began to tremble.

"Hold me tight, papa," she whispered, "or I believe I shall tumble down. There is the very man—the very man—the very man!"

"What on earth do you mean?" said Brough, with a momentary feeling that she really was out of her mind.

His first anxiety was to deposit her safely in a deck chair. That done, he asked again, What did she mean? Her eyes had become inturned—she hardly seemed to hear or see him, she was thinking desperately. She took Brough's hand with a sudden clinging action.

"Can I humble myself so? Can I tell him? Oh, what humiliations one may suffer! But I can, I will! He is the very man!"

"Who?"

"Did you not tell me that this ship sails in two or three days for China?" said Lil, whose eyes were flashing now, with the fire of quick determination.

"Yes. But tell me who you have seen!"

"Dr. Swift—my old admirer. He is on this ship; he is in uniform; he must be one of the officers. He has told me, too often, that he would do anything in the world for me. I do not think he has a conscience! I do not think he cares what he does! I know he will do it for me! The ship sails directly. He will

be safe out of England ; he will forget it, perhaps, before he returns ! Oh, if I can only bring myself to ask him ! ”

The sentences came clear, sharp, short ; in a flash she had seen all the possibilities of the situation. The last words were a cry of agony.

Brough grasped her hand tight.

“ My poor baby,” he said, “ this is terrible.”

But he said no more. He did not think she would have the courage to expose her misery to such a man as Dr. Swift. It was a most unfortunate thing that she should have seen him, for Brough’s idea—the only one he could find—was procrastination. He had resolved to sacrifice certain engagements and have a great scene with Lady Warrington in order to take Lil away alone with him for a time. He thought it was just possible that she might recover a more healthy tone of mind away from her husband. That was all the plan he could form, and he had determined to carry it out. Nothing could be more annoying than that anything or any one should turn up to keep Lil to her dreadful idea. He fancied he might turn her mind from it, if he had her to himself, amusing her, never losing sight of her, giving her mind fresh food. He had been making his plans since they ceased talking and stood thinking about them now, a frown on his forehead.

“ You said the ship sailed in two or three

days," said Lil. "Yet it might be done. *I should not go home again at all.* Would you stay with me?"

"Of course," said Brough, uneasily.

Not to return to town now would be much more serious to him than arranging to give up his work for a month. Yet it was not that which caused his uneasiness of manner—he did not think about that. What disturbed him was Lil's frightful intent determination.

"Go and find him for me," said Lil; "I will stay here; I want a minute or two to think in."

Brough said nothing, but walked away from her. He had not the remotest intention of going to look for Dr. Swift; but he, too, wanted a quiet moment to himself. He did not know whether he could "think" in it; he felt utterly bewildered at last. He was entirely at a loss how to act. The most sensible idea that presented itself was to get the boat to land them, and take the first train to town. He must get Lil out of the way of this man Swift; and he resolved to do his utmost to enable her to bear her burden. He wondered perplexedly whether Lady Warrington would be very disagreeable if he took Lil home with him, and, if she was, whether it would matter?

What a horrible situation he was in! and how infernally his head ached, when he had time to notice it!

"I must get something to drink," he said

aloud. He had a rather alarming habit of talking to himself.

He hurried away, and he had hardly got fairly among the crowd before Dr. Swift was at Lil's side. He had seen her the moment she came on deck, and had been watching his opportunity. He did not care to speak to her while she was with her father.

"What a charming meeting, Mrs. Newman!" said the familiar voice in her ear. "After all, Heaven is kind to me. You are the only woman I wanted to see in all England; and when I went over to your cottage and found you had vanished, I thought the fates had turned against me. And now, I meet you on my own ship! And you are looking handsomer than ever. Are you glad to see me?"

She looked at him and succeeded in calling a smile upon her lips.

"I believe I am," she answered.

He had drawn another deck chair close to her's, and was sitting very near her. He was bronzed, handsome, with the same bold handsomeness as of old; a fine man, showy, and effective-looking. Most women would have liked his attentions. Lil shrank from him with horror. Her old repugnance to him was tenfold increased by the feeling that she was about to throw herself on his mercy. His mercy! A man with those bold, ungentle eyes, would have no mercy. But he was her one hope! If she let him go, perhaps Heaven

would deny her any other chance! She knew not where else to look for help. Fate seemed to have brought this man to her for the very purpose of giving her help. She trembled lest her shrinking would be visible. She knew how keen those eyes of his were. She knew, too, how quick his vanity was to take offence.

"I am very glad to see you," she said. "It is a long time since we have met. Did you really go to try and find me? We have been abroad—and—we are living in London now."

We! That dreadful plural! Had she spoken naturally? She wondered how that was possible, for it seemed to her that Charlie and his home were separated from her by a great gulf. It was only this morning she had come out—only this morning!—but the discussion with her father, and, still more, the opportunity that was before her—the bare possibility that she might never return!—removed this morning a whole age from her. She already felt herself to be out on her perilous voyage—out in the world—alone—playing in a drama that was tragic because it was real.



CHAPTER XI.

“**I** EXPECT there’s a spread somewhere below deck,” remarked Brough, very audibly, as he proceeded to search for a way down.

“Certainly,” said one of the ship’s officers, who was standing near him, and who, unaware of Brough’s habit of thinking aloud, accepted the remark gracefully enough, as addressed to himself; “Come down with me and have some champagne.”

Thus invited, Brough descended, in charge of his hospitable new friend. He found a pretty “spread” below decks; a table, bright with flowers and gay groups gathered here and there, eating sandwiches and drinking claret-cup. A black steward offered Brough some claret while he was admiring the scene; he took a glass and drank it off. He was absolutely parching. But, in the meantime, his entertainer was opening a bottle of champagne, and now urged Brough to come into his state-room, and partake thereof. The officers’ tiny little dens were all converted into reception-rooms, the minute dressing-ables were covered with snowy cloths, on

which private little lunches could be spread. Many of them held one or two visitors, for the officers' hospitality was as large as their accommodation was small, and lady visitors were delighted to be entertained in these minute state-rooms, and observe how exquisitely clean and neat they were, and what womanish refinements a sailor is capable of.

Brough insinuated his big form carefully into a dainty den that looked to him very much like Lady Warrington's dressing-room, only incredibly smaller. He was immensely interested in all the little devices to save space and increase comfort which the officers had contrived, and, for a moment, Lil and her mortal troubles passed out of his mind. He drank some glasses of champagne, and amused his host very much by his conversation. Suddenly, all his bright humour departed as suddenly as it had come. He saw something which inexpressibly startled him. Through an open doorway, on the opposite side of the saloon, he caught sight of Lil, sitting on a low chair in an officer's state-room; she held a glass of champagne in her hand. A man in officer's uniform was leaning over her, speaking earnestly. Her face was towards Brough; it wore the strangest look he had ever seen upon it. Suddenly, she put the wine from her, and raised both hands to her throat as if some pain were there. Brough knew that action; he had seen her do it when a child,

and she was overwrought with excitement. He made a step towards her. If only she would drink that wine! Lil caught sight of him, and instantly put out one hand, with an imperative gesture, which made him understand he must not come near her. As he turned away she gave a sigh of relief. If he had come upon the scene and discovered what words these were Dr. Swift was saying to her, he might have done some damage to that valuable officer, and, worse still, have ruined her hopes.

“Hush!” she said, as soon as she found some voice to speak with. “You mistake me—I have not made myself understood—”

“I will leave the Navy—I will live where you like. You know your power over me. I believe you could awake ambition in me. You excite me as no other woman does. With your love I should be a different man.”

“My love!” repeated Lil. “Are you unable to understand plain English when I tell you that I can love no one but my husband?”

“And you want to leave him?”

“Yes.”

“You do not speak plain English. You speak enigmas. What has he done?”

“Nothing! Oh, Dr. Swift, do not question me! Be generous. I cannot tell you everything—not here—not now—not to you. But you will help me?”

“You know it. I have told you long ago

you can command me. But what is it you suggest? It will be a horrid trick, a painful masquerade, this plan of yours. Far better get a divorce."

"I cannot," said Lil.

"But you can let him get one!"

"What do you mean? You speak enigmas now."

"It is difficult for a woman to get a divorce, but not so hard for her husband. Take my admiration, my adoration, let me be your slave, let me love you as you have never been loved yet, and you will soon have your freedom. It is a hard price to pay for the liberty you so desire, is it not? a hard price, to let yourself be loved!"

"You cannot—you do not understand me! I would sooner live the life I do than be so false to him—to myself—to you! Why should I make of you a tool by which to gain my freedom? I would use no man so. If I loved you, it would be another matter. I have told you I do not. I have a too constant heart, I suppose. I still love the man whom I swore to love."

"I don't ask you to love me; I only ask to be allowed to love you. Accept my admiration, endure my society, put up with the passion which you so scorn, and you shall very soon be free."

A bitter, mocking look came suddenly into Lil's face; a look which was new upon her

features. She turned her head away from Dr. Swift as she spoke.

"I think I know more about this sort of thing than you do, after all. You have forgotten the damages. How would you like to pay those?"

"Your husband wants his release, as I understand, and, in such a case, the money matters are easily arranged."

"It is for such men as you that this law makes loop-holes," thought Lil to herself.

"It is very easy, you see," explained Dr. Swift, "to take a thing in public and hand it back in private."

Lil needed no explanation. She had studied the unpleasant subject sufficiently to know what he meant, but she did not reply directly. She felt afraid that she might offend him, for she could only say that neither herself nor her husband would stoop to such a falsehood. He thought he had made an impression, and began to speak again, but she interrupted him passionately.

"Don't say another word!" she exclaimed. "The horror of a public divorce case would kill me. I would rather go to my death a shorter way. Besides, he would never drag me into a Divorce Court! And, believe me, when I say, once for all, that I intend to keep those marriage vows; I respect and esteem the man with whom I took them. He has done nothing to forfeit my love, my esteem. I will do nothing to forfeit his!"

"You are trying to put yourself outside of the pale of ordinary humanity," said Dr. Swift, with the savage sound in his voice which, until now, had not made itself heard during this interview. "You might as well give up the attempt gracefully ; it must come to grief in the end."

"Then you will not help me?" said Lil, half rising, and, as she did so, turning her face up to him. He looked into her eyes a moment.

"You know I will. You have only to look at me, and I will do anything you want. Perhaps I shall not always be unrewarded. Even a slave may get a smile sometimes."

She turned to him, and a smile broke over her face.

"Now, you are kind," she said. "Now you are my friend. Oh, Dr. Swift, if you knew how my heart leapt when I saw your face to-day—when I remembered how you had promised to be my friend!"

"I would rather be your friend than nothing," said Dr. Swift, dropping his bold eyes as he spoke. He knew there was an expression in them which it would be better she should not see.

"Then help me!" she said, clasping her hands piteously, and speaking in a voice which might have melted a man of iron. Swift, with all his faults, was not made of iron, and he had a passion for this woman.

“Tell me, now, exactly what you propose,” he said, “and what you want me to do.”

“Will no one overhear me?” said Lil, in a state of breathless emotion.

“There is no one near enough,” said Swift, speaking quickly. “Pray go on.” He had caught some of her excitement.

Just then Brough passed again, and looked to Lil for guidance. She again signed to him to leave her. He walked off, and sent in his card to his friend the Admiral. He was received with delight into a circle of middle-aged gentlemen, who, as soon as the door was shut, became hilarious and witty, after a fashion. Brough was welcomed as a great social addition, so he did his best to keep up his reputation. He told stories, made jokes, and kept the room in a roar. There was a sentry on guard outside the Admiral's door, so there was no fear of interruption. The Admiral's little select party was about the most jovial on board. Brough almost forgot his anxieties, and talked his best, and laughed with that hearty, robust shout of laughter which was so infectious. He got into his swing of anecdote (nobody else ever thought of telling a story when Brough was in the vein; he always kept the platform), and the incidents of the last few hours became as a dream in his mind. Sometimes, in great trouble, the brain acts in this way of itself; it will return to events of long ago, and recall

them vividly, while the immediate moment becomes remote. But the reaction is all the more intense for this mental rest; when the mind returns to the contemplation of the present, it is to see it with a greater vividness. So it was with Brough. Suddenly, in the full flow of one of his best stories, Lil's white, agonised face rose before him, with that strange look upon it, and her hands at her throat as though she were choking. His little girl!—his Lil!—the child whom he loved so! Was it possible that she really was suffering like this! He stopped speaking; he had forgotten the end of the story. He made an effort, tried to recall it, but in vain. He rose from his chair abruptly.

“Admiral,” he said, “I am ashamed of myself. I have a lady with me on board, and I ought not to have left her so long. I must go. Your delightful society has made me forget everything else. Good-bye!”

He was gone almost before they had time to realise that he was going.

“Queer fellow, Warrington,” said the Admiral, looking round on the disappointed faces when the door had shut with a slam, and Brough's breezy brightness was gone. “One of the wittiest dogs out, but awfully conceited. This is all put on, you know. He knows we want to hear the end of that story, and he likes to go off in this style and leave us longing.”

But Brough had forgotten the very existence of the Admiral and his friends, although he was dimly aware that the Admiral's Madeira was rather "heady." He had not cleared his brain by his refreshment; on the contrary, it was more clouded. He had not thought of eating anything, and the fresh air was exhausting to a man who had been shut up in London for weeks. The effect of the wine he had drunk was to make him feel idle, indisposed for action or decision of any kind. His one dominant idea was to find Lil and take care of her. Beyond that he resolved he would not take up any immediate responsibility. The "thing was too infernally difficult." He hurried into the saloon with big strides, but presently he caught sight of Lil. She was still in Dr. Swift's state-room. They were talking earnestly. When Brough saw her he began to loiter; this he did for various reasons. As soon as he joined Lil, he would have to rouse himself to find out what she had told Dr. Swift, to exert his energies, and get her home. He wanted a moment of idleness. He had been working his brain very hard, perhaps too hard, for some time; he felt that what he had heard to-day was a greater tax on his mind than the work of weeks. He encountered his hospitable acquaintance who had entertained him in his state-room, and lingered to speak to him. Lil caught sight of him at this moment. Her

face fell instantly. She knew every passing expression of his so well that she recognised at once that he was in no mood to be easily influenced. She caught her breath—glanced at Dr. Swift—hesitated.

“What am I to do?” she said. “Papa will never listen to what we propose, to what I am determined to do. He will insist upon taking me back to town. Oh, help me!”

Dr. Swift thought a moment before he spoke.

“Sham to him,” he said. “It’s your best chance.”

Lil looked bewildered.

“Trust in me,” he said, quickly. “Pretend you are very ill. Don’t take him into your confidence till the telegrams are sent, then he can’t back out. I’ll stick to you all through. Believe me, the fewer accomplices at a given time the better. I’ll send the telegrams if you will tell me what to say. Trust me, it’s your best chance.”

Lil saw it was. It would be impossible to overcome her father’s scruples in that place quickly. She could see plainly, as she looked at him again, that he had, with a faculty peculiar to him, cast off the intensity of her distress from his mind for the moment. He was very, very sorry for her, that she well knew, but he would never be persuaded to help her carry out her terrible resolve in his present humour.

“What shall I do?” she said, in a low voice.

“When you see him approaching, faint, and stick to it. It’s safe enough,” he thought to himself. “Only a doctor would know it wasn’t real, and there’s not another doctor on board ship. I’ll get you through,” he went on, aloud, “if you do exactly what I tell you from time to time. In the meanwhile, use your brains, and tell me what to say to your husband.”

“Tell him not to come down,” said Lil. “Give him some reason why he should not come. If he should, he would ruin all.”

“I will say it would make you think yourself worse than you are, or something of that sort. Well?”

“Tell him,” she said, tremulously, “that I am quite happy and safe with papa, don’t forget. And don’t let all these people come and stare at me.”

“No, no. I’ll shut the door, and no one shall know. Quick,” he went on, speaking imperatively. “Make yourself gelatinous. Fall—I’ll save you. Don’t open your eyes till I give you your cue—“she’s coming round”—and suppress your breathing; keep your lips a little parted.”

Lil obeyed his orders with the alacrity of despair. She had determined, once having conquered her repugnance to taking Dr. Swift into her confidence, to utilise his presence, and act without delay. She was resolved not to lose this golden opportunity. Yet she trembled at

the thought of persuading her father to take her view of it. For her strength had nearly all left her; the excitement she had gone through had worn her out, and the fearful position in which she was placed seemed too much for her to understand. She had spent her energies, and now, in the great moment when all must be decided for good or ill, she clung to her new ally, a man she disliked, with the weakness of despair. It was a frightful instant, that in which she determined to deceive her father and fling her whole confidence for the moment on Dr. Swift. She disliked him more intensely than ever, if that were possible, and yet, in this emergency, she clung to him. He was so strong, so ready to help her, so entirely without scruple. The fact was, he enjoyed it. He felt himself to be playing "second lead," all at once, in a drama that interested him.

Brough's steps quickened; he saw Lil suddenly sway and fall. In a moment he was by her side, and took her from Dr. Swift, who had caught her in his arms.

"She is ill!" he exclaimed.

"I'm afraid so," said Swift. "Shut the door if you can; there's precious little room; but we can't have a crowd here, as there will be if we don't take care."

Brough shut the door; he could hardly turn himself round when he had done so. Lil's face frightened him; it was absolutely

white, and she seemed perfectly unconscious. Her pallor was terrible. The truth was that she was in a state of extreme exhaustion. For days she had scarcely touched food, and to-day she had taken neither meat nor drink. She was so worn out that this enforced stillness was grateful to her. She listened with acute interest to every word that passed, but she was not expected to speak, to plot, or plan. It seemed to her, in her exhausted nervous condition, as if Dr. Swift had taken the responsibility of her deed—as if she had shifted it on to his shoulders. She lay perfectly still and motionless, until at last it seemed to her that she was in a dream, and that all her misery was a ghastly phantasmagoria. At last she began to attend earnestly to whatever Dr. Swift said, looking out for the words at which she was to open her eyes. But they did not come. He got his stethoscope and listened to her heart; and then she felt a mad desire to smile, because she knew he shook his head. But the spasm of mirth which passed over her was like that in a nightmare; it did not penetrate the abyss of trembling misery and fear, which seemed to be all that was left of her unhappy self.

“It will be impossible for her to return to town to-night,” she heard Dr. Swift say, at last. “The best plan I can suggest is to take her on shore to an hotel, and let her stay there till this attack is over. She will not be

fit to move for a day or two; she is in a shockingly delicate state of health. I suppose you will be able to stay with her, Mr. Warrington?"

"I must, whether I can or no," said Brough. "Poor baby! I won't leave her, that is certain. I must telegraph to town."

Brough was completely deceived by this seizure of Lil's, and it sobered and saddened him terribly.

"I know the people in the town," said Dr. Swift, presently. "I think I had better send ashore and have a room got ready for her. Then we will have her carried there, for the noise here will try her dreadfully."

Brough thanked him warmly. Swift seemed so useful and good-natured he almost forgot his dislike for him.

"By the way," said Swift, turning back, "shall I send your telegrams for you?"

"Oh, do; that's a good fellow," said Brough. He took out some letters, and on the backs of the envelopes wrote out two brief messages for editors, and one for Lady Warrington. "Now, for Charlie," he said. This took longer; but he finished it at last, and handed it over to Swift. Lil gave a deep, silent sigh of relief and gratitude when she remembered that Swift knew what to say to Charlie, and would alter the message so as not to alarm him too much. All would be ruined if he should come down. Her heart

trembled at the thought. She shuddered at the idea of failing, now she had gone so far. It seemed to her as if in thus clinging to Dr. Swift she had stepped over some terrible precipice, and now lay stunned at its base. A vast distance appeared to separate her from all her preceding life.

Dr. Swift went away. She understood she was to remain motionless until his return.

It seemed a long time that he was away; in reality, he was not gone more than a very few minutes, but to Lil every second seemed an age. She was beginning to suffer now because Brough was deceived. In her nervous state she fancied this sin of hers larger than any other. She longed to open her eyes and speak to him, but she dared not imperil the plot now that it was actually being carried out. Brough himself was completely unnerved and thrown off his balance by the sight of her miserable state.

At last she heard Dr. Swift's voice; he was in the saloon again. In another instant he was at her side, leaning over her.

"Ah," he said, "that is better—she is coming round."

Lil opened her eyes slowly, and met his full upon her. The consciousness of the secret which they shared was in his; it was evidently a delight to him.

"Thank God," said Brough, in a tone of intense relief.

"Now, Mrs. Newman," said Swift, cheerfully, "we want to try and get you off this noisy boat into a quiet room; do you think you can stand?" He bent over, and put his arm under her head to raise her. Lil obeyed his guidance, and rose up trembling. Her very lips were white now, and she looked ill indeed. She was shuddering to feel herself in this man's power as she was.

She really could hardly stand, and she scarcely knew how she was got to the boat. The sailors were as gentle and kind as if they had been trained to the work. A cab was in waiting close to where the boat landed them, and Lil suffered herself to be lifted into this.

At last they reached the room at the hotel, where all was prepared for her reception. As they entered, Brough was a step in advance. Swift stooped his head to Lil's ear, and said, almost inaudibly, "Faint again." Then he uttered a slight exclamation, and Brough turned to see him holding Lil's apparently lifeless body. They got her on to a couch.

"The exertion has been too much for her," said Swift, gravely. "She is in a frightfully weak state."

He looked so serious that Brough groaned. He cursed, under his breath, the day when she had married and left him, but Lil caught the words, and a shudder passed through her.

Swift sat down and wrote a prescription.

That was an awful afternoon.

Brough left them for a few moments. Swift immediately came close to Lil. "Am I not a good doctor?" he whispered. "How do you like being my patient? Come, Lil, don't be cruel to me after this. Make up your mind to throw over your mad scheme, and come to America with me. Instead of a wretched existence, I would give you a life worth living—"

A knock at the door. "The medicine, please, sir."

Swift took it in, and immediately opened it. He measured out a dose, and, as soon as the door was safely shut again, threw it on the hearth. Then he returned to Lil.

"We would go out of reach," he went on, "and so save all the publicity you dread. You have not travelled, as I have; you do not know the charm of a new life in a new country. All your old miseries would be left behind, and, in a little while, forgotten. And I would only ask you to tolerate me, and let me take care of you."

Lil sighed heavily. To her intense relief she heard Brough at the door.

"Is she any better?" he asked.

Swift took up his *rôle* instantly.

"I'm afraid not."

He drew Brough away to the window.

"I ought to tell you," he said, "that there seems to me cause for the gravest anxiety. The action of her heart is hardly perceptible."

He saw such a look come into Brough's face that an impulse of mercy came upon him. "But rest may do a great deal," he said, "absolute rest. I am not without hope."

"Not without hope!" Brough repeated to himself. "Good heavens!"

He went and sat down beside Lil. She could not bear to think of his silent suffering. She opened her eyes and smiled. She really felt too exhausted to speak, but she made an effort.

"I don't think I'm going to die, papa," she said.

"That's right, baby," said Brough.

A sudden impulse came upon her.

"Papa," she said, very low, "will you refuse still to help me in what I asked?"

"No, baby, no," said Brough. "I'll do anything you want if you'll only get well again."

"Is that a promise?" she said, in a hardly audible voice.

"Absolutely," he answered.

Lil clung to the big hand which he had put on hers. Ah, how low misery brings one," she thought. "How is it possible I deceive him! Perhaps it is no deception in reality. I must be very ill, for I feel like death!"

Her dress had been unfastened at the throat. Brough saw the chain to which she had attached the phial which she had filled with poison. He quietly drew it out, and en-

deavoured to detach it. Lil snatched violently at his hands, and recovered her treasure.

"Give it to me," he said, pleadingly.

"Never!" she said, in a harsh voice. "I may recover!—I may fail!"

Brough rose without a word, and walked over to the window. He looked out without seeing anything. The future was so black it shut out all else from his view. Either Lil would die, or she would consign herself to a living death with him for grave-digger. Which prospect were the darker he could not tell.

And yet she was afraid to confide in him—yet.

The next time she was alone with Dr. Swift she spoke to him of herself.

"You swear you will nail up the coffin with your own hands?"

"I swear it."

"But what reason will you give?"

"That I have made a *post mortem* examination, because of the suddenness of the death. The doctor often puts the body in the coffin after that."

"Yes."

"And I swear to open it again."

"Ah!"

Lil had intended to tell her father nothing of her deception (which preyed upon her mind, strange as it may seem, more than the great deception she was practising on her husband) until after the final telegram had been

sent to Charlie. But, as she met Swift's eyes, her courage gave way. She was afraid of him. She determined that when he had returned to the ship, as he was obliged to do at night, she would tell her father all, and make him promise not to leave her until Swift had sailed.

She carried out this determination late that night.

She asked her father to stay with her and talk a little. She was lying in her bed, looking more like a corpse than a living woman. In a weak voice, broken by the most piteous tears, she told him how her illness had been in great part feigned, and what her plot with Swift was; how she trusted to him, her father, to forgive her and protect her.

Brough said nothing at first. He walked about the room thinking. He saw that if Lil would do what she had done to-day it was useless to try and stop her; she would go on to the end.

"I am glad you have told me," he said, a little coldly. "You wouldn't like to be in that fellow's power altogether."

"I hate him," she said, shuddering, "and I am afraid of him."

"He has consented to perjure himself for you, and risk his reputation. He is a calculating man. He has some object."

"You cannot frighten me," she said. "He is leaving England. I trust never to see him

again. No living soul but you shall know my hiding-place. That shall be my one care."

"I hope it will be successful," he answered, rather drily. "Baby," he said, pausing in his walk, and fixing his eyes on her, "you have not taken the irrevocable step yet."

She understood him. She raised herself in her bed, clasped the precious phial at her neck in one hand, and lifted the other solemnly above her head.

"But I will," she said, in a terrible voice. "I will not turn back. If you desert me, I go on alone, at all risks. If I fail, I will die."

She fell forward on her face. Is it strange, after her imitation of it?—this time she fainted in earnest.

Brough could not leave her all that night. Continually he had to promise not to desert her, to be true to her lie. He did so with a heavy heart.



CHAPTER XII.

NOW well she knew her husband. His first impulse, when he had torn open the telegram and hastily glanced at it, was to join her ; he read it again, and concluded she would like best perhaps to be alone with her father.

The third thought that entered his mind was of Adelaide. She was as far removed from him as she was this morning—as utterly inaccessible—yet, somehow, Lil's absence seemed to leave his thoughts freer. When Lil was with him it appeared like a secret insult to let the vision of Adelaide's face for ever shine before his eyes ; now that he was alone the wrong appeared halved. He longed for Adelaide's presence—not for Lil's absence.

He could not go to his study and shut the door and sit down to his writing-table. He kept wandering about the house, which felt so strange and empty. He went into the different rooms over and over again with a curious feeling growing upon him that the whole thing was a dream—that he would wake soon to find himself Charlie Newman of the clerk's stool, with a cottage and a

charming wife, and a dim memory of Adelaide's face as a face out of a dream.

It was strange, how, the weight of hourly self-repression being taken off him, excitement seemed to enter his blood like a fever. He could not rest, and late in the night he went out and walked about the streets. The air sobered him a little and he went home weary and dispirited. What was this foolish feeling of liberty which had so deluded him? Nothing was changed—only he was alone a little while, long enough to realise his own weakness, long enough to discover how his whole being was becoming enfeebled by a craving for the impossible.

The next morning he came down to breakfast feeling very tired and very bored. "The fact is," he said to himself, as he viewed his languid-looking face in the glass, "I want freshening up. I shall run across to Boulogne. It is a good opportunity while Lil is away; I don't care to leave her alone here."

He said this, aloud, for the benefit of his own ears. He wanted to blind himself and he almost succeeded in doing it. He was in need of some fresh air; and it really did seem an excellent opportunity to run away for a couple of days while Lil was in the country with her father. All this he repeated to the housekeeper; not for her enlightenment, but his own; but still he was glad to find she so fully agreed with him. He was

going through that queer sort of half-conscious acting which most of us feel impelled to indulge in now and then ; and which make a man wonder whether indeed he is an individual, or whether Oliver Wendell Holmes had not some good sense in his suggestion that the human being is an omnibus instead of a private carriage. We speak of talking to ourselves every day, and think nothing of the contradiction in terms ; but when it comes to large matters and we speak of arguing with ourselves, deceiving ourselves, blinding ourselves, then indeed it becomes perplexing.

Charlie was obeying a law of nature. One woman, who had held him in a clasp of love so strong it was difficult to imagine it unloosed, had kept him by her presence, in a certain state of quiet resolution ; her touch removed, her influence gone, and the new passion exerted its full power over him. He was impelled, like an arrow from the bow. But his conscience dared not face this fact ; it looked the other way and would not observe. And so he "made believe" with himself and got the very housekeeper to help him. He had no idea of going further than Boulogne ; that would just give him a taste of the sea.

His bag was packed, and he started. The sea air did him good ; and alone on this boat among a number of people who knew nothing of him, of his ties or his obligations, he began

to suffer from a strange, vague bewilderment between his desires and his sense of duty.

"That way madness lies," he said to himself many a time, and felt half inclined to take the next boat back again and go home to find protection in the familiar surroundings against that self which was overpowering him.

But he did not. He stayed at Boulogne, and thought it particularly uninteresting and uninviting. The next day saw him in the train for Paris. Nature had got her way. And now that she had got it, the better man began to feel ashamed of having yielded to her. All thoughts of the real magnet which attracted him were vigorously put aside. He determined to go and buy some china which Lil had coveted when they passed through; he wondered whether she would like a white cat, and whether it would be a very great trouble to take one across with him. She had admired a pair of bronze candlesticks in a certain shop; he would try to get those for her. He resolved to get her some long gloves, and long mittens; he felt as if he would like to carry Paris home for her. Anything to still that uneasy sense within him of being a weak-minded fool!

The next morning he went out and bought everything he could think of that would please Lil. His room at the hotel became crowded with all sorts of pretty things, from eggshell china to a white cat in a basket.

He stopped short of absurdity, and that was all. Then it occurred to him that he had better let the housekeeper at home know where he was in case of his being wanted. Lil might be really ill, and wish him to come to her! A strange foreboding suddenly filled him and he went in a hurry to telegraph to the housekeeper. He simply had not the courage to write to Lil—from Paris! What would she think? When they met at home and she found he had been to Paris—*without seeing the Mainwarings*—there could be no harm in it.

All this done, he had no occupation but to walk about the streets. At least it seemed so to him! Why did he not go to the Louvre? Because nothing attracted him there! Why did he not go to a hundred and one other places to which other people go? Because he was bewildered by a certain name of a street and number of a house which kept on repeating themselves in his head whether he listened to them or no.

In that street, in that house, Adelaide Mainwaring was living.

Might he not even look at the windows? Could there be any wrong in walking in one street more than another?

He walked up and down the street, for how long he could not tell. He regarded the door as he passed with a feeling of fear; how many times could he pass and not touch

that bell? Was not some tangible though invisible power reaching out from that doorway and drawing him towards it? He was passing it for the hundredth time when a carriage drew up close beside him; the carriage door opened and a lady stepped out. Adelaide Mainwaring was at his side, her hand on that bell which he had so long resisted. It was easy to understand now what he had been waiting for! She saw his face in the lamp-light, and started visibly.

"Is it you, Mr. Newman?" she said, making a heroic effort to keep her presence of mind; "I did not know you were in Paris?"

Even then he might have shaken hands and passed on. But he could not instantly tear himself away from looking at her face, suffused with sudden colour.

"Will you come in," she said; "Mamma will be so glad to see you."

They went upstairs to a drawing-room, where Mrs. Mainwaring was sitting reading. She looked up with a face of amazement when she saw who Adelaide's companion was. She tried to summon her social tact, and to appear pleased, but she did not succeed. Charlie, however, was not aware of what her looks expressed, though he did wish devoutly he could say Lil was in Paris when she asked him!

It is possible for sensation to become so keen that we can give our attention to nothing else. Pain sometimes prevents people

from thinking, or speaking; they are absorbed in suffering. But pain is not the only sensation which produces this effect. Excitement, joy, passion, all are capable of absorbing the faculties by their intensity. The sudden meeting seemed to have swept away the artificial appearance which these unfortunate lovers had before been able to assume; they could not battle with the bewildering sensations which overpowered them. Neither of them knew how the time passed which Charlie spent in that room; neither could have told whether a word had been uttered or not. Passion had its will so far that it crushed every other feeling. No one could have been blind to the emotions which spoke eloquently from the faces of these unhappy ones.

Charlie went away in a dream, hardly knowing that he went, and quite impervious to the indignant flash from Mrs. Mainwaring's eyes. When he was gone, Adelaide sat still and silent as a statue. She often did so now. But the change appeared extraordinary, for but a moment since every curve of her form had speech in it. Mrs. Mainwaring walked up and down the room, turning a furious look upon her daughter when she passed her, a look in which anger and horror mingled.

"Have you not answered Mr. Poyning's letter?" she said presently.

"No," answered Adelaide.

“Go to your writing-table now, and write to him.” Adelaide went to it at once, like an automaton. She took some paper and began to write. “What am I to say?” she asked.

“Accept his offer of marriage decisively; and say we hope to see him in Paris very soon.”

Adelaide leaned back in her chair for an instant as if to draw her breath more easily; but she immediately bent over the table again and went on writing the letter. She gave it to her mother to read, while she addressed the envelope. Then she sealed it up and stamped it. Then she turned and looked at her mother with a face which might have drawn sympathy from a woman of stone.

Mrs. Mainwaring was something harder; she was a woman of the world. She snatched the letter from the table with another glance of horror at Adelaide; and, merely saying “I will see it is posted immediately,” left the room.

When she had gone, Adelaide rose and put her hands to her head with a gesture of wild despair.

“What sort of world do I live in,” she cried aloud, “when my own mother, seeing that I love one man, thinks it righteous to make me marry another whom I do not love? She makes me false to the man I love—to myself—to the man I am to marry. O, hated, detested,

unnatural worldliness, which sacrifices all truth for the sake of appearances !”

Mrs. Mainwaring, having sent the letter to the post, had quietly re-entered the room. She heard these words though they were almost whispered. She came forward and looked at Adelaide, with an expression of distrust and disgust as though her child had become terrible to her. Their eyes met.

These women were perfectly well-bred. They had never quarrelled in their lives, though their dispositions were different as light from darkness.

Nothing was said now. But Adelaide, after meeting her mother's strange gaze for a moment, turned and went away to her room, feeling that indeed she had no mother. From that hour all sympathy was over between them.

Mrs. Mainwaring had now but one fixed idea. Her daughter must be married as soon as possible. She had always dreaded Adelaide's impulsive, emotional character leading her into some difficulty. But she had never anticipated anything so perfectly horrible to her sense of decency and good taste, as that it should betray her into loving a man already married. But this being now visible, and even audibly confessed by Adelaide herself, there was only one course to save her reputation and secure her from further dangers : to marry her immediately. At least none of

their own set had seen anything of this yet; and Adelaide once made Mrs. Poynings, the mother's mind would be at rest!

The only thing that puzzled her was Adelaide's ready obedience. She determined to watch her incessantly. She was so unable to understand her own child that she fancied this creature of impulse, whose face showed every emotion of her brilliant soul, was capable of deceiving her!

She knew nothing of strong emotions herself. She had always lived upon the surface of existence where everything is pretty and pleasant and everyone appears perfectly proper and well-conducted.

She could not guess at the source of Adelaide's ready obedience. She knew nothing of the despair which creates apathy. Adelaide felt herself to be helpless—adrift and astray. She simply gave up a hopeless struggle and allowed herself to be carried along by the current she was in.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning Charlie awoke to a clearer brain and better understanding of his position. He saw that it was simply madness to go and see Adelaide; that it only agitated and distressed her, and bewildered himself beyond bearing. He did not know what to do with himself; whether to start for home at once or not. He ended by getting a horse and going for a long ride in the hope that fresh air would bring back to him some common sense.

It was not till the evening that he returned to his hotel. He found there a telegram awaiting him. It was from the housekeeper at home.

“Come home immediately. There is terrible news.”

Terrible news! Why are women so mysterious—why couldn't she explain!—he asked himself as he hurriedly made his preparations for departure.

Of course he connected this terrible news with Lil. There was no one else of importance to him in the world—except one, here, in Paris! What it could be, he could not

conjecture, except that she must be very ill.

All the way home he tortured himself with wondering how he could have been such a brute as to go to Paris instead of going to her when he knew she was ill. It gradually grew stronger in his mind, the idea that something very strange must have happened. It was so unlike her to stay away from home unexpectedly. And it was most extraordinary for Brough to leave his wife, and his work, in that way. Terrible news!—What could it be?

The rapid journey seemed interminable. But it came to an end at last, and he arrived at his own door.

There were three telegrams awaiting him. They were all from Brough Warrington. The first said "Come immediately. I have terrible news for you." Charlie flung that aside and snatched up another which he could scarcely read for agitation. "Come at once, Lil has been seized with a fatal attack. I fear you will be too late." Charlie stood with this open in his hands—it vanished from before his eyes. He was stupefied.

"There is another, sir," said a voice at his side. It was the housekeeper, who had been in the room all the time. She put the other into his hands.

After a moment the mist cleared from his eyes and he saw the words which were before him.

"You are too late to see her. But do come at once."

"Too late to see her?" said Charlie to the woman who stood by him; "what does he mean?"

"I suppose, sir," said the housekeeper, with the bated breath of awe and pleasure with which such people speak of horrors, "my poor lady has died, sudden-like. It seems wonderful sudden, but I know she did have spasms in her heart, and, poor lady, she has often looked strange lately."

Charlie stared at the woman a moment, bewildered. Was this a fact that she was talking of? He snatched up his hat and was out of the house again in another moment.

Brough Warrington was spending this afternoon in idleness and deep dejection. He was left in a most forlorn position. Charlie did not come. He had promised Lil to stay till he did come. He expected Charlie's arrival momentarily, and he dreaded the interview to the last degree. He had abundance of leisure to reflect on the extraordinary folly of Lil's proceedings; and to wonder how she was bearing her loneliness and misery.

Charlie came at last hurrying in with the wildest look in his face, and the telegrams still in his hand. "Are these true?" he said, holding them up to Brough; "what do they mean?"

"True, yes! Thank the gods you have come; but you are too late."

“Too late?—do you mean Lil is dead?”

“She is gone.” Brough had not invariably told the truth all his life, and he held that in some situations a lie was the better thing. Yet this deception, in which he had been compelled to take a part, cost him a good deal, and he walked away, that Charlie might not see his face. But Charlie was not in a condition to be observant. He felt as if the solid earth had suddenly fallen away from under his feet.

“Tell me something about it!” he exclaimed.

At that moment someone opened the door, and then paused on the threshold of the room. It was Dr. Swift. In reality he had come with a message from Lil to her father! Brough welcomed him, for the first time in their acquaintance, with absolute joy.

“This is Dr. Swift,” he exclaimed, “he was with Lil when—at the last. Most fortunately we met him when she was taken so ill. Dr. Swift, tell Mr. Newman about Lil’s illness. I cannot!”

How differently this was understood by the two men! Charlie saw in it the emotion which was natural; Dr. Swift merely thought Brough, like a coward, was backing out of a difficult part of the business. However, he rose to the occasion. He put on the peculiar air which doctors adopt in such a situation; in which they dexterously mingle professional interest and ordinary sympathy. He related

briefly how he met Lil; how she had been taken ill on the ship; how he had come with her to the hotel and done all in his power for her. He described her illness with so clever a veil of medical jargon that Brough could only listen in admiration.

He cleverly hid behind a safe fact. He said Lil had died of heart disease. The action of her heart was really feeble, and he knew that if she had been examined by any other doctor this fact would be known and his tale would be plausible and easily believed.

"No power on earth could have saved her," he said. "In order to satisfy myself absolutely of that, I made a post-mortem examination."

"And that is why we were obliged to hurry the funeral," said Brough; "you see, my dear boy, we could not have kept the coffin open. It seems horrible to have you come down here and find nothing but a grave! but as you could not be found there was no other course to take."

"Nothing but a grave!" repeated Charlie, in a tone which showed the others that these words had at last forced conviction upon his mind. Until then it had all seemed a dream — an impossible nightmare. These words made it suddenly a ghastly fact.

"I think I had better go, if I am not needed," said Dr. Swift; "I have a great deal in hand, as my ship sails to-morrow."

He bowed himself out of the room, but Charlie neither saw nor heard him. He was repeating to himself—

“Nothing but a grave! Nothing but a grave!” Sometimes the words seemed absolutely senseless—then they started into sudden and horrible meaning.

Dr. Swift gave Brough a look which made him follow him. Brough did so and went with him downstairs. But they did not venture to speak till they were out of the hotel—out in the road, with no one near.

“I have been to say good-bye to her,” said Dr. Swift, “and she wished me to tell you that she is quite well.”

“Do you say that, or is it only her message?”

“Oh, she is well now, and will be for a little while. But her nerves are utterly overstrained, and with her excitable temperament it will be a long time before this will wear off. I think her mind will go if she is alone much and with nothing to do. Occupation and society would keep her from going mad; nothing else, that I know of.”

“Good Heavens, what am I to do?”

“I don’t know. But I thought it right to tell you the truth. Save her if you can. Good-bye—I must go—I have used my last minute.”

He was gone. And Brough Warrington walked up and down the road a while, before

he could prevail upon himself to return to Charlie, cursing his fate in good set terms.

He was thus engaged when Charlie himself appeared at the door of the hotel. He looked haggard, half-a-dozen years older than he had looked an hour ago. He approached Brough slowly.

“Take me to this grave!” he said, in a low voice. Brough led the way without a word. They went to the churchyard, and there Brough pointed out a new made grave. Beneath that freshly-heaped mound, there was, as he knew, a coffin weighted with lead; while Charlie believed that there lay the body of his wife. Brough stood there, thinking over that scene in the bedroom at the hotel when Dr. Swift turned the undertakers out of the room and said he preferred to move the body himself, when he and Dr. Swift hastily put the weights in the coffin, and put in, too, a great roll of linen which they had arranged in the bed to look like a dead body. At this moment Charlie was reproaching himself wildly for his absence from that death-bed! He pictured it, too, in his mind—he knew that Lil’s faithful heart would yearn passionately for him at such a moment—he knew how she must have longed to have him beside her—and his grief had the sharp sting of self-reproach in it which makes grief so much keener. He stood a moment looking at the grave, thinking of this; and, suddenly, as he

realized how his love had gone from her, and how gentle and unreproaching she had always been, he burst out into sobs and tears. Brough turned and fled ; the sight was more than he could endure ; he rushed, he knew not where, only he avoided the streets, for he felt as if he could not endure to meet people. At last he stopped, in a quiet corner, and drew breath.

“Good God !” he said to himself. “It is too ghastly.”



CHAPTER XIV.

WHETHER a man can ever know the deep despair and horror which is contained, to a woman, in the word loneliness, it is difficult to guess. Women, naturally dependent in disposition, have this tendency increased and fostered by custom. To a woman it seems a hardship to stand alone in the world, even if she has no other trial in her lot. It is a matter of infinite difficulty to make her understand that she is an isolated individual, and that, in reality, it is nobody's business to love her, or make life easy for her. Being deficient in many solid qualities, she apparently endeavours to make up for this by a great deal of tendril growth. Even Lil, whose strong, innate tendency was towards independence, had allowed herself to become so absorbed in her husband, that without him she could not understand the fact of her own existence.

Yet here she was, alive, alone, with no companions but her own barren and heart-rending thoughts.

For the past was dead, and the remembrance of its buried joys cut her heart like a knife: the future was all bleak and overcast. It seemed

that she had to live on through some blackness, as of night. Yet, from where she sat, motionless, through the blank day, her eyes rested on stretches of wild and sunlit moorland, full of the natural beauties that she loved. Outside her window the birds sang all day long, and perched on her very window-sill, undisturbed by the silent figure within, for it seemed to them lifeless. The vitality was strong, the physical nature held its own, but in silence; for the spirit within was, at last, utterly crushed and broken. Like a statue, she sat through the long hours; her hands lay, white and motionless as dead lilies, on her knees; her brain was all one blank, with a few words of vivid fire written on it, which seemed to scorch and sear her soul, and made her writhe amid her stillness. But she had expended all her force upon the deed which made her this lonely, unknown, lost being that she was; and even when her heart leaped up hot within her at the remembrance of what she had done, yet she did not move; only sometimes she sighed. Save for this heavy sigh, that now and again burst from her, she might have been the seated Livia in her chair of stone.

At first, after she had escaped unseen from the hotel, and had reached this harbour of refuge, a quiet room in a remote farmhouse, which Brough had found and secured for her—at first, when she found herself alone here, and safe, the whole thing appeared to her as a

dream. The tension was gone—there was nothing for her to do—she was here, amid sunshine and sweet sounds of open-air life—the nightmare through which she had passed was surely over now, and she was beginning to live again. Sometimes she almost fancied Charlie was with her—in the room, or on the stairs, or at the garden-gate, coming to her. Surely, he would come, soon! Surely, it was time he should come?—he would not leave her alone for long? But, gradually, as the long hours passed by, she realised that there was no one to break her solitude any more. She had no husband, she could have no lover, henceforward! Over and over again, she pictured Charlie's arrival at the hotel—her father breaking the news to him—how would he bear it?—poor fellow! She knew, by the pain in her own heart, how he would grieve for her. But that was all over now—his first grief was passed; he had accepted, realised, the fact of her death. At some moments, it seemed monstrous, incredible that he could be induced to accept such an absolute fraud! Of course, his heart would tell him the truth, he would disbelieve it, and would find her out. O, God, how her whole being became, as it were, one flame of fire for a single instant at the thought! If he suspected the plot and made Brough tell the truth, why, he might be here now, coming into the house! What a wild thought of joy to fancy him coming to

her with the old look of love on his face!—and how much more natural it seemed than anything else! But, no; the flame died away and she was all stone again. The fraud was too clever! He had been successfully deceived. He believed her dead. Then, indeed, she was dead. There was no longer any Lil Newman in the world. There was only a weary heart-sick woman, who had no name, no home, no husband; who dared have neither past nor future; who, indeed, must have no past, and could have no future! So it seemed, to Lil, then. Her past must lie for ever hidden in her own breast—that she knew well; a blank wall must stand behind her. And, in her utter weariness, it seemed that a blank wall stood in front of her, too; that she was entombed indeed. This state of deep apathy was what had alarmed Dr. Swift; it was so foreign to the bright nature of the woman, that unless it were disturbed, he felt sure it must kill her mind. It was a terrible apathy—a dejection so deep that it appeared to herself like some vast weight which was upon her. She could not struggle against it—she might as well have tried to move a mountain. She was crushed and helpless.

It is strange how much of ourselves is made out of our surrounding circumstances. With most people their greater part would vanish if they lost their friends, their material belongings, the thousand and one things which are

attached to them. Their existence would shrink into a very slender fact if once all these were taken away. Lil thought her existence was no fact at all, now she had surrendered all that was hers as Lil Newman. What was left? A consciousness, which seemed to be, only in order to suffer. A physical frame, which must have food, though its animating spirit cared not to feed it. A sweet face, which none desired to look at. An aching void, where a full heart once had been.

Slowly these hard truths forced themselves in upon her ; heavily the time passed, and she knew that her plot had succeeded. Oh, how could he so easily believe her to be dead? Could she herself have been so deceived? she asked herself wildly one moment, and the next fell back into the apathy of despair. Such hours as these should count for years in a lifetime. These days that Lil lived alone in the silence of her quiet room, altered her more deeply than ten years of ordinary life. In this period of solitude, the struggle was between yielding to the agony of desolation, and so going mad ; or clutching tight hold of her own self, throwing aside all clinging affections, and standing upright in the strength of her own individuality. She could dimly see, herself, that her choice lay between these two paths, almost equal in their terribleness, to her as yet. But she could not guess which she would choose. She could not still herself sufficiently to look

her position in the face. She could only suffer blankly, helplessly. It appeared to herself as if she were all brain and nerves, and as if an undying fire were scorching both. Her body she was scarcely conscious of. It was exhausted. And thus it was that she sat so still that the birds were fearless of her.



CHAPTER XV.

CHARLIE NEWMAN went back to his home like a man broken in spirit. The blow had fallen so suddenly upon him that it took all other sensations from him, but those of grief and remorse. He realised how much Lil had been to him—how she had filled his life, and been, in herself, his home and happiness. He felt as if he had never loved any but Lil. And yet, underneath this, there was a miserable consciousness that this was not so—that he had loved someone else ; that he had probably failed to conceal it! He saw Lil now as she was before this money came and changed their lives ; he saw her in her bright, fearless patience, working as merrily as if her tasks had all been play. He saw that smile, which was Lil's sweetest charm, and which had always come into her eyes for him, even to the very last. How should a woman, so bright and joyous, die so young? Had he chilled her spirit by his changing mood? Now he recalled her stricken face as he had seen it when she leaned from her window in Siena. Why had she looked so white and wild? Because her pure sympathy had seen into his heart—

because his wandering fancy wounded her. Bitterly he remembered this, and it seemed to him he must have been mad to have given a look or a thought to any other woman than Lil. What strange infatuation had been on him, to make him so blind, so cruel, so base? He heaped reproaches on himself, and suffered torments from his self-inflicted punishment. Any on-looker who knew the story of this tragedy might well have felt that all Lil's sacrifice had been in vain! Even she herself might have had her conviction shaken of the rightness of her course, could she have heard and seen her husband's grief. Brough told her of it, hoping to rouse her from the stony state in which he found her, when he went secretly to see her. He went down, pretending to go in a totally different direction, with a feeling of strange and unnatural guilt. It was appalling to leave the husband, mad with grief, and to go to see the wife, whose death was so bitterly grieved over!

The farmhouse in which Lil was lodged was a long way from the town. Brough was a great walker and had chosen a place to which he could go, on his own feet, unobserved. It was a glorious walk, and, for a time, amid all this natural beauty, he almost fancied the horrid secret, in the midst of which he lived, was a mere nightmare. But, no; he had left a man half mad with grief in London. He doubted and wondered what he would find here. He did not know whether

Lil's natural elasticity of temperament would have come to her rescue yet ; or whether she, too, would be almost wild with her trouble. He found something worse than he expected—a woman as white and as still as if she were carved in marble. Her motionless state cast horror into his heart ; he had once seen such a statue-like figure in a madhouse, but never anywhere else. He resolved to tell her how Charlie was suffering—he determined to hurt her, if he could, with the picture of the grief she had caused—perhaps this would stir her ! The telling of it made his own eyes wet.

“I tell you, child, the poor fellow will never get over it,” he said.

“Do you think so ?” she answered, and fixed her eyes on him ; there was not a tear within their lids.

“I don't believe he will ; he adored you, that is the truth of it—worshipped you. I don't believe he cares, or ever did care, a straw for any other woman. It's all a ghastly mistake !”

“Wait and see,” said Lil. “Wait and see.” Her words were like ice. Brough felt afraid of his own child. He looked at this white, cold woman, and wondered if she were indeed Lil. He could not stay long, for his visit had to be absolutely secret, and he dared not let his wife suppose he had come out of town, or her curiosity would have been roused. The moments he could spend with Lil were num-

bered ; he had to catch a certain train back. They seemed to him wasted moments, for he could not approach her. He could do nothing to improve her position without first talking it over with her ; for action was so dangerous and secrecy so imperative. But it seemed an impossibility to talk anything over with this woman, whose whole being was wrapped in a cold cloud of pain. He went away more anxious, more unhappy, about her than he had been at any time throughout this unhappy history. Again and again came before him the memory of that statue-like figure in the madhouse ; and he saw Lil again, but one degree more sane, but one degree less stony, than that maniac, petrified by despair. What was to be done to save her ? How could he stay that awful petrification from taking hold of her ? All that night he spent locked in his study, professedly at work upon a heavy article which had already been too long on his hands. But work he could not with this terrible picture rising before his eyes ! He walked about the room beating his brains, which seemed to him more useless than they had ever been before, in vain for some plan by which he could help his unhappy child. But nothing suggested itself to him which it appeared in the least possible to carry out. His action was necessarily so limited by the necessity of secrecy.

The night passed, and he had no plan—the day passed and no idea came to him. The

days multiplied and flew by him and he knew that each of them was like a year of torment to Lil ; yet he could do nothing. He would not go near Charlie, though, at first, he was thoroughly sorry for him ; he could not help the feeling that this man was, after all, the cause of it all. But for him, Lil would be the bright and beautiful woman she should be. For him, she had made herself a living image of death. He kept out of Charlie's way, lest this feeling should, in some rash moment, make itself evident. Lady Warrington, at last, began to be aware that something was the matter with her husband. She had never seen him in such a state in all her knowledge of him. The gay Bohemian grew more spiritless and downcast day by day ; he began to look more haggard and distracted. Dinner became a matter of indifference to him. He would not take his dogs out ; and they found out long before his wife did that something ailed him, and would come and sit up by him, expressing their sympathy by many licks. His work was neglected more and more : Brough knew that unless something was done his career would come to a standstill. His wife suggested a holiday. Brough absolutely laughed, for the first time, for many days. A holiday ! Where could he go and escape from the memory of his unhappy child ?

He went to see her again as soon as he had a safe excuse for being away so long. He

found her the same ; as stony, even more silent, and with some new lines upon her face, which were terrible to see. She was perceptibly thinner, evidently weaker. He went home in a frenzy. What was to be done ?

He was glad Charlie made no effort to see him. He felt he could not now have endured it. His whole sympathy had gone to Lil. Charlie, indeed, saw no one. For a long time, Lil had been a sort of fetter upon him—release, so sudden, scared him. He forgot all this recent time when he had wearied of her ; he only remembered that his first love was dead, the love of his youth, the wife who had made his early life a time of delight. He grieved for her now as bitterly, as sincerely, as if he had lost her while his love for her was yet warm and living. And though his love had lost its passion, his care for her, his regard for her, his affection for her, had never grown less, for she had never forfeited them. Though she might not be his ideal now, might no longer call forth his passion, she had been always his best friend. He became aware of this when, by degrees, the first keen deceptive agony of loss was over, and he realised slowly the truth of his position. He had not lost the woman he loved—he had lost the woman he had once loved—slowly a dim, half-guilty consciousness of this crept into his mind. He was alone now, no longer bound by the many laws which encompass a man who owes duty to a

wife. The sense of this—the fact that no longer was Lil a fetter upon him—made his memory of her all the more tender ; and when his grief grew less, and he became used to the horrid fact of death, he found himself often wishing most passionately that she could be back again—as his friend ! He had never known such another friend—never learned to place such absolute faith in any man or woman as in Lil. His love for Adelaide was not of the same order—it had not the element of friendship in it. Her artistic, voluptuous temperament did not inspire him with the same friendly confidence as had Lil's clear, upright disposition. But he loved Adelaide—how vividly, he knew, when slowly her image took possession of his mind, and pushed away the grief, the regret, for the past, which, at first, had entirely absorbed him. Slowly, but surely, he turned his eyes from that past, it receded from his vision, and became but a sad and beautiful phantom, while he began to see before him the “all-hail hereafter.”

Through all the changes of his state, through his grief, his remorse, his regret, he had shut himself up, seen no one, opened no letters. What was there that could interest him ? No one could approach him that could break his solitude with any real sympathy, except, perhaps, Brough, and he did not come. After a little, Charlie felt glad he did not come. The stalwart figure of the cheery Bohemian seemed

to Charlie, in the mood that was growing upon him, a part of his past. He could but recall the vividness of a grief which was slowly relaxing its hold, and giving place to new life. Human nature is gloriously elastic when it has any hope to feed upon. Charlie had shed more tears over Lil's grave than most men would have done. Is it not Oliver Wendell Holmes who says, wittily, of such sorrow as this, "Wet weather is good for transplanting?" As his manhood and strength began to re-assert themselves, his appetite for fresh life and new excitement re-awakened. He did not forget Lil—he felt himself to be walking in the midst of a heavy grief. But he began to think he could no longer endure it alone—that to remain shut in the solitude of his house was too intolerable—that he must seek some comfort, some sympathy.

Where should he go for it?

At first, of course, it seemed to him that he had nowhere to go for it. But, gradually, as his mind settled into its healthy channel, he began to feel the power of that attraction which had changed all his life, and turned Lil's sunshine into darkness. Its power was strong as ever—even stronger for its temporary suppression. It leaped into force again and asserted itself, as being more powerful than even his own will. Now that there was nothing to check it, why should he struggle against it? From having looked like a crime, it would now

begin to look like a cheerful and brilliant possibility.

But this view of it came too suddenly—too soon. We cannot always shut away our dreams, even though we may desire to, even though they terrify us. But we can fly before them. So did Charlie. He was aghast when he realised his state—he started with horror. It seemed to him as though he had nearly approached some great crime. He had not killed his wife? No, no; but how nearly it seemed akin to the murderer's freedom, this looking for new love so soon. A feeling of guilt fell upon him, which he could not shake off. At least, he could leave this terrible solitude. In sudden haste, as though he had been scared by some ghastly phantom, he left home, and hurried away. He would not even pass through Paris; he did not care where he went, so long as he avoided that one city which, he believed, still contained the woman he loved. He took the boat to Antwerp, and, from there, went aimlessly wandering on, with but the one object of tiring himself out, so that neither hope or regret should be able to stir him too deeply.

But man was not made for solitude. This kind of solitary suffering can be endured but for a certain length of time. Then human nature gives out and man feels that he must find a friend—someone to share the trouble and to halve it. In Lil, Charlie had lost his

chief friend. In his present state, it appeared to him that there was no one in the world he cared to see or to speak to, except—

Adelaide.

He had come to this conclusion a great many times before his resolution gave way, and he turned his course to Paris. But, when he did turn, it was with an overpowering impulse like that of an arrow from a bow. Having once concluded that he must go, whether it was right or wrong, he had no idea, no thought, but to get there. Who can guess what sympathetic telegraphy surrounds this seemingly so common-place world? When Charlie, at the utmost speed which he could command, was hastening towards Paris, Jack Poynings was putting all the pressure he could upon Adelaide to get the date of their marriage fixed. At last, she raised her drooping head to agree to the day he wished. This was done—and Charlie was yet many miles from Paris!

The next afternoon, Charlie presented himself at that door, the one door he cared to enter in all Paris. They were still living there; they were both at home, mother and daughter. When he entered their room, there was such a strange expression on his face that Adelaide, who knew its every passing look, rose with a faint cry. She had never expected to see him again; to see him so suddenly, and with this strange look in his eyes, as if a subdued fire burned behind them, startled her inexpress-

sibly. Mrs. Mainwaring instantly rose, came in front of her daughter, and held out her hand to Charlie. This distracted him from Adelaide; and he then saw that his old acquaintance, Jack Poynings, was in the room.

"Awfully glad to see you," said Jack, heartily. "I've been thinking of writing a line to tell you my good news. But I suppose you've heard all about it in London, and it's as stale as good news can be. But, now, you must stay for the wedding!"

Everybody fancies the world knows all about his affairs. "What wedding?" said Charlie.

"Why, mine, of course," replied Jack Poynings; "Miss Adelaide here has, at last, made up her mind to give up her liberty. I thought some of the fellows in town would have been sure to tell you; they all seem to think I'm the last man in the world to get married. They don't know the inducement!"

"I've not been in London for some time," said Charlie; he hardly knew what he said; but he felt bound to make some sort of answer. Congratulations were, indeed, beyond his power; he was staring at Adelaide, in bewilderment. She had fallen back into her chair, and turned her head away. He had exchanged no greeting with her. Was this, indeed, the meeting he had so yearned for?

Mrs. Mainwaring had listened with satisfac-

tion so far. She was delighted that Charlie should have it made distinctly clear to him, at once, that Adelaide was to be married—that her engaged lover was on the scene. To her understanding, this made Adelaide safe. Now that this was done, she hastened to interfere, and prevent Charlie's manner from being noticed.

"Is Mrs. Newman in Paris?" she said, coming forward. "Do sit down, and tell us how she is; it is so long since we have seen you——why, what's that?"

Charlie had put his hat on a table near, in moving to the chair she offered him. Her keen eyes instantly noticed the deep hatband; and being more familiar with the correct depths of outward mourning than with the ways of inner grief, she was thoroughly startled.

"Didn't you know?" said Charlie, in his turn.

"Know what?" asked Mrs. Mainwaring, looking at him. Then she stammered on——

"Not Mrs. Newman?—not——?"

"Yes," he said, "I wear that for her; she is dead."

Adelaide started up, came forward, and looked him in the face, as though to discover whether he was in earnest.

In her sympathy, she held out her hand to him. He took it and held it fast. On that one point they might surely meet! Both had

admired and loved Lil. But Charlie, holding Adelaide's tender hand in his, and gazing earnestly into her face, saw how she, too, had suffered. He guessed, out of his love for her, that mere indifference and despair had led her into giving her promise to Jack Poynings. But she had given it! At that thought he let her hand fall from his. God did not mean them for each other!

Adelaide, observing his face, saw that strange look come into his eyes again. Suddenly, she realised this news afresh. What did it mean? Not only that a fair woman was dead—not only that Charlie had suffered—it meant something else!—It meant he was free!

She shrank back a step from him, and her eyes wandered from him to Jack Poynings.

"Oh, how sad," Mrs. Mainwaring was saying, when she saw her daughter's face. "Adelaide, are you going to faint?" she exclaimed. Jack Poynings quickly came to her, and put his arm round her. He thought she would faint where she stood, her face was so white.

"Don't touch me!" she cried out, and pushed him away from her. She spoke in such a tone that he stepped back amazed. She stood, upright as a dart, though trembling all over; and she raised her eyes again to Charlie's, with a strange meaning in her own glance.

"It is too much for her; it is so sudden, this

dreadful news," said Mrs Mainwaring. "Adelaide, don't be obstinate and stand there; you will fall down and frighten us all!"

Again Jack put his arm round her, and tried to lead her to a couch, which was but a few paces off. "Leave me alone," she said, furiously, and snatched herself, as it were, from him. Then, with a tremendous effort, she walked to the couch alone and fell upon it, unconscious. Both the men rushed to her. "Go, both of you," exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring; "I know how to deal with her. Ring the bell for my maid, and go away."

Charlie snatched his hat and went on the instant, hurrying down the stairs, for he heard Jack Poynings following him, and he was exactly the last person in the world he wished to speak to at that moment. Bewildered and distracted, he went back to his hotel. After walking about his room a little, he decided on his right course, and very quickly acted on it—strapped his portmanteau, and went to the station. The next train should carry him away from Adelaide.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROUGH, meantime, staying quietly in London, heard this news for which Charlie had gone, ignorantly, to the very fountain-head. He was sufficiently startled by it. Adelaide Mainwaring was engaged to be married. What did this mean? A useless sacrifice. At first, he resolved Lil should never hear of it. A moment later, and it occurred to him that this, at least, might rouse her. Anything would be better than the apathy into which she had sunk.

He went to see her and found her lying on her bed. She was too tired to sit in a chair now. There was the look on her face of one who simply endures until death comes.

"This shall be stopped," thought Brough. He told her what he had heard; Lil's face hardly changed, and for a while she did not speak.

"She will not marry that other man when she hears I am dead," she said, at last; "I know her; and I know how strong love is." And so she laid down her head again.

Brough went home worse confounded than

ever. "That did not rouse her," he thought. "What will?"

He felt himself helpless, this broad-shouldered fellow, to move the mountain which oppressed Lil and, through her, overshadowed himself.

He had never before been entirely baffled by a set of circumstances, which would not be changed and could not be cheerful.

While he was harassing himself helplessly over this hopeless state of things, Adelaide was making such a struggle as she had never made in all her life. She was resolved, now that no law of man's making, or nature's creating, could call her love for Charlie wrong, that, at least, she would marry no one else. She told her mother this, speaking out at last. "You must save me," she said, "you forced me into this engagement; you must save me from the marriage."

"Not I," said Mrs. Mainwaring; "I will not use Jack so badly. Besides, how strange people would think it."

"What," answered Adelaide, "Is it not better to be honest and regain my freedom, than marry him and hate the very sight of him? as I do now."

"I do not understand your way of talking," was all Mrs. Mainwaring's reply, in a completely cold voice. At last Adelaide realised that her mother was immovable in the matter.

Then she became equally resolute. She would act for herself. She determined to face the very worst of it for the sake of her liberty, and appeal to Jack. He was empty-headed enough, but what there was of him was gentlemanly. Besides, he could not wish to marry her under the circumstances. The next time he called, Mrs. Mainwaring had gone out shopping. Adelaide saw her opportunity and steeled herself to her trial. He found her vibrating with excitement.

"What is the matter?" were his first words.

"Let me talk to you," she said, and resolutely she began, holding her courage with both hands; did she wait a moment she feared being overcome by that peculiar feminine bashfulness, which would have prevented many women from making such a confession at all. But she conquered her smaller fears, and told her story. She kept her head turned away, and when she had done speaking did not look round. What would he say? what would he think of her? There was a little pause and then, with a sigh, he rose.

"Good-bye," he said, quietly enough, "my romance is over. I always thought you'd escape me one way or another, after all. I am too prosaic a fellow to keep any hold on you. And now I shall carry away with me a doubly precious memory of you, as not only a perfectly charming, but a perfectly honest woman. Good-bye."

And before she had time to realise that he actually meant it, he was gone. She started from her chair, but he was already in the street. She flew to the window, he was just going out of sight. She put her hands to her head like one distracted. "Free—am I free again? really free?" she kept saying to herself. A deep feeling of happiness settled upon her. Whether she ever saw Charlie again or no, she would always have this greatest satisfaction, she had not played him false. She was true to the unspoken vows, the invisible bond, the unwritten law of love, which united them. She saw now from what a horror she had escaped. Even if Lil had lived, and her liberty had continued to be valueless to her, it must have killed her to be Jack Poynings' wife. She had been mad, blinded by misery, when she allowed such a frightful thing to become possible. Well, she was free again, and all that day this one thought exhilarated her, and filled her with joyous life.

Her mother's consternation had no effect upon her; she did not listen to the reproaches, the storms of anger with which Mrs. Mainwaring overwhelmed her; they passed aside of her, all these bitter words; she had her own inner comfort which sustained her through them all.

Mrs. Mainwaring insisted upon leaving Paris, upon going away to some remote corner, where they would see none of their

acquaintance. "I shall be ashamed to meet people in the street," she said; "you have put yourself in the worst possible position a woman could put herself in. All I can do for you now is to let the affair attract as little notice as possible. People will forget us if they don't see us. God knows you have made a cheerful life for your mother. We will pack up and go and live in some detestable village, where no civilised being ever comes. That's all we can hope for now."

She carried out this plan immediately. She told her friends that Adelaide was ill, and they left Paris at once.

Very soon afterwards two ladies, of a style hitherto unseen in the locality, became familiar objects to the fishermen and their wives, resident in a small village on the Northern coast of Scotland. Mrs. Mainwaring made herself as comfortable as she could in the only lodgings the place afforded, settled down to a life of idleness brightened by French novels, and tried to subdue Adelaide by an existence of intolerable dulness, and her own cold contempt. But Adelaide was unsubdued. She believed herself to have acted rightly. She rejoiced in her freedom. She wandered about the sea-shore, silent and full of strange thoughts. She thought a great deal of Lil, that dead, fair woman, who had stood in her light and darkened her sky. She thought of her lovingly, with a heart full

of tender pain. She wondered about her death, and longed to know her story. But all this had to be hidden away in her own heart. Her confidences could be given to none but the sea and the sky. She lived alone, and grew stronger in mind by this healthy solitude, while her cheeks gathered a richness from the racy sea air, and her step gained every day new elasticity. She was taking the very opposite path from her rival, whose life in her solitude seemed to be steadily fading away.

But, after a while, a cold chill fell upon Adelaide's heart. She was very lonely. Was she to be always lonely? There was a terrible dreariness in the thought. It came to her one day, when she walking home. Her mother would not turn her head when she entered the room. She treated Adelaide like a tolerated criminal. Thrown on her own resources entirely, Adelaide was happy, but yet it was sad to one so rich in life, to look forward to this solitude. These two women, Lil and her rival, were each tasting the bitterest cup to a woman who is full of womanhood—isolation. But, as in everything else their paths were opposite, so in this. With every day Lil's life became more absolutely empty, while the love that had been hers was steadily finding its way to Adelaide.

The inevitable took place; in time Charlie heard of Jack Poynings as still unmarried;

discovered that in some mysterious way, which no one understood, the engagement had come to an end. Having heard this, to him, extraordinarily good piece of news from two or three different sources, Charlie began to believe it. And then he set to work to find Adelaide. He determined that if the fetters which so far had separated them were removed, nothing else should keep them apart. A lover has a glorious confidence in his own powers, or the powers of that emotion which is his inspiration for the time being. Charlie felt confident that he could find Adelaide, if she still lived.

It was no Herculean task. A little persistence in inquiries, and he had the name of the Scotch fishing village in his notebook.

And then there came a day which seemed to have a different colour in it from all other days. For on that day, beneath a tremulous blue sky, beside a wide, blue sea, two people met, free to speak out that love which had been so true and abiding, although so silent and unspoken.

Charlie had travelled straight to the village, and it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world, to see Adelaide's lovely face and form down by the sea-shore, before he entered any house or asked any question. It was what he had come for, it was there for him.

But to Adelaide it was a strange, wild, startling event to turn from the waves and suddenly find her lover at her side. Her soul leaped into her face—her whole figure was eloquent with welcome. Neither could have told whether any words were uttered between them, but, oh, how much was said in that rare moment!



CHAPTER XVII.

SHE lay on her bed like a dead woman, and hardly seemed to breathe sometimes. She did but lift her eyelids, now, when her father came into the room. The people of the house told him, one day when he came down, that they believed she was dying. "What am I to do?" he said, and crept into her room.

She looked at him, but did not even raise her head. Something in his face seemed to attract her. She looked again.

"Have you any news for me."

"Yes," he answered, "you are killing yourself."

"Oh," she answered, "that is no news. You have something else to tell me. What is it?"

"Nothing," he said, and looked away.

"Nonsense," she said, in a voice grown faint with weakness; "you can't deceive a woman in the state I am. There is something you are afraid to tell me. What is it?"

"Nothing," he answered again.

"Are they married?" she asked, in a sudden strong voice.

"Oh, no," he said, "not so quickly as all

that. But they are engaged to be married. It will be very soon."

She did not say anything for a little while. Brough was entirely at a loss how to act. He watched her for a minute. But seeing her still and silent he sat down near her and waited. There was a long, long pause. A pause long enough for a heart to break in. Then, suddenly, she sat up, slid off the bed and stood confronting him in her long white dressing-gown. She was like a pale ghost; yet there was something in her eyes more startling still than that ghostly look. It was as though she had seen a shape of horror—a thing too terrible to speak.

"Papa," she said, "do you know what I have done?"

"What do you mean, child?" he asked, scared by her face.

"Do you know," she went on, wildly, "that I have done an awful thing! Do you not see what I shall have made him?—a bigamist!—a criminal! Do you not see that I have betrayed her; she can never be his true wife! Oh, my God! what have I done!—led these two people blindly into this terrible position! and their sins are not theirs, but mine! I must suffer it all! I have to hold this awful secret while I live! Papa, papa, what will become of me?"

Watching her face he held his breath in fear, knowing not what to expect of her. Her

excitement was awful. It was too great to let her faint, although her physical frame all but gave way beneath it. He half expected, as he watched her wild expression, to hear a scream of madness come from her lips, and to see her before his very eyes enter upon that living death. Her brain was tottering—her mind reeled beneath the frenzy of feeling which swept over her. She raised her arms and wrung her hands wildly over her head. “I am lost,” she cried; “every day of my life will be as the tortures of lost souls. How can I live? Oh, God let me die—let me die! Are you so cruel as to compel me to live when my life is hateful to me, and the mere fact of my existence makes those two persons criminals! their love a sin, their life a lie! O, there is no mercy in Heaven, if I must live. I have no friend who will kill me—then I have no friend at all! I must—I will die! Papa, papa, what will become of me? Will you not be my friend? Will you not kill me? I am so cowardly, I cannot kill myself!”

“Because you do not really want to die,” said Brough.

“Do I not?—do I not?—ah, I am very young to die! But I am so wretched—so wretched—so wretched—so wretched—”

Three times she said this in a voice of stony despair—but, with the fourth time, something seemed suddenly unloosed within her, in an instant the tears rushed from her eyes in hot

streams that, before a moment had passed, had wetted her face and her clasped hands. She stood there blinded and helpless beneath the sudden paroxysm, making no effort to move, but letting the tears rain down her white cheeks. Great sobs came up from her heart as if they had been held in prison there and were at last set free.

Brough did not interfere for a few moments. But after a while he took out a big silk handkerchief, wiped away a mist which had come before his eyes, so that he should be able to see what he was doing, and then went to her. He took her in his arms and lifted her on to her bed. Then he dried her tears and held her vibrating form close to himself.

"Little girl," he said, "you are saved!"

She did not hear him. She was lost, drowned in a sea of sorrow.

An hour passed like this. When at last she was quiet, he got her some wine.

"Drink this," he said, "and talk to me."

She obeyed him. When she had swallowed the wine she held out her hand to him.

"Papa," she said, "I have been very wicked, lying here, wishing to die and letting myself be such a burden and trouble to you! I cannot stay here any longer. I am afraid to. No ghost could frighten me as my own thoughts will. I dare not live alone with them any

longer. I must go out somewhere into the world and find work."

"Quite right," said Brough, with a sigh of infinite relief.

"I must act at once!" she said, feverishly; "I am so frightened of myself. Take a lodging for me, somewhere in London, where the people live in crowds, and where no one we should know ever goes. I shall be safe there, and I will find work to do."

"What will you do?" asked Brough.

"O, anything—anything that is hard!—that will not let me think!" she answered. "I do not care what it is."

He left her somewhat pacified by his promise to do what she wanted. But still she was in a state of intense excitement. She was walking about the room when he left her, her hands marked by her own grasp. But this did not alarm him. Now that she had of herself entertained the idea of work, of going out into the world, he expected her to recover herself. It was that awful silence and stillness, so unlike Lil—that had been a horror to him. He returned to town thinking over all sorts of plans for her. It was evident that she must live alone with no one to comfort or help her, save himself in his brief visits. Her secret was now become too serious to be trusted to any but themselves. No suspicion must be roused about her; she herself had the idea, evidently, that she must go into

some poor part of London, full of bustling workers, and take up some every day drudgery. The plan was not bad; but Brough longed to think of something better, something more congenial to her temperament. Could her ambition but once be roused? Was it possible? How about that play she used to talk of? The stage—the drama—that used to call out all her enthusiasm. Could it be awakened in her again? If she could but disguise herself, why should she not go safely about the town, study the stage, and write for the stage. Even if Charlie were in London, he would be most unlikely to cross her track; besides, he had told Brough that he and Adelaide meant to live abroad and shut up the London house. The plan seemed best, even to Mrs. Mainwaring; a second marriage, arranged so quickly, made it appear better to live away from the home associated with a first wife. Adelaide was so accustomed to live abroad—when once they had settled themselves, it would be most unlikely that she would ever wish to live in London, thought Brough. And, even if they did come back, he argued, the danger was but slight; their tracks was utterly different—and, above all, Lil could disguise herself. He clung to this idea. He felt that if it were only possible for her to alter her appearance and so lose her terror of discovery, he might endeavour to make her

life contain once more something of variety and incident. He might be able to get her some dramatic criticism to do, which would compel her to take a little active and intelligent interest in the world about her. He might even venture to introduce her to his friend, Edmund Laurence, and, Laurence once interested in her, if she had any capacity for dramatic writing, she could get work. Lawrence had more engagements than he could easily fulfil; he had often asked Brough to write with him; he would certainly give a trial to any one for whom Brough wished the favour. Brough went home full of these ideas. He determined to find her some lodging in Bloomsbury or near the Strand, where he would be able to have her within reach. He could easily visit her frequently if he could locate her amid his own haunts.

Lady Warrington was wearing very elegant mourning for Lil. She spoke of her now and then with the gentle pity which it is customary to feel for the dead. Lady Warrington grieved for Lil with all outward propriety. She had even exerted herself so far as to pay a visit of condolence to old Mrs. Warrington. Gran received her very stiffly. She had never forgiven this "frivolous person," as she called her, for marrying her son. He was going to the bad fast enough without her to help him. Lady Warrington was not in a hurry to repeat

the visit ; but, having paid it, she had the cheerful consciousness of a duty well performed.

She was thinking of laying aside her mourning now. It was high time, as she remarked, when Lil's husband was on the way to a second marriage. "*He* had got over the loss pretty easily, it seemed," was one of her frequent remarks. She could not forgive Brough for having, apparently, felt Lil's death so very deeply. He had never been the same man since the event. He was always in a state of absent-mindedness, he had lost his high spirits, he did not work properly, and constantly he did not hear when his wife spoke to him. Lady Warrington almost lost her temper under this treatment more than once. She had made allowances at first, of course ; but when Lil's husband had consoled himself with a new love, was it at all reasonable that her father should be just as distracted as at the very first ? Lady Warrington began to have a feeling that this was something hidden from her ; but she could not guess in the least what it was. She did not connect it with Lil, whom she supposed to be beneath the growing grass. But she was naturally jealous and exacting ; and she very readily suspected. Certainly Brough's condition might excite suspicion. It seemed hardly natural that his child's death, however much he had loved her, should so completely upset him, and for

so long. He appeared quite unable to recover himself.

So that he had learned lately not to be too sure how he would be welcomed by his butterfly tyrant when he returned home. But to-day he thought less about it than usual. His mind was full of Lil, and his new plans and hopes for her.

He found Lady Warrington in the most agreeable of moods. Edmund Laurence was waiting to see Brough, and had turned the time to account by propitiating Brough's wife. No one could resist Laurence when he chose to be charming. One of the most delightful writers of stage dialogue, he understood the art of conversation. Lady Warrington had kept him to dinner, as he was evidently anxious to see her husband.

"What's on your mind, old fellow?" asked Brough.

"I've got too much to do, and they want me to write them a new play at the 'Favourite.' Will you help me? I've got a capital plot."

"Wait till after dinner," said Brough, "and we'll talk about it. But I believe I also have too much to do."

"You're not yourself, Warrington," said Laurence, as Brough sat down wearily; "you look as if you had been carrying the world about on your shoulders for a day or two."

Brough groaned. "O Lord," he said, "that would be nothing to it."

"What is the matter, Brough?" asked Lady Warrington.

"Nothing, child, nothing," said Brough, hastily, "only I want my dinner, I suppose. I've got a vacuum somewhere in the middle of me; when that is filled I shall be myself once more. You look jolly enough, Laurence, and as handsome as ever. What a confoundedly good looking fellow you are."

"And so are you, my boy, only more so."

"Well," said Lady Warrington, "I never heard two men set to work to pay each other compliments in that style before. However, you are both quite right. Come, dinner is ready, and that will give you something else to think of."

For the first time for a long while, Brough seemed to rise in his old fashion to the excitement of the dinner hour. Laurence's presence appeared to him to be a good omen for Lil; perhaps he might get this work for her. And this new hope of seeing Lil once more alive and at work, re-activated him. After dinner they went to Brough's study, where Laurence brought out the notes for his plot. Brough told him that he had not time to help him, but that he believed he knew some one who could. "You shall have an interview with her in a few days, if I can manage it," he said.

"*Her*," interrupted Laurence.

"Didn't I tell you it was a woman?" said Brough. "Does that make any difference?"

"Oh, no," said Laurence, "if she has brains. I am less likely to quarrel with her than with a man. Can she do the work, that's the question?"

"She can, if she will," said Brough.

"Then see me again about it, when you've seen her."

"Will you let me have the notes of your plot?" said Brough. "Thanks; then I can talk it over with her."

When Laurence was gone, Brough put aside the papers to take down to Lil. He was determined she should attempt the work. "She'd be compelled to study the stage," he said to himself, "and that going out among people would save her."

He went lodging-hunting for Lil in the morning of the next day, and engaged her some rooms; in the afternoon he went again to see her, and unfolded his various plans.

"You are mad, papa," said she. "It is impossible. I cannot disguise myself sufficiently to go about the town except far away at the East-end, or in some place where no one ever goes. And I cannot write. My head is gone. My power of application is gone. No, I cannot write."

Brough looked at her with such a face of disappointment that she made an effort and held out her hand for the papers.

"I will look at the plot," she said. "Leave it with me, I will try to read it. And now

about this disguise. That idea is good in any case. I could turn my hair black."

"And it is so jolly with that golden streak in it," said Brough.

"That does not matter now," said Lil; "it makes no difference to me or any one else whether my hair is black or brown."

"Nonsense," said Brough. "And I will help you to find out how to disguise yourself. I'll get hints from some theatrical people. To please me, make up your mind to do what I want."

"Very well, papa," said Lil, languidly. She had at least consented, and that was everything. He knew she only did it to please him, but what of that, so long as she did it?

She was to read Laurence's plot, and, in a week, see him and take his directions, if she felt she could do his work. By that time she was to be settled in her lodgings in town, and have her disguise so far perfected that she might be seen in the streets in safety.

"And I must think of a name for you," said Brough, when he left her.

"How good he is," she cried, to herself, as she watched him walk away. "Oh, such a father as that is worth a hundred lovers. Why is it a man loves his child while she lives, and his wife only while his fancy lasts? There—I must not think—I will go and look at that plot."

She opened Laurence's papers and looked

languidly at them. There was the abstract of the play, broken here and there by pieces of vivid dialogue. By degrees Lil's interest became intensely excited.

"A wife neglected, yet too proud to show it when she suffers—a woman no longer loved, but too honest to her better nature to claim from her husband the maintenance of those established rights, which would only be given to her grudgingly—where did he find this character?" she said aloud, in her interest, after she had read it through. She read it again, and again, and almost forgot her own personal agony in the picture of another's.

"But I cannot write it!" she cried, at last, despondently; "I cannot write it!"

She told Brough all this when he came to fetch her away from her lonely home in the farm house. "It is wonderful," she said, her eyes lit up by vivid feeling with something of their old brilliance, "he has dug deep into the heart of a proud woman who feels that the very laws of her country insult the purity of her love. But I cannot write it; it is useless for me to see him, papa."

"Nonsense, child," said Brough, who was reaping some reward for his exertions already in seeing the light in her eyes; "to please me see him, now that it is arranged. He will give you just the idea of how to do it; he is such a clever fellow. And you have the brains if you will only rouse yourself."

Lil sighed, a sigh of complete hopelessness. She felt as if her sufferings had killed her brain. She had not the faintest gleam of hope for herself. But she would not oppose her one dear friend ; she would not refuse to try and please him, even though she felt her effort would only end in disappointment.

Could she have looked forward, she would have refused to believe in what she saw !

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