



# Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON







B. 256. e. 3395  
*Crown 8vo, Price 4s. 6d.*

FOR A SONG'S SAKE.  
*AND OTHER STORIES.*

BY THE LATE PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

With a Memoir by WILLIAM SHARP.

---

*Crown 8vo, 440 Pages, printed on Antique Paper, Cloth Gilt, Price 3s. 6d.*

WOMEN'S VOICES.

*AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC POEMS BY  
ENGLISH, SCOTCH, AND IRISH WOMEN.*

Selected, Arranged, and Edited by MRS. WILLIAM SHARP.

LONDON: WALTER SCOTT, 24 WARWICK LANE, PATERNOSTER ROW.





*FOR A SONG'S SAKE AND OTHER STORIES*









PHILIP B. MARSTON.

*From Photo:—Henry Van der Weyde,  
182 Regent Street, London.*

FOR A SONG'S SAKE  
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON

AUTHOR OF "SONG-TIDE," "ALL-IN-ALL," "WIND-VOICES"

WITH A MEMOIR

BY

WILLIAM SHARP

LONDON

WALTER SCOTT

24 WARWICK LANE PATERNOSTER ROW E.C

256.

e

3395





DEDICATED  
TO THE MANY ADMIRERS, HERE AND IN AMERICA,  
OF THE  
POET AND WRITER,  
AND TO ALL WHO HOLD THE  
MAN  
IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE.



## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
DEDICATION . . . . .	v
MEMOIR . . . . .	ix
FOR A SONG'S SAKE . . . . .	I
THE LADY OF THE GRAVES . . . . .	73
A STRANGE WOMAN . . . . .	87
TRAPPED . . . . .	112
MISS MOWBRAY'S EXPERIMENT . . . . .	189
THE ACTRESS AND HER DRAMA . . . . .	207
AN ADVENTURE AT A FRENCH HOTEL . . . . .	241
HER PRICE . . . . .	255
SIR CHAS. GODFREY, BART. . . . .	306
A THOUSAND POUNDS . . . . .	316
AN ÆSTHETIC FLIRT . . . . .	335
HEAVY STAKES . . . . .	353
MISS BERESFORD'S MYSTERY . . . . .	378
A LETTER TO EVA . . . . .	402
HIS TRUST . . . . .	421
LILIAN . . . . .	431
MISS STOTFORD'S SPECIALTY . . . . .	469
BRYANSTONE AND WIFE . . . . .	488





---

MEMOIR  
OF  
PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

—:o:—

“IN this life calamity follows calamity by no apparent law of cause and effect. In the web that destiny spins there is a terrible and a cruel symmetry, which no theory of ‘circumstance’ can explain. When once the pattern of their tapestry is sombre, the Fates never leave it incomplete.” To no one could these words by the author of “Aylwin” be more applicable than to Philip Bourke Marston, whose death in the early part of the present year enfranchised him from suffering, brought him that surcease for which he had long yearned with an intensity which had in it no shadow of affectation or superficial emotion. He dwelt continually in the shadow of a great gloom, for in addition to the physical affliction which in the most literal sense darkened his whole life, the evil mischances of Fate sorely wrought against him. “If one were not too insignificant for the metaphor,” he once remarked, “I could with bitter truth assert that the stars in their courses have ever fought against me.” It is not given to many men, especially to men so mentally dowered and in some ways so advantageously circumstanced as was the subject of this memoir, to experience so much sorrow with such little alloy of the common pleasures of life. Those who are stricken unto death are not those who make loudest wail; and there are doubtless many among the casual acquaintances of “the

blind poet" who have thought that Marston's compensations must have been numerous to enable him to bear the brave front before the world which was his characteristic attitude. He died ere he had fully plumbed the seemingly fathomless depths of human suffering. But till fatal illness overcame him he could laugh with or take keen interest in the affairs of a friend, as if for him life had but the same significance as for the majority of men.

Philip Bourke Marston was the third child and only son of the well-known dramatist and poet, Dr. Westland Marston. His mother was a woman of as great charm of mind as of body, and endeared herself to her son by her penetrative sympathy and tenderness. Philip was born in London on the 13th of August, in the year 1850; his second baptismal name, Bourke, was that of a family connection, and 'Philip' was prefixed to it out of Dr. Marston's affectionate regard for his friend, Philip James Bailey, the author of "Festus." Miss Dinah Muloch (Mrs. Craik) became godmother to the little boy, and it was for him that the popular authoress of "John Halifax, Gentleman," wrote the familiar and lovely lyric entitled "Philip, my King." An unconscious prophecy was uttered in one of the stanzas of this poem, a prophecy to be only too adequately realized—

"One day,  
Philip, my king,  
Thou too must tread, as we trod, a way  
Thorny and cruel and cold and grey."

Philip had two sisters; the elder, Eleanor (Nellie), who afterwards became the wife of Arthur O'Shaughnessy, author of "The Epic of Women" and of other volumes of poetry; and the younger, Ciceley, who in days to come was to prove to him a second self. While in his fourth year, his sister Nellie was prostrated by scarlatina, and in order to render Philip as secure as practicable from the insidious disease he was given quantities of belladonna, probably an excellent remedy, but one which proved over-potent in the case of Dr. Marston's delicate and sensitive little boy. The eyes are supposed to have suffered from the action of the medicine; but further, and probably more irremediable, harm was endured by a blow which the child received during play with some boisterous companions. Inflammation set in, first in one eye and then in the other; and ere long incipient

cataract became only too perceptible. At this time the boy's beauty was very remarkable. If I remember aright, Mrs. Craik once stated that she had never seen a lovelier child—an assertion corroborated by others who knew Philip in his infancy. Lady Hardy has told me how she was perplexed by the way in which he was wont to run up against chairs and tables, as if he had miscalculated their distances—though he was quite of an age to have estimated them properly. It was soon after this that it became evident his sight was seriously affected. Some years later an operation was performed, and a measure of temporary relief was thus afforded; but in a brief while it became plain that a doom of hopeless blindness was in store for the poor child. The best oculists were consulted, and everything that loving anxiety suggested was done. But all was without avail, and as the months went past even Mrs. Marston surrendered her hitherto unquenchable hopes.

Philip's mental powers began to exert themselves at a very early period, although of necessity his opportunities towards intellectual development were sadly modified by his blindness. As it was, he produced while yet in his teens some very noteworthy poetry. Poems such as "A Christmas Vigil," lyrics like "The Rose and the Wind," do not read as if they were immature efforts. The latter is perhaps unsurpassed by any poem in our modern literature written in an author's nonage. Philip was not wholly blind—that is to say, he not only easily distinguished night and day, and even sunshine and cloud-gloom, but could discern the difference between men and women by their relative sizes and the shape of their garments: the morning, during his boyhood and early youth, was not wholly deprived of its beauty, and moonlight evenings were a source of infinite solace and delight. For the sea he early conceived a passion. It afforded him an ecstasy of enjoyment—wherein pain almost as largely prevailed as pleasure—and, taking his blindness into account, there have been few more daring swimmers than Philip Marston. He would listen to the shingly roar upon the beach, or to the strange rhythmical tumult of the seaward waves, innumera- bly marching in vast battalions, or to the murmur of the fretful surge where the sea slept against the shell-strewn sand, with an expression so rapt, so intensely absorbed, that for the time his soul seemed to look through his shadowed eyes and to animate his face with the glow of its spiritual presence. If

throughout his weary latter years he yearned for anything more than for death, it was for the neighbourhood of the sea—its ultimate silence to be about him, its moving music to be his requiem. And thus it was that among the most treasured reminiscences of his desolate years of darkness were those of broad spaces of moonlight and of the deep lustrous green of sea-water.

To a dear friend, Mrs. Moulton, he once energetically stated, "No! I was *not* blind, then. I couldn't read, of course, or see the faces of people; but I could see the tree-boughs waving in the wind, and I could see the pageant of sunset in the west, and the glimmer of a fire upon the hearth, and oh, it was such a different thing from the days that came afterwards, when I could not see anything!"

Philip Marston's first and not least loving amanuensis was his mother, who not only wrote out for her blind boy his early attempts in prose and verse, but also acted delicately and wisely the part of critic. To her love he owed much, nor was he ever chary of acknowledgment of his indebtedness. But partly as cares accumulated upon Mrs. Marston, thus preventing her from such ceaseless devotion to her son as she would fain have given, and partly from purely natural reasons, Philip's most incessant and most loving companion was his sister Ciceley, who may without exaggeration be said to have devoted her whole life to her afflicted brother. A touching tribute to her ceaseless sympathy and love was given by the latter in the pathetic verses inscribed to Ciceley Narney Marston,<sup>1</sup> two stanzas of which I may here appropriately quote.

"Oh, in what things have we not been as one?  
 Oh, more than any sister ever was  
 To any brother! Ere my days be done,  
 And this my little strength of singing pass,  
 I would these failing lines of mine might show  
 All thou hast been, as well as all thou art.  
 And yet what need? for all who meet thee, know  
 Thy queenliness of intellect and heart.

"Oh, dear companion in the land of thought,  
 How often hast thou led me by thy voice  
 Through paths where men not all in vain have sought  
 For consolation, when their cherished joys  
 Lie dead before them . . . .  
 . . . . .

<sup>1</sup> Vide "ALL IN ALL" (Chatto & Windus), pp. 173-180.

Thy love to me is as thy precious hand  
Might be upon my forehead if it burned  
In hell, of some last fever: hold me fast,  
Oh thou to whom in joy's full noon I turned,  
As now I turn, the glory being past."

If it had not been for his blindness, Philip Marston's youth would have been more enviable than the early experiences of almost any other young poet of whom there is record. Dr. Westland Marston was not only a successful dramatist, but one of the most popular literary men in London. There were few houses in London where were frequent *réunions* more enjoyable than those in the hospitable abode near Chalk Farm. There, occasionally, would be Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his brother William, Dr. Gordon Hake, William Morris, Swinburne, and many other celebrities and "coming men." Philip turned as naturally towards those benign intellectual influences as the heliotrope to the sun: his poetic development was rapid, and before he had emerged from his teens he had written—as has already been said—some eminently noteworthy poetry.

While yet under twenty-one, Philip Marston loved a beautiful girl, Miss Mary Nesbit. The passion of the young poet was returned, and—notwithstanding the darkness in which he dwelt—a life of beauty and even joy opened up before the ardent youth. Affectionate and indulgent parents, a self-sacrificing and adoring sister, a society of which it was at once an honour and a delight to be a member, a close comrade such as Oliver Madox Brown, the love of a beautiful girl, and brilliant literary prospects—each and all of these made up a lot which, if the fulfilment had equalled the promise, would have banished the gloom from Philip's life. The shadow of melancholy which haunts the poetic soul, and perhaps a constitutional tendency to excess of emotion, combined with darkened sight, account for the sad and occasionally sombre tone which characterizes many of the sonnets and shorter poems written during this halcyon period.

As a wave comes to a climax when its crown of foam is greatest, and thereafter expends itself brokenly, so Philip Marston's life, having reached a certain summit of happiness, thenceforth knew the shallows and no more the heights of joy.

While he was putting together the poems which were to make up his first volume (a few of which, it may be mentioned here,



had already appeared in the *Cornhill* and other magazines) his mother was prostrated by what proved to be a fatal illness. All who knew Mrs. Marston loved her, but to no one was her loss a greater blow than to that son whom she had so lovingly tended, to whom she had been as a sister and a friend as well as a mother. His grief was intense, and more than ever he writhed under the curse of his affliction; if only, he yearningly cried, he could have one ever-to-be-remembered glimpse of the beloved dead who had been to him so much of his light of life.

But the elasticity of youth and the quick succession of new and vivid interests overcame his despair, and it still seemed as if his coming years were not to be devoid of happiness and prosperity. He did not know that the blow which had fallen upon him was the first summons of his lifelong companion, Misfortune.

It was about this time that he won the love of Miss Nesbit. Perhaps if his eyes had not been dimmed he would have foreseen the shadow of a new and irremediable disaster. Miss Nesbit was far from robust, but only a few friends knew that she had developed symptoms of consumption. She bore her unseen crown of sorrow bravely, and only when it became certain that her life was no longer secure for any length of time did she endeavour to warn her lover of the inevitable. But love had blinded his inner vision, and he either did not realize or else refused to allow himself to believe what was with infinite gentleness hinted to him.

Before I pass away from the record of his youth—for with the next and most terrible calamity he became old beyond the warrant of his years—I may quote a few passages from an obituary notice by one of Marston's most intimate and most loyal friends, Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton, the well-known American poet and novelist, prefixing to these passages an excerpt describing her first meeting with the young poet when in his twenty-sixth year.

“I first met him,” writes Mrs. Moulton, “at a literary evening—a sort of authors' night—at a well-known London house, and I knew the blind poet would be among the guests—the one, indeed, whom I felt most interest in meeting. I soon perceived him, standing beside his sister Ciceley—a slight, rather tall man of twenty-six, very young-looking even for his age. He had a

wonderfully fine brow. His brown eyes were still beautiful in shape and colour. His dark-brown hair and beard had glints of chestnut ; and all his colouring was rich and warm. His was a singularly refined face, with a beautiful expression when in repose—keenly sensitive, but with full, pleasure-loving lips, that made one understand how hard his limitations must be for him to whom beauty and pleasure were so dear. At that time the colour came and went in his cheeks as in those of a sensitive girl. . . . How many tales he has told me of his darkened, dream-haunted childhood ! He began very early to feel the full pain of his loss of vision. He fell in love, when he was not more than ten years old, with a beautiful young lady, and went through all a lover's gamut of joys and pains ; and sometimes the torture of not being able to behold the beauty of his adored was so extreme that he used to dash his head against the wall in a sudden mad longing to be done at once with life and sorrow. Yet the love of life was keen in him, and his earliest childhood was haunted by visions of future fame, which should make people acknowledge that though blind his soul yet saw unshared visions. His *life* was his education. His house was the resort of many of the intellectual giants of that time ; and every day's guests were his unconscious teachers. He was fourteen, I think, when he first met Swinburne, who was just then the idol of his boyish worship. At that time—so wonderful was his memory—he actually knew by heart the whole of the first series of 'Poems and Ballads.' He was taken to see his demi-god, and entered the sacred presence with a heart beating almost to suffocation ; and went home feeling that his hopes and dreams had been, for once, fulfilled. To the very end of his days Swinburne's friendship was a pride and joy to him."

In 1871 a great event occurred. "Song-Tide," the first-fruits of the young poet's genius, was published, and instantaneously received a warm and unmistakably genuine welcome. The leading literary journals hailed the advent of a new poet, and that cultivated section of the public which ever keeps its eye on what new thing of promise comes to light, speculated with interest as to the possibilities of the new singer. I am inclined to differ from the many who look upon "Song-Tide" as Marston's chief production. Notwithstanding all its beauties and individual charm it is overshadowed by the genius of Rossetti, and in a lesser degree by that of Swinburne. In his



latest book, "Wind-Voices," he had attained to a larger and freer utterance; and if he had lived, and circumstances had not proved fatally adverse, Marston would probably have accomplished work of such distinctive quality as to have ensured for himself a permanent place among the leading poets of the later Victorian epoch. On the other hand, there is nothing in either of his later books to surpass certain poems in "Song-Tide." I shall refer again to his poetic achievements, however, further on.

While there was still hope that Miss Nesbit might recover—and by this time the lover's heart was often sore beset with terrible forebodings—Philip Marston's heart was gladdened by the receipt of the first copy of the book over which he had long been lovingly engaged. In it he had enshrined his love in many a beautiful sonnet and lyric, and in the delight of placing the first copy in the hands of his betrothed he almost overlooked what to every one else was becoming too evident.

In the autumn of 1871 Miss Nesbit was spending a visit with some friends in Normandy, but the change wrought no benefit. Philip Marston was a guest in the same house. A very painful and very harrowing story concerning the circumstances of her death has gained currency, and has even appeared in one or two journals. This story, which asserts that the blind lover did not know of his betrothed's death, and, accidentally gaining access to her room unnoticed, ascertained the truth with a fearful suddenness and directness, is, I am assured by Dr. Westland Marston, not the case. The bereaved young poet did indeed sit in a voiceless, tearless agony by the bedside of the girl whom he had so passionately loved, but the calamity had not arrived unexpectedly, and he had first learned the bitter news from lovingly sympathetic lips.

With this great sorrow the youth of Philip Marston died an early death. Simultaneously, the faint, glimmering light deserted the dimmed eyes; bitter tears, tears of many hopeless days and sleepless nights, of unavailing regret and speechless yearning, quenched the flickering flame. Thenceforth darkness settled down upon his life. Verily, it seemed as if indeed, in his own words, "the gods derided him."

But even so supreme a loss, even such irremediable calamities, cannot prevent human nature from finding relief in possible pleasures or partial diversions.

More and more Ciceley devoted herself to her unhappy brother, alleviating much of his grief, endlessly helping, suggesting, amusing, and acting for him. She became to him almost a necessity of life ; without her he did not consider it possible he could endure the infinite weariness and sorrow which encompassed him.

Brother and sister went to live together in lodgings, firstly at Notting Hill and later in the Euston Road. They had sufficient means between them to enable them to live comfortably, and Philip was entering upon that sustained intellectual drudgery which brought him such bitterly inadequate monetary recompense, but which continually extended his sympathies and won for him new friends and admirers. Henceforth, except for an interval when Ciceley stayed with the Madox Browns, the two lived together in their London lodgings, save when they went into the country or to the seaside, to France, and once to Italy. For certain golden weeks, a "sovereign season," Philip Marston revelled, sightless as he was, in the manifold delights of Italy ; Florence and Venice especially enthralled him, and throughout his life the memory of this happy time remained unshaken. He was wont to speak of his experiences in a manner that puzzled new acquaintances. He would dwell longingly on the splendour of the view from Fiesole or Bellosguardo, of the glory of light and shade athwart the slopes of Vallombrosa, of the joyous aspects of Florence itself, of the transmuting glamour of the scirocco, of sunset and moonrise upon the Venetian lagunes. Still more would he puzzle people by such remarks as "I don't like So-and-so's appearance : he has a look on his face which I mistrust," or "London looks so sombre ; I like to see a place looking as if it were aware of such things as sunlight and flowers." In this there was nothing of affectation, although it is undeniable that Marston was always very sensitive to any reference to his blindness : his sister Ciceley had become his second sight. Through her he saw and understood, and had pleasure in those things which otherwise would have been for him more or less sealed mysteries.

After this happy experience—too short, alas ! and clouded with sad memories—Marston settled down to a regular literary life. His means, he used to say half-humorously, were children of Mercury : every note, every sovereign was winged, and departed from his possession with an expedition which was at

once mysterious and alarming. In fact, then as always, his generosity and hospitality knew no limits. As these means gradually began to disappear, and as the struggle for existence became keener, his open-handedness knew no difference, and to the end he practised the same liberality.

Philip was never tired of the company of that well-loved sister, but naturally he formed new and valued friendships. From first to last, however, no one ever quite usurped the place of Ciceley Narney Marston. Dr. Gordon Hake, an old friend of the Marstons, and as a poet the possessor of Philip's admiring regard, has, in his beautiful poem, "The Blind Boy," perpetuated the significance of the love of this brother and sister—two exquisite stanzas from which I am tempted to quote—

" She tells him how the mountains swell,  
How rocks and forests touch the skies ;  
He tells her how the shadows dwell  
In purple dimness on his eyes,  
Whose tremulous orbs the while he lifts,  
As round his smile their spirit drifts.

More close around his heart to wind,  
She shuts her eyes in childish glee,  
' To share,' she said, ' his peace of mind ;  
To sit beneath his shadow-tree.'  
So, half in play, the sister tries  
' To find his soul within her eyes."

The friend of his own age and sex whose companionship he most cherished at this time (1872), was the late Oliver Madox Brown. An acquaintanceship, much appreciated on either side, developed into a friendship which, to the blind poet especially, meant much. The two young men saw each other regularly; innumerable literary schemes were talked over; poems, stories, studies from life were discussed and criticised in Marston's rooms. There one evening Oliver Brown withdrew a bulky MS. from his pocket, informed his friend that an acquaintance had sent him the manuscript of a romance for his perusal and suggestions, and forthwith began to read the strange and thrilling story of one Gabriel Denver. Once or twice Philip's suspicions were aroused, chiefly on account of the emotion which the reader could not refrain from exhibiting, but still he was unprepared for what followed. The tale excited

at once his astonishment and his admiration, and on its conclusion he expressed what he felt in the most emphatic manner.

“What did you say was the name of that story?” he asked.

“‘The Black Swan,’” was the reply, in a voice husky with emotion.

“And its author? Tell me at once the author’s name.”

“Oliver Madox Brown.”

Sincere were the congratulations, and genuine the mutual joy and pride : that night Oliver went home with a foretaste of fame making his heart beat wildly, while Philip sat awhile in his darkness, and indulged in many a fair visionary dream for his loved friend’s future.

When the two were apart, each wrote to the other : in a word their comradeship was complete, and to the older of the twain it meant more than anything else, save the devotion of his sister Ciceley. A deep and all-embracing humour was one of the chief characteristics of Oliver Brown, and he was a delightful *raconteur* : he was thus just the right companion for his blind friend. The latter had of course other friends, among whom may be mentioned his brother-in-law, the late Arthur O’Shaughnessy : indeed, Philip Marston was one of those men possessed of an occult, magnetic quality of attraction which few people could resist. Wherever he went he made would-be friends, and without any apparent effort to please he seemed to exercise a pleasant fascination over all who came in contact with him. And down to his last days he was, in company, cheerful and animated, often merry, and always genial. He never wore his heart upon his sleeve, and even to fairly intimate friends he so rarely betrayed his secret desolation that many of them have been quite unable to realize what depths of wretchedness his forlorn spirit was wont to dwell within. Perhaps, nay I know, that there is only one living friend of the dead poet who ever fully knew how dire was the grief and despair which gnawed at his life.

Suddenly Oliver Brown became unwell. Philip was anxious but never looked for any permanent ill-result. When, all unexpectedly, he was told that Oliver Madox Brown was dead, the shock was so great that years elapsed before he could speak calmly of his loss. Of another bereavement, soon to follow, he never spoke at all. Apart from his keen personal sorrow he deplored the untimely passing away of a young writer of such



extraordinarily brilliant promise, believing as he did that no one of such precocious mental powers had appeared since Chatterton.

The young painter-romancist died in 1874. Earlier in the same year was published the second edition of "Song-Tide." It has been stated in one or two quarters that the pathetic dedication has reference to Miss Nesbit : this is a mistake, for it is indetical with that in the first edition, which appeared before the death of his betrothed. In both editions the dedication has reference to the poet's mother. Nor, it may be added here, are all of the love sonnets due to Miss Nesbit's inspiration, though the majority doubtless are.

The poems comprised in the volume, "All in All," had been read *seriatim* to Oliver Brown, but the book was not actually published till after his death. At best it was a volume of sad memories, and now one of the expected pleasures attendant upon its publication was not to be realized. "All-in-All" had only a limited success : its sadness was too extreme for the majority of readers, and though, in point of workmanship, it was superior to its predecessor, it was practically voted too gloomy. Some critics went the length of complaining that such a sombre tone as prevailed throughout this volume was either morbid or affected : it is almost needless to say that neither surmise was correct. Irremediable grief, as distinct from more or less placid sorrow, is so rarely experienced by men that it is not strange there should be a tendency to consider it a symptom of weakness or affectation ; but if those of this bent of mind will put themselves in the place of Philip Marston—unhappy, often lonely, smitten cruelly by adverse fate, and dwelling continually in blank and terrible darkness—they will not, in all probability, find themselves strongly impelled towards the composition of very joyous verse. We are at best waifs and strays before the wind of circumstance, but when one is whirled hither and thither in absolute darkness the outlook does not become enlivening.

Marston's second volume was dedicated to his father "with profoundest love and admiration." The greater portion of it was occupied by poems in sonnet-form, a fact which possibly conduced towards the book's limited popularity. That the author's attitude was not one of absolute despair is manifest from his prefatory words : "In the present volume," he says,

“ I show how the love, so longed for and despaired of, is at last vouchsafed with all attendant peace and blessedness, until the beloved one is withdrawn, and the mourner is left but a memory, under the inspiration of which he still aspires to some great and far-off good ; but is met at every turn by tempters who would mislead, and enemies who would drive back.” The author’s intention was that “ All in All ” should form a connecting link between “ Song-Tide ” and the final division of the series of love-poems to be entitled “ A Pilgrimage.” The scheme in its entirety was never carried out, though, it may be added, many of the sonnets in “ Wind Voices ” were originally intended for the last-named work.

Throughout this second volume it is easy to note how frequently the poet recurs to the theme of irretrievable loss : passing years had blunted the extremity of his pain, but, keen and vital, the old agony was only more subdued, not vanquished. Again, there is to be noted a loving hope that in the days to come, if he be remembered at all, it may be in union with her whom he had so early lost and so deeply loved :

“ When I, at last, with life and love break trust ;  
 When the soul’s yearning and the body’s lust  
 Are ended wholly as a tune out-played ;  
 If then, men name my name, and from these lays  
 The depth and glory of thy soul divine,  
 Shall not, beloved, my memory live in thine ?  
 Our memories moveless ‘mid the moving days,  
 Intense and sad like changeless stars that shine  
 On ruined towers of a predestined race.”

In this volume also there occurs one of the noblest and most simply direct of Marston’s sonnets ; one which to all who love and have loved must be of strong and permanent appeal.

NOT THOU BUT I.

It must have been for one of us, my own,  
 To drink this cup and eat this bitter bread.  
 Had not thy tears upon my face been shed,  
 Thy tears had dropped on mine ; if I alone  
 Did not walk now, thy spirit would have known  
 My loneliness, and did my feet not tread  
 This weary path and steep, thy feet had bled  
 For mine, and thy mouth had for mine made moan ;

And so it comforts me, yea, not in vain,  
 To think of thy eternity of sleep,  
 To know thine eyes are tearless though mine weep :  
 And when this cup's last bitterness I drain,  
 One thought shall still its primal sweetness keep—  
 Thou hadst the peace and I the undying pain.

The saddest life is not without compensations : at least, this stereotyped saying may pass as a generalisation. Few men have ever had more friends than the blind poet of whom I write ; men and women of the most opposite tastes and sympathies were at one in their regard and love for Philip Marston.

“ There *is* a kind of compensation,” he remarked to me once, “ in the way that new friendships arise to brighten my life as soon as I am bowled over by some great loss. But one's capacities for friendship get worn out, and it is impossible that I can ever be to new friends that which I was to those who are gone and am still to the one or two who are left.”

About this time Philip came to know Dante Gabriel Rossetti with something like intimacy. No man ever obtained from him more fervent, it may without exaggeration be said more worshipful, regard. As a poet he considered Rossetti foremost among those of the Victorian age, and his love for him as a man was deep and abiding. Nothing prejudiced a stranger quicker in his view than disparagement of Rossetti : admiration of the author of “ The House of Life,” on the other hand, was a bond of immediate union. An appreciative letter from this source would give him more joy and stimulus than would anything else. For Mr. Swinburne, also, he always entertained emphatic admiration and strong personal regard, and among his few most treasured friendships was that with Mr. Theodore Watts. None of these, however, he saw with any frequency ; hence, after the death of Oliver Madox Brown, he found himself in growing solitude.

It was subsequently to the publication of “ All-in-all ” that Marston began to write for the American magazines, his first acceptance coming from the editor of *Scribner's Magazine*. From this time forth he more and more devoted himself to production for the American public, with the result that he is now far more widely known as a poet and writer of fiction in the United States than in Great Britain. He would fain have had it otherwise, but his poems and stories met with almost invariable rejection

in this country, and he became wearied of what appeared to be a hopeless attempt. Moreover, he had to live, for his means had become straitened. There was some jealousy among certain of his co-equals in age, but probably his misfortune in this lonely struggle with adverse circumstances arose mainly from other and practically insurmountable obstacles. Anyhow, it came to pass that nine-tenths of his prose-writings and the great proportion of his short poems appeared in American journals and magazines ; and that this clever story-teller and writer of exquisite verse experienced nothing but disappointment on this side of the Atlantic. Within the last year or two, one discriminating editor, the popular novelist, Mr. F. W. Robinson, recognized the talent for story-writing which Philip Marston possessed, and commissioned several tales for his magazine, *Home Chimes*.

In 1876, as has already been recorded, Marston made the acquaintance of Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton. The friendship arose from and was sustained upon a keen literary and intellectual sympathy. Mrs. Moulton was interested from the outset in the young poet and his work, and Marston was soon attracted to one who evinced such kindly interest and consideration. The affectionate devotion of this most loyal and helpful of his friends did more than anything else to cheer his remaining years. In Mrs. Moulton, he not only found the most perfect intellectual sympathy ; her broad and cultured taste, her wide experience of the world of men and women and of the world of books, and the charm of her society, all helped—as he said himself—to make life endurable. Every spring Mrs. Moulton came to London for the season : during her visits the blind poet forgot much of his weary sadness, and even the long months of absence were relieved by continuous correspondence. It would have fared ill with him in his latter years if it had not been for the self-sacrifice and sisterly care of this devoted friend.

This friendship was formed in time, for it was not long afterward that Philip Marston endured another great loss—one of the most deeply felt afflictions of his life. Mrs. Moulton, as will be seen, has best right to speak of this event, so I shall let the narration be in her words. “ I had known him and his sister but a few days more than two years when, on July 28, 1878, Ciceley called upon me at my rooms. Dr. Marston and Philip



were away in France, and she spoke of them very tenderly that morning. She complained, when she came in, of an intense headache, and after a little I made her lie down to see what rest would do for her. She grew worse, and when the doctor came he pronounced her illness apoplexy. My name was the last word on her faithful lips ; and in the mid-afternoon of that long July day she died. Quite unaware of her death—since we did not know where to find them with a telegram—and while she was still awaiting burial, her father and brother returned. On this crushing sorrow I cannot linger. Its full bitterness I shared. I think it was the cruellest bereavement that had ever come to our poet. When his mother, his betrothed, and his friend died, he still—as he used often to say—had Ciceley ; but when she left him there remained for him no such constant and consoling presence. His other sister was married, and therefore was not in his daily life at all ; and at that time, even, she herself was a chronic invalid. His father was his one closest tie ; but many sorrows had saddened Dr. Marston and broken his health ; and there was no one to be to Philip what Ciceley had been, as reader, amanuensis, and constant untiring companion. It was the year before Ciceley's death (1877) in which, to gratify a whim of mine, the well-known novelist, R. E. Francillon, cast Philip's horoscope. Mr. Francillon is a loving student of all mystic lore, and has studied astrology, by way of amusing himself, until he has become a thorough proficient in its mysteries. As a sort of test of the clear seeing of the stars, I persuaded him to cast, and carefully to write out, the horoscope of the blind poet ; and in this manuscript—which I still have in my possession—he prophesied, several times over, the death of its subject in 1887. One never believes in such prophecies until after their fulfilment ; but I look back, now, to see, with wonder, how many predictions, even besides this final one, that horoscope contained ; and they have been fulfilled, every one."

In that dreary year after the death of his beloved sister, life seemed to him a bitter and worthless thing. Mrs. Moulton had returned to America, Oliver Brown was dead, his father—a beloved companion and friend—was in ill-health. Desolate in spirit and sorely tried in mind and body, Marston sought surcease of pain in hard work. Literature was his saving : without it he had perished.

Although those sea-coast and inland voyages wherein he was wont to take such keen pleasure were still indulged in, they were no longer the same. In his own pathetic words, as he spoke to me on the subject some years ago, he had undergone the horrible experience of twice becoming blind. His own sight waned in childhood and was drowned in tears in his early manhood ; his second sight, his sister Ciceley, was snatched from him with more terrible suddenness.

Among the men and women whom he came to know about this time, and whose friendship he greatly valued, were Miss Mathilde Blind, Miss Mary Robinson, M. Carmichael, and James Thomson, author of "The City of Dreadful Night." Many an hour which would have been spent in dreary solitude was made happy for him by Miss Robinson, who never grudged to spare from a busy life a liberal period of her scanty leisure for reading and chatting. She was almost the last of those to whom he consciously bade farewell, though neither he (perhaps) nor certainly any of us knew how imminent was his death. Nor, while it would be inappropriate and impracticable to give any catalogue of the numerous acquaintances whom he held in high regard, should mention be omitted here of Lady Hardy and Miss Iza Duffus Hardy, valued friends who had known him since childhood, and who were among the privileged few who followed him to the place of his long rest.

It was at the beginning of 1880 that I came to know Philip Marston. In the autumn of the preceding year I was spending an evening with Rossetti, and I chanced to make some reference to Marston's poetry. Finding that I did not know the blind poet and that I was anxious to meet him, Rossetti promised to bring us together ; one thing and another, however, intervened to prevent our speedy meeting. At last, one day in January, I reminded Rossetti of his promise, and the result was a line of introduction posted direct to Marston. I remember that I was fascinated by him at once—his manner, his personality, his conversation. On his part he gave a generous reception to one who had no claim to his regard save acquaintanceship with the poet for whom we had in common the most genuine love and reverence. Our friendship grew steadily—but I need not say more of it here than that with his death I have lost a very dear and valued friend.

A year had not passed since the decease of Ciceley, when fresh

sorrows came in the guise of the deaths of his sister Nellie (Mrs. O'Shaughnessy) and her two children. Philip now saw more of Arthur O'Shaughnessy. One day in 1881 I was sitting with the former, when O'Shaughnessy ran into the room, reminded me of a promise to go to his house and hear him read the proof-sheets of his new book, and asked his brother-in-law to come also. In less than a week, poor O'Shaughnessy was dead : sudden inflammation of the lungs had put an end to all his hopes and dreams.

At Eastertide in the ensuing year Rossetti's death came upon Marston with a great shock. I had been staying at Birchington shortly before the end came, and not foreseeing the imminent disaster, had brought back not unhopeful news ; and, at Rossetti's request, I also planned to go down to Kent again with Philip. We did indeed journey thither shortly, but it was to attend the funeral of him whom we both had such good cause to revere. When the ceremony was over Marston whispered to me that he could not rejoin our friends just then ; so we went along the cliffs and over the wide reaches of the shore, speaking no word. As we returned, he suddenly stopped, and with eager emphasis begged me to grant him one desire of his. I soon discovered that this desire was that I should see little of him henceforth, for, as he bitterly explained, "every friend whom I love seems to be brought within the influence of my unhappy fate." When, later on, I became dangerously ill, poor Philip sent me a letter full of remorse and sorrow. He had heard that I could not recover, and he believed that I had succumbed to the malign fate which pursued him and his. Looking through the letters which he at different times addressed to me, I find that note of apprehension ever recurring : and I believe the same would be found by his few really intimate friends. He had a belief, which was not altogether fanciful, that he had lived the human life on earth before. This idea is embodied in the following sonnet which he addressed to me in the first year of our friendship, the publication of which in this place may on this illustrative account be excused.

## MET BEFORE.

Not surely now for the first time we meet :  
 So seems it to me, rather I believe  
 That in some vanished state one had to grieve  
 For loss of other, and with weary feet  
 Went on his way finding no sweet thing sweet,  
 Listless and sad, unwilling to relieve  
 His thought from pain by joys that but deceive,  
 Nor trusting to a friendship less complete :  
 At length through death into new life he passed ;  
 And there he joined his friend, then hand clasp'd hand,  
 Then soul cried out to soul, re-met at last :  
 So seemeth it to us, who understand  
 Each other perfectly, and know right well  
 How much there is on either side to tell.

It was in 1882, also, that another friend, to whom Marston had become much attached—attracted in the first instance by the common bond of unhappiness—died under peculiarly distressing circumstances. The public who are interested in that strange and sombre poem, “The City of Dreadful Night,” know vaguely that James Thomson died in poverty and in some obscure fashion. Philip Marston and myself were, if I am not mistaken, the last of his acquaintances who saw him alive. Thomson had suffered such misery and endured such hopelessness, that he had yielded to intemperate habits, including a frequent excess in the use of opium. He had come back from a prolonged visit to the country, where all had been well with him, but through over-confidence he fell a victim again immediately on his return. For a few weeks his record is almost a blank. When the direst straits were reached, he so far reconquered his control that he felt himself able to visit one whose sympathy and regard had withstood all tests. Thomson found Philip Marston alone : the latter soon realized that his friend was mentally distraught, and endured a harrowing experience, into the narration of which I do not care to enter. I arrived in the late afternoon, and found Marston in a state of nervous perturbation. Thomson was lying down on the bed in the adjoining room : stooping, I caught his whispered words to the effect that he was dying ; upon which I lit a match, and in the sudden glare beheld his white face on the blood-stained pillow. He had burst one or more blood-vessels, and the hæmorrhage was dreadful.



Some time had to elapse before anything could be done, but ultimately, with the help of a friend who came in opportunely, poor Thomson was carried downstairs and, having been placed in a cab, was driven to the adjoining University Hospital. He did not die that night, nor when Philip Marston and I went to see him in the ward the next day was he perceptibly worse, but a few hours after our visit—when his farewell consisted of a startling prophecy, which came true—he passed away. Thus came to an end the saddest life with which I have ever come in contact—sadder even than that of Philip Marston, though *his* existence was oftentimes bitter enough to endure.

I do not regret this opportunity for narrating simply and directly the circumstances attendant upon James Thomson's illness and death. I have several times heard, and once or twice seen in print, such misleading statements that in justice to the living as well as to the dead it was but fitting I should briefly give the main outlines of a painful incident.

Thomson's death, and the manner of it, affected Marston very deeply. To a man of his sensitive nature, the very room where his friend had lain when his death-stroke came upon him was haunted by something inexplicable, but tragic and oppressive. This sense of haunted rooms—in a somewhat vaguer, yet not less genuine significance than the adjective generally bears—was a very real thing to him. It was for this reason that one of his supreme favourites among Rossetti's sonnets was that entitled "Memorial Thresholds." Readers of "All-in-All" and "Wind Voices" will find numerous passages which give expression to it : indeed, some of his most pathetic poems were evolved from this motive.

" Must this not be, that one then dwelling here,  
 Where one man and his sorrows dwelt so long,  
 Shall feel the pressure of a ghostly throng,  
 And shall upon some desolate midnight hear  
 A sound more sad than is the pine-trees' song,  
 And thrill with great, inexplicable fear ? "

Probably no one has ever felt more grateful to the inventor of the "type-writer" than did Philip Marston. When he purchased, and learned the method of working, one of those invaluable machines, he found himself to a great extent independent of an amanuensis. By this means he wrote all his stories and poems, and also his extensive correspondence,

without assistance from any one. It was, naturally, a matter of no little moment to him to be able to write, enfold, and address private letters without having to place expressions meant for one person within view of another. For a considerable period he spelt for the most part phonetically, but in course of time he came to write as correctly as—and, as it was some consolation to him to know, infinitely more neatly than—the majority of educated people. Dr. Westland Marston generally revised the type-written sheets meant for publication.

The blind poet was a rapid as well as an industrious worker. From his slight and late breakfast (for from his boyhood he had been accustomed to go to bed at times when the mass of his fellow-citizens had been asleep for some hours) the *click-click* of his type-writing machine might be heard incessantly till the late afternoon. By dinner-time a goodly array of foolscap pages would environ his chair, and several letters would lie on the adjoining table awaiting postage.

He also became proficient in the Braille system, but was unable to gain much satisfaction therefrom, owing to the fact that few of his friends at a distance could bring themselves to learn it sufficiently for correspondence. He never, however, urged his desire upon his absent acquaintances, for he was quite aware of the much greater difficulty in the acquirement of the Braille and allied systems experienced by those who had use of their eyes and whose finger-nerves were, comparatively, so much more insensitive.

As each year elapsed Marston found his reputation in America more and more assured. His stories and poems not only gained acceptance at the hands of editors, but procured for him many friends. After Mrs. Moulton, and another kind and generous friend, Mrs. L. C. Bullard, the friend of oversea whom he most valued was the "Poet of the South," Paul Hamilton Hayne; for E. C. Stedman, R. W. Gilder, Whittier, and others, he had a sincere regard. A glance at the books in his room at No. 191, Euston Road, would have convinced any new-comer as to the numerous friends and admirers of Philip Marston. From many well-known, slightly-known, and quite unknown poets and novelists of both sexes, there were scores of volumes containing on their fly-leaves affectionate and flattering inscriptions. Nothing of this kind was more valued by him than Swinburne's and Rossetti's books, given to him by their authors. There was

something very pathetic in the ardent and unbroken friendship between Paul Hamilton Hayne and his English comrade. Their correspondence was continuous, and most of their letters were lengthy epistles. Both eagerly anticipated meeting. Perhaps at last their long friendship has its consummation, for Hayne died last year. His death was yet another keenly-felt sorrow for the friend who survived him for a few weary months.<sup>1</sup>

During the spring months of 1884 I was residing at Dover, and in April (if I remember aright) Philip came down from London to spend a week or so with me. The weather was perfect, and our walks by shore and cliff were full of delight to us both : once or twice we crossed to Calais for the sake of the sail, spent a few hours in the old French port, and returned by the afternoon boat. In the evenings, after dinner, we invariably adjourned to the beach, either under the eastern bluffs or along the base of Shakespeare's Cliff. The music of the sea, in calm or tidal turbulence or tempest, had an unfailing fascination for him. To rest upon the edge of the cliff, and hear the fretful murmur of the surge far below ; to lie at full length and listen to "the long withdrawing roar" adown the shelving shingly strand ; to sit in some sheltered place among the rocks, and hearken to the tumult of stormy waters as they surged before the gale and dashed themselves into clouds of foam and flying spray almost at our feet ; such experiences as these afforded him, for the time being, an exhilaration or, again, a solace which to him meant much.

He took keen pleasure in learning how to distinguish the songs of the different birds, and all spring's sounds and scents were exquisite pleasures to him. How well I remember the rapt expression of puzzled delight which animated his face, as one day we crossed some downs to the westward of Folkestone.

"Oh, what is that?" he cried, eagerly ; and, to my surprise, I found that what had so excited him was the crying of the young

<sup>1</sup> Since these lines were written, Dr. Westland Marston has received a gracious tribute from that Southern State where Paul Hamilton Hayne spent most of his life. Many of the admirers of Philip Marston's poetry—with recognition also of the friendship between the American poet and his English comrade—have sent a large lyre made of white immortelles, with the word *Marston* in purple flowers across the strings. I may add here that in "Wind Voices" there is a pathetic sonnet addressed to Hayne.

lambs as they stumbled or frisked about their mothers. He had so seldom been out of London in the early spring that so common an incident as this had all the charm of newness to him. A frisky youngster was easily enticed alongside, and Philip's almost childlike happiness in playing with the woolly little creature was something delightful to witness. A little later I espied one which had only been a few hours in the world, and speedily placed it in his arms. He would fain have carried it away with him ; in his tender solicitude for it he was like a young mother over her firstborn.

As we turned to walk homeward we met a boy holding a young starling in his hand. Its feeble, strident cries, its funny little beak closing upon his finger under the impression it was a gigantic worm, delighted him almost as much as the lambkin.

"A day of days !" was his expressive commentary, as tired and hungry we reached home and sat down to dinner, with the deep boom of the sea clearly audible through the open window.

Philip Marston had a subtle sympathy with nature which amounted almost to a new sense. A cloud would rise upon the horizon, and he would be the first to portend some change in the weather ; it was as if his sightless eyes yet conveyed some message to his mind, or as if his ears heard an ominous murmur of far-off wind and rain inaudible to senses less acute. Sunset, a solemn moon-rise, the company of cloud-drifts passing westward and glowing with delicate and gorgeous tones and hues, to these he was never insensitive, even if no friend referred to them ; in some occult fashion he seemed to be aware that these things were making earth and heaven beautiful.

There is none among our younger poets who has touched with more exquisite truth and grace those evanescent aspects of the skies, those soft fleeting hues of earth and sea ; the inner vision of the blind-poet was as faithful to him as the pole-star to the seaman.

And because to him the sea and the wind were always among the most wonderful things in nature, endlessly suggestive, endlessly beautiful to eye and ear and spirit, his love for them never grew less. But in the growing sadness of his last years one of his most abiding sorrows was the loss, in great part, of the old passionate love and yearning for nature. But for his blindness this would not have been so, for to men and women who have anything in them of spiritual life, nature is the source of their



most sacred comfort. On a mountain-slope, on a wide plain, by the margin of the sea, the keenest grief becomes rarefied till it attains to a higher and nobler plane of sorrow.

Far more deeply than some of his friends guessed did he feel this passing away of the old worship. It was a genuine sorrow to him, a deep and cruel disappointment. "It is as though one were parting with one's last hope—one's sole remaining consolation," he once remarked to me bitterly. In the sonnet called "Youth and Nature" he has given expression to this sense of estrangement:—

" Is this the sky, and this the very earth  
I had such pleasure in when I was young?  
And can this be the dential sea-song,  
Heard once within the storm-cloud's awful girth,  
When a great storm from silence burst to birth,  
And winds to whom it seemed I did belong  
Made the keen blood in me run swift and strong  
With irresistible, tempestuous mirth?  
Are these the forests loved of old so well,  
Where on May nights enchanted music was?  
Are these the fields of soft, delicious grass,  
These the old hills with secret things to tell?  
O my dead Youth, was this inevitable,  
That with thy passing, Nature, too, should pass?"

Few natural incidents seemed to strike him more ominously and painfully than the oncoming in mid-July of one of those autumnal winds which make one vaguely realize that the summer is dead. The sonnet, "A July Day," was born of this emotional susceptibility.

" To-day the sun has stedfast been and clear—  
No wind has marred the spell of hushful heat,  
But, with the twilight, comes a rush and beat  
Of ghost-like wings; the sky turns grey and drear,  
The trees are stricken with a sudden fear.  
O wind forlorn, that sayeth nothing sweet,  
With what foreboding message dost thou greet  
The dearest month but one of all the year?  
Ah, now it seems I catch the moan of seas  
Whose boundaries are pale regions of dismay,  
Where sad-eyed people wander without ease;  
I see in thought that lamentable array,  
And surely hear about the dying day  
Recorded dooms and mournful prophecies.

Even Spring, for which he ever yearned throughout the rest of the year, brought with it latterly but little of that conscious and unconscious exhilaration which it is wont to bring to all of us. "Spring Sadness" was his theme rather than "Spring Joy." There is one fine and pathetic sonnet where this sad foreknowledge of its significance is recorded.

## IN EARLY SPRING.

With delicate wind, clear light of the warm sun,  
 Surely I know how subtly sweet is Spring,  
 The earth and man's worn heart revisiting.  
 I would not have thy brief existence done,  
 And yet I would, O new-born Spring, that one  
 Might meet thine eyes without their mirroring  
 The ghost of many a sweet and bitter thing—  
 Old dreams, old hopes, too frail to lean upon.  
 O last descended of a hostile race,  
 Though in thyself so sweet and softly fair,  
 Within thine eyes ancestral Springs I trace ;  
 So some wronged woman, in her baby's face  
 May shuddering see its father's likeness there,  
 While parted raptures thrill through her despair.

The three last-quoted sonnets are from the third of Philip Marston's published volumes of poetry. In 1883-84 this book was issued by Mr. Elliott Stock, with the poetic title "Wind Voices." Its success was immediate and emphatic. Messrs. Roberts Bros., of Boston, speedily disposed of every copy of the American edition, and the London publisher sold the last few score at a considerable premium. The book is consequently almost as difficult to obtain as "Song Tide," for it was not stereotyped.

"Wind Voices" is dedicated to "Louise Chandler Moulton, True Poet and True Friend." It contains much that is very beautiful and very touching, and exhibits a greater breadth and *grip* than its predecessors. I am hardly likely to be contradicted in the assertion that it contains a greater amount of genuine poetry than any volume by a Victorian poet posterior to those few chiefs of song whose names are upon all our lips.

In addition to a further instalment of his exquisite flower-lyrics, grouped under the title "Garden Secrets," there are touching poems in memory of Oliver Madox Brown, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, James Thomson, and Rossetti, and several sonnets addressed to C. N. M. (his sister Ciceley). Among the

more ambitious poems are "Caedmon," where the Saxon poet relates before the Abbess Hilda that famous dream which resulted in the Song of Creation ; "Caught in the Nets," a merman story founded on a passage in Sir Richard Baker's "Chronicle," wherein is described the capture of a strange, half-human creature of the deep, on the Suffolk coast in the twelfth century, and its ultimate escape to the "dear waves" and "some sea-girl's damp and salt caresses;" "The Ballad of the Monk Julius," based on the familiar legend of the demon-tempted monk ; the "Ballad of Brave Women," a record of two heroic Swansea fishermen's wives, which, however, is too markedly Rossettian ; and "Nightshade," founded on the conclusion of Oliver Madox Brown's "Dwale Bluth," as designed though not completed by its author. The songs and lyrics scattered throughout the volume are most winsome. Those beginning "Now that Hope lies sick to death," and "Love has turned his face away," have much of the subtle charm of the lyrics of the Elizabethan poets. The following poem, which I cannot refrain from quoting, has an exquisite music in it recalling the happiest effects of Poe and Swinburne. It is called "The Old Churchyard of Bonchurch," and is headed by a note stating that "this old churchyard has been for many years slipping toward the sea, which it is expected will ultimately engulf it."

"The churchyard leans to the sea with its dead—  
It leans to the sea with its dead so long.  
Do they hear, I wonder, the first bird's song,  
When the winter's anger is all but fled,  
The high, sweet voice of the west wind,  
The fall of the warm, soft rain,  
When the second month of the year  
Puts heart in the earth again?

Do they hear, through the glad April weather,  
The green grasses waving above them?  
Do they think there are none left to love them,  
They have lain for so long there, together?  
Do they hear the note of the cuckoo,  
The cry of gulls on the wing,  
The laughter of winds and waters,  
The feet of the dancing Spring?

Do they feel the old land slipping seaward,  
The old land, with its hills and its graves,  
As they gradually slide to the waves,  
With the wind blowing on them from leeward?

Do they know of the change that awaits them,  
 The sepulchre vast and strange?  
 Do they long for days to go over,  
 And bring that miraculous change?

\* \* \* \* \*  
 \* \* \* \* \*

Do they think 'twill be cold when the waters  
 That they love not, that neither can love them,  
 Shall eternally thunder above them?  
 Have they dread of the sea's shining daughters,  
 That people the bright sea-regions  
 And play with the young sea-kings?  
 Have they dread of their cold embraces,  
 And dread of all strange sea-things?

But their dread or their joy—it is bootless,  
 They shall pass from the breast of their mother ;  
 They shall lie low, dead brother by brother,  
 In a place that is radiant and fruitless,  
 And the folk that sail over their heads  
 In violent weather  
 Shall come down to them, haply, and all  
 They shall lie there, together."

The sonnets, of which there is a large number, are unequal. Some of the poet's finest are in this book, and perhaps nowhere has he written one more powerfully imaginative than that entitled "No Death."

NO DEATH.

I saw in dreams a mighty multitude—  
 Gathered, they seemed, from North, South, East and West,  
 And in their looks such horror was exprest,  
 As must forever words of mine elude.  
 As if transfixed by grief, some silent stood,  
 While others wildly smote upon the breast,  
 And cried out fearfully, "No rest, no rest!"  
 Some fled, as if by shapes unseen pursued.

Some laughed insanely. Others shrieking, said,  
 "To think that yesterday we might have died ;  
 For then God had not thundered, 'Death is dead!'"  
 They gashed themselves till all with blood were red.  
 "Answer, O God ; take back this curse !" they cried—  
 But "Death is dead," was all the voice replied.

“Wind-voices” was warmly praised by “all sorts and conditions” of critics : the review which most deeply touched and pleased the author was the long and generous article in *The Athenæum*, by Mr. Theodore Watts.

In the last year or two of his life Philip Marston gained a new friend in the person of Mr. Churchill Osborne, of Salisbury, whose admiration and affection for the poet were returned in full. Another friend was Mr. Herbert Clarke, whose visits he always looked forward to and with whom he spent many “forgetful hours.”

His health henceforth steadily declined. His power of concentration lessened, and all labour became a weariness to him. “It is impossible I can live long,” he was wont to exclaim, impatiently—“how unutterably thankful I would be for the end, if only—if only—I *knew* what lay beyond !”

Until the summer of 1886, however, he still wrote industriously, though rarely in verse. In August he and his father were at Brighton for rest and change of air. Every autumn for some years past, it may be mentioned here, father and son went away somewhere together ; neither was wont to tire of the other’s companionship, for the friendship between them was almost as brotherly and amicable as paternal and filial. One hot day, while bareheaded in the glare of the sun, Philip was prostrated by a heat-stroke, which was followed by serious illness of an epileptiform nature. Mind and body suffered from the strain, and the derangement foretold death.

So great was his vitality and power of endurance that neither his father nor the friends who saw him at this time guessed the imminence of the end. Mrs. Moulton was disturbed by his condition, but when she sailed for America early in October she foresaw no final breakdown.

Throughout the winter his letters were full of foreboding and weariness. “You will miss me, perhaps, when I am gone, but you must not mourn for me. I think few lives have been so deeply sad as mine, though I do not forget those who have blessed it.” This was the keynote of each infinitely sad letter. About mid-winter he wrote to Mrs. Moulton, “I feel that I said my last good-bye to you, that 4th of October, when we parted at the Euston Station. I shall be gone—somewhere—before you come again. The stony streets will be here, and the bells that drive me mad will ring ; but *I* shall be gone. You will miss me



sometimes, I think, you and a few others ; and perhaps people will be sorry when they remember how dark and lonely was the life I lived here." Again "If I *could* only sleep. I try everything, but rest will not come. Is there anything in all the world so good as sleep."

Serious illness and months of tardy convalescence prevented my seeing anything of Philip Marston from the spring of 1886 until last December. On Christmas forenoon I went to see and spend an hour or so with him. He was in bed, and I was shocked by the change. It was almost imperceptible to those who had lately seen much of him, but as nearly a year had elapsed since I had seen him (save for a few minutes on one or two occasions), I found the alteration only too evident.

He was not under medical charge ; for one thing—he considered his ill beyond the healing of any physician. With some difficulty I gained his consent to the advent of a doctor, and his promise to act in strict accordance with the latter's suggestions. Dr. Byres Moir thenceforth attended him with the utmost sympathy and skill, but ere long he saw that nothing more could be done than to render the invalid's last days free from discomfort and pain.

On the last day of January paralysis set in, and gradually the nervous system surrendered. For the next fourteen days he lay speechless, as well as sightless. His efforts to make himself understood were at times most harrowing. Certain desires he managed to convey, but latterly his will-power was insufficient even for the tremulous raising of his poor wasted hand in sign of acquiescence or negation. To another friend and myself I know that he consciously said farewell : blind though he was he saw the shadow of death coming very near.

On Sunday, February 13th, the restlessness had gone, and he spent a better night than he had done for long. It was that strange apathy which sometimes precedes the final energy of the act of death. On Monday morning, about 9.45, he suffered from a momentary palpitation ; gave one or two low sighs, and was gone.

All the fever and fret of his life was passed out of his face on the day when he was laid in his coffin. At last he was asleep and at peace.

On Friday, the day of the funeral, the few friends who were asked to attend felt, on taking a farewell glance at the face of

the dead poet, that Death had never looked more beautiful. Pure and white, with the pallor but not with the rigidity of marble, the serene face lay amidst white flowers which intertwined with the dark hair and beard. Among the many wreaths which had been sent from far and near, were one or two where the laurel prevailed, so that in death also he went honoured as was his due.

Philip Bourke Marston was buried at Highgate cemetery. Having belonged to no sect in matters of religion, and having expressed a desire to have no regular ritual at his grave—though in him, I may say here, abode that large faith in ultimate good which is the vital spirit of all true religions—he was lowered to his rest after the following few earnest words from an old and valued friend of himself and his father: “Our dear brother whom we now commit to the grave found a difficulty in accepting the doctrines of either Churchmen or Dissenters. But though he could not distinctly recognize the intervention of a Divine Power in the affairs of the world, he would not deny the possibility of such a loving superintendence, and it is certain that he manifested love himself to his fellow creatures, especially to the poor by his sympathy and generosity. He inclined, perhaps, more to Positivism than to any other form of worship—but to Love, whether Divine or human, we now humbly commend him.”

It seems fitting to say a few further words here concerning the personality of Philip Marston.

Close upon five feet eleven in height, his erect carriage and alert attitude afforded him a buoyant and youthful aspect. His features were clearly-cut, his sensitive mouth very mobile, and the expression—until the last year or so, when illness wrought such ravage upon him—one of peculiar refinement and very winning. He was always slight, and latterly was fragile, in figure; his hands were a musician's, supple, long-fingered, delicate. This last remark reminds me how passionately fond Philip Marston was of music: I have seen him quivering like an aspen-leaf under its influence. He played a little by ear upon the pianoforte, mainly old plaintive airs, illusive reminiscences of those folk-strains which have usually so much of the *vox humana* in their melodies.

He was generosity itself; hospitality he was wont to exercise to excess. His faculty of putting himself *en rapport* with the

prevailing mood of his company was electric, and it is this, doubtless, which has led so many of his acquaintances to think, on the one hand, that his most intimate friends have exaggerated his habitual spiritual gloom ; and, on the other, that his unhappiness has not by them been sufficiently emphasised.

It may be said in a word, that his customary bearing towards his friends was one of animation and interest ; that his habitual attitude, for himself, was one of almost invariable gloom and deep despondency. His interests dwelt mainly with literature ; supremely with poetry. He was a much wider reader than many of his friends supposed, though his knowledge was superficial elsewhere than in poetry and fiction. As one who knew him intimately, and to whom he has often spoken on the subject—and my assertion is corroborated by Dr. Westland Marston, Mrs. Moulton, and one or two others who enjoyed only a less degree of intimacy—I can emphatically affirm that Marston was not, as has been stated in an obituary notice by one of his acquaintances, an atheist. He hated dogma and had no definite creed ; but he was equally averse from blatant trumpeting abroad of disbelief, and even affirmed that he considered atheism as illogical as it was undesirable a creed. He was, in a word, an agnostic, with a strong tendency to hope and believe that “all would be well.” His keen and ready sympathy with all upon whom dwelt any ban made him sometimes appear in a dubious mental aspect ; and his bitter sorrows caused his one dominant desire to be rest—

“ Rest, rest, a perfect rest  
Shed over brow and breast.”

Work is the surest palliative for a broken heart, and in arduous and incessant labour, as has been already stated, the blind poet found some measure of relief. In his later years his idea of possible happiness was to be independent of literary work ; to live in an old manor completely shut off from the outside world by orchards, old-fashioned fragrant-flowered gardens, and shady avenues of elm and beech ; to be within a short walk of the sea ; there to write nothing but poetry, and then only when the impulse was irresistible ; and there to have occasional friendly visits from dwellers in distant Babylon. He dwelt on this halcyon existence with a half-humorous, half-yearning persistency which showed how keen was his longing for some such



peaceful passing of his remaining years. "Just imagine," he would say, "what it would mean to be beyond reach of this everlasting Babel of the Euston Road! Instead of the clatter of cabs and omnibusses and the jangling din of those accursed bells, to hear such blessed and soothing sounds as the rustling of leaves and the swaying of boughs; the cawing of rooks and the drowsy cooing of the wood-doves; the wind passing over the grass, and the ever-varying music of the sea!" No such sweet nepenthê was to be his, however, poor fellow.

The ear accustoms itself wonderfully to any noisiness that is incessant, and of the endless tumult of the busy Euston Road Marston became practically heedless; but to the intermittent yet far from infrequent clangour of the church, chapel, and other bells he never grew resigned. In one of his latest sonnets, if not as I believe *the* latest, he refers to these hated bells. This sonnet is published in *Lippincott's Magazine* for the present month (April). Appearing just six weeks after the poet's death, "My Grave" seems a sadly appropriate last utterance, a pathetic "music at the close."

#### MY GRAVE.

For me no great metropolis of the dead,—  
 Highways and byways, squares and crescents of death,—  
 But, after I have breathed my last sad breath,  
 Am comforted with quiet, I who said,  
 "I weary of men's voices and their tread,  
 Of clamouring bells, and whirl of wheels that pass,"  
 Lay me beneath some plot of country grass,  
 Where flowers may spring, and birds sing overhead:  
 Whereto one coming, some fair eve in spring,  
 Between the day-fall and the tender night,  
 Might pause awhile, his friend remembering,  
 And hear low words breathed through the failing light,  
 Spoken to him by the wind, whispering,  
 "Now he sleeps long, who had so long to fight."

I wrote, a few sentences back, of Marston's ideal of possible happiness during his later years. In his boyhood, youth, and early manhood all his desires were towards action. He had then no craving for rest, for the iron had not yet entered into his soul sufficiently to paralyse each faculty save that of endurance. The soldier, the mariner, the pioneer—those were the men whom he envied most. *To be doing*—that was his keenest desire. In all stories of adventure, real and fictitious, he took

great delight. For a long period during his youth he lived a kind of dual existence. His father has told me how Philip was "always off somewhere"—India, China, America, Australia, the North and South Polar Seas, the Pacific, and so forth. In those imaginary voyages he was invariably accompanied by two jovial and dare-devil personages whom he had named Buffalo and Mackintosh. In the daring exploits upon the high seas, in the wild scenes in unexplored countries, in the terrific combats with bloodthirsty savages, Buffalo and Mackintosh were often temporarily prostrated; but they were always to hand for any new voyage when their creator required them. Both "worthies" continued to be faithful companions for many years, and when at last they died a natural death, their memories remained ever-green. Philip always enjoyed a reference to the daring Buffalo and the redoubtable Mackintosh, and, I suspect, oftentimes joined them again in the land of shades and revelled in many a surreptitious adventure. Although his poetic development was precocious, he had no wish "to sit at home and write poetry." When the glamour of recent association with Buffalo and Mackintosh was not upon him, he would yearn even for the unromantic life of a city clerk. Anything to be doing; that was his one cry until it changed into "anything for rest."

Nothing is more surprising than the maturity of thought and expression which occasionally characterises the productions of young poets who have in them something of the divine breath of genius. As already mentioned, such fine poems as "A Christmas Vigil" and "The Rose and the Wind"—indeed, all the poems in "Song-Tide"—were written before the poet's twentieth birthday: several of his published sonnets were composed between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. The following ("Song-Tide," *p.* 179) was written during the author's fifteenth year.

DESOLATE.

I strain my worn-out sight across the sea,  
 I hear the wan waves sobbing on the strand,  
 My eyes grow weary of the sea and land,  
 Of the wide deep and the forsaken lea:  
 Ah! love, return! ah! love, come back to me!—  
 As well these ebbing waves I might command  
 To turn and kiss the moist deserted sand!  
 The joy that was, is not, and cannot be.  
 The salt shore, furrowed by the foam, smells sweet;  
 Oh, blest for me, if it were now my lot,

To make this shore my rest, and hear all strife  
 Die out like yon tide's faint receding beat :  
 If he forgot so easily in life,  
 I may in death forget that he forgot.

“A Christmas Vigil,” written in Marston's nineteenth year, is beyond question a remarkable poem for so young a man : its dramatic vision and intensity, its poetic concision, its humanity, combine in irresistible appeal. In this sad story of a ruined woman's life there are passages displaying that exquisite insight into and sympathy with external nature which Philip Marston, blind though he was, so frequently demonstrated. This is hardly a verse such as we would expect from a blind man :

“Now, when the time of the sun's setting came,  
   The sky caught flame ;  
 For all the sun, which as an empty name  
 Had been that day, then rent the leaden veil  
 And flashed out sharp, 'twixt watery clouds, and pale ;  
 Then, suddenly, a stormy wind upsprang,  
   That shrieked and sang ;  
 Around the reeling tree-tops loud it rang,  
 And all was dappled blue, and faint fresh gold,  
 Lovely, and virgin ; wild, and sweet, and cold.”

But neither in “Wind-Voices” nor in either of its successors is there anything more memorable than the exquisite lyric, “The Rose and the Wind.” It is in point of substance as well as in manner very remarkable as the work of a youth. In a letter which Rossetti wrote to its author occurs the following passage of genuine as well as generous praise : “Only yesterday evening I was reading your ‘Garden Secrets’ to William Bell Scott, who fully agreed with me that it was not too much to say of them that they are worthy of Shakespeare in his subtlest lyrical moods.” Of these “Garden Secrets”—which are to be found in “Song-Tide” and “Wind-Voices”—the “Rose and the Wind” is the second.

#### THE ROSE AND THE WIND.

DAWN.

*The Rose.*—When think you comes the wind,  
 The wind that kisses me and is so kind ?  
 Lo ! how the lily sleeps ; her sleep is light ;  
 Would I were like the lily pale and white ;  
 Will the wind come ?

*The Beech.*—Perchance for thee too soon.

*The Rose.*—If not, how could I live until the noon?

What, think you, Beech-tree, makes the wind delay?

Why comes he not at breaking of the day?

*The Beech.*—Hush, child, and, like the lily, go to sleep.

*The Rose.*—You know I cannot.

*The Beech.*—Nay, then, do not weep.

*The Beech.*—(after a pause) Thy lover comes, be happy now, O Rose,  
And softly through my bending branches goes.

Soon he shall come, and you shall feel his kiss.

*The Rose.*—Already my flushed heart grows faint with bliss;

Love, I have longed for thee through all the night.

*The Wind.*—And I to kiss thy petals warm and bright.

*The Rose.*—Laugh round me, love, and kiss me; it is well.

Nay, have no fear, the lily will not tell.

## MORNING.

'Twas dawn when first you came, and now the sun

Shines brightly and the dews of dawn are done.

'Tis well you take me so in your embrace;

But lay me back again into my place,

For I am worn, perhaps with bliss extreme.

*The Wind.*—Nay, you must wake, love, from this childish dream.

*The Rose.*—'Tis thou, love, seemest changed; thy laugh is loud,

And 'neath thy stormy kiss my head is bowed.

O love, O Wind, a space wilt thou not spare?

*The Wind.*—Not while thy petals are so soft and fair.

*The Rose.*—My buds are blind with leaves, they cannot see,

O love, O Wind, wilt thou not pity me?

## EVENING.

*The Beech.*—O Wind, a word with you before you pass,

What didst thou to the Rose that on the grass

Broken she lies and pale, who loved thee so?

*The Wind.*—Roses must live and love, and winds must blow.

Of recent years it was often in Philip Marston's mind to write a novel which would be something else than "a pot-boiler." But for long he had neither time nor any likely opportunity for the enterprize, and latterly he had not the energy to undertake a task whose ultimate result was so very dubious.

I suppose the stories included in this volume represent about a third—possibly rather more—of Marston's short tales. There are one or two which I should have liked to have added, but which it was not practicable to obtain in time for inclusion; but the selection, as it stands, is undoubtedly thoroughly representative.

These stories their author was wont to speak of, half in fun, as his *Prose Bitters*. It had long been his wish to see the best of them published in collective form in this country, but he had never been gratified in this keen desire. Very shortly before his death he was glad to hear that Mr. Walter Scott would issue a selection of them in a single volume: when a day or two later I spoke to him concerning some details of publication he could only express by gesture and hand-pressure what his wishes were. It was his own desire that the volume should bear its present title. The book was to have been dedicated to a friend, but it has been thought better, as things now are, to have a more general dedication.

And now all is over for Philip Bourke Marston—the long toil, the abiding pain, the infinite weariness. Many years ago, while he was in the prime of youth, tears quenched the flickering flame of light in his dimmed eyes: through a darker gloom than any in which he travailed here he has passed towards the light.

Looking at his serene face on the day ere the coffin-lid enclosed it, where something lovelier than mortal sleep subtly dwelt, there was one at least of his friends who forgot all sorrow in a great gladness for the blind poet—now no longer blind, if he be not overwhelmed in a sleep beyond our ken. At such a moment the infinite satisfaction of Death seems bountiful largess for the unrestful turmoil of a few “dark, disastrous years.”

Wheresoever he who is gone from us now is, surely it is well with him.

“Far off is he, above desire or fear:  
No more subjected to the change or chance  
Of the unsteady planets.”

WILLIAM SHARP.

BY

**PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.**

---

**SONG-TIDE.** Chatto and Windus. (Out of print.)

**ALL-IN-ALL.** Chatto and Windus.

**WIND-VOICES.** Elliot Stock. (Out of print.)

**FOR A SONG'S SAKE : AND OTHER STORIES.**

Walter Scott. Crown 8vo, price 4s. 6d.

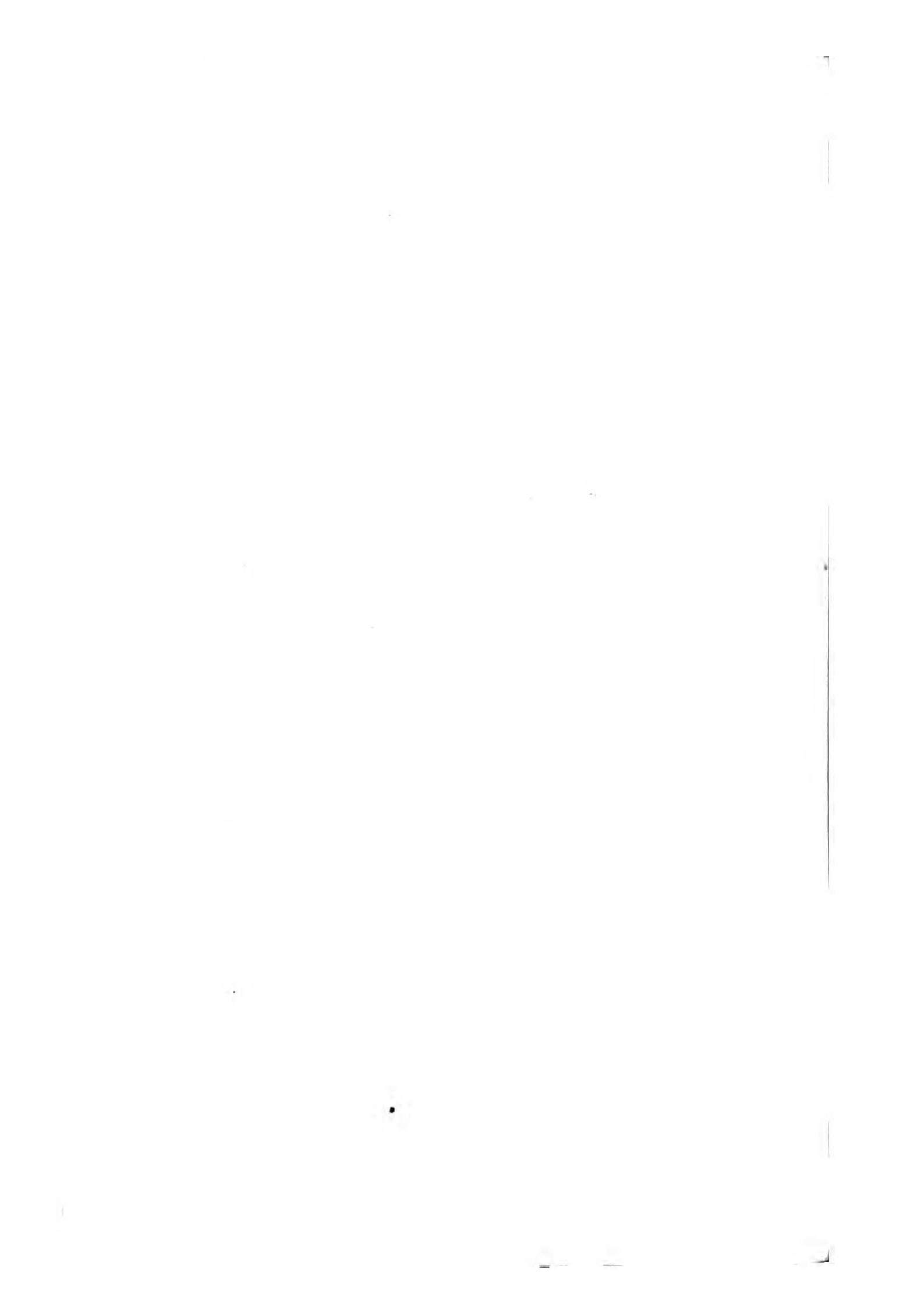




*Of me ye may say many a bitter thing,  
O Men, when I am gone, gone far away  
To that dim Land where shines no light of day.  
Sharp was the bread for my soul's nourishing  
Which Fate allowed, and bitter was the spring  
Of which I drank and maddened, even as they  
Who wild with thirst at sea will not delay,  
But drink the brine and die of its sharp sting.*

*Not gentle was my war with Chance, and yet  
I borrowed no man's sword—alone I drew,  
And gave my slain fit burial out of view.  
In secret places I and Sorrow met.  
So, when you count my sins, do not forget  
To say I taxed not any one of you.*

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.



# FOR A SONG'S SAKE,

—101—

## CHAPTER I,

### FOUND.

WHAT a wild February night it was! All the witches were abroad in the air, chasing each other through the wind, or playing at hide-and-seek in and out of the great luminous clouds which were from time to time hurried across the moon as she sailed, pale and spectral, above the windy turbulence. Such a night in the country is magical. The leafless woods are populous with shapes we see not, yet whose presence we feel. Each blade of grass is informed with strange life; and what is it that the trees shout to one another as the wind comes on, billowing through their dark ranks. In London, even, such a night is not without charm. There is a keen sense of purity and triumph in the air, with a nameless fragrance, blown from what far-off fields that pasture no herds of ours.

It was just the night to set a poet or painter dreaming, and to fill his head with all sorts of nonsense; so, as Herbert Montague *was* a painter, can we wonder that, as he walked from a friend's house in the Regent's Park, where he had been passing the evening, back to his own modest rooms in Museum Street, his mind should have been full of dreams and visions? The road on which he walked skirted the Park, and he and the wind seemed to have it to themselves; for had not the clocks all round just struck one, and the good people in that most respectable neighbourhood, do they not retire to rest at reason-

able hours? He was walking on, then, dreaming and smoking, when he became aware of a sound so subtly sweet, so delicate, so remote, that it seemed to him like a flower of sound, sprung of the wind—a half-blown aerial lily. He stood still and listened, and the air seemed sweetened by some divine fragrance. Then he went on his way, and the sound became more distinct, till he discovered it to be simply the voice of a girl singing. In a few moments he came up with her. She was leaning against a lamp-post, and the light fell full on her face, and on the thin, torn dress in which she was shivering.

“Too young for this sort of thing,” thought Montague, as, with a glance at her, he passed on. He did not go far before an impulse moved him to return to where she was standing. He had a shilling all ready to produce, but he spoke first:

“I’m afraid it’s too late for your singing to be appreciated to-night. Don’t you think you had best go home?”

“I have no home,” she replied.

Herbert saw now that it was neither an English nor a common face that he was looking at.

“How can that be?” he asked, kindly; “don’t you belong to any one?”

“No—I belong to no one,” she returned. “Father died this morning, and they turned me out because I had no money, and I’ve been all the time since in the streets. I’m so cold and hungry that I can’t cry for father, as I want to do.”

She spoke English well, but with a foreign accent.

“Your father was very good to you, then?” said Herbert.

“Good?” cried the girl—“good? I should think he was. He was an angel!”

“You are not English?” he observed, quite interested in his adventure.

“No; I am an Italian, but my mother was English. I don’t remember her—she died so long ago.”

“And what do you think of doing to-night?” inquired Herbert.

“How can it interest you what I do?” cried the girl. “I suppose I can sleep here in the street, can’t I? Oh, how cold it is!”

There was something in her tone half-pleading, half-defiant—something in the desperate light which flashed out of her dark eyes that went straight to the young man’s heart, and at that time a very tender heart it was. He replied, as young people

very often do, on the impulse of the moment, without at all considering the consequences of their speech :

“No, my child, you can't sleep in the streets.”

“And why not, will you tell me, please?”

“Yes, I will, with pleasure. Just for this reason, then—that I won't let you. What's your name?”

“My name is Mabel.”

“Well, then, Mabel, we may let our own people lie in the streets, but not you, because you are a stranger. I live very near here, and you must come with me. My landlady is a good soul, and she will give you food and a night's shelter ; come !”

The girl's eyes seemed to brighten, but she answered :

“Father said I was never to listen if gentlemen spoke to me.”

“And he was quite right,” said Herbert ; “but, you see, he never thought of your being like this, and then I am not a fellow who would do you any harm.”

She did not resist as he drew her along, but he soon saw that she was really too weak to walk, so he took the first cab they met, and they drove off to Museum Street. The house in which Montague occupied rooms on the second floor was one of those strongholds of Bohemia of which many people read, but only the Bohemian knoweth. It was kept by one Mrs. Bloomfield, who, with a little slavy, did the entire work of the house, save that her son, Master Tommy, when released from the compulsory education of his school studies, was put to knife and boot cleaning, or sent for the lodgers' beer, an expedition which he never objected to undertake. Mrs. Bloomfield was a person of moods, and as tides are governed by the moon, so were this lady's moods regulated by her husband, Mr. Bloomfield—Ned Bloomfield—whom dire necessity had made a house-painter, and nature had designed for a “stump” orator. When Mr. Bloomfield was in work, and not in liquor, a more delightful landlady never gladdened a lodger's heart than she of whom I write. Mr. G. G. Smith, on the first floor, would find, and not infrequently, his simple breakfast of roll and coffee supplemented by eggs, bestowed on him by his landlady out of a basket she had received from the country. Mr. Clayton, perhaps the most underpaid and hardworked of all literary hacks, would sometimes find the dreary chop, that unpalatable resource of poverty-stricken bachelors, displaced by a fine cut



off missis's own joint, smoking hot, with gravy and two vegetables, and, if you eat chops and steaks all the week, you will understand how good that plate of roast mutton or beef used to taste. But when Mr. Bloomfield was at the Queen's Arms round the corner—where, if he was emptying his pockets, he was at the same time filling the heads of those about him with an amount of political knowledge by which I am sure they must have been greatly benefited—his wife, who had little interest in the diffusion of knowledge, became another person, and, of the change, her children felt the first fruits. Master Tommy, who, but the night before had been requested to move out of mother's way like a dear little man, would be, from time to time, pinched, spanked and shaken; his little sister, Anna Maria Matilda, receiving the same treatment; after which they would be thrust out into the area, there to cool and howl, or driven forth into the body of the house, where they pranced and yelled, but whether most from bodily pain, or a sense of outraged justice, who shall say? When Mr. Clayton, on the third floor, heard the sounds of woe, his heart would sink within him, for he knew too well, by fatal experience, that his chops that day would be done to a cinder, or not done at all—that the potatoes would be cold and hard—and as for coals, he might whistle for them. But he paid for board, and, whatever it might be, he could not afford to forego it. Mr. G. G. Smith, whose worldly circumstances were much better, and who only dined at home when it suited him, on hearing Master Tommy's roar, would ring the bell and countermand his dinner, if he had ordered it in the house for that day.

Sundry reminiscences of Mrs. Bloomfield's moods occurred to our hero as he drove towards Museum Street with his charge, and there grew upon him a dismal conviction that he had that very afternoon discovered Master Tommy leaping and howling in the area—occasionally battering the door with his feet. This recollection was not a cheerful one, but of course, now there could be no going back from what he had undertaken. Arrived at the familiar house, Montague opened the door with his latch-key, and jerking his candle from a table in the hall, led the way up the dark, uncarpeted stairs. He was in mortal fear lest he should meet Smith or Clayton, or that dreadful little wag, the artist Jones, who lived at the top of the house. Did two flights of stairs, I wonder, ever seem so long before? At length his

own rooms were reached. In the studio the gas was alight and a bright fire burning, before which he rolled the one armchair the room boasted. Having installed Mabel in this, he told her he must leave her for a few minutes, and go and speak with his landlady, who, he knew, never went to bed till well into the small hours. How his heart failed within him as he knocked at that lady's parlour door. It was opened by Mrs. Bloomfield herself.

"Well, Mr. Montague!" she said, sharply, "I hope you want nothing more to-night, because, if you do, I can't oblige you, that's all! The whole of this blessed day have I been on my feet!"

"Indeed," replied Herbert, "I do know how hard you work. I assure you it has often made my heart ache!"

To which Mrs. Bloomfield said:

"Bah! just as if you thought about it, one way or the other!"

"But you must give me a few minutes' talk," said Herbert. "You mustn't shut me out to-night." And with that he pushed by Mrs. Bloomfield and took up his position, with his back to her fire, and thus it was that he began the attack.

"I have brought you," he said, "a new lodger for that dear little room which you have on my floor. I think you want eight shillings a week for it; but that's not enough. I shall pay you more." And without waiting for any reply, he manfully caught his bull by the horns, and grappled with it, and told what we already know. Between surprise and indignation, his good landlady was speechless for a moment or two. Then she burst out with:

"Well, Mr. Montague, a pretty thing you have been a gone and done! A pretty thing to do, wasn't it? And now, if you don't this very minute send that street vagabond about her business, I'll come myself and turn her out by the shoulders. Just as sure as my name's Sarah Bloomfield, I'll do it, and you know I mean it!"

"Not you," returned Herbert, with a laugh.

"And why, pray? My house ain't a workhouse; I don't keep a night-ward open for paupers; nor is it another sort of house, which, perhaps, you fancy it is!"

"Indeed, I fancy nothing of the kind. I know it to be the most respectable, as it is the pleasantest, house in London. I've tried other houses, but I always come back here. It draws me like a loadstone. Don't do what you would repent to-mor-

row. You're cross to-night, and why? Because Mr. Bloomfield has been perhaps a little too free with his money at the public. By Jove! how he does snore!"

During the foregoing conversation, Mr. Bloomfield from the adjoining room had kept up a full-toned accompaniment to his wife's shrill performance.

"Snore!" ejaculated his partner. "I should think so, and so would you snore, and louder too, I'll be bound, if you had drunk four or five pots of beer, and who knows how many goes of whisky and gin besides!"

"Very likely," he replied, with a smile, though rather at a loss to know on what his landlady founded her belief in his snoring capabilities. "But," he resumed, "don't be hard-hearted. I pledge you my word that if you don't like the young person she shall walk away to-morrow, but don't turn her out to-night. Befriend a young fellow who acted on a kind impulse, and let me be bound to you for ever by the warmest feeling of friendship. There are enough cruel people in the world, my dear Mrs. Bloomfield. Why shouldn't you and I be a little different?" And with this very moving speech Montague held out his hand, and came off victorious, as he generally did. So, while sheets were being got ready and put upon the bed, he went back to his own room. Mabel had slid from the chair in which he had left her, and was crouching before the fire, her back resting against the chair. As he looked at her then, he saw that she was much more beautiful than he had thought. Her face was pale and perfect in shape; the lips were full and very red, the eyes were dark and profound, with a look in them of prayer or patient protest. What brightness might be in them he did not then even conjecture. This strangely beautiful face was set in a frame of crisp brown hair. He produced some biscuits, and beat up a couple of eggs in sherry. He was noted for his egg beating.

"Now you must take some of this," he said, bringing the glass over to her.

"I don't feel hungry now," answered the girl, "only sick and sleepy."

"I don't care about you taking much till you've had a good night's rest," he urged, "but you must take a little"—which she did, saying that she liked it. Then he came and sat down in the chair against which she was leaning.

"How good you are to me!" she said, simply, resting her arms upon his knees. "It would have been very cold out in the streets all night, wouldn't it? Would they have put me in prison for staying there?"

"Very likely they would," he replied.

"That *would* have been dreadful," she said, and then her head dropped on his knee, and when Mrs. Bloomfield came to say that the room was ready she found Mabel asleep.

"She's too fast asleep for us to wake her," said Herbert, and taking her up in his arms, he carried her into the room of which mention has before been made. Having deposited her on the bed, he left her there in the hands of Mrs. Bloomfield, with a request to that lady to wait upon him the very first thing in the morning. Then he went back to his room, where he smoked pipe after pipe, and indeed was so restless and full of excitement that he never went to sleep all night.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND.

HERBERT thought the morning, with the rakish London sparrows and the early milkman, would never come; but it dawned at last, as in due time all things, not forgetting love and death, do reach us. The gray, chill morning looked in at his window, and Mr. Clayton, who had been making a night of it, as he always did whenever he received a cheque, let himself in with his latch-key. Then the cocks at the back of the house began to crow; then the milk-cart, with all its clatter of cans, rattled up to the door; and, at length, came breakfast and Mrs. Bloomfield. What a good thing breakfast is when one has sat up all night! Mrs. Bloomfield had had her breakfast, but she would gladly sit and talk to Mr. Montague while he had his. Fortunately this lady was in the best temper possible, for that morning her spouse had awoke with a splitting headache and a penitent heart, and as a pledge for his better behaviour in the future, he had put into his wife's hands all that remained of the week's earnings except sixpence.



Mrs. Bloomfield had not very much to report. The child, as she was now pleased to call the stranger, was certainly scantily dressed. Her clothes were worn, but they had been really good things once. About her neck she had a gold locket, which contained a miniature of a lady, as didn't look foreign at all. It was there and then decided that Mrs. Bloomfield was, with all expedition, to go forth, and to purchase a neat outfit. So the landlady went, leaving her lodger to cultivate the virtue of patience. What a trial that waiting was! He tried to work, but that was impossible; he tried looking at his watch, and he tried not looking at it. He walked up and down, and smoked and smoked, and at last took up his post at the window.

His glance fell upon the name of "Hunt" over a shop-front. The letters of the name held his eye with a resistless fascination. What sort of a man was this Hunt, he wondered—was he a happy man, or had he his skeleton in the cupboard? He wondered why he had never noticed the shop before. Then he became interested in an old gentleman, who was walking along and reading a newspaper, and doing both in a self-satisfied fashion. There was the young man who had just brought the fish to the next house flirting with the pretty housemaid, who, because she *was* pretty, and lived in the service of a pre-Raphaelite republican artist, wore no cap, and dressed her hair just as her young mistresses did, and was equally pert to tradespeople and visitors. Montague thought how it would be if ever some profane hand should clean the windows of that house. An exhausted swell, smoking a cigar, was whirled by in a hansom. "Whither so fast, I wonder," thought our friend; "and when would Mrs. Bloomfield come back?" To Schoolbred's it was only a step, and she had already been gone an hour and a half; but before the second hour had expired the sight of Mrs. Bloomfield, bearing a great brown paper parcel, blessed the eyes of the waiting artist. His trial was not over yet, however; actually two whole hours elapsed before that long-desired knock came at his door and his landlady entered, followed by Mabel. Mrs. Bloomfield had good taste in all things, and the dress in which she had clothed Mabel, if not of an expensive material, was of a soft texture and a pretty dark-blue colour. There was a neat white collar round her charmingly shaped neck, and white wristbands round her two slender wrists.



"I hope you will think I have done well, sir," said the landlady, "having to h'act on my own responsibility."

"I am sure you have done excellently," he replied; and then, turning to Mabel, he said: "I hope that you slept well, and that you have eaten something this morning."

"She says she slept very well," said Mrs. Bloomfield, who regarded her charge as an infant; "and for breakfast she have had a cup of tea and an egg and some bread and butter."

"And when do you think she had better have something more?" inquired Herbert. For himself he could go from early breakfast to seven o'clock dinner with nothing to eat, but he had an idea that women and invalids were like babies and birds, and wanted to be fed constantly with food in small quantities. Mrs. Bloomfield suggested a glass of wine after the process of dressing, but Mabel cried out with a smile that she couldn't take anything then—that she was not ill, but only a little tired.

"Very well, then," said Herbert to his landlady, "give her a nice little lunch about four o'clock. I wish I hadn't to dine out to-night. Thank you very much, Mrs. Bloomfield, for all you've done. I know I mustn't keep you any longer. Oh! try a bottle of this sherry. I think it's pretty good."

"Thank you, sir, and I'm very much obliged to you." And with this the good soul departed. Now that the hour had come for which he had been longing so eagerly, Herbert felt somewhat shy and scarcely knew what to say first. Finally, he observed that it was a cold morning, to which his companion, seated in a chair before the fire, assented: "Yes, it's very cold, indeed." Her voice struck home to him, as it had done the previous night. It was a voice that surprised you by its quietude. It was very low, and now and then a wonderful note of pathos would vibrate through it. It was a voice so sensitive, so in harmony with herself, that from it you could have told the expression of her face. It was a voice that, once heard, haunted one ever after.

At length Mabel, in her turn, broke the silence. She was quite self-composed.

"I want," she said, simply, "to tell you about myself, and to ask you what I am to do."

"Nothing would interest me more," answered the young man, and he settled himself to listen.

The story which Mabel narrated we do not pretend to give in her own words. Her father, Varese, was one of those handsome, kind-hearted, not very scrupulous, adventurous men of which nearly every country can furnish an example. Play and love—these two words contained the essence of his life. He handled the bow as skilfully as he did the billiard-cue. Then he sang. It was not the power of his voice that so much charmed people, but rather the subtle pathos of it and the careless grace of it. At a German watering-place he met Mabel Torrington. She was a pretty, romantic little thing, and he sang and played her heart away in no time; and then he looked at her, as he had looked at a great many women before, with those kind, wicked, splendid eyes of his, and like the others, she went down before them. But this time he himself was hit pretty hard. He was quite frank, and told her what kind of life it was he led—but he did not make this confession till he felt sure that her heart was in his own keeping. Of course, Miss Torrington, who was rich and of good family, knew well that her parents would never consent to such a marriage, and since this grace was unattainable, the young lady bore the privation very philosophically. She was of age, and she chose to give herself to Varese, who lost no time in making her his wife. I am glad to say that the experiment proved a complete success. Three years they wandered about Europe; then she lay down one day and died, quite quickly and unexpectedly, and left with him their sole child, Mabel. When the girl was seven years old he sent her to a fairly good school, where he especially wished her to be taught English. While she was there he saw her from time to time; when she was twelve he could wait no longer, but took her to live with him.

He had never really recovered from the blow of his wife's death. He frequented his old haunts, but he handled billiard-cue and violin less skilfully—or was it that luck was against him? He and his little girl had often to weather hard times. When Mabel was fifteen he received, quite unexpectedly, the sum of two hundred pounds. With this he came to England, the country of his sweet, fond, little dead wife. He went to the county in which her father's house stood. He saw a fine carriage drive out of the park gates. Some of her people, he thought were in it. Then he walked to the little village church, where so many of the Torringtons slept, and among the others,

his wife's mother, who had died unforgiving. As he walked back to the station in the soft June twilight, through which a few stars, tremulous, as it were, with heat, were beginning to peer—as he heard from a thicket close by the long, liquid notes of the nightingale, ending in that divine gush of melody—it seemed to him as if the peace of Almighty God had fallen upon him. He blessed the memory of her who had gone—he blessed her country and all within it.

If such moments could but last, some of us might turn into saints ; for it is in these moods, that come we know not how, that the heart grows strangely tractable, and at the same time yearns passionately to be absorbed into some spirit of infinite goodness.

The country of his love did not treat our poor friend as well as his own had treated her. I mean only this, that during his sojourn in England he had bad fortune from first to last. He taught himself bookbinding, and with this, and cards and fiddling, he and his pretty daughter got along somehow. One by one he parted with all the little pleasures of life. He no longer took his meals at the Italian restaurant in Compton Street. The four-penny soups, the ten-penny fillet, the long cigars, the society of his bearded, unwashed brothers—these were delights from which he seemed shut out.

At length illness took such fast hold on him as to keep him in bed. He had *not* taken care of the pence, and this was probably why the pounds, in his case, failed to show that wisdom of behaviour with which the old proverb accredits them. All were gone then except the last. What was to be done? An idea flashed into Mabel's head. She knew she could sing well—her father had taken trouble with her voice—so one day, thinking she could leave him alone for a few hours, she went out desperately into the streets and began singing. Her unusually beautiful face, and equally striking voice, with her simple modest manner, attracted much attention, and she returned quite rich. So for a month the father lay dying, and the girl kept on singing.

The house in which they had two dreary rooms was one of those given up to disreputable mechanics, and dressmakers who did not, perhaps, depend wholly on the needle for their means of livelihood. Weary hours must those have been for the sick Italian, when, in his child's absence, he tossed about on his hard

bed and listened to the altercations which were always taking place between the landlady and her first floor lodger, a dress-maker of the type to which we have alluded.

"I'll let them know just what you're worth," would roar the voice of the landlady from the bottom of the stairs.

"No, you won't, you old cat!" the other would cry, with a defiant laugh, from her place on the landing; "how about that letter which came for Smith the other day?"

Then the landlady, who was neither young nor lovely, would pass up the stairs, and for a time there would be peace. Over his head all day long a journeyman carpenter sawed and hammered, and, later, all through the night, while his daughter sat by his bedside, men lurched past the door, stumbling and swearing at every step. Sometimes a woman might be heard to shriek, which would be followed by a sound of subdued voices, as of people holding council. Then silence would reign till the next drunken lodger sought the haven of his bed.

Now, it chanced that one day when Mabel was out singing, the poor invalid, tossing restlessly on his bed, threw over the table by his bedside, on which Mabel had set his barley-water. The poor lips were dry and blistered by thirst; he called and called and called, but though his cry must have been heard, no one answered it. In his bitter misery, too weak to call any more, he lay and sobbed like a beaten child. At length he could no longer endure the hell of thirst, and, slipping from his bed, he tried to make his way to where the water stood, but he fell in the attempt to reach it, and, unable to return, he lay shivering on the floor till his daughter came back. How she felt—what she said to the people of the house—the reader can imagine. The Grim Visitor could not have been kept very much longer from the door, and the accident which we have just narrated threw it open to him at once. After that night Varese had done for ever with all fiddling—yes, and with all love-making too. When the landlady informed Mabel that she could keep her room no longer, and suggested the workhouse, such fear fell upon the girl that she ran out into the streets. She would sing, she thought, and by that get quite enough to pay for a night's lodging. Then, surely, she thought, she would get a place somewhere as shop girl. While she had felt that her father's chance of life hung upon her singing, she had sung without ever thinking of the people, only regarding their money; but to sing for herself



in cold blood!—heart-stricken, she shrank from it. All the day she wandered about London in what seemed to her like a horrible nightmare. When the night came, so famished with hunger was she, so exhausted with cold, that she did the most foolish, if the most natural, thing she could have done, and began to sing where there was not a soul to hear her. Yes, fortunately there was one, and that one was Herbert Montague, with his tender, susceptible heart. So, up to the present time, that is the end of Mabel's story. "You will help me to find something to do, won't you?" she said, as she concluded. Now, in the watches of the last night, Herbert had been forming his plans, which he now proceeded to unfold.

"Mabel," he said, looking at her very kindly with those clear, honest eyes of his—"Mabel, I am an artist."

"I thought so," she said.

"By the things about the room?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you know something about pictures."

"I have seen a good many pictures in my own country, and I love them; that is all I know."

"Well," said Montague, "you have just the face I have been wanting to paint for years. I sha'n't tell you whether I think it's a pretty face, but it's the face I want. Will you let me take care of you, then, as my child, and in return let me paint you as often as I wish. Should you like that? Tell me."

"Yes, I should like it," she said, shyly, but earnestly, as children do sometimes when one proposes a great treat to them. "Will you promise to send me away when you have no more need of me?" she asked. "But then, if you didn't tell me, I should find it out and go."

"How wrong you would be, then!" he replied, with a laugh. "You would very likely go away when I most wanted you. No, if you are going to be my child, you must be an obedient one. And as for sitting, I shall want you no end of time, for I am a most indefatigable worker. Do you really think you could bear it?"

"I think I could bear almost anything if I *had* it to bear, but *that* I should *like*."

"I think by the look of your mouth you could," he said; so there and then the compact was struck, and when Mrs. Bloomfield came in with lunch, she found them the best of friends.

From time to time, as the girl thought of her father, the bitter tears brimmed her eyes. Presently Herbert had to go and dress for dinner. When he issued from his room, splendid in black cloth and lustrous linen, Mabel thought she had never before seen anything so fine, and it must be said that a very handsome fellow he was. He had a well-knit, athletic figure, a rather pale, but perfectly healthy-looking face ; a brown beard, with warm gold lights in it ; bright blue eyes that could look very tenderly, or could flash like steel, and a good deal of crisp hair curled round his small, classic head. To some people his voice was charming. It was not particularly low, nor was extreme sweetness characteristic of it, but it had a tone of manly reliance and sincerity which was like the ring of true gold. About his manners opinions were divided. Some say they had a careless grace, others that they were decidedly brusque.

"Well, Mabel," he said, looking down at her very kindly, "I must be off now. Make yourself at home here. Let me see. I believe there's a novel about somewhere. I can't look for it myself, everything in this den is so abominably dusty. Ask Mrs. Bloomfield to find it. Be sure and eat something, and go to bed early. Good-night."

Then he ran downstairs, and struck out briskly in the direction of Tavistock Square, where lived his host for that evening, Mr. Bryant Jackson. This gentleman was one of those dear souls who believe in rising genius. He had always on hand a stock of budding poets, and half-developed artists, and young men whose comedies were always on the point of being acted, but never came off. It is surprising for how long a man can live on what he is expected to do ; for a certain amount of fame he gives a promissory note of performance, which, when presented, is often not credited. Jackson was a man of good judgment and real appreciation, and he was large-hearted and kind. His wife, who still retained some relics of prettiness, patronized her lions, or rather, the lionkins, that roamed about her rooms. As soon as she thought she could do so, she loved to call young men by their Christian names, adopting the motherly air. How many a sensitive bard or painter has winced under her patronage, has been mangled by her smirking assurance that he would do good work some day—she felt quite sure he would. No, he must *not* be discouraged. Mr. Jackson thought there was real promise in the last picture or poem, as



the case might be. They all liked her husband, and for his sake and their own—for they thought it was good for them to be seen at the house—they swallowed his wife with just no more of a wry face over the nauseous draught than they could help.

As I have said, lionkins they mostly were; but they lashed their tails very considerably, and roared the one against the other, and made, altogether, quite a successful noise. Sometimes a real, full-grown lion, a huge monster, out of those great literary jungles where the awful lions and lionesses make their lairs, would appear for a little while upon the scene, and then these smaller members of the leonine species would grow very quiet indeed, and would frisk about their king with little conciliatory growls. There he would stand, dignified extremely, and yet gentle, as for the time they were themselves. Indeed, some of them, seeing how very little he roared, played at being lambs, and, of course, overdid the thing.

After dinner, when the men were left with their wine and cigars, Montague did not acquaint his friends with his adventure, full as his heart was of it. Be it understood that he was a young man of fierce morality, and as for harming a girl whom he had taken under his protection, he would much rather have put a bullet through his head.

These views, he knew, would not be shared by all his friends, and their chaff on a matter so delicate would have angered him. Nothing makes us more cross than to be credited with a virtue we don't possess, or to be taxed with a fault which we do not reckon on our list.

As he walked back to his rooms that night, Montague reflected gravely, for the first time, on what it was that he had done, and he could not disguise from himself that the act had been a somewhat rash one—to take another person to keep, clothe and board, when he had, with all, scarcely enough for himself. But she would save him a good deal in models. He must work hard, and if he found the expense more than he could stand, he would have to find her a place somewhere, that was all. His father, who was a man of fortune and family, belonged to a very old-fashioned school. He was in such a rage at his son's choice of a profession and emigration to Bohemia, that he made him only the smallest allowance. The father was old now and in bad health, not at all likely to live many years, and though Herbert knew that the old man had no love for his only son, still he ex-

pected he would leave him his fortune, if he did nothing further to anger him ; just because he *was* his only son, and family pride in the old man was strong. When he should fall into this inheritance it was easy enough to see that his charge never wanted for anything. It was late when he reached home ; he had just taken his bedroom candle, when his eye fell on a sheet of folded paper. It was a letter, written in the prettiest hand. He opened it and read :

“DEAR MR. MONTAGUE—I want, before going to bed, to thank you once more for all your goodness to me. I don't know what I can say more than this. I have had such a nice evening. The book which you said I might read Mrs. Bloomfield found for me. How interesting it is ! What a kind person Mrs. Bloomfield is ! She brought me some beef-tea before I should go to bed. I am going very early, because you told me to. Good-night, sir.”

“What a dear little thing it is !” he said, as he put the letter into his pocket. He did not notice how blotted with tears it was,

---

### CHAPTER III.

#### AN IDYL OF BOHEMIA.

THE two months that followed were they not, perhaps, the very happiest in Herbert Montague's life ? Every day he and his model became more perfect friends. Her beauty delighted him. What long, glad days he spent painting it. Was ever a sitter fairer, or half so patient ? He had taken her in all things most completely into his confidence. She knew the condition of his funds as well as he did himself. Let us enter the house in Museum Street one April morning. A very important gentleman from Manchester who buys pictures is being shown out by Montague, whose face wears a grave, business aspect. The door closed on the picture-buyer ; he dashes upstairs, taking three steps at a time, and, entering the studio, cries out to the young person who has been hidden from sight in her own apartment :

"Mab, Mab, come here at once, my dear."

In another moment Mab is in the room, her face shining with smiles as she says: "Bought? I *knew* it would be! Didn't I tell you so all along? Perhaps you'll believe me next time!"

"Yes, you child! But how much do you think the old boy gave for it?"

"Very, very much?" she asks, her eyes sparkling.

"Pretty fair, pretty fair," he replies. He is scarcely less of a child than she. "What should you say to thirty pounds, Mab?"

A great "Oh!" from Mab by way of answer.

"More than that," Mab, as our friend in 'Great Expectations' used to say!"

"Thirty-two?" hazards Mabel.

"More than that, mum."

"Thirty-five?"

"No!"

"Forty?"

"No!"

"It couldn't be fifty?"

"Upon my soul, not one farthing less than fifty-five."

Mabel clasps her hands and then prepares to resume work, but Herbert calls out:

"No more work to-day, Mab! We'll have a spree to-day, if we never have one again. But what's the matter? You look quite grave over it? Shouldn't you like it?"

"Yes," she says, "I should like it!"

"What is it, then?" he inquires.

As a sensitive child when asked some question which it knows it is bound to answer, while it hates to do so, stands before you with twitching hands, quivering lips, and eyes filling fast with tears, so stood Mabel. Then, seeing that she could no longer put off the moment, she said just as a child would have done, and the tears *would* come as she spoke:

"I don't want you to think I *want* a treat—that's all!"

"Why, you foolish little thing!" he laughed, "don't you think I want a treat sometimes myself, and wouldn't I much rather have you with me than go alone? Run away and put on your bonnet. You shall have a new one to-morrow."

Then he attired himself in his newest coat, assumed his best hat, and looked, for him, quite a swell.

What should they do, on this divine April day, when the

whole world seemed to have yielded itself up to joy, and all the mighty ravishment of Spring?

What better thing could they have done than the thing they did, which was to go up the river to Kew by the penny steamer? How gently the wind blew! How delicate and warmful was the pure sunlight! The season was young, even as these two were young. Mabel had never before been on one of these steamers, and it delighted her; the people who came on board made her laugh; she wanted to know everything about each place they passed; and at the music of a harp, violin, and cornet, she could scarcely keep her feet from dancing. As for Montague, he revelled in his holiday. On the way to the boat he laid in a stock of good cigars, which he smoked without intermission. He treated himself to a brandy-and-soda. The river, with its boats and piers, and, over all, the soft blue sky; the pleasant noise of the water as the steamer parts it; the notes of harp, and violin, and cornet; the sepulchral voice, crying, "Turn her astern!" or "Stop her!" or the voices shouting, "Now, then, for the Kew boat!"—while Montague lives, will not these sights and sounds in combination bring to his mind the memory of that day, of that dear day, that day of virgin blessedness? Surely, if days get their deserts, that one should be an angel in Paradise!

Of course, Mabel was charmed with the gardens of Kew, but the nicest part of them, she thought, was that called the "Wilderness." In that uncultivated spot smoking is allowed. There these two sat on the grass, pulling it up by handfuls. I wonder why it is that whenever we are near grass we want to pull it? Sitting there, he told her no end of droll stories, of things that had happened to him in his life, till the air rang with her laughter, and she cried out:

"You mustn't tell me any more! Don't you see you've made me laugh so that I'm crying? I have a pain in my side, just where I know my heart is! Oh, how could you have been so absurd? And what a dreadful person your landlady must have been! No, I won't hear any more—I won't."

"Well, then, you sha'n't, for a little time, at any rate," he answered, and began singing, in which she presently joined with her very beautiful voice.

There was nothing fit to eat in Kew, Herbert said; so, when the April twilight was falling, they came by train to Richmond and to what place of entertainment but the "Star and Garter"?



They had a simple meal. Just soup, and fish, and meat, and a blazing rum omelette—and for wine, a pint of sherry and a bottle of champagne—but how they did enjoy it! The repast over, they walked on the terrace, while Herbert smoked his cigar. How pure the wind seemed, and how full of stars was the sky! Presently they took the train to London. As they came out of Waterloo Station, they could hear Big Ben rolling out the three-quarters past ten. They walked back to Museum Street. Mabel dearly loved walking at night. When she went to bed she fell asleep at once, just as a child does, tired out by a day's pleasure. Against her will it was, for she wanted to lie awake, and think how sweet the whole day had been. Montague, too, thought that it had been a nice day, as, having made himself comfortable in the old velveteen coat, he smoked his last pipe before going to bed. It was of his guest of the morning that he thought most, however—that guest who had paid him so liberally, and almost promised him a fresh commission. He also made a very careful study of his ward, and this was the result as he summed it up: sweetness and devotion of nature very strong; sensitiveness, strong; simplicity, strong; appreciation, fair; intellect, inconsiderable; a strong tendency to brood long over any slight hurt. She was sure his pictures were masterpieces; she could even tell what were some of their good points; but, of the things on which he most prided himself she had no sort of knowledge. She liked novels of the romantic type. What her taste was in poetry he had soon found out, and made her very happy by a present of Longfellow's poems. At last his study of character was over, his pipe was smoked out, and he slept the sleep of the self-complacent. The next day the daily routine went on, as if there had been no holiday.

Often when the day's work was over, they would go and dine at some little French house where Montague was not likely to meet any of his brother artists. Then he would walk back with her, leaving her to her books and soon to go to bed, while he passed the rest of the night at his club or at the rooms of a friend. That little first good-night letter of Mabel's was made a precedent of by Herbert, and when he spent his evenings out, which he did about three or four times a week, he never failed to find the folded sheet on his return. What funny little letters they were! One said:

“ I have had such a pleasant evening reading my Longfellow. Don't you like the 'Psalm of Life,' and isn't 'Evangeline' beautiful? I keep the door locked as you tell me to. Two gentlemen came to see you. They seemed very cross when they couldn't get in. One said to the other that was a new freak of yours to lock up the studio. That at one time a fellow could come in if you were not there, and make himself at home. Mrs. Bloomfield's cat has kittens. Would you mind my having one? I sha'n't cry if you say No ; but they are such dear soft little things. I am getting quite fond of the old lay figure. At first, you know, I was rather frightened of it. I suppose you are enjoying yourself very much. I am going to bed now. Good-night.”

After an evening of smoking and drinking, and such songs as young men will sing and such stories as young men will tell, and for the matter of that—older men sometimes, too—these simple letters seemed to him a sort of mental bath, and he went to bed all the better for them. He was really very fond of his charge, and it pleased him to think that he had saved at least one soul from that slough in which so many are daily lost. I must say he was very good to her, and may add that so was she to him, for, when absorbed in work, he became, for the time being, unconscious of anything else. Once, after a stretch of eight hours, he cried, throwing the brush aside: “ There, that will do for to-day ! Do you want to look at yourself, Mab ? ” A very faint “ Yes ” from Mab, as she arose and took a step forward, put out her hands and dropped back in the chair in a faint. Montague called himself a brute for his thoughtlessness in not giving her a glass of wine during all this time, or an occasional rest. Mrs. Bloomfield, who was sent for instantly, appeared at once, and spoke her mind with that freedom which was characteristic of her when her inferior half had been spending more than he should on drink.

“ Poor, dear thing ! ” she exclaimed. “ Why, you know as little about women, Mr. Montague, as my boy Tommy does about babies. Why, my *charwoman* has her meals regular ! Now don't you let this thing happen again ! ”

“ No, indeed, I will not, my dear Mrs. Bloomfield,” he replied, thoroughly penitent and frightened—for he had never seen a woman faint before—and it was such a long time before Mabel



showed any signs of coming to herself. "Dear me, Mrs. Bloomfield," cried the poor fellow, "I am afraid she is very ill. Did you ever see any one so bad before? Mabel, my dear, don't you know me? Shouldn't you like to go to Richmond to-morrow?"

"Stuff and nonsense! What do you suppose she knows about you or Richmond?" broke in Mrs. Bloomfield. "There's no doctor wanted, and I dare say I can get her over it *this* time, if you'll get out of the room, and leave her to me. I can't abear to see men fussing round when women are ill. The very best thing you can do for the poor child, after what you have done, is to take your hat and go off and get your dinner."

"Very well, Mrs. Bloomfield, I will certainly do as you wish," he said, and taking his hat, departed straightway. He was half frantic, for he thought Mabel was going to die; but he comforted himself a little by thinking that if she had really been so ill, Mrs. Bloomfield would have sent him for a doctor. He returned in an hour or two, however, to find Mabel quite brisk again, only very much mystified at what had happened. She had so often before, in these long sittings, been on the point of fainting without letting him know anything about it, and in her innermost heart she had been very proud of this self-control. She wanted never to fail him, and now she had been beaten. He would think her a fragile, good-for-nothing thing.

"It wasn't that I had been sitting too long," she protested, when Montague again called himself bad names; it was the weather, or something else. "Oh! you won't shorten the sittings, will you?"

"I assure you, my dear child," he said, touched through and through by her emotion, "it is almost as bad for me to paint too long as it is for you to sit too long. I don't faint, you know, but there's a horrid sprite who comes when I am done, and takes up his quarters, where do you think, but in my head? And though he's come there of his own free will, he doesn't seem to like it, and he tries to get out, but he can't, and he hangs this side and that, and in front and behind, but all to no purpose, except to make me extremely uncomfortable. Finally, like a certain class of lodger, he departs by night, and when I wake up in the morning I find him gone."

"Is that all true?" asked Mabel.

"Upon my soul it is!" So the sittings were shortened, and a repetition of the fainting fit avoided,

Now that the season has fairly set in, Herbert was out nearly every evening. As a rule he kept Sunday clear for his charge ; and many a pleasant country ramble they had, returning to a modest supper of hard-boiled eggs, salad, cheese and beer. Over this meal how merrily she would laugh, as Herbert gave her funny descriptions of the people he met. Then she would fill him his longest pipe, which she had to kneel down to light, and as he smoked he would often have her sing to him. He was glad to get to bed early, and have a long night's rest. Is not what we call "pleasure" often the hardest work we have to get through? I must now tell of a transgression on Mabel's part, asking the reader not to be too hard with her.

Montague had told her that she must never, on any account, go out by herself in the evening, and she had promised not to. But oh ! those beautiful June nights, when she sat by the window, feeling somehow so like a prisoned bird, and just for this one thing wishing she were a man, that she might go out and roam about the streets. She used to feel quite thankful to the man with the street piano, who came every Monday night, and played in front of the house. She was too restless to read. The Italian blood in her veins answered to the warmth of the summer-time. She wanted to be out and moving in it. Long she withstood the temptation, but one night the bad spirit would be refused no more. She put on her bonnet, locked the door, and taking the key with her, she crept downstairs and slid out. She wandered, without knowing it, into the great fashionable squares, where she watched all the carriages flashing past, to draw up at the brilliantly lighted houses. At last, thinking she had been out as long as was safe, she went home as quickly as she could, let herself in with her latch key, and was thankful when the perilous passage of the stairs was made. If Mrs. Bloomfield should discover her, she intended to ask her to stand her friend ; but, if she could help it, she thought she would rather not say anything about it. The experiment had in all ways turned out so well that our young lady repeated it many times, and on one of these occasions, the fact came under the knowledge of Mrs. Bloomfield, who at once acquainted Montague with it. When he heard it, he turned white with anger, but remained perfectly quiet. He was not a man who got into rages. He said :

"I made her promise never to do such a thing."

"Lor', now, did you?" cried his landlady; "and she to do it after all! I wouldn't have believed it; no, that I wouldn't, after your goodness to 'er, h'and all."

Shortly after Mabel had set out on her next nocturnal expedition, Montague returned to the house. As he expected, he found the door of the studio locked. He had another key, with which he let himself in. Yes, the cage was empty and the bird flown. So what Mrs. Bloomfield had told him was really true! He locked the door on the inside, and, removing the key, set himself to wait. Cabs rattled by, boys called to each other, occasionally tipsy men exchanged pleasantries with one another under the lamp-post which ever regarded the house in which Mrs. Bloomfield and her lodgers resided. Somewhere in this London was Mabel wandering. He had been waiting just two hours, when he heard a light step on the landing. Then the key turned furtively in the lock, the door opened, and Mabel came in. When she caught sight of him she blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Good evening?" he said, frigidly. "I am home, you see, earlier than I thought. I hope you have been in pleasant company."

"I've been in no company," she answered.

She was standing in the middle of the room, dark and sullen, as one sees a child stand sometimes, who knows it has done wrong but is too proud to ask forgiveness. This behaviour was not calculated to soothe Montague's feelings of anger. He waited a moment or two, and then Mabel said, with her eyes on the ground:

"I know you told me not to go out, and I promised you I wouldn't, and I have been out many times and broken my promise. If you can get more out of it than that, do."

"Get more out of it!" he exclaimed. "I should like to know what more could be got out of it? I've tried to be kind to you: all that I could do to make things pleasant for you I have done, and what do you do in return but cheat me and break your word to me. You talk as lightly of a broken promise as you would of a broken wineglass! In your country promises may be only little, petty, silken chains, things nice to play with; but in England we have quite a different class of article. No chains of silk, but fetters of iron. After this I can never believe in you again. I shall not trouble you to sit to me to-morrow. I have nothing more to say."

With that he took up his hat, but it took him some time to find his stick. Mabel said nothing, so he passed by her, downstairs, and out of the house. He called the first hansom he saw, and drove to his club. As he walked home through the early June morning, he began to wonder if he had not been too hard with Mabel. Had he never broken a promise—a promise to meet this friend or that—when something much more pleasant had turned up at the last moment? Women never would consider promises in slight things binding, and she evidently looked upon this as just a whim of his. Yes, he was sure that he had been too hard; still, she had been naughty, and it was necessary that she should be punished. He would do as he had said, and go through the next day without painting her, but he should be glad when the day was over. It was broad daylight when he found himself in the studio again. He was in no mood for bed, so he threw himself on the sofa and awaited the advent of breakfast.

While he had been beguiling the time at his club, where he was very popular, Mabel had been lying on her bed, her hot face pressed into the pillow, that no one might hear the sobs which shook her so convulsively. Under the stinging memory of his bitter words, she lay and writhed as they came back to her, word after word, cutting her tender, naked heart like a lash. She almost shrieked aloud. She would keep by herself through the day; then, when he asked her to sit again, she would tell him she was sorry. Perhaps, as he had said he would never believe in her again, he wouldn't even believe that.

When the morning was well come, she got off her bed, and washed, as best she might, the traces of tears off her cheeks. Ah, me! but what could she do for the poor swollen eyelids? When breakfast appeared, but not Mabel, Betsy was despatched with a message to that young lady's room, to the effect that breakfast was ready. To this message Betsy brought back the following reply:

"Please, sir, she says her 'ead aches, and she don't want no breakfast."

"Well, run and fetch a tray, like a good girl, and take her some tea and toast. That will be the best thing for her." Then he fell to on his own repast, to which, I am bound to say, he did ample justice.



When Mrs. Bloomfield heard of Mabel's indisposition, she knew at once what was the matter, and made haste to the poor child's room, but Mabel cried out :

"I don't want to see you, Mrs. Bloomfield. I think you're the unkindest person I ever heard of! Why didn't you tell me before speaking to him? He'll never like me again. He told me he wouldn't!"

"And sorry enough, my dear, I am that I didn't," replied Mrs. Bloomfield, who was quite upset to see how ill the girl looked. She tried her best to comfort her, and then left her to break like a thunderstorm upon Montague, who was occupied in painting some drapery.

"Well, Mr. Montague," she began, "how you can go on a-painting, after almost killing that poor child by the awful things you've said to 'er—'er that 'as got no father, and no mother either—I say, how you can go on with that stuff, and she in the next room a-breaking 'er 'eart, is what gets over me!"

"But, my dear soul!" exclaimed Montague.

"Don't 'my dear soul' me, don't!" returned the angered landlady. "I want none of your soft speeches. It's not me that wants sticking-plaster. Put it on where it's wanted."

"Well, Mrs. Bloomfield, then—since you so much resent being called a 'dear soul'—surely you must own that Mabel behaved very badly."

"Lor', so do my children sometimes," returned the landlady ; "and what do I do? Why, whip 'em first, and kiss 'em after!"

"I see! You think I've done the whipping, but not the kissing," he replied. "Well, Mrs. Bloomfield, will you go and tell her I want to speak to her? Is she up? I heard she had a bad headache."

"Up!" exclaimed Mrs. Bloomfield. "Why, she ain't been to bed all night!"

The message with which Mrs. Bloomfield returned was, that if he did not want to paint her, she would rather keep where she was. On hearing this he went, in great distress, to the door of her room.

"Mabel, I want you, please."

No answer.

"Mab, open the door, please ; do as you are told."

Then the door did open, and she stood before him, not dark and half-defiant, as on the previous night, but pale and very

penitent. Her appearance fairly shocked him. He took her by the hand, and led her into the studio. Mrs. Bloomfield having accomplished her mission, departed. They sat down together on the sofa, and he said :

“ Look here, my dear : it was very naughty of you to break your promise to me, but it was very bad of me to say all the things I said last night, and I want you to forget them, please, and forgive them, if you can.”

“ And you don't mean that you will never believe me again ? ” said Mabel.

“ Not a word of it.”

“ Have you really forgiven me ? ” she asked, her eyes filling with tears.

“ Of course I have ! ”

Then, for the first time, he put his arm round her and kissed her, and not quite as a father kisses a child. She made no sort of resistance, did not even seem surprised, but a slight quiver ran through her.

“ Do you think it was any pleasure to me,” he asked, “ to know that you were shut up in this room ? It was for your own good.”

And then he told her some things about the great city, which, I am afraid, would not be news to us, thinking rightly, that too much innocence is a dangerous thing. The end of it was that they went to Richmond, and enjoyed the day very much.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

### PROGRESS.

AFTER that last expedition of hers, recorded in the preceding chapter, it need scarcely be said that those solitary night rambles of Mabel's were not repeated. However, she gained permission to accompany Mrs. Bloomfield, when that good lady went out in the evening to do her shopping. Saturday night was Mabel's special treat, for then they stayed out very late and went into all sorts of out-of-the-way places—strange, narrow passages, with flaming fruit-shops on either side, and



butchers' shops with a fine display of meat—the men calling out their goods in harsh, defiant voices. Mabel thought it was all very bright and picturesque, as indeed it was. Herbert knew how fond the girl was of flowers, and whenever he could afford it, he gave her a shilling or two to spend upon them. You may be sure this was a great excitement to her. How proudly she came home bearing a fuchsia, or a geranium, got, "Oh, at such a bargain!" Fuchsias and geraniums, lilies-of-the-valley, and roses such as one buys in London at street corners—were not these with Mabel all woven into the fabric of Montague's life? Were not the flowers of the spring and the summer, all dearer for her dear sake?

As an artist he had many merits. His composition was good, his colouring harmonious, his method of treating his subject imaginative.

"But why the deuce don't you draw better?" asked Mr. Blackmore, his Manchester patron.

"Because I can't, I suppose," he replied.

"I don't believe in 'can't' with you," said the other. "Now, I'll tell you what to do. Shut the shop up here and go for two or three years to Munich—that's the place for a man to learn drawing. I want you to do yourself justice, Montague; you're too good a fellow to have your work spoilt for the want of one thing."

These words sank very deeply into the soul of the young painter, for he wished, like all of us who give our lives to Art, to take some not unworthy position in her train. He knew his own lack well. Yes, he must follow his friend's advice and go abroad; but what to do with Mabel? As I have said before, his funds were by no means large, and to keep up two establishments, however humble, did not seem a possible thing. Well, he must find her a place, he supposed, as a shop-girl or nursery governess; but the more he thought over this prospect for her the less he seemed to like it. And then for himself? What would life be in which Mabel would take no more any part? Dreary as a winter room in which the fire has ceased to burn. How hard it would be to part with her! And why should he part with her? The idea struck him quite suddenly as he was walking home one night. Was she not beautiful? Was she not devoted? Above all, was not he very much in love with her? Since that kiss, of which mention has been made, his

feelings for her had undergone a considerable change. What in the world was to stand in the way of his marrying her. The marriage must, of course, be kept a secret till after his father's death, when he hoped their means would be quite ample. I have said he was a man who acted upon impulse, so, if he had to sleep that night on the thought of his so suddenly formed project, it was by no desire of his that he did so.

He was in the studio very early the next morning, but it was quite in vain that he tried to paint. Breakfast passed off silently.

"Now," said Mabel, "are you ready for me to sit?"

"Yes, but I have something to say to you first, Mabel. I'm going away—out of England—for some years, so here I must put the shutters up." He saw how the colour rushed into her cheeks, and then, forsaking them, left them white as marble.

"Does this grieve you, Mabel?"

"Yes; of course I'm sorry, but I thought it would have come a long time ago." Then, changing hesitation for volubility, she rattled on with strange glibness:

"You *will* try and find me something to do before you leave, won't you? I think I could do very well as a shop-girl." She rose, and continued with increased hurry and excitement: "Gloves? Thank you, madam—what size do you take? Allow me? What else can I have the pleasure of showing you to-day? We have a very nice assortment of silk stockings, which we are selling at very low prices. Anything in the way of handkerchiefs or collars? Thank you, madam! . . . Can you spare me for a moment or two? I hear Tim shut up in my room."

Tim was the handsome studio tabby.

"No; I can't spare you for a moment," answered Montague, going to the door, and resting his hand on the handle. Then he went on, with a mischievous light in his eyes: "Why did you tell me a fib, Mab? You hear Tim in your room no more than I do. You hate that we should part, and you want to go to your room and cry, and let me know nothing about it, and then to come back and play that, on the whole, you are rather glad to go. But what's the good? Haven't I eyes to see with, and a heart to feel with? The thought of our parting is such bitter pain to me, that if you, my darling, will only will it so, we will never part—at least, not more than we can possibly help. Tell me, Mabel, will you be my wife?"

At his words a wonderful light came over her face, which made her look more beautiful than he had ever seen her. Then she said : " You can't really mean what you have just said, can you ? "

" Do you think I should say it without meaning it ? "

" No ; of course I don't think that ; but are you sure you are not speaking out of pity for me ? And your father, what would he say ? "

" During the remainder of his lifetime our marriage would have to be kept private. Should you mind that very much, Mabel ? "

" Not at all, if I thought you married me just because you loved me, and for no other reason in the world. "

" I marry you, my darling, " he cried, throwing his arms about her, " because I love you, and for no other reason in the world, and now tell me, do you love me ? "

" Love you ! " she said. If you had heard the tone in which she uttered these two words, you would have known that they were charged with such a treasure of love as is not often laid at the feet of any man.

" Tell me about it, dear, " he said, kissing her lips passionately. Did she tell him ? Scarcely, I think, in words ; but by the tears of great joy, by the clasp of her clinging arms about his neck, by her broken utterances, by her kisses on his hand ; surely by all these she told him. Of what passionate love her nature was capable he never dreamed till then. The two great mysteries of the world are love and death. The one is a mystery of light—the other a mystery of darkness ; and it does not do for us to look too closely into either.

The day following that of the little event I have just described, Herbert paid a dutiful visit to his father. It happened very fortunately that the elder Montague was, for him, in quite good humour. Besides being rather better in health, he had met, the previous evening, a distinguished academician who had congratulated him upon his son's rare talents, and said he was sure that some day he would do really fine work. The old gentleman approved of his son's plans for going abroad. As he had gone in for art, the only thing was for him to try and make a name in it. So he not only gave Herbert a sort of parting blessing, but, what was far more to the point, wrote him a cheque for a hundred pounds, and some of this hundred pounds was ex-

pended by Mrs. Bloomfield, who had been taken into confidence, in purchasing an humble *trousseau* for the bride.

Men say that long engagements are dangerous. We know they are tedious ; still it is possible to have too little of a good thing as it is to have too much of it. Courtship is a dainty dish, to which justice should be done. If you were ever really in love, how long the nights that parted you must have seemed ! How you must have longed for the light, and for the face you loved more than light. If you were a business man, was it not sweet to take your secret with you into the city ? As you thought of some one some few miles from you, and recalled the colour of her hair and eyes, the voice, and all the countless sweet ways grown so dear to you, did not everything about you shine in a great wonderful new light ?

Our friends, then, did not have as long a courtship as I, for one, should like them to have enjoyed. The days of the London Studio came to an end, and, I think, though they did not say so, that they both felt a little sad when they came back, the last Sunday, from their country ramble.

The new life to which we are going may hold for us delights of which the one we leave knew nothing ; still, if the past have treated us at all well, do we not say good-bye to it with some tenderness and regret ? I should mistrust the man who did not.

The very next day then following that last Sunday ramble, they walked out in the bright September day, and straight into a church, out of which Mabel came, Mabel Varese no longer. They passed the day at Richmond. It was rather like a dream to them both, I daresay. Then in the evening, as husband and wife, they came back to the old studio. Two days after found them on board the boat for Rotterdam.

I have no intention of accompanying these young people across the water. Their life for the next four years was doubtless full of interest to themselves, but scarcely so to us. In the course of that time Herbert sent three pictures to the Royal Academy. Two were accepted and well hung, and the third found a home in one of our well-known picture-galleries.

In the first year after their marriage a little boy came to them, and for six months it was given to Mabel to know the joys of motherhood. For six months she had a baby to love, to cherish, with her bosom and her lips. To trace in his features a like-



ness to his father was her great delight. She was quite sure he would be a great painter. Perhaps he might have been, but at this period of speculation a cold which he had taken ended all dreams of the future by causing his death. For some time the poor mother was quite broken-hearted. Montague did not feel it so acutely, his love and his art quite filling his life. Which loved he more—his wife or his art? It would be difficult to say. Her beauty was as fresh to him as ever. He never tired of painting and praising it. He was for ever playing with her hair, so temptingly dark.

"No ; really, dear," she would cry out, "you mustn't any more. This is the third time to-day you've done my poor hair in some extraordinary new way."

"Mustn't I, really, Mab?" he would answer, looking at her with a look she loved so well to see.

"Of course you may," she would answer then, showering her long hair all down again as she spoke. "Don't you know, my love, my king, I would give my soul to accomplish your least wish."

Yes, he did know it, and loved her perhaps better because she so well loved him.

One dreary November afternoon, they returned from Munich to the old house in Museum Street. In the evening Montague had to meet a man in town on business. Poor Mabel was depressed as she sat alone that night, and yet she knew not why. One of Tim's descendants lay before the fire, there stood the familiar lay-figure. All was homelike, as of old, but the presence of her dead father seemed to be with her in the room—it seemed to her as if her cold, dead baby lay on her breast. At length came the quick, well-known, well-loved step up the stairs, and with a puff of smoke, and a cheery "Well! little one!" Herbert came in. He was in excellent spirits, so glad, he said, to be back once more in the dear old city.

The only other person besides Mrs. Bloomfield to whom Montague intrusted the secret of his marriage was his friend Blackmore, whom he knew to be a safe man, and being also a man of a somewhat tender heart, Herbert thought a knowledge of the fact would make a commission from him more certain. It was a day of profound excitement to the Montagues when the great man appeared.

"Mrs. Montague, I presume?" he exclaimed, shaking that

lady very warmly by the hand. "I recognize you at once. Our friend here follows the old masters in reproducing one face a great number of times, and upon my soul, I don't think, in the present case, he could do better."

"So he thinks himself," put in the painter, who, while really very nervous, strove to assume an indifferent manner.

Mr. Blackmore was delighted with nearly everything he saw, and the upshot of it was that he gave a handsome commission for an important picture, on which Herbert was very shortly to begin.

No more domestic husband than Montague could be found in all London. When the day's work was over, he and his wife would walk to one of the restaurants before mentioned, where they would have dinner. After which they would return home to a long fireside evening, he lounging in front of the fire, she reading aloud (Herbert was one of those men who dearly loved being read aloud to), and from time to time filling his pipe, which he had grown quite too lazy to do. Occasionally they would dine humbly at home, on chops, and go to the pit of some theatre. His friends wondered what had come to him. Of course sometimes he had to offer himself on the shrine of friendship. A Bohemian, living in Bohemia, he had, now and then, to pass an evening with his countrymen. From these expeditions he never returned till daybreak, and, faithful to her old habit, Mabel never went to bed without leaving a little letter of good-night on the table. How changed they were, how sweetly changed from those first letters of hers. Forgive us, dear Heart, if we look over your husband's shoulder, as he stands by the fire, in this dreary winter daybreak.

"My Darling," ran her little epistle, "how lonely I am without you this evening. I know you are obliged to go. It makes me proud to feel that you would always rather stay with me, but if you were to go out a great deal I shouldn't really mind it, as long as I thought that you loved me. I have been reading a little of Longfellow, but I was too restless to read much. It is now just ten—you have been gone two hours, and, oh! what an age it seems! I think no woman ever did love a man as I love you, my saviour, my husband. I wish our little baby had lived, that when you were away from me I might have seen something of you in him. I am sure I shall not sleep much. I shall come



in and look after the fire, for you will be dreadfully cold, coming home in the winter morning, as I know you will. Do you know how wholly I am yours, for you to do just as you will? Good-night, or, I suppose I might more fitly say, good-morning."

He puts the letter away with others of a nature equally effusive.

All through that winter, and the early part of the spring, Herbert worked hard at his picture, of which, of course, Mabel was the central figure. Ah! me, but she was proud to think that out of all his pictures her face looked.

"I think, if my pictures live, Mab," he used to say, "men will know what sort of a face somebody had!"

They were sitting in the studio, one April evening, when the postman's knock was heard. The letters he brought did, in the course of time, find their way to the people for whom they were intended, but they were first allowed to wait some time at the foot of the banisters, so that if any lodger greatly desired to save the legs of Betsy an extra journey, he might have the opportunity of putting a wish so charitable into execution. Mabel was always postman for the studio, so she ran down stairs, and returned with a letter.

"A card of invitation, I suppose," said Herbert, as he opened it. "Oh! yes—it is! 'Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, at Home, Thursday evening, the 28th of April, and Thursday evenings afterwards through May and June.' Here's a line from Jackson himself. He says:

"MY DEAR MONTAGUE—I know you have given up all the world and all the ways thereof, but I shall be really hurt if you don't make an exception in favour of your old friend, B. J.'

What a bore!" and the young man threw the card on the table. "I suppose, as Jackson makes such a point of it, I shall have to go. I'll be a man, and go to this first one and get it over. A fortnight from to-day, that will be. You can kiss me, if you like, Mab, and then go on reading."

The two weeks passed off very quickly, and brought the 28th.

"Shall you be late home?" asked Mabel, as she stood fastening a flower on his coat.'

"You may be sure I shall get away just as soon as I can."

"Now, really, you must be off," she said, "or it will be absurd your going at all!"

"Must I, Mab?" he rejoined, in that tone of voice, and with that look which she always felt as a caress. "I've a good mind to throw off this coat, light up a pipe, and not go."

"No, dear, go, and get it over."

But still he lingered a little; he was specially fond of her that night. At length he took his final kiss, and ran downstairs, humming as he went, an air out of one of his favourite operas.

I wonder if that hansom cab that took our friend to Tavistock Square had deposited him in the gutter instead of at Mr. Jackson's house, thereby fracturing some of his bones, and causing him to keep to his bed for a month or two, whether it would really have made any difference in the long-run. Have you not seen an escaping thief run from the arms of one policeman straight into the arms of another? We may dodge Fate down one street—she gets us round the next corner.

---

## CHAPTER V.

MRS. FLORENCE HEATHER.

IT was so long since Montague had taken any part in society that the once familiar sound of many people talking all together struck on his ear quite strangely as he stood in the hall taking off his coat. How once he used to like this kind of thing, he thought, as he went up the staircase which he had not trodden for four years. In the doorway of her crowded reception-room he was greeted by his hostess.

"Here you are at last. I began to think we should never see you again. I hope you have been working hard. I thought your last picture excellent—I did indeed."

"I'm sure you're very good to think anything about it at all," he replied, with that air of almost insolent indifference which he cannot help assuming under the scourge of that lady's intolerable praise. "Hullo! Godfrey!" he goes on, catching sight of a much younger brother artist, "what an age it is since we met."

In society we must all have our *rôles*; some of us choose

badly, while others are more happy in their selection. Mr. Godfrey, who was not a brilliant young man, assumed the rôle of enthusiast ; he gushed on every conceivable occasion ; metaphorically speaking, he was always sitting at some one's feet, in which position he was often found in the way. When he spoke, it was with a jerk, nay, as it were, a spasm of excitement in his voice, responded to by a sympathetic contortion of his person.

Montague was one of the men whom Mr. Godfrey honoured by his homage.

"Is the fault mine?" he replied, lifting up hands and eyes. "I'm still in the old place. I used to think each ring at the bell might have been you. Whenever the postman came I hoped he might be bringing me a letter from you—but no!"

"We must see more of each other," rejoined Montague. "There are a lot of people here to-night."

"Have you been here long?" asked the other.

"No ; I've only just come."

"Then you have not seen Mrs. Heather, yet?"

"No ; I have not had that pleasure. Who may Mrs. Heather be?"

"It would be impossible for *me* to describe her."

"Oh, I'm sure you could," said Montague, with a smile, as, perceiving his young friend was meditating a gush, he made haste to pass onward.

"Oh ! Montague !" cried another friend, arresting his progress, "haven't seen you this long while. Isn't she worth coming some way to see?"

"Who is worth coming some way to see?"

"Who? Whom should I mean, but Mrs. Heather?"

Here they parted, and after shaking the hands of some dozen or so ladies, Montague came upon a complete swarm of Bohemian friends.

"Why, it's never Montague !" cried one. "Montague in the flesh?"

"No ; it's his ghost !" said another ; while a third ejaculated : "Turn him out !"

"Yes, but not till we've had his opinion of Mrs. Heather," put in a fourth.

"Can all of you fellows talk of nothing else to a poor devil who hasn't set foot in these rooms for more than four years ! I give you good notice that if you mention her name again I shall

go at you as a bull does at a red flag. What is this lady, and why has she so turned your heads?"

"By Jove! The fascinating widow hasn't turned my head. I don't like her looks!"

"Don't like them?" exclaimed one of the group, while the central figure of the party replied: "Who the deuce, man, ever supposed you would?"

Did you ever, in the whole course of your life, even by chance, stumble into admiration of the right thing? Why, if anything is just perfect of its kind, it's enough to set your vile old back up. It strikes me you were designed by Providence as a safety-valve. We can't let our feelings off sufficiently. Then we find you, and, in abusing you, we really find vent for some of our superfluous praise.

At this moment a hand touched Montague on the arm, and the voice of his host said: "I want to introduce you to Mrs. Heather. She is an admirer of yours."

In another moment the introduction had been performed.

He saw before him a lady of some two and thirty years, perhaps; she was just over the average height; her figure was exquisitely shaped, perfect in every ripe outline. Her face was rather pale. In repose it wore an expression of almost divine placidity, but when she was interested, no face was half so animated. The large, luminous eyes, which looked as if they might draw your soul from you, were more of a violet than any other colour. A great quantity of purely golden hair waved round her delicately-shaped head like the nimbus that artists paint round the heads of their saints. Indeed, if you regarded only the upper part of her face, you felt, almost, that she must be a saint—you wanted to fall on your knees before her, and there to offer your prayers, and make your confessions. If you looked lower, at the red ardent mouth, at the superb neck, and the wonderful figure, at the large, lovely, white strong arms, in whose ample clasp it seemed that only a demigod should lie, you still wanted to fall down and worship, still wanted to offer your prayers and make your confessions, only the character of them would have undergone a change.

Her voice—I have heard lower voices—had in it none of that sweetness which cloys you; it was free from all languor; it was rather a clear and vital voice, with something in it that suggested blown spring-water shining in the sun.

"It *is* such a pleasure to meet you at last, Mr. Montague," she said. "I quite began to think it was a pleasure I should never have, but I perceive now that all things come to the woman that waits, as well as to the man."

He could only say that he was very proud, if anything he had ever done caused her to take any interest in him.

"Won't you have this seat? you look tired," he said.

So she sat and he stood by her.

"Do you know," he continued, "I hadn't been in the room ten minutes when I was asked by as many persons if I had been introduced to you?"

"Really?" she replied, as if she was tired of compliments, and wished to avert any more.

Her complete indifference somewhat discomposed him. He was wondering what remark he should hazard next, when Mrs. Heather herself recommenced conversation.

"Are you very hard at work?" said the fresh voice.

"I have been painting tolerably hard this winter and spring," he replied.

"I am glad to hear that. May I come and see your picture before it goes away?"

"My poor studio will only be too much honoured by a visit from Mrs. Heather."

"Thank you. All artists are not so amiable."

"Do you know all the people here to night?" he inquired.

"No; very few. I've been a great deal abroad. Last year I stayed six months in London, but saw no one, except the kind people at whose house I was. Now, I have just come from paying a long visit to Beckford, the artist, and his wife. They have a beautiful house in Kent. He, you know, absolutely never sees any one but one or two of his very oldest friends. How I ever could have got into his good graces as to be made an exception, I *can't* think—but so the fact is."

"He is a most remarkable artist," said Montague.

"Just before I left he completed such a wonderful picture," went on Mrs. Heather. "I *do* wish I could give you some idea of it, but I'm afraid it's impossible. Yet I want to describe it to you, if I only could. Let me see."

She paused, as if she were once more seeing it rise before her vision. Then she went on again, speaking very slowly:

"It shows you a girl in bed—sick to death. She is propped



by pillows. You can tell perfectly well how lovely she must have been in health ; but now the face is all thin and fallen in, and the eyes are so hollow ; on the coverlet is a great bunch of Spring flowers, the dear old-fashioned things such as we only find now in a few gardens, and I assure you, so wonderfully painted that you can almost smell them. You know how he can do flowers when he likes. By the bed is a table, with the medicine-bottles and glass upon it. You see she has been playing with the flowers. Her fingers have grown so thin that from one of them a ring has slipped, and sparkles just beside the flowers. Her lover is kneeling by the bed. He is a splendidly strong-looking fellow ; he has one of her hands in both of his, and anything as striking and awful as the look of despair in his eyes I have certainly never seen. It is a look so hopeless, so intense, that it seems almost like the cry of a creature on the rack. With all his strength he seems to be straining deathwards, as if to draw her back, and she, poor child, you can see that long suffering has triumphed over all the passionate desire of love. All she wants for herself is *rest*—just not to feel pain, to sleep for ever and ever. She has scarcely any strength left, but with what she has she seems to be turning feebly lifeward for his sake, and to hold his hand a little longer ; but you see so unmistakably that it *is* only for his sake. The contrast between his wild and unavailing despair, and her mild pity for him, and complete acquiescence in her fate, is so marvellously shown. The window of the room is open, and through it you can see great stretches of smooth, green lawn, and trees waving in the bright May afternoon. It is just, you know, one of those dear days that we do get sometimes in May, made up of warm winds and brilliant sunshine. Seen from that sick room, what callous sunshine it seems, what an indifferent wind that is bearing down all the branches of the trees ! You know Nature to be unconscious, but you fancy, if she could feel, she wouldn't care two of her roses for all the trouble that is going on in her midst. I scarcely know of any picture which brings home to one so the indifference of Nature to our pains. I do hope you will see it before long !”

While Mrs. Heather had been speaking, a strange and very beautiful look had come into her eyes. It was the look of one who has seen through life and beyond death, and whose soul has possessed the after mystery. Her voice, too, had thrilled with a tone which corresponded to the look of her eyes.

"Thank you," said Herbert. "Do you know I think you are rather a dangerous advocate?"

"Why?"

"Because, after such a description, any picture must to some extent disappoint."

Just then Mr. Jackson brought up a new candidate for introduction, and Montague prepared to move away. Then she said, quite simply, as if she had known him some time :

"Will you come and see me at 12, Brook Street? I'm at home every Monday."

"I shall be an early visitor," he replied, as he fell back with a smile. He was at once accosted by Mr. Pinlake, as bland and meek a bard as ever perpetrated a sonnet.

"Anything on the stocks?" asked Herbert.

"A little volume," replied the bard. "Indeed, I may say a very little one, but containing, I hope, some of my very best work."

"I hope so," said Montague. "You're a remarkable man, Pinlake."

"Indeed, you make me very proud."

"Yes ; but I mean remarkable as a man as well as a poet. You're the first fellow to-night who has not mentioned Mrs. Heather to me."

"Mrs. Florence Heather, *please*," returned the poet, in a deeply grieved tone of voice. "There are so very many persons of that name in her late husband's family, that, to prevent the least confusion arising for a moment between her and them, we always say, most emphatically, Mrs. *Florence* Heather."

"You know her, then?"

"I have the great happiness to be numbered among her few intimate friends."

"Lucky fellow!" responded the other. "The rooms get hot, don't they?" and he passed on.

Nearly all the ladies in those rooms were of the pre-Raphaelite faith, but there were a few exceptions, and these, as it were, demonstrated the facts—some appearing in the most perfectly fashionable toilets, others in high-up stuff dresses, from under the skirts of which protruded heavy, thick-soled boots.

For nearly an hour Montague wandered about the room, speaking to people who were all of more or less interest. Then he took leave of his hostess. As he was putting on his coat, in

the hall, Mrs. Heather's carriage was loudly called. Just for a moment he lingered, then he stepped out into the soft April night, and, lighting a cigarette, made for Museum Street. He found Mabel sitting with a pile of socks and shirts before her, which she was actively engaged in repairing.

"Why! you dear, dear, industrious little woman!" he said, coming in. Then he knelt down by her, as he was very fond of doing, and put both arms around her, and looked up at her proudly. There was in her beauty such a wonderful depth and shade.

"I think you do like to look at me," she said, in her quiet, soothing voice, and her fingers began moving through his hair.

Of course she must know all about his evening, and when he described, with great ardour, Mrs. Heather, and asked her if she were not jealous, she laughed and said:

"No; not at all!"

"And why aren't you, Mab?"

"Because you are too frank about her. I will find out fast enough, and surely enough, if any other woman ever comes to take my place!"

"Put your work away, you very wise woman. I see there's no fun to be got out of you, at all!"

The next Monday afternoon Herbert presented himself at Mrs. Heather's house in Brook Street.

"How good of you to come and see me!" she said.

"I thought you would excuse my being a late visitor," he replied, "but I am hard at work, and the light is, you know, my master."

"I am glad you came late," she answered. "It gives us more chance of talking. I hope I shall have no more callers this afternoon—some of them do bore me so! Will you tell me about the picture you are painting?"

"With pleasure. It is taken from Rossetti's wonderful poem, 'Staff and Scrip.' The Queen, among her maidens, is waiting for the return of the Knight who has gone forth for her deliverance. These are the lines I take:

" ' But the Queen held her brows and said :  
It is the cry of Victory !'

Upon the faces of her ladies different expressions are visible. Some are flushed with triumph, others look anxious, but on the

Queen's face there is a look of fatal comprehension. You should see that she feels, by an awful intuition, that they are bringing her lover and Knight home—dead.”

“I see,” replied Mrs. Heather. “If you can paint that look it will be a splendid picture. But *can* you? There is nothing else in the picture out of which you can get a great effect but that.”

“I think you are quite right. I have often before felt that I had been misguided in my choice of a subject.”

“I don't think so in the least,” she returned, looking at him with those wonderful eyes of hers. “Your soul must see the look, and your hand must reproduce it.”

“You are confident of an artist being able to master his subject?”

“I know that genius can !”

“But have I genius?”

“Yes !”

No woman knew the art of making monosyllables impressive better than Mrs. Heather. The tone in which she now said “Yes” implied : “Of course you have, and if you had ever any doubt of it, you can rest assured, now that I have told you of the fact.” There was not in her manner the least ray of conceit or affectation. It was only that she relied calmly on her own critical perceptions, which were, I am bound to say, almost invariably right. She was a woman inspired to appreciate. The beauty of rightly chosen words, or of wonderful colours, touched her senses so sharply as to be almost pain—just as we, who love music passionately, feel our soul stung to divine agony, when from the hand of a master we hear the long drawn notes of a violin. But the keen and exquisite pleasure she took in all forms of beauty did not lessen the interest she had in all questions of thought. Her intellect was as vigorous as her imagination was subtle. She was one of those few women born to reign. Her praise quickened Montague's pulses ; but he said, almost brusquely :

“Is not our conversation growing too personal ?”

“Then, let us change it. I hope you like my cat,” and she pointed to a superb Persian beauty lying at her feet.

“I do—tremendously. I suppose you are great friends.”

“Yes, we get along very well together. She is beautiful to look at—too beautiful to have much heart. Indeed, I don't



think she has any at all. Few cats have much. My beautiful Persian is a blessing to my eyes. Every time I look at her they send up a little thanksgiving; but she is no comfort to my hands; she never deigns to sit on my lap. I assure you (I shall shock you, but I don't mind) there have been times when I have been absolutely hungry for some dear, homely tabby, who would like to be stroked, who would rub her soft, dear head into my hand, cat-like. My Persian looks down on all affection."

"She becomes you very much," replied Montague.

"Indeed? I never thought of it in that light, and that surely should console me. Now, after this rest—that is, if you don't really mind—I want to be personal again. I think you are more interesting than my cat, beautiful as she is."

Was it not a fascinating voice, that voice of Mrs. Heather's?

"What shall I tell you, then? I am an only son. I angered my father by my choice of a profession. I live in one of the strongholds of Bohemia, and am not generally popular."

"Thank you; but I didn't mean such details as those. I wanted to hear a little more about your work—what you yourself thought of your picture—if you were doing anything else as well; but if you don't wish to tell me any more, pray don't. I suppose I ought never to have asked you."

She spoke with such grave, sweet dignity that Herbert, whom we know to be impulsive, was mentally swept off his feet, and exclaimed:

"There is nothing I would not tell you. You don't think I have been rude, do you?"

"Yes, if you want me to speak the truth. I think you were a little rude."

"And you will set me down as a prig, and never forgive me, and—who knows, we might have been such good friends."

"And shall we not? I have taken no offence."

"You have forgiven me, then?"

"Don't be absurd. I have nothing to forgive!"

At this juncture the conversation was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Pinlake, who seemed meekly put out at finding another visitor. As Montague took leave, he said:

"Shall you be at our friends, the Jacksons, Thursday week?"

"Most decidedly I shall? This literary life, which I suppose bores you all very much, is to me something wonderful and strange and delightful."



"Then we shall probably meet there?"

When he reached home he found Mabel ready dressed to go out with him to one of their quiet dinners.

"Well," she asked, as he stood with one arm thrown round her neck, his fingers playing with the ends of her soft, dark hair, "was she as fascinating as ever?"

"Oh, quite! She certainly is a most charming and intellectual woman. When it is known that we are married, I hope you will be able to see a great deal of each other. Kiss me, my dark-eyed beauty. Now, let us go!"

So they do go, talking and laughing very happily, turning over books at book-stalls, and looking in at old furniture shops. At length they reach the restaurant for which they are bound. There they partake of a modest, two-shilling *table d'hôte* dinner, with a bottle of champagne. After coffee, Herbert proposes a stroll, and whither do they wander but to the very spot where they first met. What a different night this one was to that February one — of which the two were doubtless thinking. There seemed now a soft-searching, compelling spirit of tenderness in the air. They walked back very silently, but it seemed to Mabel that her husband never loved her so well as he did that night.

It was a very pleasant memory that Montague entertained of Mrs. Heather. Her voice teased him, like a subtle air of music which ever eludes one's endeavours to capture it. If he could once hear it again, he thought, it would cease thus to haunt him. So when the next Monday came he resolved to look in upon her.

"What, again?" said Mabel, when she heard of his intention.

"Why not?" he replied, gaily, brushing his hat as he spoke. "She is an extremely nice woman, and then, what I am afraid is still more to the point, she is a very rich woman, and, I should fancy, a great picture-buyer. I have not been doing my duty by you, my darling, in giving up society, as I have been doing. But don't think I like it. Certainly, I would rather talk to a woman like Mrs. Heather than to most of the women I meet. You know too well how I love you to be jealous. Good-bye for a little while, darling."

So he kisses her and goes.

When he reached Mrs. Heather's he found there a great number of people. The room was full of flowers, and the mistress of it was looking her queenliest.

The first man to whom Montague spoke was Mr. Pinlake, who observed, in a manner which was at once meek and ostentatious:

"Really, I never thought I should have the pleasure of meeting you so soon again. I suppose work is rather slack."

"Quite the reverse!" replied Herbert, dryly. "I have left my work at some sacrifice for the sole pleasure of improving my acquaintance with Mrs. Heather. I see there are a lot of people here that I know." And he moves on.

Presently great attention prevails while Mrs. Heather sings. Her voice had neither the exquisite sweetness or perfect finish of Mabel's, but there was a rare note in it which struck you—a strange thrilling power that fascinated you. It rose and fell fitfully, like a wind. She could not, of course, speak much to any one person, and, as Montague had come solely for the purpose of talking to her, he began internally to fume. He had talked art and politics for over an hour with people who rather bored him, and, as the rooms were still quite full, he went to take leave. He had chosen his time, fortunately, for Mrs. Heather was standing alone at a side-table, looking over a portfolio of engravings for a particular one she wanted.

"How full your rooms are!" he said. "I am going to make you one less."

"Don't!" she answered, without looking up. "Stop till the rest are gone, and then I will show you some really nice things."

"Do you think I want any bribe to stay?" he replied.

"Of course I do, and a very heavy one too!"

"Then, I may really stay till the rest are gone?"

"May you? Haven't I just asked you? Go and talk to Miss Sprig, will you? No one seems to be noticing her at all. Will you? Thanks."

"I will do anything I am told."

"Dear me! how nice you must be. I don't find your sex generally so obedient."

So he goes to make himself agreeable to Miss Sprig, which he does very successfully, being in high good humour. In course of time the guests do depart, leaving Pinlake and our friend in possession.

"You are tired," said Montague, earnestly, looking full at Mrs. Heather with those very eloquent eyes of his.

"I don't think so."

"But I *know* you are."

"How grieved I am," says little Mr. Pinlake. "I think, Mr. Montague, we had better follow the example of the others."

To which Mrs. Heather replies: "You will do nothing of the kind!" And when the bard pursues the matter further, she says with her most queenly air: "Please, my dear Mr. Pinlake, don't say anything more about it. Don't you know, by this time, that when I say a thing I mean it?"

This slight reproof does not altogether please the sensitive poet, and before very long he takes himself off.

"An old friend of yours, isn't he?" asks Herbert.

"Oh, I have known him about a year. He is good enough to believe in something about me. I am sure I don't know what. Sometimes he bores me, but more often he amuses me. And then you can't think in how many ways he makes himself useful to me!"

"What a happy fellow!" said Montague. "Can't *I* be useful?"

"Yes, of course you can!"

"What shall I do?"

"Show me your studio."

"I would, with pleasure, but I have nothing there worth showing now. I have a few sketches, which I could bring you if you cared to see them."

"Thank you. I shall keep you to your word."

When he rose she said:

"Must you really go now. It is only a little after seven. I don't dine till eight. Can't you stay till then?"

"May I?" he replied, with unfeigned pleasure in his look and voice. "I certainly will, if I may."

"I am glad you will, for at these great, crowded evenings one gets no opportunity for anything like real talk, and I have a hundred and one things I want to ask you, about books, pictures, persons, disputed questions, and I don't know what besides. I am so glad to find that you agree with me in thinking Tennyson the greatest living poet. Other poets, perhaps, may have more robust intellects, but surely in supremacy of vision he goes beyond them all. Then there is no stop of the instrument which he has not mastered. His verse, which at times can thunder, at other times will seem to have in it all the wonderful quiet of the country just after sunset. I confess it is

a quiet which depresses me, for I seem to feel through it the spirit of a great, inconsolable sorrow."

"It is not that, I think," replied Montague, "but rather that a peace so stainless and profound saddens us by making it so apparent how different is the great peace of Nature from any rest which we poor wanderers of the earth may hope to enjoy."

"I suppose that may be it," she answers, rather dreamily; "but, sitting here in this room, even, I feel an unutterable melancholy to think of long ranges of low hills clothed with quiet, and visible through the soft, summer twilight; of wide, green, voiceless pastures; some small, uncertain note of bird or insect faltering through the silence; but for that it is so still that you could almost fancy you heard the dew falling. Please say something to make me cheerful again. Here is an opportunity for you to be useful!"

It would be impossible to describe the charm of Mrs. Heather's manners and conversation. She was emotional without being sentimental, imaginative without being high-flown, witty without being hard. The things she wore and the things in her room were all exquisitely in harmony with herself.

"I may come and see you again?" he said, when he rose to go.

"I shall think it very kind of you if you will."

"May I come often?"

"Yes."

"May I come some afternoon when you are quite alone, and bring you some of my sketches?"

"I wish you would do that. Let us fix an afternoon, now. Shall we say next Tuesday?"

"That will do for me, perfectly."

So it was settled and they said "good-bye" quite like old friends.

Montague must have been walking in the streets for about an hour before he became aware of the fact. It also occurred to him that he had had no dinner. Why was he walking in this manner, like a vessel drifting? Was it that his mind was pre-occupied with the thought of Mrs. Heather? Very likely, and why not? Her conversation had greatly interested him; but probably he had kept Mabel waiting for her dinner, and his heart smote him, as, without any more delay, he turned his



steps homewards. Of course Mable *had* been waiting for him. It is a bad sign when wives give up this foolish fond habit. Herbert was genuinely disturbed, but when he showed her how greatly to his interest as a painter the time so spent had been, she seemed to see it quite in the same light. But was he sure that she was really as satisfied with it as she said she was? Through his life he had known very little about women, but he had always heard that they were jealous. It seemed to him half as if Mabel were trying to keep something from him.

"Is anything troubling you, my darling?" he said, very tenderly to her. "You couldn't be such a foolish child as to be jealous of any one, could you, Mab?"

"No, not if you are quite sure you love me the same as you used to do," she answered, a little gravely, the warm colour rising in spite of herself.

"Love you the same?" he responded, passionately. "I love you more than ever. My love for you grows with every minute of every day!"

"How you *will* love me, then, in twenty years' time, won't you?" she answered, with one of her delightful smiles.

"Don't you like me to love you more and more every day, Mab?"

"Yes! Love me all you can, and you can never love me more than I want to be loved," she said, shyly, even reverently.

He knew her voice to be the dearest and sweetest in the whole world, but it did not shut out, now, another voice, whose quick tones lingered in his ear. While he believed most thoroughly everything he said to Mabel, while he fondled her dark hair, while he called her by every endearing name he could think of, he was smiling to himself to remember what a look of pleasure and surprise had passed over Mrs. Heather's face when he had asked so earnestly for permission to come again soon. If a man is at all impressed by a woman, the most dangerous thing for his peace of mind that she can do is to assume that he is further gone about her than he is. Provided he sees that his admiration flatters her, the position is at once made easy for him. Tacitly, some rare privileges have been accorded to him. We are all of us experimentalists, and the experiment of a long clasp of the hand at parting, or of an appealing look, or of some subtle speech—all these come very naturally to men to try, and if, in the beginning, they said perhaps a little more than



they meant, they often end by not being able to say as much as they would.

"Put your things on, Mab," said Herbert; "late as it is, I should like a stroll!"

---

## CHAPTER VI.

### MORE OF MRS. FLORENCE HEATHER.

WHEN a wife proves unfaithful to her husband, or *vice versa*, or when one of the two persons engaged to be married finds elsewhere, before the holy event is consummated,

"Metal more attractive,"

the excuse generally made is that love came like a thief in the night, and before one had time to cry "Thief!" the treasure of a heart had been stolen. For my own part, I consider this excuse a most utter sham. I believe Love to be a thief who lets us know very well what he is about. Don't you think, if we listen carefully, we can hear him picking locks, and forcing bolts? I am not even sure that, as he comes lightfooted up the stairs, he does not come singing a sweet old tune—the tune which has been heard ever since the world began. Somehow there is an excitement in fearing that this old thief is knocking about in the vicinity of our treasure room. If we once owned this fact to ourselves, many of us would have to spring up, vanquish him on the spot, or fly. So we say: "Oh, this is not Love!" and we lie at rest. Perhaps, indeed, when our treasure has been taken off, and handed in where it has been repudiated as stolen property, we may rise too late, wring our hands, and cry shame on the traitor. But he only laughs, the sly rascal: he knows well enough that no policeman can take him into custody. Don't you think Love was on larceny bent, in a certain case we know of? Ah, me, but I have my fears!

The next Tuesday found Montague with his sketches in Mrs. Heather's drawing-room. He had hoped for a long *tête-à-tête* with her, but in this he was to be disappointed, for they had only just begun to look at the sketches when Mr. Pinlake was

announced. The smile on Mrs. Heather's face showed very plainly that she had noted the not very amiable expression which darkened Montague's as the bard, with a sweet look, almost ran into the room.

"You're just in time to see some of Mr. Montague's sketches which he has kindly brought to show me," remarked Mrs. Heather.

"Then I am doubly glad I came," said the poet. "Do you know it was quite impossible for me to come yesterday? I assure you I am speaking the truth." To which the lady replied that she could quite believe it.

Then they turned to the sketches.

"How I like this," said Mrs. Heather. She was looking at the drawing of an old country church, seen in brilliant summer sunlight.

"It has," she went on, "that pathetic look of mild fatuity which is, I think, just as remarkable in old places as in old people—especially when you see them basking in a strong light."

"How perfectly true what you say is," sighed Mr. Pinlake, lifting his eyes heavenward as he spoke. He was always the first to applaud Mrs. Heather's points, and reminds me, in that, of a good-natured fellow, who, every evening during its run, witnessed the performance of a friend's comedy, in order that he might, as he said, establish the points. This was done by applauding loudly, and convulsing himself with laughter at all the best jokes, an example which the audience could not choose but follow. How he managed to laugh so well every night at the jokes he so well knew is a mystery to me, but that he did so is upon record.

"A French peasant girl washing clothes in a brook," exclaimed Mrs. Heather, describing the next sketch she came to. "Did you ever see water *quite* so blue, Mr. Montague? I don't think I ever did. Don't you think, Mr. Pinlake, the arm of the girl is too big for her body? One doesn't see, poor thing, quite how she can ever manage to raise it."

Of course Mr. Pinlake perfectly agreed, and moreover, laughed sweetly and lowly, and rubbed his little plump hands together—proceedings which were not enjoyed by the artist, who was not lacking in sensitiveness to healthy criticism. Anything that Mrs. Heather had said directly to him, if he had not liked, he could still have borne with perfect good humour; but

that she should appeal to *Pinlake* about his work, that *Pinlake* should sit in judgment upon it, that he should laugh at his expense—all this was more than he *could* bear; and let us remember, too, that his temper had been very early disturbed by the appearance of the gentleman in question.

“As it’s by far the best work I’ve brought,” he remarked, moodily, “and seems to afford you so much amusement, I do not think there is any use in your going further through the collection.”

Mrs. Heather raised her eyes, with a rather surprised look in them, and said, very quietly :

“I think you’re mistaken. If you will allow me, I will turn over a few more?”

To which Montague replied of course he had no choice in the matter.

“This is delicious!” she said, “and this,” turning to another, “how very beautiful it is. Mr. *Pinlake*, is this not divinely lovely?”

“Oh, quite supremely beautiful,” he replied. “If you thought one girl’s arm out of drawing, you must own that this lady’s foot is just in proportion to her form.”

But Montague knew the meaning of their speech. His quick eyes detected the satire that lurked in Mrs. Heather’s smile, and the look with which she glanced at *Pinlake* as she spoke.

“Why don’t you say the truth?” he cried.

“Really, Mr. Montague, you are the first gentleman who has accused me of not telling the truth.”

“No; of course, I don’t mean that,” he returned, “but you are silent about the things you don’t like.”

“You’re an odd man. You neither like mild censure nor strong praise,” she remarked. “Oh, you painters and poets! What shall we do to please you?”

“I think you always please us when you let us show you our work, and tell us what you really think of it,” observed Mr. *Pinlake*, in his very blindest tone of voice.

“That does seem to have been the result in the present case,” she said, with a smile. “I tell you what, Mr. *Pinlake*, you must come very soon, and read me some more of your forthcoming volume, and, mind, you must be pleased with everything I say, just to reinstate me in my own good opinion!”

But though they tried to talk and laugh there was a constraint upon the little company. Presently Mr. Pinlake said he had another call to make, and so took his leave. As soon as the door had been closed on him, Montague took up the sketches that were lying on the table, and tore them in pieces.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Mrs. Heather, in a voice of studied indifference.

"Because," he replied, "because you laughed at me, because you must appeal to *him*. You do know about my art, and so have a right to speak; but what does he know, a miserable, little, inconsiderate poem-monger, who grows virtues to flavour his rhymes with—Patience, Unselfishness, Trust in man, and who knows what good things besides, and as he turns out poems by the ream, of course the stock of these merits is exhausted. None left, I assure you, for domestic use."

"I'm sorry you did that," looking at the torn sketches on the table. "Some of them were as good as they *could* be; they didn't please me all equally; and many, whether you like to hear it or not, were horribly out of drawing."

"Have I been behaving badly this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes—very badly. You have been rude and sulky; but I make some allowance for you. I saw how your face clouded over when your aversion came in."

"He had only quite recently become my aversion, but now he is for ever hanging about. One can never have a quiet word with you. Well, I am punished for my ill temper. There lies, torn up, much of the work of three years. Do you want me to go now, or may I stay with you a little longer?"

"At seven I must dress for a dinner party. I will be very much pleased if you will stay till then."

So he grows strangely tranquil, and sits down. Her beauty ever more and more draws his eyes with a resistless fascination. After a pause, he says: "May I tell you something?"

"I suppose you may, but I should think you know best."

"I want to tell you," he says, "that you have the most beautiful face in the world."

"Thank you. We are all vain alike, you know."

"Now will you answer me a question?" he goes on.

"Very likely; I am sure I will if I can."

"Tell me, then, should you not have known that if I had said nothing about it?"

"Must I answer that quite frankly?"

"You must."

"Well, then, I did think that, after we had been together a little time, from some cause or other you did rather like to look at me."

"I knew you couldn't help knowing it," he answered, and his looks became rhapsodies. "You make life seem so painfully short," he went on. "If I were to see you for years and years how many new beauties, I wonder, should I find out in every hour?"

"Now, don't be absurd," she answered, but not as if ill-pleased. "I think the conversation is getting a little frivolous. Suppose you read me part of a poem some one has been kind enough to send me. I can't make out, for the life of me, what it's all about; but you're clever, and can, I've no doubt."

How swiftly the hour and a half goes! The little French clock on the mantelpiece strikes seven, in its sweet, silvery voice.

Montague gets up to go. He holds her hand for quite a long time, looks at her with a lingering, earnest look. Then he says Good-bye as if he hated very much to say the words, and she asks:

"When may I come to the studio?"

"When there is something to show you. Don't you think a visit from you will be something to work for? Good-bye."

As Hannah, Mrs. Heather's maid, helps to get her mistress ready, she exclaims:

"Why, ma'am, what a lovely colour you have in your cheeks to-night, and your eyes are so bright. I know all the gentlemen at the party will be in love with you."

At which Mrs. Heather tells her not to be foolish, but, looking in the glass, is obliged to own to herself that the remarks are not ill-founded. Few women can be indifferent to the homage and admiration of a man who is anything in the world's eyes, and when, besides this, he is a handsome man, with a manner strangely magnetic towards those by whom he is attracted, the result is often to cause a thrill stronger even than that of gratified vanity.

As Herbert walked away from Brook Street he asked himself, seriously, if his interest in that quarter were not growing too strong, but he most satisfactorily answered the question in the



negative. He would not disguise the truth from himself, and why should he? He worshipped Mrs. Heather's beauty. He worshipped her intellect. For Mabel he had a warm, petting love. He had no real love for Mrs. Heather, but he worshipped her, and to worship was good and pleasant. Whither he was tending he scarcely knew, till he found he was at the steps of his long disused club. He turned in, ordered a nice little dinner, partook freely of good wine, and was very brilliant afterwards in the smoking-room, where he remained till the small hours.

As Montague walked home it seemed to him that the May dawn was feverishly warm. The little wind there was felt like a breath upon his face, an opinion in which people who passed him, shivering, evidently did not concur. Standing in his room, that early May morning, he thought how often in long past days he had stood thus in the dawning. Among letters and cards of invitation which lay upon the table was a line of good-night from Mabel. It was a dear, tender little letter. When he had read it he kissed it passionately, and did not put it with its companions in a drawer out of sight, and labelled "Mabel's Letters." No! this letter he thrust into the breast pocket of his coat. Was the man fool enough to think that a little inked paper could stand between him and a new dart—if love were willed to wing me? All that day he painted away hard at his picture, which was making rapid progress, and when Mabel asked where were his sketches, he replied that Mrs. Heather was keeping them for a day or two. It was the first untruth he had ever told her, but when he came to remember that among the sketches he had torn up were many he had made of Mabel in the early days, and by which they both set great store, he saw in what a tremendous rage he must have been. A man of moderate common sense, seeing danger ahead, would have fled from it, but a gentleman of Mr. Montague's superior wisdom determined on pursuing precisely the opposite course. He would see all he could of Mrs. Heather; he would tire himself of her, and if, when the season was over, he were not tired, then good-bye. If any nonsense had crept into his head, the sea-winds and the sea-waves would soon take it out. What a different life was the one into which he now plunged to that which he had been leading! All the day he painted till late, then he put on his evening dress, and dined at the club, or he

ate a hurried chop at home, while Mabel would busy herself in getting his things ready. I wonder, was she very fond of these dress clothes? Anyhow, she did her duty by them. How carefully she brushed them! How neatly she inserted the studs in his shirt! Did he think much about her, and the lonely times she must have had? Not very much, I am afraid, and then, why should he? Was she not always cheerful? Did he not still kiss her from time to time? Did he not call her by the old pet names? Sometimes he would say to her:

"I shall be glad, my darling, for your sake and mine, when this season is over. It won't be very long now, dear, before it is, and it is certainly bearing fruit; my hands are quite full of commissions. My picture in the academy is a real success. Who knows whether, in a little time, I may be rich enough to acknowledge you my wife openly, and leave the old gentleman to give or keep his money, just as he pleases. By the way, Mab, could you play the piano, if you had one?"

"Yes, I could play," she answered.

"You can? Then what a fool I have been! You shall have one in to-morrow, dear. So you won't be lonely any more then." And with a kiss, and a bright smile, he left her. Very handsome he looked. The double life of work and excitement that he was leading told on him, visibly but becomingly. His handsome face looked handsomer for being extremely pale, and his eyes were almost of unnatural brilliancy. Wherever Mrs. Heather was, there was he, till all society talked of it. And Mabel, what of her? Had she any trouble in her heart? Look at her this June night, as she stands before her husband, fixing a flower in his coat. He always wears a rose. Do you think she says in her heart, in the words of our great poet:

"I shall never be friends again with roses."

"Shall I do, Mab?" he asks.

"Yes, dear," she answers, cheerfully; "you look quite irresistible. You won't leave a lady in the room heart-whole!"

He tells her not to be foolish, and goes. In another half-hour he is making his way through a crowded room to where Mrs. Heather is standing, with a little court round her, as usual. As he approaches, the little court breaks up. As soon as he comes she seems to care for no other admiration.

"Horribly bored, aren't you?" he asks.

"Not now," she replies.

Let us leave these people, the smell of flowers fading in the gaslight, the wonderful pre-Raphaelite women, the din of voices, the intellect, the love-making, the deceit, the jealousy, and all the rest of it, and go back to the house in Museum Street; go gently upstairs. Faintly you hear the notes of a piano—now they cease—let us enter—for are not you, as I, O! reader, on the free list of spirits? Mabel is sitting at the piano, bowed over the keys, her face in her hands; she is sobbing to herself—she, who once sang so merrily. Is she crying like this, *only* because she is left so much alone? When Montague comes home in the early dawning, she will be placidly asleep, or pretend to be. Sometimes, thus lying, she will hear him pacing up and down the studio, having taken off his boots so as not to wake her. She will smell the odour of his pipe, then she will hear him cast himself on the sofa, and listen to him breathing heavily, as people do when sleep is caused by exhaustion. Then she will get up and throw a rug over him, and look, with what a love, at his pale, handsome face. Perhaps she will venture to kiss his hand. Was it only her fancy, that once as he walked to and fro, she heard him cry to himself: "Ah! great god of love, help me, and let this thing not be!" or did she dream it?—she dreams of him so much. She dresses herself quietly, takes very little breakfast, then goes out—on domestic duties bent. When she comes in she thinks it is time to wake Herbert, so she wakes him with a kiss, and has a cup of strong coffee ready for him. He calls her a dear little woman, drinks it off, springs up, and having divested himself of his evening clothes, and taken a cold bath, seems, for the time being, to have washed off all the dust of society, and is quite disposed for something to eat. After which he gets to work.

"Mab," he says one day, "Mrs. Heather and her friend Mrs. Jackson are coming to-morrow to see my picture. See that I have a nice little lunch for them, please. You, poor child, will have to keep in the next room. You won't be able to see Mrs. Heather, but if it will be of any interest to you, you can hear her voice. There is no chance of your confusing it with Mrs. Jackson's, for, like herself, Mrs. Jackson's voice is naturally shallow, and artificially sweet." Mabel smiles assent, and promises to see to the lunch.

The next day is a sultry, slumberous summer day. Immense

heat of veiled sunlight seems to weigh upon the land. Even the strawberry-sellers called out their wares exhaustedly. About all the arrangements for the lunch Montague was extremely fidgety—nothing seemed to please him. At length Mabel said :

“ Dear, don't you think you're a little hard to please ? ”

To which he answered with a sigh, that if everything else went wrong, at least he knew the wine was good.

“ There, there ! Mabel,” he said, with some irritability, “ no one's blaming you, it's not your fault, you did your best ; but, of course, you don't know about these things. I know how differently it would be done at Luck's. Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't look as if you were going to cry ! ”

“ I am not going to cry,” she answered. “ I suppose it might be better, but I think it's very well. Isn't it time for them to come ? ”

If he had known what pride she had taken for getting up that lunch of his, his natural kindness of heart would have kept him from finding fault with it.

Just then there was a sharp knock at the street door, and Mabel fled to the room, from which soon she heard a low rustle of dresses, and a voice, which she knew at once, from his description of it, to be Mrs. Heather's, said :

“ We have brought you a few flowers, Mr. Montague, just to keep us in your mind a little after we are gone.”

“ Do you think,” he answered, “ that my memory will need any stimulant ? ”

“ Now, please show us the picture,” she soon said.

“ Here it is, then, as you will see, not quite finished, though very nearly.”

Mrs. Jackson is instantaneous with her verdict. She pronounces it to be a lovely thing—knew from the very first that he could do fine work.

“ But what do *you* think ? ” he asks of Mrs. Heather, with painful impatience. “ Have I succeeded or not ? Let me know my fate ! ”

“ You *have* succeeded,” she says, speaking under her breath. “ I have never, in all my life, seen such a splendidly tragic face. The eyes have just the look you described to me, when you told me what you wished to have. It is the face of one waiting quietly for the end, for the blow which she knows must fall and crush her.”



"Of course," puts in Mrs. Jackson, "that's the great point of the picture. You see she can't escape her fate."

"And what a beautiful face it is!" says Mrs. Heather. "You remember that afternoon you were so cross with me, and tore up all your sketches. This is the same face I saw in many of those."

Thus at length, and in this unexpected way, Mabel heard the truth, for when again and again she had questioned her husband about the sketches, he replied always that he could not remember to bring them away. "Not if she tied a knot in his handkerchief?" Not if she tied fifty! Now she heard the truth. I wonder how she liked it.

"It is," he rejoined. "She's by far the best model I have!"

What more was said about the picture need not here be related. In due time the lunch was served, and there was a clatter of knives and forks, and a popping of corks, and a great deal of laughter. Luncheon over, Montague puts before Mrs. Jackson a pile of sketches.

"I want you," he says, "if you will take so much trouble, to go very carefully through these, marking the ones that you like."

Mrs. Heather is about to join in examining the sketches, when he gives her a look which she knows now how to interpret.

"I brought them all to you long ago," he says. "Please take this chair," giving her the one that stands most in shadow in the room. Then he throws himself on the ground at her feet. "Thank you for coming," he says, in a tone of voice only just audible.

"Thank you for letting me come," replies she, in a voice so strangely and so subtly sweet. There is no ray of the coquette in this woman. She draws and holds you simply by that mighty power of attraction which is hers.

"At what time have you told the carriage to call!" he asks, presently.

"What a strange question to ask!" she answers, with a laugh. "At five o'clock. Poor fellow! did he think he wasn't going to be bored so long!"

"I want to know how much time I have in which to realize that you are here. It is now just half-past three. One hour and a half—that is all!"



"And won't it seem a long time to you!" she asks.

"Don't mock me," he answers—"don't! Do you know that I have never seen you looking quite so beautiful as you are looking to-day!"

"But you tell me that every time!"

"Because every time it is the truth! Give that to me," he says, putting up his hand for the rose she is wearing in her dress.

She glances around to see if Mrs. Jackson is properly occupied with her sketches, and, finding that lady is not looking, she takes the flower from her dress and gives it to him. I am bound to say of Mrs. Jackson that she made a most desirable gooseberry. If she did not understand geniuses, she understood lovers perfectly. If she lacerated men of imagination by her praise, she meant well.

"That picture makes me very proud of you," said Mrs. Heather.

"Does it?" he cried, in a passionate outburst of delight.

"Don't you know I only paint now to win your approval?"

"Is that quite true?"

"Most solemnly it is."

The hour and a half flies, and at the expiration of it Mrs. Jackson's carriage is announced.

"May I drive back with you?" he asks.

"I wish you would."

"I will then."

As they are on their way to Tavistock Square, Mrs. Jackson asks:

"Now, won't you come in and have dinner with us, Mr. Montague? Florence is going to spend the evening with us. Have you any other engagement?"

"I have another engagement," he answers, "but I will break it. I am due at Lady Whittier's at eight, to dinner."

"Surely you wouldn't disappoint *her*?" asks Mrs. Jackson. "Such an important person as she is for all painters to stand well with."

Mrs. Heather says nothing, but there is a wonderful look of triumph on her face.

"It's well worth it," he answers, gaily, and then he says to the coachman: "Stop at the next telegraph office you come to."

They came to one very soon; he gets down and sends the following dispatch:

“So sorry. Quite prostrated. Have hoped against hope. Forgive, but don't forget.”

When they reach the house, Mrs. Jackson flutters upstairs, and Montague and Mrs. Heather are left together in the large drawing-room, full of flowers, from the scent of which all the air is heavy. When two persons sit down very near each other, and say nothing for several minutes, I opine that things have gone pretty far between them. At length he speaks: “Shall you forget this day?”

“No, never!” she answers.

“And I—God knows *I* shall not!” he replies.

Then silence again, which he is the first to break:

“Will you let me thank you?”

“For what?”

“Just for *being*—for sweetening life, as the rose sweetens all the air around it.”

“I don't think,” she said, a beautiful smile coming round the corners of her lips, “that I want much thanks on that ground.”

At that moment Mr. Jackson came in.

That evening Montague thought nothing of the future; he gave himself up wholly to the delight of worshipping; his looks were more passionate than the most passionate of written love poems. He would have liked all the world to have seen his adoration. It was past one before he left the house. He didn't go to his club, nor did he go home; but he walked about the streets smoking. He could not disguise from himself any longer how awfully he was fascinated by this woman. The season was nearly over, and was he tired of her? Did she not every day acquire a stronger hold upon him? What was he doing? Whither was he drifting? He could never marry her. Then he thought of his wife, who so loved him, who had served him so faithfully. Should he be less a man than Jim Bludso, and he quoted aloud the words of that fine American poet, Captain John Hay:

“He seen his duty a dead sure thing,  
And went for it thar and then!”

He would be a man, yet; he would go for his duty in the same way; he would see Mrs. Heather no more; he would

return to his wife ; and, saying to himself : " Never again, never again," he went back to Museum Street.

" You didn't come back to dress for Lady Whittier's," said Mabel, the next morning. " I suppose you didn't go ?"

" No, I sent a telegram. Really, I didn't feel up to it. I have done with society for this season, and while I'm putting the last touches to my picture, Mab, we'll have a nice, quiet week or two, and then for France !"

---

## CHAPTER VII.

### LOST.

So Montague turned to domesticity, to the old life with Mabel. The early part of the day he gave to his work, the rest of it he devoted to her. They went to the old places, roved about Richmond Park just as they had been used to do. Did he know how changed he was? Did he realize how feverish his gaiety was, or how long were his silences? So taken up was he in the battle he was fighting, that he never noticed how changed she was. Only once, when he became conscious that he had been silent for a very long time, he found her eyes fixed on his with a look of infinite sadness.

" Is anything the matter that you look so strangely, Mab ?" he exclaimed, almost sharply, with the guilty self-knowledge which often makes us unjust. " I thought you would enjoy yourself, and be happy. Don't you like coming out with me ?"

" Yes, of course I do, and there *is* nothing the matter. Perhaps the sun has affected my head for a few minutes. Don't be cross, dear, you never used to be."

" I never used to be !" he muttered, and then to himself he said : " I never used to be in hell !"

" Look here, Mabel, I have gone through a good deal this season—more than you know of ; my nerves are unstrung. If at times I seem strange, you must bear with me as best you can."

" I will," she cried, and putting both her arms round his neck, kissed him with one of the old, long, close, clinging kisses.

So a fortnight passed, and during that time he had not once seen or heard from Mrs. Heather. He was wild for a sight of her, as an opium-eater is for his opium, if some hand has deprived him of it. Brain and soul were painfully wide-awake. As one in fever tosses and turns, and finds no rest anywhere, so was it with him, who could find no rest, no comfort, no mental posture of ease.

It was the night of Mrs. Jackson's last reception. To guard himself from going to it, Montague took a stall at the opera. He was passionately fond of music, and he never in all his life made a greater mistake than this. The music heated his blood like wine. It was like a wonderful light of sound in which even things glorious were still more glorified. He was consumed by a fire of longing to see Florence Heather. He agonized just once more to hear the sound of her voice, just once more to feel the touch of her hand. The opera over, he strolled away in the direction of Museum Street; still he kept saying to himself: "There is time yet to see her!" Should he not—just one more last time? He stopped suddenly for a moment, on fire with happiness at the thought. "Yes!" he said, and then "No!" and then, "Come what may, I *will*." So he called a hansom cab, and springing in, promised the driver three times his fare to go with all speed to Tavistock Square. I wonder what people lounging about the door-step thought as the furiously-going hansom drew up in front of the house? There was a goodly number of carriages waiting—among them Mrs. Heather's. His heart gave one great bound. He should see her, then. He went up the stairs, but leaned against the door-post, weak and trembling, as once again he caught sight of the beautiful face, and the queenly figure. In a moment he had made his way to her.

"Is it a ghost?" she asked. "You look as white as one. What *is* the matter?"

"I thought I mightn't be in time to see you," he replied, faintly.

"You haven't wanted to see me this last fortnight," she answered, with a rather scornful, incredulous smile.

"Don't let us stop here," he said, "the air is stifling. Come into the conservatory. We can have it to ourselves. Come!"

So they went, and, as usual, became the topic of conversation.

"And I haven't wanted to see you much this fortnight?" he began, when they were alone.

"Not very much," she replied.

"Do you believe what you're saying?" he asked, fixing his burning eyes upon her.

"I scarcely know, you're so strange to-night. What *is* the matter?"

"I'm mad!" he rejoined. "I must have been very mad, indeed, when I could think that some singing voices and a pretty jingle could divert me from coming after you. Yes, I've come from the opera."

"Herbert!" she said, with an unmistakable thrill and tenderness in her voice, "why should you wish to keep away from me?" Her hand for a moment dropped in his, in a sudden transport he bent down, and pressed a long kiss on her superb bare arm. There was a flush on her face, but not of resentment.

"We must stay here no longer," she said. "Come to me to-morrow afternoon."

So they went back to the drawing-room. Herbert was in a frame of mind hard to describe. His infatuation—even now he would not call it love—had so possessed him that the possibility of the object of his adoration becoming moved in her turn had never for one moment occurred to him. In his wildest moods he has comforted himself by thinking that she could not be harmed by his worship. Mabel should never know he had ever cared about another woman. If he were mad, then on him, and on him alone, would fall the consequences of his madness. Now, he had said more than ever before; and he saw that she loved him; regarded him in the light of an accepted lover. That she *should* love him stung him with an exquisite rapture; that he should so have wronged her made him wild with mingled pride and passion and pain, and a strange feverish delight. He was fairly intoxicated. As he handed Mrs. Heather to her carriage, she said, and with a look in her eyes which he had never seen there before: "To-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow!" he echoed. Then humming gaily, as men do sometimes, with a sort of desperate courage, he went into the smoking-room. Did any one there notice how his hand shook when he poured out a bumper of Burgundy? Through that night he was silent and brilliant by turns. When all but himself were gone, he trespassed on his host's hospitality, as he had done not infrequently in his bachelor days, for a few hours' rest on the sofa.



The servants of that pleasant and Bohemian establishment never knew whom they might find in the smoking-room. After a short, sound sleep, Montague awoke. He looked at his watch—it was a little after ten. He buttoned his light overcoat, so as to hide his evening dress, and left the house. How many times before had he left it in this way—often with a splitting headache, but always with a light heart. Now, neither head nor heart were at ease. Between Mr. Jackson's smoking-room—and I am bound to say of that house that it was the Bohemian's sanctuary—and his own room, what a difference there was, he thought, as he entered his home. What a pure atmosphere pervaded it. The windows stood wide open. A large Morris jar full of sweet-smelling flowers was on the table.

"Why, dear, I thought you would be home early, last night," said Mabel, coming in from the next room. "Didn't you go to the opera, after all?"

"Oh, yes, I went," he replied, "but I thought when it was over that Jackson would be taking offence if I didn't show up at his last evening, so I went, and, of course, we made a night of it. Get everything ready, Mab; we'll fly the day after tomorrow."

"What shall we fly from?" she questions; and he answers almost savagely:

"From the hell of this life?"

He throws himself on the sofa, and she comes and sits beside him.

"You look ill, my poor boy," she says, and, laying her hand upon his forehead, she adds: "How hot your poor head is!"

Her sweetness, and the touch of her hand are more than he can bear. He cries out:

"Don't, Mabel, it burns too much to be touched!" Then, after a pause: "Don't mind me, my dear, I shall be better soon."

Later on, when he has changed his clothes, he announces his intention of taking a long walk, and seeing what that will do for him.

"I may or may not be home to dinner," he says—"but most likely not."

Mr. Montague's long walk, as the reader may imagine, terminated at a certain house in Brook Street. The door of Mrs.

Heather's boudoir, in which no man has till now set foot, closes, and these two, for the first time, stand face to face as lovers. He opens his arms, and she comes into them simply, as if they were her rightful home. First, he touches her soft, flower-scented hair, as her head rests against his shoulder; then their lips meet, and by the summer of her kiss he knows the desperate ardour of her nature. Spring weather, at its brightest and intensest, is totally distinct from the larger heats of summer—heats that at times burn with white light, at times are sombre and pregnant with imminent storm. So much difference is there between passion in girlhood and passion in mature womanhood.

“You love me, Florence?”

“Should I be in your arms if I did not? Some men,” she went on, “have been foolish about me, but no one ever loved me as I wished to be loved till you came. It was the way in which you love me that first made me love you.”

His heart cried out within him, should he not tell her, there and then? No; he had gone too far. Out of all they must lose, that afternoon, at least, should be theirs. She was sitting on the sofa now; he, in his favourite attitude, at her feet.

“Tell me again and again how you love me?” she says, bending down. In what mad words does he reply? Who would care to hear them?

“Do you remember the day I came with Mrs. Jackson to the studio? By evening I knew just how you loved me. Do you know how you used to hold my hand, and look at me for such long whiles together? If ever a woman's heart was loved away from her, mine was. I wonder can it be good for me to love you so much? Why, the least touch of your hand can make me quiver from head to foot!” And she bowed down her blushing face, and again their lips met and clove.

So the almost intolerably sweet hours, which one of these two knew to be sinful, fled away, and a late afternoon caller ended them.

“To-night,” said Mrs. Heather, “I have a friend coming to stay all night with me; to-morrow I have to go out to dinner. I shall be back at half-past ten. Will you come?”

“Do you think there is need to ask?”

“I should hope not!”

So with yearning hands, and lips and eyes, they part.

Herbert walks about the streets, with his blood on fire. In his blind passion for this woman's beauty and intellect, he has never once questioned what manner of woman she was ; apart from that, wicked or noble, saint or devil, he had formed no shadow of an idea. After wandering restlessly about the streets for a long time, he went to his club, where he passed the night, not getting home till dawn had waxed into early morn. It was impossible that he could keep up, for much longer, the kind of life he was leading, but it is wonderful what men can do when stimulated by a great excitement. Mabel looked at him anxiously, but made no comment. He devoted that day to writing letters, packing, and generally putting things in order. The day passed swiftly, and brought the evening.

"I daresay I shall be home early to-night, Mab," he said, as he was about to leave her. "You know you must be up betimes to-morrow to catch the mail."

"I won't keep you waiting, dear," she answered.

"What are you looking sad for, Mab?" he cried, suddenly. "Don't you like going to Paris? I thought you would?"

"So I do, and I'm not sad. Now, you must go, dear, because I know you have many things to do, but before you go, kiss me, just as you used to when we were first married?"

So he did, and they clung together—she, in very passion of noble love ; he, more in passion of remorse. Then he put her from his arms gently, and went.

It is not a very pleasant piece of work that Montague has before him ; he wishes to get it done, and it seems to him as if half-past ten would never come ; but it comes at length, and his heart turns sick as he lays his hand on the bell handle. Mrs. Heather is sitting in her boudoir. She has on a dress which leaves visible her magnificent neck and arms—not a very low dress, but one which enthralls as much by what it suggests as by what it reveals. Diamonds light her dainty ears and shine round her neck. In her hair she has one red rose. She is looking her very loveliest, wonderfully happy and expectant, when, after a low rap, the door opens, and Herbert walks in.

"I thought you would never come," she says, rising and coming to him. "Love makes such a foolish woman of me. I suppose you are not really very late."

She has put both her hands into his, and is looking up at him

with those desperately dangerous eyes of hers. How *can* he tell her? And is it not even harder when he has kissed her perfect mouth, and white, flawless neck?

"How beautiful you are looking to-night!" he says.

"More beautiful than you have ever seen me look before?" she returns, questioningly, speaking evidently in inverted commas, and with one of her most fascinating smiles.

"Yes, I think so," he answers, taking his seat by her on the sofa.

"I thought the long night and day never would go," she said.

"Heaven knows, my queen, I thought the same!"

"You're quite sure of that?"

"Quite."

"Then you may kiss me. Herbert, how happy are you? Tell me."

"Happy!" he almost shrieked, springing up. "Happy? *My God!* I am the most miserable man to-night on all His earth! Tell me, do I look happy?"

"No," she answered, in a changed tone of voice, speaking very slowly, and looking at him with eyes wonderful for their dread. His own fell before that look.

"What has happened?" she went on. "Will you explain, please?" Her tones were icy cold.

"Oh, Florence, how can I tell you? I have deceived you!"

"Deceived me?" she repeated, as if she could scarcely realize the meaning of the word. "Deceived me?" Then, with a sudden rush of trust, and a grand deliberateness of renunciation: "I *don't* believe it. You may fancy you have. Is it not some money question? Have I not enough for us both?"

"It's no question of money," he replied, walking up and down. "I have wronged you, but Heaven knows I never meant to do so. Florence, we can never be anything more to each other."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Because," he answered, "I am married."

"You are married!" she said. There was no quiver in her voice, but a cold pitiless light shone in her eyes. "Married? Then, will you tell me, Mr. Herbert Montague, how, being married, and at the same time making professions of love to me,



you failed to know the wrong you were doing me? I am curious to hear!"

"Because," he cried hopelessly, "I never, in my wildest moments, thought you could ever love me. I thought my homage pleased you. I thought you accepted it as you would have done a flower. It seemed to me you were too supremely above us ever to love any one, and, God knows, least of all me."

Here she interrupted him :

"Will you tell me why? You are not deformed. For the matter of that," with a scornful curl of her lip, "you are handsome. You are no fool. You can flatter better than any man I ever heard. For me, do I look like a marble woman, with no blood in my veins? There was nothing in your face or voice to hint the thief and traitor that you are." Then she went on with awful concentrated intensity of bitterness, shuddering as she spoke: "When I think that you have kissed me, as you have done; that your arms have been about me; that you have seen my very inmost heart; have heard from me the confession of my love—I tell you, when I think of these things, I feel one burning blush go from head to foot, all through me. My soul blushes. It is as if a man, under seal of confession, should lay bare all the most sacred secrets of his life, and, having done this irrevocable thing, should find the priest, whom he had thought one of God's anointed, no priest, but a juggler. Let me go on, please," observing he was about to speak. "Do you think I should have suffered your looks of undisguised admiration, your long clasps of the hand, had I not thought of you as the man who was to be my husband? If what you say be true, you must have thought me a strange woman. But it is *not* true. Oh, Art! that I have loved you like a religion, that a man like *you* should be one of her high-priests!"

"What I said was most solemnly true," he broke in; "for two or three hours I did yield myself up to the hallucination that we were lovers, and that, God forgive me *was* wrong, was unpardonable. But as for trying to win your love, I would just as soon have thought that I could have sung the moon down out of heaven. No man was ever more in love with his wife than I was with mine, till I met you. You turned my head, you delighted and maddened me, you thrilled my senses and my imagination as they had never been thrilled before. I thought the punishment of the sin would follow me alone. You,



I thought, could not be harmed by my worship. My wife knows nothing, and never shall. The sweetest, faithfulest wife that man was ever blessed with."

"How well you *do* appreciate your blessing, don't you?" she retorted, with a smile of infinite scorn; then, with a flash of evil triumph in her eyes: "Go home to your sweetest, faithfulest wife. It will be sweet for you when she lies in your arms to think how you have repaid that sweetness and trust; to think that if she really knew what you were she would really scorn you, even as I do, unless, indeed, she should be like my dog, who fawns the more the more it is beaten. Go back to her, as I wish both she and you were here—dead before me."

"Florence," he said, kneeling before her, "will you never forgive me?"

"Never!"

He tried to take her hands, tight-locked in one another.

"Don't, please," she said; "we have done with that kind of thing for ever. I hope never again to touch your hand. Will you leave me now? I should like to be alone."

"I will do your will," he said, rising.

"Thank you," she answered, ringing the bell as she spoke. So, without another look or word, they parted. When he was gone Mrs. Heather cast herself on the sofa. If you had seen her writhing there, in an agony of baffled love and outraged pride, you could not but have pitied her.

"At last," thought Herbert, "it is over. How cruel she was!" He walked restlessly about the streets till early morning; then, with almost a sigh of relief, he went home. On the table was Mabel's "Good-night."

"Faithful always!" he said, as he took it up and began to read. This was what he read:

"MY DARLING,—I do not want this letter to shock you. You know how you found me—you saved me from starvation, or perhaps from worse, who knows? For three years you made my life as beautiful as one of your own pictures. A long time ago I told you that I should know when you ceased to want me for your work. So, should I not find out when you ceased to want me for your love? Dear, I have known for some time that you love another woman. How could you help it? If we could have gone about together, I think it might have been

different, but we could not. I know, my darling, how you have suffered in trying to be faithful to me. Now the picture is done, you have no more any need of me, and when you read this I shall be, oh, I don't know how far off. I told you I should find out when you didn't want me, and go. Don't, my darling, let any thought of me trouble you. You have given me, in three years, more happiness than I believe even most women know in the whole course of a long life. I don't disguise from you that at first, when I felt we must part, I had, at the thought of leaving you, a short, sharp pain; but when I made myself realize that it was for your good and happiness, then it scarcely hurt at all. You will hear my voice never again. Once, I know, you did love it dearly. I have had such a bright, happy life with you, dear. You may love the other woman better—I do not mean that you did not love me—but I think no one will love you quite in the same way that I have. These are the last words I shall ever write you. My last thought will be of you; my last prayer will be for you. Now, good-bye, my saviour, my lover, my husband.

“MABEL.”

Pale as death he stood there, holding the letter in his hand. Mabel gone? and gone where? The thing was too horrible to be true. It was a new July morning. The keen, high wind was driving rain mixed with hail against the window. With a dread no words can describe, he went into the bedroom. “Oh, thank God!” broke from his lips, as, instead of the empty, unpressed bed which he had so dreaded to see, he saw Mabel, lying in her customary place, in her customary attitude. The dark hair flowed over the pillow; one hand lay under her cheek, the other lay on the coverlet.

He realized, now, how vital was his love for Mabel; how quietly transcendent over every other feeling of his life. He fell on his knees by the bedside, in very passion of thankfulness. Placidly as she was sleeping, he must wake her, and once more hear her voice. At the least word of his she would wake, for she always slept as if hearkening for his tone.

“Mab,” he said, gently, but she did not stir. “Mab,” in a louder tone, “Mab, my treasure, my sweetheart!” still no answer. “Mabel!” the mad, questioning cry rang through the room. The dread in it of a horror too great to be put into

words would have haunted you ever after, had you heard it. . . . The awful silence answered that question. She was gone. "Mabel, his treasure, his sweetheart," would waken at the sound of his voice never again. He sprang to his feet, he looked round the room with fierce, inquiring eyes. On the dressing-table stood a little bottle, labelled "Laudanum"—it was empty.

He said nothing. The time had not yet come for words. He went into the studio, and there in the chill light of that gay summer morning, the painted eyes of his dead darling seemed to look at him. In after days he knew that their look of fatal comprehension, which all the world so praised, had been seen by his *eyes*, not as he had thought at the time, simply realized by his soul. There was only one thing to do. He rang the bell with all his might. Mrs. Bloomfield will never forget the sound of that sudden and violent ringing at that early hour. In years to come she will often shudder at the sound of the studio-bell, for it was distinguishable from all the others by a peculiar note of its own.

She rushed upstairs.

"Oh! what is it?" she cried, as she caught sight of his face. He laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, in a hoarse whisper:

"She's dead! I'm going for the doctor," and with that he left. The doctor was not far to seek. He returned with Montague, said "it was a very sad case—life must have been extinct for four or five hours." He shook his head, took his fee, and went his way.

Good Mrs. Bloomfield's heart yearned to Montague, but she could say nothing, only, as she wrung his hand, gasped through her sobs:

"No stranger's hand shall touch her, my dear. I'll do it all myself."

When the last sad offices had been performed, Montague went in and stretched himself on the bed by his dead wife. In her ears that heard not, he whispered all his love; he told her all about his infatuation for Mrs. Heather—an infatuation of which now, not even the ashes seemed to remain to show that it once had been.

Very few of us, under great trouble, go mad and die—that is, not directly. Often the ultimate cause of death has had its root in a grave. Montague seemed very near to death or madness,

when, growing uneasy as time went by, and she saw nothing of him, Mrs. Bloomfield went to his room. After knocking, and receiving no answer, she opened the door and went in. Montague was lying by his wife's side, his arm was round her neck, and his lips were laid close to her cold cheek. He was whispering and laughing softly, and playing with her hair, as he used to be so fond of doing. Was not this temporary eclipse of reason merciful? The doctor who had come in the morning was soon again upon the spot. Another room was made ready to receive the patient, who, before the night was over, was in the height of brain fever.

Mrs. Bloomfield at once acquainted the Jacksons, whom she knew to be Montague's most intimate friends, with what had happened. Of course Mrs. Jackson told Mrs. Heather.

Mr. Jackson had only that morning left for Liverpool on important business, so the two women went together to the house in Museum Street to see if there was anything they could do.

"I will come to you presently," said Mrs. Heather to her friend, when they had reached the house. Then, turning to Mrs. Bloomfield: "Please will you show me where she is?"

Mrs. Bloomfield unlocked the door of the bedroom. By the way, I wonder why it is that we always keep our dead under lock and key, as if we thought they could run away from us any further than they have.

"I will call you in a few minutes," said Mrs. Heather, and the landlady, taking the hint, left her.

Then Mrs. Heather went over to the bed, and looked at the dead wife of the man whom she had loved with a very genuine, if not with the noblest love.

It was in very truth a beautiful face, she thought, as she looked down upon it. You may be sure that her woman's instinct had guessed at the probable cause of Mabel's suicide. As she stood there looking and wondering—wondering what manner of woman this had been, her heart waxed very compassionate. Very reverently, and with tears in her eyes, she kissed the folded hands, and the white, cold lips. "Good-bye, my dear," she said, "and sleep well!"

Through his long and dangerous illness, Montague was nursed constantly by Mrs. Heather and Mrs. Jackson. When he recovered he never knew who one of his nurses had been,

both Mrs. Jackson and Mrs. Bloomfield had kept the secret so well.

When Montague returned at last to the affairs of every day life, it hung just for a little while in the balance, whether he would seek refuge from his sorrows in stimulants and opiates, or whether he would turn to a truer source of comfort, and dedicate his life to his wife's stainless memory. This last was what, after a little time, he choose. He was never again seen in society. From time to time he saw a few old friends at his house ; nor was his door ever closed against men who were fighting their own hard way in the world, and to whom his opinion was of great benefit always, and often of great comfort.

As for Mrs. Heather, he remembered her only too well ; but he hopes that he shall never see her again. In course of time she married a very noticeable artist, and people speak of her now as a woman who must have been very beautiful once. Can one be sure that anything short of Mabel's death would so wholly have extinguished Montague's feeling for Mrs. Heather? I think not, so, had she lived, the ending to our story might have been sadder and more tragic than death.



## THE LADY OF THE GRAVES.

—:0:—

DURING the autumn of 18— I visited the romantic watering-place of Rocky Bay, and there I formed my memorable but short-lived friendship with Walter Darill—short-lived, alas ! for he was then in the clutches of consumption, and sinking rapidly.

His handsome, wasted face attracted my attention from the first. It was the face of a man whose life's story must have been in some way tragic.

We seemed drawn to each other in some strange way, and shortly before he died he told me the story of his life.

I shall never forget that afternoon when he approached the subject. How the wild west wind came storming round the one hotel of the place in which we were ! The sea was of a grayish-green, flaked with white, flying foam. The window of the room in which we were sitting looked out upon the shore, where we could hear the thunder of the oncoming, and the prolonged, serpentine hiss of the retiring waves. The fire in the room flickered pleasantly.

Walter, on a sofa near me, seemed half asleep, occasionally murmuring to himself :

“The jewels must be found—the rubies and the diamonds and the baneful opal !”

He started, and said :

“How the wind blows ! I think I must have been asleep !” Then, after a pause, he said : “My friend, there is something I want you to do for me when I am dead.”

I promised to carry out faithfully any commission with which he might intrust me.

“I think I should die easier,” he went on, “if you would listen to my strange experience.”

I protested my willingness to hear, and he thus commenced, using no more words than were absolutely necessary, for his strength was low.

I shall not break up the narrative by showing how frequently it was interrupted by fits of coughing and intervals of exhaustion, but give you as nearly as possible in his own words my friend's history :—

As a child I was strangely excitable, and possessed from an early age by the thought of death. Funerals, while I shrank from them, had yet such a terrible fascination for me that I could not refrain from following one when I met it in my walks.

At night my dreams would be haunted by them, so that I would wake myself with a shriek. Later on I came to know why my boyhood had been so cursed by these dark visions of hearses following hearses in what seemed an endless procession—why it was that my last thought at night was of coffins and newly-made graves, why it was that I seemed to smell death in the air.

Shortly before my birth my mother, who was a most sensitive woman, was out driving, when the horses took fright at something, and, breaking away, rushed into the midst of a long funera procession which was proceeding in the opposite direction. The carriage dashed into the hearse with such violence that the coffin was flung out.

You can imagine my mother's horror at having birth and death thus rudely confronted—a horror which she transmitted to her child, who was that night born prematurely !

As I approached manhood the terrible repulsion and fascination exercised on me by the thought of death grew less, though at certain periods it would take hold of me as keenly as ever.

I could never pass a country churchyard without going into it and wandering there among the graves.

I was in my twenty-second year when my doctor advised me—for I was very far from strong—to try the effect of a country life, early hours, no reading, but plenty of horse exercise. He advised my going to a pretty village called Hampton, where a brother-doctor resided, in whom he had great confidence.

Looking in the paper, I saw a furnished house advertised to let at Hampton. I at once wrote and secured it. I reached the village at the close of a beautiful May evening. Nothing could have been more peaceful than the scene which lay before me. The nightingales were beginning to try their voices through the soft dusk.

On reaching the house destined for my reception, I saw, with a shudder, that it overlooked the village churchyard. Was I never to have a chance of escaping from the thought of death? But, after all, I was to spend but little time in the house, which in every other respect was all that man could desire; so I resolved to make the best of it.

As I sat in my room I could hear through the open window the notes of the organ; some one was practising late. In the morning I was up betimes, and passed the whole day in riding and walking. In the evening, yielding to a temptation which I had been striving to resist, I strayed into the churchyard adjoining the house.

Among the graves, one especially attracted my notice on account of the beautiful flowers with which it was wreathed. On the stone was cut, as part of the inscription:

"To the memory of  
CHARLES EDWARD BEAUMONT,  
Who fell fighting for his country."

I cannot say why my thoughts were so strongly drawn to this dead Beaumont. I passed on after a time, studied the inscriptions on various other tombstones, and was returning when I saw, kneeling by the grave which had so curiously interested me, a tall, slight figure, clothed all in black.

The young woman was surrounding the headstone with fresh flowers. Startled perhaps by the sound of my advancing steps, she raised her head, and the light of the setting sun fell upon the most beautiful face, though also the strangest, I have ever seen.

Neither have I ever seen so sad a face. The large, dark, wonderful eyes seemed very well-heads of sorrow; moreover, they seemed to have in them knowledge of things supernatural, while the unrelieved blackness of her dress rendered still more striking the extreme pallor of her beautifully shaped face.

Though the mouth was red, it looked as if it had never smiled, nor ever could smile.

She rose, and unlocking the church door, passed in. I lingered outside, and soon heard the slow, solemn notes of the organ. Were they wakened then by the same hands that had wrought the music of the night before—almost the first sound which had reached me in my new abode? Can you see how clearly it was to be from the first?

The twilight fell, but I lingered. It was the "Dead March in Saul" which, played with passionate, despairing melancholy, floated through the church. More than once was it played through; then followed the wonderful "Moonlight Sonata."

It was appropriate, for the moon was beginning to rise, raining down over all its white miraculous peace. I wondered if the dead people underground knew anything of it, or if they heard the chirping of the crickets in the grass above them.

For an hour I stayed, listening; then the music ceased, and the tall figure, clothed all in black, passed from the church into the moonlight. As she moved, dark and noiseless, among those silent homes of the dead, she seemed to me the reigning spirit of the place, and to myself I called her, as indeed she seemed to me, "The Lady of the Graves." I remained unseen in the shadow of the church, till I felt she must be out of sight. Then I came out of hiding, and went into my house.

That night my dreams were of her and of men long dead. They were sable dreams, and through them all was a music of lamentation.

The next day found me so weak and depressed that I carried my letter of introduction to Dr. Spenser. I found him a middle-aged man with a cheery manner.

Seeing my depressed condition, he very kindly asked me to dine with him that evening, and I accepted the invitation gladly, for I hated to be alone. I spent most of the day in country inns talking to whomsoever I might chance to find there—anything but to be by myself.

Thankful I was when seven o'clock struck and I could repair to my doctor's house, not knowing that in that very place, and that very evening, I was to meet my fate, my love, my beautiful Lady of the Graves—my Marah. But so it was.

After dinner, when we were alone, my host, in a few words, told me Marah Beaumont's history.

Her mother, passionately beloved by her husband, died in giving birth to this daughter, her second child. Associating his daughter with this disaster to his life, Mr. Beaumont shrank from her from her birth, and christened her Marah.

Marah grew up a strange, reserved girl, idolizing her brother Charles, who seemed to have been to her brother, sister, mother, father, in one. He fell fighting in the Crimea.

The shock of his loss nearly killed Marah. It was now two years since Charles's death, yet his sister would not lighten her mourning. Not a day passed but she visited his grave. Mr. Beaumont spent most of his time on the continent; and, as the doctor and his family were all attached to Marah, Beaumont had, at their suggestion, let his house furnished, and consigned her to their protection.

I learned with surprise that it was this very house that I had rented, having made all my arrangements with the housekeeper, a somewhat singular and reserved old lady.

That night, when I went home, I knew myself, for the first time, to be in love. I was so restless that, instead of going to bed, I wandered about the country.

The nightingales all sang of love, and not of their ancient griefs. The owls chattered of love, and not of prey. Where shadow and moonlight blended I seemed to see forms of lovers clasped in one another's arms. But enough of these fancies.

I became rapidly intimate with Marah, so that we spoke frequently of her brother and visited his grave together.

What was it about her that so wholly fascinated me? In part, it was her strange, forlorn beauty, which suggested a fair country—fair but forsaken—seen for the first time in the light of a setting sun; partly it was her earnest, twilight voice, partly the silent grace of her movements, and the unexpected way in which she would come and go. But, above all, it was that, in some way impossible to define, she was utterly unlike any woman that I had ever met or ever heard of.

With all her beauty, there was a nameless something which seemed to forbid that beauty's appropriation; and yet, to me, this prohibition of Fate seemed only a new attraction. She was eight years older than I, and that inspired in me a deeper adoration than I could have felt for some one of my own age.

I shall not forget one midsummer's eve. I had been for a long walk, and returned to my house as the twilight was



deepening. The door stood open, and I walked straight into the dining-room ; and there, sitting in the window's recess, was Marah, her fair face fallen into her hands.

At sight of me she would have risen, but I prevented her.

"Marah," I said, "it is good of you to have waited for me."

"I came," she answered, and I could tell by her voice that she had been weeping—"I came that we might sit together, you and I, where I have sat so often with him."

Then I laid my hands on hers—long, slender hands they were—and said :

"Marah, I have known you but a little while, and yet, with all my heart, with all my body, with all my brain, with all my soul, I love you. Young as I am, a curse seems to hang upon my life. You, and you only, can take my curse away. Will you take it away? Will you be my wife?"

For answer, she flung her arms round my neck and strained me to her, while all her body shook with sobs.

"Marah," I cried, "you love me?"

"Yes," she answered, and her voice was broken—"yes, I love you more than my own soul. I love you, but I dare not marry you. Your life is cursed only in your fancy. In time you would come to hate me, and ah ! merciful heaven ! how could I bear that? I love you, but I must not marry you. You must choose some happier woman. You *think* yourself cursed, but I *know* that I am ! Was I not with Death from the first? Am I not called Marah?"

I swore to love her, to cherish her in every way, to share her sorrow more gladly than any other joy, and to be her slave. I prevailed at last, and all that evening we sat entranced in deep rest and happiness.

That very night I wrote to Mr. Beaumont. His consent to our marriage was speedily obtained. For a wedding-present he gave Marah some wonderful old jewels which had been in his family for many generations.

"They are too beautiful for me," she said, turning them over.

I thought they were not worthy of her beauty.

We were married in September, and went abroad for our wedding-trip. I knew my love, on the whole, was happy in her grave, serene way ; but sometimes it would seem to me as if she were standing between two great shadows, and the light would

die out of her eyes and leave her face gray and hopeless ; or, without seeming cause, the sudden tears would break from her eyes.

If I questioned her, she would say it was only because she was not strong, and she would put up her lips to be kissed and ask me to be patient with her.

Not in gay cities like Paris and Vienna can I picture her now ; but I have visions of her as she moved by my side through the twilight streets of Bruges, or I see her winding down the staircase of the old hotel, with carved swans for the balustrade ; or she is moving noiselessly through old cathedrals, where she would often kneel down just as the common people did, saying that it was good to pray there.

I wonder if she knew just how much I loved her—how in all things I strove to do her will ? I was happier than I had ever been before.

All that troubled me was the vague sense of misgiving which seemed to hang about my darling, and the knowledge that she was never strong.

My morbid moods recurred at longer and longer intervals. Still, they did recur.

After our happy wanderings we returned to Hampton for Christmas—fools, not knowing that we were such !

The severity of that winter was almost unparalleled. Hampton Station was about a mile from our house, and that Christmas Eve on which we arrived such a heavy snow-storm had fallen as to delay the train ; and, having sent no notice of our arrival, we found it impossible to procure any carriage, so that we were compelled to struggle on on foot through the driving snow.

“ Cold, and still as death—is it not ? ” she asked.

I kissed her cold mouth, and put my arm more tightly round her, and strove to cheer her with talk of home joys. At length we reached the house.

But that night, while the simple villagers sang carols beneath our windows, my darling lay in bed, with burning cheeks and hands, and madly-throbbing head.

I would have sent the singers away, but she said :

“ No, dear ; let them stay. Charles would have had it so.”

Morning brought no alleviation of her symptoms. Her illness became serious and threatening. Often she wandered at in-

tervals, talked of Charles as if they were again children together. Then, recovering consciousness, she would fix her eyes full on me, and say :

“ Mind, if I die, you bury me in the same grave with Charles. Dear, I shall grieve to leave you, if indeed it must be so, but I shall be so glad to see him once more ! ”

Almost she smiled, and that smile roused in me a demon of jealousy, and I answered :

“ So long as you can see him, what do you care that I shall be left here alone ? ”

She began to cry, and I cursed myself for the words I had uttered, and fell on my knees by the bed, with my head upon her bosom.

“ But you will not die,” I cried. “ This is no more than a feverish cold.”

But though I tried to delude myself with these words, I had at heart the sickening sense that she was slipping from me. I knew how fragile her constitution was.

Sometimes she was wholly delirious, and seemed in terrible distress, clasping her hands against her side. For ten days I did not close my eyes. I could eat no food, and lived almost entirely on brandy. I would have no one nurse her but myself.

We fought death, as it were, hand-to-hand—Dr. Spenser and I. We drew out the cold, which at first had threatened to strike inward ; we quelled the fever. But what skill could combat the exhaustion which followed ? She felt that she was going from me, and when I could not help showing her that my heart was broken, for the heart of pity in her, the tears would fall fast down her poor, wasted cheeks.

On the eleventh night, feeling that it would be physically impossible not to yield to sleep, I reluctantly accepted Mrs. Spenser’s offer to keep for a few hours my vigil. I slept as people under such circumstances do sleep—a long, dense, dreamless sleep.

When I awoke, it was in the gray, cold light of the implacable winter morning. I sprang up instantly, full of my love.

I heard the door of her room open and shut. I heard the doctor’s voice speaking in low tones. I heard the sound of a woman’s suppressed sobbing.

My heart seemed to stop beating, for I knew then that she had gone from me. For me there was no longer Marah in the

world. Coming out of my room I came on Spenser, who saw by my face that I knew.

"We would have wakened you," said his wife, "but she passed away in her sleep so peacefully."

Then I went into the room. There on the bed, with lace at her neck and wrists in harmony with the marble whiteness of her marble face, but with the peace of God, it seemed to me, still hovering in her beautiful face, cold and motionless, lay my three months' bride!

I kissed the mute, unresponsive lips, the closed lids, the cold, dark hair. It seemed to me that my heart and brain must burst, for I could shed not one tear.

All that day I sat by her in the room of death. Of course the room was fireless and, they told me, cold; but I felt it not. In the evening those awful men came with their black burden, but I would not let their hands come near my love, who was then a saint in heaven; so I and Spenser laid her in her narrow bed.

When I saw her lying there, a fresh sense of grief, blended with a mighty increase of my old childish horror of death, suddenly came upon me.

My head swam round; my heart beat so fast as almost to stifle me. I had meant to pass the night alone with my dead, but I sprang up, trying to reach the door. I heard my own shriek as I fell to the ground. Then all was dark.

I was conscious next of strange, shifting scenes and illusive forms, like, yet unlike, people I had known.

There came a day at last, when I awoke to consciousness of real life, and gradually to the remembrance of what had happened; but that grief, though very real, seemed yet sanctified and softened, as it were, by a great distance.

I had been prostrated, I learned, by brain fever. When it abated, I was told that my life had been despaired of, and that, for at least a month to come, it was necessary that I should be kept in a state of the profoundest quiet. I was to sleep as much as possible, and to be well nourished.

Almost the first question asked of the doctor was, if Marah had been duly laid to rest with her brother, as she desired.

"All," he replied, "was just as I would have it to be."

Then he bade me ask no more questions, and think of nothing but getting well.



It was then early April, and the purity of the young spring, innocent of all large heats of sun, seemed to flow into my veins ; nor did it seem a bitter thing to sit in the soft April twilight, and there to let the tears have their way, thinking of her who was now no more in this world, but in another one, joined to the brother she had so loved.

I would look up to the stars, wondering if any one of them might be her home ; but I did not wish to speak of her.

Once Mrs. Spenser approached the subject, but I put it aside, asking her to wait till I was stronger.

Day and night did I pray to my love that from her far place she would so influence my life as to make me worthy of being there re-united to her. Was I stronger than I had thought ?

One evening, when I was sitting alone, watching the April sunset in a sky half pure blue, half black with thunderous clouds, watching the virginal green branches of the trees as they tossed in the blithe spring wind, which, though cool this evening, had in it a wonderful sweetness and zest, an uncontrollable longing to be once more in the open air came upon me.

If I asked permission I knew it would be refused. I listened. The house was perfectly quiet, but for a servant who was singing over her work in the kitchen.

Supporting myself by a stick, I crept downstairs, then out into the fresh wind and gold light of the setting sun. I went a few steps down the garden, with the songs of birds in it, and heard, blown about by the wind from near clover-fields, the violent note of the cuckoo.

I opened the garden-gate. Ah, whither should my first pilgrimage be, if not to my love's grave ?

I passed into the churchyard. I tottered onward to the grave I knew so well, by which I had first seen her. There I came upon the ghost of her, watching, as it were, by her own grave. Nay, not her ghost, but her very self !

“*Marah—Marah !*” I called.

She rose, wavered, and then, with a low cry, flung her arms about me. Upon my neck I felt her cold hands.

“*Love,*” she cried, “*it is I. I am not dead, but yours only.*”

Could I still believe my senses ? Scarcely. Later on, when I was calmer, I came to hear how she had lain in a trance, which even the practised eye of the doctor could not distinguish from



death, till at last, and only just in time, her agonizing internal convulsions resulted in a faint moan, which roused those present as if it had been the crash of doom. The shock was too much for me, and all that night I relapsed into delirium.

Dr. Spenser and his wife had meant to break the joyful news to me gently, but I had forestalled them.

I regained my health slowly. The presence of Marah so excited me that I was only allowed to see her briefly every day.

It was on midsummer's eve, just a year since I had told her of my love, that we were, so to speak, remarried, that we again began to live together, quite by ourselves, as husband and wife.

Shall I ever forget the awful stillness of that dark midsummer's eve, and its sky charged with coming storm?

The Spensers, who had been staying in the house, had left us, and we were alone together for the night—I and my love—who had come back to me, as it were, from the land of Death.

So absorbed was I in this thought that I started violently at the sound of her low voice as she asked me of what I was thinking.

“What,” I answered, “could I be thinking of but of you?”

As the clock struck twelve, she said, lying in my arms:

“The sound of that clock came very near reaching you over my grave.”

Her words made me shudder, and I thanked God with all my heart for having given my love back to me.

Were we as happy as we had been in the early days of our marriage?

As the weeks went on I could not help asking myself that question. The fascination Marah had for me was greater than ever. Indeed, it was so intense as to be almost painful. Yet I felt that we were both of us changed. Sometimes she would say:

“Why do you look at me so long without speaking? Say something, or I think I shall go mad.”

It is true that when I looked at her I seemed to lose the power of speech.

One evening, at the beginning of August, I was sitting by myself, thinking of Marah and of death, seeing again her white face in the coffin, and having terror of it.

Suddenly a cold hand fell upon mine. I sprang up and away from her with a wild cry. I said:

"I had forgotten you were not dead."

"Perhaps," she answered, quietly, "you would rather not have remembered?"

I tried to laugh, and said that dead people come to life could not be like other people.

Against what happened I strove manfully, I think, but vainly. The added fascination which she had for me was tainted. It was the old morbid fascination of death. I would go to the grave where she had so nearly been laid. I would fancy her lying within it, and again I would picture her confined face. Then, with dread and desire, each enhancing each, I would go to the house to clasp her in my arms, my dread, beautiful Lady of the Graves.

Sometimes I would wonder if it were not all a delusion, and Marah no more than the phantasm of a madman's brain. Then terror of my wife would come upon me, so that I would shun the sight of her.

Day by day she grew whiter and thinner—more like one dead—and it seemed to me that there was a look of mournful reproach in her eyes which I had never seen there before. I can scarcely say why that look should so have maddened me, but it did.

In September I went quite alone to London, to see if that change would be of any help to me. I strove to keep the thought of Marah from my mind—I strove in every possible way to divert myself, but, oh, how vainly! In crowded streets, in theatres, in drawing-rooms, in the gaslight and in the sunlight, and in the darkness, always, I saw before me that white, confined face.

I returned to Hampton, hoping that her real face would lay this dreadful spectre of it. I returned, quite unexpectedly, one grave, quiet afternoon. A few birds were singing dubiously through the damp haze which hung over everything.

As I passed the well-known church a tall figure flitted out from among the graves, and seeing me, gave a low cry.

It was Marah.

But as she came near I shrank from her, saying:

"No, not now, Marah; you smell of death. God help me, but I think you are dead yourself!"

She passed into the house, and, though I dreaded, I had to follow.

“What were you doing in the churchyard?” I asked.

“Laying flowers on my brother’s grave. At least your dead wife may tend her dead.”

She passed on, and I did not attempt to follow her.

Was I cruel to her in these days? Why did I not leave her? Because, while I hated her—yes, I think it had come to be hatred—she yet retained for me an awful, ghastly fascination.

I dreaded to hear her voice, her footfall—dreaded to see her face; yet she drew me to her as the North Pole draws the magnet. My old horror of death returned to me more strongly than ever, and among the funerals moved the spectre of my wife—the ghost that would not be laid.

Was there no way in which I could break from this fearful thralldom?

I spoke of it to no one—not even to my doctor—who, I can see now, detected something strange in my manner.

“Why do you hate me?” she said once. “What wrong have I done you?”

“What wrong did I do you,” I answered, “that you should haunt me thus? Can one live with the dead, and not go mad?”

We had separate bedrooms. That night I was in my own room. I awoke from a light sleep with an irresistible sense that I *must* see Marah, or the phantom of Marah. Perhaps I should find her bed empty and the phantom gone.

I took a lamp, and, shading its light with my hand, went stealthily into her room. I crept close to the bed and gazed.

Yes, there upon the pillow, framed in its dark hair, lay that white, awful face just as I had seen it lie in the coffin.

I just touched one cold hand which lay upon the coverlet; then a voice seemed to whisper in my ear:

“End this! Bear it no longer. Dispel this phantom!”

I set the light down, and dashed a heavy pillow over the white, strange, wasted face. With all my might I cast myself upon that pillow, crying:

“Now, now, now, leave me for ever!”

When I drew the pillow away the face was there, but the eyes were changed. By a sudden blaze of sure knowledge I was aware that my wife Marah lay there, and that I had murdered her.

Still, the thought of my own death filled me with terror, and such a death as I should have to die on the discovery of my

crime. Cold drops of sweat stood upon my forehead. Was there no way to escape detection?

With fiendish promptness I thought of a way. The house was only one story high, and divided from the road by a low wall. A tree pushed its branches against it just outside the window. By the use of this tree a dishonest person could reach the room.

I found my wife's jewel-case, and wrenched open the lock. I dropped one ring upon the floor, as if to indicate it had been dropped in the hurry of plunder. I raised the window, let myself down by the tree, and, going straight to a deep, disused well, dropped all the jewels therein.

I re-entered the room by the same way, and, going noiselessly to my own room, waited till I should be aroused by the intelligence that my house had been broken into, my wife murdered, and her jewels stolen.

Now my confession is made. When I am dead, I want you to go to the house at Hampton and to have the disused well searched for the jewels, which you will restore to Mr. Beaumont.

My crime was, I think, the crime of a madman, but my remorse has been an agony which will make death welcome. I love my wife now with all the old strength and tenderness, and I cannot help thinking that if there is a life after this, when I have suffered more still, perhaps some dim, purgatorial land of tortures, that God will pity me, as I know she does, and join me to her in the city that is not built with hands.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days after this tale was told Walter Darill passed away into the mystery of things. The trust he left me I duly fulfilled.

# A STRANGE WOMAN.

—:0:—

## CHAPTER I.

WHEN Mr. Gordon West, who had spent his summer holiday visiting various French watering-places, turned his steps in the direction of Etretat, he had very little idea that there was his fate waiting for him—that the 30th of September, the day on which he arrived, was to influence his whole future life.

The season was over, the *salon* was closed. The hotels remained open for the accommodation of the two or three visitors who still lingered. Gordon reached it on Monday, and proposed to leave on the following Friday for England.

It was a thorough-going seaside afternoon when he found himself in the courtyard of the Hotel Blanquet, the fame whereof had often reached him. The high autumn wind was vital with the keen scent of the sea, whose great foam-crested waves came in with a sound of thunder, flinging their spray high into the cold wind, which the failing warmth of the sun did all it could to ameliorate. He took a brisk turn about the place, dropped into the library and bought a French novel, and longed for the hour of dinner as one does at a strange place, when, from ignorance of its ways, he does not like to venture far a-field.

What kind of a man was this English tourist? To begin with, he was a handsome fellow—about that there could be no doubt. Men did not dispute it; young ladies, waxing confidential, spoke to each other of his splendid, half-tender, half-audacious looking



eyes. They sighed over his beautiful dark curly hair, his aristocratic face, his perfect hands—neither too large nor too small, so white, strong and firm. But they always closed their remarks by asking one another if they ever had seen, or ever hoped again to see, such a figure—such a perfect blending of strength and grace. And all they said was very true; the admirable way in which he bore himself, set off to the best his advantages of face and form. Moreover, he had a voice very pleasant to listen to. It was a full and very vital voice—a tone of strength and good humour ran through it.

By the recent death of his father, he had become possessed of a good fortune and estate; so, altogether, he was a desirable *parti*. Some day he intended to marry, but he wisely resolved first to exhaust the sweets of a bachelor life.

The red September sun was setting into the cold white waves, when at last the *table d'hôte* bell sounded, but covers on the long table had only been laid for six persons.

When West entered the room, he found there assembled a French lady; her son, who was lame, and had a sweet, grave face; a very fat and not very amiable-looking Frenchman, and his daughter, about ten years old, who chattered all through the meal.

The sixth place remained for a time vacant. To a sensitive nature there is something irresistibly comic in the fact of five people, three of whom were strangers to each other, sitting down to dinner at a very long table. In the stillness which prevailed, the fat Frenchman could be heard taking his soup with long, deliberate sips.

“Who will the sixth person be, I wonder?” thought West, as, having finished his soup, he was consulting the wine-list.

He had just given his order, when there was a soft *frou-frou* in the room, accompanied by a delicate scent. The place opposite him was taken by a lady.

A look, at first of great surprise, and then of extreme content, passed over the face of Mr. Gordon West, for he saw at a glance that the new-comer was beautiful, and the sight of a beautiful woman was always quite sufficient to put him in good humour.

The lady who had just taken her seat was about the average height; her deliciously-moulded figure was well set off by the most perfectly-fitting dress imaginable. The pallor of her exquisitely-shaped face was excessive, yet there was a fascin-

ation in it. The mouth was well-formed, the lips full and red. The wonderfully delicate nostrils indicated a sensitive and highly-strung organization. The large dark eyes had in them a look of great weariness; the hair was perfectly black—very thick, strong, short, and crisp. Rings shone on her long, slender fingers.

“French or English, I wonder?” thought West. “Neither, perhaps. There’s an Italian look about her.”

With the appearance of the fish, the little girl belonging to the fat Frenchman became very excited, crying out:

“Oh, papa, I saw this fish this morning when it was alive! I was on the beach with Marie when a fishing-boat came in, and Monsieur Dagon was there, and the men began throwing the fish out one after another; and, says Monsieur Dagon, pointing with his cane to one, ‘How much for that?’ And the man says, ‘One franc fifty.’ And monsieur says, ‘One franc, and no more.’ ‘One franc twenty-five,’ said the man. ‘*One franc!*’ said monsieur, very slowly, just like that. ‘Well, I suppose I can’t help it,’ said the man. Oh, but he did look cross!”

To this papa remarked only that a franc was quite enough for it, and suggested to his child the advisability of talking less and eating more.

The lady with the lame son here helped herself to cider. Such a proceeding on such a cold night made West shiver; and he turned with a glow of content to his bottle of good old Burgundy.

The room was ill-lighted and distressingly cold.

“Oh, the sea *was* rough this morning,” recommenced the irrepressible little lady. “The spray came right in our faces, papa. A man came up and asked me if I saw a lot of birds flying about, and I said I did, and he said, ‘Well, that’s a sign there will be a lot of windy weather.’ What makes birds come in windy weather, papa? Is it, do you suppose, because they like it?”

The father gave some reason which seemed entirely to satisfy his child, and then for a little while the meal proceeded in silence.

Mother and son had smiled at the little girl’s prattle, as if they thought it the right thing to do; but West and his *vis-à-vis* seemed too much occupied with each other to have any

thoughts for smiles. They knew instinctively that they were each thinking of the other. They surveyed one another furtively between the courses.

The wind could be heard sweeping round the house, and West made up his mind to venture a remark, so he said, in his very pleasant voice :

“ I think the wind is rising even higher.”

“ I hope not.”

“ You dislike the wind ? ”

“ I dislike the wind when I am on the sea, as I shall have to be on Friday.”

“ You are going to England ? I suppose it's not your first visit ? ”

“ It is my country,” with a pretty laugh.

“ Mine, too,” replied West, in his native tongue, laughing in his turn.

The beautiful stranger had a very attractive voice—it was low and lingering. All she said, she said with earnestness ; his remarks did not seem at all to embarrass her.

“ Don't you think it's rather cold for this sort of thing ? ” he asked.

All the six persons were shivering over iced pudding of a very humble description.

She answered, with a smile :

“ I shall give it up. I don't know how I shall get warm to-night. It's really colder than it should be for the time of year.”

“ I'll tell you what,” said Gordon, “ let us take the kitchen by storm. There was a cheerful fire there when I came in ; doubtless there is one still. I think our friend, the cook, would be quite accessible to a little bribe. Should you feel disposed to venture ? ”

“ I would venture anywhere, I think, to get warm.”

“ Then I will lose no time in seeing how the land lies.”

He returned shortly with the pleasant information that the cook professed himself only too much honoured.

“ Where will you have coffee served ? ” inquired West.

“ Where it's warmer,” she replied, rising.

“ Let me show you the way, then.”

And they left the other poor shivering mortals to get warm as best they might.

To reach the kitchen they had to cross the courtyard. The

wind was so violent that West offered his fair companion his arm. She declined this with what seemed to him the most remarkable vehemence, and walked forward, as if in fright.

However, when they reached the kitchen she was quite composed again, and looked even more beautiful for the disorder into which the wind had blown her hair.

"Pray smoke," she said—"pipe or cigar ; I like the smell of either."

"Really?" he asked.

"Really," came the grave affirmative.

Then he lost no time in filling and lighting a handsome meerschaum.

It then occurred to West, for the first time, to speculate upon the age of his companion. Somewhere near twenty-eight, he settled in his own mind, and that about hit the mark.

"Do you like this place," he began, by way of reopening conversation.

"Yes—very much ; but then I have only been here since August. I like the walks round about it, and the air of it gives me fresh life."

"You are travelling with friends?" he asked, sending a cloud of smoke from his pipe slowly.

"I live alone, I travel alone—I shall *always* be alone," she answered, with an amount of suppressed bitterness that quite took West by surprise.

Who *could* this beautiful woman be, whose manners were so wildly unconventional, and yet had nothing in them that could be called fast? And how could such a beautiful creature come to be still unmarried?

"I am alone, too," he said. "My father and mother are both dead, and I have neither brother nor sister—don't you pity me?"

"Not in the very least! What a man means by loneliness is boundless freedom—freedom to be as bad or as happy as he pleases. You know it is so," she went on, seeing that he was beginning to smile, in spite of himself.

His smile was very winning, especially when he was making futile attempts to keep it under.

"I won't dispute it. There is truth in what you say. Still, you know, we do get tired of being alone."

"And then you marry—for change and convenience."

"Some of us do. I don't think I ever should. It must be



such a glorious sensation to be downrightly in love with one's wife! Nothing in all the world, you know, can come near that. Without being a remarkably rich man, I have enough to enjoy myself pretty freely in all ways. But I know a little hardworking country curate—if he gets enough to eat, it's as much as he does get. As for wine, he would as soon think of buying a bottle as I should think of not buying one. But he is in Paradise—he experiences joys of which I have no conception. And why? Just because he is madly in love with his wife, a little dumpy, pudding-faced thing, and with no charm of manner to atone for her fearful plainness. How can I let a little country curate outstrip me in this way?"

"Why *don't* you fall in love, then?"

"Just at present," he replied, with a laugh, "I wouldn't if I could, and I couldn't if I would."

"Do you suppose your curate's wife is as happy as her husband?"

"I fancy so. Their happiness is the talk for miles round. It is a blessing for them that they should be all in all to each other; if they did not desire the society of each other, I don't know who would."

The lady laughed—a rather forced laugh. Her hands lay on her lap, and she kept opening them and closing them, and her eyes yearned.

Outside the wind shrieked on, making the roaring of the sea seem less tremendous than it otherwise would have done.

West had grown restless, and he began walking up and down, casting his eyes round the room, that they might seem more by chance than by desire to rest on that strangely beautiful face.

Presently he said: "You don't look at all English."

"No," she answered; "my mother was an Italian."

After a little more talk the lady rose, and, complimenting West on the complete success of his experiment, wished him "Good-night" very graciously, and left him to his own reflections, which were not altogether of a tranquillizing order.

This strange woman had made a profound impression on him.

How the wind buffeted him when at length he rose and crossed the courtyard to reach his bedroom. Through its shout and bluster he heard the continuous coming and going of the great, cruel waves, distinguishable through the darkness by a line of white foam.



“By Jove! How cold it is!” he exclaimed, as, shiveringly, he drew the bedclothes round him.

Few things in their way are drearier than to lie awake through a long, cold, stormy night. As West listened to the wind raving outside, he wondered how the hotel, which was but slightly built, could withstand it.

After a while he managed to get some broken rest; strange dreams came to him, and through them all looked out one face.

As soon as light was well come, he sprang out of bed and dressed himself.

He was a splendid swimmer, and the height of the waves did not in the least disconcert him. The sun was shining brightly; the wind was undiminished.

It seemed a revel of wind and light and sea—a revel in which he wished to lose no time in taking his part.

In a few minutes more he was in the thick of it. He was tossing on the crests of the waves, the sun right over him and the wind all round him.

As he rose on the waves, which came against him in vain, and which, indeed, he seemed to master, he was regarded with much interest and admiration by some fishermen on the beach, also by the proprietor of the hotel.

“What is it?” inquired a woman’s voice.

It was our friend of the previous evening.

“Look!” returned the other. “It is your countryman who swims in a sea like this.”

The lady looked in the direction in which he pointed, and smiled as if she were even well-pleased to know herself half-English.

There is nothing in women—not even beauty—which men love so universally as women love courage in men.

Not till he was a speck scarcely visible did the swimmer show any signs of returning.

An hour afterward he entered the courtyard of the hotel, smoking an excellent cigar.

“I say!” he called to the cook, who was passing. “I hope you’re getting a good breakfast ready for us, my friend—my hunger is something awful. Think of me as seven men, and allow accordingly.”

“Good-morning!” said a sweet voice, which he had heard mentally through the wind and the waves. “You surely deserve

breakfast. I witnessed your swimming achievement from afar. It must have been very dangerous."

"What danger there is lies in getting back. Just, you know, when you put your feet down, a big fellow rolls you over, and sends you flying out to sea again. Of course, if this happens a good many times, it begins to tell on a man's strength, but I have been in rough seas enough, and have only twice been really hard run for it."

Then the breakfast-bell sounded, and they moved to the *salon*, where they were regaled with shrimps, ham—very hard and salt—mutton chops, and mashed potatoes, an omelette, grapes, and cheese.

"Well, well, it might have been worse," said our hungry friend, as he swallowed his last grape, and tossed off his last glass of Burgundy. "Waiter, coffee and cognac."

West had discovered from the proprietor of the hotel, the name of the English lady. She was a Miss Brougham.

"Won't you let me drive you somewhere?" he said, as she was about to leave the room. "I feel in a way as if we were cast on a desert island, and were bound to help one another."

"I feel just so, too," she answered, smiling, "but I am afraid all the helping will be on your side."

So it was arranged that she would accept his offer, and a ramshackle little carriage, drawn by a very lean horse, soon made its appearance.

"He certainly is not a thing of beauty," said West, as they drove off.

"Nor a thing of strength, either, I am afraid," she answered, with a laugh.

The two drove many miles, and I am bound to say that from time to time, they looked at each other, and to judge by the smile which generally followed these looks, it would have seemed that they were mutually satisfied.

As they were on the homeward road, West asked his fair companion if she had ever driven. She answered in the negative.

"Then take your first lesson, now," he said, pulling up sharply. The artful rogue knew well enough that such lessons cannot be taught without much touching of hands.

Miss Brougham had been in the most buoyant spirits, but at

this proposal she looked perplexed. She seemed to desire a lesson, and yet to hesitate.

“Do,” resumed West, “take the reins. No, not like that. Please let me settle them in your hands.”

For the first time he set his firm, lithe fingers on her hands. He was getting to look more and more at her, and he observed then a strange look, as of pain, which she was trying to suppress, pass over her face.

“No! we haven’t got them quite right yet——”

He knew well enough that he was needlessly prolonging this pleasantest part of the lesson; but the pupil ended the lesson very abruptly. With a short, sharp cry she wrenched her hands away, and clasped them under her cloak.

“Have I hurt you?” he cried, in horror.

“No, no!—only I don’t want to drive. It was a sudden pain.”

She was silent through the rest of the drive, and her weary eyes seemed to look even wearier.

---

## CHAPTER II.

MR. WEST was not at all given to the practice of self-deception. He had met Adelaide Brougham on a Monday; on the following Wednesday he announced to himself that he was desperately in love, irremediably fascinated, hopelessly spellbound. To look at her beauty threw him into a fever of excitement; there was a subtle magnetism for him in every movement of her gracious body, in every tone of her voice.

He was attracted and perplexed by her manners, which were so free, while she shrank from any overt sign of demonstration on his part. He managed to pass the greater part of his time with her. When she was in her room writing letters, he hung aimlessly about the courtyard, smoking and wondering if she would never have done.

The wind continuing so violent, Miss Brougham resolved to postpone her departure for another week. West also made the same resolution.

The Monday following his arrival was a bitter day for this

love-sick youth. In vain between morning coffee and eleven o'clock breakfast did he look for the object of his adoration. She came not, nor did she come at breakfast-time.

He inquired of the waiter about the missing one, and heard she was confined to her bed by a severe headache. He looked at her vacant place gloomily, and put extra brandy in his coffee; then he went for a long walk.

It was a day of high winds and casual rains. He walked and walked, and smoked and smoked, and thought the day never would go; but at length the desired evening did come, and the thought that he should see her again put him into tremendous spirits as he walked back.

But he was doomed to disappointment, for still her place remained vacant. I can assure you that through that evening he was in no very sweet frame of mind. He took a walk in the wild, windy moonlit night, so suggestive of a certain kind of music. Then he returned and went to bed, with a strong sense of having been shamefully used.

"I began to think I should never see you again," he said the next day.

They were walking up the cliff to the little windy chapel, where mostly sailors' wives come to pray.

"I am very glad you missed me at all," she replied. "I thought of you when the pain in my head would let me think of anything. You don't know what a long day it seemed to me. I thought it never would go; but it did go, and the night brought such delicious sleep!"

"Do you still mean to go on Friday?" he asked.

"Yes. Whatever the weather is, I shall go then."

"I am also going over that day. Will you let me take charge of you?"

"I should be only too delighted!" she answered.

Half-an-hour afterward they were standing in the chapel, which they had wholly to themselves.

"I wish I believed more in prayer than I do," she said, suddenly; "then what a comfort it would be to pray."

"What would you pray for?" he asked.

And she answered, with her eyes to the ground:

"To be as other women are."

"A very vain prayer," he said, "for that you will never be. You are the most bewilderingly fascinating woman that ever lived!"

"Thank you," she replied, with a faint smile. "I know I am one of the most unhappy."

"Won't you tell me what your trouble is?" he said, coming very near her.

But she shrank from him, and said :

"Not now. Perhaps some day. Who knows?"

\* \* \* \* \*

The following Friday found our friends on their way to Havre in a carriage from the hotel. The steamer did not start till midnight, so they had time to dine at Etretat before leaving.

Perhaps neither of them will ever forget that drive. The wind had all fallen away ; the heavens seemed brimming over with large loveliness of saintly moonlight.

They spoke but little. The kind of conveyance in which they were was not altogether favourable to conversation. But when they drew up by the way—which they did pretty often—all French drivers being alike thirsty and sociable—they remarked in low tones on the beauty of the night, or West would ask her if she were cold, and she him if he did not want to smoke, at which, nothing loath, he would light a cigar.

Then the driver, pipe in mouth, would issue from the roadside *café*, mount his seat, exchange last good-nights with his friends, swear at his horses, crack his whip, and again they would proceed upon their way.

Whether it was the moonlight or not, I cannot say ; but as they were nearing Havre a quite irresistible feeling impelled Mr. West to draw very close to his travelling companion, and to lay his hand upon hers.

Just to touch her hand thrilled him with exquisite delight. For about half a minute he felt it lying under his ; then it began to tremble, then, with a start and something like a cry, she drew it away as she had done on a previous occasion.

"Are you vexed with me?" he asked, in his most tender voice.

"No," she answered. "I am not vexed with you!"

All too shortly it seemed to West that they descended into Havre, then the driver cracked his whip furiously, and the streets were driven through in what he evidently considered style. There is always something fresh and striking, see we it never so often, in the night view of a town, from which we are going to turn directly to make our way through the dark, perilous sea to another land. You are passing through the midst



of people, some happy, some unhappy, some sick, some in health, some feasting, some sleeping. They abide, but you do not endure there ; from the midst of lives on which you speculate you go to fulfil your own life, it is even possible that you may never again set foot on land. Surely West and Miss Brougham were not the only travellers who felt this as they made their way through the high bright streets to the quay. Henceforth a continental town by night, with carriage lamps flashing, and the jingle of bells, will always recall to them the glow and romance of that night.

They soon reached the quay where the *Wolf* lay, getting steam up fast. The process of lading was going on with great activity. West saw Miss Brougham on board at once, then he went to see after the luggage. The second bell had sounded when he found himself beside her again. The passengers were not numerous, but they were fairly representative. There was *paterfamilias*, very important and hot from altercation ; there were the gay young dogs, who chaffed and smoked and strutted about the ship, as if it were their own exclusive property, and the dainty little French lady, talking very fluently in her own tongue, occasionally speaking the prettiest broken English.

The *Wolf* was evidently soon going to depart, the steam was roaring and the engineers were getting to work in earnest ; the mails had been sent in.

“Any more for shore ?” cried a voice. Then the sound of the steam ceased suddenly, two or three persons ran hastily up the plank, then it was withdrawn—good-nights were exchanged between the sailors of the *Wolf* and their brethren on shore—there was a movement, a splash, they were off. At length the harbour was cleared, and the *Wolf* stood out into the moonlight and the open sea.

“You will go down, now, I suppose ?” inquired West.

“No. I shall stay on deck all night, I like it so much better. The sea is almost as calm as a river, is it not ? Let us take a turn up and down. How well the Havre lights look from the water

They had had the deck to themselves, at least the part of it they traverse. For a little while they stood leaning against the bulwark, looking down—

“The moonlit waters white.”

Very pleasant was the sound of the water as the rapidly revolving screw divided and churned it.

"Do you go straight to London?" inquired West.

"No. I don't live in London. My home is in the Isle of Wight. I have a delightful old house there."

"I should like to see your home," he replied.

"That does not seem difficult of accomplishment. I don't think you will find the doors closed against you."

"I take you at your word," he answered.

"How else should I mean to be taken?"

"May I call on Sunday evening?"

"Most certainly you may."

West's heart began to beat fast. Who was this woman to whom he was so losing it? What *would* be the end of it all?

Presently West found a nice, sheltered seat for his companion.

"Now let me wrap you up cozily," he said; but she shrank away from him, and answered:

"I am quite equal to doing so myself. You wouldn't do it as well."

"Perhaps I shouldn't," he replied, not too well pleased.

Then he bade her good night. He walked up and down in dreadful restlessness. What a flavourless, savourless thing life must have been, he thought, before this interest had come into it.

And she—she lay there coiled up in rugs, her hot hands locked tight in one another.

"Oh, will it never, never, *never* be?" she moaned, under her breath. "Must the act of another, before I was conscious of being—before my eyes had seen the light—waste my whole life utterly? Ah, how strong he is," she went on, "how manly, how tender!"

Then, as she thought of something, a great shudder possessed her whole body.

When West went below in the gray of the early morning, he found the inmates of the cabin all tranquilly slumbering. He was desperately hungry, and somewhat refreshed by the sight of the steward, who at once went to boot-cleaning.

However, he procured from him some biscuits and a potation of brandy-and-water. This breakfast was regarded with much disfavour by *paterfamilias*, who happened just then to wake up,

and who thought any one in the last degree culpable who did not as he did, or would have done.

When West returned to the deck he found everything there greatly alive. The sea was shining and quivering under a bright sun. Groups of passengers stood here and there, talkative and hungry. Another half-hour saw them in Southampton water.

"Good-morning," said a well-known voice, and, looking round, West saw Miss Brougham.

"I hope you managed to get some sleep," he said.

"Oh, yes ; part of the time I slept charmingly. The captain tells me we shall be in by nine or a very little later."

The man who enjoys a breakfast on board ship, I venture to say, enjoys it as no other meal can be enjoyed. After the tedious, uneventful night, after the stimulating effects of the fresh morning air, how good it is to sniff the rashers of bacon, the odour of tea and coffee, to behold the joint of prime English beef, to revel in crisp toast and fresh butter. Only now, to think of these things has roused in me such a hunger that, by your leave, I will not write another line until I have well fed. That is just what all the passengers on the *Wolf*, who could do so, did, for there *are* those sad, much-to-be-compassionated souls for whom the delight of a breakfast at sea is a thing non-existent.

"In what part of the Isle of Wight is your home?" asked West, as he and Miss Brougham stood again where they had stood the previous night.

"It is close to old Bonchurch," she answered. "It is called 'The Firs.' We must be passing quite close to it now, I should think."

The captain was as good as his word. A few minutes after nine saw the *Wolf* safely in dock, discharging at once her passengers and her steam.

By ten o'clock, West had seen his own and his companion's luggage through the Custom-house.

"I suppose you will go straight to Cowes," he asked ; "there is a boat which you can just catch, if you like."

Miss Brougham did like, so West saw her on board again. She just let him touch her hand at parting.

"We shall meet to-morrow evening," he said.

"Yes," she answered, earnestly, "I shall expect you."

There was no more time to be lost, and he had to hasten on shore.

He watched the little ship till it was out of sight. Then he began to consider what he should do.

He had felt it would be best for him not to accompany her into what seemed her own domain. The thought that there was a strip of water between them aggravated him so much that in three or four hours that source of aggravation no longer existed.

The more he thought of this woman the deeper grew his infatuation.

Arrived at Cowes, nothing would serve him but to push on with all the speed he might, so that he should sleep that night near her. The thought that he was going where she was filled him with delicious excitement.

It was about ten o'clock when he reached Bonchurch, that beautiful and peaceful spot, the beauty of which is tender and compassionate, and its peace the peace of spirits made pure through much tribulation.

Not at all too well pleased at seeing so late a visitor, seemed the waiters at the hotel where he put up.

The *Firs* he found upon inquiring was about ten minutes' walk distant. It was close to the old church, and could not be mistaken. Thither, while his meal was being prepared, West turned his footsteps.

Gentle as May was the October night, lit by a sweet, pensive-looking moon. A wonderful hush lay over everything—a hush through which occasionally the voice of a cricket faltered.

There was in the ineffably soft, pure air the supreme rest following some divine attainment.

He had proceeded a few steps only when he heard the sea—a continuous flowing sound of a sea agitated by no waves.

He soon reached the old church which leans, with all its dead, to the sea—the sea which, I make no doubt, shall one day take it into its large embrace, and hide it away with all its other pains.

Think you the dead take thought of this as they lie there through long nights and days? Do they hear the sea calling, and whisper each to each under ground: "How long, oh, brother, before we be moved from here—before waves and not grasses stir above us?"

Do they, on nights of shouting winds, when they seem almost to hear the sea roaring at their feet, turn colder, thinking that the hour of their change is upon them? For I imagine a dead man liketh well to take his ease, and, if he be well-housed, desireth not to change his quarters.

But it is with living, not with dead, folk that we have to do ; so let us back to our story.

“ Yes, there is the house in which she is even now,” said Mr. West to himself, as he surveyed with passionate worship the high, moss-covered walls of The Firs.

A rambling, old-fashioned house, from what he could make out. He stood there in an ecstasy of delight to know himself so near her again.

A vision of sulky and sleepy waiters rose before his mind’s eye and compelled his return, but not before he had said many times softly, under his breath—

“ Good-night, my lady, my beautiful, my mysterious love ! ”

The fatigue of the day and the sea-voyage produced their good work, and, excited though he was, sleep overtook his thoughts of her—or, rather, turned them into dreams of her.

Not restful dreams, however. She would call him to her, and when he came command him to fly. Once she was standing on the edge of a cliff, her face turned from it, and quite unconscious of her danger. He stepped to her, and threw his arm round her to draw her back. She gave a wild shriek, wrenched herself free from him, and fled—he knew not whither.

The power of the dream awoke him ; but he fell asleep again, and this time slept so late that when he awoke it was to hear the church-bells.

The thought flashed across him that if he went to church he might see her there ; but he thought it, on the whole, pleasanter not to anticipate the evening meeting.

What could the mystery about her be? he again asked himself, as he dressed. Unconventional she certainly was to a most remarkable degree. On the other hand, she was free from all those arts which stamp ladies of a doubtful class.

Upon one point he was very clear, which was, that were she low-born or high-born, rich or poor, saint or sinner, he would win her and make her his wife—that even if her past had been what she might have to regret, henceforth no one should have right in her but himself.



He had the whole of the solemn coffee-room, and the solemn waiter therein to himself.

Breakfast over, he walked to the pretty lady town, Ventnor, which Death makes to be perpetually in season. They often look cheerful enough ; yet to me a great sadness rests upon these frontier towns of Death. Still, flirting goes on there ; the brothers of sick folk meet the sisters of other sick folk, and outside the sick room in the bright, open air, there is room for a little harmless diversion, though a good many funerals and wheeled-chairs go by.

West threw himself on the little strip of beach, and began throwing stones into the sea.

The serene autumn day wore slowly but surely away. At five o'clock West dined ; then with a feeling of delicious pleasure to think that the precious moment had at last come, he walked down to The Firs. Through the Sunday evening peace went a not unpleasant peal of church bells, and smote him somehow with a keen sense of vanished boyhood.

---

### CHAPTER III.

"Is Miss Brougham at home?" he inquired of the servant who opened the garden-gate to him. Miss Brougham was at home, and West followed up a long garden-path to the house, and was shown into a room, which he supposed to be the drawing-room. The furniture in it was elegant and uncomfortable. There was a handsome cabinet of old china which he was examining when the door opened. He turned, and once again they stood face to face.

"So you have come?" she said.

"Did you think I should not?" he answered.

"Oh! I shouldn't have been greatly surprised. Do you like my china?"

"Yes, I admire it greatly."

"Let us sit in the library," she said, after a pause ; "this room is only meant for very formal visitors. There is to me something chilling in the very air of it. No fire, however large, could, I believe, warm it."

Indeed, the library was a very different kind of room. It was ringed round by books ; it contained a harmonium, a sofa, and a few low, comfortable chairs. The thickness of the carpet rendered one's step noiseless ; it was lighted by a shaded lamp.

"This is a famous room," said West.

Then for quite a long time they remained silent. Out of this strange position what was to arise ?

"You have a number of books," he began.

"Yes."

"You read a great deal ?"

"A great deal. I have nothing else to do. From any trouble I have to try and take refuge in my books."

"But I hope that you have not many troubles."

"We won't speak of them now," she answered, in her low, strangely sweet voice.

She was leaning back in a low armchair ; the red velvet cushions on which her head rested showed off her dark hair well.

They talked of the Isle of Wight, of books, of music.

When at length he took his leave she walked with him as far as the gate.

"Thank you," he said, suddenly.

"For what ?" she asked.

"For letting me come to see you."

"I don't think thanks are needed for that."

They had reached the garden-gate by this time.

He asked whether he might come again ; the permission was granted.

"How still it is !" he said. "But what sound is that ?"

"Oh ! it is only an owl."

"I like the sound," he said.

"Yes ? So do I."

Mr. West seemed to find it very hard to get out of the gate. After a long silence he said, "Good-bye !" and in a tone that meant a good deal.

He took her hand and held it fast ; it trembled in his ; then she said, simply—

"Don't, please."

"You are not angry with me, are you ?"

"No, not in the least. Good-night."

In another moment the gate had closed upon him.

He went and walked on the shore. There was a cruel hunger gnawing at his heart. Would she never love him? Would there always be on her side this barrier of ice?

Now, unless a love-affair has something about it which differs from the ordinary run of such things, it is not very interesting to follow; so I propose to skip some days in the present history, because they were distinguished by nothing remarkable.

West went to The Firs often, and remained as mystified as ever. He began to think, however, that in time he might be necessary to Miss Brougham's peace of mind.

Then a time came when he could endure suspense no longer, so at the end of a gray October afternoon he walked up the long garden-path of The Firs. There he met her.

"Come to the house," she said. "You shall have afternoon tea."

He assented, and in a few minutes more they were in the library.

While expecting the servant to enter with tea, he made some observations at random. He was thinking all the time how he should begin the subject he had at heart.

"What is the matter with you to-day?" said Miss Brougham, when the servant had brought in tea and left the room.

"Do you really want to know?" he asked, turning round and looking straight at her.

"Yes, very much."

"Then it is this," he went on, speaking very slowly. "I love you—tenderly, desperately. Tell me what hope there is for me."

He ceased and kept his eyes fixed upon her. What meant the expression on her face? Surely pride and pleasure rushed for a moment into her eyes, but were almost instantly replaced by a look of such hopeless pain, a look of such mad longing, that it was keen almost as a cry.

"Speak!" he said. "Why do you look so? Is it pity for me because you don't love me?"

Then she said:

"It is pity for you; but not because I don't love you. It is pity for myself, too."

"Then, if you love me, my darling," he cried, "why, in God's name, need you pity us? Are we not free to do as we like?"

"No," she answered, "we are *not* free to do as we like."

"Adelaide, tell me what this mystery is, for you must be mine—nothing shall stand between us."

“How can I tell you?” she said. “Through no fault of mine, I have been cursed. Listen, then; I love you, and you have a right to know.”

Then she began her strange story, as follows:

“I have told you before that my mother was an Italian. She was very beautiful, and her nature was as sensitive as her face. She was married when she was twenty to Mr. Brougham, who worshipped her. Through her girlhood she had been loved desperately by a countryman of her own, a strong, fierce man of bad character. When he heard she was engaged to be married, he came to her, gnashed his teeth and groaned with rage and pain. He implored for a kiss, but my mother positively recoiled from him. It is impossible to say what might have happened, had not Mr. Brougham at that moment entered the room and driven out the unwelcome visitor.

“A day or two after this they were married, and went straight to England. No, don’t,” she said, as he was about to take her hand, “please don’t. When I have told you the end of this, you will know why, and then you will shrink from me as from something unnatural.”

“Never, my love,” he answered. “Come what may of it, mine you shall be. But now go on.”

“What more there is to tell will not take long—but it cursed all my life. I scarcely know how to tell you,” she continued, a slight colour coming into her face. “Well, my mother had been married about a year, and expected soon to be mother. It was summer time, and they were staying at a French watering-place. They had taken a small house—a little wooden gate and two or three yards of ground divided it from the road. You walked straight into the *salon*.

“Here my mother was sitting one evening alone, my father having left her to make some purchases. She was lost in thought about the future, so that she neither saw nor heard anyone enter the room. Then an awful shadow fell in front of her, and a voice, at sound of which her blood turned cold, cried in Italian, ‘At last I have found you! Now, my little witch! I will kiss you as much as I please. If you call out I will kill you.’

“Then he caught her in his arms and kissed her. How long she had to endure the horror she could not say. She heard an oath and a blow; her husband stood by her, and her persecutor

lay dead at her feet. They thought at first he was only stunned.

“My mother shivered and cried, and was put to bed; a few hours afterward I was born.

“Don’t you begin to see, now, how it fell that I was afflicted? Don’t you see that the awful horror of those minutes that my mother went through, made on me an ineffaceable impression?

“You have heard, doubtless, how fear, caused to a mother by some animal, had imparted to her unborn offspring a terrible and lasting recoil from the sight of that animal; how even a longing on the mother’s part for some fruit or other dainty has, if unsatisfied, left its traces on the very form and face of the child! It is thus that the horror which filled my mother at that vile man’s embrace, gave to me a revulsion stronger than reason; an intuitive and ungovernable recoil from the signs by which men show their attachment to women. I love you! Oh, I love you; but now you know why it is that when you take my hand in yours, I thrill with pain instead of pleasure. Why! if you were to kiss me, I think I should go raving mad. And yet—oh, God! how I long to be loved!”

“Yes,” he said, quietly. “I understand it all now.” His face was as pale as hers; he knew now from what that great pallor of hers arose.

After a pause she resumed. “The one hope of my life has been that I might love some one so much that my love would be stronger than this awful revulsion. I waited, I looked; but till you found me I cared for no one in that way. As soon as you saw me, you took my heart from me. Dear, I have acted selfishly toward you. I have let you hope when no hope was. But I hoped against hope, forgive me. Take my hand; let me see how long I can bear it.”

He did as she bade him. The light was low, but still there was enough to see her by. Her face was paler than ever; her lips compressed, growing every moment more so. The fingers of the other hand were clenched in her palm. The hand he held grew cold as ice, and trembled. She was striving with all the force of a strong nature to endure it to the uttermost.

At last she could endure no longer, and a cry of exquisite agony broke from her lips.

“Would you like such a wife?” she said.

Then he spoke:

“My darling, I love you. Only the more do I love you for your



trouble. Though you may really never be more to me than you are now, if so you will we will marry. I have seen much of the world. I will love no other woman, in any way, but you. I know, dear, there will be pain for me in it, but I shall be with you—I shall hear you—above all, I shall see you. Come, I shall take care of you, and you shall take care of me.”

“Oh, how noble you are!” she moaned. “But, my dear, it can never be—bless you! Go and leave me to my fate.”

“Never!” he replied. “Only tell me one thing—have you spoken to no doctor?”

“I have—to two.”

“And they said—what?”

“The first said nothing could be done. The second said there was one faint chance, but to try it might be attended by such dreadful consequences to myself and others that he would not advise it.”

“Then there *is* hope!” cried West, feeling the blood rush through his veins. “Tell me,” he whispered, “*all* the doctor said.”

“He told me,” she answered, “that if a man I loved—and who loved me—would, against my will, and utterly in spite of myself, hold me and kiss me many times, in the great shock to my nerves, my unnatural revulsion *might* be overthrown. But that the experiment was much more likely to send me mad, or to end in my doing some physical injury to myself or him.”

“Dear,” said West, very earnestly, “let us test this chance.”

“But,” she answered, moaning, “I don’t want to go mad, and I know I should.”

“I believe you would be cured.”

But she shrank from him, crying, “Don’t come near me, or you will kill me. Oh, it is awful to feel like this, and yet I am so hungry for love.”

“It shall be as you please, my poor darling,” he said, but she noted the trouble in his eyes.

It may be imagined that West got no sleep that night. He walked up and down his room, about as desperately miserable as a man well could be. Never to hold the woman that he loved close in his arms—never to feel her kiss answer his—never to feel her heart beat to his—to live with her under these circumstances would be to endure untold agony. Yet to live away from her—to have no right in her—how could he bear that pain?

As he paced to and fro, the wind rose and the rain fell. He threw open the window and leaned out that he might feel the wind blow the large raindrops against his face.

It was a north-east wind, but it seemed warm to him, in his condition of mind and body. He wanted to feel the cold of an Arctic winter in his blood. He longed for waves—for waves icy cold—he longed for the quiet, awful embraces of the winds which the North Pole chills. Under the gusty and ever-increasing gale he heard the sea beginning to rouse, and the noise of waves grew louder and louder.

Oh ! that night of rain and wind and waiting ! Do you think he will ever forget it ? At length a chill, wet, dreary day broke over land and sea.

No trouble is great enough to throw an Englishman out of his daily life. His dearest may lie dead or his fortunes be shattered, still he will sit down to his accustomed meals. It may be scarcely more than a pretence of eating that he makes, but he will make it.

So it was that, notwithstanding the disturbed state of his mind, Mr. West, when the time came, took his place in the coffee-room. As the solemn waiter brought in his breakfast, West could not help wondering how any man could be so uniformly solemn.

In his excited state of nerves he became almost hysterical over the thought. He swallowed a few mouthfuls of toast, drank some tea and went out. It was too early to go to the Firs, so he walked along the shore.

Through all the days of his life, that day will stand out to him. He will remember that dreary seaside walk, the dull, dirty-looking sea rolling in heavily under the bleak north-easter. The rain was pouring down as if it meant never to leave off. Not a sail was visible ; only some screaming seagulls swept over, and now and then plunged into the waves.

He must have been walking to and fro a long time, for when he looked at his watch he found it was considerably past eleven. So he turned to the Firs.

As he went up the garden the wind wailed through the trees like desolation. He found Miss Brougham in the library.

“ How ill you look ! ” she said.

“ *You* don't look much better, my poor dear,” he replied.

“ I have been awake all night,” she answered.

“So have I.”

“I have thought it all over,” she went on, “and, if you are willing, we will try it.”

A great light of hope kindled his face as he said: “Bless you!”

Then there was an awful silence. The wind went on wailing round the house; dead leaves hurried past the window; the fire flickered, and a cuckoo-clock in the hall went through the hour.

West looked at Adelaide. Her face was blanched but resolute, prepared to meet the worst.

“I am ready,” she said, in a low voice.

She could not keep from trembling, such a great shivering-fit was upon her.

“Wait just one moment more,” she cried, as he took a step toward her.

At length, resolved to end for them both this torture of waiting, he caught her in his arms and pressed his lips on hers.

Her face must have been awful to see. She shuddered and struggled in his hold, drawing in her breath with a sound as people do when straining every nerve and muscle.

Suddenly the servants heard a wild, prolonged shriek ring through the house. It was the cry of their mistress, and they rushed at once to the library, whence the sound proceeded.

The shriek was repeated; the door was locked. Everything grew silent again.

It was some time before John, the gardener, the only man about the Firs—and he a very old one—could be found. However, he was able to force the lock. The door was thrown open, and there, in the centre of the room, stood Mr. West, his face white and set. He was holding Miss Brougham in his arms; she had her face bent down, and her teeth were meeting through the flesh of his right hand.

“Stand back!” he said to the servants. “You shall know everything in good time.”

Then, with a supreme effort, he got his hand free, and, raising her face, kissed her again and again. She remained passive; then, suddenly, she flung both her arms about his neck, sank her head upon his shoulder, and burst into passionate tears.

“Thank God, my darling!” cried West, as he strained her to his breast. “We are saved!”

Of course, all this much mystified the servants ; but the doctor had soon to be sent for. He was consulted, and thought it best to say that Miss Brougham was subject to fits, in which, if she were not physically restrained, she might do herself some serious injury.

It was very fortunate that a man as strong as Mr. West happened to be present at the time.

It was not for the lady of the Firs that the doctor had come, but for West himself. Those white, sharp little teeth had made sad havoc. He had to pay for his happiness, for, in spite of all that could be done, the wound grew so threatening and virulent that the hand had to come off.

"I fancied it would end so," he said, when the doctor prepared him for his loss. "This hand has done good work in its time," and he regarded it affectionately.

No doubt he fell to thinking how it had once plied an oar in the university boat-race ; how many a sea-wave it had parted ; how many a partridge it served to bring low, and how much work of a very different kind it had done.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Adelaide heard about her lover's hand she was inconsolable.

"Dear," he said, "I shan't mind it *very* much, if *you* don't. Do you suppose it will make you love me less?"

"Love you less ! Only more—more—more !"

"Frankly," he said, with a smile, "I'm a greedy fellow. I should have liked to have kept both, but, since I could not, I would rather have my love than my right hand. Kiss me, sweetheart."

# TRAPPED.

—:0:—

## CHAPTER I.

A WILD stormy evening near the end of October—an evening when the rain, whirled and driven by the raging sou-wester, became a veritable scourge to lash the face and eyes of any one who might be exposed to its fury. One person, whom we shall know later on, *was* so exposed. This person, then, was making his difficult way along a road in the wild country of Blankshire. He held a bag in one hand and a disabled umbrella in the other. Between his teeth he gripped a pipe, at which he pulled hard to keep it alight. There were trees on either side of the road, and as the hurricane, like a great wind-sea, went billowing about the land, he could hear many a bough snapped short by the stress of its strength. In the lulls of the tempest one would seem to hear strange unearthly voices calling and replying, but the lulls were brief indeed, and always resulted in more violent outbreaks, as if the wind had rested to gain fresh force.

Outside of man—as he has been manifested to us in some of his dealings in past ages—nothing seems possessed by such a fiendish spirit as a really great wind, if attended by rain. The roar of an angry sea is a thing grand and terrible to hear ; but the wind exults and delights like a fiend in all the dreadful havoc that is going on—a feminine fiend, albeit we have been taught to regard the wind as of the masculine gender ! And the voice



of the fiend shrieks and yells for more and more disaster, more and more glut of death, till it breaks into a shrill falsetto, and is answered by the immense, deep boom and heavy roll of the great waves as they come and go.

"Yes, have it your own way, fiend!" ejaculated the man. There was good reason for his ill-temper, for he was drenched to the skin, and was almost blind with the rain in his eyes. "No!" he went on, "no one in sight! not a soul to speak to!" and he uttered another malediction on the weather.

At that very moment he could hear a sound of wheels coming rapidly in his direction. The conveyance, however, whatever it might be, carried no light, and for the violence of the wind—which seemed at times as if it must leave him senseless upon the ground—he could not tell, certainly, whether the wheels were coming on the right side or the left of him, so he shouted, with his uttermost strength, trying to match his voice against the wind:

"Look out there! and stop!"

After this had been vociferated three or four times, a light cart came to a halt in the middle of the road, a few yards from where the foot-passenger was standing.

"Right you are, governor!" said the cheerful voice of the driver. "Rough weather!"

"How far is it to the nearest village, the way I am going?" inquired the man in the road.

"How far?" answered the man in the cart. "Well, there ain't what you may call a real village nearer than Popilton."

"And how far may that be?"

"Just about four miles."

"Can I get a bed there?"

"When you get to Popilton—if you ever do, a night like this! you go to the Three Jolly Drummers and try. They have beds there, and good beds, if they ain't full. That's the trouble—it's run on a good deal by sporting gents. Glad to drink your health, sir!"

To this friendly willingness the other responded by a sound which for the moment utterly mystified and dumbfounded the man in the cart. It was, however, nothing more than a French oath, hissed between the teeth with true French vindictiveness.

The English are brutal; the French are vindictive.

The man in the cart speedily recovered himself, and turning

round, shouted after the fast-receding figure of the foot-passenger :

“ You don't want nothin' for your money, do you ? ”

This sarcasm, the point of which was, to say the least of it, doubtful, was followed by a long string of those unsavoury expletives in which a wronged Briton gives vent to his indignation ; but regardless of everything except the weather, the stranger held resolutely upon his way, talking to himself, sometimes in English, sometimes in French. In spite of the wind, which dealt him great blows at every step, and the rain which lashed him, he could not have been walking more than an hour when he distinguished lights ahead of him, and in a few minutes more found himself in the one, wet, shivering street of Popilton, which in its present aspect looked forlorn enough. But one shop in the street was to be seen open, and that was, of course, *the* shop of the place ; it sold candles and groceries, and cheese, and sweets, and apples and nuts, and drapery and tobacco, and pipes in which to consume the same, and stationery. In fact, it is difficult to say what it did *not* sell ; the wonder was that so small a shop could have held so much material of various kinds.

The traveller, who was footsore, for he had walked far that day, and whose clothes were heavy with rain, opened the door, which caused a little bell attached thereto to tinkle sharply, and admitted himself and a stupendous gust of wind, which almost extinguished the one candle by which the shop was lighted. The traveller knocked the ashes of his pipe out against the counter, and asked for an ounce of tobacco. While it was being carefully weighed, he inquired his way to the Three Jolly Drummers, and having received his direction, once more went on his road. This time he had not far to go, as the inn stood at the bottom of the street.

He looked up at the sign, on which the Three Jolly Drummers, so reputed, looked anything *but* jolly, as portrayed by the hand of the village artist, who doubtless in his time had been a wag. But the inn itself, even from outside, had a cheery aspect, its windows being lined with red blinds, which, lit from within by lamp and fire, made a delightful glow of colour.

Gladly enough the wayfarer walked into the warmth and light. He closed the door behind him, went up straight to the bar, and asked the pretty country girl who was serving behind it if

he could have a bed for the night. The girl was afraid not, but she would speak to her mistress.

Oh, moments of agonizing suspense! After he had eaten and drunken, was he to be housed for the night? To stretch his weary limbs between clean, fragrant sheets—to fold his arms, and rest, and fall asleep watching the bright fire-light flickering on the wall—hearing the wind and the rain beating round the house, and he safely out of their reach—this, or to go forth again and walk probably a dozen weary miles before any town where he might reasonably expect shelter could be gained?

The landlady herself now appears, buxom and smiling, the picture of good humour. To such landladies belong only the best of beds. She is very sorry that all her four beds are occupied. “Such a bad night, too!” She “is quite put-about, that she is? Would ask him if he did not mind to sleep on the sofa in the bar-parlour, but so full have they been for the last week that she and her husband are obliged to sleep there themselves!”

The traveller asked if there was any place where he could sit down, and was shown at once into the before-mentioned parlour, where a bright fire was burning. He sat down by it and demanded bread and cheese, and, first of all, a glass of hot brandy and water. “That’s one of their good English notions,” he said to himself, as he threw his bag aside, and saw that the rain had drenched all its contents as it had drenched him.

Top-coat he had none. He set down before the fire his soft felt hat, which the rain had made painfully sodden and heavy, and from which under the fire’s heat the steam ascended.

The stranger, standing with his back to the fire, the glass of comforting brandy and water in his hand, proved to be of slight but well-made figure. He was graceful in all his movements, but graceful more as a woman than as a man. His face was intellectual, with something hard and subtle—a physiognomist would have said cruel—about the lips. His eyes were brightly and clearly blue. He could not have been more than thirty years old, but his forehead was seamed by deep lines, as of one who had greatly *lived*. This, however, only added to the interest of his face. His hands were long, white, and well-shaped. He had the look and voice and manner of a man well-born. He was standing ruefully eyeing his soaked bag, when a vehicle drew up sharply in front of the door, and a man’s voice, strong and cheery, greeted the landlady.

"Well, Mrs. Cooper! Overtaken by this wretched weather! Drove over to Colstone to do some commissions for the ladies, and you see how I am rewarded! Near the Firs, as I am, I can't get past here without a pint of your famous ale, and a minute's warm at your cheerful fire. Full as usual, Mrs. Cooper?"

"That you may say, sir, so full that there's a poor gentleman in the parlour as I can't take in nohow, although the gent's all but drowned!"

"Dear, dear!" replied the new-comer, walking into the parlour. He was a powerfully-built, broad-chested young fellow, overflowing with animal spirits and good nature, an Englishman of the best type. He inclined his head towards the other occupant of the room, and remarked that it was a night not fit for a dog to be out in. The other agreed, and smilingly sketched his position as we know it.

"No," replied the Englishman, "I don't suppose you can count, in these wild parts, on getting housed under twelve or fourteen miles. Well, I'm sorry for you with all my heart!"

"It's a dreadful night for the gentleman to have to go on in, and he soaked through already," said the landlady, bustling in and setting a foaming tankard of ale upon the table. "Well, if we can do no more for you, sir, we'll keep you as warm as we can while you're here," and she flung a fresh pine-log on the fire.

The rich potent ale sent even an added glow of good-fellowship to the new-comer's always warm heart. He looked at the stranger steaming himself before the fire, and at the bag containing his drenched change of linen. The man was well-dressed, and a gentleman to all appearance. He thought vaguely of the stranger who fell among thieves—the cases were not identical, but there was a resemblance between them. He drained the contents of his tankard, and said as he set it down:

"I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir; but if you want to know who I am, this will at least tell you my name," and he handed the other a card, on which was engraven:

"HORACE GILBARD,  
OLD COURT, INNER TEMPLE."

The recipient of the card bowed his acknowledgment, and Mr. Gilbard went on:



“I don’t live down here ; I am at present on a visit to an old lady, a dear friend of mine, whose daughter I hope will shortly be a dearer friend still—in fact, the dearest friend a man can have ! I am now on my way to their house—The Firs—and if you will come with me and let us put you up for the night and see after you, I know they would be only too glad. Why, man alive, it would be sheer madness to go on ! To let you do so would be like letting you take your own life. You’ll come with me and we’ll make you comfortable.”

“You are but too good,” returned the stranger, speaking with a slight foreign accent ; and I shall accept your proffered hospitality with the utmost thankfulness, for—as you say in England—I am pretty well beat. You have given me your card—pray accept mine.”

The card which he handed to Gilbard, who only just glanced at it, was inscribed :

“M. ALBERT D’AURELLES.”

In a very few minutes the score had been settled and the two men, seated side by side in the high dogcart, were driving at an almost perilously swift rate through the loud, tempestuous night, Gilbard shouting aloud to warn any unfortunate foot-passenger out of the way, although the light cart swerved from side to side as if it must every moment sway over altogether. In the course of a few minutes more they reined up sharply ; Gilbard called aloud, and his call was answered by the clamorous barking of many dogs. Then the great gates of the carriage-drive swung back, and a man appeared, lantern in hand, ready to take the horse when the house was reached.

“Yes, that will do, Jones !” exclaimed Gilbard, as he sprang down. “She’ll want a good feed of corn to-night, for she’s come fast and far. Now, Monsieur d’Aurelles, if you will kindly come this way, I will leave you to get acquainted with the smoking-room, while I see that a bedroom is made ready for you. The smoking-room is my institution here, and I am rather proud of it ; I think it is, or should be made, the jolliest room in the house.”

An hour after this, behold Monsieur Albert—having luxuriated in a warm bath as only a man at once cold and weary can luxuriate—attired in his new friend’s clothes !—which, to put it



mildly, were amply big enough for him, though what would have made any other man look absurd, he carried off with a sort of negligent grace. In a minute more, he was entering with his benefactor a large, solidly-furnished, oaken-wainscoted, old-fashioned dining-room. It was lit by many candles, and a large crystal, rose-shaded lamp, which depended by long chains from the ceiling. A brilliant wood-fire burned in the immense open fireplace. Near to it two ladies were standing, whom Gilbard at once introduced as Mrs. and Miss Lennard.

"I have to thank you more than I can say, ladies, for your kindness to a wayfarer and a stranger. It will be yet another grateful recollection I shall have of your country when I am far away from it," said Monsieur d'Aurelles, bowing very low.

Mrs. Lennard, whose future son had really wronged her by calling her an "old lady," was the model of a gracious English-woman, midway, it might be, in her fifties. Warm-hearted and kind to weakness, she replied that they were only too happy to have been of any service. Really, and he was not English? Well, she should never have thought it, though, now he called her attention to it, she could just discern a slight foreign accent. Then the four sat down to table, and the late dinner—late, indeed, to-night—was served, to which Gilbard did such justice as a healthy Englishman can, especially when he has been long exposed to bad weather. But the Frenchman, who but an hour or two before had felt ravenous, found himself now only able to taste of each dish. Of wine, however, he drank feverishly, like a man whose throat is parched by thirst. His place at table was opposite Miss Lennard's, so that it would have been impossible for him not to know before dinner was over what she was like to look at. And what did he see in her?

He saw a woman who might have been six or seven and twenty, about the average height, with an exquisitely developed figure, if anything a trifle *too* abundant in its gracious outlines—and yet, who shall say? She was dressed in a long, flowing, tightly-fitting silk, as if she tried by her dress to appear older, not younger, than she really was. The face was pale, and beautifully shaped; the mouth small and unusually sensitive. In the eyes, which were of a soft grayish green, there was a dreamy, far-away expression, as if they were looking for something she had missed in her life.

The classical head was crowned by folds of wonderful red-

gold hair. Her fingers were long and slender, but firm to touch, showing that nervous strength which is generally inseparable from a really passionate nature—and that such a nature was hers, her mouth bore witness. When called to the affairs of everyday life, the dreamy look would quite vanish from her eyes, and they would seem to become at times very well-heads of mirth, suggesting clear waters which the wind and sunlight surprise together. Her laugh had in it the depth and fulness which comes with matured womanhood, and which is totally distinct from the clear silvery treble of a girl's laughter. I am not here saying which of the two yields the more delightful music. I am simply distinguishing between them.

Her manner was a rapid alternation of langour with animation—the animation taking you by surprise as an unexpected wave will, breaking suddenly over a quiet sea. Her voice had in its quieter passages something of the peace and purity of moonlight. In its gayer phases it was characterized by a gentle vehemence. If the terms seem irreconcilable, the fault is not mine. I can only see her as seen through the eyes of Albert d'Aurelles ; only hear her as heard through his ears. Rather than through the eyes and ears of her lover? Yes, even so. Horace Gilbard felt all the charm of his betrothed, though he would have been at a loss to say in what it consisted. But the Frenchman, among other things, was a poet, and he had a poet's love of analyzing whatever he came across. So he analyzed Miss Lennard's charm, as well as the influences it produced upon him.

After dinner, in the smoking-room, he asked Gilbard with courteous interest some questions concerning her, and learnt that she was a great reader. In conclusion, the young fellow said :

“I trust before Christmas time to take her out of this. It's lonely for her—confounded lonely !”

Shortly afterwards, they retired for the night ; but how disappointing to D'Aurelles was the long-looked-forward-to time of rest ! The bed yielded him none. He ached in all his bones ; he burned and shivered by turns. He heard the wind storming about the house, and through it he heard the clock of the church which stood close by chime all the hours.

There are times when a man is possessed by a feeling of tragic forlornness which no words can depict, when he seems

even forsaken of himself. Such hours were those to Albert d'Aurelles, as he tossed from side to side upon his bed, and longed for the first glimpse of morning light. When it came, he fell into an uneasy doze, through which he seemed to fancy Miss Lennard's presence in the room. Later on, he awoke to find himself in a highly feverish condition, and to hear from Gilbard that the doctor had been sent for and would shortly be upon the spot.

The attack from which Albert suffered, although sharp, was brief: and within a week of his arrival at The Firs he was able to leave his room. Horace Gilbard had been compelled the day before to leave for London, assuring his new friend that the women were born nurses, and would take excellent care of him.

He was so weak from his illness as to find the dressing of himself quite a labour. It was late in the afternoon when he descended, leaning on the arm of a servant, who informed him that there were visitors in the drawing-room, and Miss Lennard thought he might not be strong enough to see them, so he was to be shown to her own sitting-room, where he would be quite quiet.

This room was a charmingly-furnished, odd-shaped, old-fashioned apartment, situated in a remote corner of the house. As the door was opened, a delicious perfume came out as it were to meet him, at the same time Miss Lennard advanced towards him.

"I am so very glad to see you," she said, holding out her hand. "That is where you are to sit, please," indicating a luxurious easy-chair drawn up close to the fire. "Shall I ring for candles, or do you prefer the firelight only, till it gets absolutely dark?"

He took the chair to which she signed him, and replied that nothing could be more acceptable than the fire-lit dusk.

Then, close by the window, came an unexpected shouting of many boys:

"Please to remember the 5th of November,  
Gunpowder, treason, and plot!  
I see no reason why gunpowder treason  
Should ever be forgot!  
Holloa, boys! holloa, boys! make the bells ring!  
Holloa, boys! holloa, boys! God save the Queen!"

For a long time afterwards these matchlessly-foolish words

clove to his memory, as the most trivial words, the most meaningless incidents will, when associated with any important train of events in our lives.

"The noise startles you?" said Catherine Lennard.

She rang the bell, and bade the servant dismiss the boys with a shilling.

He asked what it meant.

"I forgot you were not English," she said, smiling, and then explained to him the old English custom of carrying about on the 5th of November an effigy of Guy Fawkes, to become at night the fuel for a bonfire. "Do you really feel stronger?" she asked, in a voice that harmonized well with the soft twilight.

"Yes, really," he answered, looking from the fire in her direction, and past her to the tall, windless trees outlined against the sky. "Stronger, but still pleasantly weak. I can never thank you sufficiently for the goodness you have all shown to me."

"Please don't talk of thanks, but tell me if there is anything I can do for you."

"Am I to answer quite frankly?"

"You are."

"Then I will ask you to say some poetry to me. Mr. Gilbard let out that you were fond of it. Oddly enough, to love genuinely what so few people know anything about, is also a weakness of mine."

"How glad I am! What shall I recite?"

"Choose for yourself, please."

After a moment's deliberation, she began repeating some of the most dramatic of Tennyson's poems. The deep melody and suppressed passion of her voice in reciting thrilled him to his heart's centre. When she paused, he told her a little French *chanson*, which delighted her; and when he saw how she kept murmuring over to herself the last lines of it, he admitted that the lines were of his own composition.

A harmless pastime enough, one would think, this of two people sitting in the firelight and quoting poetry against each other. But few things in this world that are nice *are* harmless—very seldom, indeed, where the sexes are concerned.

Presently Mrs. Lennard, having got rid of her visitors, bustled in, and candles were lit. After this, dinner was served; after which, and having smoked one pipe in the smoking-room,



Monsieur d'Aurelles played a game at *écarté* with Mrs. Lennard, and then, quite wearied out, went to bed; and there, as he watched the firelight fairies come in and go about the room, he fell asleep, to dream of the strange, lovely eyes, and even stranger and lovelier voice, of Miss Lennard. She did not dream of him, but she did think it was a blessing to have met at last with any one who could share her love of poetry as this man did. In all ways Horace was dear and desirable to her except in this one way alone, that he proudly vaunted his imperviousness to the refining influence of the high arts.

---

## CHAPTER II.

THE next day Albert d'Aurelles arose much earlier. It was three months since he had left behind him in France the woman to whom he had vowed his heart—a beautiful and a passionate woman, though, unlike Cæsar's wife, her reputation was, I am afraid, *not* above suspicion! But it was generally believed that this, her latest love, was really an affair of the heart. Indeed, what else could it have been, for D'Aurelles was far from being a rich man. Somewhere in the wildest part of Brittany he owned a small house, in which his only sister lived with him. It was reported that now he had gone to England to try his luck as a teacher of languages, and for once report spoke correctly.

Three months separated from the lady of his heart—three months, during which period she had nourished him only on paper kisses, had chastened him with paper chastenings—three months' absence, and the man a poet! Is any one surprised to hear that he was just in the condition to take once more the sweet fever? The man at that time was not wholly lost. He would not own to himself that he was in love with the betrothed wife of his benefactor, who most likely had preserved him from death; but he owned to himself that he *did* want some more intimate relationship than that which at present existed between them.

So one day when they chanced to be alone together, he broke silence by saying :



‘To-morrow, Miss Lennard, I must resume my journey.’

‘No, you must not ; the doctor says you must remain quiet for at least three days longer.’

‘Does he indeed ? What a very obliging doctor !’

‘I am glad you think so, I was afraid you were becoming weary of your captivity.’

‘I assure you my captivity is charming to me.’

After a pause he resumed : ‘Miss Lennard, I have been wishing to tell you a little about myself.’

‘Yes?’ and her eyelids drooped over the work she held in her hand.

‘I should like you to be my confessor ! I have never seen any one before to whom I felt I could speak of myself. Will you be my confessor ?’

‘Do you expect absolution ?’

‘I might like it, but I scarcely dare expect it !’

‘Confess what you like, and withhold what you like. I am no longer a schoolgirl ! Are you going to begin with the latest heroine of your poems, the lady who causes you such exquisite delight and such equally exquisite suffering ?’

‘We will come to her in time, if you insist.’

‘I insist on nothing.’

It was, of course, a very romantic confession that Monsieur Albert d’Aurelles had to make. He came of a very old family. He early had quarrelled with his father on political grounds, he—Albert—being a most ardent Republican. In the revolution of ’71 and the overthrowing of the Second Empire, he had taken a very active part. Then came a string of love episodes, each one of which was flawed. Either he grew tired, or the lady grew tired, or they both grew tired. So, with his loves and his poetry, his scanty means, his blue blood, and his Republican proclivities, his handsome face and his low voice, he was altogether just the kind of man to impress a nature which all its life had been craving for romance.

Tell me now, my opium-smoker, or my drinker of absinthe, is not the craving which some natures have for romantic interests just as keen, and often as disastrous in its results ? It has wasted many a life, and gone near to breaking many a heart.

During the following days, Catherine asked herself no questions. She lived in a beautiful dream. He did not make love to her, but he put his life, as it were, into her hands, and

that is perhaps the subtlest way in which a man *can* make love.

Still, he admired her, he was not swept away by her until the last night of his stay at The Firs. He had unexpectedly obtained occupation as tutor in a neighbouring family, whither he was to depart on the morrow. Mrs. Lennard, whose facile liking had been easily won by the courteous, gracious, handsome young foreigner, had invited a few guests to dinner in his honour on this his last evening under her roof. The dinner was unusually elaborate, the wines of rare excellence. There are times in a man's life when all things seem to conspire against him to drive him into a particular course. Such a time was that evening to Albert d'Aurelles. The wine warmed his blood; the thought that he was so soon to leave the house disposed him to be sentimental.

Catherine Lennard wore a dress of unusual splendour, which showed to perfection her entrancingly beautiful figure, leaving bare the superb neck and glorious arms. She had flowers in her hair, and the scent of them seemed to him like a caress. He found himself suddenly dazed, bewildered by her. Why, she was simply marvellously lovely! It had been his lot to be all these days under the same roof with her, yet only now to realize how triumphantly beautiful she was!

When the after-dinner wine had gone round, and the other men joined the ladies in the drawing-room, he escaped to the garden to smoke a cigarette and think of her.

Though the month was November, the west-wind, as it came sweeping through the trees, was balmier than it often is in an English spring. There was a soft hurry of light clouds across the sky, and now and again an ecstatic revelation of pale angelic moonlight. These nights, full of gentle turbulence, with their delicious alternations of cloud and moonlight, have in them that divine blending of spiritual hope and earthly regrets which is suggested to us by some of Chopin's loveliest *nocturnes*. It was a night to cast a glamour over everything. He was lost in thinking of Catherine when he heard a light step near him, and the soft rustle of a woman's dress. Just then the moon was free of the clouds, and its light fell upon Miss Lennard's face.

"Did you think I was a ghost?" she asked, coming up and standing so close to him that he could feel—and thrilled in feeling—her dress brush against him,

He could smell the flowers in her hair, over which his face just leaned. How desperately dear her tones were! How low, and how they lingered!

"You will be cold," he said.

"No: I have on a light shawl."

"Do you think it is thick enough?" he asked, letting his hand fall and rest upon her shoulder.

"Yes, I think so—don't you?" she replied, and did not draw away from him.

There was silence for a space between them, an electric thrill quivering in every gust of the wind that swept about them. The hand on her shoulder went round the beautiful neck, and played with the brooch which held the shawl in its place. And still she did not draw away from him, but he could feel a sudden, swift shiver go all through her.

"To-morrow I go into exile!" he said.

"And to-morrow *I* shall be lonely!"

"Shall you be a little sorry?"—with a very distraction of tenderness in his voice.

"You have no cause to ask that!"—in slow, low tones, spoken almost under the breath, but laden with the sweet despair of a love confessed which should never have been felt.

Did she press a shade nearer to him?—or was it but the wind which blew the folds of her dress yet closer against him? At any rate, he bent down with a low cry of desperate entreaty, and their lips met and clung together. In that kiss, which mingled the rapture of greeting with the agony of farewell, it seemed that they were striving to concentrate the whole passion of their two passionate natures. When at length their lips severed, she was so shaken by the storm of joy which had passed over her that she leant upon his shoulder, unable to speak, pressing her hand against her wildly throbbing heart.

They were in a condition to care little what people might say or think; but to avoid absolute discovery it was needful that they should part at once, she going first to her own room to settle her disordered hair and cool her burning face; he to the smoking-room, from which, being fortunate enough to find no one there, he could pass to the drawing-room with the excuse of the "after-dinner cigar" for his absence.

Presently Catherine reappeared, saying she had not been

able to resist a turn in the garden—it was such a fascinating night! D'Aurelles remarked that he had been less worthily occupied.

“Yes, I think I can guess—the smoking-room has been your attraction?”

“I fear you are right. Still I do not need to be absolutely out in it to agree with you that it *is* a fascinating night. Won't you play us something?”

“Oh, yes, very gladly,” and she went to the piano and sat down, and played like one inspired.

The music she played seemed to Albert to be thrilling with her own personal magnetism. In time the guests left, and he had to say good-night to the ladies, with an almost imperceptible pressure of the hand for Catherine.

An outbreak of passion between two people situated as these two were, looks differently when viewed in the light of morning to what it did over night. The woman is generally the first to recover, and openly to court a repetition. However noble women may be, they are as a sex less loyal than men. We know that men are often unfaithful to their wives and sweet-hearts while they are vowing them the uttermost devotion; but still—although they have the precedent of ages to go upon that a man may take for himself licenses not to be endured in his wife—the man suffers for his disloyalty more acute remorse of heart than he will own to himself. He says he is no worse than other men, or he invents special theories for his self-justification; whereas if a woman transgress in this way, she, with everything in the way to make it seem a step of much greater magnitude, feels no remorse. Her one sole care is that she shall not be found out.

So when Catherine reflected in the misty light of the November morning on what had happened the foregoing evening, she felt not so much remorseful as perplexed. Was she to marry Horace, loving the Frenchman?—or was she to be frank with him?

But Albert, although not a scrupulous man, *did* feel remorse. He knew that Catherine would not be a dowerless bride, that her fortune was in her own control; so much he had learned from Gilbard's trustful confidence in him; but, to do him justice, he shrank from the thought of betraying that confidence, and no mercenary speculations entered into his mind.



At that time there must have been *some* little good in the man. He kept saying to himself :

“The fellow saved my life—I wouldn’t mind but for that. One can’t take one’s life at a man’s hands and then rob him of a woman! No, it won’t do—one must draw the line somewhere. There shall be no repetition of last night!”

It is noticeable in all weak natures that they know no medium course; they delight in extreme sensations.

Catherine’s position was a different one after the episode of the past evening. Even had she resolved to throw over Horace Gilbard, she could scarcely offer herself to Albert d’Aurelles as his wife.

The advance must now come from him. But he resolutely made no advance. She gave him opportunities of being alone with her, which he avoided. Still, in spite of his avoidance, they happened once to be left for a few minutes alone together.

As soon as the door shut behind Mrs. Lennard he saw Catherine rise and come to the fire, near which he was sitting; he saw her lean against the mantelpiece and let her eyes wander in his direction. He heard her sigh. He both saw and heard her toying with her watch-chain. He stroked the Persian cat lying at his feet, and said nothing. How the minutes hurried by!

“What are you thinking of?” she asked, in a low voice, that was almost tragic in its intensity.

“Of last night,” he replied.

“And what of it?” was her next question.

“That it must never happen again.”

He would not kiss her, nor touch her; but he could not help rising and standing close beside her.

“Are you ashamed of me?” she asked.

“Of you, no; but of myself, yes.”

“If you think so badly of yourself, what must you think of me?”

“I think of you,” he answered, almost fiercely, “that you are the most adorable woman God ever made!”

“Will you come again and see me?” she asked.

Her hands looked as if they wished to be held, and the beautiful lips seemed mutely to ask for a kiss; but he controlled himself, man-like, consoled in a measure by the thought of what he was making her suffer.

“No, I will not!” he said, vehemently.



"Why will you not?" and though the tone was low and earnest, there was surely in it just a little quiver of triumph.

"Because you are dangerous! because women like you ought to have 'Dangerous' branded on the forehead!"

"And if we had, do you think you would take warning and shun us?"

"No, perhaps not; men are such fools about women! But I will see you no more!"

It is impossible to say how much longer his strength might have endured, but at that moment the door opened and Mrs. Lennard returned. Half an hour afterwards he had taken leave of mother and daughter, and was on his way to the place of his future employment, not, however, more than three miles distant.

As he drove thither, he felt that unduly exalted triumph in having resisted a temptation, which in weak natures is short-lived and replaced by intolerable depression.

He had not been in the house of his employers an hour when this reaction set in, and he endured agonies of longing to see Catherine Lennard once again—once more to feel her lips laid to his, once more to feel about his neck the clasp of her strong clinging arms. Unfortunately for him, studies were not to begin that day. It was past noon when he arrived at the house, and the rest of the day was passed in becoming acquainted with the two lads who were to be his pupils, their parents, the house they lived in, and the grounds which surrounded it. They were not bad people in their way, and they doubtless imagined themselves to be giving the tutor a treat, while he, poor man, was burning up with desire to see again the fair woman he had left but a couple of hours ago.

As soon as dinner was over, he announced his intention of walking over to The Firs, where he found he had left something of importance. In a few minutes more he was hastening on his way as only lovers and escaping thieves know *how* to hasten. In less than three-quarters of an hour he found himself inside the gates of The Firs

"Who ever can it be at this hour?" exclaimed Mrs. Lennard, as the door-bell sounded and the dogs began to bark.

"Who, indeed?" echoed Catherine, suddenly raising in front of her face the light hand-screen with which she had been toying. Then the door opened, and Monsieur d'Aurelles walked in.

Mrs. Lennard was full of kindly surprise at seeing him back so soon, but Miss Lennard said :

“ I quite expected he would appear soon. You will see he has left something behind. Whatever they may please to say, men are more forgetful than women.”

“ You are perfectly right, Miss Lennard. I *have* forgotten something—a most valued cigar-case. It is in one of the bureau drawers. With Mrs. Lennard’s kind permission I will run and fetch it.”

But he had scarcely reached the door of what had been his bedroom the night before, when he heard a light step following swiftly down the corridor. He was right in feeling sure she would contrive to see him alone. He paused, and their eyes met.

“ I came to bring you this,” she said, holding out a key. “ The bureau was locked after you left and the key removed. Here it is.”

“ Thank you—I want nothing of any key. The case I spoke of is at this moment in my pocket. Catherine ! my love ! so desperately dear ! you know what I came for ! ”

He advanced to her, but she drew back, saying :

“ You said there was to be no repetition of that night.”

He looked at her as he had looked at many a woman before—with a strong, compelling look. He uttered her name in just such a tone as he had many times before uttered the names of other women. “ Catherine ! ” he said, just that and nothing more, but in a tone of infinite, pleading tenderness. Few women could have resisted such a look and such a tone—least of all this woman, with her warm, eager nature. In another moment her arms were about his neck, while his were straining her close to him. One long, ecstatic kiss ! Then she forced herself free from his arms, saying she must return to the drawing-room ; she had been away dreadfully too long already.

After a short imaginary search for an imaginary object, he also returned to the drawing-room, chatted for a few minutes with Mrs. Lennard, and then took his leave.

The following day Catherine received a letter from Albert d’Aurelles, to which she duly replied, the closing sentence of her letter being :

“ Wait just a little ! I *cannot* tell them yet.

“ To all eternity, yours ! ”

## CHAPTER III.

ABOUT ten days after this, Catherine Lennard was sitting in her boudoir. The time was afternoon, and all outside, looking cold and gray, only served by contrast to make the bright fire-lit interior the more attractive.

Miss Lennard occupied a low chair in front of the wood-fire, into which she was gazing, her delicately shaped chin propped in her slender hands. It cannot be said that at that moment she looked the embodiment of happiness.

"To-night," she said to herself, "come what may, I will write! I know it is a shame to keep him in ignorance—but, oh! it is so hard!"

Just then there was a quick light tap at the door; it opened, and let in the object of her thoughts, the man who at that moment believed himself her betrothed husband, his good, kindly face, with no lack of resolution in it, radiant with health and good-humour, his curly hair looking curlier than ever.

"Horace?" she exclaimed, in unfeigned astonishment.

"The same, my dear—and sooner than you expected!" he replied, bending down and kissing her lips heartily and honestly, but not with that enthralling refinement of sensuality which had made the Frenchman's kiss a living love-poem to her. "How perplexed and dismayed you look!" he went on, gazing into her eyes, but speaking in a tone of affectionate banter. "Come, let's have the news! Has a bad fox been getting at the chickens? or won't the hens lay as many eggs as they ought? Which one of all the sea of troubles incident to a country life is it, my dear, that thus overshadows you? Doesn't that sound as if it were out of a book? But, my darling, there is nothing really wrong, is there? You know I have always laughed at you for looking solemn about things which seemed to me trifles when I came to hear them?"

"You will not think this a trifle, I know," she said, her voice low and dreadfully in earnest.

A sudden terror blanched his face as he replied:

"Catherine! It is not about yourself? You are not ill in any way?"

"Yes, it is about myself ; but I am not ill—only dreadfully ill at ease till I have told you something."

"Tell me, then, my darling," he said, holding both her hands.

"No, don't !" she cried, protestingly, trying to draw them away.

"Have I done anything to vex or grieve you, Catherine?"

"You ! Heavens, no ! not you !"

"Who, then?"

"Only I, myself, and that because I have to grieve you !"

"Be brief!" he almost commanded, and still he would not let her hands go.

"How can I tell you?" she said, and then broke out, impetuously, "Horace, if the woman you loved discovered after a year that she was not in love with you, as she had striven to fancy herself, but only very fond of you—would you still want to marry her?"

He did let her hands go then, and stood up with a sudden recoil.

"Horace, speak to me—speak to me!" she pleaded.

In any crisis, the bravest of women is terrified by a man's silence.

"Yes—yes," he rejoined, faintly, "in a minute !" After a pause, he went on, "So this is what you have to tell me? I have known women who have married men only through quiet affection, and who after marriage have fallen very much in love with them."

"Yes, but not when they are already in love with another !"

She rose and reached out her hands beseechingly to him.

"Oh, Horace, don't be too hard with me, or with him ! Do you think we would have loved each other if we could have helped it? Though it hurts you now, you will find it in the end to be for your good. We have few tastes in common. I should never have satisfied you—nor you me. You will find the right woman suited to make you happy as I never could have done—as the right man has been sent from far away to make me happy as *you* never could have done !"

She stopped. He did not take her outstretched hands ; he only asked—and asked it with terrible quietness :

"Who is this man that has come between us ? and what is his name ?"

She trembled for a moment, and then spoke clearly the name of her lover, Albert d'Aurelles. He started, visibly.



“That man! The man whose life I saved? Oh! but it was worthy of a Frenchman!” Then turning on her with sudden fierceness, “Where is the man? Is he in the house?”

“No, he is not. It will do you no good to know where he is. We could not help loving one another!”

“True,” he rejoined, bitterly. “What is criminal in a woman towards her husband, is not criminal until she becomes his wife! But *his* life all the same is ruined! I can do nothing—I wish to do nothing—except to ask you a few questions about this man. Do you know who he is?—who are his relatives?”

“He has told me everything about himself that I desire to know.”

Horace was silent for awhile. Then :

“Catherine,” he said, “have no bitter memory of me! It was not your fault that I could not hold your love! and for the pain you have given me, and which I must bear as long as I live, I forgive you! God bless you, my poor love!” and with these words, a short pressure of her hands, he went from the room.

He mounted the stairs quickly towards the bedroom which had always been allotted to him. As he expected, he found there the bag which he had intrusted to one of the servants on arrival. He descended to the hall, bag in hand, and there was met by Mrs. Lennard. Tears were in the good lady’s eyes as she pressed his hand, and, kissing him on the forehead, said :

“I *am* so sorry, dear! And you won’t stay to dinner? Won’t you come in and have a glass of wine?”

“No, I must get back to London as soon as I can. Good-bye! Find out all you can about him!”

So the door closed behind him, and he went out into the dreary gray November evening, seeming, as he walked, to hear her voice following him. Now in front of him, now on either side of him—he still seemed surrounded by her presence. He walked rapidly along the lonely road, sometimes crying aloud to himself with the frightful incredulity of grief.

“No, it can’t be—it *can’t* be!” then realizing with grief’s fearful reaction of certainty that it *was*.

In a short time he came to Popilton, where the lights of the “Three Jolly Drummers” shone cheerfully through the dense November dusk. He stopped, and looked at the house where he had taken pity on the man who had repaid him for that help-



ful compassion by wrecking the one dear dream of his life. How many times, when returning from a long walk across country, he had paused at that noted hostelry to refresh himself with a pint of its famous ale, his strong heart beating cheerfully, his young blood glowing warmly at the thought of his rapidly approaching marriage, and the fair woman waiting at The Firs to greet him! Out on it for a faithless friend to have played him such an ill turn! He shook his clinched hand at it, and then passed on.

When the door had closed behind him, Catherine had cried a little, but her eyes dried quickly, and she drew a sigh of infinite relief. A meeting between the two men had been avoided, and on the whole things could not have happened better.

When Albert came that evening, Catherine at once told him the good news.

"Now," he said, "you have done with him from this time henceforth! He is blotted out of your life and out of your thoughts."

"Blotted out of my life by his own choice henceforth, I should think he would be!" she replied. "But out of my thoughts—I cannot promise that! Would you wish me not to be sorry for the poor boy?"

"Yes, I would," he replied, shortly, and walked away to the other side of the room, a hard, cruel, sinister look about his lips.

"If you wish to sulk, she said, rising and moving towards the door, "you can do so alone!"

At that time the man was absolutely in her power. He came at once to her side, and entreated her forgiveness. So their first approach to a love-quarrel ended, and all through the rest of the evening he was a very hero and lover of romance. He begged hard to have the wedding-day fixed swiftly, and as there was no reason for delay, and Catherine had no will to refuse his entreaty, the marriage was arranged to take place early in January. Catherine's fortune was settled upon herself, so there was little trouble about settlements.

On the weeks that elapsed before the wedding there is no occasion to dwell.

One January day Horace Gilbard came on the news, in the first column of *The Times*, of Catherine Lennard's marriage to Albert d'Aurelles. He started and recoiled, while sparks of fire sprang to his eyes. Yet he had expected it; he had known it

must be so. So we know that hope for the life of some dear one is dead in us ere life itself had quite died out. Do we expect a miracle? Do we think that Almighty God in our case, for our little particular prayers, will forego His Godlike will?—reverse the decree He has sent forth?

No, we do *not* expect to see our all but dead get up and walk! We are not like those of old who believed that their king could keep the sea from on-coming—yet when death, whom we have seen approaching for so many days, has knocked at the gates, defying any to do battle with him, has passed across the threshold, entered the room, and made our dear one his for ever—are not the days that follow fraught with a strange surprise, as keen as if we had not known for so long that the suffering we had watched *could* end no way but this?

So was it with Horace; and as he sat before his fire that January day he maddened afresh at realizing how irrevocably *now* she was gone from him, the wife of another! Our bitterest experiences must all be lived out alone. For our daily vexations, for even our moderate troubles, there is balm in Gilead, if we will but seek for it—which some of us are too proud to do! But for the great memorable sorrows of our lives, which even when they have passed leave us branded in heart and face—never to be really again our old selves, though once more we take our seat at meat with men, and are seen once more in the market-place—for such sorrows will any tell me, who have suffered, if for *them* there is balm in Gilead? Nay, there is none! If we do not fall before the enemy at once, we do our battling alone, and none have sight of it.

So let us leave Horace to do *his* battling alone, through that, for him, so black and bitter winter, which was then in its second month. Let us only say that it passed, and even *he* was gladder when he could say with the Psalmist:

“The time for the singing of birds has come!”

And the time for other things had come as well. So, while nightingales were giving away their souls in music to the moonlight and the trees, and occasionally to a moonstruck poet, the sopranos shrieked through their operatic performances, the tenors melted softly through theirs, and the basses growled through theirs, while the boxes and stalls presented the appearance customary to them in the London season.

Now, love of music in Horace Gilbard was, unfortunately, larger than his balance at his banker's, so that he did not generally aspire to more than a modest seat in the pit. However, he almost always managed to get into the first row, and there, one hot, never-to-be-forgotten June evening, just as the first act of "Lucia di Lammermoor" had been concluded, he started to see two persons enter a box on the grand tier—a man and a woman. The man was Albert d'Aurelles : the woman was a well-known actress, whose beauty was said to be greater than her morality. Beautiful certainly she looked as she sat there, with her splendid dark eyes, her dark, lustrous hair, and her magnificent bosom and snowy shoulders so abundantly bare. Even Gilbard, whose mind was quite filled by the thought of another woman, had to own that this one, in her own bold, reckless way, was good to look at.

D'Aurelles, whose evening clothes fitted faultlessly, looked wonderfully handsome, the hard, sinister lines round his mouth being scarcely visible. Gilbard looked full at him, but the Frenchman appeared not to see him, and was wholly devoted to his fair companion ; and Gilbard sat and looked, and hated them both. He took no pleasure in the music, and was glad when *Lucia's* sorrows came to an end. He was due that night at a large ball, and once, on leaving the opera-house, he took a hansom to his destination.

He would stay but a few moments, he thought, as he made his way up the spacious staircase, and was greeted by the strains of a well-trained band, which was playing one of Strauss's most enchanting waltzes.

"My love—my poor love," he was thinking to himself, as he went up the stairs, "where are you, I wonder? and was it for a man like this that you left me?—a man who would break your heart without one pang of regret, if ever it stood between him and his pleasures? A man whose blood could burn like fire and his heart be cold as ice! Fire and ice—how shall one escape from between these two?"

How sick he was of the whole thing which he had seen so many times before that season! There were the same girls with the same dollish faces flirting with the same inane young men, whom it seemed impossible to imagine in any other costume but evening dress. There were the same little jokes being made, followed by the same little languid laughs. Gilbard

made his way through a group of people clustered in the doorway, shook hands with his hostess, and then remained for a moment rooted to the spot. For there, at only a few yards' distance from him, talking to one of the inane young men, *she* stood—the one love of his heart! the beautiful lady of all his dreams! She was moving her fan slowly backwards and forwards with the old matchless grace of gesture which he knew so well. He could see the weariness with which her companion inspired her. He went forward, and, taking her hand, said, with something just a little forced in his manner :

“I thought we should never meet again!”

“Are you sorry to have your expectations disappointed?”

The same low, subtle, sweet voice as of old, with now a rather weary note in it, which only made its music more captivating. She was perfectly self-composed.

“I only wonder that we have not met before,” she went on. “We have been in London since the beginning of last month, and have been to so many places where I thought it quite likely we should meet you. Mamma is here—have you seen her? How warm it is! Do you think you could find me a cool corner anywhere?”

He gave her his arm, and, with his heart wildly beating, he led her toward a curtained recess, where an open window let in such air as the sultry night could lay claim to. He found her a seat there, and stood by her side looking down upon her, drinking in the perfume of the flowers she wore in her hair.

By day and by night, asleep, awake, he had dreamed of meeting her, but never like this! and now they had met, the minutes were rushing by, and he could say nothing.

“Well?” she asked, when he had gazed at her for some time with rapt eyes. “Do you find me changed?”

“Yes, a little. You are as beautiful as ever, but you have a weary look. Catherine, are you as happy as you thought you should be?”

“Yes, quite as happy. Albert is very, very good to me.”

“Is he here to-night?”

“No; he had to spend the evening with some old friends; but he will come to take me back. Of course, it is natural that his own old friends should want to see him.”

Horace could only listen. How could he tell her what he knew?



“ I can measure his love,” she continued, “ by his jealousy.”

“ My dear,” answered the young man, with a heartfelt of tenderness in his voice, “ I hope he gives you better proof than that. Both men and women, if their natures be exacting, will often guard jealously what has ceased to attract them. It is not love, but that sordid sense of proprietorship which is at first rightly associated with love, and which, outliving love, is by itself mean and unlovely.”

“ Thank you, but that is not our case yet. All the same I am obliged for your little sermon. I always told you the Church had a loss in you ! Now, would you mind taking me back ?”

“ There, now !” he said, “ I have offended you ! But indeed, indeed, I wish only for *your* happiness. I have long ceased to hope for any for myself ! Won't you forgive me ? won't you believe me, Catherine ? *won't* you forgive me ?”

He looked so genuinely heartbroken that she laid her fingers lightly in his outstretched hand, nor did she chide him when for one moment he raised those long, slim fingers to his lips.

“ Still, you must take me back now, please,” she said. Of course he did her bidding. Almost as soon as they left the cool and shady recess, they came face to face with Albert d'Aurelles. The two men could not avoid recognizing each other, which they did as coolly and formally as possible. The Frenchman looked portentously dark, and told his wife that it was late, and they must go at once.

“ Yes,” she answered, “ I am ready.” Then turning to Horace, she added, graciously : “ Good-night, Mr. Gilbard. Come and see us, you will always find me at home on Thursdays from five till seven.”

“ You forget I have not the pleasure of knowing your London address.”

“ How stupid of me ! 20, St. George's Terrace. Can you remember ?”

“ I shall not forget.”

So once again they had met and parted.

The drive home, for husband and wife, was a silent one ; indeed, neither of them spoke till they had entered the house. Then the master thereof, paying for it out of his wife's fortune, spoke, and his voice sounded harshly.



“ We may as well understand each other at once, Catherine,” he commenced.

“ Yes,” she answered, leisurely unclasping her bracelets, “ nothing could be better ; only we must do so quickly, as I want Marie to brush my hair.”

“ Well, the point is this, then—I will stand no resuming of any intimacy with Gilbard. Do you hear ?”

“ Certainly, my dear. You speak loudly enough, but I am not impressed. I am your wife, not your slave, and I will see and know whom I like.”

She was still in love with her husband, very much in love ; but, unlike most women, love had not quelled her native pride. Albert looked at her as a man may at a beautiful wild animal he has resolved to tame, yet does not quite know how to set about it.

“ You have not got a weak man to deal with,” he said, with suppressed rage, letting his fingers close almost cruelly upon her wrists. “ You will be watched.”

“ Shall I ? Let go of my wrists, please, and ring the bell for Marie. I am tired and wish to get to bed.”

He did as she bade him and left the room.

As Marie brushed out her mistress’s hair that night, she could not help noticing a strangely pleased smile come and go about the corners of her mouth. Women are as ambitious to subdue hearts as great statesmen are to dictate to their country.

---

#### CHAPTER IV.

MADAME D’AURELLES’S first visitor the next Thursday was Mr. Gilbard. “ I am glad you have come early,” she said, “ so that we can have a little talk before the others come. Tell me, now, what you are doing—studying for the Bar still ? How warm it is ! Do you mind lowering that blind ? Thanks !”

“ I am yours to command in all things,” he rejoined, coming and standing a little nearer to her.

How beautiful she looked in her exquisitely fitting, long trailing dress ! At that moment the door opened, and, contrary

to his usual practice, Albert walked in, to be present at his wife's afternoon.

At his entrance Catherine showed signs of pleasure, in which Horace Gilbard did not participate ; but the Frenchman looked well pleased with himself.

It was, nevertheless, a relief to the three when other callers arrived—amongst them an æsthetic, conceited, bilious young man, who informed Gilbard that he and every one else had a moral self, and that to sin against that self was the unpardonable sin.

“ And,” he added, with supreme contempt, in spite of his evident biliousness, “ as Morality is but another name for Beauty, he who sins against the laws of Beauty sins against Morality ! Will you inform me if you admire pictures ? ”

“ No, I do not.”

“ The highest poetry ? ”

“ No, nor the lowest.”

“ Will you tell me, then, in what form you do adore the Beautiful ? ”

“ No, I will not,” returned Gilbard, with savage rudeness ; and he walked away, leaving the bilious one dumbfounded ; for some people were in the habit of regarding him as a kind of oracle.

Gilbard lingered a little to see if there would be any opportunity of conversation with Catherine. As it appeared there would not be one until they were again alone in the presence of her husband, he went his way, out into the bright sunny afternoon with a strange, bewildered kind of feeling in his head.

To see her in this way, surrounded by other people, was a worse thing than not seeing her. Yet, could he make up his mind to stay away from the house on these Thursday afternoons ? He went to his club, and there dined in the vilest of tempers. His brother-members remarked it, and wondered what had come to Horace Gilbard, who, as a rule, was one of the best-tempered of men.

The next Thursday afternoon he again presented himself at the house in St. George's Terrace. This time he arrived late. Monsieur d'Aurelles was on the scene again ; he was engaged talking to a group of ladies ; his wife stood near the doorway.

“ I thought you were not coming,” she said.

“ And I have only looked in for a minute or two. Tell me, will you be at the opera on Saturday ? ”

“ Yes ; I am going with mamma. Albert has a club dinner, I believe.”

Where is the woman who can forbear experimentalizing upon the man who is in love with her, whether he has any right to be so or not ? As Catherine d'Aurelles said those words, she looked at him to see what effect they would produce ; and she saw the blood leap into his face—the light into his eyes.

“ I think I will go, now that I have shaken hands with you,” he said.

“ No—why, how absurd you are ! Stay and help me ! There are so few men and so many women—see how they absolutely surge about my husband ! Are you going to be good or not ? ”

“ I told you last Thursday that I was yours to command.”

“ And you are still in that mind ? ”

“ I am always in that mind.”

“ You will stay, then ? ”

“ Surely I shall stay—till I can serve you no more by staying.”

The following Saturday night saw Horace Gilbard again at the opera, seated in the stalls this time. He paid less attention than usual to the music, and when the drop had fallen on the first act, he quitted his stall, and quickly reappeared in a private box occupied by two ladies—the one elderly, the other might have been about thirty, but looked somewhat younger, and was possessed of unusual beauty.

“ I thought I should never see you again ! ” said Horace, as he bent over Catherine's chair.

“ What can you mean, when you saw me only last Thursday, and the Thursday before as well ? ”

“ That was *not* seeing you ! I have not really seen you since we met at the Grays'. How warm it is here ? Don't you want to take a turn in the corridor ? ”

She rose, and they left the box together, to mix with the other pairs who were lounging or promenading leisurely in the comparatively cool corridors. There was doubtless plenty of flirtation and intrigue going forward, heartaches and headaches being laid up for the morrow ; but these two were innocent enough. The woman who was with Gilbard should, he knew, have been his wife, and she was another man's, and he, Gilbard, loved her

more than ever ! But because you envy a man some treasure in art, on which it delights your soul to gaze, does that mean that you are going to turn burglar some fine night ? Certainly not. It means nothing of the kind !

She was the first to speak.

“ Well ? ” she asked, “ Have you nothing to say to me ? ”

“ No. What should I have to say ? It is enough to be with you—to look at you.”

These words were spoken in low grave tones. As a suitor he had been remarkable for his gravity, though boyishly *ungrave* at other times.

“ Don’t speak so,” she said, in a voice equally low.

“ Why not ? Where is the harm ? While I love you and you are indifferent, there can be no harm.”

“ But it seems to me there is harm. Let us talk of something else.”

“ I don’t want to talk of anything else.”

“ Then we will be silent.”

“ Very well—I am content.”

“ It is too absurd ! ” she said, with one of those outbursts of mirth which contrasted so delightfully with the habitual queenly languor of her manner, when they had been pacing up and down for a few minutes in solemn silence. “ Why do you look so serious ? ”

“ I suppose,” he replied, with native simplicity and undiminished gravity, “ because I am trying to take it in—trying to realize that I am here with you—that I can see you, hear you, feel your hand on my arm, smell the old jasmine perfume escape from your dress just as it used to do in old days ; and for anything I know, such an hour may never come over again ! ”

Her answer was a pitying pressure of the hand that rested on his arm. Shortly afterwards they returned to the box, where Gilbard remained installed for the rest of the evening. When the opera was over he saw the ladies to their carriage.

“ Good-night, and thank you,” was all he said to Catherine, as he handed her into the brougham ; and his look and his touch and his tone did all indeed convey a sense of most profound heart’s thanks.

Then he lit a cigar and walked away through the crowd streaming out of the opera-house, only to get entangled in another stream discharging and dispersing itself from a neigh-

bouring theatre. As he walked across the road, absent-mindedly recalling the touch of her hand in his, the tones of her voice, the likeness of her face, he heard a man's voice shout at him with a French execration. He started back to see a lighted phaeton which, drawn by two high-stepping horses, was coming on at a rapid pace, and would infallibly have run him down but for the driver's warning shout and restraining hand. The horses, for an instant checked, resumed their speed, and the carriage flashed by.

"We all but ran him down, did we not?" remarked the other occupant of the phaeton. She was a lady sumptuously dressed and alight with diamonds. She spoke in tones of uttermost nonchalance, as if for her part she did not care a hand's turn whether he were run over or not. But her companion looked dark and struck the horses sharply.

"If I had known him," he thought to himself, "I might have been less careful!" for the light flashing on Gilbard's face had shown him who it was, though Horace had been too suddenly startled to recognize the driver of the phaeton which dashed past so swiftly.

D'Aurelles drew up in front of a small house, situated in one of the most expensive quarters of London. He tossed the reins to a man-servant, and helped Violet Lyndale out. The name of the beautiful young actress was at that time ever on men's tongues. Entering the house, they turned into a splendidly-furnished apartment, where a table stood spread with shining silver and spotless damask. Violet Lyndale drew off her gloves and threw her hat aside.

"What are you thinking of," she asked, glancing at Albert d'Aurelles, "that you look so cross?"

"Of a lost chance," he answered, scowling.

"Of the man you did not run over?"

"You have discovered it with your usual penetration."

"A rival?"

"Yes, an old one."

"I shouldn't mind, were I you, about an old one. But come, make yourself agreeable. I want lobster salad, and champagne, and some one to say pretty things to me!"

"And you shall have all three, my beautiful darling!" he answered, kneeling down and pressing his lips against her fair firm throat.



"That is better," she answered, a well-pleased light in her eyes. "You see I have your diamonds in my ears and in my hair?"

"You have looked your loveliest to-day," he answered.

"Do you think all the men at your dinner were in love with me?"

"Of course they were! How could they help it?"

"I'm always amused to have boys in love with me," she went on; adding, with a touch of childish delight in her voice, "they do look so foolish, don't they?"

Albert assented, and still kneeling at her feet, his hands toying with the lace and jewels at her throat, asked her if she had enjoyed the drive to Richmond and back, the dinner, the company, the view on the river? To which she replied that she had indeed enjoyed it all. And let it be said of Violet Lyndale, that whatever was to come, at that time she enjoyed life as keenly as a child. She meant no harm to any one—only she had no idea that there was such a thing as what is called moral responsibility in the world.

Poor butterfly, flashing its bright wings in the summer sunshine! It hath but a day to live, and shall not that day be sweet? Shall we grudge it the sunshine and the flowers?

"Do you think you ever loved any one?" he asked, later on, when he had drunk champagne to his heart's content and lighted his cigarette.

"Yes," she answered, "I think I love you! It is a fine thing to have a poet for my lover! And you will write a book of poems to me, won't you? Of course it will be dedicated to me," she went on, with intense business-like earnestness; "and there will be a portrait of me at the beginning? Let me see, which would be the best dress to be taken in? Which do you really think I look prettiest in?"

She looked so lovely in all, that he could scarcely make up his mind. Then she wanted to know how long he would be writing the book, and almost cried with vexation when he told her that he had no idea, and that to do her justice, something called inspiration was needed, "which, unlike your actress's tears," he said, "is not always laid on! Some days I write a good deal, some days a little, some days nothing at all."

"Would he promise to have the book ready by the autumn?"

“No, he would not, but he would promise to take her to the Derby.

And Catherine lay awake and knew not the ways of her truant lord.

---

## CHAPTER V.

A HAPPY, yet rather an anxious man, was Albert d'Aurelles in those days. Thanks to his wife, he was in good circumstances. He was even then fond of her ; indeed, had scarcely ceased to be in love with her, though he was making love to another woman, and taking his wife's money (which Catherine trusted largely to his management) wherewith to buy costly presents for Miss Lyndale. Yet, whatever he became in later days, at that time the man's worst faults sprang from the imperative need that his nature had for excitement. The woman who had held his fancy longest, of whom indeed he often thought even now, between his wife and his mistress, was his latest love in France—a resolute, desperately passionate woman—a woman totally unlike any other that he had ever seen. But she grew jealous of him, and that angered his pleasure-loving nature, so that bitter words were uttered on both sides. It was after his last parting from her, while still keeping up a correspondence with her, that he came to England and met Catherine.

Still often at night he dreamed of Delphine ; her intense warm brown eyes, with sometimes a piteous look of appeal in their depths—such a look of heartbreaking wistfulness as we see often in the eyes of a suffering dumb thing—would haunt him, and he would hear again the urgent music of the swift sweet voice ; would see the tall, serpentine figure swaying towards him with its incomparable grace. Let us rejoice, and let our womenkind rejoice with us, that there are no glass doors let into our hearts, through which, when we are dreaming, they can come and peep !

These were, as I was saying, happy times to D'Aurelles, because of his new riches and because of the excitement of a perfectly new love. He was a poet, and he had been married four months, and for three out of those four he had scarcely

seen another woman besides his wife. Yet they were anxious days, too, because he wished to avoid detection, not at all to prevent pain to Catherine—he was much too selfish ever to think of that!—but because he had a wholesome horror of “scenes.” Yet he was determined to see as much of his new love as he could. Then he was somewhat troubled about money matters. Large as was the balance at the banker’s over which he had control, it could not for very long endure the inroads which were being made upon it to gratify Miss Lyndale’s taste.

It was very well to have a poet for a lover, but had his hands been empty it would scarcely have been so well. Many of the gifts were as yet unpaid for. He must in time make some excuse, and induce his wife to sell out some of her capital. It would be a bore to be poorer by so many hundreds, and it would make a scene, and that would be horrible. Still it was the only thing to be done, and would have to be done some day, and the next time he went in search of fresh quarry, he must not fly so high!

He had never before had money at his command, and he spent it as an extravagant boy might. Meanwhile, through all his thoughts there ran an unworthy suspicion of the wife for whom he still cared in a way (in whom he felt the proud and absolute sense of proprietorship which was *not* to be experienced in the case of Miss Lyndale), and of the man whom he had supplanted.

“She had cared for him once; might not his turn come again? As for Gilbard, he knew how *he* himself in Gilbard’s place should have behaved.”

So while he pursued his pleasure with the fair actress, and purchased her gifts with his wife’s money, he treated that wife as if she were half a criminal. On the nights when she went into society without him, he always demanded on her return a rigorous account of the evening, a list of the people she had seen. On those occasions when she had to report the name of Horace Gilbard, it meant her having to endure a succession of small spites from Albert for days after. Most very sensual men are also very cruel, and verily D’Aurelles was no exception to the rule. He took an exquisite delight in punishing; and though it was no fault of Catherine’s that she sometimes met Gilbard in society, it pleased him to punish her all the same as if it had been.

But still the woman remained infatuated, for he had his moods

of tenderness, and he had studied women and the art of love, and then, too, women often love best the men who treat them worst.

One afternoon she asked him if he would take her to the Derby. He replied shortly that he would not ; that it was a disreputable English institution, to which he would neither take nor let his wife go. He was in a bad temper that afternoon, for he had been to call on Violet, and had found a man there whom he could not outstay, as he had a dinner-party at his own house, and he had to get back in time to dress. Catherine coloured a little at his refusal, but she said nothing.

The Derby day of that year, for a wonder, was a fine day. The night previous to it Albert had not returned to his house ; his wife believed, as he had often told her, that he had chambers where he sometimes found it more convenient to pass the night. At about ten o'clock in the morning, a break, with its complement of gaily-dressed women and men, with flowers in their button-holes, drew up in front of Madame d'Aurelles's door, and in a minute more Catherine descended the steps, looking very beautiful, with a curious smile about her lips.

"You're quite right, my dear," said Mrs. Gray, a pretty, little languid society-woman. "I broke *my* husband, just as you will break yours !"

Mr. Gray, of course, was not of the party. Ill-natured people said that Mr. Gray had been broken to such good purpose that he saw much more of other ladies than of Mrs. Gray.

One fine Derby day is just like another. How well we know the road—the stream of wagonettes and carriages, out of which fair women seem to bloom like human flowers ; the omnibus ; the horse and trap ; the humble donkey-cart ; the crowd of pedestrians all swarming the same way ; the brass band ; the separate musical instruments trying to do business on their own account ; the good-natured chaff between those riding and those on foot ; the smell of good cigars and bad. Ah, me ! how well we know it all ! The favourite for the great spring race, and very much in favour, too, was a horse called "Firefly"—"Sea Bird" and "Pretty Boy" being good second and third. The women, of course, made books with the men, who allowed them to hedge in the most obliging fashion.

They were nearing Epsom, when a phaeton, drawn by two high-stepping horses, passed them. Catherine started, turned



pale, and closed her lips tightly as if to prevent herself from calling out, for she recognized in the driver of the phaeton her husband, beside whom sat a woman, whose striking features were at that time, through the shop windows, familiar to every one. Those of the party who knew D'Aurelles wisely said nothing. Others, less well-informed, seeing how pale Catherine turned, were prompt with sympathy and smelling-bottles. Two young men grown wise before their time, looked at one another significantly. They had predicted something of the kind, when they had heard of Madame d'Aurelles' scheme for asserting her wifely independence.

"Felt sure he would take Violet"—for the matter was town-talk.

Catherine was a proud woman; she recovered herself quickly, and made fresh bets, and became unusually animated; her eyes glowed, and there was a very becoming flush upon her cheek.

D'Aurelles, also, had seen his wife, though he did not appear to recognize her; only his companion noticed his quick glance at the break and his suddenly turning his gaze on his horses.

"You have seen some woman there," she said, "whom you do not want to recognize!"

"Right, as usual," he answered, calmly, lighting a cigarette. "No less a woman than my wife."

"You are married, then?"

"Most surely I am."

"And you did not tell me?"

"I did not. There were surely pleasanter topics of conversation than my marriage."

"True," she answered, with a laugh; it was *not* a matter of thrilling interest! You don't think 'Copperplate' will win, do you? I was talking to a man yesterday who said he did not feel at all sure that he would not; and if he does, oh! the gloves I shall lose!"

"I shall lose more than gloves in that case," replied her companion, trying to appear unconcerned, but not getting on very successfully with the endeavour.

An hour afterwards the race had been decided, against everybody's expectation, with the exception of a fortunate few, whom a special providence must have had in charge. The despised "Copperplate," scarcely expected to make a bad fourth, had won!



The event meant ruin to many people, and amongst them Albert d'Aurelles. As a rule, he was not an incautious man in such ventures as these ; but now debts were gathering all about him, debts which his wife's money must meet, unless by some brilliant stroke of good fortune he could procure aid in some other way. Of course, to sow such a crop as would yield him the desired harvest, he had to give tremendous odds ; but it seemed to him impossible that this horse, out of all the other horses, most of whom seemed so infinitely superior in all points, should win ! Of course, there was a risk—how slight it was, though ! What a blessing it would be to feel himself a free man once more—to avoid that scene which he knew must come when his wife began to suspect, as she inevitably would, how and where his money had gone ! The horror of such a scene grew doubly strong when he saw that Catherine recognized him and the woman in whose company he was.

When it was known that "Copperplate" had won the race, he turned so pale that Violet thought he was going to faint. But he did not. He drank off some champagne, and rolled up and lighted a cigarette.

"Have you lost very much?" she asked, not without a touch of genuine trouble in her voice.

"Everything—that is how much," he answered ; "but if you don't mind, we'll get out of this, and drive back."

The actress assented, and they made their way out of the crowd, and drove away in the direction of London. Again they passed quite close to the break wherein Catherine sat, and she could not help noticing the dreadful change which had come over her husband's face. Much as she thought she scorned him just then, she almost pitied him, too ! Since that encounter between the two vehicles, a sort of cloud had fallen over Madame d'Aurelles and her party which no amount of false and forced gaiety could dispel.

Albert drove to London at a rapid pace, the swift movement seeming to suit him well. He scarcely responded to Violet when she spoke, so that at last she desisted from her prattle. At another time she would have told him that he was stupid and that unless he promised to make himself more agreeable he should not take her out again ; but just now there was something in his white face and fixed eyes which rather frightened her ; so she gave herself up to the delights afforded

by watching the road. At length the drive came to an end, and they drew up in front of her little *bijou* of a residence. Albert handed out his fair companion, and followed her up into the pretty, flower-scented drawing-room.

"Well," she asked, when they had stood silent for a few minutes, "you were silent all the drive! Have you nothing to say to me now?"

"Yes, I have at least one word to say, and that is, 'Good-bye!'"

"What! you won't stay to dinner?"

"I don't mean for to-day only," he answered. "I mean good-bye for ever! Have you forgotten that I told you I was a ruined man? And you are not the woman who wants a ruined man for a lover!"

"Albert, is it really as bad as that?"

"Yes, quite as bad as that."

"Why, my dear, how sorry I am!" and going up to him she passed her hands across his face, making, as she did so, a soft, purring sound. "Don't you think you will ever be rich again?"

"No, never!" he answered, desperately, but firmly.

"Then I suppose we really must say good-bye," she replied; "for I couldn't do without pretty things—could I?"

"Good-bye!" he said, harshly, and moved to the door.

He was just leaving the room when she called to him to come back for one moment. When he came she threw her arms about his neck, telling him how fond she was of him—that she should never like any one else so much!

"No more!" he said, almost fiercely, and with that he went from the house into the bright May evening.

The streets were gay with many carriages, and musical with many cornets played by ambitious young men. He knew not where he should go, but to his own home not yet.

If that was a disturbed evening for Albert, what kind of an evening was it for his wife.

Her friends left her at her door. She made a pretence at dining, so that the footman who stood behind her chair should not wonder. She was more innocent of the world's ways, this woman who had passed so much of her life in the country, than many younger women. She had never thought it possible to doubt this husband of hers who had been so

jealous of her every movement? She had not learnt, as most wives have to learn, that there is one law for them and another for their husbands.

She went into the drawing-room, and, saying she would not have the lamps lit, sat alone in the darkness—not absolute darkness, because of a lamp-post which stood just opposite the house, and looked in like a big eye watching her. Somewhere near at hand the music of a street-piano hovered in the soft evening air, and to her death-day she will remember the tune it played, and to her death-day she will hate it.

In the first dreadful shock of her surprise she had felt scornful and indignant; but now, in the force of a great reaction, bitter tears flowed from her eyes—those beautiful eyes of hers!—and violent sobs shook her, as she asked herself between them what she had done to merit such disgrace. She had loved him with all the strength of a strong nature. During the days of their engagement he had told her that she had given him back his youth! And was almost the first use he made of it, to desert her? He had told her even after their marriage how exquisitely she suited him in every way.

At the first sight of him by Violet Lyndale's side to-day she had been angry—bitterly angry! But had that been dignified or just? she asked herself now. Was it *his* fault that she lacked the charm to hold him? What a bitter disappointment it must have been to him when he found that she could not! But, oh! it was cruel to think that she had lost him because of whatever failure; and with all her heart she hated the woman who, she felt sure, had schemed to take her husband away from her!

Dear soul! she pictured in her mind's eye the desperate struggles he must have had with himself before yielding to those alien charms! When he was with *her*, his wife, what cruel remorse of heart he must have suffered! No wonder he had of late not seemed himself. It was as if that oldtime charm—a "love-philtre"—had been given him, to take his heart from her and make it another woman's.

No, a great curse had fallen upon her, under which she must bow her head. She wondered if it was a punishment for her having broken her faith to Horace! And yet to have married

him, loving another man all the time, would have been wicked ! So she sat alone in the darkness, and idealized an unfaithful husband's *peccadillo* into a piece of old Greek Fate ! How pitifully little she knew the man she had to deal with, who, as he paced up and down the street, calmer then and smoking a first-rate cigar, was thinking not at all of Violet, but of his gloomy prospects in the future, and of the dreadful scene that he feared, when he must tell his wife all, and that her money must save them from disgrace, after which they would probably be as poor as beggars.

As far as the man knew anything about love at that time, he probably loved his wife better than any one in the world ; but his swiftly excited, restlessly unsatisfied nature demanded constant novelty. Indeed his very unfaithfulness to his wife made him in a way fonder of her. To know that he had such a secret from her gave zest to the relationship. Of real tenderness the man had none, although he could assume it very well.

At last he said unto himself that there was no good in putting it off any longer—the sooner it was over the better ! He dropped into a public-house, swallowed a glass of brandy, and went on his way home !

His wife was sitting in the drawing-room, dark, but for the lamp outside, which continued to watch her, when she heard the door-bell ring violently. Then the hall-door opened and closed, and she heard her husband's voice asking some question of the servants. Then his step was on the stairs, and he came into the drawing-room. He could just discern her figure by the lamplight which fell in from outside. He was quite as well pleased that there should be no light in the room.

"What ! all alone in the dark, Cathy?" he began, with an assumption of tenderness in his voice.

"Yes," she rejoined ; "I have been so for some time."

Her voice was tired and pitiful through her much weeping. He could hear in her tone how she had been grieving. After a pause he spoke again, coming nearer to her. There was something strange in this scene, carried on between two persons in almost total darkness—yet the tones of a voice may often represent looks.

"Cathy," he said, "if you had not gone against my most earnest wishes, you would have been spared something which I see has pained you."



"It was better for me to know," she answered, her voice quivering, made heavy with its tears. "Don't think I blame you. The fault was not yours, dear! It was my failure that I could not keep you—could not hold you, as another woman might have done. You have still tried, for my sake, to play that you loved me——."

Here her voice broke, and he knew that she was shedding bitter tears.

"Nonsense!" he cried, taking her hands from before her eyes, and holding them in his. She did not attempt to withdraw them, nor did she shrink when he kissed her cheeks and poor wet eyelids, and even then, in her great sorrow, her blood thrilled to his kiss.

"You are quite free," she said. "You must make *her* and yourself happy. I blame you for nothing." And as she spoke he felt her fingers tighten round his.

"What in the world do you mean, darling?" he broke out, impatiently, his tones growing shrill in his excitement. "The wretched woman you saw with me is simply so much beauty to be bought by so much gold!—a splendid animal, nothing more! Go to her!—make her happy? She is nothing to me! I was thrown into her society, and, I confess, I let things go too far—the kind of thing which will happen to a man whether he is married or not, though very often his wife finds out nothing about it. I have never loved *you* less! It was a mere affair of the senses, which ought not to be mentioned in your pure presence. I am sorry it has happened—sorry that you found it out; but let us make no scene about it, nor talk as if a man, because he was married, was therefore inevitably out of the reach of temptation!"

He ceased, and she drew her hands away. It seemed to him that she recoiled from him, and that a shudder went through her.

"Catherine," he said, after a pause, "have you nothing to say to me?"

"Not to-night, I think," and her tones were cold as snow; there was in them now no vestige of her late weeping.

She rose and moved towards the door. He laid a detaining hand upon her arm, but she freed herself, and said, with not the faintest quiver in her chilly voice:

"Have the goodness to let me pass, if you please. I am tired, and wish to go to my own room."



"You are my wife," he replied, fiercely, "and you shall not go from this room until you have answered me my questions."

"I am your wife—*not* your slave! But what *are* your questions you wish me to answer?"

"You have heard my explanation about that wretched woman. Do you mean to believe or disbelieve it? Answer that."

"I have to believe it," she answered, still coldly as ice. "You have left me no other choice. I could wish you had!"

"You wish I had! Do you want me to be in love with the woman?"

"Since I am not free to leave the room till your questions are answered," she said, "I will speak now, and once for all! And afterwards, mind, the subject is not mentioned between us. Do you know what your explanation, so obviously genuine, has done?"

"No, and I don't care!" he rejoined, the native insolence of his temper aroused by the dreadful, quiet contempt of her tones. But she went on, without heeding the words which she knew were false:

"It has killed my love for you. It has killed my faith in you. It was not your fault, I thought, if I lacked the charm to keep you mine. I said, 'Love is all powerful—not to be resisted! He found out too late that he had not loved me as he had at first thought he did.' At first to-day I was angry, but when I thought of your bitter disappointment in finding that I was so little to you, when you had thought I should have been so much, I grieved for you. I began to think what countless ways there were in which I might have fallen short. I thought how you must have been tortured between temptation and remorse, and as I sat there in the darkness my heart bled for you as well as for myself. I was ready with my forgiveness when you came in. I wished only to sacrifice myself for your happiness. I had lost you, but I loved you still!"

"You never *had* lost me!" he put in.

"That is just it!" she answered, with terrible distinctness, each word crystallized into a veritable ice-flower. "I could still have loved you, though apart! In such a dreadful crisis of your life I would have helped you, against my own heart. But to hear from your own lips that it is no crisis, nothing but a common affair with a common woman! and that you chose to associate me with such a woman in your life, to divide yourself

between your mistress and your wife, to be unfaithful to me for the first pretty face that caught you, and to say that all the time you loved me! Yes, I believe that you *do* love me now—I believe that you love me as much as you could love any woman—you who, I see now, have never dreamed of what a sacred love could be. I suppose the law constrains me still to live with you as your wife, but I tell you,” and her tone changed to one of passionate bitterness, “I tell you I am a proud woman, and that you have struck my love for you dead, dead, *dead!* A long life would not be long enough for me to show how I despise you! God! is it possible that you are the same man whom only this morning I loved with all my heart? It can't be—it *can't* be! and yet I know it *is!* Now that I have spoken, am I free to leave the room?”

He made no answer, but opened the door for her.

“Thank you,” she said, acknowledging the courtesy as she swept out.

For a moment, as she passed him, the light in the hall showed them each other's faces. Hers was cold and scornful, with a cruel brilliance in the eyes. His was appallingly white, the lips set tight together.

He closed the door and threw himself on the sofa. With the dreadful perversity of things, he had fallen in love with his wife all over again. Her coldness and her scorn had moved him as her sweetness and tenderness never had done. Yet he had lost her! Yes, strange as it may seem, in such a little while Love had died. All romantic loves must die just as inevitably as human beings die. The love between married persons, which after years or months, as the case may be, loses the zest of romance, has no less died because it has passed into a kind of jog-trot friendship. Some loves die long, lingering deaths, with spurts as of fresh life in them at times; and some drop dead instantly, as this had done, slain by a man's falseness.

Albert had seen much of the world, and he knew that no dead thing in it is as dead as a dead love. What becomes of us after death we cannot tell; the hardest thinkers among us can only conjecture; but that a dead love rises up never under any circumstances whatsoever we know for certainty—for a terrible certainty, those of us who have seen on the dead king's face his look of awful unforgiveness!

After some time Albert roused himself, and went to the

smoking-room, where he sat long, smoking cigar after cigar, and helping himself liberally to brandy.

---

CHAPTER VI.

EARLY the next morning he requested an interview with his wife. He found her, as usual, perfectly dressed ; her manner was indifferent and composed, while he for once appeared nervous and ill at ease.

“Catherine,” he began, “I have something to say to you which I could not say last night.”

“Yes?” she said. “I am listening.”

He went on : “What I have to say can be said in five words. I am a ruined man!—a disgraced man—if I cannot pay my debts. I have got into debt. I thought to retrieve everything yesterday, and lost everything!”

“What do you propose doing?” inquired his wife, who had started at this disastrous news, but almost instantly regained her self-composure.

“Do?” he answered. “What can I do?—nothing!”

“How much money shall you require?”

“Twenty thousand pounds.”

“Out of my fortune? That will leave five thousand pounds, on the interest of which we shall have to live.”

“You are going to save me, my darling?” he cried.

“Don’t, please!” she said, as he held out his hands to her.

“I have no fancy to be the wife of a man publicly disgraced. I will order the carriage, and drive to my lawyer’s at once.”

He looked at her with longing admiration as she rose and left the room.

In a few days Madame d’Aurelles’ fortune went to satisfy her husband’s creditors. The house and furniture were disposed of, and the married couple retired to The Firs, where they meant to live.

The evening before leaving London, Catherine was sitting by herself, when Gilbard walked in. Of course this “frightful smash” was town-talk.

"I heard you were going to leave London," he said, "so came to say good-bye. What a dreadful affair it has all been!"

"Yes, indeed; but the worst of it is over now. The Firs is left to us, and there we must live, you know, with few servants and half the house shut up. It will be lonely. Will an old friend come and see me sometimes, do you think?" she asked, with the old exquisite sweetness in her tones.

"There is nothing an old friend would more long to do," he replied. "But your husband?"

"I shall be mistress at The Firs! Come when you like. Horace, how good you are to have forgiven me!" And as she spoke she let her hand rest for a moment on his. He raised it and carried it to his lips.

"I shall love you always," he said, in his grave tones.

"Are you sure of that, Horace?"

"Very sure."

"Then how wrong I have been! For only unhappiness can come to you out of such a love!"

"No!" he said—"A thousand times *no!* To love you without hope is a better thing than to love a less perfect woman with hope. Just to sit here with you like this is more blessedness than any man deserves."

"You poor, foolish boy!" she said. She was his senior by some years. He took her hand and she let it remain in his a few moments. He will always remember with loving gratitude that soft summer twilight. It will be a blessed refuge for his thoughts to seek out in his long uncomforted days. Her hand in his, the sense of her presence close to him, her beauty divinely indistinct in the half-light—the passion and the romance of it will come back to assuage his sore pain.

"I will go now," he said, presently.

He had no fear of facing her husband, but he was reluctant to mar the evening with the sight of him.

"Yes," she answered, gently, "I think you had better go now."

"I thank you," he said, getting up. "You have been very good to me. God bless you, my heart's one love, and make you happy!"

"Good-bye, dear," she answered, pityingly. And so they parted; he, to walk on his way home, now fortified and transfigured by a memory: she, to sit with clasped hands, brooding

over the ruin of her life. She was thankful that the next day they were to leave town.

The summer passed eventlessly enough. Albert and Catherine said little to each other. He was attentive to her in every way that he knew how to be, and she accepted his attentions or declined them with unvarying coolness. Even Mrs. Lennard said it was quite touching, his devotion! and almost reproved her daughter for being so cold.

"After all, my dear," she said, "I have no least wish to excuse Albert—he behaved shockingly!—still I do think you have punished him enough! Wives have forgiven their husbands for such things before this. We should remember that to 'err is human, to forgive divine!'"

And Catherine said :

"Mamma, dear, I have no desire to punish him. I cannot help it that he killed my love for him. I could no more make myself other to him than I am, than I could keep this rose from withering! There, let us talk no more upon the subject. He will find consolation in time, I have no doubt. But my life is ruined, and it is his work!"

In late September a few men and their wives, with a sprinkling of unmarried folks of both sexes, came down to The Firs for the shooting, according to the long-standing hospitable custom there. Amongst the men came Horace Gilbard. Albert had heard his wife announce to her mother her intention of asking him, and though he swore a great deal inwardly, he said nothing aloud. He was desperately in love with his wife—that is, as he understood love. Her coldness kept his passion ever alive, and though he knew he could not bring her dead love to life, he determined to lose no chance of winning at least her toleration. For this end he strove to gratify her every wish, to interfere with none of her schemes, till, as we have seen, Mrs. Lennard thought his devotion quite touching.

Horace was at a loss to understand the warm welcome accorded to him by his host, who in London had seemed to regard him with anything but favour. He mentioned this change to Catherine one day when they were alone. She smiled her long, slow smile, and said :

"I told you I should be mistress here."

This was a very trying time for Albert d'Aurelles. His jealousy was roused; he morbidly imagined all kinds of evil,



but he kept pace with his purpose. Whether he was with Gilbard in the open air, on slaughter bent, or with him in the smoking-room, his manner was uniformly civil, if not to say absolutely hearty, while the care he strove to take of his wife—for she would not always endure it—remained undiminished.

Gilbard had brought with him a quaint little black-and-tan terrier, a new purchase, an animal of no great value : but as Catherine seemed to have taken a fancy to it, he begged her acceptance of little "Topsy," and she, after a slight hesitation, was pleased to accept his gift. This Albert noted, and with no pleasure. Still he restrained himself, and things went on peaceably enough for about a fortnight. During that time, Topsy, who was a pugnacious little dog, had attacked with some show of force a delicately-built spaniel, the property of Albert.

He and his wife happened to be in the grounds at the time ; they had just come in from riding. With a look of rage, which the occasion quite failed to justify, Albert descended upon the too pugilistically inclined Topsy, and with his riding-whip administered to it a sound thrashing, only desisting at his wife's earnest entreaties.

"Take care it does not happen again," he said, "or it may go more hardly with your favourite !"

But it did happen again. Only two days afterwards Catherine was crossing the hall when she heard a sound of snarling and barking. She hurried forward, suspecting what was wrong. At the same moment her husband appeared, and seized, from the wall where it hung, a real instrument of torture, a whip with curled and knotted lash, used for the subjugation of some huge mastiff or fierce bloodhound. Before she could utter a word the cruel lashes, wielded with all the man's uttermost strength of rage, the stronger for having been so long kept under, fell with frightful effect on the little offender's back, eliciting absolute shrieks of agony. But the fiendish part of the man's nature was up now, and while she prayed for mercy on her pet, he grasped her wrist with his left hand and held it as in a vice so that she could neither fly nor interfere, while his right hand rained down mercilessly blow after blow. In time the shrieks failed into a wail, and then into a sound, half-sob, half-moan.

"There !" he cried, when he had sated his fiendish rage, flinging the whip from him ; "your favourite will not need a second lesson !"

“At least finish your work!” cried Catherine, who was white with passion, as she threw herself on the ground beside Topsy. “You see the dog is dying! Kill it outright!”

“That you can get a servant to do,” he answered, lighting a cigarette and strolling away.

“It shall not suffer another moment!” said Catherine, and taking up the whip, which had a heavy metal handle, she dealt with her firm strong hand, just where she knew it must be instantly mortal, the one merciful blow that would put her pet out of its suffering.

The incident, as may be imagined, changed her cold indifference towards her husband into loathing of him. It also inspired her with terror of him, as it did Mrs. Lennard on her daughter’s account. Further sorrow was in store for Catherine. Before October closed, that gentle mother’s pure and blameless life passed away, after an attack of congestion of the lungs, which terminated fatally on the fifth day. Up to almost the last her recovery had been hoped for. Before she sank into the final stupor, she expressed a wish to see Horace Gilbard alone. Of course he came to her at once. Then she bade him, speaking with difficulty between her short and laboured breaths, not to desert her child, now left to the sole care of a man who could prove himself such a brute. There was no knowing what such a man might not do in a fit of rage.

Horace promised he would do his best never to lose sight of Catherine for long, and he tried to comfort the mother by reminding her that great brutes were as a rule great cowards; but with all due regard for traditional wisdom I venture to think that more than one exception will be found to prove that rule.

Of course with Mrs. Lennard’s death the shooting party came to a close; even Gilbard had reluctantly to take his departure; and The Firs was deserted, but for a few servants and the master and mistress thereof.

Those were sad months to poor Catherine which followed, shut up in the big deserted house, saddened by the memory of her mother, alone, quite, but for the servants, with a man for whom she had not only no love, but from whom she now shrank with a feeling akin to fear—she who before had never dreamed of what fear might be.

The most bearable hours in the day were those when she

took her breakfast by her bright dressing-room fire, wrapped in some dainty morning robe, and reading one of her favourite volumes. Later on the dull work of the day would begin, there would be household directions to be given, calls to be made, callers to be received, as the neighbours did their best to "cheer poor Madame d'Aurelles's" solitude. Luncheon and dinner, *tête-à-tête* with her husband, were silent meals, but for the exchange of a few observations of a purely formal kind. Dinner over, she would retire to the drawing-room, where she had passed so many a happy evening with her mother.

There, while she sat before the glowing fire, even while she turned over the pages of the newest novel, she would be thinking of the dreadful failure her life had been. Other women, not loving, had married and had been happy and prosperous in all ways ; but she, because she had so high an ideal of love, would not desecrate that ideal. In putting Horace away from her when she discovered that she never had loved him as it was in her nature to love, she thought she had done only what was right. And how had it turned out ? Her youth had passed in her own dreams of romance, and now it was over ! God, to realize that it was *over* ! That was what hurt her so.

Nothing but this one dreadful fact seemed real ! Other women in her position might have addressed themselves to other interests, but this was not possible to Catherine. Her nature was too intensely, too profoundly romantic, to feel interest in anything which did not use those great emotional forces which lay, by many people quite unsuspected, beneath the langour of her manner.

If all the circumstances of the case had been known, Albert would have got no pity, because men so placed never *are* pitied. The untempted, and therefore the faithful, husbands hail the opportunity as one on which to flaunt the banner of their virtue ; the *unfaithful* ones think that a man who could not keep such a little affair dark from his wife must be a fool who deserves all he gets ! And yet the man did deserve some amount of pity. Many other women would have loved him in spite of his unfaithfulness. On the discovery of it there would have been a dreadful scene ; red lavender and all the rest of it ; protestations on his part never again to be untrue in act or word—protestations which to him would mean nothing, and then would have followed forgiveness, and joy of the forgiven—who would draw

a long breath and pledge himself to be more careful if ever again his feet strayed from the path of rectitude !

For Albert, Catherine had made no scene. She had only, as we know, turned to ice. If she was lonely, I think he was even lonelier. He took to regularly frequenting the "Three Jolly Drummers," where he would sit in the bar talking to those who came and went, smoking, and drinking much brandy-and-water. It wanted but a day or two to Christmas. Was any Christmas angel abroad on the air, I wonder, through the wild wind and the swirling snow, through the snow-charged clouds, which, parting from time to time, revealed the moon's flying face? Was any power trying to bring two sundered souls together again? One thing is certain, that as Albert sat there, early in the evening, sipping his first glass of brandy-and-water, a cloud seemed to roll away from his spirit, and to show him the face of his wife as he remembered it before she had become his wife ; and to the man's strong passion there came a great, resistless, all-sweeping-away rush of soul love ! He asked himself how he could have wronged her ? how he could have been unfaithful to her ? A madman ! nay, worse ! Oh, surely, surely he had not lost her beyond recovery ! He was alone and she was alone ! Once more he would cast himself at her feet. He had sinned against other women and been forgiven. Why should this woman be alone implacable ? He would go to her.

He left his brandy-and-water scarcely tasted, and went out into the night—the night of wild wind and fitful moonlight. The little village was deserted, and the only sound of life which the wind brought with it was the baying of some deep-chested watchful dog. He reached the house, and rang a peal at the bell. Catherine, sitting in the drawing-room reading, started to hear the hall-bell at that hour. It could not be her husband back so early ; who could it be, then ? But after all it was her husband, she saw, as the door opened, and he walked in. He shut it behind him and came over to where she was sitting.

"Catherine !" he said.

"Yes," she answered, without raising her eyes.

"Catherine, I can bear this no longer ! I have sinned against you, and I have repented. You must come back to me, my wife ! You must love me again !"

He knelt down by her and caught her hands in his. How slight and cool and white they were, with soft old lace clinging



around the wrists ! How fair she was, with the lamplight and the firelight falling on her warm-tinted hair, and on her dress, which showed to such advantage the full seductive figure !

She looked at him with mild surprise in her soft steadfast eyes ; then she said, with neither pity nor resentment in her voice :

“ You ask for something which it is not in my power to give you. You might as well ask me to give you a star out of the sky. I loved you once, and I love you no more. I have not the power to make dead things live again. I am sorry for myself and sorry for you, but I cannot make things otherwise than they are.”

She rose and moved towards the door, but he intercepted her, and, reclaiming her hands, spoke, while his eyes burned into hers.

“ Catherine, is this final ? Are these your last words to me on this subject ? ”

“ I could never speak differently. Let me pass, please. I am tired. I wish to be alone.” He caught her to him, as it were ; crushing her against him, while he kissed her fiercely till she was breathless ; then he stood holding her with one arm, the other raised as in the act to strike. “ Are you going to treat me as you did my dog ? ” she asked. “ Well, I would much rather bear your blows than your caresses—besides, then I could be divorced.”

“ No ! ” he replied, his eyes full of rage ; “ I would like to treat you just in the same way ; but Frenchmen do not beat their wives ; unfortunately, it is not the custom of the country. Go now, and may God never forgive you ! ”

With that he passed from the room, and she heard the great street-door thunder behind him. She sat alone, and her heart was bitter within her.

He returned to the “ Three Jolly Drummers,” and there drank brandy till his brain reeled and the homeward path seemed to sway beneath his feet. He had never really been drunk before, and the experience was unpleasant. He awoke in the morning somewhat disgusted with himself, his throat parched, his head throbbing. Following the prescribed course, he ate hard biscuits and drank brandy-and-soda, with such good effect that before long he was himself again, and again in the evening frequented the “ Three Jolly Drummers,” taking care, however, to drink



more soberly ; but for all that the demon of drink had him in his clutches.

That sick craving for stimulant which, once acquired, seldom leaves a man till life leaves him and death makes his lips dust, had taken hold of him. The confirmed drunkard, avoided by his friends, left wholly, as a rule, to himself, is regarded by most people as a happy, easy-going kind of gentleman, who takes up with melancholia as an amusement, who regards fits and such-like pleasantnesses as special favours on the part of a benign Providence, especially benign to him.

“Poor fellow!” say the most charitably disposed of us. “What a pity it is he is so self-indulgent!” If such a life were bared to us, what should we see? No festival, verily! I think, but a horror of great darkness, a man mentally prostrate, held by the glitter of insatiate eyes, secured in the clutch of unrelenting hands, of a monster who is breaking him, body and soul! No, it never strikes his good friends that he is the most miserable of men, set apart from his happier brethren, doomed to see the dreadful end coming nearer and nearer to him every day, yet powerless to avert it, for to all practical purpose he is as powerless as is a fly in the web of a spider. Now and then, but very rarely, some strong-winged angel with triumphant blast may come to the rescue, but, as a rule, the malady is without cure. Of course there are various stages of the complaint, and some reach the later stages more rapidly than others. Such was the case with Albert d’Aurelles ; and through winter and early spring he drank, under protest of his better self ; so, though he drank a great deal too much, there was yet something of method in his madness.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

AS spring came on Catherine’s health declined, and when May was come, with its festival of birds and flowers, she was weak and at a low ebb of vitality. Her doctor said that she must have change ; but her means were small. The physician spoke to D’Aurelles, who then bethought him of his cottage in France, on the coast of Brittany, where his sister lived.

“We will let The Firs, and go to Brittany for the season,” he said to Catherine. “My sister Aglae is good, and will take care of you.”

And Catherine, willing enough to be out of England, consented. So it was settled, and one clear moon-lit May night found husband and wife on their way to St. Malo.

Catherine went below almost at once ; Albert, cigar in mouth, paced the deck. He, too, was glad to be on his way to France, his own country, where so much romance had befallen him ; he leant over the ship’s side watching the shining tracks of water made by her on-pressing keel, hearing, as half in a dream, the steps of the sailors as they came and went, or now and then, through the stillness, the cry of “Boat ahead !”

At length the long shining reaches of Southampton Water were traversed, and the ship, as it were with a more confident, or rather more imperious, tread, went out into the sea and the crisp sea-air. Ah, happy sea-air, which the sea keeps ever chaste and strong ! A sailor had caught the exhilaration, and was singing to himself as he went about his work. Albert was thinking of many things when he heard a light step beside him, and felt a hand upon his arm.

“Albert !” said a low, but withal penetrating, voice. He started as though he had been stung—but by pain or passion who shall say ? He turned, and faced his old love.

“So we meet once more,” he said, taking her outstretched and perfectly-gloved hand. “It is an odd coincidence.”

“It is not odd,” she rejoined. “It is no coincidence. It is Fate.”

“Have you been in England long ?” he asked.

“About a month.”

“Where are you going now ?”

“Why, to St. Malo, of course.”

“And then, where ?”

“Where *you* are going ! Oh, my friend, I have wearied for you and waited for you !” She stood close to him, laying both her hands on his arm, and while her passionate dark eyes shone in the moonlight : “I knew you must come back to me,” she went on. “But tell me—where are you going ?”

“To stay with my sister.”

“At St. Jean ? The air is perfect. I will stay there, too.”

“Delphine,” he said, “I am not travelling alone.”

“No! And who is your companion?”

“My wife, and my curse!” he replied, passionately.

“You ought never to have married,” she answered. “And an Englishwoman? Those women of snow! The thing is impossible!”

“It is irrevocable,” he said, drearily.

“But you have me still,” she whispered, pressing closer to him.

“Yes!” he cried, turning on her with the desperate look of one famished for some womanly love, some passion, some tenderness! “I have you, and I was a fool to leave you, my queen! I might have known that you, and you only, were for me the world’s one woman!”

“That is nonsense,” she answered, quietly. “You could never be content with only me; but you would come back to me as to no other woman. That I do know!”

They were unseen of any just then. He kissed her, and felt his kiss returned.

By eleven o’clock the next morning the boat was alongside the quay of St. Malo. Dear St. Malo! so dirty and so picturesque? After breakfasting at one of the hotels, and an interval of rest, Albert and Catherine proceeded in a somewhat ramshackle carriage, one such as Brittany proudly vaunts, to their destination.

After two hours of jolting through long, poplar-bordered roads, and much swearing on the part of the driver, and much unnecessary flogging of his unhappy horse (nowhere are horses so shamefully ill-treated as in France), the primitive village of St. Jean was gained. St. Jean is much like most French villages, only perhaps a little more deserted than most. They first passed the unfailing blacksmith, who seemed to be perennially engaged in shoeing a much-belaboured and very lean horse; then the *café*, with a glimpse through its open door of a vista of wooden benches and tables, and men playing dominoes and drinking coffee. How Frenchmen of the labouring class always seem able to find time for these recreations is a mystery which has never been solved to my satisfaction. Then they passed the great shop of the place, in which you could buy grocery and hosiery, and all manner of hardware goods, and much else besides. Also, behind the shop was a small room which served as a second *café* of the village, where you could buy glasses of

*eau-de-vie* over the counter for ten centimes a *petit verre*. Then there was the little church, to which the good went ; a druggist's, a few cottages, and that was about the whole of St. Jean—if we except the dogs and the begging children who seemed to divide the street between them. The children, of course, pursued the carriage, but the driver shouted at them and slashed the foremost of them with his whip, at which they dispersed, some laughing, others yelling.

The house known as Les Ormes was about two miles outside of the village. It stood back some way from the road, and was surrounded by a growth of wild, unkempt, elfish-looking trees, through whose branches the wind, when there was any, moaned drearily. As the carriage drew up in front of the house, the sun was beginning to set ; it struck on the trees, and the wilderness-like garden, and on the white lace cap of Mademoiselle d'Aurelles, which only partly concealed her grey hair. It must have turned grey prematurely, for the face was the face of a woman who has not yet reached the middle period of life ; it was not a prepossessing face ; the forehead was low, the eyes resolute, and of a clear grey ; the lips were thin, and about the corners of them lurked that look of cruelty at times discernible in her brother.

“ You *may* be good to me—but I shall be surprised if you are ! ” said Catherine to herself, as she greeted her sister-in-law.

Les Ormes was not a cheerful house. The ample garden which surrounded it had all run to waste. In a corner of it, supposed to be fenced off, a pig had its habitation ; but the fence was a slight one, and quite as often as not, dirty and bloated, he might be seen waddling and ruminating, as only a pig can ruminate, about the grass-grown paths of the garden, where the sighing poplars stood.

On the lawn a cock and hens and chickens pecked and strutted to and fro, and seemed to be for ever full of talk. They had no business to be there ; but the poultry-yard door was scarcely ever closed, and, like other things, they naturally preferred being where they knew they had no right to be. Occasionally they were joined by a self-important turkey. When thus reinforced, they would make an invasion into the heart of the enemy's camp—namely, into the parlour through the open window. Sometimes they would find it unoccupied, and would take possession with much



glee ; then they would be discovered and dispersed entirely, like the true cowards they were, seeing that not even a turkey is a match for wicked man.

A great curly dog, chained up on account of his fierceness—and who on seeing any one leaped madly to the end of his chain, howling and foaming at the mouth with rage because he could not lodge his teeth in that person's flesh—did not brighten up the surroundings of the house, which in itself was remarkably old and remarkably dirty. The woman-servant of the place, Aglae d'Aurelles's right hand, looked well-nigh as old as the house, and of her voice only a whisper seemed left.

The first thing Catherine did on going to her bed-room was to throw open the window. The room smelt musty as a long-closed church.

"Are you hungry?" asked Aglae, of her sister-in-law, a little later.

"No, thanks."

"That is lucky, for there is not much in the house. Soup and *bouilli*—that is all."

"That will be more than enough," replied Catherine ; and till the meal was served she went into the garden.

Cheerless as it was, it was less cheerless than the house. She wondered if such a change of air as this was going to benefit her as the doctor hoped it would. Before seeing them, we all acquire impressions of places, and she had fancied the house where her husband's sister lived a much smaller place, but standing in the midst of a bright flower-garden overrun with sunlight. Then she had hoped to like her husband's sister, of whom she had also conceived a very different impression from the reality.

As soon as the meal was finished, Albert rose and went out, saying he should not return till late ; and shortly afterwards, Catherine went wearily to bed, to lie awake and hear the hours go by, and occasionally the dismal howling of the dog and rattling of his chain. As day dawned, a fact to which the birds gave glad assent, she fell asleep and dreamed of Horace Gilbard, and, as is the case sometimes, loved him in her dream much more than she had ever done in her waking hours.

She rose late, and having taken coffee in her own room, went to the *salon*—a room not less depressing in its aspect than the other apartments of Les Ormes. Like the rest, it had a musty



smell. Over the bare slippery floor no rugs were strewn ; the furniture was old and looked worm-eaten ; on the centre table, which was draped in a heavy, pall-like looking cloth, stood a few books and a card-plate ; on the mantelpiece was, of course, the inevitable French clock. An exclamation of pleasure escaped her as she caught sight of a piano. She was so weak that the smallest exertion tried her, but she rose from her chair and crossed the room to where the instrument stood—only to find that it was locked. She had just regained her seat when Marie-Jeanne handed her a card bearing the name :

“MADAME DESCHAMPS.”

“Ask her to enter,” said Catherine, wondering who the stranger might be.

In a moment Marie-Jeanne ushered in a fashionable, overdressed woman, whose age might have been about thirty-five, though it was difficult to say, the handsome face, with its passionless lips, and bold, brilliant eyes, was so obviously “made-up.” She was a large woman, but still retained a shapely figure, as large women may do who have not brought forth olive branches.

“As an old and dear friend of your husband’s,” she began, in tones that rang clear and bell-like, “I have taken the liberty of calling upon you.”

“It gives me pleasure to see you,” answered Catherine, rather overpowered by the other woman’s dominant presence.

The stranger regarded her from head to foot as if she had been some curious kind of animal.

Catherine returned the look languidly, and then said, in tones as languid :

“Do you think we have ever met before, madame ?”

“Yes,” returned the other, nothing abashed. “I fancy we met on the St. Malo boat. You look ill—is that the case ?”

“It is so. I am far from strong. My husband has brought me here for the benefit of my health.”

“Then he has brought you to a strange place ; but when you know him a little better you will know that his loving-kindnesses *are* sometimes a little odd. But perhaps you are too weak for callers ? I wanted to see you, and I *have* seen you, so now will wish you good-day.”

"I am not strong," replied Catherine, extending her hand, and making no effort to detain her visitor.

A few minutes afterwards, Aglae d'Aurelles came in, and, going to the table, glanced at the card-plate, in which lay Madame Deschamps' card.

"So she has been here, has she?" she said, with a strange smile. "I am glad I was out of the way."

"Who is she?" asked Catherine, still languidly.

"One of his old loves—a discarded mistress!" replied the Frenchwoman, brutally. "I thought they had quarrelled, but they seem to have come together again."

"And I have been allowed to shake hands with such a woman!" cried Catherine, starting up, no longer languid, but trembling all over with indignation, the flame of it on her cheeks and in her eyes. "How dare you insult me in this shameful way? How *dare* you?" she exclaimed, turning upon her husband, who had just entered, her voice thrilling with the sense of the wrong which had been done her.

He was smoking, and remained quite unmoved, save for a look of evil triumph in his eyes; then he remarked, coolly:

"Is the firework display over? It was certainly brilliant! Because, if so, let me inform you of a fact which you seem to have forgotten. I shall have whom I like to visit at my house, and for as long as I choose. This lady had a curiosity to see you, and she had my free consent to gratify that curiosity."

"I will return to England this very night!" Catherine cried, vehemently, white and trembling.

"No you will not," he replied. "You are too weak. Your own life you are free to risk if you choose, but not the life of my unborn child!"

For the child that might be he cared nothing, but it gave him a hold over her. She had been ice to him when he had been fire; and to humiliate her in every way that he could was the manner in which he revenged himself.

She knew that his words were fatally true, that she was too weak, indeed! that only by a great effort of will now had she kept herself from fainting! Still mastering herself, she managed to get out of the room without faltering and with her head held high, for indignation lent her strength.

"You are a charming husband, so thoughtful and tender," remarked Aglae, when the brother and sister were alone.

“ She has a spirit, and I will break it,” he answered.

Two or three evenings after this, Catherine was sitting in the *salon* before dinner, when she heard her husband’s voice.

“ My wife,” he said, as he threw open the door, “ will, I know, be charmed to welcome you ! ”

He entered with Delphine Deschamps, her hand resting confidently upon his arm. Catherine rose without a word, and moved towards the door, which Albert shut, and set his back against it.

“ It seems to me, my friend,” said Madame Deschamps indifferently, throwing herself into a chair, and regarding the rings on her fingers, “ that if I am to be entertained you will have to do it all yourself. Madame d’Aurelles does not seem amicably disposed towards your friends.”

“ Madame d’Aurelles will do what I tell her,” he said, fiercely.

“ I think not,” said Catherine, who had retained perfect self-possession. Then swiftly she passed through the open French window into the garden, re-entered the house by another door, and went straight to her room, where she remained for the rest of the evening. She was without candles, or dinner ; and though she rang the bell repeatedly, it was unanswered, so she undressed in the dark and went to bed.

Her room was over the *salon*. As she lay still, she could hear the voices of her husband and the woman he had dared to bring into the house, into her presence. They seemed to be talking fast, and more or less excitedly. Her tones at times became almost resonant ; his, fitful and unsteady. Then there was a sound of chairs being pushed back, and then a woman’s shriek rang through the house. Catherine sprang out of bed, and rushed down to the *salon*, where she found Madame Deschamps cowering in a corner of the room, while Albert stood in front of her, his eyes on fire with rage and drink, and a knife in his hand.

“ Save me, save me ! ” cried the terrified woman. “ He has struck me, and now he would kill me ! ”

“ He is drunk,” said Catherine, wresting the knife from his hand and casting it to the other end of the room. Then, taking the brandy-bottle from the table, she flung it through the window into the garden. At the same moment Albert, raising his hand with an imprecation, lurched, and fell heavily to the ground.

“There he can lie till he is sober,” said Catherine. “It will be the best thing for him.”

“I told him he drank too much, and the quarrel began with that,” said Madame Deschamps, recovering her composure, as she put on her hat and mantle and turned to go. “I thank you for saving my life,” she added.

“I don’t think he would really have killed you,” answered Catherine. And so these two parted to meet no more.

The next day Madame Deschamps left the room in St. Jean which Albert had taken for her, and when he came to his senses he found this note in her somewhat large handwriting :

“After your last night’s conduct, I hope never to see you again. You are a drunkard and a brute, and I wish your wife joy of you !”

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

ALBERT swore many oaths ; and going to the *auberge*, sat there the whole day drinking, and at night had to be carried home. The next day found him in a sober frame of mind ; and, as if ashamed of himself, he remained at home all day and avoided drink. So between drunken bouts, and fits of shamed-faced sobriety, the next two or three months wore away ; and one bright July day the old village doctor appeared at Les Ormes, and shortly afterwards the baby face of a little daughter lay on Catherine’s bosom.

As the days developed the little life, she was glad to see in the baby features no likeness to its father. Yet for him, as it were, a new feeling had come with the new life. He was unhappy, lonely, disappointed. That was why he had taken to drinking. He had wronged her in the early days of their marriage. When she had most believed in him, he had desecrated her feelings for him ; what had been holy fire in her he had turned to ice. Verily her loss had been very great ! But was not his loss great, too ? He had pleaded with her ; she remembered *how* he had pleaded, and still she had been marble to him. What she had said was true—she could not make a

dead thing live ; but she might have been more pitiful, she need not have told him the truth so bitterly ! She might have feigned a little warmth, even if she had felt none. If God judged man as she had judged him, what hope of mercy would there be ?

So it came to pass that when she was again up and about, there was a marked change in her manner to him. She spoke to him of "our child," tried to interest him in it, and one evening when he was sitting with the brandy-bottle before him, she came in, and laid her hand on his shoulder, and said :

"Don't, just to please your wife ! I want you to take me for a moonlight walk !" To her surprise, he rose and did as she desired ; and they walked, almost in seeming like happy man and wife, through the sweet grave beauty of the late summer evening, at that point of time when the year first begins to think about death.

But the work of reform Catherine had proposed to herself was impossible now. It was too late. When he was in liquor, which on the whole was more frequently than not, he treated her either with brutality, or with maudlin affection, and she could not tell which of the two more alarmed and disgusted her.

One September afternoon, when it was all quiet, and a soft haze hung over everything, Catherine, having left the baby asleep, was wandering about the garden, which in spite of its neglected condition had a kind of forlorn beauty about it, when she was startled from a reverie into which she had fallen by a footstep, and looking up she saw Horace Gilbard at her side.

"Why, what a glad surprise !" she said, giving him her hand. "You are the very last person I should have thought of seeing !"

"I suppose because I am so completely out of your thoughts?"

"No ; you are wrong. You are in my thoughts very frequently."

"You are looking very ill," he said, in tones of dreadful apprehension, fixing his fine dog-like eyes upon her face.

"I am a little tired," she said, as they began walking together. "My life is not a happy one, you know."

"It is a death in life !" he answered.

"You got my address from The Firs, I suppose?"

"Yes, and I was determined to find you out. I knew you were suffering."

"I will be better, I hope, when we are back at The Firs. But



tell me about yourself, Horace. Is there a Mrs. Horace Gilbard yet?"

"There never will be," he replied, in his deep, low tones. "I can love no woman unless in all ways she is my ideal. I will marry no woman that I do not love. And for me the world holds but one ideal woman, and she is another man's wife."

"How faithful you are!" she said, and let him take her hand, but drew it away swiftly as her husband, flushed from drink, came suddenly on the scene. Her eyes asked Gilbard to go—which he did, having exchanged a few words with D'Aurelles.

As soon as he was gone, Albert hissed in her ear: "Revenge, revenge! That man whom I have always hated was holding your hand! That is ground enough for a duel, and this little pleasantry will cost him his life, if my hand is what it was!"

"Listen," she said, giving each word deadly emphasis. "If you do that, by everything in which I most believe, I will kill myself, and haunt you night and day, and curse you night and day, till you go mad with fear. This man is my friend, and loved me once. Do you make life so sweet to me that I should care to keep it? What I say I will do, *I do!* You know me, Albert!"

Yes, he did know her. She had attacked him on what she knew to be his vulnerable point. He came of a superstitious family, and in his present shattered state of nerves, he was only too ready to fancy visions and conjure up ghosts.

"You love this man?" he said, coming close to her. "Tell me the truth."

"He is my friend, and I will protect him!"

"You were glad enough to be rid of him once," he sneered, "and to fall into my hands."

"Before I knew the thing you would become," she replied, making as if she would walk past him to the house.

"It was you that drove me to drink," he said, stopping her. "When I loved you most, you were a snow devil, and now you reproach me!" and, swept away by a fit of ungovernable rage, he raised his clenched hand and struck her on the forehead.

She gave a low cry and fell to the ground. For the first time in her life she had fainted. On Albert this seemed to have a sobering effect. She was carried to the house, and when she recovered, it was to find him beside her on his knees entreating forgiveness.

When Horace called the next day, Albert was out, but he found Albert's sister, who had evidently received her instructions, and who followed Madame d'Aurelles and her guest from place to place.

"It is insufferable," said Catherine, speaking in French, and glad that she should be overheard. Then to Horace: "Come, and take me for a walk in the woods; we have wonderful woods, not more than a mile away."

Of course he was only too glad, and so they escaped.

"All the same," she said, when they were alone, "it was a risky thing to do, but I was determined she should not have her way. We must be careful how we meet at all. Our meeting yesterday resulted in this," and she pushed up her hair and showed him the traces of a blow.

With all the eloquence Horace could muster, he pleaded with her to leave this man. That she could obtain a separation he had not the least doubt.

"Your very life here is not safe," he said. "To think of your being at the mercy of a drunken brute such as this wretch has become, and of that hateful, sinister thing, his sister, who would do his will in all things! Catherine, in a few days I must return to England. I shall have no peace, day or night, if I think of your living here in these people's power! Tell me, tell me, that you will get a separation?"

"Don't be so troubled, my dear," she said, tenderly, adding with a sad smile, "I can take care of myself."

"You won't leave him, then?"

"No; that is, certainly not yet. I might have to do so, if things get to be much worse than they are; but I am always hoping that they will be better."

"They never will be," he said, "never!"

"Well, let us talk no more about it," she answered, gently and firmly. "You used to say in the old days that when my mind was made up to anything, no power in earth or heaven would keep me from it."

"And you are the same still?"

"I suppose so. Would you like me to be another woman?"

"No, only changed in that, for this once, because I am so terribly anxious about you!" and his face of torturing anxiety was a thing pitiful to behold.

"Don't look so dreadfully sad!" she almost pleaded. "I

want you to amuse me, for the little while we are together—to take me out of myself.”

“Amuse you?” he groaned—“amuse you, when I believe your very life to be hanging on a hair? Catherine, I would try to do even that for you; but how shall I? How begin? Shall I tell you the latest witticism from *Punch*, or the political rumours which were in all men’s mouths just before I left England?”

He spoke with a desperate levity more terrible than any tears would have been.

“No,” she answered, “I don’t think that *would* amuse me. Have you forgotten there are two things women like—sweetmeats and scandal? Have you neither for me?”

“Sweets I have none, and of scandal but a small store.”

“Well, such as it is, let me have it. Have you forgotten how long I have been out of the world?”

So he gave her all his little odds and ends of news; and they walked about the woods together much as they had done in the old far-off days about other woods and under other skies. Such a lull in nature often comes before some crisis. When it was time for them to part, he looked round. There was not a soul in sight, and she answered the yearning in his eyes by raising her lips for him to kiss.

“There,” she said, “don’t be too unhappy!”

So they parted, and that evening at sundown a mad wind sprang up, and went storming over the land like a great wind-sea, and ships were wrecked and great trees uprooted.

The next morning Catherine was sitting alone in the *salon*, when Gilbard walked in.

“How are you?” he asked, his voice fraught with a lover’s concern.

“I am as well as usual, quite.”

“No fresh horror has happened?”

“No, really.”

“That is well. I had such a dreadful dream last night.”

“But you don’t believe in dreams?”

“Not altogether. Just a little, perhaps. In my own experience I have known some strange dreams come strangely and dreadfully true; so that now, when I dream anything horrible, I think of those other dreams, and while the spell of it is upon me I am unhappy. Morbid, I know; and in the nineteenth

century one should *not* be morbid. All the same, there are some weaknesses one cannot help."

"It was imprudent of you to come to-day," she said, "when you were here yesterday."

"Forgive me," he answered, "I have come to say good-bye."

"What!—you are going?"

"Yes, to-night. I have been called back on business sooner than I expected."

"I am sorry," she said, and her face fell; "for I have no friends here. Madame Lefevre, the doctor's wife, comes to see me sometimes. She is a kind, well-meaning little woman, but she wearies me with her incessant stream of small talk."

She looked so sad and tired that he came close to her.

"People may be coming," he said; "I want to say good-bye to you now."

She had risen and was standing near the stove.

"Good-bye!" she said, with great sweetness and regret in her voice.

"God guard and bless you, my life's one, only love?" he cried, and their lips met in a close farewell kiss. They started apart as the door opened suddenly, and Albert came in. Had he seen? He said nothing, but the look in his eyes told them that he had. The door was scarcely closed behind him when it opened again, and this time Marie Jeanne announced Madame Lefevre, the doctor's wife, and the voluble little Frenchwoman entered. She had come, she said, to spend a long morning with her dear Catherine. There was so much she wanted to tell her, and she knew dear Catherine would be amused to hear.

Albert chatted with the visitor for a little while, then he rose, and, excusing himself by saying that he had business of importance—business which would brook no delay—he left the room and the house.

Gilbard took a hurried leave and followed him. D'Aurelles's hard, set face, and the look in his eyes, troubled Catherine's faithful lover, and he resolved, scarcely knowing what would come of it, to follow him and find out, if possible, what this "important business" might be. If D'Aurelles went on foot, nothing would be more easy. Yes, he was going to walk. He closed the garden-gate behind him, and turned in the direction of the nearest market-town. Horace followed, keeping at a discreet distance.



It was a gray day, with occasional glimpses of bleak sunshine through the trees on either side of the road, the wind-swept road, from which it was pleasant to get into the comparative shelter of the town. D'Aurelles walked fast, but Gilbard kept him in sight all the way. D'Aurelles went into a *café*, but came out, after a short time, none the worse for liquor, to Gilbard's surprise. Had he some motive to-day for keeping his head? In front of the gunsmith's he stopped, went in, and Gilbard saw a revolver taken from the window. He narrowly escaped being discovered, as Albert came out rather suddenly, thrusting something into his breast-pocket. He paused in front of another *café*, looked in longingly, then resolutely turned and went his way, out of the town.

The village of St. Jean could be reached either by the road or by the shore. Albert had come by the road, but for his return he chose the shore. The tide was coming in, but was yet far off from the cliffs. There would be ample time to allow of the passage being made. Along the shore Gilbard followed—still, of course, at some distance behind. The wild wind whirled the sand and flying foam in his eyes, but through the storm, which was rising higher and higher, he never lost sight of his man. The sea raged, the wind shrieked, the gulls clamoured. He followed.

That revolver! what was the meaning of it? What would a desperate man not do, thus armed? And what was *he* to do? Overtake him! speak to him? Could he do anything by speaking? If he roused his anger, and took the contents of the weapon in his own body, would that be regarded as *her* expiation for that kiss? If D'Aurelles shot him, would that save Catherine? Would it not rather leave her in deadly danger, unprotected and alone. Would her husband not wreak on *her* his vengeance for that farewell caress! That the kiss and the revolver were associated, Horace felt sure. *He* had brought this peril upon Catherine, and now, what should he do to shield her? He could do only one thing. He followed. At least this gave him time to think.

The sea thundered upon the shore; and higher and higher the wind howled and raved along the cliffs. Horace was drenched with spray every now and then, as some great wave leapt up in showers of foam. But his hands burnt; his head throbbed as he asked himself again and again how he would



prevent what he believed to be Albert's deadly purpose? He might die for Catherine, but then how could he defend her?

Presently Albert paused, but for nothing more important than to endeavour to light a cigarette. He endeavoured in vain; for however he strove to shield the light with his hands, the fierce wind blew it out every time he tried. He swore, and went on a few steps; then he hesitated, looked about him, and retraced his way a little, and, turning his back on the sea, went up to the cliff, stooped down and disappeared. For a moment Gilbard wondered; then the mystery was clear to him. For the purpose of lighting his cigarette, D'Aurelles had entered one of the many caves which line that part of the coast. As Gilbard lingered near, waiting for him, far above the roar of the wind and sea came a harsh crash like thunder, the sand and spray flew in his face like a shower of small shot, and the solid ground seemed to shake beneath his feet!

It was as if some immense weight had been projected from the cliff's side. Indeed, this was just what had happened, as Gilbard, staggering back startled, immediately perceived. A huge boulder had been dislodged by the force of the wind, and had fallen on the sand, completely blocking up the entrance to the cave which the doomed man had entered, and wherein, like any wild beast for whom the snare had been laid, he was indeed *trapped!*

Did a shriek pierce outwards from its depths? or was it the wind? Gilbard could not tell. He only knew that the man who had been the curse of the woman he loved, whose black heart he believed to be planning her death, was trapped! that she was safe from him! It would not have been possible for Gilbard's unaided strength even to stir the huge mass of fallen rock. Was it his duty to rush and shout for help?—that the man, so rescued, might carry out what he believed to be his purpose? or that, at best, he might waste away her life by his drunken brutalities? No, the hand of God was in this!

---

## CHAPTER IX.

THE steamer would leave St. Malo at six o'clock. He would just have time to catch it. He turned and ran at the top of his speed, as if pursued, back to the high road. The wind hurried after him; the gulls clamoured more wildly than ever; the sight of the great staggering waves dizzied him; his brain was reeling, and like one pursued he fled! A light cart was passing swiftly along the road; Gilbard paid the man lavishly for a "lift" to St. Malo. That morning he had sent his luggage thither to be put on board the boat in readiness for him.

The steam was up and roaring, and the gangway was about to be withdrawn when Gilbard rushed on the quay, gesticulating to them to wait for him. The men who were about to haul in the plank held their hands, and he sprang upon the deck of the *Helena*, bound for Southampton.

The sailors on board shouted to the sailors on shore, who shouted back; ropes were cast loose, and the *Helena* steamed through the harbour, and, through the stormy September twilight and the tumult of the sea, stood out for England.

It was a wild sea, indeed. Even the steadiest seamen staggered. As though she had been a thing mortally stricken, the good ship quailed and thrilled as the great waves struck her. Presently they were abreast of a lighthouse, and under it, Gilbard knew, lay that part of the shore he had quitted such a brief while ago; he was close to it again, but now in reality as far from it as if he were already in England. There were only two or three passengers on board beside himself, and they at once went below. Supporting himself by a rope, and drenched by the waves as they burst over the ship, Gilbard stood in the twilight, white with foam and loud with wind. With nightfall the gale seemed only to increase, and being chilled to the bone, he followed the example of his fellow-passengers and went below.

He took a little brandy from a flask and flung himself on a sofa. Overhead he could hear the lurching steps of the sailors as they came and went. Now and then came the cry of "Boat ahead!" The engines groaned heavily as they contended with the opposing waves. Gilbard's travelling companions groaned

too. The Frenchman, who was nervous, said he believed they were going down ; to which the Englishman, who was sea-sick, replied that he didn't care if they were. Then to Gilbard, lying in his berth, there came a kind of vision. Far away beyond the ship, he saw into a cave. In it were strange sea-loving things—which he saw as it were from a light in his own eyes, for no light was there—and amongst them a man ran madly backwards and forwards, dashing himself against the unyielding rock till he was one mass of wounds.

Horace sprang up with a cry. His fellow-passengers were too wholly absorbed in their own misery to pay any attention to him. The voice had spoken ! He was a murderer ! Had he hastened for assistance, the fallen mass of rock could have been removed. An animal trapped is shot or knocked on the head, as the case may be, not left to die in darkness, and of thirst and starvation ! He had done something which never in all his life's days could he undo ! The frightful thought made the cold sweat break out upon his forehead, while his brain seethed, and his mouth felt as dry as sand. He argued with himself, tried to think that it was *his* life against *hers* ; under the curse of his life her own was withering ! Yet if he had only thought, there were other ways of saving her—though he saw it now too late. He might have outstripped D'Aurelles, gained Les Ormes by some short cut, warned her of her imminent danger, put forth all the power of his will, and forced her to fly at once. But instead, he had let this thing come to pass. He had left a human creature to the fate of being buried alive !

Overhead, to and fro, went the steps of the lurching sailors. Over the deck swept the wind and the sea—the ear could scarcely distinguish the one from the other. From side to side rolled the ship, at times seeming all but to heel over, and only recovering herself as by a miracle. For his own part, thought Gilbard, he should be glad if she did heel over, so that he might forget in death the frightful thing he had done. But could the deed not yet be undone ? The instant they reached Southampton he would telegraph to Catherine, telling her to have that part of the shore searched for a cave, the mouth of which had been blocked up by a fall of rock, and in which her husband was imprisoned ; but she herself was to come to England at once, because he knew that her husband had designs upon her life. Ah, would it be too late ?

A great wave thundered on the deck. What hissing sound was that? The ship faltered, stopped, and then rolled heavily and helplessly.

“*Ah, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*” cried the little Frenchman, smiting his hands together in abject terror. “Now, indeed, we are lost!”

“The water has burst into the engine-room, and put out the fire!” exclaimed Gilbard, who at once divined what had happened. He rushed up to the drenched deck, whereon even the sailors could scarce keep their footing, and ascertained, as soon as he could get any one to speak to him amid the turmoil, that his conjecture was the right one.

All that dreadful night the *Helena* rolled like a helpless log on the waves. Downstairs the Frenchman prayed continuously, and the Englishman groaned and swore. Gilbard remained on deck, heedless of the risk he ran.

“How long could a man live without food?” he asked the captain suddenly. The captain replied he need not be anxious on that score; they were well provided. Gilbard rejoined that he felt no anxiety, but repeated his question. The captain supposed about three days, and hastened back to the bridge.

In spite of winds and waves, the *Helena* weathered the storm, and with daylight the gale somewhat moderated. It was then discovered how far they had drifted out of their course; and they proceeded under canvas, but very slowly, as the wind, still very high, was against them. All day they made but small headway. At sundown the wind rose again to a gale, and again they had to lie to, expecting every moment that the vessel could not endure the strain put upon her and would go to pieces. This was what every one dreaded except Gilbard, and his one and only dread was lest it should be too late before he got to England. All the night as they lay rolling from side to side, he saw the wild, desperate eyes of the man in the darkness of the cave, but the figure was prostrate now; any hope of deliverance had been given up. The thought consumed him like a flame. His hands were ice, his brain fire. The captain remarked that he looked ill, and recommended breakfast. He answered that he could not eat; that his getting to England within a given time was a matter of life or death. The captain replied that for his own sake as for that of every one else, he should do his best, but they might be thankful if they got there at all.



The night passed, and again with daybreak the gale moderated, and under canvas, as on the previous day, they beat about, endeavouring to regain their course. And now, alarmed by his own symptoms, Gilbard forced himself both to eat and drink. It was a mistake.

They had been out three days, and might be out three more, or more still, said the captain ; it was quite impossible to tell while this weather lasted.

It was ten days after she left St. Malo that the *Helena*, fatally disabled at the last, was towed into Southampton docks by a sister vessel which had picked her up. Of the three passengers on board, one seemed to have lost his reason, and lay helplessly and wildly raving of dark caves and of telegrams to be sent. Horace Gilbard was suffering from acute brain fever. A letter was found upon him, addressed to "H. Gilbard, Esq., Arts Club, London." He was at once conveyed to a hospital at Southampton, and the secretary of the club was communicated with, the result being that several of his friends came down from London to look at the sufferer, where he lay tossing upon his bed, evidently undergoing the most horrible torments ; now fancying himself at sea, now in the terrible darkness of some dreadful cave, now striving wildly to dictate some message, yet never able to succeed ! More than once the doctors gave him up ; but at last the fever abated, and one morning, weak and exhausted, he awoke to consciousness, but it was days before he could associate the facts of the last month together in his mind.

He ascertained that the *Helena* had been ten days on the voyage. He had been ill on land for fourteen days. Ten and fourteen !—nearly a month ! Nothing could be done now. He must accept his punishment. Others before him have been consumed in hell-fires of remorse. Let us hope it is accredited to them in the life to come.

As soon as he could travel, he returned to London, to his chambers. The last time he had crossed their threshold, it had been as an innocent man. Now the curse of a horrid crime, though not perpetrated by himself, lay upon him, and in his heart so separated him from his fellow-men that he exiled himself from all society. He never went to his club, and people wondered what had come to their old friend and brother-member, Gilbard.



Occasionally he was met in the streets, looking more like a ghost than like a man, saying in answer to all inquiries as to why he never came to the club, that he was not quite himself again.

Then in confidence it was whispered that he did his walking between the hours of two and seven A.M., and this was true.

Oh, those never-to-be-forgotten walks, when London seemed to him, indeed, a veritable "City of Dreadful Nights," as depicted by the late James Thomson, in a poem which for firm power it would not be possible to match! Mostly, Gilbard's dreamy beat was over the various bridges. He would lean on the parapet and look down into the river. Beyond, it was the sea; and beyond that—what?

Once he found a woman, driven to despair, in the act of attempting to throw herself over.

"Listen to me," he said. "Life is bitter to me, with an awful secret which I can tell to no one, and yet I live, because I may yet serve one who is dear to me. If there is no one whose life yours could aid or your death make wretched, I have nothing to say. But if help is all you need, I will help you!"

And so he did, and rescued one family from misery. And his own misery, for which there was no cure, had come to him through his zeal to protect the woman he worshipped.

Those dreadful mornings, when through the yellow winter fog the lurid winter sun shone like a ball of fire! Then, worn out in mind and body, he would creep back to his rooms, to fall asleep, and dream, perhaps, that it was all a dream, and thank God rapturously that it was so! Then to awake. Oh, the anguish of knowing the dream false!

\* \* \* \* \*

Waking, late one afternoon, he found, amongst his other letters, one from Catherine d'Aurelles.

He opened it quickly, and read it with eagerness. It informed him of what he knew too well, that on the day he left for England her husband had disappeared. He had been traced to a gunsmith's, where he had bought a revolver, but since he left that shop nothing had been seen or heard of him. It did not seem as if he had contemplated going away, as the balance at his banker's had not been touched, and he had but little ready cash with him. The whole thing was shrouded in mystery. She

had accepted an invitation from some friends living near The Firs to come and stay with them until The Firs should be vacated. She hoped, if it were not too far, he would come down to see her. Her friends (whom he would remember, the Blackstones, of Greythorpe) would make him welcome. She wanted very much to see him, and was always most sincerely his friend, Catherine.

*She* wanted him? Of course he would go to her. He took the next day's train, and reached his destination just as the dusk was falling. She received him alone in much such a room as had been dedicated at The Firs to her especial service. It was in such a room, half-library, half-boudoir, about two years ago, that she had told him the bitter truth—that she loved another with the love that a husband had a right to claim. It was twilight then, too, and she was sitting by the fire.

How it all came back to him !

Now she held out both hands, and said, with heartfelt earnestness in her tones :

“Oh, I *am* so glad to see you ! How cold your hands are ! Come and sit by the fire !” and she drew him to the hearth, still keeping his hands in hers ; he could feel the rings on her fingers. She seated herself near to him, and said : “Aren't *you* a little glad to see me ?”

“Very glad,” he replied—and his voice sounded weak and hollow.

“What is the matter ?” she asked, quickly. “Your voice tells me that you are ill.”

“No, not now ; but I have been.”

And then he told her about the long, dangerous voyage to Southampton, and the subsequent fever.

“*I* was answerable for your illness,” she said. “It was because you were so troubled about me !”

“I think you were partly answerable for it,” he replied ; and then, more to himself than to her : “How I suffered ! I thought I should have gone mad !”

She knelt down by him, took one of his hands, and leant her rose-soft cheek against it.

“My saint !” he said.

“No,” she answered. “No saint, my dear, but a very weak and, if you like, a very womanly woman !”

Later on, they spoke of Albert ; but Horace could not disclose

his dreadful secret, though it was for her that the awful sin had been sinned.

He could not, of course, stay at Greythorpe all the time, but he took a room permanently at the "Three Jolly Drummers," and came and went frequently. He could not fail to see the increasing tenderness of Catherine's manner to him, and a warm, soft light in her eyes which he had never perceived there in the old days when he had dreamt that she loved him. He knew that when a certain number of years have passed and nothing is heard of a missing husband, the law mercifully allows the wife to regard him as dead, so far at least as, in the event of her second marriage, to exempt her from the liability to prosecution for bigamy should the vanished husband reappear. Thus, if Catherine were minded to marry him, a few years hence, he might be her husband without revealing the secret of Albert's death. But even were she so minded—for, after all, what she felt might be mere gratitude—could he ever, in any time to come, marry the wife of the man he had murderously left to perish? Always between himself and Catherine he saw the wild eyes of the desperate and dying man.

She noticed the change in his manner, and it perplexed her. She was wholly at a loss to what to attribute it. Sometimes he would lay his hand on hers, and then take it away with a shudder.

One day she asked him if he liked her no more.

"I shall love you," he answered, "till I die—to the uttermost limits of being! I am not a happy man; but you must ask me no questions."

"Certainly not, if you wish it so," and her tone was cold. "I tell you all *my* thoughts. *You* know all *my* life!"

"If I only *could* tell you!" he groaned, and burst away from her.

So the days wore on, and brought the welcome spring, when Catherine returned to live at The Firs.

Gilbard still retained his room at the "Jolly Drummers," and dined often at The Firs with Madame d'Aurelles, who was now generally regarded, and appeared to regard herself, as widowed.

One evening after dinner they were sitting on the lawn. Catherine had been reading, and the book lay open on her lap; her eyes still bent upon the page. *His* were bent down; he was lost in bitter meditation. Would Conscience never, never stay

its inexorable hand from the lash? Would there be no least respite on this side of the grave? God! it would drive him mad, this remorse that poisoned all the air he breathed!

Between them and the faded light of the setting sun there fell a shadow! With a cry of almost insane terror, Horace sprang up and recoiled. Catherine started and pressed her hand upon her heart; her face was white and her voice faint and faltering, as she said:

"Albert, is it you? Where have you been? What is the mystery?"

"I will tell you," he said, feebly, sinking into a garden-seat; and they saw how wasted were his face and figure.

"God in heaven be praised for this!" Horace cried, in his heart, overcome with great relief.

Then, interrupted by questions from time to time, the man supposed to be dead and come to life again told his tale. It appeared that in the cave where he found himself imprisoned he had discovered kegs of brandy and tobacco; this showed him that the cave was used by smugglers as a kind of storehouse, and gave him some measure of hope. Also groping about, he found a bag of biscuits. He forced one of the kegs of brandy, and on that and the biscuits he lived for a day or two, which seemed an eternity. At last he heard strange sounds above and behind the cave—voices—a shot! There were people near. Presently there was a rumbling noise at the upper part of the back of the cave, and a rock rolled gratingly aside and the blessed light of evening streamed in. The rock had concealed a secret entrance leading from the cliff. Down a rugged sort of stairs came two men bearing a body.

"He won't spoil sport any more," said one.

It was the coast-guard whom they had shot. Other men followed them; they instantly perceived Albert, and he was seized by many hands, with cries of "A spy! a spy!" He protested and explained in vain.

"We must make a clean job of it," said one man, "or there will be no safety for us!" And, drawing a pistol, he was about to lodge the contents in Albert's brain, when a commanding voice exclaimed:

"Stop! I knew this man once, before I took to this business, and he did me a good turn. His story may well be true. Spy or no spy, I'll not have him shot. We'll set him down where



his barking will harm no man. Never take life unless there is no other way out of the difficulty. We'll take him with us, and teach him to work the ropes."

The others yielded a grudging obedience to their captain, and Albert was left unharmed, but tied hand and foot and shut up in the cave with the body of the murdered coast-guard until past midnight, when the gang returned, and they were both taken out; the body was flung into the sea, and Albert into the bottom of a boat, which was rowed out a short distance to a sailing-vessel, up whose sides he was dragged. Once fairly at sea, he was unbound, and on the whole not treated badly. He gladly learned how to "work the ropes," but his health, enfeebled by his intemperate habits, broke down. After some weeks he was rowed ashore one night, and left on the coast of Spain, while the ship, having done her business there, went sailing away.

He had had ten pounds in his pocket, and through the intervention of the captain, who stood his friend, not more than half had been taken from him. He found his way to the nearest town, and procured shelter for the night. The next day he was seized with inflammation of the lungs; he was kindly nursed by the sympathetic Spanish women, at whose mercy he found himself, and who were all goodness to the forlorn stranger; but his illness was serious, and terminated in consumption. Nevertheless, he recovered sufficiently to work, for the decline was a lingering one; and he made friends among these strangers, who procured him some light task to do.

Then, as he grew worse, a yearning to see his wife once more before he died came upon him, and he got money enough together for his homeward passage. He could have written for money to his bankers, but he admitted that his first wicked plan had been to leave Catherine in the belief that he was dead, and to trap her into a marriage with Gilbard, and then to appear and blight their hopes. But when he saw Death coming very close, he gave up the scheme, and perhaps was even a little penitent.

In conclusion, he said to Catherine:

"As I must confess soon to God, I will confess to you that but for that fallen rock that blocked up the cave, you would not sit there to-night. I had made up my mind to kill you, though I killed myself after. I had bought the revolver for that purpose. Even when I seemed to hate you, the thought of another



man's touching you maddened me, so that when I saw him kiss you I swore to kill you, and him, and last, myself ! It was a brave plan, but the gods ordained otherwise."

The listeners shuddered ; then Catherine said :

"I forgive you, for I think that brandy had made you almost irresponsible for your thoughts or actions !"

Well, there is little more to tell. Before the spring ripened into summer, Albert d'Aurelles died. It would be a farce to say that many tears were shed over his grave.

The evening after the funeral, kneeling at Catherine's feet, Horace confessed his secret. She heard him through, and not without a tremor shaking her, as he described the horrors of his remorse for the crime he believed himself to have committed.

When he had made an end of his story, she passed her hand across his hair, which had turned quite grey during the last few months.

"My poor Horace !" she murmured, softly. "What have you not borne for me ! I am glad that his death does not lie at your door ; you are free from all guilt, whatever *might have been* ! But you should have told me all. I can understand that, loving me as you did, believing, as was truly the case, that my life was in danger, you did not, until too late, realize what it was that you had done. You would have undone, if you could. Fate, not your will, prevented you. The long voyage, that you could not have foreseen, made you powerless ! Everything was against you ! If you had told me, I would have talked to you, and I think I could have comforted you a little ! My poor darling !" she said, in her lowest and most caressing tones, "how you must have suffered !"

"Yes," he answered, as he clasped both her hands in his, "I have known the tortures of the damned ! Some day, Catherine, I shall know, shall I not, the felicity of the blest ?"

"I hope so, Horace," she whispered, and their lips met in a long kiss.

## MISS MOWBRAY'S EXPERIMENT.

—:0:—

WHEN Mr. Lessing, barrister-at-law by profession, novelist by choice, let himself into his chambers one morning, at the primitive hour of 5 a.m., it seemed to him that he could hardly be the same man who had quitted those identical chambers precisely seven hours ago.

He had left them weary and out of spirits, a man on whom existence had really palled. He had begun life early. For sixteen years, from twenty to thirty-six, he had gone on ringing all the changes that could be rung on all the pleasures of the senses. They had fallen now from pleasures into accepted necessities, as inveterate smokers lose the zest of an after-dinner cigar.

On the whole, he was rather a passionless man ; he had been many times near marriage, but he had never, till this morning, felt what love really was. Society called him an abominable flirt, because he went very far with women, but had only in one case proposed. It regarded him as a selfish monster, who went about seeking whom he might devour. Now this was not the case. Selfish the man may have been ; cruel of design he was not. The truth is, that when life began to pall upon him, he tried desperately, with all the strength of his nature, to fall in love. Women seemed to find a great fascination in him. And when the eyes of a certain pretty girl brightened at his subtly-implied compliments, he felt a very pleasurable sensation. She had such a sweet, low voice that he loved to be near her, just that he might hear it. He admired her, and made

up his mind that this was love in good earnest. It was not the wild bliss he had imagined it would be, but that was doubtless because he was by nature cold. He proposed, and was accepted, but a month after the engagement there began to grow up in his mind an awful doubt as to whether this were indeed love.

To be bound, to give up the freedom of a bachelor life, for a woman whom, if he did not really love, he must in time, according to the laws of his nature, inevitably sicken of, not quietly like and endure, as some men could, seemed to him a horror into which he could not, would not plunge; but he hoped he was mistaken—hoped he did really care for her. He knew the poor little girl worshipped him, and that her health was delicate.

Indeed he strove manfully to fancy himself in love. A bachelor whose domestic attendance is meagre knows what it is to wrestle with a fire fast going out. He stimulates it by fencing it round with his daily paper, greatly scorching the same. When, after this stimulant, the flames which have received temporary increase of life again subside, he casts sugar on with a reckless hand; he fans, he puffs, but all in vain. The little flame collapses and goes out. So strove Lessing to stimulate the fire of his love, or what he hoped was love. When he called in the evening and found the fair one was out, he tried all he could to imagine himself miserable. He talked of her to certain people who he knew never wearied of praising her. He tried the effect of a quarrel, and strove to think he was desperately unhappy over it. On that occasion she showed a quiet dignity which pleased him, and gave him a little fallacious hope. He tried, ye gods! how he did try, to see in her the charm that other people saw. Why, there was a man he knew to be almost out of his mind with love for her. He liked to draw this man out about her. Nothing, on the whole, stimulated his feeling so much as that did; as nothing so much stimulates a fire as spreading a paper close in front of it; but everything proved vain. The feeling, which from the first had not been love, went out irrevocably. The thought of the girl became a nightmare to him. He lay awake and thought of her, and shivered. One day he could bear it no longer, and he asked her to free him, which she did, and again displayed such quiet dignity that he was half tempted to ask for his reacceptance. She went abroad, and he heard no more of her.

After that he had many times fancied himself a prey to the grand passion ; but he wisely deferred any absolute proposal till he was confident of being really and lastingly in love, which he always found out in time that he was not. Yet he went so far as to get certain girls talked about, which was very unpleasant for them, and not at all right on his part, and procured for him the reputation of a flirt of the worst character.

The last hours of the May night preceding the day of which I am writing, were, therefore, always to be memorable in Mr. Lessing's life. For then it was that, at a certain brilliant reception, he met his fate—stood face to face with the woman who made him know, for the first time in his life, what love really was. When he left the house, after passing a couple of hours there, he was too excited to go back to his chambers, so he went to his club, where none of his friends could make him out, he appeared so wild and excited.

As he walked to his chambers, through the soft May morning virgin-pure and tender, Love walked beside him, and whispered in his ear :

“Met at last ! Escape was possible once ; now escape is possible no more. Lovest thou me ?”

“With all my heart,” Lessing answered.

So they walked home together, and Love came in and abode with Mr. Walter Lessing.

The barrister threw himself on the sofa, and clasping his hands behind his head, surrendered himself wholly to recalling two hours of the past night. Again he was in a crowded room, again he heard his hostess say :

“Mr. Lessing, let me introduce you to Miss Mowbray, an admirer of your books.”

He had always fancied that the woman with whom he should some day fall in love would be of the Ophelia type ; but it was no Ophelia whom he saw then. As he lay there on his sofa, he seemed to see her again almost as distinctly as if she were present. She was a woman of perhaps thirty—about the average height. Her figure was glorious ; he had never seen one before which seemed to him perfect. This was the *Venus de Medicis* made manifest in the flesh. Her dress displayed the magnificent column-like neck, fair as rose-tinted marble ; and the large, fair, white, strong arms, with their queenly, indolent droop.

The colouring of the perfectly-shaped, intellectual face was beyond praise. What a red, ardent mouth, made for songs and kisses! The warm, brown hair with gold lights glinting in it was wound in folds round the small, classically-moulded head. After talking to her for some time, he discovered that her beautiful eyes changed their colour frequently. At times they were softly and purely grey; at times they were just divinely blue; at times, blue touched as with light of green sea water. Not only did he see her again, but he heard her, and that was quite as much of a sensation.

It would have been impossible for any one to have defined the subtle, instant, electric, all-potent fascination which people found in Miss Mowbray's voice. It was low and sweet and expressive, but so are many voices. It had in it a special magnetic charm. It was a voice that haunted you, but to hear it was always a fresh surprise. It was the most sympathetic voice ever heard.

The flower in his button-hole smelt of her. He arose and went softly about the room. All was just as he had left it seven hours ago. There on the mantelpiece lay his pipe, but half smoked, as he had put it aside when he went to dress. There on the floor, close to the sofa, lay the volume that had fallen from his hands, as he dozed after dinner, wondering dreamily whether he should go out, or straight to bed.

Sleep was out of the question, so he changed his clothes, took a cold bath, and went into the streets. He walked on and on, till he found himself in the country.

Night had fallen when he was again in London. Glad with a great, unspeakable joy, and worn out in body, he fell asleep that night speedily, but through his sleep he did not lose consciousness of his love.

Three days after he dined with young Mowbray at his club, and then one afternoon he made a formal call upon the ladies. Only Miss Mowbray was at home. Due regret was expressed on both sides for the absence of her mother.

Miss Mowbray's manner fascinated him as much as did her face, voice, or figure. She talked earnestly, and she talked well. He knew not how the time must be going on, but still he sat there. She seemed to put him under a spell, so that he could not move to go. At length he roused himself, and said almost stupidly, with a look of bewilderment upon his face :



"Really, I must go now."

"If you must go, I have to thank you for a most pleasant afternoon," she said, simply.

"It has been more than a pleasant one to me," he replied, speaking slowly, and with difficulty. "If I had known, if I had dreamed of an influence in the world as potent on my work as yours might be, I would never have done any work till we had met."

"Do you mean one word of what you say?" she asked, quite quietly.

"I mean every word of it, most absolutely. What should make you doubt me?"

"Reading your books, I suppose. Your men always flatter your women, and then laugh at them."

"But I am not a man out of my books."

"No, but I think I can see a family resemblance between creator and created."

"You will know me better some day."

Then he took one long look, as if to fill himself full of her, and left. Miss Mowbray seemed somewhat thoughtful as she went to change her dress for dinner.

She never exacted homage; she only just seemed to tolerate it. One night, at a crowded evening reception, he managed at last to make his way to her. She was looking beautiful and weary.

"How they have been boring you," he said, almost indignantly.

"Yes, they have rather, I must confess."

"I'm so glad I have come."

"Then you are sure that you don't bore me?"

"I do bore you sometimes, but not always."

"You are wrong," she said, earnestly; "you never bore me."

Did she care for him, or would she ever care for him, in the way he wished her to? This was the question that he was for ever asking himself. At times he almost felt certain that she did; at other times he was equally despondent. He was so much in love that he dared not ask his fate, but as he did not conceal his passionate admiration, and was certainly not repulsed, he could not help thinking that on the whole he had good grounds for hope. The season over, he gladly accepted Mowbray's invitation to visit them in September, for shooting.

That month would have been a month of wild, happy excite-

ment, had not Mowbray, with masculine obtuseness, engrossed nearly all his friend's time ; but there were dear evenings, when Mowbray would go with Lessing to invade his sister's private sitting-room. He was very proud of his beautiful sister, and liked well to hear her read ; and on one of these happy occasions, worn out by the day's sport, he fell asleep lying on the floor, with his head propped on his arm ; and Lessing and Miss Mowbray were virtually alone together.

"Read something," he said.

"I have been reading."

"But read more."

"Why?" she asked, in her wonderful voice, and raising to his face her glorious eyes, in which just then the green sea lights were shining.

"Because I wish you to."

"Are you quite sure that is a sufficient reason?"

"I think it would be, if you realized how much I wish it."

"But you see I don't realize it."

"I hardly ever see you now," he went on.

"No ; you prefer the partridges."

"You know I don't."

"Why, certainly, I think you do."

"Do you really know me so little?" he answered, in his most subtle tone of voice, the soul in his eyes yearning to her.

"I'm not a good reader of character," she replied ; then for some time they were both silent, while round the house the autumn wind moaned drearily.

"How suddenly grave you have grown," he said ; "an hour ago you were all smiles."

"Perhaps it's the wind," she answered ; "doesn't it sound like a forlorn spirit seeking vainly for rest?"

Then she asked him, after a pause, and suddenly :

"Where you ever at the English cemetery at Florence?"

"Never ; were you?"

"Yes, many times."

Then they were silent again ; and as in a sort of vision Lessing seemed to see the pleading, large blue eyes, the delicate face, the purely gold hair of the woman he had thought he loved once, and cast aside.

"It's a melancholy night," he said. "I'm not surprised it should make you think of churchyards."

He was sitting close to her ; his hand touched hers, then folded it in a close clasp. He bent down and kissed it. She made no resistance. She quivered a little, that was all. What words she might have spoken, there and then, who shall say, had not just then Mr. Mowbray aroused himself, and borne his friend away to the smoking-room.

The next day Lessing resolved to know his fate absolutely, though, on the preceding night, he had thought he could forecast it with some certainty. It was a wild, windy autumn day, with a heavy, sunless sky. He went straight to Miss Mowbray's sitting-room.

" I am an early visitor, am I not ? " he began.

" Well, I suppose for you it must be considered an early call."

Her manner was somewhat constrained ; and surely he detected in her eyes a look of comprehension. She knew of what he had come to speak ; of that he felt there could be no doubt.

" Do you mind being called upon so early, Miss Mowbray ? "

" Not in the least."

" I have not done wrong then ? "

" Not at all. I am generally prepared to receive visitors."

He found it more difficult to begin speaking about the subject so near to his heart than he had imagined. Breaking at last an awkward pause, he said :

" I am here to know my fate from you. I love you. I have never disguised the fact. I could not have disguised it had I wished to. I have been too frightened to speak, but now I can keep silent no longer. Helen, your answer—Life or Death ? "

Outside the wind raved on ; inside the fire flickered, and a cinder fell.

Miss Mowbray was looking down at her hands clasped on her knees ; her face had grown very white in the last minute.

" Speak, speak," he cried. " I cannot bear suspense. Life or Death ? "

" Death," she said, and no more.

He staggered back as if some one had struck him a heavy blow. She did not look up. Then he began in a bewildered way :

" I don't understand you. You are not the woman to flirt heartlessly. When a woman receives, and seems pleased to

receive, a man's unbounded admiration, she is encouraging him to hope. What does a woman mean when she lets a man that she knows loves her hold her hand as I held yours last night. I want to know what it *does* mean?"

She raised her eyes for the first time now, and looked at him; then she said, speaking in a tone of voice even lower than usual:

"At the English Cemetery in Florence there is an unpretending grave, which I have visited many times, and which my friends in Florence keep always fragrant for me with flowers. It is the grave of an English girl, who died when she was twenty years old. I made her acquaintance at Florence, just six months before her death. Her name——"

"Was Alice Richmond?"

"Yes."

"And she lied to you about me? Well, no, perhaps she didn't lie; but she did not tell you, for she could not know, how desperately I strove to cling to the idea that I was in love with her. In God's name, would it have been for her good that I should have married her *not* loving her? With my temperament, I should have come in time so to hate her as to make her life one torment. Though I hear from you to-day for the first time that she is dead, I remember still my foreshadowing of how I should have felt had I been compelled day after day to see in my path those big dolls' eyes of hers, and to hear day after day her pretty babyish prattle; but what has she to do now, thrusting herself in between you and me?"

"Do you think," Miss Mowbray replied, quietly, "that I could ever love a man who behaved to a woman as you did to her? What had you to do with self-pity? After you had once won her heart, but one course was open to you, and that was to marry the girl and to make her happy. And is she your only victim? How many other women have you made dupes of? I am not sentimental enough to imagine that your treatment of her directly killed Alice Richmond; but that it did so indirectly I most solemnly believe."

"And you thought you would make yourself your friend's avenger? Have the comfort to know your vengeance has been complete."

"I designed no vengeance," she said. "When I saw that you admired me, I did not undeceive you, as I should have done

another man ; I thought I would let you find the facts out for yourself. Do you think it was unpardonable ? Do you think I had no justification ? ” She smiled, and there was a cruel light in her eyes.

“ If Alice Richmond died,” he exclaimed, “ because I cast her off, finding I had no love to give her ; yes, cast her off—get all you can out of these words—you are not so easily freed from me as I was freed from her. You have kindled a fire which you shall quench or burn in. You must, you shall love me. I will haunt you day and night ; and though I died to-night, my ghost should haunt you.”

“ I am frightened of no man,” she answered, calmly, “ and I don't believe in ghosts.”

He took her hand between both of his, and though she had just said that she was frightened of no man, she dared not, when she met his eyes, withdraw it.

“ I love, *love* you,” he pleaded. “ You have made a new world for me. Life had grown to be with me only death in life till I met you ; then, for the first time, I knew really what life meant. I will not live to die again ! Helen, be merciful. Promise that you will try to love me. O, my love, I love you so desperately ! If you are not mine wholly, then love of you will drive me mad. You do not dream what it is to love as I love you.”

“ That I concede, willingly,” she answered ; “ but these fires quickly burn themselves out, and leave no trace behind.”

“ This fire will never smoulder, never be extinguished.”

“ So they say *in novels*.”

“ For God's sake, Helen, don't sneer ! ”

“ I am not sneering, but I hate scenes.”

She drew her hand away and rose.

“ Upon this subject neither you nor I can have anything more to say.”

“ Are you utterly without heart ? ”

“ I don't know ; the question doesn't particularly interest me.”

He spoke no word, but held the door open for her to pass out. A minute after he followed. He went straight to his own room, and packed. The afternoon delivery had brought him letters from London, and he excused his abrupt departure on the ground of important business. In a short time everything was



arranged. He shook hands with Mowbray, Mrs. Mowbray, and lastly with Helen.

"Remember what I told you this morning," he said, as he held her hand—ah, surely not for the last time.

"You told me so many things, and you know my memory is not good."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," and then he was gone.

Arriving in London, he went straight to his chambers—to those same rooms he had entered that May morning when his whole heart was one fire of love for her, when the world seemed re-created ; and it seemed to him now that love, stronger than ever, burned in his heart. But what of his future ? He smiled grimly, recalling that he had once fancied himself a cold-natured man. Something was to be done, but what ? How was he to win her love ? Somehow or other it *must* be accomplished. He paced up and down, grappling with his fate—a struggle which is always a slightly unequal match, as he found before the night was over.

At length he could stand his rooms no more, and he dashed into the streets. The rain was pouring down in torrents ; a dreary north-east wind prevailed. Though the blood burned in him, though his thoughts were all centred in one object, he took in a sharp and distinct sense of the crowded, wet London streets, the streets he knew so well. They were the same streets, but they seemed to his fevered imagination like ghosts of their former selves seen through a blood-red mist. The jingle of street pianos, the roll of wheels, the voices of the passers-by talking one to another, had in them for him a hollow ring. In time he came to the river. There everything was still, except for the ceaseless pouring of the rain, and down that dark way of water lay the sea. Life was a dark river flowing to a darker sea. A violent fit of shivering took him, while at the same time his hands burned. He made his way back to his chambers, thinking that fever lay before him, in which conjecture he was right, for the next morning his landlady found him delirious. After this he was conscious of nothing definitely, till he woke one night about the middle of October. Some one was sitting by the bed, and a friendly voice asked :

"You know me, old boy ?"

"Yes," he replied, in a faint whisper, for his strength was low. "You are Mowbray. Have I been ill long?"

"More than a month ; but you will be all right soon. Now swallow some of this, and go to sleep again."

The sick man did as he was told. Nature came to his aid, and he slept long and profoundly. Day by day he gained strength, and by the middle of November was once more himself in bodily health.

But the fire of his love burned only more fiercely. He found out from Frank Mowbray that his mother and sister were going to winter in Paris, and he left England at once for the bright French city.

He met Miss Mowbray, for the first time after their parting, at the house of a mutual friend. A number of persons, both English and French, were present. He snatched an opportunity of speaking to her alone, in a corner of the room.

"Are you surprised to see me?"

"No, not particularly. If you know what is for your own comfort, I should think you would rather pass the winter in Paris than in London. I heard of you from my brother when you were ill. I was sorry to hear of your illness. What nice people there are here to night, are there not?"

"Shall you be at home to-morrow afternoon if I call?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I shall come, then."

Then they were swept apart, to come together no more that night.

The next afternoon he presented himself at the Mowbrays' pleasant apartments, in one of the best quarters of Paris, but as Mrs. Mowbray was present all through his visit, it was, on the whole, a dull affair ; only with his eyes could he express his worship of Helen.

She seemed neither to like nor dislike him—to be simply indifferent to him ; and this indifference was to him the hardest thing to be borne.

In the course of a few days fortune favoured him. He met her in the Louvre, and she was by herself. It was near the hour of closing. She was standing before the Venus of Milo.

"It always makes one think of Heine, doesn't it?" she said ; "of how he must have felt when, for the last time, from his

poor, broken body, his soul burned through his eyes on that supreme beauty that had long been his delight, and made him feel that, bitter as life had been, it had still been worth living."

"I think I love it almost as much as the great German did," he replied. Then Miss Mowbray turned away.

"I am going now," she said.

"You will drive home, I suppose?"

"No; I shall walk."

"If I may, I will walk back with you."

"I shall be extremely glad."

They walked along for some time in silence. At last he said, suddenly:

"I wish you'd hate me."

"Do you? What a droll idea! I would if I could, to oblige you; but I don't think I could."

"You only scorn me."

"I do not respect your behaviour to women, certainly."

"But I tell you I am a changed man."

"Perhaps so; yet, but for you, my friend might have been living now."

"You make me hate her memory," he answered, fiercely.

"Helen, I am growing desperate. You must give me hope; you must come to care something for me."

"Must I?" she answered, indifferently. "If you have the power of changing my nature, I suppose I shall."

At the door of her hotel he left her, and turned away, more deeply fascinated, more terribly in love than ever.

She was the one interest of his life; in her all his thoughts centred. His love grew almost a madness; he could not sleep at night for thinking of her. He became wild and haggard-looking.

Toward the end of winter the Mowbrays returned to England, and went directly to their house in the country. Of course Lessing left Paris at the same time; but as they did not ask him to visit them, he had to pass two whole months without seeing Helen; still he knew that in the season they *should* meet. In time he thought his persistent love must triumph.

He was right; they did meet, and it was in the lobby of a theatre. He had been watching her all through the performance, feeding his eyes greedily upon her. Besides herself and mother, there was in their box a tall, handsome intellectual-

looking man, whose attentions were extreme. This fact made Lessing's blood boil.

"I have not seen you for some time," he began, as they met on the way out ; "but you see we are fated to come together."

The man of the party was introduced as Mr. Clifford. The two men did not seem to regard each other with favour.

"Shall you be at the Grays' to-morrow?" she asked.

"I shall."

"Then we shall meet there."

Just then their carriage was called, and they passed out to it.

When he entered the Grays' drawing-room, late the next night, light, brilliant dance music was sounding through it. He at once caught sight of Helen Mowbray. She was dancing with the man he had observed at the theatre on the preceding night.

Lessing was standing with his eyes following her movements, when a well-known and cheery voice accosted him.

"Well met, old boy." It was Frank Mowbray, whom he had not seen for some time. "What has become of you all this while?" he added.

Lessing replied somewhat absently. He was thinking that to-night he was in the very room where he had first met the woman who was to be the one love of his life. Just there, where he was then standing, had they stood that night. Later on he had managed to get her a seat in a quieter part of the room. There was a tide of people between it and himself now, but yonder was the very corner. The rooms were flooded to-night ; there would be no chance for a quiet word.

"A lot of people here," remarked Mowbray. "I suppose I must plunge into the midst of them soon. Been here long?"

"No ; I have only just come."

"How do you like the look of my future brother-in-law? There's plenty of him, isn't there?"

"What do you mean?" Lessing rejoined, turning white as death, while his heart gave a great bound.

"Why, my dear boy, it's easy enough to make out, surely ;" then, regarding the changed face of his friend, the truth flashed upon him, and he wondered that he had never suspected it before.

"You are not well, old fellow," he said, kindly. "The heat of the room has knocked you over ; come with me and have a glass of champagne."

"As many as you like," the other answered, with a forced laugh, making a desperate attempt to be gay.

When the two friends returned from the refreshment-room the music had ceased, the men were paying the women stupid compliments, and the latter were fanning themselves. As usual, a group of admirers clustered about Miss Mowbray. Lessing had not partaken sparingly of champagne, and through this group he made his way confidently. He bore himself well, and there was a defiant light in his eyes.

"I hope I'm not too late for a waltz with you," he said.

"No," she answered; "I think you're just in time. I did not mean to dance the next waltz, but an old friend is not to be refused; besides that, you are an unusually good waltzer."

The music struck up again, and in a moment more Helen was borne away in the dance. It seemed to Lessing as if he were almost mad with joy. He forgot everything but the delight of holding her warm, breathing beauty so close to him.

"Are you happy?" he asked her, in a whisper.

"Happy and sorry, too."

"Sorry for what?"

"Sorry for you; I know what it means, now."

"Do you think what you dream of will come to pass?" he said, speaking under his breath.

"Most certainly I do."

"But it will not."

"Will it not?" she answered, dreamily. Life to her then was strange and lovely and mysterious. Her heart was very full of pity for the man whom she was beginning to realize that she had wronged. "It's a dangerous business to meddle with souls, and matter enough to save our own."

When the waltz was over, he drew her away to a little room close by, which was quite unoccupied for the moment.

"Here you will find a seat," he said. "How splendidly beautiful you look to-night. A great deal too beautiful to be *any* man's wife except mine, and only mine because I worship you as you deserve to be worshipped. I am your fate, as you are mine. Do you think you can escape from that fact? Do you think you can fly from me? I would follow you to the ends of the world. Sometimes I think you are a saint; sometimes I think you are a beautiful fiend; but always you dominate my life. The sound of your voice makes me faint with



happiness and wonder that any thing so beautiful should belong to this world of ours. My hand remembers the touch of yours till it clasps it again. Just now, when my arm was round you, I thought you must have heard above the music the beating of my heart, I was so filled and thrilled with delicious excitement.

"Hush! you musn't say such things to me now."

"Nay, but I *will* tell you how I love you. I look at men who can love other women, with a kind of dull wonder. In you all opposing charms are reconciled. In you is the sum of every man's desire."

He glanced round quickly to see that no one was by, then he caught both her hands and kissed them passionately.

"Helen, I am mad with love for you; my soul burns as in a fire. Don't you pity me?"

"Yes, I do pity you; but take me back now, please."

In a few days' time people began to say that Lessing had either taken to drink, or was going mad. He could hardly understand himself. A desperate excitement, keen almost as sharp pleasure, had come upon him. He slept little, indeed hardly at all; but his strength did not fail him. When would the reaction come? When it did, it would be something to be dreaded.

One very hot, still June night, while Miss Mowbray was enjoying herself very much at a ball, her hostess came to her with rather a grave face.

"My dear," she said, "a messenger from the Great Central Hotel has just arrived with a letter for you."

Helen turned pale as she took the letter,—paler still when she saw it was in her brother's handwriting. She broke the seal and read:

"I have had an accident; excuse yourself to Lady White, and drive at once to the Great Central Hotel."

In a few minutes more she was on her way. The horses went at their best pace, still the drive seemed to her interminable.

At length the carriage drew up in front of the Great Central Hotel.

"You will wait," she said to the coachman, and then asked to be shown to Mr. Mowbray.

"You will say Miss Mowbray, if you please."

They passed down a thickly-carpeted passage.

"This is Mr. Mowbray's sitting-room, madam," observed a servant of the hotel. As they paused in front of a door, he threw it open and announced "Miss Mowbray."

It was a handsome, spacious apartment in which she found herself. On the table stood fruit and wine. On the sofa, with his face buried in the cushions, lay a figure.

"Frank," she said, coming over to him, "what is it? What is the matter? Speak to me; look at me."

Suddenly the figure turned and confronted her, and she uttered a cry of horror to see not her brother, but Lessing.

"You seem surprised," he said, and passing swiftly before her, he locked the door and removed the key.

"I *am* surprised and outraged. The letter, then, was a forgery?" she asked.

"I am compelled to own that it was. Your brother is away for the night. No harm has been done. It was inevitable that I should have an interview with you in private. Sit down, my beautiful queen."

"How dared you?" she cried, scorn and hate flashing from her eyes.

"Helen, pity me. I am distracted by my love for you."

"I *did* pity you; but do you think a woman would ever forgive a fraud of this kind? Never, I tell you, never! If you would preserve one fraction of self-respect, you will instantly release me from the offence it is to be in the same room with you."

"You carry it with a high hand, but it will not do," he said.

"Will you not free me?"

"Not till you have heard all I have to say."

"Then will you be as brief as possible?"

"I will."

She dropped into a chair, while he paced to and fro.

"Helen, when I told you that you had kindled a fire which you must quench or burn in, I knew what I said to be truth. You wronged me as a woman never yet has wronged a man."

"Your reason, if you please, for decoying me to this place? That is all I wish to know."

"That is what I was coming to. My reason for bringing you here was to tell you that you should marry *me*, or no one. Call me wicked, fiendish, what you will, but I will *not* think of you in another man's arms."

"I told you some time ago," she said, sneeringly, and rising, "that I have a dislike to scenes. I have no fear of you. I shall marry the man I love, and who loves me."

"Will you swear to your fidelity?" he asked.

"I will," she answered, seriously. "I swear by the God who I believe guides and governs this world, and before whom we shall all appear and be judged; by my unshakable belief in the life hereafter; by every thing I hold sacred,—most solemnly, that I will marry no man but one, the man I love. I have heard what you have to say; will you now consent to free me?"

"This is the only way in which I will free you," he said, coming close to her, and drawing from his pocket a small pistol. "One cry for help, and you are dead on the spot."

With a low moan she shrank away in terror, hiding her blanched face in her hands. What could she do? She looked into his eyes, and saw a strange glitter in them. For some time there was perfect silence; somewhere a door closed—that was all. How pitiful, how almost abject, she looked now; she who but a little while ago had borne herself so proudly. At length she said, in a whisper:

"Come here, please."

He went over to her. She took both his hands and looked up at him with her great beautiful eyes full of mute prayer.

"I'm in your power, I know," she began; but for God's sake be merciful. I am happy. I want to live, and to marry the man I love. This madness of yours will pass, and then we shall both be happy. O spare me! spare me! See, I will be tender to you. You may put your arms round me, and I will kiss you. Are my kisses nothing to you?"

"Don't tempt me," he answered. "I brought you here that you might make your choice between marriage with me, or death; you have chosen death."

He filled her a glass of wine, but she put it from her. Her face, white with terror, must have looked all the more ghastly in contrast with her ball-dress and the diamonds sparkling on her neck.

"No," she cried, springing up and reaching out her hands to him, "I have not chosen death. I repent of the foolish oath I took. I will marry you. There, let us go;" and she moved to the door with feverish haste.

"It is too late," he answered. "I made you take that oath to try you. Can I think that a woman believing in God and religion would break such an oath? No; you would break your promise to me, which you would be quite justified in doing."

"You don't know me," she pleaded. "You don't know with what terror I shrink from death. Besides, the very desperation of this action makes me feel as I never did feel till now, how you *do* love me! Do you want to throw me away? I tell you I will marry you; you have wakened a new self in me."

He stood for a moment with a light of hope gleaming in his eye.

"If I could only believe you," he said, losing, for the moment, consciousness of everything but hope. For her purpose that one moment was enough.

As swiftly as a panther which has been unseen lurking round her prey springs upon it at last, strikes and captures it, so sprang this woman upon the man in front of her. Her teeth fastened his hand, out of which she wrenched the pistol, discharging its contents in the air, while at the same time she cried desperately for help.

"There's no occasion for violence," remarked the man. "No man is a match for a woman; you have vanquished me."

Then the doors were burst open.

To the charge brought against him Lessing made no defence; but after all it was to a madhouse, and not to a jail, that he was consigned. Those of his friends who knew him intimately were not surprised to learn that insanity was in his family.

So ended Miss Mowbray's experiment.

# THE ACTRESS AND HER DRAMA.

—:o:—

## CHAPTER I.

ARTHUR FEATHERSTONE was a fortunate man. At the age of twenty-five he was not only an accepted suitor, but, in virtue of his very first attempt, a successful dramatist. Daily he had the gratification of reading in the papers and on the street placards that Mrs. Brakehill would appear every evening as *Leonora* in the immensely successful drama of “‘What Evidence?’”; written expressly for her by Arthur Featherstone, Esq.”

Mrs. Blanche Brakehill was the rage that season in London. Her portrait hung on the walls of the Royal Academy. The windows of stationers and art repositories were crowded with photographic portraits of her both in and out of character, in various attitudes and divers dresses. Haberdashers showed new scarfs entitled “The Brakehill;” music-sellers displayed the “Brakehill Waltzes,” the title-page whereof was adorned with a lithograph of the new actress as *Leonora*.

Certainly Featherstone had reason to feel proud. I am inclined to think that his pretty betrothed would rather he had chosen some path in literature which did not lead behind the scenes, where, to her unsophisticated imagination, lay a world of evils and enchantments. That her hero came back from such a world unscathed, seemed to her such a miracle that her natural admiration for him was not untouched with awe.



Indeed, Featherstone himself felt it a striking change to pass from the glare and excitement of the Sun Theatre to the pretty little drawing-room at Kensington, pervaded by the delicate odour of spring flowers, where Sophie Lenthurst read, studied music, did a little fancy work, and copied—an occupation in which she was always happiest—her lover's nearly illegible manuscripts.

Now, Featherstone was not for a moment, not even in thought, unfaithful to his pretty betrothed; yet he could not be ignorant of Mrs. Brakehill's charms. What man, indeed, could have been indifferent to those dark, deep eyes of hers—eyes that could kindle with fire or melt with infinite tenderness into looks that were at once appeals and caresses? What man, we ask, could have noted without admiration the bright, mobile face, the sweet, red, passionate mouth, the dark hair and the shadow of the hair on the white forehead, the figure so ripe in its development, yet so supple in all its movements? Who, again, could have been insensible to the captivation of her manner, which at one time was almost child-like in its frank simplicity; at another, fraught with the most intense earnestness? If, for instance, you caught her studying a new part, you would find something almost ominous in the expression of her countenance, while she would speak of the character in those low, hushed tones which most of us use unconsciously when we enter some darkened room which death has recently invaded.

It chanced one night—as I am bound to say it did chance two or three times a week—that something occurred to Featherstone about which it was necessary to speak to his heroine. The curtain, he conjectured, on this particular occasion, would be just falling on his arrival, and he would thus catch her before her husband came to take her home.

Mrs. Brakehill's reputation, let it be clearly understood, was quite above suspicion. Robert Brakehill had fallen in love with her, for her beauty, I suppose, when she was a mere girl. He had married her, and under his wing the young actress had nestled securely. Never was she seen in society without him.

Nightly he brought his charge to the theatre, and nightly, no matter how attractive the society at the club, returned for her in his brougham at the close of her performance.

Little was known of her, but it was reported that her origin as on one side foreign—Italian, it was generally surmised

and, judging by certain indications of her face, the rumour was probably correct. But to return to Featherstone.

He pushed open the stage door of the Sun Theatre and went in. It was somewhat later than he had expected. The music was playing for the *comediotta* with which the evening's entertainment closed. The stage, which was full of bustle, seemed in one way like the deck of a ship when about leaving port.

Mrs. Brakehill, however, had not yet left the theatre. Featherstone found her in the greenroom in earnest conversation with a man whom he had not seen before—a man of some forty years of age. He had a well-proportioned and graceful figure, abundant brown hair, here and there touched with gray; a pale face lit with large, bright eyes. If not, strictly speaking, a handsome face, it was certainly a striking one—a face which you would not easily forget.

The person in question was dressed, on the whole, in excellent taste. A critical observer might have detected in his appearance just the least suggestion of foppery; but it was so slight as to be scarcely discernible.

“Ah, I'm glad you've come,” said Mrs. Brakehill, breaking off her conversation as she caught sight of Featherstone. “I want to introduce you to my dear friend, Mr. Waters. Only think, he has been detained all the spring in Italy, and has seen me to-night for the first time as *Leonora*. I want you both to be such good friends.”

Then followed the introduction.

“I consider myself very fortunate, Mr. Featherstone,” said the stranger, bowing courteously, and speaking in low, sweetly modulated tones—“very fortunate, indeed, in having the pleasure of making your acquaintance thus early on my return to England. Need I say what enjoyment I have derived from witnessing the performance to-night? Among many other admirable qualities, of which perhaps I am not entitled to speak, your drama has the rare merit of giving our friend here a fit opportunity for the exhibition of her powers.”

“I am glad of your approbation,” replied Featherstone.

Then Mr. Brakehill came in, and seemed equally surprised and pleased to see his wife's friend.

As the two engaged in conversation, Featherstone turned to Blanche, observing that the hour was probably too late to talk over business. But he got no answer. She was smiling to

herself, taken up heart and soul in listening to her husband, who was relating that on the preceding night at the end of her great scene in the third act, the whole house rose and cheered like one man. The "house" had a very unpleasant habit of omitting to do this when Featherstone was one of the audience, which he not infrequently was. He wondered why it chanced so. He could have liked exceedingly to see such a demonstration. He now spoke to Mrs. Brakehill a second time, and more peremptorily :

"I see it's of no use trying to get your attention to-night."

"I am afraid it is not. But come again, soon ; I have a great deal to say to you."

"About what?"

"Oh, you shall know all, in time. Now go to Sophie, you bad boy ! She wants to see you."

"Who told you so?"

"My own woman's heart."

"Have you any?"

"Yes."

So he shook hands and went away vexed, he scarcely knew why. There was something in this man Waters from which Featherstone's whole nature absolutely recoiled. Yet he could assign no reason for this fact, and, given as he was to analyze all subtle intuitions of the human mind, he hated to find himself at fault.

"Well," said he to himself, at last, as he entered his chambers, "I will justify my antipathy or overcome it."

A few days after this he called on Mrs. Brakehill, by appointment, at her charming residence on the Kensington side of Hyde Park. His object was to discuss with her the plot of a new play.

She was quite alone in her daintily-furnished boudoir, through which a soft, roseate light was diffused.

After business had been talked of, the conversation turned upon Waters.

"I half feel as if you didn't like him," she said, looking inquiringly at Featherstone.

"Indeed ! Why, what could I allege against him ?"

"Nothing, I know ; but be frank, and say what you think."

"Frankly, then, he is a man I should mistrust."

"How mistaken you are! He has been the kindest friend to us. You should hear Robert's opinion of him."

"Ah, Brakehill is a dear, simple soul."

"And for that reason I value his opinion more than yours. You writers are like ogres, who go about seeking whom they may devour. A simple gentleman is not interesting enough for you. You must look below the surface; and here the truth is on the surface. Mr. Waters is just what he seems—a kind man and a perfect gentleman."

"I bow to your judgment," said Featherstone, rising; "but don't forget you have called me an ogre."

"Yes, but a very nice ogre," she rejoined, with one of her most captivating smiles; adding, archly, "especially when you write me beautiful speeches that bring the house down."

He had not gone far from the house before he met Brakehill and Waters, engaged earnestly in conversation.

"I am just from your place," said Featherstone.

"So I supposed," replied Brakehill. He was a man with a kind, florid face and a singularly boyish manner. "I heard," he went on, "there was a plot to be talked over, so I made myself scarce. She is peculiar in those things"—he always spoke of his wife as *she*—"and does not like any third person present—not even her husband. Hard lines for a married man—eh, Waters?"

Waters smiled blandly, in recognition of the pleasantry, and, addressing himself to Featherstone, said, in his very sweetest tones:

"You will be doing the public a real service—that is, as regards its pleasures—if you will only induce our friend to try her hand at comedy."

"Ah, I wish you would," put in Brakehill. "I've said to her again and again, 'My dear child, you could be just as great in comedy as in tragedy.'"

"Yes; but pardon me, my dear fellow," said Waters, still speaking in his perfectly modulated voice, "a dramatist has an influence over his heroine in guiding her selection of parts which not even her husband can acquire. Let us leave our cause, then, in Mr. Featherstone's hands."

"I hope it will prosper," answered Featherstone; and, refusing the warmest invitations to return and dine, he went on his way



to the house at Kensington, where he knew a place had been kept for him at the dinner-table.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

The first of June was to be a trying day for Sophie Lenthurst and Arthur Featherstone. It was the one fixed by Sophie's mother for leaving England for Switzerland, where they were to spend their summer holiday. Featherstone was to join them in a month's time, but he could only do so by working like a galley-slave day and night, for commissions were crowding in upon him.

You may be sure, however, that on the morning of the first of June he was at Grove Lodge betimes. You may be equally sure that Sophie was well through all her packing arrangements so as to wholly devote the last hour before leaving the house to her lover.

For some time they sat silent in a pretty modestly-furnished drawing-room, which had in it a delicate odour of flowers. Sophie and flowers went well together. Through the open window came the cry of "Flowers all a-growing and a-blowing!" which to these two seemed like the refrain of a melancholy poem. What could London want with flowers when Sophie was going to leave it? And Sophie's canary-bird went on singing—singing as if nothing were about to happen.

"How sorry I am you are going, little one," said Featherstone, presently, drawing her shivering head to his shoulder.

She pressed his hand for answer, her control of her voice being just then rather dubious. At length she said, but almost in a whisper :

"I would so much rather stay in London with you."

"What, among all the chimney-pots and all the glare, rather than have mountains and lakes, glaciers and all the rest of it?"

He did not find talking quite so easy himself as it seemed to be when he began.

"What do I want with mountains and streams, and all the rest of it," she answered, with an effort to smile through her tears, "and you not there?—making yourself ill, perhaps, in this horrible London with overwork."

"No ; I promise not to kill myself. I want to see you again too much for that."

"And you will write to me often, if only a few words? I know you won't have time for more."



“Every night, my little lady, last thing, I shall write to you what I have been doing through the day, and post it.”

In any fiction that attempts to follow real life there must necessarily be a sameness about love-scenes, especially about those between parting lovers.

Let us, therefore, suppose the billing and cooing over, and Featherstone, on a platform at Charing Cross Station, waving his hand to his beloved as the train moves almost noiselessly away.

The day was intensely hot, and the hour was as yet early. Featherstone wandered restlessly about the streets, examined various book-stalls, and, of course, found nothing worth notice.

Then he thought he would try to work, and for this laudable object went straight to his chambers, where he found a telegram from Mrs. Brakehill; she had a professional love of telegraphing.

The present telegram was brief, and rather more peremptory than usual :

“Be at the Sun Theatre to-night. Don't fail. Important.”

It was quite in vain that Featherstone strove to work; so, instead, he wrote several pages of a letter to Sophie. The extreme heat of the day seemed to have conquered the natural shade and coolness of his chambers. He smoked pipes and cigars alternately, took refuge in iced claret, and finally concluded that part of his great heat was born of his own restlessness.

A man in such a frame of mind is generally glad when his dinner-hour comes. Very glad was Featherstone when, the long hours having worn away, a quick-going hansom set him down at the steps of his club.

There, having comfortably dined and smoked a cigar, he lit another and turned his steps in the direction of the Sun Theatre, with, for the first time, a vague feeling of curiosity about Mrs. Brakehill's telegram.

It was a wonderful night. The air seemed glowing with the heat of the departed sun. There was no least breath of wind. But for the warm, passionate blue of the sky, through which a few sultry stars were beginning to appear, you would have thought a thunder-storm imminent.

A Londoner rarely thinks of such a night in connection with the open country. When he goes for his long looked-for

summer holiday, the evenings, especially by the sea, are beginning to turn chill.

A night like the present is intimately associated in his mind with the close of the London season ; its quick succession of deceptive attractions ; its crowded and brilliantly lit rooms ; women fair and young, upon whom the stress of the season has told, nevertheless — all the intrigues, successes, failures, and heart-breaks which have been focussed in three or four short months.

“I wonder how many fellows are making themselves unhappy about women to-night ?” thought Featherstone, as he slipped through the stage-door of the theatre.

Mrs. Brakehill was in the midst of that great speech which wound up the third act—the speech, you may remember, in which the heroine reveals to her lover that passionate devotion for him which, till then, certain weighty reasons have obliged her to conceal.

Featherstone had often called Blanche Brakehill heartless, both to her and to himself ; yet now, as he stood listening by the wing, he wondered if it were possible for a woman destitute of feeling to interpret thus magically the subtlest, strongest, highest emotion of which our nature is capable ; every tone was like a close and passionate caress.

Her voice seemed almost weighed down by its great freight of love ; yet so exquisite was the articulation that every word was distinctly audible in the remotest corner of the house.

He knew well, too, how look, gesture and attitude harmonized with every inflection of her voice. Her acting to-night was finer even than usual.

At the close of the scene she had to give up family, friends, fortune, for her lover, to whose name an undeserved stigma was attached. As if her soul were borne up on wings, her voice rose to some far, almost impossible, height. For a moment or two it quivered with such rapture of enunciation as if love had been deified by the consciousness of its might ; then, as if failing beneath the too great ecstasy, she flung wide her arms and sank on her lover’s bosom, moaning between half-suppressed sobs of infinite joy and half-restrained bursts of divine mirth : “ Safe, safe ! Safe in your love at last ! ”

The audience, which had throughout been electrified with breathless silence, rose with what seemed almost a yell of

enthusiasm. "What god inspires this woman to-night?" ejaculated Featherstone. His own heart was beating fast and there were tears of excitement in his eyes—such tears as come when the heart is whirled round in a storm of music; or when in some grand moment of nature, amidst wind and thunder, the visions disclosed by the lightning flash across us. Again and again the actress was recalled, till the orchestra, by striking up the music for the next part, got the tumult somewhat under, as a fire is got under by water. Then Mrs. Brakehill passed to where Featherstone was standing. She was flushed with triumph; there was an almost unnatural brilliancy in her eyes.

"Bravo!" cried Featherstone, clasping both her hands in his. "You have surpassed yourself to-night."

"Are you satisfied with your heroine?"

"Can you ask me?"

"We have no time for talking now; you must come back with us to supper to-night."

"To-night? Thanks; it will be impossible."

"You must come."

"My dear lady, I have discovered that a man cannot serve two masters. My master is work, not pleasure, and work I must serve."

"I cannot stay now. Go round to the front and see me in the next act. After that, if you are still in the same mind, come back and tell me so. I wonder how many men would refuse to come and see me when I ask them?" and, with one of her most fascinating smiles, she tripped to her dressing-room.

Featherstone did as he was bid. Entering an unoccupied private box, he glanced mechanically round the theatre. The first man his eyes rested on was Waters, in the front row of the stalls. The two men recognized each other. Waters bowed and smiled blandly; then, after a little time, he slowly rose and left his seat. That a man should leave the theatre after an act of a play which he had probably seen often, was not in the least singular; but that he should wait to do so until the curtain was just rising, puzzled Featherstone.

His own appearance in front of the house seemed to have been the signal for Waters to leave it.

"Nonsense!" thought Featherstone, as he strove to dismiss the trivial incident from his mind, "my own plots are turning my brain."

The next and last act, as usual, passed off with all success ; and, as soon as the curtain had fallen, Featherstone again repaired behind the scenes. He had to wait a few minutes while Mrs. Brakehill was changing her dress. Soon, however, she came to him, still flushed with triumph, still looking even more lovely than was her wont.

"Well," said she, in her most winning tones, and just resting her hand on his arm, "has that hard heart of yours been softened?"

"If you mean is my master less rigorous—no."

"At least you will drive home with me for a few minutes' talk? Mr. Waters has to meet my husband and another man at the club on business. They will not be long, however, and until they come we can talk of your idle work. We did so want you to stay to-night, because Robert has to go to Paris to-morrow, and it may be the last pleasant little supper we can have this season."

"I will see you home with pleasure," said Featherstone.

So they left the theatre in the luxurious brougham which was in waiting. Still the warm and yet blue sky overhead, and the solemn, sultry stars.

Carriages flashed by theirs, bearing some beauty, perhaps, to a new conquest. Somehow it seemed to Featherstone that he realized, as he had never done before, all the romance and intrigue which daily go on in this great city of ours. And had he not his own share of romance?

How much would many men have given to occupy his present position—a position which had really been forced upon him. Not from the height of his five and twenty years, but from his height as dramatist and reader of human nature, did he regard himself with a mental smile of satisfaction—satisfaction to feel that his head was quite unturned, and that, by the side of the fascinating actress, pure as the starlight came to him the thought of Sophie, who was now probably sleeping contentedly in Paris after the fatigue of her journey.

---

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. BRAKEHILL scarcely spoke until they were seated in her boudoir. Then she began, as if scarcely knowing what to say :

“ I wish you would stay to-night.”

“ Please tempt me no more,” said Featherstone.

He wanted to get to his work, and, be it also admitted, he wanted to write to Sophie.

“ If you could see my table littered over with almost illegible notes—brain deposits from which plays are hereafter to start full-grown—you would really pity me.”

“ I do, I do ; but I am afraid women are selfish in their wishes.”

“ Now, please,” he added, “ will you tell me the import of your telegram ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” she answered, as if trying to recall herself. “ Let me see. I was—oh, yes, it was about my new part. I want you, if you can, to give me a little more to do in the third act.”

“ And is that what you call important ? ” said Featherstone, with a smile.

“ Yes, to me, if not to you.”

“ Then, really, this is all you wanted me for ? ”

No answer. Featherstone rose in alarm, for the face of his companion had suddenly turned pale, and she was leaning back exhaustedly, one arm thrown over her chair, the other pressed to her heart.

“ Please open the window,” she said, just audibly. “ Oh, my heart ! I am stifling.”

Featherstone flung wide the window. He leaned out for a moment into the warm, starlit night. Then, all at once, a strange feeling beset him—this woman’s persistency in detaining him ; the emotion which she, generally mistress over herself, could not control !

It seemed as if a mystery was gathering round which he could neither penetrate nor escape.

“ Come here, please,” cried Blanche, almost beseechingly.

“ Help me to the sofa.”

He ran to her, and in his arms half carried, half-supported her there.



"Thank you," she said; "I feel just a little better now. Don't let go my hand; there seems a sort of magnetism in your touch which revives me." Then with a faint and far away smile: "Did Sophie ever tell you what nice hands you have?"

"Sophie says a great many dear, foolish things to me."

"Tell me something about her. Oh, but I forget—you have work to do."

"Do you think, Blanche, I could leave you, ill as you are, until your husband comes back?"

His blood was kindling under the touch of those beautiful fingers.

"You are kind and thoughtful. I shall be much better soon. Is Sophie jealous?"

"I don't think so; but I have never given her cause to be."

"Supposing you were faithless to her, what would she do?"

"Well, in that very impossible event, she would cry her eyes out, when I wasn't by, and then meet me with a sweet, distant manner, with more of pity than reproof in it."

"And would that be all?" exclaimed Blanche, her eyes suddenly kindling, and her voice regaining its old strength; "what a meek little soul she must be! Why, if any man I loved were faithless to me—say Robert—I should like to tear his heart out! I would sell my soul, yes, and a hundred souls, if I had them, only to inflict on him all the suffering I could dream or devise!"

"Bravo!" cried Featherstone, clapping his hands. "I must really give you a jealous heroine to act. What a pity your audience on this occasion has been limited to one!"

"Do you think I am always acting, then?"

"More or less; though, perhaps, sometimes unconsciously to yourself."

She was about to frame some reply, when Waters and Brakehill entered.

"Only fancy, Robert," she exclaimed, rising, "Mr. Featherstone talks of not staying to supper! You won't let him go, will you?"

"Really, my dear child," returned Brakehill, "if your persuasions have been ineffectual, I can hope little from mine."

"Indeed," said Featherstone, "I am obliged to go."

He longed with a nameless longing to be out of the house;

yet some subtle spell seemed to be sapping his powers of resistance.

"Surely," pleaded Waters, with grave earnestness in his voice, "surely, you will not deny your heroine this request?"

Featherstone had really pressing work to do; yet, was not his extreme desire to get away partly morbid? He thought it was, and that it would not do to let such a feeling master him. He would let work go, then, for this night. Even if he stayed late, he could still conclude and post his letter to Sophie.

"I can resist no longer," he said, calling up a smile; "I will stay."

"Thank you! thank you!" exclaimed Blanche. "As a reward, I will flirt with you all night; and," with a smile at her husband, "lest Robert should be jealous, he shall wear my flowers."

Taking a rose from her bosom, she fastened it in his button-hole.

Though Featherstone strove to be gay, that strange mistrust of ill, which he already detected and combatted persistently, came back. What was the meaning of it? Were there indeed such things as occult and sympathetic warnings? Had anything happened to Sophie? The thought turned him cold. Yes, he would still contrive to slip away early and write to her.

The group then descended to supper, which was a little banquet. The room was brilliantly lighted, and the air heavy with the scent of flowers. The wine flowed freely, though Featherstone drank but little.

Again he spoke of going, but his objections were overruled. The light seemed to grow even more sultry.

"I hope it's not impertinent," said Waters, "for me to express my admiration of Mrs. Brakehill's necklace."

It deserved admiration, being a cluster of very fine and effective diamonds.

"Yes, it is rather pretty," she replied, unclasping it from her beautifully-formed throat. "But it seems quite a weight to-night; it coils heavily round my neck like a serpent."

"A royal chain to be strangled by," laughed Featherstone. "Splendid, indeed!"

It seemed too costly a toy for common occasions. Perhaps Blanche had just put it on that he might see it.

"It was mysteriously sent home to me one day," she said, "without a hint of the giver."

"By Jove! he must have been a Cræsus, Waters," said Brakehill.

Mr. Waters, who had just suspended his interest in the matter to watch the shuffling lights of gold and green in his wine-glass, rejoined in his tone of bland placidity:

"Or perhaps, Bob, some hopeless adorer who loved to ruin himself."

As she resumed her necklace, the conversation turned upon other offerings made to Mrs. Brakehill by her professional admirers. Of these she pointed out with pride an antique silver-hilted scimiter over the mantelpiece. She had fallen in love with it on a visit to Lord B——'s show place in Yorkshire, and the generous owner had caused it, with a complimentary line, to be deposited in her carriage.

After some time Mrs. Brakehill, pleading fatigue from her public exertions and a slight headache, rose to retire. Her husband, to whom she wished to speak for a minute, also left the room.

"Well, you must wait till Brakehill returns," said Waters. "Let me play host and suggest a glass of this chambertin. It goes admirable after champagne."

"Thanks," laughed Featherstone. "I fear I'm in a mood for excitement."

And, topping off a couple of glasses quickly, he lit a cigar.

After some twenty minutes, Brakehill came back, and conversation was resumed. In this, however, Featherstone bore his part but flaggingly. He felt strongly that he must now resist further temptation and take his leave.

Though the hour was now too late for work, he must not fail to conclude and post that letter which he knew Sophie was expecting. But in spite of his wish to leave, the power to do so seemed almost to have collapsed. He was aware of a difficulty in answering questions, even in comprehending them; of a growing lethargy which his moderate indulgence in wine by no means accounted for. Suddenly there struggled through his density of brain a recollection of the spell over his will, and the strange presentiment of evil which he had formerly experienced. He would quit the house at once; to delay would be to succumb.

"Good-night, Brakehill," he said, rising, and striving to speak resolutely and coherently.

Though Brakehill still plied him with hospitable entreaties, he held out his hand to take leave ; but his gait was unsteady.

“ My dear fellow, you look quite ill,” said Waters, in his dulcet, mesmeric voice.

“ Who shall prevent me ? ” burst out Featherstone, with a violence unnatural to him, and in loud but unsteady accents.

“ Why, I, as your friend ; he is not fit to go yet, Brakehill, and must not.”

“ Must not ! ” shouted the detained man. “ I tell you, I will ; I will free myself from—what do you mean, Brakehill ? ”

For Brakehill had soothingly placed his hand upon his sleeve. There was no need, however, of further friendly contest with the young dramatist. While endeavouring to support himself by his chair, he sank into it unresistingly. The lights began to swim before his eyes ; the voices of his companions grew fainter and fainter.

After a while all around him seemed vague and confused. It was as if a crust had formed round his brain and deadened his sense of actual things. Nevertheless he retained a certain perception of sounds—sounds such as fever catches and fancies in disturbed sleep, and weaves into the mesh of its hallucinations ; he heard stealthy movements in the room, yet felt that he was dreaming and powerless to speak or stir. His brain was going round and round, as to a mystic tune, in which mingled near whispers ; then sounds as of doors gently opening and closing ; next a shrill, sudden utterance—half-laugh, half-moan—followed by a noise dull and heavy.

Then, as it were, a breath of wind came over him, then silence, and he seemed to be drifting down a stream, with green banks on either side, Sophie on the bank above him, and he could not reach her—Sophie reaching down to him with loving hands, praying him to come to her, and he could not ; Mrs. Brakehill gazing at him from the other bank, no longer young and lovely, but old and ugly, the face thin and fallen in, the hands lean and scraggy.

Ah, and she was laughing ! He knew, if he could only hear it, how horrible that laughter would sound. Then, suddenly, his dream seemed arrested. He had gained the top of the bank, he knew not how ; but Sophie was gone ; Mrs. Brakehill was gone, too.



Could he move his hand? He would try. He could. What was it he touched in front of him—the table? Yes; and this was a chair he was sitting in.

As through a haze one makes out familiar objects, he began to remember the events of the preceding day, beginning with the hour in Sophie's drawing-room. How far off that hour seemed!

He must have been asleep. He felt stupefied, though not as a man feels when he has taken too much wine. Yet he must have been asleep some time, for the wax candles were burning low, the flowers on the tables were drooping, and the morning light was stealthily creeping in.

He made these facts out by slow degrees; then the strangeness of his being alone suddenly occurred to him. Had they left him there to sleep?

There might be yet time to post Sophie's letter. He knew the ways of the house; he would leave it. If people came, as they doubtless would, to look after him, they would simply find he was gone; his unnatural sleep must have been due to the overwrought state of his brain.

He rose and moved somewhat unsteadily toward the door, feeling rather than seeing his way. He had only gone a few steps when he stumbled against something in his path. It was a prostrate figure.

"Well, perhaps, after all," was his first thought, "we may have been having a drinking bout—at least, here is one of us down. Now, who is it?"

Taking a candle, he bent down to look, but recoiled with a cry of horror; for there, still with the flower fastened in his button-hole by his wife, lay Brakehill—motionless, lifeless—a wide, terrible gash drawn across his bloody throat.

His eyes had a fixed frantic look. His shirt and the floor round him were drenched with blood.

Featherstone picked up a weapon close by, which was wet and had almost slipped from his hand. It was the very scimitar that had hung over the mantelpiece—Lord B——'s gift to Blanche! Great heaven? What should he do?

At that moment the door opened a little way, and Mrs. Brakehill, in her dressing-gown, appeared on the threshold.

"Are you, gentlemen, ever going to break up?" said she, in her sweet voice. "Waters went hours ago. Why don't you



answer?" Then she came in. "My God! what is this?" she cried, as her eyes fell on the body of her murdered husband! Then, turning to Featherstone with blazing eyes: "Oh, wretch. *You* have done it! I heard you quarrel; I grew uneasy at the silence, and—oh, heaven!"

"Are you mad?" cried Featherstone, "that you should say this to me? You may be overheard."

"And why should I not be overheard? I tell you, *you* have done it."

Before Featherstone could reply or interpose, she had rung the bell, roused the house, and left the room.

Stupefied with horror, he stood motionless. At length he heard a cry, "Help! help! Police! police!" rend the still morning air—a cry soon followed by a hurrying of feet through the hall.

He was conscious of nothing more till a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder; then he turned to face his position. Sophie would have to go without her letter.

The policeman, who had already mutely arrested Featherstone, turned to Mrs. Brakehill, who had entered with him, while not only the agitated domestics, but passengers from the street, had gathered together in the room.

Two more of the police now entered, raised the lifeless form of Brakehill and laid it on a couch.

"You charge this person with the murder of your husband?" said the first functionary of the law, with the mechanical impassiveness of his class.

She then proceeded with her relation. She had left her husband and the accused man with a friend, whom she and one of the servants, retiring late to rest, had heard long since leave the house.

She had heard high words of menace addressed by Featherstone to her husband—a fact to which the same servant also bore witness. She had felt a little uneasy, but it was not till she found her husband had not entered his bedroom at daybreak that she became really anxious.

Unable to endure longer suspense, she had then risen and gone down to the dining-room. There she found her murdered husband's body, and Featherstone standing over it. No one else was present.

"And there," cried she, suddenly perceiving the stained

weapon—"there is the instrument with which he effected his crime."

Early that morning Featherstone was brought before the magistrate of the district and committed for trial.

---

### CHAPTER III.

THE summer was over, and all metropolitan holiday-makers, except a privileged few, had returned to the horrors of a London November, with its thick fogs and quagmires of mud.

Amongst the placards which adorned dead walls or scaffoldings, by far the most conspicuous was that which announced Mrs. Brakehill's approaching reappearance at the Sun Theatre.

Although some people thought that that event should have been longer delayed, it must be remembered that the vocation of an actor denies leisure even to grief, and that several months had already elapsed since the occurrence of her domestic tragedy.

During this interval Featherstone, though "committed" for Mr. Brakehill's murder, had not yet been brought to trial. He had been stricken down by an attack of brain fever, from the effects of which he was now slowly recovering—coming back to life in all probability only to quit it, since he could not disguise from himself—nor did his lawyer attempt it—that his case was a bad one.

Those were dark days for Sophie. Many women in her position would have been utterly prostrated; but in that slight, fragile form of hers beat a strong, brave heart, the indomitable courage of which so sustained her that she could minister to him, whenever the regulations of the prison permitted, the solace of her presence or her tendance.

Besides, she felt certain that the innocence of her lover would be established. There were times, indeed, in the dead watches of the night, when the thought would flash upon her of how it would be should it prove otherwise. At such times her terror seemed to take a spectral shape, and some hideous phantom seemed to gaze into her eyes with eyes of fire. It would be all

she could do to keep from shrieking aloud, while her teeth chattered and she shivered in every limb.

These terrible visitations, however, were but rare. Even with the morning returned her faith that all would go well.

A week before her reappearance at the theatre, Mrs. Brakehill was sitting in her charmingly-furnished boudoir. Dusk was falling ; but instead of ordering her lamp, she gave herself up to a firelight reverie, scarcely a pleasant one, if judged by the expression of her face, which wore a look that gradually darkened, as if struggling hope had been overcome by fear. She started when the door opened and Waters walked in ; but she said, quietly, scarcely turning her head :

“Good afternoon. I saw nothing of you yesterday evening.”

“No, darling,” he answered, taking both her hands and kissing her. “Quite unexpectedly I met Lady Wynville at the *Gaiety matinée*. She is only here *en route* for Paris, and insisted on my dining with her.”

“Was her daughter there ? She was, or you would not have accepted. You love that girl. Oh, you might as well be frank with me,” she said, with a slight, hard laugh, that had more menace in it than mirth. “Let my hands go, please.”

“Certainly, if you wish it ! Well, Blanche, I *will* be frank with you. The thing can be put off no longer. I love you now as I have always done. I am a cold man, not given to fall in love. You are the only woman that ever moved me. To me you are ever fascinating—ever adorable. But I will not disguise from you that I am worldly and ambitious.”

“And you think this girl will marry you ?”

“She is going to do so ; it is this fact that I came to tell you.”

She sat perfectly silent. So he went on without much misgiving and with some show of ardour :

“Blanche, my darling, whoever I may call my wife, I shall be married really only to you. Can we not be all to each other that we ever have been ?”

Had he seen her lips pressed tightly together, or the strange light in her eyes, he would not have done what he did, which was to bend over her caressingly. She sprang up as if she had been stung, while her eyes, now meeting his, seemed all at once filled with infinite hate and scorn.

“How dare you,” she said—“how dare you insult me in this way ? Do you think I will ever forgive it to you ? Not as long

as we two live ! What ! I to serve your passion, she to bear your name ? For me the disgrace, for her the honour ? I gave myself to you because there seemed no chance of our marrying. But, now, and, my God, after all that has been ! ”

“ I think I would leave the Almighty’s name out of the business,” he replied, with a sneer.

“ Perhaps so,” she said ; “ but if I had no pity, I had no fear. There is nothing more to be said—leave me ! ”

“ You will be more reasonable in a day or two.”

“ Perhaps so ”—her voice was very low—“ will you go now, or shall I ring for my servant ? ”

“ No ; I should be sorry to put you to that trouble ; only act as well next week as you have done this afternoon, and your triumph will be sure. Farewell.”

When the door had closed behind him, she sat still some little time, as if too stricken to move. At length she rose and began a hurried walk up and down the room.

She had not loved the man who had just left her with any high or noble love. *That* it was not in her to give. The strongest feeling of which she was capable was the desire to triumph. She had been enthralled and spellbound by this cold nature, which only she could kindle. She had loved him with a love fierce, violent, unholy ; but it had been the one great passion of her life.

The days—full of fierce, turbulent struggle for Blanche, of darkness and horror for Sophie—passed on their course.

The night for the former’s re-appearance on the stage came at length.

A marked feature in our poor human nature is its passionate interest in the morbid and the terrible. That a crowd should eagerly rush to inspect a house which fire has devastated, or in which murder has been committed, is not, perhaps, surprising ; but there are those for whom the very houses that adjoin the gutted building have a fascination—those who will count it a rare privilege to buy their ounce of tobacco at the same shop where the latest hero of the police-sheet made similar purchases, till that awkward incident befell him which put a final end to his smoking, as to his recreations in general.

The diseased excitement thus evinced is by no means confined to the so-called vulgar.

As might have been expected, therefore, from the tragic



events we have related, the Sun Theatre was densely thronged in all parts, on the night of Mrs. Brakehill's re-appearance.

No sooner had the booking-office opened than every box and stall was secured. A completely new play honoured the occasion. But there was really no need for it. Had the manager chosen even one of our great master-pieces, I believe the house would have been no less crammed.

The new decorations, the fair faces, the splendid toilets made the Sun Theatre quite pleasant to survey, while the musicians were tuning up for the overture.

In front all the talk was, of course, about the heroine of the night. One young lady wondered how she could have appeared on the stage again ; another thought it showed great nerve, and very much admired her ; a third wondered how she would look, and " whenever the music would begin."

Then the critics lounged in, trying how to disguise their interest, and not to look less bored than usual.

Behind the scenes there was, of course, all the bustle and excitement inseparable from the first night of a new play. Without, however, lingering at the wing or peering into the green-room, we will go at once where probably many would like to accompany us, that is, to Mrs. Brakehill's dressing-room. We find her in a chair in the front of her looking-glass, where her faithful attendant, Flower (herself quite a bewitching young lady), is arranging the beautiful dark hair of her mistress.

" Why, I declare !" Flower exclaims, in her sweetest tones, " you do not seem the very least bit excited about to-night."

" No ; I am quite calm to-night."

" And what a lovely part you have," went on the other. " Oh, I say, won't you have a lot of bouquets? I should think Mr. Waters would throw half-a-dozen himself."

Mrs. Brakehill started, as with sharp physical pain.

" Have I hurt you, ma'am ?" cried the vivacious Flower. " I thought I was brushing your hair quite gently."

" Oh, it's nothing," replied Mrs. Brakehill. " I was looking for my handkerchief."

" There ! they are striking up the overture. How it excites me. I declare I shall have to go on the stage myself, one day. At all events, I could take the part of a lady's-maid."

" Foolish child," said the actress, with a smile. " I have no intention of letting you leave me—I like you a great deal too well."



At which the handmaiden protested that it was her unshakable resolve to live and die in the service of her mistress, who really had a great fascination for her.

Then Mrs. Brakehill rose. Flower remarking, as she put on that lady's simple dress for the first act, that it did seem a shame to hide such a beautiful neck and such lovely arms ; but she added, more cheerfully :

"You will be able to show them in your great ball scene, in the fourth act, won't you?" At which Mrs. Brakehill smiled rather faintly, and said :

"Why, Flower, I believe you are more vain of me than I am of myself!"

The finishing touches were then given to the toilet, which was in the most perfect taste. The music ceased, and loud applause announced that the curtain had risen.

The call-boy's summons came, and Mrs. Brakehill went to take her position at the wing.

The stillness which falls behind the scenes after the curtain has gone up contrasts strangely with the noise and bustle which precede its rising. People move stealthily, as if bent on theft or murder behind the "set." In the green-room they speak in voices carefully moderated, and at the wings only in whispers.

"And here she is!" exclaimed Mr. Prince, who acted the father of the play heroine. This was Blanche's cue, and she went on.

The house rose and thundered its applause. The men shouted "Brava!" the women waved their handkerchiefs. You would really have thought that the murder of the unfortunate Mr. Brakehill had in some way redounded to the nobility of his wife as a woman and to the greatness of her talent as an actress.

At length the tumult subsided. A few indefatigable young men tried to awake a fresh outburst ; but, having been severely and simultaneously hissed, they gave in, and, after looking round defiantly and superciliously, at length settled themselves to enjoy the night's performance.

We shall not attempt to follow the plot of the piece, which was somewhat melodramatic. The first act passed off with considerable animation, the principal performers being called before the curtain.

Of course, all the talk was of Mrs. Brakehill. Some people thought she looked even better than before the murder of her

husband. Others, more romantic, said they could see unmistakable signs of keen suffering in her face ; but all agreed she was acting with less spirit than usual.

"It won't do," said one critic to another ; "she is trusting to the situations, and doing nothing for the part herself."

"And a poor enough part it is, so far," replied the other.

On the night of this theatrical event so long looked forward to, Waters was dining with a friend at his club.

Waters was a man who, while he thoroughly enjoyed the pleasures of life—all those, at least, that could be derived from the senses—kept his relish for them by avoiding excesses.

On this night, however, he had indulged in wine more freely than was his wont. The two men were sitting at coffee, when Sir William Boulton, whose guest he was, said, as he lit a cigar :

"What do you say, Waters, to looking in at the Sun Theatre? Lady Grace and her mother will be glad to see us in their box. I hear Brakehill has only one good scene, and that's at the end of the fourth act. Come, what do you say?"

The other did not seem very warmly to second the plan.

"I tell you what it is, old boy," cried Sir William, with a laugh : "you don't want Brakehill to see you with that pretty wife of yours, that is to be."

"No, upon my soul, you're wrong," said Waters.

"Come, then, and face the enemy. At such a distance you can afford to be brave. I want to see if she has been pining for you. She is certainly a fine-looking woman, but to my taste just a shade less of her would be an improvement."

Waters was unorthodox enough to return from coffee to champagne, after having drained two glasses of which he exclaimed :

"Well, I'm your man—lead on !"

That last glass, beyond moderation, is often an important factor, not only in the life of the drinker, but in the lives of others.

All through the evening Mrs. Brakehill had kept her eyes fixed on private box A, which was one of the most conspicuous in the theatre.

On this occasion it was occupied by two ladies. One was well advanced in life. She had a full, round, good-natured, but thoroughly foolish face. Her companion was quite young.

Her face was oval, her complexion fair, her eyes soft and sleepy, her mouth small, but somewhat scornful in its expression. The reader need not be told that the two women were Lady Grace and her mother.

Just at the close of the third act, when the house was so hushed that you could have heard a pin fall, as Mrs. Brakehill, in low, passionate tones, described the retribution due to a faithless lover, she heard the door of a box gently open and shut.

Two men had entered box A, one of whom was leaning over Lady Grace's chair. From the actress to this man flashed a look swift as lightning and charged with meaning. On that look the curtain fell.

"By Jove!" cried Benson, the critic of the *Moon*, to Jenkins, the critic of the *Earth*, "did you see that?"

"You mean that averted side-look of Brakehill's? The best thing she has done to night. I half-fancied it might have set the place on fire!"

"Oh, but the look was at that box. Waters is there. I think there will be a storm in that quarter before very long."

"What quarter?" asked uninitiated Jenkins.

"You haven't heard about the affair? Oh, it's no end of a joke. I could manage a brandy-and-soda. How do you feel?"

Jenkins's feelings going in the same direction, the two censors rose and made their way to the bar of the theatre, where they found a few brother critics, with one or two semi-literary young men, who liked to be seen in their company.

Some members of the group soon began to make merry over their liquor, at the expense of author and actors, while the more knowing ones talked apart of Mrs. Brakehill and Waters. One man deposed to having met that gentleman in the lobby, and gave it as his opinion that the gentleman had been dining, on which the interlocutor, pulling out his watch, remarked that he had not dined yet, and that he envied any man who had.

While this was going on, while young men were paying private box visits to fair ladies, for which purpose chiefly some of them were come, and while the orchestra was playing its most spirited music for the fourth and last act, the heroine of the night sat in her dressing-room, trembling and white as death, her marble-cold hands locked tightly in each other. Flowers thought she was going to faint, and poured eau-de-Cologne on her forehead.

“Oh, what is the matter, my dear?” said the poor maid. “You do look so bad. Let me take your dress off. It’s high time to change for the next act.”

But Mrs. Brakehill sat lost and silent. She was seeing again the look with which Waters had answered hers—a look of quiet insolence, which said plainly as words: “Yes, you don’t like the position, do you? You would like to spring. Do you think it would be advisable?”

“Do let me begin, ma’am,” implored faithful Flower. “We shall never be ready if you don’t. Remember the next act is your ball scene, and you must look lovely. I say, didn’t they applaud you when you came off? Now, my dear, do rouse yourself. Why, there’s the music!”

Yes, the music had begun. It went on playing while scene-shifters and carpenters got ready the next set, now and then swearing good-humoredly at each other. Light-hearted and light-heeled actresses came singing from their rooms to the wing. Through the half-open door of his room the manager might be seen gaily chatting with his friends over libations of champagne, or brandy-and-soda, for, whatever the critics might say, the new piece was going capitally with the house.

Spite of the general and noisy animation without, Mrs. Brakehill still sat moveless and abstracted until Flower almost forced her to swallow a few mouthfuls of wine, which seemed to revive her.

“Now we shall do!” cried the delighted tire-woman, as she found herself able to proceed, though still slowly, with the dressing of her mistress.

Suddenly the actress turned round, with a dangerous and evil fire in her eyes, and exclaimed fiercely, “It is to be, then. You have taken your part!”—words which happened to occur in her next scene.

Flower, who thought she was rehearsing, ejaculated, “Splendid, splendid!” and clapped her hands; adding, however, “But we must really make haste.”

“Mrs. Brakehill called!” cried the call-boy from without.

Blanche had only just begun to put on the elaborate ball-dress in which she was to go through the business of the last act; but she was now as excited as she had before been lethargic. Her eyes glittered, and, even through her rouge, a bright spot burned on either cheek.



She looked "glorious," Flower said, as she lit her dainty ears with two great drops of light in the shape of superb brilliants.

Blanche talked and talked, passing rapidly from one matter to another. Then she laughed and sang snatches of songs ; but when, for the second time, the alarming announcement came that the stage was waiting, she was found sobbing hysterically on the shoulder of her maid.

Poor Flower, almost beside herself, prayed her to be composed.

"You know," she said, "they can't raise the curtain till you are ready. Do listen to the noise ! On my word, they are hissing ! The brutes in the gallery are hooting and whistling."

Indeed, the audience had reason to be displeased ; for the hour was late, and the music had more than once ceased and recommenced. And now the manager came to Blanche's door to ask what was the matter that she did not appear.

Learning the true state of the case, he was about to bespeak a few minutes' more patience from the audience on her behalf, when the lady darted from her room and said she was ready.

"Don't be frightened," she said, "for the play *shall* be a success."

Then she turned and kissed Flower. In another minute the curtain had risen on the appeased audience.

The new act was one which afforded Blanche great opportunities for the display of her power, and of these she fully availed herself. In the preceding acts there had been an impression that the great Mrs. Brakehill was not all that she used to be ; but now every look and tone came home, and the riveted crowd felt, and with truth, that they had never seen such acting before. I wonder if they ever will again ?

Even the performers who acted with Blanche, when they were once off the scene, spoke of her with amazement.

"Brakehill is superb. She is carrying everything before her. I thought at first she was gone."

"Not she," put in another. "Don't you see, she was holding in for this."

The audience listened as if they were spellbound, and when the play neared its close, passed from fierce excitement into pathos, the women wept unrestrainedly, while the men, to



avoid doing so, knitted their brows, and looked sternly before them. Then came the last word—that word which divides an author from his fate—and the curtain fell. A hurricane of applause followed. Then the curtain again rose, and instantly the actress stood almost knee-deep in a rain of bouquets and wreaths. Over the storm of sound, her voice rose clear and piercing, commanding silence. There was something awful in the instant cessation of madly clapping hands and cheering voices. It was as if the angel of death had touched all present.

Mrs. Brakehill's face was white and ghastly, but she did not tremble, neither did her voice falter, when she began to speak.

"I thank you all," she said, "for your kindness ; but I have a graver matter to speak of. In that box" she pointed to one from which Waters was slightly leaning forward ; "in that box stands the murderer of my husband !"

The effect produced by these words were electrical. Lady Grace sprang up ; but Waters, with a half-stifled oath, put his hand on her shoulder, and forced her into a chair. "Would you make a scene," he whispered, "and ruin me? Don't you see the woman's mad?"

All eyes were riveted on his box.

"That's he ! that's he !" cried many ; but as he again came forward and made a sign with his hand, there was again a dead silence.

"Is any medical gentleman present?" he asked, slowly and softly. "This poor lady is my friend. I half-feared it would be so ; under the excitement her brain has given way."

"No, no ! I am not mad," cried the voice from the stage. "That man is my husband's murderer. I will prove it. I will prove it : " but here consciousness deserted her, and Blanche fell motionless on the stage.

"Poor thing, poor thing !" said a few of those in the stalls, evidently disposed to accept Water's statement.

"He is going ! he is going !" burst forth from many in the pit and gallery, in tones of menace.

"To the stage-door to inquire," said Waters, to a gentleman in the stalls, who immediately circulated the information.

After a minute or two had passed, the manager came forward to state that Mrs. Brakehill, suffering from a recent shock, and

from the strain of the night's excitement, was still insensible, but that the best medical aid had already been volunteered.

When Blanche had been conveyed home, the statement of Waters received an authentic corroboration. The physicians pronounced her really mad.

---

#### CHAPTER IV.

IT was the day of Featherstone's trial—a dull, dreary, January day. The court was crowded and great excitement prevailed, though not of course, to the degree that would have been the case had Blanche Brakehill been called as a witness. Time, however, though it had in some measure restored her bodily health, had not given back her reason. Hopes, indeed, were entertained that she might in time recover it, but they were too vague to form a ground for further delaying the trial. To resume, the witnesses had been examined on both sides. Amongst these had been Waters, who swore that he left Brakehill in his usual health late on the night preceding the discovery of the murder; also that he had left with him Featherstone, who was, or who feigned to be, overcome with fatigue.

The servants repeated what they had stated before the magistrate—that on retiring late they had heard loud words (the sense of which escaped them) between their master and Featherstone, and that they had also some time afterward heard the street door open and close, a fact which tallied with Waters's account of his departure.

The nature of the evidence for the defence will be seen from the concluding remarks of Mr. Sergeant Belford, the prisoner's counsel.

“ I ask you to remember, gentlemen of the jury,” said the learned advocate, “ that the prisoner whose fate you will have to decide is known as a gentleman of irreproachable reputation, of a humane and social disposition, of a happy and even temper. All this has been deposed to by those who knew him in the intimacy of private life, by various members of the club to which he belonged; by those, also, who knew him in his pro-

fessional life—the manager and the leading actors of the Sun Theatre.

“ Bear in mind, too, I entreat you, that Mr. Featherstone, at the date of the murder, was engaged to be married ; that he had in his keeping not only his own happiness, but that of one dear to him. Bear in mind that he could have no motive for the crime of which he now stands accused, that he was highly prosperous as a dramatic author, and that his success was in a great measure due to the talents of Mrs. Brakehill. What utter madness, then, would it have been for him to raise his hand against her husband, with whom, as with herself, he had long been on the most friendly terms ? We find, therefore, not only that he had no motive for perpetrating this crime, but every motive against it.

“ The only facts, indeed, on which the case against this unfortunate gentleman rests are his presence in Brakehill’s house, subsequently to the murder, and the evidence given before the magistrate by Mrs. Brakehill, that he had been found by her kneeling beside her dead husband, with a blood-stained weapon in his hand.

“ Mrs. Brakehill, as you have heard, cannot be examined here to-day, as to the truth of her statement. But, gentlemen, I put it, is it not highly possible that the deprivation of reason under which she now suffers, had attacked her for a while under the first shock of her husband’s murder, and that her testimony was that of a woman deliriously excited, if not insane, at the time it was given ! But were every word of that evidence true, could any fair mind regard it as conclusive of this hitherto irreproachable man’s guilt ? And what, gentlemen, is the testimony borne by those two eminent physicians, Doctor Holt and Doctor Williams ? They both examined Featherstone on the day when the murder was discovered, and subsequently, and they both tell you that his symptoms were those of a man slowly recovering from the effects of a powerful opiate. They fully confirm, in a word, the statement of the prisoner before the magistrate, in which he expressed his strong conviction that he had been drugged. Even could Mrs. Brakehill’s statement be relied on that on encountering him he seemed dazed and confused, that fact would quite cohere with the opinion of the physicians that an opiate had probably been administered. But even were doubt possible on that point, how else but ‘ dazed

and stupefied' could a man appear who had suddenly seen in his path the murdered body of a friend—a friend who had shortly before seemed full of health and animation? What more natural than that Featherstone, on reviving to consciousness, finding himself alone, the time morning, and knowing the ways of the house, should prepare to leave it?

“He goes toward the door, he comes suddenly upon the prostrate body, he kneels and examines it, his eye is arrested by the murderous weapon. He acts as, I believe, any man in his place would have acted—he takes it up, and while in his horror he asks himself what is the best thing to do—how the awful news is to be broken to the person whom the tragedy most intimately affects—that very person herself appears, and accuses him of the murder of his friend.

“It is not my duty to explain this fell deed, or to suggest its perpetrator. It is sufficient for me to show that it has not been brought home to the prisoner. Amongst the speculations to which this mysterious event gives rise, what is there to shut out the possibility that it may have been due to Brakehill's own act? The wound was precisely of that kind which a man may inflict upon himself.

“The Brakehills, though the wife was in receipt of a large salary, lived in a state of luxury which was possibly beyond their means, and it has been proved to you that the unfortunate husband very shortly before his death, had lost largely on the turf. Heavy losses, concealed jealousy, however ill-founded, of a wife who attracted so much homage, or other motives, may have impelled him in a moment of excitement to the fatal act.

“I do not say that any of the suppositions are probable, but I put to you whether, at least, they are not more probable than that a man of unblemished character should have committed so foul a murder upon a friend whose interests were one with his own?”

The sergeant sat down amidst considerable excitement. The Crown prosecutor then did his best to lessen Featherstone's chance of life by a long-winded reply, after which the judge summed up to the effect that certain facts given in evidence doubtless told forcibly against the prisoner; that if they left no reasonable doubt of his guilt it was not necessary to have evidence of motive—the law would presume it; that, if however, they could entertain a reasonable doubt, either from the



testimony of the medical men, or from that borne to the prisoner's character, he ought certainly to have the benefit of it. In brief, this dignified functionary lucidly restated all the difficulties of the problem, and invited the jury to solve it.

The fateful twelve were absent from their box just a quarter of an hour. On their return the question, "Gentlemen, are you all agreed in your verdict?" was duly asked; the answer, "We are," was duly returned.

"Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," said the foreman; and from the late spellbound crowd burst a cry of relief, followed by a shout of applause, which was at once sternly repressed.

Thus from Featherstone the horror of a shameful and violent death had been averted. The life, however, to which he had been restored offered to him a future from which the strongest fortitude might have shrunk.

He had been absolved by the law, but he felt that by the world generally he would be suspected, even if not condemned. And, besides, a man who had been tried for murder could never be Sophie's husband.

It was under this bitter thought, most of all, that he bent as the officials helped him into the cab which was to bear the broken-down man to his old abode.

When the populace caught sight of him many cheered, but not a few hissed. He was lost and stunned. He did not even draw up the window as the cab drove off.

How strange it seemed to be back in the old place, to see the old books on the shelves, the likenesses of a few chosen friends on the mantelpiece!

Of course, the first thing to be done was to write to Sophie. For this purpose he went to the familiar writing-table, and on opening the drawer he came upon his half-completed letter to her, written that ill-starred day on the night of which began for him the great trouble of his life.

He was reading it over curiously, as the composition of another man, and had just reached the words, "My own darling love, light and summer of my life, you of whom the very thought is a benediction," when the door opened, and he was given a letter which had just been delivered by hand. It was from Sophie. He first kissed the seal, then broke it and read:



“Some one who was in court for me, my dearest, brought me the news. I knew it could be no other. Still I feel weak. The fight with my trouble for you has been so long. You will dine with us to-night. You must be prepared for aunt making no end of fuss over you. Please come, dear, the very soonest you can, for I long to see you more than words can say.

“SOPHIE.”

An hour afterward Sophie was sitting alone in the drawing-room. Her face is indeed worn and tells of weary and sleepless nights ; yet a bright spot of excitement burns on either cheek. She has on her prettiest dress, and altogether looks adorably sweet and tender.

The house occupied by Sophie and her aunt, stood in a road, the quietude of which was almost melancholy—a quietude which certain regularly-recurring sounds seemed only to intensify.

There you can hear the postman at least ten doors off. Mrs. Paynes, who lives next door, borrows the *Times* for a couple of hours a day, and every afternoon at three and five o'clock the shrill cry of “Paper !” rings down the road.

If the milkman is disposed to be chatty with the housemaid or cook, as he frequently is, the conversation in the area is overheard in the drawing-room. Mr. Smith who lives opposite, is an invalid. He dines early and invariably has fish for supper. This you know by hearing every evening at seven o'clock the cry of “Fish, ho !” If at the time you are thinking of nothing in particular, and are by nature of a reflective turn, you wonder how any invalid can eat so much fish ; you wonder what result such a course of fish eating would have upon yourself ; you wonder if he has a particular fish for every night in the week—if Monday means cod-night, and so on—you wonder what is the fish for *this* night ; you think what fish *you* would like it to be. In this still spot a street cry gives birth to endless reflections.

Before a caller plies knocker or bell, you know he is imminent by hearing him mount the many and steep steps to the hall-door. It was at this sound that Sophie now sprang up, clasping her hands upon her heart. She then sat down again, trembling as once more she heard the familiar resolute knock.

Ah, how often had it set that fond heart of hers beating. In

another moment she was in his arms, weeping tears of irrepressible joy and thankfulness.

"My poor darling," she said, when the first minutes of meeting were over, "how worn you look!"

"And you," he answered, "look half like a ghost. Sophie," he went on, after a pause, "I'm going away—far away, and for a very long time. Perhaps I shall never come back again. Shall you miss me?"

"You are going away?" she said, looking up in his face with more wonder than trouble in her eyes.

"Yes, sweetheart, just as far as I can get. Sophie, a man placed in my position never recovers from it, unless the real criminal be discovered. The majority may believe in his innocence, but there will always be others to say, 'Such and such a thing looked strange and dark,' or, 'Such and such a point has never been cleared up.' To say the least of it, there are people in the world who will think it quite likely that your affianced husband is a murderer. Would it be well in me, dear, to bring you such a fate?" he asked, with a bitter smile.

"I don't understand you," she replied. Her hands were locked fast in each other; on her face lay the shadow of a great despair. "If in the time we have been parted you have got over loving me, I would so much rather that you told me the truth. Won't you tell me the truth, please?"

"Sophie, my love," he answered, bending down and covering her hand with kisses, "most solemnly I have told you the truth, and most solemnly this is the truth also—that I love you more than ever."

"If that, indeed, be the truth," she said, and the shadow had passed from her face, "if you go away, you do not go without me."

"God bless your noble heart!" he cried, his voice quivering; "but you don't realize what this would be. Besides, I know myself too well. Suppose, in spite of everything, I let you become my wife, how do you think I should repay this grand devotion? Why, by being often moody and wretched; I could not help it. And you—— No, this thing cannot be."

"Can't it?" she said. There was no note of fear in the clear voice which, though low, expressed decision, confidence, and wondrous love, while her eyes were full of a great triumphant light. "If you would be so unhappy with me, then how far

more unhappy would you be if all companionless? Arthur," she cried, passionately, "my lover, my king! if all the world believed you guilty of this crime, do you think I should love you one whit the less? I love you, and I am not ashamed for you to know it. Life holds only two terrors for me—the dread of losing your love, or that of losing yourself. If you leave me, you take every vestige of joy out of my life. Do you wish to turn all my days into an agony of hopeless longing! Will you go?"

She was looking straight at him with those eyes of hers, always beautiful, but now glorified by love.

"I may go," he answered, "but not without my wife."

So this brief but critical talk ended in the joy of both, in a sense of peace and consolation on Featherstone's part which he had never dreamed could be his again.

How strange it seemed to him to rest that night in his own bed! What a contrast was there between the cheery, fire-lit room and his prison cell, between his thoughts there and his thoughts of Sophie now!

The wedding was hurried on, it being the opinion of all concerned that the interest of his new condition would more than anything divert Featherstone's mind from morbid recollections.

For a while, indeed, this result followed his marriage. But a time came, and before very long, when the sense of disgrace—indelible though unmerited—weighed heavily upon him. I cannot say that, on the whole, he was much better than he had predicted of himself. He would often, for long whiles together, be silent and gloomy. Then Sophie would know that he had unlocked the closet and was looking at the skeleton within.

At such times she never said anything; but she would often sit at his feet and hold his hand close to her heart, or lean her cheek upon it. His emphatic "Bless you, my treasure!" when the mood had passed from him, repaid her for all, for it showed her that he had known and been consoled by her mute sympathy.

Ah, these women of ours! If they are plagues, are they not comforts, too?

## AN ADVENTURE AT A FRENCH HOTEL.

—:0:—

LONG stretches of deserted shore ; limitless wastes of sand blown like smoke by the wind, which in the neighbourhood of La Crosse—a little place on the French sea-coast—seemed never to need rest ; low sand-hills, with lean sea-grasses shivering at their edges, reaching out far into the sea—these were the scene. On the beach stood the one hotel of the place, a long, low, rambling building. Even in summer, in the height of the season, when a band blew its brazen music under its windows, it could not have been called altogether a cheerful place. In the autumn it was all closed, with the exception of one wing, which was kept open to harbour an occasional visitor or two ; and, at this dreary time of the year, shore and hotel looked just the refuge for a jilted lover, jilted in the most heartless manner.

The jilted lover, in the present case, was Mr. Walter Locker. Without doubt it is a bad thing even to be crossed in love, but to be jilted, to find your ideal woman no more than a heartless flirt, that is worse.

Some men under these bitter circumstances console themselves with society ; others, and these are perhaps the harder hit, want, like wounded animals, to get away from their fellows. So it was with Mr. Locker.

His friends had helped him to discover this remote seaside retreat, where he might be alone with nature, his grief, and his dead faith—where, if the mood took him, he could address any

one of them, or all three, in poems, which, for the present at least, his friends would run no risk of hearing. On this last item they congratulated themselves ; and they were most friendly in assisting him to find this remote retreat. They advised him to stay a long, long time. Most likely they had had some experience of love-sick bards, and knew they could but postpone their evil day. While he is away he will spoil whole reams of paper with his grief, the reading of which will be finally inevitable.

“ This poem,” he will say, “ was written when I thought my heart *must* break ; this was an inspiration of the winds ; this was whispered by the sea ; and this I had in confidence from the moonlight.”

But let us look forward no more ; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.

Round about La Crosse was much good rabbit-shooting, and from the occupation of constant slaughter his friends hoped much for their afflicted poet.

“ Yes,” he sighed, bitterly, as he surveyed the scene before him on one wild, windy October afternoon. “ Yes, this is the place for me—the place of places.”

A strong north-west wind prevailed, and it blew the sand from the shore and the foam from the sea in the eyes of the unhappy poet ; but above the wind the sun shone, and touched with sharp light the wild crests of the vast, on-coming thundering waves. Great, splendid, broad pieces of seaweed, warm from the sea’s tumult, and smelling of the sea, were cast momentarily upon the strand. Locker picked up piece after piece, and drank in its pungency.

He walked along the shore, he inspected the boats, pulled up high and dry, and wondered how many storms they had weathered. The sea air did its work. Rebel against the fact as he might, it remained a fact all the same—he was getting hungry. He retraced his steps to the modest hotel. It wanted yet an hour to dinner. He went to his room, and tried to beguile the time by unpacking.

It was a small room, and when the wind blew violently it shook with it. It looked straight out to sea, and when there was a high sea on you could hear, even though the windows were shut, the sound of the waves confused with the shriller note of the gale.



At six o'clock the welcome bell rang out through the wind, and Walter Locker proceeded very gladly to the *salle-à-manger*. The waiters had been dispensed with when the regular season ended, and the landlady herself, a good, buxom body, waited at the table. It was laid for two persons only.

"Who will be the companion of my meal?" thought Locker, as he began upon some very watery soup.

To reach the *salle-à-manger* from the sleeping apartments one has to cross a courtyard; and, while Locker was asking himself the question we have just mentioned, the door flew open, letting in a tremendous rush of wind, which, with a shriek, threatened for a moment to extinguish the light, and, being shut out and defeated, wailed menacingly.

"Ah, Madame Omont, what a night!" exclaimed a fresh, clear, and singularly buoyant voice; and the speaker seated herself opposite Locker. Of course you had divined that the other guest would be a "she."

Our bard was very susceptible to the charms of the fair sex, as where will you find me a bard who is not? Long before the simple repast had been concluded he had taken in the good points of his *vis-à-vis*. She was tall, and he liked tall women; she had a well-shaped, lithe figure. Her face, cut clearly as a cameo, seemed bloodless—a peculiarity which, while it somewhat detracted from her beauty, gave her face a special individuality not without its own fascination. Her eyes were clearly and coldly blue. Her small, classically-shaped head was covered with a great deal of light, fluffy, golden hair, which, surrounding her face like a frame, seemed to make it even paler by contrast with this aureole of brightness.

Her manners were unusually self-possessed. They were a triumph of quietness.

While Locker partook of fish and wondered what it might be; while he dispatched, almost at two mouthfuls, a small piece of warm, tough—oh, *how* tough!—underdone mutton; while he made equally short work of an equally small piece of veal, the lady, whom we may as well at once introduce to the reader as Miss Bertha Hardy, carried on an animated conversation with the landlady, who, as I have said before, did the honours of her table.

The lady, who was evidently English, though she spoke French with a perfectly French accent, remarked:

“Oh, madame, I have had such a delightful walk to-day. I must have gone miles and miles.”

“And mademoiselle was not frightened to go so far by herself?”

“Frightened! when I had my dear old dog, Czar, with me? Why, I'd go with him to the end of the world, and feel no fear. Now give me some more mutton, madame; you don't want to see me die of starvation before your eyes, do you? Mind, a larger piece than before; I am desperately hungry!”

Madame laughed, and left the room in search of more provender.

“The allowance does seem rather scant,” observed Mr. Locker, with a smile and a respectful glance at his companion, who answered, returning his smile graciously.

“Oh, it's too bad, you know, because meat and vegetables are wonderfully cheap here; but I think madame will do what she is told. Shall we bring about a reform? You have no idea how hungry this place will make you after a little while. Ah, here is madame; now let us open fire!”

This Mr. Locker did, and to such good effect that when the meal was concluded he did not feel hungry.

“Do you like this place?” he asked his companion, as they tried to survey each other not too intently across the table.

“Yes, I think so. It is just the kind of place to come to if you want to be alone. The evenings are heavy, that is true. I hope Madame Omont will ask us into the kitchen; it is warmer there.”

The invitation came, and in the pleasant hour that ensued the two wanderers were quite on good terms, and in possession of each other's names.

“A fascinating woman, certainly,” thought Locker, as he lay awake listening to the sea-wind raving round the house.

He was up early the next morning, enjoying the high wind and the strong, windy light. Why is it that we so seldom realize morning? On this occasion sea and shore seemed possessed by it.

“Good-morning. What a nice smell there is of the sea in the air, is there not?” said the buoyant voice that he knew, now, for Miss Hardy's.

“What a fine sea it is!” he rejoined. “Just look at those great, green, moving masses, their white foam-crests glittering,

in the sunlight. Ah," he added, "the sea is as cruel as a woman."

"Do you think women are crueller than men?" she answered, with a laugh.

"I think," he replied, gloomily, "that they are as much more cruel than men as cats are more cruel than dogs."

"Well, I think cats are much nicer," she said, "so it's equally balanced. I wish it did not want such a long time to breakfast. I shall go and write a letter or two."

"And I shall walk about and smoke, so we shall both be content."

Returning to the hotel in a couple of hours, he found Miss Hardy with Madame Omont's little girl upon her knees. She was bending her face over the child and saying, in perfect French :

"Oh, my poor little darling! what a cut on your hand! Let me bind it up. It is dreadful, and you bear it with such a brave spirit!"

"She cut herself with a knife," Miss Hardy observed, explanatorily to Locker.

"May I examine the wound?" he asked. "Why it is a mere scratch," he said, laughing.

She informed him that men knew nothing about such things, and carried the little girl to her mother, who quite took Locker's view of the case.

Miss Hardy had surprised him. Those blue eyes had not, to his thinking, bespoken such a pitiful nature.

"You are fond of children?" he asked, as they sat down to breakfast.

"Yes," was the answer; "how can one help being fond of what is small, pretty, and helpless?"

"But all children are not pretty."

"I think that, up to a certain age, nearly all children are. I cannot say as much for madame's meat, but her eggs are excellent."

He asked her if she had been reading.

"Yes," she replied. "Thackeray, to whom it seems to me that I am always ungrateful. I enjoy his books so much while I am reading them, but, when I have finished, I ask myself what really great, memorable scene stands out to me, and find I have been merely entertained. I suppose the death of Colonel

Newcombe is meant to be very heartrending, but it does not move me. However," she added, after a pause, and with a burst of laughter, "if you knew me better, that would not greatly surprise you."

"But I *am* surprised. You are quick to feel for the sufferings of others."

"Oh, yes," she said, rapidly, and looked down at her long, slender hands.

"Who is your favourite novelist?" he asked.

"Really, I don't think there is any novelist that I care much about."

"Or poet?"

"Browning, a little, perhaps."

"But you read novels and poems?"

"Oh, yes, I read them to pass the time; one must do something. What people call very dry books are those from which I get the most pleasure; and you cannot get such books here. I wonder how that poor, dear little wounded thing is. I must see after it. It did not seem to me that her mother was sufficiently grieved."

"I think," Locker said, with a smile; "that you wrong her mother."

She smiled in return, and went from the room.

To describe Locker's daily life would be as tedious as to have lived it—not being a rejected lover—would have been. He walked; he shot no end of rabbits; he wrote melancholy verse; he wrote letters to his friends, which he could not help wishing that they would preserve, as he thought they would read well, when the history of his sad life should come to be written. Still, day by day, and hour by hour, his interest in Miss Hardy, his new and strange acquaintance, deepened. She wandered about by herself day and night fearlessly. She treated Locker with as much easy familiarity as if he had been quite an old friend. There was something in her manner that was icy cold, yet at times she surprised him by an outburst of feeling, which, as in the case of the wounded hand, was quite disproportioned to the event that caused it.

"Shall you stay here through the winter?" he asked her one day at the end of November.

"Oh, yes, I think so! It's just the kind of place to spend Christmas in; and you?"

"I? Well, certainly, I should scarcely yet like to see England, and all that England means to me."

Of course, he had confided his grief to her, and she said :

"I am sorry for you. I suppose it is very painful, but I have never had a like trial to go through, for I have never been in love."

He had fondly imagined that she, too, might be suffering under a love disappointment, and he had written quite a nice sonnet in which he pictured her and himself as soul joined to soul by the tie of a common grief.

After a while madame's little girl, truly a pretty little thing, with long, warm, brown hair, and large, soft, rather sad-looking grey eyes, took a fever. The fever was not an infectious one, and Bertha made herself useful in nursing ; for the matter of that, so did Mr. Locker, who sometimes sat up with the child at night.

Now it happened one morning, just as the hard, pitiless December dawn was breaking, that a little voice called out from the bed :

"I want to go out in the boat with father ; oh, let me go, let me go !"

Her father had been drowned at sea many years ago.

"Yes, my child, you shall go," he said.

"Yes," she echoed feebly, and in another minute she had gone to find her father on a sea where no compass of man's invention guides, whence no boat returns.

Hot tears sprang to Locker's eyes as he bent down and closed those of the dead child, and kissed the thin little face.

Madame Omont, quite worn out, was most likely still sleeping. He hoped, before she awoke, for an opportunity of informing Miss Hardy of the melancholy event. One woman, he thought, could break it to another so much better than a man could. He left the room, and found Miss Hardy, who had risen very early, sitting in the *salle-à-manger*. She was reading a book with apparent interest.

"I have sad news," he said ; "Julia is dead."

"Yes," she answered, scarcely raising her eyes from her book.

"Just wait till I finish this chapter. No, never mind ; that will do another time. How grieved I am ! what can be done?"

Her way of receiving his tidings greatly puzzled and surprised



Locker ; she had professed to be so much attached to the child.

She willingly undertook the sad office of breaking the shock to Madame Omont.

“How much braver women are than men,” he said ; “now it seemed to me that I could not do this, and you at once, without shadow of hesitation, accept the task.

“Or is it,” she questioned, with a flitting smile, after which she looked grave again, “that women have less feeling ?”

Perplexed and fascinated, Locker went to his own room, for which he was getting quite an affection.

The last day of the year was to be, for a long time to come, memorable in the annals of La Crosse. Madame Omont’s child had been buried, and the poor woman would have utterly abandoned herself to grief, but that she had still her two guests to provide for—so she struggled on. It was a day of wind and driving, arrowy sleet. As the time wore away, the wind increased perceptibly. At sunset it blew a gale, and the sea, rising under it, waxed awful.

As the two guests of the hotel sat at dinner, they could hear the frantic shrieking of the wind, the regular thunder of the waves, then the deadly, snake-like hiss when a vast ninth wave would reach over the sands and dash its spray against the windows.

“What a night to be at sea !” observed Bertha, mixing wine with her water, as she spoke.

“A storm like this means sure death to many,” he answered. Just then there was a momentary lull of the wind, one of those lulls in which it gathers strength for a greater outbreak of fury. Suddenly they heard a sharp spluttering sound. Miss Hardy went on with her soup, but Locker sprang up.

“Did you not hear that ?” he cried. “It was a rocket, it must be from a ship in distress.”

“Perhaps so,” she answered, but she went on with her dinner.

Walter Locker walked out. It was as much as he could do to close the door behind him, the wind blew so violently against it. Yes, he was right ; another rocket darted into the darkness. The lights of the distressed ship were visible. In another moment many eyes were on the outlook, and there was a confused sound of voices.

La Crosse possessed a life-boat ; this was at once got ready

and manned. How weird the men looked in their tarpaulins, with the light from their wind-blown torches flaring on their weather-beaten faces.

Locker asked if he could be of any use, and was given to understand that he would be in the way, rather than anything else. At length the boat was ready, and with a yell of defiance the men drove her into the sea and the night. Soon the track of their voices was obliterated by the might of the wind.

Women made pale by fear; mothers, sisters, and sweethearts were talking to each other in excited groups.

"I like to be out in a night like this," said Miss Hardy, coming up to where Locker was standing. "There is something very stimulating in a storm. Do you think they can be saved, or must they all be drowned?"

"It is impossible to say. It is an awful sea for any boat to live in. The wind is too strong for you to stand alone in it; please take my arm."

She accepted his offer, and even at that moment he felt the blood thrill in him as he held her arm tightly to his side.

In the course of time they heard, over the roar of sea and wind, a shout out of the awful waves. Then the sound was blown away by the wind, then it was heard again. Then the life-boat with its rescued souls grew visible, tossing, as it seemed, helplessly in the waves. Still it came on. It was nearly to the shore when a monster wave towered up dark, malign, irresistible, and burst over it. A cry of despair from the men as the boat keeled over. A shriek of horror from the women—that was all Locker heard. Casting his coat aside with strength that was born of the occasion, he plunged into the seething waters. He caught at one of the storm-worn sailors, and dragged him from his doom. He reached the shore with him, and then again plunged into the thick of the battle. This time, however, the sea was too much for him. The current swept him away; wave pitched him to wave. "Now, come death," he thought, "and who cares?"

He was wrong, however, his time was not yet come. Perhaps the gods had too much compassion for the world to deprive it so suddenly of one of its younger poets. With infinite danger to themselves, the Englishman who had risked his life for theirs was rescued by the men of La Crosse.

But the shock and the cold proved more than his not very

strong constitution could stand. He wandered in mind all that night, and the next morning was found in a high fever. The fever went to the brain, and for many days to come the doctor looked grimly as he entered and left the hotel, which he did sometimes twice a day.

It was a mild February day, when, having escaped the danger of dying from fever on the one hand, or the sinking through total exhaustion on the other, Locker awoke to a sense of consciousness.

It was about five in the afternoon. He was lying in the little, wind-swept room he knew so well. There was no wind now. Through the window he saw a sky of faint, pathetic blue. Some one was sitting by his bed ; it was his pale-faced, gold-haired fascinator. Then she had been helping to nurse him ? She must have a tender heart, after all.

“Have I been ill long ?” he asked, faintly.

“Yes, a long time.”

“How long ?”

“Six weeks.”

“When was I taken ill ?”

“The last day of the year.”

“And now it is what ?”

“To-day is the 15th of February. But you must ask no more questions. The doctor said you were to be kept perfectly quiet.”

“You *must* answer me one more.”

“Well, what is it ?”

“Have you been helping to nurse me ?”

“Yes.”

“How good that was of you !”

“I see no goodness in it at all. Now you must have something to take, and then go to sleep again, and be obedient.”

Plenty of rest and nursing did their work with Locker. I wonder if he was, on the whole, glad or sorry to find that somewhere in his wanderings he had lost his love-griefs, which had been the reason of bringing him to La Crosse ?

That happened to be an unusually mild February, and he was soon able to sit in the courtyard of the hotel, and then to take short turns by the sea. The desire to be constantly in Miss Hardy's society was growing an absolute passion with him. Her voice, which I have said was buoyant, was also very

low in tone, and had a most soothing influence upon him. Then he liked her grace of swift, unexpected movements. She fascinated him, as the snake fascinates the bird.

One day she came into the courtyard with a deeply black-edged envelope in her hand.

"I have bad news," she said, speaking in her usual tone of voice. "My mother is dead, and I must go to England to look after my sisters, who are all much younger than I am; but it is too late to catch to-night's boat. I am sorry to leave this place. I dislike England so intensely. Ah! I forgot that you do not know. I am going for a long walk," and she went away rapidly.

"Certainly she has wasted no love on her mother," he mused, as he followed with his eyes the tall, slight figure till it was out of sight.

He was only strong enough still for the shortest walks, and he felt aggrieved at her for taking a long one, which must lose him so much of her; now, too, that she was going away. What would life be when she had left? He shuddered as he asked himself that question, the question which lovers have so many times to ask themselves, and the true answer to which would be: "Greatly changed, of course, horribly uninteresting, but bear it long enough, and something will turn up."

He sat thinking of her for a long time. Then he fell asleep and dreamed of her.

"No," she was saying in the dream, "I cannot let you come to my house. What do you think my sisters would say? It is too cold."

These last were real words, and they awoke him. She was standing by his chair.

"It is too cold for you to be asleep out of doors," she said; "the spring is not come yet."

"Yes," he assented, dreamily. "I am so glad you are come back! What is the time?"

"Just four. I have been away three hours."

"Will you stay with me all the rest of the day? You ought to, you know, because I have been so ill. You know I'm far from well yet."

"Very likely I will."

"And you won't go to bed before half-past ten?"

"Not unless I feel sleepy."

"But you won't feel sleepy?"



"How can I tell, till the time comes, how I shall feel?"

"Because I shall be so entertaining."

"You must be very different then to what you have been the last day or two."

"Let me see—from four till half-past ten! I shall see you then to-day for just six hours and a half more!"

"And after one o'clock, to-morrow afternoon, I suppose you will see me no more at all."

"Surely you are not going to-morrow?"

"Most certainly I am. I should have gone to-day, but it was just too late."

"Then I think it is very unkind of you to leave me alone three hours, if you knew it was to be the last day."

"Do you?" she answered, in an indifferent tone of voice.

She was letting her cloak fall from her shoulders.

"Perhaps by falling asleep here I have taken a chill that will bring on a relapse and kill me."

"Perhaps so," she rejoined, throwing her cloak over her arm, and walking straight into the hotel.

In the *salon* of the hotel, in which these two had passed so many evenings—for Madame Omont had very often company, when, of course, she did not ask them to the hospitality of her bright, clean-looking French kitchen, and Locker had grown to be glad of madame's company evenings—well, I was going to say, that in this *salon* was a piano, so they would often beguile part of the evening with music. They sighed that night as they rose from the table, to think that, perhaps, they two should never dine together again. His was a very genuine sigh, and her's—well, she certainly *did* sigh. Then they went to the *salon*, which had rather a faint, musty smell from being used so little of late. That smell—which is often met with in hotels out of the season—will always recall that night to Locker.

He was lying on the sofa, and she had just finished playing a waltz of Chopin's, when he said, suddenly:

"Come here, will you?"

She came over at once to the sofa, and asked if he felt ill.

"No, not ill, but there is something I must say to you. Draw one of those chairs here, and sit close by me; I am not strong enough yet to speak in a loud tone of voice, and you must lose no word of what it is that I have to say."

She drew a chair close to him, as he desired, and he began:



“When I first came to this place, I was, as you know, the most miserable of men. I was without hope. I met you ; you interested me from the first. Then you fascinated me ; then I loved you. Answer me, Bertha, cannot you love me in return ?”

He took her hand in his ; it was, as it always was, pleasantly cool ; the expression of her face was unchanged.

“Why don't you speak ?” he cried.

“Because I am wondering whether I should tell you the truth or not.”

“You owe me the truth.”

“Indeed ! I scarcely agree with you ; but, all the same, I think I will be frank with you. The truth, then, is this : I don't love you one jot. I love no one ; I never have loved, and I never shall ; not only is it that I love no one, but I care for no one ; I am without an emotion. You are handsome and pleasant and tender, yet, if you died here before me, it would not give me one thrill ; my pulse would not move faster by one beat. When men love me, as you do, I am neither sorry nor glad. I am simply indifferent. I never knew a case like mine. You think you have seen me moved at times. When I was with my family and friends I wished to keep my secret. I went to the extreme. I feigned to be too pitiful over little troubles, while I was unconsciously hard in real sorrows. No one could make me out, though I think one person suspected the truth. I grew weary of the strain of trying to act like other people, and on my father's death came here. I shall never know either the pain or joy of love.”

She stopped short, with a cold, wintry smile upon her face.

“And you can smile ?” escaped from him.

“Yes, I can smile.”

“Why did you nurse me when I was ill ?” he asked, suddenly and almost fiercely, turning his burning eyes full on her.

“I had sense enough to know that it was what humane people in my place would have done.”

“And not because you loved me in the least ?”

“Not in the very least.”

He had been sitting up, but at those words he fell back on the sofa, with a terribly hopeless look upon his face.

There was a pause ; then he said :

“Bertha, will you marry me ?”

“Do you want to marry a statue?”

“I want to make you my wife; will you marry me?”

“I would as soon marry you as not. Yes, then.”

He threw his arms round her and kissed her, and her lips coldly and mechanically responded. Don't you think he was a happy lover?

Mr. Locker took charge of Miss Hardy to her home. Then he went to London, a rather distracted man on the whole. He could not bear to be out of Bertha's presence; but the thought that he could never marry her soul drove him wild.

“You can never tell what may come in time,” remarked his friend, Will Hamilton, a handsome young painter, with whom the poet talked the affair over. “The girl is awfully good to look at. I'll do a picture of her for you.”

It was the following September that Bertha Hardy became Mrs. Locker. It was strange to this woman to know herself a wife; strange seemed it to her to know, afterwards, that she should be a mother; but it was to be, and in due time a son was born to these two.

And then it seemed that a miracle was wrought in the heart of Bertha Locker. She began to love—began to feel that something could be dearer to her than herself. She had been incapable of a wife's passion, but she was fully capable of a mother's devotion. She hung over the cradle of her baby in an ecstasy. She kissed its foolish little lips, as if they had all the bliss of the world. She called on her husband to share her worship. Did he ever see such eyes—such lovely golden hair? As to the latter, Locker was tempted to say that he must fetch his microscope to discover it; but he prudently refrained. He humoured all his wife's delusions. He saw now that she could love, and he could not help believing that his own turn would come some day.

Who should know human nature if not a poet, and has not Tennyson written—

“And the child, too, clothes the father  
With a dearness not his due—”?

Locker quoted Tennyson to himself, as he watched his wife kneeling before her small idol; and the man is not wholly unhappy who can still hope.

## HER PRICE.

—:0:—

“Death only can take from a man his pride of soul.”

“HAS the great man come yet?”

“You mean the great Russian, Ivan Petrovitch Orloff, the implacable enemy of freedom, the sworn friend of the oppressor?”

“Even he.”

“Oh, he affects fashion, and turns up everywhere late.”

“Does he know into what a hornet’s nest he is coming? And why does our republican friend, Featherstone, have such people?”

“I don’t know what he may have heard, I’m sure. As for Featherstone, perhaps he means to try a conversion. His wife is beautiful enough to convert any one.

‘Bid me to live, and I will live  
Thy Protestant to be—’

That’s her favourite song, you know.”

The foregoing conversation took place between two young men, one night, near the end of May. They stood in the doorway of a crowded and brilliantly-lighted room. While they were yet talking, there was a commotion on the stairs, and a servant announced, with much evident satisfaction at having such a big mouthful to discharge—

“Ivan Petrovitch Orloff and Serge Accolaivitch Zenbrowsky.”

It was the great statesman at last, with his private secretary. Orloff was a tall, slight man. He had a cold but very clearly cut face. He held himself proudly. About the corners of his pliant lips lurked a half-amused, half-disdainful smile. Hair and eyes were both light.

The private secretary, who received, of course, comparatively little attention, was by no means unworthy of it. He was more robust than his patron. His handsome face was strangely boyish for his age, which must have been fully thirty. His fine, warm brown eyes had a look of indolence in them—the look of one who had more dreamed about living, in the large sense of the word, than actually lived. The mouth, with its full, pleasure-loving lips, was withal painfully weak. About Orloff there was no sign of weakness anywhere. His bearing was strong—there was strength in the resolute lips, strength in the lithe, well-shaped fingers. He looked like a man who had fought with Destiny, and who had conquered, and set his heel upon it. The news of the great man's arrival now ran from room to room. Those who stood near enough to hear, said that his voice had a singular charm. It was low and full, and somewhat slow in utterance. He spoke English well, but with a decidedly foreign accent.

When he beheld his hostess, he confessed that she was good to see. But, if the great man regarded her with favour, what shall be said of the great man's secretary? Her beauty stormed his heart, and he capitulated without a struggle. And what was this Mrs. Featherstone like, of whom men made so much talk? It must be said she was an attractive woman to look at. She was about the average height, but with a superbly moulded figure. Her low evening dress revealed white, magnificent arms, tapering down to the exquisite blue-veined wrists—her glorious shoulders, and firm, white throat, against which any man, with blood, not water, in his veins, must have longed to press his lips. Her complexion was darkly clear, for she was of foreign origin—supposed by many to be Eastern, perhaps merely because her name was Zuleika,—her eyes were brilliant, full of rapid fire—the mouth small, red, sensitive—the hair of a blue-black hue, and very abundant. But what was more about her, than even her great beauty, was the sense of sex, which escaped from her like scent from a flower. This aroma, which can so intoxicate men, does not belong alone to beautiful women.

I have sometimes observed it in women most people would call plain. Mrs. Featherstone dressed well. She had a beautiful woman's love of sumptuous attire. As she stood there, using her fan as though she had been a Spanish woman, a diamond cross shining at her throat, it occurred to one of the young men we have before mentioned to whisper to his friend :

"So fair,  
She takes the breath of men away  
Who gaze upon her unaware."

To which the other assented. Then the fair woman beckoned to them and presented them to Orloff as countrymen of hers, much interested in everything Russian. Indeed, both the young men happened to have visited Russia, and managed to say some handsome things about it.

"You can boast a great novelist," remarked Walter Graves, the younger of the two men, he who had quoted Mrs. Browning.

"Turgéniéff, I presume," answered the Russian. "Yes, a man of great powers. Yet, were mine the power to do so, I would suppress most of his books."

"What in the world would you do that for?" asked he known as Bob Blake, who, being very democratic indeed, had a manner which was literally no respecter of persons.

"Oh, simply because I consider their teachings often dangerous. Doubtless you think we have not enough freedom in Russia ; but I tell you I know the Russian people, and we have too much."

"I suppose you think so," returned the other ; "the Americans thought they knew their nation, and that the negroes were born to be slaves, as you think the Russians were born to be."

"You are quite correct. That *is* my opinion," said Orloff, imperturbably ; and at that moment Mr. Featherstone brought up more people who desired to be introduced to the great man. Featherstone and Orloff were much of a height, but Featherstone had a finer figure. He would not have been called handsome except when he was under the influence of excitement, when a radiance seemed to come upon his face, and his eyes seemed like a soul on fire, and it is to be said that he was very often under the influence of strong excitement.

"He talks too much open republicanism," some of his more



temperate friends would say. "The worst of Featherstone is that he shows his hand so ; yet, with all his talk, he's really not an immoderate man—certainly not a nihilist, for he's dead against assassination or anything of that kind."

Serge Accolaivitch Zenbrowsky could do nothing but gaze at Mrs. Featherstone, while his heart beat fast. At length he said :

"You have many fine poets in England. I have been reading lately the works of Mr. Tennyson. They are charming."

"Yes," responded Mrs. Featherstone, in her low, twilight voice, "did you read them in English?"

"Yes, madam, I read them in English."

"Have you read much of our literature?"

"No, not so very much ; not so much as I want to. Will you tell me what to read? Will you make me know your country? Will you civilize me? Will you make it a compact?"

Mrs. Featherstone's beauty had somewhat the effect of champagne upon Serge—it had gone to his brain. He was generally a silent, reserved man, but, as we see, his tongue had been loosened, and he spoke to some purport.

"Mrs. Featherstone regarded him for a moment with a glance which seemed to be questioning what line of conduct she should pursue. Then she lowered her eyes and said :

"I don't think you need much civilizing, but I will tell you some books that you ought to read."

"Bah," he protested, "my English is shocking!"

"Well," she answered, with a smile, slow and sweet and subtle—it was one of her great charms—"your English, perhaps, might be better. See—I am at home every Tuesday, from four till seven, to receive my friends. If you like, you can come at three, when you have time to spare. No one ever really comes before five. We would read together for a couple of hours. One hour of English for you, one hour of Russian for me. You see, I demand an exchange."

Zenbrowsky flushed with pleasure as he said that that would be something to live for. This very to-morrow was Tuesday—was he to come then?

"Yes—why not?" she answered. "The sooner we begin the better."

The next moment Orloff, whose practice it was to arrive late and leave early, came up, bade his hostess good-night, and the two Russians left the room together. As they went down the

stairs they paused to listen to Mrs. Featherstone's magnificent voice. She was singing in superb fashion those glorious old words of Herrick :

## TO ANTHEA,

WHO MAY COMMAND HIM ANYTHING.

Bid me to live, and I will live  
 Thy Protestant to be,  
 Or bid me love, and I will give  
 A loving heart to thee.

A heart as soft, a heart as kind,  
 A heart as fond and free  
 As in the whole world thou canst find,  
 That heart I'll give to thee !

Bid that heart stay, and it will stay  
 To honour thy decree,  
 Or bid it languish quite away  
 And't shall do so for thee !

Bid me to weep, and I will weep  
 While I have eyes to see,  
 And having none, yet I will keep  
 A heart to weep for thee.

Bid me despair, and I'll despair  
 Under that cypress tree,  
 Or bid me die, and I will dare  
 E'en death to die for thee.

Thou art my life, my love, my heart,  
 The very eyes of me—  
 And hast command of every part  
 To live and die for thee.

Twenty minutes later beheld them in one of the Langham's most luxurious sitting-rooms, smoking their final cigarettes and drinking brandy and soda, which they found a grateful novelty.

"She's a nice-looking woman, that Mrs. Featherstone," said Ivan Orloff, casting his arms up above his head wearily.

"She is more than that," replied the secretary ; "she is without exception the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"Bah," ejaculated the other, "you will not say so in ten years ! But then you are an infant."

"I never again expect to see so beautiful a woman," replied the secretary, "nor do I desire to."

"Well, my friend, I am glad you are pleased. Do you know anything of these people? You know more about this place than I do."

"I know next to nothing," answered Serge, emptying his glass, and throwing away the end of his cigarette. "I believe they hold advanced views."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" mused the other; "it's interesting to meet people who hold advanced views. Well, good-night; I'm tired."

A word or two must here be said concerning Ivan Orloff, who was at this time fifty-two years of age. There was no doubt about the man being hard and cruel, but he had a sense of justice, too. He would have used the knout freely, but he would never have inflicted great punishment for small offences. Where the offence had been great, there great should be the punishment. All the influence he had in Russia, and that was large, he exerted in the cause of tyranny. He was an especially dangerous man, because he was a brave man. Even the most hardened assassin shrinks from taking the life of a man who, whatever his faults may be, is known to be no coward. Not many people had reason to love him. One man had, however, and that was Serge Zenbrowsky. His mother died when he was all but a baby. His father, who was an intimate friend of Orloff's, became reckless and dissipated a large fortune, and died when Serge was not much past eight. The boy seemed to have no relations, and Ivan Orloff, then a young man of thirty, beginning life on his own account, took the friendless boy to share his fortunes. Perhaps the fact that he, too, was an orphan, may have had something to do with this praiseworthy action. Later on was discovered another soft place in his heart. He fell in love with a beautiful young Russian lady—proposed and was accepted, and for a time all went well; but one day they quarrelled over their political views. He spoke violently, and swore he would never ally himself with any one who could hold such an opinion, which was—the right of free speech for all persons.

He left her house in a passion, and left St. Petersburg for a fortnight, at the end of which time his rage was greatly modified. He was a proud man, but he had grown suddenly most desperately hungry to eat humble pie. He might disagree with her opinions, but she had a right to them, and what might

not argument do in time? He returned at once to St. Petersburg, meaning to ask forgiveness, but he was too late. They had hidden away for ever that shining head which he had meant to lay upon his shoulder. He was partly answerable for her death, for she had but delicate health, and when she imagined herself cast off by Orloff, whom she adored, she broke down altogether, and in this weak state she fell an easy prey to a malignant low fever then much in the air. Thus ended Ivan Orloff's love-story. After that he never took particular notice of any woman, and became more conservative than ever. Doubtless he may have thought, in the gloomy recesses of his mind, "If it had not been for her opinions she might have been with me now."

Well, he educated Serge Accolaivitch Zenbrowsky. Things prospered with Ivan Orloff, and before long he was known as one of the richest men in Russia. Seeing that Serge Zenbrowsky somewhat chafed under his dependence, he appointed him, in his twentieth year, to the post of his private secretary, which he had held ever since to their mutual satisfaction. The work was abundant—although Orloff was not an exacting task-master—and the salary ample. I have said that there was a look in Serge Zenbrowsky's eyes, as if he had rather dreamed of life than lived, and this, in great measure, was true. From boyhood up he had been fond of poetry, and his life went by in day-dreams and castle-building till he became Orloff's secretary. He had less time then for dreaming, and that was a good thing for him. He had had many flirtations. The feelings produced by these he had imagined to be the grand passion, and in his heart of hearts he thought the grand passion a disappointment; but as he lay awake in the small hours following the night of which I have been writing, he knew that up till then he had never experienced it.

"Now," he thought, feverishly, "it has come in very earnest"—and so it had.

Mrs. Featherstone, the next day, received him in her own especial sitting-room, which was daintily furnished. As he followed the servant up the broad staircase he heard her singing—

"Bid me to live, and I will live  
Thy Protestant to be,  
Or bid me love, and I will give  
A loving heart to thee."

Her voice was as beautiful as her face—a wonderful voice—a full-sustained contralto. If one could imagine such a thing as voices having colour, one would have known there must be in it a note of deep crimson.

“You are very fond of that song,” he said, when they had shaken hands.

“Yes, I am ; but how did you know I was ?”

“Because you sang it last night, and now sing it when you are alone.”

“Did I sing it last night? I had quite forgotten doing so.”

“My memory, madam, in such things, is better than yours.”

“So it seems—but don’t call me madam, if you wish to be made an Englishman. It’s what shopmen say.”

“Then what shall I call you ?” he asked.

“Oh, if you like, you can say ‘Mrs. Featherstone,’ occasionally. Do you find the air too heavy with the scent of these roses? It’s a little oppressive, yet I rather like it.”

Serge avowed his complete happiness and contentment with everything.

“What shall we read, then ?” she asked, leaning back in her low chair and contemplating absently the rings upon her fingers.

“That you are to decide.”

“Am I? Well, then, it shall be Swinburne’s ‘Songs before Sunrise!’” and moving across the room to a book-case, she returned with the book in question.

“See,” she said, seating herself, “I will first read the poem aloud, that you may enjoy the sound of it. Then you shall read it to me, for the purpose of receiving instruction.”

The poem chosen by Mrs. Featherstone from that mighty and noble volume is one of the finest included therein. It was “*Mater Triumphalis*.” She read those superb words, in which tyranny is so fervently denounced and freedom so extolled, her breath coming and going quickly as she did so, the colour in her face deepening with her visible excitement, her eyes flashing, her sensitive lips quivering.

“Well,” she said, when she had made an end, fixing her eyes full upon his face.

“You read it magnificently,” he said, “but it is a wicked poem.”

“Wicked to you,” she answered, “because you love what is



wicked. Listen to this word-picture of your own country." And she read from the wonderful "Eve of Revolution"—

"I set the trumpet to my lips and blow,  
The day is broken northward,  
Lands through all their lengths are loud with chains,  
Strange tyrannies and vast—  
Tribes frost-bound to their past—  
Waste where the wind's wings break,  
Displumed by day-long ache,  
And anguish of blind snows, and rack-blown rains,  
And ice that seals the white sea's lips,  
And ice whose monstrous weight crushed flat  
The sides of shrieking ships—"

"It is not true," he observed ; "the land is no longer

'Loud through all its length with chains.'

I would we had some of the chains back. Had I my way every nihilist should suffer death for his belief. I would Ivan Orloff had even more influence at court than he has. But it will spread, it will spread !"

"Stop !" she cried, and her tone was imperious and her gesture one of command.

Zenbrowsky did stop, and looked as much alarmed as if he had done something very dreadful. She pressed her hand to her side as though she had been hurt. Then she remarked, more quietly—

"Your views are not my views. I thought you would have known that, and I fancied that, knowing it, you might have abstained from the free expression of yours. Shall we begin the lesson ?"

"Not till you can say you have forgiven me," cried the unfortunate Serge, clasping his hands together.

"Your views I hope never to forgive, but I will try to forgive this expression of them. Only don't shock me again, because, as far as I know myself, I am not, I think, a very forgiving woman."

Serge promised not to offend again, and the reading was resumed. When the clock struck four Mrs. Featherstone rose, and saying they must go to the drawing-room lest callers should come, she led the way thither, and there they read Russian poems till they were disturbed by the first caller, who happened

to be Mr. Graves, who did not look too pleased at finding another man installed before him. Shortly after, Serge took his leave and Graves was alone with his idol, for his idol she was, though he knew his love was as hopeless as it was mad.

He was a painter, and it did him good just to come and bask in her beauty.

"I wonder you should have that fellow about," he remarked, as soon as the door had been shut upon "that fellow."

"Do you? Why?" she asked, settling the folds of her dress.

"Because," he replied, with some warmth, "I thought you were a lover of freedom. I never thought you would have had tyrants and the dependents of tyrants under your roof."

"No?" she answered, with provoking coolness. She could not help taking pleasure in teasing him.

"Do you mind telling me if you have changed your views since last night?"

"No; my views are the same as ever they were, but this half-savage Russian, with his odd English and his handsome face, amuses me. We have been reading English and Russian together this afternoon. I read him some things from 'Songs before Sunrise.' He got too excited, and I had to bring him to contrition."

The arrival of fresh guests put an end to the conversation.

Mrs. Featherstone was changing her dress for dinner, when her husband walked into her dressing-room, kissed, first, the bare white shoulder, then the small, sensitive mouth, and said—

"Well, darling, I must be off to the meeting. They have sent for me, so you will have to dine alone again."

"I sha'n't like that," she answered, "but I know you ought to go."

"Yes, I must go, for I am really the only man on the committee who knows how to speak at all about the redistribution of land. Some go too far, and others don't go far enough."

"Are you sure, dear, that you go far enough?"

"Yes. I think I am sufficiently advanced," he said, with a laugh.

"Have you written any more of your 'Despots and Slaves' to-day?" she inquired.

"No," he returned, "it goes on but slowly. However, I am not sure that the age is ripe for it yet."

"You are Ralph the cautious," she said, with the faintest

suggestion of a sneer discernible in her voice and in the corners of her mouth.

"And you," he answered, good-humouredly overlooking the sneer, which had not escaped him, "are Zuleika the hot-blooded—by the by, did your Russian charmer come?"

"Oh, yes, he came."

"And did you succeed in showing him the error of his ways?"

"I could hardly do that in one afternoon, but I made him ashamed of himself once."

"Well, that was something. If I speak jestingly, God knows my heart is heavy for the wrongs of all down-trodden nations; and in the freest of countries, which I think ours is, what slaves the rich make of the poor! While thousands every year are left to die, like rats poisoned in their holes, because forsooth, this man has need of money to regale his friends with strawberries, when they are five shillings a dozen. We pay fabulous prices for green peas, and count wine cheap at three guineas a bottle, while children die for want of bread. But I must stay no longer. Keep up heart, and let us, at least, go on with the good work, and do all we can."

He kissed her once more, ran swiftly downstairs, and was driven to a hall at the East End of London, where a meeting of a decidedly revolutionary character was to be held. But we need not follow him except to say that Graves and Blake were both upon the platform. They both thought Mr. Featherstone's views were not extreme enough, especially Mr. Graves, who that night was absolutely rabid.

Before the week was out, Ivan Orloff, who prided himself on speedily becoming acquainted with the customs of the country he might be visiting, made his call of ceremony on the Featherstones. Politics were ignored, and no man, when he liked, could be more agreeable than Ivan. On this occasion Mr. Featherstone was present, and he also made himself specially agreeable.

"There is something strangely dangerous about that man," said Mrs. Featherstone to her husband, as soon as they were alone.

"As dangerous as a deadly snake," he replied. "He has that strength of character which alone gives permanence to evil. It would be a blessing for his country were he to perish from off the face of the earth."

"Even so," she said, and became strangely thoughtful.

The month which followed passed like a dream to the secretary. Besides his unflinching weekly visit to Mrs. Featherstone, he called frequently on other days—and, in addition to these meetings, he met her often in society—at the opera, in crowded receptions, or at garden parties; and the more he saw her, the more deeply enamoured did he become. Though he was happy it was in a feverish sort of way, which would not let him rest at night. He grew pale and haggard-looking.

One night when Orloff and his secretary were strolling back to their hotel from a house where they had met Mrs. Featherstone, the former broke silence by saying—

“You are in a reverie, my friend.”

The other started as though a ghost had spoken, and said—

“Yes; I was thinking about something rather earnestly.”

“You have been thinking,” replied Ivan Orloff, “of certain dark eyes and blue-black hair. You were thinking of Mrs. Featherstone.”

“You are right,” cried Serge Zenbrowsky, excitedly. “I deny nothing—I confess everything. I am horribly, horribly, *horribly* in love with her——”

“You were that the first night,” replied Orloff. “It was never a secret to me, but I thought I would let you choose your own time for telling me. When a man is *really* in love, have a confidant he must, even though he should get laughed at.”

“I know it,” cried poor Serge. “I could keep silent no longer.”

“I have found out all about these Featherstones,” went on Orloff. “They are socialists: people who hound on the rabble, as men do dogs to attack some nobler animal. They call themselves levellers of class distinctions, enemies of tyranny. I would I had them all under my sway for a little time”—and Orloff set his teeth.

“I knew all that the first Tuesday I went to call there,” replied Serge.

“And still you can feel a passion for such a person?”

“I can. I feel hells and heavens of passion in me, and I can feel a blind adoration which, I believe, would make me do her will without questioning. There is more music to me in the least tone of her voice than in all the cadenced music of the world—more beauty in her face and figure than in all the pictures that ever were painted. When I don’t see her for two

days together I feel starved. Did you ever hear a woman get so much out of that little word 'yes' as she does?"

Serge was quite right. With a lover's quickness he had touched upon one of Mrs. Featherstone's peculiarities, which was the way she had of using the word "yes."

One Tuesday, when she and Serge were alone together, he said :

"May I come to-morrow to finish this book if you are disengaged? We are so near the end of it."

She gave him a swift look, and said rapidly under her breath—  
"Yes."

"You are very good to let me see so much of you," he had said, and she had answered in a low tone of voice :

"I like you to come."

"You've no business to be in love with her, you know, speaking from a strictly moral standpoint," remarked Orloff. "You say the man treats you decently."

"He has taken to forcing his politics down my throat."

"Still you go to his house and appear his friend."

"Well, and if I do, whom does it hurt?"

"At present, no one except yourself. I wonder what the woman means? Of course she knows you are in love with her. Any fool could see that, and Mrs. Featherstone's not a fool.

Serge half feared, half wished that Mrs. Featherstone should know he was in love with her. If she did know it, it was clear that she was not offended, for her manner to him was not cold. Indeed, she seemed to regard their friendship as something very special. However, he spoke not again till he and Orloff were within their apartments.

Then Orloff began pacing up and down, always with him a bad sign, and brought up sharply in front of Serge, who was lying back in a big chair smoking, a dazed, far-off look in his eyes, which Ivan's voice, raised considerably above its usual pitch, served to dispel.

"Well," he asked, "what are you going to do now?"

"Going to do about what?" answered the other.

"About the Featherstones, of course."

"Why, what in the world can I do, should I do, but go on loving her, and see all I can of her?"

"Well, and what will the end be?"

"I know not!"



"Now, look here," said Orloff, kindly, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "it is an old saying, that only Death can take from a man his pride of soul. If it goes no farther, what do you get but feverish unrest? Supposing it were to go farther, I know you well enough to know the hell of remorse in which you would be plunged. You have not the kind of spirit which can carry such an enterprise through without losing more than you gain. Then will you, with the bluest of blood in your veins, suffer yourself to be moved by a woman who would defame that blood, who would make the man who was your serf your equal?"

"What you say is true," responded Serge, "but you don't know how completely she has fascinated me. I burn with longing to be with her. She is my one thought by day, and when I sleep my one dream is of her. I hate myself for loving her, but all the same I do love her, and there is no way out of it."

"Only Death can take from a man his pride of soul," again quoted the other. Then he said :

"Serge, we are old friends, are we not?"

"Yes," groaned Serge. "Heaven knows we are. What should I have been without you?"

"That," answered Orloff, "is beside the question"—indeed he was too proud a man to have striven to profit by any benefit he might have conferred, and he resumed :

"Without you—without a constant companion—I should have been dull and lonely ; but as friends, as father and son, we are in a way answerable to each other. By this bond, I conjure you, man, to make one last effort, and free yourself. Is there no pleasure in fighting, no fierce delight in bracing one's self for the contest, no glory in grappling with the foe, in vanquishing him, and setting your heel upon his prostrate neck? For God's sake be a man, and not a love-sick boy. Say that you will make yourself a free man, and you will be free. Come, drink to your freedom—" and he filled a glass with fine Burgundy. Serge drained it feverishly, and then springing up, grasped his friend's hand, and said :

"Friend, father, I will do it ! I will be free. I will shiver this temptation as I shiver this glass," and he dashed the glass to pieces against the hearth.

"That is well," cried Orloff, wringing his hand warmly. "I knew it must be so in the end. I wish we could leave town at

once ; but, as you know, we cannot for a month to come. You must refuse to go to any place where you are likely to meet her for the next month. Drink ; be as wild as you like, only keep out of this hell-set snare !”

“Have no fear,” answered Serge, “I will not turn back.”

There is always a certain amount of excitement attendant on the adoption of any new course of life, which, if the course be one to which we are disinclined, seems to inform us with a strength which is often misleading. I once heard a swell doctor remark (I use “swell” in the sense of his being a big man), that nothing so stimulated a man as to deprive him of *all* stimulants. The remark stayed with me.

When Serge arose late the next morning, it was with the sense of having come to close quarters with his foe. His action was *not* to act. That was all. He had never overdrunk himself, but he had a good head, and took pleasure in the stimulating qualities of wines and spirits. Yet now, when it seemed to him that he most needed comfort of some kind or another, he forbore from drinking at all, for a great fear was upon him that if he now turned in that direction for comfort he should soon be ruined, body and soul. The temptation to drink himself into a state of temporary forgetfulness had an awful fascination for him. Therefore, it must be resisted to the death. Through the long hot June day he lay listlessly on the sofa, forgetting even to smoke, and saying to himself over and over :

“Only Death can take from a man his pride of soul.”

In the afternoon, Orloff, who had been to a fashionable breakfast, returned and compelled Serge to rouse himself, and the two drove to Richmond, dined well at the Star and Garter, and pretended to forget that they were due that day at the Featherstones.

The next day Serge wrote a brief note, saying he was so much occupied that he was afraid he should have to discontinue their arrangement for his coming on Tuesday afternoons, which had been to him so charming. Pressure of work combined with the hot weather had rather knocked him up, so that just now he was not going out at all. He didn't know when he should see her again, perhaps never (he could not forbear that little touch of sentiment), but he wanted her to think of him as always her friend,

SERGE ZENBROWSKY.

As soon as he had posted this letter the unhappy man began to wonder if he should have any answer to it. However, he was not kept long in suspense. The return post brought him a note in Mrs. Featherstone's small and exquisite handwriting. It was a charmingly expressed note.

She was very, *very* sorry to hear that their so pleasant meetings were to be discontinued. She had heard much of Russian pride, and hoped she had in no way sinned against etiquette. She hoped he was not really ill, hoped he would not work too hard, hoped he might be able to reconsider his decision. What did he mean by saying they might never meet again? He was not going back to Russia yet! And she thought they were real true friends. Some things which she had said to him about equal rights for all people, she prayed him not to forget; and she was, as ever, his friend,

ZULEIKA.

When Serge had read the letter through, he tore it in pieces and cast the pieces into the fireplace. This was like striking his passion a blow on the head. For the moment he felt proud of himself. Where a love is sinful or unreturned, a savage delight can be afforded by destroying some gift or letter from the beloved one. But the reaction speedily follows — great heart-sickness for the carefully traced characters, much longing for the sheet over which she has leaned, which has been thought of by her, which has felt the touch of her sanctifying hand, the warmth of her breath.

"Yes," exclaimed Zenbrowsky, aloud, "I shall get over this!"

"Of course you will," said Orloff, who had just entered the room, "or you would not be the man I have taken you for. Last night I was at Vera Lapinski's, and they were asking after you, and there I met a girl worth fifty of your Mrs. Featherstone in looks, and, while I have disliked the woman, I said from the first that I thought *her* pretty. Vera Lapinski is at home on Thursdays. To-night is Thursday—so come."

"All right," responded Serge, "do with me as you will."

Vera Lapinski was a Russian lady of strong conservative predilections, and all Russians of her party in London held her in great respect. At her Thursday evenings you met chiefly Russians; sometimes there would be a very thin sprinkling of English and Americans. Vera lived in the pleasant suburb of

St. John's Wood, and through the warm weather very enjoyable were these Thursday evenings, for the house boasted a really good garden, on which the drawing-room opened, and the guests, most of whom smoked, and many of whom were women, moved between the garden and the house, as the fancy took them. There were not many people in Vera's room when the two friends made their appearance on this particular evening.

Vera chided Serge for not having been before, and while they were yet talking and he protesting, Orloff came up and said :

"I want to present you to Nadeschda Sablina, her of whom I spoke to you."

The next moment he found himself face to face with an extremely beautiful Russian girl. She was dazzlingly fair. To look at her was like looking at light. Her manner was bright and vivacious.

"Do you like London?" she asked, in a clear ringing voice.

"Yes," replied Serge, "I love London more than is good for me."

"How can that be?"

"Because it would be better for me to leave it."

"Why have you not been to Vera's before? Not to have been here is a kind of treason to your country."

"Lately I have been nowhere."

"But till lately?"

"Till lately I have been visiting only English houses."

"You have lost your susceptible heart to some fair English-woman, then. But come into the garden and tell me all about it."

"And pray what makes you think that I have a susceptible heart?" he asked, following her through the open French window into the clear, potent moonlight which made the garden, with its green recesses, look quite wonderful and mysterious.

"Oh," she answered, with a gay laugh, "I have heard all about you—like yourself, I have friends in St. Petersburg."

"They are wrong," he replied; "I never really loved till I loved this Englishwoman. English I say, but she is partly foreign."

"I was right, then; and you have lost your heart again. Oh, faithless, faithless!"

"Yes," answered Zenbrowsky, "faithless to loves that were no loves."



"And this," quoth she, "will pass and be accounted no love like the other."

"It may," he replied. "I wish you may be right. Will you light me a cigarette?" and she did so.

"Isn't it nice out here?" she asked; "but tell me more about your charmer."

"Don't," he answered, almost violently; "I could forget her just now, for a little, if you would let me."

"By all means. We will talk about something else, then. But first fetch me some fruit, please."

He did as she bade him, and they passed some time together, her talk running on like the flow of a bright shallow brooklet. People who passed in and out said that a most decided flirtation was being carried on between Nadeschda and Serge. Was it a flirtation? Well, perhaps it was. Since he could not have the excitement of seeing Mrs. Featherstone, he now craved for any that might be thrown in his way, so he asked if he might call, and he hinted very plainly that she might perhaps save him; and she laughed, and said she did not think he had very much from which to be saved. At length her mother called from the house, so the talk came to a sudden end.

"Well," asked Orloff of Serge, as they walked away together, "is she not charming?"

"Some people might think so; I don't think so."

"I am not of that opinion," replied the other. "It is easy to see when a man is taken. Naturally, you do not like to own so quickly that the other love was not genuine—but see a little more of her. She is about the most dangerous woman I ever met."

Now, this last declaration was a good deal more than he really felt; but he knew human nature well enough to see that the most likely way to make a man in love with a woman is to persuade him that he cannot escape being so, the woman being one who would turn the head of any man.

For the next fortnight a brisk fire of letters was kept up between Serge and Nadeschda, and they met frequently at Vera Lapinski's and other houses, all of the same coterie. There was no doubt that for the moment she diverted him. He began to think she was falling in love with him, in very earnest, and that flattered his vanity. And she may have said to herself, what in Russian would have been equivalent to our "Many a heart is caught in the rebound."



It was the last of Vera's Thursdays, and the first Thursday in July—so near the end of the season. The rooms were not well filled. Nadeschda was to be late as she was to go to another party first. Certainly the evening was uninteresting without her. She would surely come soon, now. Yes; there was the hall-bell.

"There is Nadeschda," exclaimed Vera. "She had to be a little late to-night."

The door opened, and there entered a fat, good-natured-looking Englishwoman, and with her the proudly-beautiful Mrs. Featherstone. So great was the shock to Serge that he staggered in his walk. The room swam round with him. For a moment he thought he must fall, but with a great effort he controlled himself. He failed to answer questions spoken in his very ear. He saw the fat lady present Zuleika to Vera, whose acquaintance Mrs. Featherstone had so long wanted to make. Mrs. Featherstone had such a keen interest in all that concerned Russia. Vera assented graciously, and Zuleika came on to where Serge was standing, his eyes devouring her face and the superb figure, from which grace seemed to exhale, as perfume from a rose.

"Good-evening," she said, in her beautifully-modulated voice, which had among its various charms such a rapturous surprise of gentleness.

"Good-evening," he returned, taking her hand, and thrilling to do so.

After a little music and conversation, she asked, quietly :

"Will you take me into the garden? It is so hot here. Besides, I've always heard so much about Vera's garden."

"Let us go," he rejoined, his heart beating stormily.

"Why have you not been to see me?" she asked, as they walked down a sequestered path, her dress whispering as she moved. Her tone was a little lower even than usual.

"Did I not write you why?" he answered, making a desperate attempt at courage.

"I know; but those were not your real reasons. Confess," she added, after a pause, in a tone of infinite and beseeching sweetness. "Let us sit here"—and they sat down very near each other, on a garden seat.

"I confess," he replied, "they were not my real reasons. Some day, perhaps, I may tell you what the real reasons were."

Did his hand first touch hers? or did her fingers of their own accord slide into his? Who shall say? For a minute they sat thus—then she drew her hand away, and said slowly, in a voice of strenuous sweetness :

“Are you coming to see me again?”

“I am coming to-morrow,” with a wild, exultant laugh; “may I?”

“Yes.”

They rose and continued their walk, but they were both silent. After a little while Zuleika suggested that they should join the others, lest their absence should attract attention.

The first person to meet Serge's eye on their return to the room was Nadeschda. After finding Mrs. Featherstone a seat, and seeing that she was likely to be well provided for, he crossed over to Nadeschda, whose beauty seemed to him wholly eclipsed by that of Mrs. Featherstone.

“Who was that woman you brought in with you just now from the garden?”

She looked flushed, and was fanning herself.

“That is the beautiful Mrs. Featherstone. Have you never heard of her?”

“Never. Are you coming to-morrow to play lawn-tennis with me?”

Much to the young lady's surprise, he excused himself, and as soon as he could do so with courtesy, left her to join one of a group clustered about Mrs. Featherstone. She certainly was the excitement of the evening, but all too soon the fat lady broke through the circle, saying their carriage was waiting. Serge saw the ladies to the carriage. As he handed Zuleika in, she said, simply and gravely to him :

“To-morrow at four, then?”

“To-morrow at four,” he echoed, and in another moment the carriage lights were out of sight. He stood for a few minutes like one in a trance. The events of the evening seemed to him so wonderful and unexpected. How could he endure to stop and talk to Nadeschda? He hastened up the sweet-smelling strips of garden which lay in front of the house, regained the room, took leave of his hostess, said a few hurried words to Nadeschda, and, like a prisoner freed, dashed into the open air.

He had gone but a short distance, when he caught the fragrance of an unusually good cigar, heard a step behind him—well known

—quick and light, then his name was pronounced, and Ivan Orloff came up with him. He had been so occupied with the wonder and mercy of seeing Mrs. Featherstone, that he had forgotten, for the moment, the fact of his friend's existence.

"You left suddenly, my friend," began Orloff, "what, and not smoking! you must be preoccupied indeed."

"I have reason to be preoccupied," answered the other, in a voice which was at once far-off and triumphant.

"Well," replied Orloff, "the memory of unattainable women is rather cold food, I should think, for a heart as hungry for excitement as, I know, yours is."

Serge turned round and faced his friend, who perceived on his countenance a look not good to see—a look of furious, mad determination, the look of a dangerous man at bay, the look of a man who would go through hell to possess himself of the object of his passion. As I have said, there was no vestige of the coward in Orloff, and he regarded his young friend with the utmost *sang-froid*, but with the look of one who is mildly interested. Serge's lips moved once or twice before he could speak, then his words came distinctly, and in his voice was a white heat of passion :

"Orloff, I owe you a debt of gratitude for your protection of me when I was a boy. For the rest, I have worked hardly and faithfully; and because of one generous act done, I will not give myself to you, body and soul. Whatever happens between me and the woman I love—whichever way it is—it is not likely that you will know. Being a free man, not, thank God, a down-trodden, degraded, wronged, helpless serf, who should have equal right with us, I am bound by no law to tell you anything of what my intentions in this matter are. But because you *have* befriended me, I will not conceal my actions from you. I am going to see Mrs. Featherstone, whatever comes of it. I will see this matter out to the end. Do you understand me?"

"I understand you perfectly," Orloff replied, with absolute composure. There were reasons besides a real affection for Serge which made him reluctant to come to an open quarrel. Moreover, he believed strongly in his own personal influence attaining in the end the ascendancy over any nature on which he might will to exercise it. So he went on gravely, but less severely than Serge had expected :

"You are quite correct when you say I have no right to con-

trol your actions. I have none. As one who is interested in you I shall not even try at the present moment to stimulate you to be your highest self. For you are more drunk with passion than ever man was with wine. I believe that this fit will pass, and that you will come back to your old high ideas, your old grand beliefs; and that you will on that glorious day of self-restoration shrink from yourself of to-night as I should shrink from you if I believed this self to be really you."

"It *is* myself in bitter earnest," said the other in a gloomy but somewhat modified tone.

"I have good hope for you yet," said Orloff; adding in his low, musical voice, "Death only can take from a man his pride of soul."

"Passion will do it, too," said Serge. The rest of the walk home was a silent one. The crisis had been reached, and each had resolved on his own course of action.

Orloff's action for the present consisted in waiting.

At the hour of this conversation, Ralph Featherstone sat in his study, immersed in work, a perplexed, worried look upon his face. He was surrounded with a litter of papers, to which he constantly referred. Occasionally he took up his pen and wrote, and then would pause, buried in thought. As the clock struck one the door opened softly. He looked up well pleased to see it was his wife, who came over and stood beside him. She placed one hand on his shoulder, while the other passed over his hair.

"I am glad to see you, my darling," he said, as she leaned down and kissed him. "Did you meet the Russian?"

"I did."

"And is the feud made up?"

"It is—if feud it ever was; but I think our first impression was correct—that Orloff thought we were tampering with his beloved secretary. He could not long remain in ignorance of the kind of people we were."

"Well," remarked Ralph, with a smile, "now that we have Zenbrowsky back, I hope that we shall be able to tamper with him to some purpose. A rebel, made so by conversion, is always more ardent than one who has not undergone this process. I wish, in the same way, we could tamper with Orloff; but that I fear, is past even *your* skill."

"I fear so, too. What is past yours may well be past mine."



“You are a beautiful and charming woman, and that is half the battle. Would we could have got hold of Orloff, for he just now means the real curse under which his country groans. I tell you, things cannot last long like this, and though I hate bloodshed as much as any man, I find a bitter comfort on looking forward to the time when the voices of the stricken and down-trodden nations shall be heard all over the world, and the cry shall be war, vengeance, and death to the tyrants who have so long ruled over us. I fear the sins of tyrants *can* only be expiated by blood. Yet it is this that I labour to prevent.”

“You labour vainly,” was her answer. “Of what church was it written in the Book of Revelations, ‘I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot’?”

“I am sorry you should add to my other troubles, dear, by misunderstanding me,” he answered, gently, but withal wearily.

“Forgive me,” she said, kissing him again; “I only meant that I thought you were too humane. How did the meeting go off; and do you think we shall get a Liberal Ministry?”

“I hope so; but the Conservatives are strong. We shall have a hand-to-hand fight of it when the time comes. See, while you have been away, I have written these six addresses to be delivered in different parts of the country. Then this pamphlet which I have finished, called ‘What the Conservatives Want,’ I think will spike some of their guns.”

“Surely it will,” answered Mrs. Featherstone, her eyes brightening; “but work no more now.”

“No; I will work no more now. Tell me about the evening—how you liked it, and who was there.”

The next afternoon, just as the clock struck four, Serge presented himself at the Featherstones’ street-door. Outside, the streets were full of dust and glare, but on entering the house you found yourself in a heaven of shade. The green blinds to all the windows were lowered, while great vases of flowers stood in the hall at not infrequent intervals. As he passed up the stairs, the sound of Mrs. Featherstone’s voice came to meet him. She was singing her favourite song—

“Bid me to live, and I will live  
Thy Protestant to be;  
Or bid me love, and I will give  
A loving heart to thee.”



"You were singing that song the first afternoon I came to see you," he said, when they were both seated upon a low couch.

"Was I? What a memory you must have."

"Only for some things."

"Thanks; I am glad my singing pleases you."

"There is nothing about you," he answered, with suppressed passion, "which does not charm me."

"Let us read something," she said; and, rising, she fetched a book. They read in low tones, sitting very close together, so as to be able to look at the book at the same time.

Outside, the burning summer day went by, and people attended, as well as they could, to their various occupations, whether of business or pleasure. But these two thought not of them. The little air that came in at the open window was ardent with the sun, whose light came only faintly through the green blinds; the room was fragrant with flowers, and there was something drowsy in the sound of the flies as they buzzed in and out. At length Mrs. Featherstone laid down the book and said:

"How quiet it is?"

"Almost as quiet," said Serge, "as it is hot."

"I don't think we will read any more to-day," she said, languidly; "my head aches."

"Then I should do better to go."

"Why go?"

"Because I shall tire you if I stay."

"Not at all. After you have been away so long I like—" Then, after a pause, "I like to have you here. But I must not keep you against your will, after having made you come."

"Don't speak like that," he burst out, "when just to sit in the same room and look at you, though you should not speak a word, would be more happiness than I or any other man can deserve."

"Don't be foolish," she said, almost pitifully, as if she were grieved, but in too much pain to protest. Then she took his hand and leaned her head into it, saying it was so cool, and her forehead burned so.

"Does the coolness of it really soothe the pain?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, but very sadly, and then there was silence between them.

Serge's blood had become electric. There were sparks of fire in his eyes—a mighty struggle was going on within him. Mrs. Featherstone was sitting with her forehead bowed in his hand—her delicate white dress, from which a subtle fragrance escaped, touched him. He could not see her eyes, but he saw the wonderful dark abundant hair. His lips were very near it. They yearned with a great yearning to touch it—but dare they? Should he lose her friendship thereby? He laid his disengaged hand on the soft folds—she did not withdraw. Then his lips approached nearer—at last they imprinted a kiss on the superb dark masses.

---

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. FEATHERSTONE started away as if she had been stung, and seated herself in a remote corner of the room. Serge now bit his lips with anger. What a fool he had been! He got up, and coming to where she was sitting, he knelt down before her, and said :

“I was a fool—nay, worse. Can you ever forgive me?”

She was leaning back in her chair, breathing quickly—her hands clasped loosely in her lap.

“Zuleika,” he cried, “speak to me ; for the love of God ! Are you ill, or are you too offended to speak to me?”

And he caught her hands, which were cold now, and held them.

At length she spoke ; her voice was low and uncertain, but it had in it an almost overpowering sweetness.

“I am surprised—dazed,” she said. He let go her hands and began walking up and down. Then he sat down on the couch, where but a few minutes ago they had sat together. For some time there was no sound but the buzzing of the flies in and out. He waited breathlessly, as souls may wait at the day of Judgment.

The light of the room, subdued though it was, seemed to vex him, and he plunged his face into his hands. Suddenly there was a slight stir, as of a woman's dress moving, then two cool,

soft hands took hold of his and drew them from his eyes. She was kneeling there by him as he had knelt by her.

"Don't be vexed with me," she said, holding one of his hands in hers.

"It is I who have vexed you," he replied.

"We are neither of us vexed with the other, now," she answered, and her tones were low and thrilling—subtle as a caress. She looked into his with those wonderful eyes of hers—those eyes which seemed to draw his whole soul out to her, while the touch of her hand flooded all his veins with passion. With a great effort—for the better part of the man was rousing within him, and doing battle with his temptation—he turned his eyes away. Then the sweet magnetic voice, which seemed to have come nearer, said :

"Will you not even look at me?"

He turned his eyes ; their faces were very close together. Neither of them spoke ; but the same thought must have been in both hearts. Can the needle help turning to the North Pole? or rivers help flowing to the sea? Their lips yearned, but kept aloof. Then they drew closer together till they almost touched. Then they clove together, in one long, ardent, strenuous kiss.

"Your place should be my place," said Serge, as he raised Mrs. Featherstone from the ground, his whole blood in tumult. She took the seat, and he knelt by her, holding her hands and at times covering them with kisses.

How the time had flown ! The clock on the mantelpiece struck six. They started.

"You must go at once," said Zuleika, "as I shall only have time to dress for dinner. We are dining out to-night. I wish we were not, my head pains me so."

"We could not read much to-day," said Serge ; "can we resume to-morrow?"

"Yes," she answered, very gently, and again their lips came together.

Serge Zenbrowsky passed from the rose-scented room and hastened down the stairs. In the hall he met Featherstone, who shook him warmly by the hand and expressed his great pleasure at seeing him once again.

"I was just on the point of giving you up as an inexplicable mystery," he said, in his frank, genial voice, "when my wife had the good fortune to run up against you. Horribly sorry I can't

ask you to stay to dinner, but we dine out. Have an iced brandy and soda before you go out into the heat. What, you won't? Well, a wilful man must have his own way, I suppose. Good-bye till the next time, and mind that is to be soon."

"Surely, surely," said Serge, who was extremely ill at ease. He was relieved to find himself in the open air. He walked without knowing whither he went. He was conscious of things about him, but conscious as one may be in a trance. He saw the shops, the moving multitudes, the whirling vehicles, but as through a veil of fire; and as through a veil of sound he heard the turmoil of the streets—the tramp of feet, the thunder of wheels, the cry of flower-girls at street corners.

"Now, then, roses—beautiful moss-roses, only two a penny!"

He walked along like one possessed, seeming to feel Zuleika's lips still on his, the blood in his veins coming and going violently. What wonderful thing was this which had come to pass and changed all life for him? Zuleika had suffered him to kiss her—nay, had returned his kiss, and that not coldly. What did it mean? Could she love him? Did she love him? And what would the end of it be? He was too drunken with the strong, potent draught of joy he had drained to go deeply into any of these questions. He whispered to himself:

"To-morrow will come, and then, oh my queen, my one adorable woman, I shall see you again. Oh, sweet, sweet, sweet lips!"

A thousand times that evening he enacted over to himself the scene of the afternoon, lingering lovingly on every least detail. The sun had set and the clear dusk fallen, when a sudden faintness reminded him that he had not dined. He went into a brightly lighted restaurant and ordered some dinner with a bottle of champagne to accompany it.

"Bring the champagne at once," he cried, and it being brought he drank off a couple of glasses feverishly. After dinner, being altogether too restless to sit still, he resumed his walk about the streets, smoking cigarette after cigarette. It was past one in the morning, when having through absent-mindedness missed his way many a time, he found himself within his hotel. He went straight to his room, undressed and flung himself on his bed, yet not to sleep, but to dream with open eyes of Zuleika.

In a couple of hours light was visible. Then he threw open

the window and let in a little shiver of cool air. How still it was, though at this early hour there were rumours of awakening life. What would this day bring forth for him, he wondered. He watched the shimmer on the sky strengthen until it became perfect, unmistakable, absolute light. How gradually and how wonderfully it expanded. The east was suffused with a rosy flush, from which the sun broke suddenly—a pure gold flower of flame.

At breakfast he and Orloff met. Orloff's manner was not unfriendly, but they did not talk much. Orloff observed to himself a certain wild look about his friend, and that he took little breakfast, but he said nothing, and divided his attention between his morning's letters and the newspaper, only saying once, as he glanced up :

“You make a mistake not to eat. One needs to, especially this weather, to keep up one's strength.”

“Thanks, thanks,” responded Serge, “I'm all right. Eat or not, hot or cold weather, I am always well.”

He rose, and going to the piano played some Russian airs with intense emotion. They were the airs of passionate love-songs. It was early yet, and he knew not how to pass the time until the longed-for hour of meeting should come. It would be of no interest to follow his movements until four o'clock, when he found himself again ascending the stairs of the Featherstones' house.

Mrs. Featherstone received him, as usual, in her own especial sitting-room. She wore a dress which looked soft as a summer cloud.

“Another torrid day,” she said, when the door was closed ; “hotter, I think, than yesterday.”

Serge assented, and then coming over to where she was sitting, he took her hand and raised it to his lips.

“We must read,” she said, in her low, too quiet voice. “I have a fancy to read you again from the book I read you the first afternoon you came to study with me—‘Swinburne's Songs before Sunrise.’ Get it for me from the book-shelf, please.”

He brought it to her, and again she read those words of fiery denunciation and of love not less fervid.

“Well,” she said, having finished, “do you find the poem as horrible as you did?”

“No,” he cried, impetuously, “you have bewitched me. Your



thoughts shall be my thoughts. Henceforth you shall be my religion."

"That is good," she said, and gave him her hand, and leaned so close to him that her soft hair touched his face. He kissed her, and under the pressure of his lips she thrilled to her fingertips. He threw his arm round her. For a moment she seemed to yield; then she shuddered, and drew herself away, saying:

"Serge, we must not. It is wrong—hateful! What must you not think of me?"

"I know," he answered, throwing himself before her. "I know that I adore you—that my whole life is now centred in you. I have not closed my eyes all night for thinking of you. When I am with you I am in heaven; when I am away from you I am in hell!"

She leaned forward and smoothed his hair, saying:

"You have pretty hair. I like the warm gold lights that come and go in it."

"Zuleika," he said, almost fiercely, "you owe me something."

"Have I given you nothing?" she asked, a shade of reproach in her tone.

"Yes," he replied, "my heart knows you have; but I strove to fly from you, and you have brought me back. I was frightened of you, of myself, and of what I felt for you, but with Ivan Orloff's help I resisted your spell. After seeing you again at Vera Lapinski's—after we had touched hands in the garden, I made four English lines of poetry."

"Tell them to me," she said, an accent of sweet sovereignty in her voice.

And he recited, his voice quivering just a little:

"Because I am so very near your feet,  
O love, forbear!  
One look more tender or one word more sweet,  
And I am there!"

"Was it not lawful of me to bring back my best friend?" she asked.

"Did you go to the house for that purpose only?"

"Yes. What other interest could I have in visiting such a house as *that*? I heard you were avoiding all your London friends, but were to be met with there, where you had fallen in love with a beautiful young Russian lady, and I resolved that

despite this most beautiful young Russian lady, I would not be wholly forsaken. Did you go to see her last evening?"

"She is no more to me than the commonest woman in the street."

"But, surely, you flirted with her?"

"I did, I confess it," he answered; "I did whatever I could to divert my mind from my grief."

"I don't think your feelings are very deep," she remarked, coldly, taking her hand out of his; "I don't think a real grief would think diversion *possible*."

"I," he rejoined, "found it to be impossible, but I struggled."

"And failed?"

"Yes, failed horribly."

He strove to kiss her, but she averted her face and said "No."

At that moment the door-handle turned. Serge rose instantly, and Mr. Featherstone walked in.

"I hope I am not breaking in upon your reading," he said, when he had shaken hands with Zenbrowsky, "but I wanted a word with you, my dear, about those last papers from the society. I believe you have them?"

Yes, Mrs. Featherstone had them; and having produced them she sank gracefully into a chair and said, as she waved her fan softly to and fro:

"Ralph, I am proud to say we have made yet another convert to the one great cause."

"His name?" asked Featherstone.

"His name," said Zuleika, "is Serge Accolaivitch Zenbrowsky!"

"We may indeed congratulate ourselves and our friends. And you, my dear fellow, you will not repent having chosen to take the right path; and when the whirlwind comes, as come it will, you will not be among those that it destroys."

He had been speaking with his arm on the young man's shoulder. Now he shook him warmly by both hands, saying, as he did so, "Brother!"

"Yes," answered Serge, not daring to look in the direction of Zuleika, "brothers in the noble cause of liberty! Down with tyrants!"

"And with all the friends of tyrants," said Mrs. Featherstone, speaking very slowly.

"Well," said Featherstone, "I have an engagement now and must hurry away to it, but we shall meet again at dinner. You'll stop and dine with us, of course, if you have nothing better to do?"

Serge, however, excused himself; he had no wish to partake of this man's hospitality.

"*Why* won't you dine with us?" she asked, as soon as the door had closed upon her husband. "It is unkind of you not to."

"Do you think it would be very possible?" he answered.

"I don't know; I should think so," was her reply. "I don't know. Have we done more harm than to be a little foolish?"

"And I," answered Serge, with a sudden outburst of passionate energy—"I, to whom it means everything—for to you it is but play—well, I will be foolish no more. So may God help me! What is it that we say in Russia? 'Death only can take from a man his pride of soul.' I love you, and while we are in the same town I suppose I shall see you; but I will not, as you phrase it, be foolish. I have some strength of moral nature left yet."

"Yes," she said, "it is better so;" and her voice was like beautiful, broken music. She sat quite still, her eyes bent upon the ground.

"I am sorry you will not stay for dinner," she went on. "Mr. Featherstone is going to Liverpool to-morrow for a week, and when he comes back we shall be going out of town for some months, so that this will be your only opportunity for a long time to come of having any talk with him."

Serge said he was sorry, too, but the thing was impossible. He caught her hands, which drew him toward her.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," she answered, though the tone in which the word was uttered made it an invitation to stay. But he disregarded it, and withholding his lips from hers with a supreme effort, and letting go her hands, he went from the room and from the house. Ivan Orloff had known his friend well when he had said to him that he was not the man to carry such an affair out to its ultimate issues without losing more, by way of remorse, than he could hope to gain. Orloff noticed the haggard eyes of his secretary, but said nothing. He was biding his time.

For the next two days, when Serge could have seen all he wished of Zuleika, her husband being absent, he kept himself even from the *direction* of the Featherstones' house; but

the strain was tremendous, and to ease it he drank heavily. On the third day he could stand it no longer ; and long before the hour had come for conventional calls, he found himself once more in Mrs. Featherstone's boudoir. The servant brought word that she would be with him in a few minutes. The happy room seemed, like his heart, permeated with the memory of her presence. The impress of her individuality was on all things there. He was lost in such reflections when the door opened and she came in.

"Good-morning," she said ; "I thought you had forgotten me, and how lonely I should be."

"No," he replied, bitterly ; "I don't forget so easily—more's the pity !"

"You look ill, she said. "Tell me what has been the matter."

"The matter is that I have been drinking too much, making a beast of myself, because I said I would not come to see you, and I had to borrow strength from alcohol to carry out this resolution for two days only. What do you think of me ?"

"Why, I think you were foolish not to come to me, if you wanted to do so so very much that to keep away made you drink more than you should have done."

"I think I was," he returned ; "but if you had seen my struggles to be strong you would have been sorry for me."

"I am sorry for both of us," she answered.

"What have you to be sorry for?" he asked. "It is nothing to you. It is death to me."

"Serge," she said, with a flash of genuine pride, "you insult me. What do you take me for? Do you think I would let any man hold my hand, or kiss my lips, as I have let you do, except for one thing, which, shameful as it is to confess, is still less shameful than the lack of all womanly modesty which your words would impute to me. It is my calamity to love you."

"Ah, forgive me," cried the distracted man. "I meant only that your love could not be like mine, because I love you so wildly."

He came near, and tried to draw her to him, but she put him away, saying :

"No—you said you would be foolish no more. You will be sorry afterward. Be content to see me as my other friends do. Shall we read now?"

Like a madman he turned from her, and sprang toward the door. He was in one of those moods that will not brook a

moment's trifling, but before his hand fell on the handle he heard the low command of recall :

"Come here !"

She was standing in the centre of the room, tall and beautiful, with her arms reached out to him. In another moment they were locked in a close embrace. Their lips sealed fast upon each other.

"My darling, my darling," she moaned between her kisses, "how have I borne these days without you?"

"They have been days of torment to me," he replied.

Serge stayed that day to lunch, and drove afterward with Mrs. Featherstone in the park, where, owing to the lateness of the season, only a few vehicles were observable. But one man saw them, himself unseen, and that man was Orloff.

Returning from the drive, Serge did not part company with Mrs. Featherstone, but stayed to dinner, and they were happy, with a feverish reckless happiness.

Zuleika had never looked more lovely. Her dinner dress left bare to the elbows her splendid arms. A diamond cross shone against her glorious throat. In her dark hair she had a blood-red rose.

After dinner, and when they had had coffee, he asked her to sing to him ; and going to the piano she sang :

"Bid me to live, and I will live,  
Thy Protestant to be ;  
Or bid me love, and I will give  
A loving heart to thee."

"Why do you always sing that song?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered. "I suppose partly because I like it, and partly because it might be useful some day."

"How could it be useful, except in the way of enjoyment?" he said, with a laugh.

"Well, I hardly know myself, but it might be. I might be a second Pippa, you know : the girl in one of Browning's poems. She is heard to sing when other people's lives are just reaching their most critical situations, and the sound of her voice changes them all. But *she* was a good girl, this little Pippa, so her influence was good.

'God's in His heaven,  
All's right with the world.'

"I wonder what *my* influence would be?"



"To madden," was his prompt response.

"Do you think so?" she said, softly. "I wonder how mad I could make you? But it is late for you to be here when I am all alone. You must go."

He took her hand and kissed it—then the fair strong arm, and then the perfect mouth. He whispered something in her ear, to which she answered :

"I love you. All the same there is a price to pay, and the price is not gold."

"Whatever the price be," he cried, "I will pay it."

"Will you?" she said. "Well, to-morrow we shall see. Now kiss me once more and go."

So it was thus that they parted.

Neither of them slept much that night. Indeed, Serge could not do anything but pace up and down his room. As it would not be well for him to spend so much time at Mrs. Featherstone's house, in her husband's absence, it was agreed that they should meet at ten o'clock in Kensington Gardens, at which place Serge arrived some time in advance of that hour. At length the figure he knew so well came in sight.

"You look tired, my darling," he said, as he drew her hand within his arm, and they walked away together.

"Yes," she answered, "I am tired. Yesterday was a happy day, but hardly a restful one, was it?"

"No, Heaven knows it was *not!*" he cried, very genuinely.

"I have a carriage waiting," she said. "Where shall we drive to?"

After a little debate they decided to drive to Epping Forest, where they could walk or sit undisturbed in the densest part of the wood. As they drove along Serge asked :

"What is it I must do for you?"

"I will tell you this evening," she said, "and not before."

"You will keep me all that time in the agony of suspense?"

"Suspense!" she echoed. "How can it be suspense if you still think, as you did last night, that no price would be too great to pay? Were those words only meant to sound well? I had believed them."

"They were but the strictest truth," he cried, "and I say them again—feeling them even more intensely than I did then."

The weather was still brilliant, but, arrived at Epping Forest, they had small difficulty in procuring all the shade they desired ;

and there, under the vast elms and beeches, Serge lay at the feet of his queen and worshipped her, holding her hands, gazing up into her eyes, while she would lean low to kiss his face or to let her cool fingers meet about his throat.

They returned to London rather sooner than they had anticipated, for, as the sunlight faded, the small wind which had been playing among the tree-boughs dropped dead, and awful silence and dread expectancy reigned over everything. One could not quite tell when it would break, but it was evident that a storm was gathering.

So Serge and Zuleika hastened back to town. Shortly before reaching her own house she alighted and dismissed the carriage.

"Farewell for a little while," she said.

He held long and lovingly the exquisitely gloved hand and relinquished it with a sigh, saying, as he did so :

"And you think it better for me not to come till just dinner time?"

"I am sure it is."

"Well, my lady, I do your will in all things. Two weary hours! They will seem an age."

"Write me a little more poetry. Do you remember

' Because I am so very near your feet,  
O love, forbear ;  
One look more tender or one word more sweet,  
And I am there !'

Now, keep me standing no longer. This close weather makes me feel faint."

Serge walked about the deserted park for an hour. Then he went to his hotel and dressed for dinner. Having accomplished this, he walked to Mrs. Featherstone's with a quickly beating heart, asking himself again and again what she could want of him. Certainly nothing that he would withhold. For the moment he seemed to have stupified his conscience. He was travelling, indeed, through a land of desperately sweet and dangerous romance. After all, romance does exist outside the covers of the "Arabian Nights."

The atmospherical effect of the evening was to soften all the outlines of the metropolis, and to give it a strange dreamlike appearance. There was that intense stillness in the air through which the least sound is audible and seems to acquire a special

significance. The postman's knock, heeded at no other time by the passer-by, seems to him, in breaking such stillness, like the shock of doom. From your drawing-room you can almost overhear the conversation of the people who pass under your windows, while those passing can hear, perchance, the notes of a piano almost as distinctly as if they were in the room.

Entering the drawing-room Serge started, as Zuleika came forward to meet him. For, magnificent as her beauty always was, it had never appeared till now to such superb advantage. The dress she had put on was of some diaphanous material, and fitted her figure to perfection, revealing all its wonderful and gracious outlines. On her wrists were large broad bands of gold clasped with rubies. A red rose again glowed in her bosom, and one shone in the folds of her dark hair.

"Well," she said, marking the thrill of unspoken admiration in his look, "does my dress become me?"

"I never saw you look so beautiful before, and that I can tell you is saying a great deal. It is small wonder that I should love you as I do." And he drew her close to him, his eyes feeding greedily on her face.

"Do you know," he said, "it seems to me now that I never really lived till I loved you? I had dream-loves, I had dream-friends, always excepting Orloff; *he* was, from the first, a real and very important factor in my life. I have told you how much I owe to him."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Featherstone, "you have told me."

And they went down to dinner. Oddly enough Mrs. Featherstone was more of an epicure than her husband, for whom the plainest fair served. She delighted in all manner of daintily made dishes. But for this there would have been no expensive French cook in the Featherstone establishment, for the master of the house, though wealthy, held that the individual had no right to spend unduly upon himself while there were so many starving thousands in the world. But to his wife he could deny nothing, and for his extravagance in her behalf he tried to make up by practising, as regarded himself, the most rigid economy. Mrs. Featherstone was one of those women who could passionately resent any act of oppression, but she failed to realize, as her husband did, what an immense amount of the world's misery might be lessened if the rich would only combine to forego a few of their luxuries.

Good to see was the dining-table, with its soft damask, its profusion of glass and silver, its noble epergne in the centre, filled with the choicest flowers.

"Why, you have prepared us quite a banquet," observed Serge, as dish after dish of the most tempting description was handed round; "and your wines are simply perfection—but you do no justice to either, yourself."

"No, I have not much appetite; I am always painfully affected when there is thunder in the air."

"Which there certainly is to-night," he said, tossing off a glass of champagne, "though I fancy the storm won't burst till later;" but at that moment a brilliant flash of lightning made them both start. It was followed, at a long interval, by a low growl of thunder.

At length the repast terminated.

"I shall not be long after you," he said, as he held the door open for her to pass out.

"Don't," she answered, "for I shall be lonely."

Serge went back to the table, and gazed at the chair she had so recently occupied, as if he saw her beauty still gracing it. He filled himself a glass of the splendid claret, and began drinking it slowly, like a man on whom good wine is not thrown away. He had already taken as much as he should have done, but in those two days when, having resolved not to go to see her, he had called alcohol to his aid, he seemed to have contracted the pernicious habit of having recourse to stimulants. Love, however, was a greater temptation than wine, and he lingered but a brief space. Yet those were blissful and strange moments when he sat there in the softly-lighted dining-room, heart and blood aglow with love and wine. He was in just that stage of excitement from wine when everything—either joy or pain—is felt most intensely. The mystery which was about to be solved, of what great service it lay in his power to render the object of his adoration, had an infinite fascination for him, and lent glamour to the occasion. From the drawing-room, Mrs. Featherstone sang:

" Bid me to live, and I will live,  
Thy Protestant to be :  
Or bid me love, and I will give  
A loving heart to thee."

This finished, she broke into the mad, thrilling notes of the



"Marseillaise." So wholly lost was she in this, so carried away and possessed by the stormy spirit of it, that she did not know of a presence in the room till he joined with her in singing the chorus.

"It stirs my blood," she said. "I think if I could always hear that just at the right moment, I should be enabled to do just what I wanted to."

She had left the piano and had seated herself near the window.

"If you are seeking air, sweetheart," said Serge, "I am afraid you will not find it," and he cast himself at her feet, leaning his arms upon her lap. And now, you know, you have something to tell me."

"Yes, I have promised to tell you to-night, and so I will, but not just yet."

She took both his hands and pressed them lovingly against her fair neck, and said, in a voice which passion seemed to have rendered slumbrous :

"Are you as much in love with me as you were yesterday? Say only what is true."

"More, more, more! Every minute I pass with you I am more beside myself with love for you. What I have to do for you you may count upon having done swiftly."

Then he raised himself to kiss those sweet and subtle lips.

"No other woman *could* be as beautiful as you are," he said.

"But," she answered, "many women are better to see. My great friend was"—and here her voice quivered a little—"was incomparably more beautiful. Hers was a sad fate, as was her father's."

"Ah, let's have nothing sad to-night," he said, leaning his face upon her hand.

"We must, my darling," she answered, "for those I speak of concern us closely. Their fate is inseparable from what you have to do for me."

"Well, tell me, then," he answered, feverishly; "this unrest is driving me mad."

"My great girl friend," began Zuleika, "was a young Russian lady of the name of Ellen Vikentiorna. I loved well her father, a guileless, gray-headed old courtier, devoted to the person of the Czar. He had one mortal enemy in Paul Ostrinski, a man



who had been a suitor for his daughter's hand. As his persistent advances were objectionable to both father and child, the father, Nicolas Rudinseff, dismissed him one day violently, and ever after had denied him admission.

"Ostrinski conceived and carried out his scheme of vengeance, to which he confessed on his death-bed. He contrived to obtain possession of some revolutionary documents. These he managed to secrete in one of Rudinseff's private receptacles for papers, with this," and Mrs. Featherstone took from the table a small sheathed dagger, on the hilt of which two Russian letters were engraved.

"These letters stand for Revolutionary Committee," she added. "How this came into my possession does not matter. It would be a long story to tell. Ostrinski's next step was to give information to the police, as to what they would discover in the house. One night, when it was occupied only by the servants, a search was made; the papers and weapon were discovered, and on Rudinseff's return to his house he was arrested. He was tried for Nihilism, but feeling at Court was in his favour. He was known to have been so long devoted to the Czar, that somehow or other he would have been cleared but for one man—" she paused and then said, "Orloff, whose influence was then rapidly making itself felt. Though then but a young man, he maintained that clemency in the face of such evidence would be a bribe to any member of the household who should become disaffected. In the end he prevailed and Rudinseff was condemned to death. He took his sentence calmly enough, only saying, 'The Czar will be sorry for this, some day.' But his child, who was in court, was frenzied with grief. She denounced the Czar as a tyrant and invoked curses on him and his. She was at once taken into custody. Still, on the whole, she would have been leniently dealt with but for Orloff, who declared it necessary that she should be made an example of. The devilish knout was used, and that not sparingly. Of the shame and torture of it she died, the day after they had murdered her father."

"It is horrible," cried Serge. "Orloff has much to answer for—but how does this affect us?"

"I will tell you," she answered, leaning her face close to his, "the daughter was my sister."

"You are Russian," he cried, starting,

"Yes—your countrywoman. Have I not kept the secret well? My sister was many years older than I. My mother fled with me to England, where we had relations. I was not considered a stupid child. I studied hard, and soon acquired a good knowledge of English. When I was about sixteen I met Mr. Featherstone at a democratic society, of which I was a zealous member. I told him my story, and we became fast friends. At the end of two years we married. We thought it best that my Russian birth should be kept in the background."

"But tell me," he cried, "what am I to do? In what way can I help you?"

"Kiss me first," she said. He did so, and that kiss, sweeter than any they had yet interchanged, stormed all his veins with violent delight. He strained her to him, saying:

"Oh, my heaven of love, my queen, my wonder among women!—ah, what, what is there that I would not do for you? Now tell me."

Then she said, almost in a whisper, while her eyes shone:

"You must stop this loathsome life, that it may do no more evil. You must avenge my murdered father and sister. Use this dagger, and suspicion will never fall upon you."

Mechanically he seized the dagger, and then sprang up with a sharp cry of horror.

"No!" he hissed between his set teeth. "This I will not do. Go elsewhere to find your paid assassins. I am not one. Murder my protector! the man to whom I owe everything; the man who was to me as a father! Oh, Orloff, you were right, you were right! Among what people have I fallen? But, oh, witness, heaven, that when this woman revealed her true self to me I cast her from me as if she had been a snake—yes, I would have trodden her under my feet! It was for this foul end that she spoke so softly, kissed so sweetly—that through passion she might degrade me to the rank of a hired assassin, and she—this woman—her fair base self to be the price! It is too horrible for man to endure the thought of!"

During this outburst Mrs. Featherstone had sat perfectly still, her hands locked tight in one another.

"Have you ceased vituperating me?" she inquired, when he paused, shaken to his heart's centre, all the blood drained from his face.

"In words, yes," he answered, "but in my thoughts, never.

Now we part, and I trust that by the grace of God we may never meet again."

"I have a presentiment that it will be otherwise," she said. "I wish to tell you one thing, which is that my husband is in the most absolute ignorance of what you have been pleased to term my '*baseness*.' His regard for you and interest in you were perfectly genuine."

"I would I had never met you," he groaned, restlessly moving the dagger to and fro in its sheath.

"Its blade is as keen as hate," she observed. He moved to the door. He struggled to leave the room without again looking in her direction, but it was in vain. He was constrained to turn and look once again at her superb beauty. Her wonderful eyes were regarding him with a slow, compelling gaze. He strove to meet that look with one of proud defiance. For a minute or two there was between them a battle of looks—before hers his faltered, and finally became abashed. By the force of her irresistible magnetism she drew him to herself. In spite of his will he walked to where she was sitting. Then he said :

"You are very wicked; but you are very beautiful."

She raised her face. He caught her to him and kissed her, again and again, desperately. Then he threw her from him saying:

"For the last time, for the last time!"

He went quickly to the door. Before he had reached it a light hand fell upon his shoulder, the perfume of a rose was near him, and a voice whispered in his ear:

"Remember!"

"Do you think," he returned, "that I am likely to forget?"

As Serge quitted the Featherstones' house, the storm which had been so long gathering burst in its uttermost fury. An immense crash of thunder seemed to shake the world to its foundations. A blaze of lightning, which for a moment seemed to sear the eyeballs, suggested to one the fiery sword which guarded once the gates of Paradise. Then the rain came down with what seemed a shout of exultation. There was a universal shutting up of windows, and sound of hurrying feet, and a frequent demand for four-wheelers. But wholly indifferent to fire, water or thunder, Serge Zenbrowsky walked on his way, realizing only that this woman whom he had so madly idolized had sought to bribe him to commit a murder.

Orloff was sitting writing important state letters of advice when Serge walked in out of the storm. A decanter of brandy stood on the table. He filled a glass and drained it, and then stood regarding his friend, who in his turn regarded him intently.

"What's the matter?" he asked, and not unkindly; "you look half like a ghost and half like a madman."

"Orloff," said the other, "I have come back to you. You were right in all you said!"

Orloff rose, and taking the other by the hand, said:

"I knew it must be so in the end. I have been waiting for this. As I cannot leave town just now, I have this day taken a pleasant house at Richmond, where I hope to pass much time. The change for you will be better than no change at all."

"Yes, much better," assented the wretched man, who turned and went straight to his own room, but not to sleep.

The day which followed was like many another day succeeding a thunderstorm—gray and windy, and inclined to rain. A terrible and depressing sense of reaction is produced by a day so uninteresting occurring after an event so vital as a thunderstorm. Even a day of unmitigated rain is less commonplace than this sort of gray, bleak, uncomfortable day, unfortunately met with so often in our English summers—a day when one is chill without a fire, and too warm with one—a day to depress even a cheerful man.

Zenbrowsky and Orloff remained indoors till late in the afternoon engaged in preparing and copying certain papers. At five o'clock they left town and dined at Orloff's villa at Richmond. It was not the right kind of evening on which to have tried such an experiment for just appreciation. The house, before everything else, demanded fine weather. It was emphatically a summer retreat. It stood at the end of a long garden well lined with trees, through which the wind this night made the most melancholy sound. The dining-room opened on the garden by a French window. It was a pretty room, fantastically but coldly furnished. The establishment boasted a good cook, so that the dinner in itself was fairly successful, but those who partook of it were in no condition to appreciate even the best viands. Serge tried to provoke some sort of life into himself by drinking freely of the good wine,



with the result of becoming for a short time feverishly excitable, after which he collapsed, and throwing himself on the sofa was soon sound asleep and breathing heavily.

“Poor boy, poor boy,” mused the statesman, regarding the young man’s flushed cheeks; “too much wine! I must send him off as soon as I can.” He went on with the letters he was writing; and as the night wore on and Serge showed no signs of awakening, Orloff cast a rug over him, and went to his own sleeping apartment. When Serge awoke at last it was with throbbing temples, and the strange sense of being in an unfamiliar room.

The chill light of dawn was creeping in at the window; a cock crew violently, and was answered faintly by a friend, either too sleepy or at too great a distance to make much effect with his return salutation.

Zenbrowsky had been dreaming vaguely of Mrs. Featherstone, and as he lay there he was possessed by a distracting sense of her personal presence. The dagger which she had put into his hands remained in the breast-pocket of his coat. It had a curious fascination for him, as being something that her hand had touched, for the potency of her charm was still upon him, though mentally he recoiled from her in horror.

He laid the dagger lightly upon his throat, with the fancy that it was her hand. Then he said, pressing his fingers upon his burning forehead: “‘Death only can take from a man his pride of soul.’ Last night is not the first time, lately, that I have taken too much wine; surely I am not going to let myself fall into this snare!”

He looked in a kind of dazed, hopeless manner about the room, threw his arms above his head, rose, and, opening the window, passed out into the garden. The damp, cool air upon his face was grateful to him. Through the strengthening light a few birds were beginning to sing dubiously. He regarded with aching eyes the wet trees and bushes and the forlorn garden-paths. He drew out his cigar-case and began to smoke and to think of Mrs. Featherstone—only ten miles away, yet whom he should never see again. Oh, but her lips had been sweet to kiss!

As the morning grew, it improved, and when all the birds were well awake and up to their day’s work, fair, settled summer weather seemed to have commenced again.



Serge went indoors, took a cold-bath, but appeared at breakfast hollow-cheeked and haggard-eyed. Through the day Orloff kept him actively employed. After dinner the two friends went for a walk up the hill so famous in song. This hill is a great rendezvous for sweethearts of the shopocracy. As these walked together or lingered on benches set by the way, they seemed to Serge like soul-friends—for were they not in the mystic land of love and romance? Orloff told his best stories, of which he had quite a store. Serge laughed when the stories were of a humorous kind, but his laughter was too faint or too violent to be genuine. The excessive laughter with which a man occasionally receives your good story is sometimes a sign of inattention. At length Serge broke out with :

“It’s no good pretending ; I can’t for one moment get away from the thought of her ! I know not whether I most hate or most love her. All I know is that I can think of nothing else, and that to think of her is such torture that I drink more than I should just to escape from it.”

“It is difficult for me to spare you just now,” replied Orloff, “but I see you require change. You shall start for France to-morrow.”

Zenbrowsky accepted the proposition gladly. But when the morning came he could not tear himself away from the country in which all the interest of his life was centred, so he assured Orloff that he was strong enough not to have recourse to flight, and should be wretched, travelling by himself. He would wait till Orloff could leave London with him. Orloff had his doubts about his friend’s strength, but he said nothing, and they fixed their departure for the first week in August.

Only those who have loved, where they most hated to do so, can form any proximate idea of what Serge underwent during those remaining weeks of July. He had two enemies to fight—his passion for Mrs. Featherstone, and his growing temptation to drink that he might forget her. Between the two he was storm-torn frightfully, in body and soul. He was sick, almost unto death, for the woman from whom he had flown ; he was parched for the touch of her, the sound of her, the sight of her ; with desire but once again to clasp her hand, but once again to feel her lips cling close to his. He would say to himself, it was true that she would have made an assassin of him, but had not her family suffered outrage at Orloff’s hands ?

If she demanded much from him, was she not going to give much? At the thought, he broke out into grim laughter.

"What amuses you so?" inquired Orloff, looking up from what he was writing. Dinner was concluded, and the candles lighted, for the days were shortening perceptibly.

"You wouldn't appreciate the joke," replied Serge, pouring out some brandy.

"Not as well as you appreciate strong liquors, eh?" said Orloff, resuming his writing.

The night was warm and still, lit by a large, solemn-looking moon. The window of the room stood wide open, and in the garden could be heard the silvery cheeping of crickets.

"Oh, my God," groaned Serge to himself, "if only once again I could see her, or hear the sound of her voice!"

Hark, hark! Full and sweet and low, and fraught with unimaginable significance, up the garden-path, in the well-known and beloved voice, floated these words:

"Bid me to live and I will live,  
Thy Protestant to be;  
Or bid me love and I will give  
A loving heart to thee."

Serge started as if a ghost had spoken to him, but instantly controlled himself.

"That woman must be singing just outside our garden, I should think," remarked Orloff, who was no musician. "She seems to have a fine voice. Well, I shall write no more to-night; I think what I have written will help to rivet the chains on the dogs who would be our masters, unless we took them with a strong hand; still, at the best one is crippled, in these days of social reforms, such as your sweet friends, the Featherstones, further."

Hark, hark! the song is dying away slowly in the distance.

"She has learned, then," said Serge to himself, "where I have retired. She has followed me. Did she assume, in spite of all that I have said, that the compact is still binding? Is she still ready to fulfil her share of it?"

The thought maddened him.

"How," he asked himself, "if she should be right after all, and Orloff's influence a curse to his country? Was personal friendship sufficient cause for withholding his hand? Then,

again, suppose there was no country in the question ; she had been cruelly wronged by Orloff. Was not his first duty to her—his supreme lady?"

With such-like arguments he played, as sick men play with strange fancies.

The next night at the same hour, that is to say, between ten and eleven, the wonderful voice was heard again. Serge sprang up with a convulsive cry. Then he darted from the room and went to the back of the house. When he returned to the dining-room the voice was silent.

"If you can spare me," he said to Orloff, "I will go to London to-morrow for a day or two."

"To fall into old temptations?"

"No, that I give you my word," adding to himself, "rather to fly from them."

"Yes, I can spare you, if you will wait till the last train. By that time I shall have some important papers ready which I shall like you to leave with your own hand at the Russian embassy. I hope that, in a week's time, we shall be free to go where we like."

"God grant it may be so!" said Serge, devoutly, "If not out of this hell soon, I shall die or go mad!"

Orloff smiled cynically, as he remarked :

"Oh, you can stand more than you think—as I have known serfs to stand the knout. Men don't so easily lose their heads or their lives."

"But you don't know all," growled the other man, incensed at what he considered Orloff's levity.

"Possibly not," returned Orloff; "but human nature can bear a good deal, I know."

The next day was a busy one for Zenbrowsky. He spent it entirely in copying and writing at Orloff's dictation. At dinner he refreshed himself liberally with wine, and afterward lingered, talking in a wild, excited strain, which after all made Orloff half fear for his reason. At length, seeing that it wanted but a few minutes to train time, he rang the bell and directed one of the servants to bring down his light hand-portmanteau. He then took a hasty leave of Ivan Orloff, and strode away through the warm night air. As he was making his way to the station a sudden fit of dizziness seized him, and he leaned for support against a wall. The unpleasant sensation did not last long, but

it left him weak, and in a profuse perspiration. He could walk but slowly, and reaching the station found he had missed his last train. There was nothing for him then but to return. Could he have secured a carriage at that time of night to drive so far, what a wearisome affair it would have been ; and, though the thought was one which made him tremble, still it was sweet—he might again hear that voice !

When he returned to the house he found Orloff sitting where he had left him, leaning back in his chair wearily, his eyes half closed. Serge related his misadventure, but received little sympathy from Orloff, who observed :

“ It’s the wine that’s doing it, or rather the brandy. If you are too great a coward to face life like a man, you’ll be dead of it soon. It has been for some time on my mind to speak, and now I have spoken.”

“ And you can go to the devil for your pains,” replied Serge, drinking off a glass of brandy.

“ I wouldn’t be abusive,” answered Orloff, languidly ; “ there’s too much difference in our ages for that, and then you might make me forget myself.”

Zenbrowsky bit his lips and glared, but said nothing, and Orloff lapsed into his former condition of half slumber. Serge sat lost in his own reflections. He was desperate with desire for one woman. Hark, hark ! it is her voice again ; the voice with its subtle, potent, all-thrilling magic, more desperately sweet, more enthralling than ever :

“ Bid me to live, and I will live,  
Thy Protestant to be ;  
Or bid me love and I will give  
A loving heart to thee.

A heart as soft, a heart as kind,  
A heart as sound and free,  
As in the whole world thou can’st find,  
That heart I’ll give to thee.

Bid that heart stay, and it shall stay  
To honour thy decree ;  
Or bid it languish quite away  
And ’t shall do so for thee.

Bid me to weep, and I will weep  
While I have eyes to see,  
And having none, yet I will keep  
A heart to weep for thee.

*HER PRICE.*

Bid me despair, and I'll despair  
Under that cypress tree ;  
Or bid me die, and I will dare  
E'en death to die for thee.

Thou art my life, my love, my heart,  
The very eyes of me,  
And has command of every part  
To live and die for thee !”

As she sang, a vision of her as he had last seen her, in all her glory of beauty, seemed to rise before him. Oh, to clasp her close in his arms, to call her his, his very own, to banquet full of love !

And what stood between him and this paradise of passion ? What but the life of the man who had just insulted him ; the man, too, at whose instigation her father and sister had fallen ? Should the chance go ? A movement of his hand, and she would be his, and a curse to his country set aside. He set his teeth together and for a minute fought hard with himself. Then he drew his dagger from his coat-pocket, and sprang like a wild animal upon his victim, pressed one hand over Orloff's mouth, and drove the dagger into his heart, not once, but thrice. Then he cast it on the floor, and passed rapidly and noiselessly down the garden. The night was dark, so that his advancing figure was not seen by a woman who was leaning against the garden gate, singing. Suddenly the gate opened from within, and a hand fell on hers, while a voice said in a hoarse whisper, which had something terrible in it :

“ Kiss me. It's done. He will wrong no one any more now !”

“ Is it indeed so ?” she said, triumphantly ; “ you could not hide from me for long.”

“ And now,” he said, when he had kissed her hungrily, “ I have paid the price. When shall we meet in London ?”

“ Come to me to-morrow afternoon, in town,” was her low reply, as freeing herself from him she vanished in the dark night. Serge stood for a moment as if uncertain what to do. He turned as if to re-enter the house, and then walked away in the direction of London.

When Featherstone returned from Liverpool, it was to find his wife so out of health that, at her request, he postponed till



she should be stronger their holiday trip on the Continent, and took for her, again at her request, charming apartments at Richmond for the month of July. He suggested sea-air or the life-giving hills around Dorking, but nothing would satisfy Mrs. Featherstone but Richmond. So thither she went, Featherstone dividing his time between that place and London, for he was one of those men who, if near the scene of action, must be taking part in it. On the morning following the events just chronicled, Mrs. Featherstone travelled up to London by an early train ; reaching her house she went straight to her bedroom, and changed her simple travelling dress for one of rare costliness and beauty. Then she rang the bell and inquired if Mr. Featherstone were at home.

Yes ; Mr. Featherstone was at home, and in his study. Thither, then, went Zuleika. So engrossed was her husband in what he was writing that he did not hear the door open. He started to see his wife standing beside him, sumptuously attired, with a look upon her face which he could not interpret.

“ Yes,” she said, in answer to an exclamation of surprise on his part, “ I came up by an early train, because I had news to give you—great news ! Do I look well ? ”

“ You are beautiful at all times,” he answered, “ but what is your news ? ”

Then she came very close to him, and fixing her eyes on his, said :

“ He is dead—my foe and Russia’s ! That which I have sought to accomplish I have brought about.”

He sprang up and caught her hand, saying :

“ What do you mean ? Speak ! Are you mad ? What has happened ? ”

“ No,” she answered, proudly, “ I am not mad. He has fallen, not by my hand, but by the hand of Zenbrowsky. I first stole his heart, and made him think I would be his when he had done this deed by which my murdered sister and father are avenged. This afternoon he will come to claim me, and I shall meet him in your presence, and never set eyes on him again.”

She had spoken rapidly, and with desperate excitement, as if indeed her fulfilled vengeance had affected her brain.

Featherstone stood before her, his face white as a statue’s, and as hard, and when he spoke there was something marble-hard in the tone of his voice :

"I know not which to shrink from more, you or the actual assassin. Of the two, I suppose you are the more deeply stained."

Then he burst out with a violent transition of manner, speaking with fearful concentration: "Leave me, woman! Your presence pollutes the air—I cannot breathe with you. Take off those clothes—for shame! Put on sackcloth, and scourge yourself, but leave me, leave me! Oh, that my eyes need never again look upon you—you whom I have so loved."

A low cry broke from her as she turned and left the room. She had fancied that though her husband might have thought her over-zealous, on the whole he would have triumphed in her triumph.

Featherstone paced up and down his study distractedly, not heeding how the hours went by, saying to himself again and again that it could not be, and then realizing that it was.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when a figure he knew passed the window and ascended the steps of the house. Featherstone heard the door open and let in Zenbrowsky, but he still paced up and down his room in silence. What was it to him what the assassin might have to say to the woman who shared his guilt?

Fast, indeed, did Serge's heart beat as he ascended the stairs. He opened the door and entered the little room he knew so well. The room lay in loving shadow. The blinds were lowered to keep out the light of the July sun, but the penetrative heat of it was not to be so resisted. The pretty Dresden clock on the mantelpiece ticked gently; flies buzzed in and out. The heavy, concentrated, slumbrous rest of a summer afternoon weighed upon everything. Mrs. Featherstone had yielded to it. She lay there on the sofa, her face turned from him, one arm hanging down indolently. The lace sleeves of her dress were full, disclosing a portion of the fair arm. He caught the shimmer of her dress, saw the abundant dark hair, so warm-looking against the red velvet pillow on which her head was resting. She was his, and he contemplated the outlines of her beauty with a rapture not unmixed with awe.

Approaching the couch on which she was reclining, he knelt down by it, and raising her hand pressed it to his lips. How softly cool it was even in the fervid heat! Then he whispered her name gently. She moved not. Well, he would wake her

with a kiss ! How deeply asleep she was, he thought, as he turned her reluctant face to him, his eyes glowing with love's fire. They encountered hers, un conjecturing, inscrutable, more ironical in their horrible indifference to human joy or sorrow than any conscious look of scorn could have made them. A cry of horror and agony broke from his lips. On the ground, emptied of its contents, lay a phial of that poison of which ladies so well know the external use—but her eyes, if they had needed it, it would brighten never more.

Yes, he was too late. Go to, now, oh, lover, and wail for the lips which shall kiss you never more, for the fingers that shall wed no more with yours ! That miracle of beauty and fragrance which set your pulses throbbing and made your heart beat faster, which filled you with desire at once so exquisite and poignant, had been given away most wholly to that grim love from whom there is no parting for evermore.

Featherstone was still pacing up and down, when a wild distraught face flashed beside him, and a voice hissed in his ear :

“ Go to her ; she is dead ! ”

That evening Serge Zenbrowsky surrendered himself for the murder of Ivan Orloff ; on this charge he was duly tried, found guilty, and hanged.

Nihilists revere his memory as do Roman Catholics that of their saints—not so we, who know the nature of his martyrdom.

## SIR CHARLES GODFREY, BARONET.

—:0:—

SIR CHARLES GODFREY, baronet, lay sick at his house in Park Lane. This all people knew ; that is to say, all people who concerned themselves with the London season and read their *Morning Post* with proper attention. From his youth up Sir Charles had been a bit wild. There were plenty of stories about mad, merry times in town and country when he was a handsome young fellow, with black curling hair thick on the head that for a long time now had worn a wig—an imperturbable wig, which by reason of the hot weather and his present illness was just now put aside, so that at last he looked an old man.

But what a young fellow he *had* been once ! He had sowed his wild oats by acres, but he had been very careful of his dogs and horses, and very tender to women. No woman reasonably young and tolerably good-looking ever had occasion to accuse him of hardness. With much light loving, with hunting and pigeon-shooting and good dinners, Sir Charles beguiled the best years of life. But at sixty or thereabout the inevitable reckoning came ; for all of a sudden he fell flat on life, or, to speak more correctly, life fell flat on him. There was an appalling cessation of all desires, an awful slackness of intention. Well, at past sixty one can't keep the ball of pleasure going as one did at thirty, or even at forty. He had loved widely if not deeply. He had seen every place considered worth seeing, drunken every epicurean wine, eaten every epicurean dish. "All was done that man could do," and, so far as present pleasure went, all had

been done in vain. At sixty, hereditary gout took up its abode with him, exacting merciless reckoning for all the past good dinners.

What was to be done? "Marry and settle down" suggest Wisdom and Experience at my elbow; and this was precisely what Sir Charles did. He bought for his wife as fresh and pretty a girl of twenty as you could find anywhere. She, poor child! was only too delighted to be sold, for she came of a very impoverished old family, and she lived shut up in a great, gloomy country-house twenty miles away from any large town—lived there with her father and mother, who were engaged in a desperate lifelong struggle to make both ends meet, yet always left them the fatal half-inch apart. One after another the family had parted with its pleasant things, and the young lady's own little pony phaeton had just gone to the hammer when Sir Charles made his appearance on the scene.

He regarded the daughter of his old friend with the eye of a connoisseur—found her pretty, nice, altogether desirable in all ways. In a week or two he proposed for her hand and was accepted, and shortly afterward they were married.

Then peace and plenty replaced struggle and want in the bride's family, and she considered herself a fortunate woman; and with good reason. Had she not a stately country-house, with all its well-bred luxuries, and a town-residence, charmingly appointed, where she might take her fill of the delights of the London season? Nor was Sir Charles a bad husband, as husbands and buyers go. Certainly, he might easily have been worse. He was still nice-looking—a handsome old gentleman—and his manner was kind and courtly. True, he got to be somewhat of a bore when, about a month after marriage, he really fell in love with his wife and became excessively demonstrative. However, the bride was philosophical. She bore with his spooning as gracefully as she had borne with his gout. She met alike his affection and his irritability with the greatest sweetness of temper. She was certainly a model wife: would that all elderly husbands could find such a treasure! Sir Charles, poor soul! vain by nature, and more vain by reason of a long course of successful lady-killing, easily persuaded himself that he was beloved, and hugged the dear faith to his heart.

Thus things went on pleasantly enough till his serious illness



(with which the *Morning Post* daily concerned itself) took Sir Charles resolutely by the shoulders and put him to bed. What was it? A combination of gout, low fever, and what besides not even the doctor, who came daily and shook his head a guinea's worth, could precisely tell. But he always said his patient would be better soon, and that was a comfort.

It was sad for Lady Godfrey that this illness should have come just in the midst of the London season. But she bore this misfortune with her usual sweet patience. Certainly, she was a most admirable woman. Day after day went by, and she saw absolutely no one except the doctor and two young men familiarly known as Ned Lewson and Bob Butler—two devoted friends of her husband, for Sir Charles was popular alike with young and old. Easily persuaded in most things, Sir Charles had sworn a big oath when his illness first seized him that whether he lived or died no hired nurse should cross his threshold. Of course his wife, with her fragile constitution, was unequal to the arduous task of taking care of him; so these two young men, quietly foregoing all the pleasures of the season, took up their abode under his roof and devoted themselves to him entirely. The first of the two to propose this step had been Lewson. His offer took every one by surprise, for he was universally regarded as a pleasure-seeking, selfish sort of fellow. He was big, heavy, handsome, with more muscle than brains. He had a pleasant voice, with a slight military drawl. His fair, clearly-cut face was adorned by long conventional moustaches.

Butler was comparatively insignificant-looking. He had a thin figure and a pale face, with the suggestion of a sneer about the close lips. Lewson had long ago nicknamed him "Meph," as a convenient abridgment of Mephistopheles.

Straw had been spread thickly before the pleasantest house in Park Lane, and horses and carriages passed softly as a procession in a dream. But from the near distance, like the murmur of some ever-flowing sea, could be heard the ceaseless ebb and flow of busy, surging life—that life in which Sir Charles had already scarcely more part than if he were dead. It was brilliant May weather. People rode and drove in the Park; went to flower-shows and kettledrums; dined and danced; made love, intrigued, did all manner of things, good and bad; and all the time Sir Charles lay there parching through the hot

days, and there was no fun for his patient, pretty little wife. But what a model wife she was, to be sure !

Every morning she came regularly to his room, examined the medicine-bottles, sipped at the barley-water to see if it was properly made, patted the pillows, caressed the poor hot old face on them with her cool, delicate little hands, asked if there was anything else she could do, hoped he would be well soon, and then, her duty sweetly done, went back to her own especial sitting-room and beguiled the time by the wholesale perusal of three-volume novels. The epochs of the day were luncheon and dinner, for at those times she saw Lewson or Butler—generally Lewson, for Butler was a professed woman-hater, and seldom came out of the sick room. But, after all, those were sad meals. My lady sat pale and drooping in Sir Charles's place, and Lewson sat close by, and they sighed over soup and ate sweetbreads dejectedly. Then coffee would be served in Lady Godfrey's boudoir—quite an ideal room, by the way. It was simply and daintily furnished, with a soft rose-bloom pervading all the appointments, and very little light. The window was always open, and from the balcony came in plenteously the scent of summer flowers. In this pleasant room the after-dinner conversations would run something in this wise :

“ Do you sit up to-night ? ”

“ Yes : I shall relieve Butler at eleven.”

“ You are my husband's favourite, I think.”

“ Yes : without vanity, I do believe that is true.”

“ Poor Sir Charles ! Heaven send he may soon get better ! ”

“ Ah, yes indeed : I hope so.”

“ Light your cigar : you know I like it.”

“ Thanks—I will.”

Then a long silence—conversation is so difficult when the mind is preoccupied.

Downstairs Sir Charles lay alternately groaning and growling, for what man is patient under pressure of ceaseless physical pain ? Butler looked on with his cynical smile, and said to himself, “ Settling day ! ” There were long arrears of good living and women's smiles and idle follies to be paid for in those dark days. At times poor Sir Charles would cry out in a voice that seemed to have been thinned and attenuated by pain, like his face, “ I wish I were out of it, Butler—dead and done with it all. But there's my poor wife. Poor Emma ! Who would comfort her ? ”

“That would be easy enough,” thought Butler—“send her to the seaside or the Continent in good company.” But he did not speak his thought. Instead, he answered in the most sympathetic tone he could command, “Who, indeed, poor thing?” and then added, more cheerfully, “But you aren’t going to die yet, you know, by many a long year.”

“Ah, you really think so?” Sir Charles would say, something comforted for the moment; for he wanted to live, though sometimes he thought—when the gout wrenched and tortured him, and the cruel fever consumed him with thirst and parched his skin till it was like dried hay—that he wanted nothing but to be done with pain. What he really wanted was to get well. He was rich, and he was intensely in love with his wife. Life had indeed lost its zest for him before he married her, but she had brought back to him warmth and hope and desire. These were reasons why he loved life: there was one, equally strong, why he dreaded death. He had been brought up with strictly orthodox views in regard to a future life. During his gay years he seemed to have escaped from them, but they had come back now, and quietly insinuated themselves again into the very texture of his mind, or perhaps they had always lurked there.

He had, indeed, not stolen nor done murder nor borne false witness, but there were other commandments of which he could not affirm that he had kept them from his youth up. He had been always looking forward, no doubt, in some vague way to a time of repentance. He had not thought about it consciously, but he had had a shadowy expectation of some future time when he would take stock of his transgressions, and say a few prayers and set his house in order before going on his travels into an unknown world. And now he was in too much pain for the proper performance of these last arrangements, and he had a torturing doubt as to the nature of his reception in the next world. About dying itself, too, there was something horribly uncomfortable. After a life of social pleasures he shrank from the awful unsociability of death. Its darkness and its mystery troubled him. He had always had a horror of deathbed scenes, and he shuddered at the thought of the worm for neighbour to his delicate and well-cared-for flesh.

Lewson was absolutely invaluable as a nurse: he brought cheerfulness into the sick room. He was also an indispensable comfort and support to Lady Godfrey. On leaving Sir Charles’s

room, when he had been watching there all night, he would go straight to my lady's little sitting-room to give her the latest tidings ; and so anxious was she to hear them, poor dear ! that she used to be up at least two hours before her customary time. Those must have been strange mornings when they sat alone together—she fresh from sleep and blooming from her bath, he with the moil and wear of night-watching upon him. They talked little at these times, and that little was chiefly of Sir Charles.

One morning Lewson said, "I sha'n't see so much of you when Sir Charles gets well, shall I?"

"I suppose not," she answered, fidgeting with her watch-chain.

There had been a thunderstorm in the night, from which the air had gathered strength and keenness.

"You are cold," Lewson said, seeing that she shivered ; and rising he closed the window. "Why, your hands are like ice," he went on, taking them in his as he spoke—"poor, pretty, cold hands !"

She did not take them away. They *were* cold, and his were warm and comforting. She looked up in his face with her child-like, beseeching eyes.

"Do you know," he asked, after a few moments of dangerous silence, "that it is just a year to-day since I saw you first? It was at Lady Osborne's. You wore a pale-green dress and pearls."

"Why, what a memory you must have !" she cried.

"Yes," he answered, quietly, "I have—for some things."

Before he could say any more she interposed with, "You really think Sir Charles suffered less through the night?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you do think he will get better?"

"I do."

"Thanks. You are so much more reassuring than Mr. Butler."

Dear reader—I mean dear masculine reader—if your friend lay sick, and it was part of your duty to try to comfort and support his afflicted wife, and if, moreover, she were both young and pretty, and you and she were left alone together for hours at a time, would you, or would you not, now and then take possession of her hands? Of course you would—sympathy would demand



as much. And having thus captured them, would you kiss them from time to time? Ah, yes—I thought you would say yes—and you would find it most natural to lavish little endearments upon them. And you, dear madam, if you were that afflicted wife, and had for your support and comforter a man young and handsome, over six feet in height, and broad-chested in proportion, would you, or would you not, when he took your hand, press his in grateful acknowledgment, or lean your cheek against it for a moment? For the sweet sake of womanly gratitude I think you would.

Sir Charles had brightened for a day or two, but just at the end of May he grew much worse. The doctor came twice, and sometimes three times, a day, and shook his head more than ever. Lady Godfrey looked half dead with suspense, and Lewson had grown very solemn at last.

One afternoon, when the air was strangely sultry and all outside Nature seemed waiting for something, my lady sat alone in her sitting-room. She was lost in thought, when Lewson came in, looking very pale.

“The doctor has just been,” he said; and his voice was a trifle husky. “I bring you bad news—Sir Charles himself asked me to break it to you: there is no more hope.”

There was a visible change in my lady’s face, but she controlled herself in a moment, though she was white as death. “Doctors are mistaken sometimes,” she said, slowly.

“Yes,” he replied, “but I fancy this is not a mistake.”

He was standing a long way from her. In this hour, when she needed comfort most, he did not take her hands, and there was none of the caressing tenderness to which she had grown accustomed in his voice.

“I must go now,” he said. “Butler is lying down. It is his turn to watch to-night.”

So he left her, and she, poor little woman! sat and cried softly to herself. And Sir Charles meanwhile set himself seriously to the momentous business of dying, and got on very expeditiously with his repentance. He called to mind the publican of the Scriptures, who said only, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” This Sir Charles said over many times and fervently, and then his tortured mind grew a little easier as Death drew nigh.

About eleven o’clock that night Butler awoke and relieved Lewson, who went straight to Lady Godfrey’s room.



She looked up and smiled faintly. "I'm glad you have come," she said. "I couldn't go to bed, and I have grown so dreadfully nervous sitting here alone. But I mustn't keep you up : that would be too selfish, for you look more dead than alive. You must get some rest."

"I would rather stay with you," he answered.

"Well, then, do stay a little while, please."

So they sat on together, one hour, two hours, and all the time they scarcely spoke. About one o'clock, when everything was awfully quiet, and the rumbling of some far-off carriage now and then seemed like the ghost of a sound, they were startled by a sharp tap on the door, and Butler came in. He glanced from one to the other, and then, curling his lip a little more than usual, he said, "I am very sorry to interrupt you, but I thought it might interest you both to know that Sir Charles is dying."

Lady Godfrey rose, and blushed from the tips of her pretty little ears to the topmost plait of her soft hair : Lewson blushed too. They could hardly have looked more conscious.

"Oh, don't cry," said Butler, observing that my lady was feeling for her handkerchief. "Let me assure you that the greatest grief is always tearless. We had best make haste : there is no time to be lost."

So they proceeded in solemn procession to Sir Charles's room.

Sir Charles was sitting up in bed, supported by pillows. The room was brilliantly lighted. Lady Godfrey went over to the bed and said, "Charles, do you know me ?"

He was breathing with great difficulty, but a smile crossed his face which was good to see, since all that was best in the man's nature came out in it. "Yes," he gasped—"yes, my poor faithful, loving wife !"

She kissed the damp forehead and put her hand into one of his, too feeble now to close on it. His other hand was pulling at the counterpane. Poor wasted hands, done at length with all love's pressures ! Late as it was, even then fashionable London was full of life. Dancers were circling to mad, bewitching waltz-music. Men and women made engagements for the morrow and planned fresh pleasures, thinking as little of the hour of their death as of that of their birth.

The summer night was passing with its riot of mirth and of roses, and Sir Charles, who had been foremost once in every

scheme of pleasure, was passing with it—transacting that grim last business which, shrink from it how we may, we must all transact some day. My lady stood on one side of the bed, looking tearful and agitated; Lewson stood just opposite her, serious as a judge, forgetting somehow even to twirl his moustaches; Butler stood at the bed's foot with an air of quiet expectation.

At length Sir Charles addressed himself again to his wife. "My darling," he said, faintly, "I am dying. If I could but have lived, how happy I meant to make you! And now"—he paused for breath, and then resumed—"now you will be all alone. Dear, you are young: you mustn't be too sorry for me—sorry for too long."

She pressed his hand for sole answer. Then for several minutes the silence would have been complete but for the loud, persistent ticking of Sir Charles's watch, which sounded on with a sort of don't-care tone, as if to say, "Men may die, but I must keep time."

Though Lewson had forgotten to twirl his moustaches, he had not forgotten to look at Lady Godfrey, or, rather, he had forgotten *not* to look at her. Did he sympathize with her so deeply? or did that face, with its wistful, childlike gaze, draw him as by a spell? Raising her eyes suddenly, she met his. This meeting, significant look which crossed the bed was quicker than light, but Sir Charles intercepted it. An awful comprehension dawned on his face. He had been about to die, carrying with him one sweet delusion. He knew well enough that he would have few mourners—that his death would leave little void in the world. But he thought that all was not gone from him, since even at the last he had had power to win and keep his wife's love. He believed that he should carry it down with him into the darkness. He fancied her in her widow's weeds, pale with many tears, bent by heavy sorrow. Would it not warm his heart even in the grave to know that she came there to weep? But now—he had seen that look.

Lady Godfrey saw the awful, unnatural intelligence in his eyes, and shivered. Lewson stood thunderstruck. The sneer round Butler's lips grew a shade more decided than usual, and he looked interested.

Then Sir Charles, glancing from one to another, laughed, but his laughter flowed scantily, like a thin, winter stream, and

was choked among gasps and inarticulate words. At last, with one supreme effort of will, he spoke clearly : " I see it all now, all—funeral and wedding-cards all in one. Yet I would have sworn you loved me. What a fool I have been ! poor fool ! poor fool ! "

" Don't, oh, for mercy's sake, don't ! " cried Lady Godfrey kissing him, with a desperate attempt to play through her *rôle* of loving wife creditably to the end. He bore her kiss—he had always been gentle to women—but he was not one whit deceived. Fate accorded him no such mercy. He lay there with his strange gaze fixed on something very far off—his lost youth perhaps—and he kept saying over to himself, at first with awful emphasis, and then at last drawlingly and feebly, as if the words had lost their meaning, " Poor fool ! poor fool ! "

Then suddenly, just as they thought he was dead, he cried out, fixing his eyes on Butler, " Let them wait a year. " And then he tried to laugh, but it was a faint yet horrible laugh, which froze upon his stiffening lips. In that last ghastly effort his soul had passed.

" I believe Sir Charles is really dead now, " said Butler, quietly. " He never kept people waiting longer than he could help. "

## A THOUSAND POUNDS.

—:0:—

FOR a lady who is about to pass, as a holiday with her lover, the twenty-fifth anniversary of her birthday, it cannot be said that Rose Bellward looked the incarnation of earthly happiness. She sat alone and expectant in the drawing-room of Grove Lodge—a small house in a new district of London, occupied by Mrs. Bellward and her two daughters, Rose and Clara. The Bellwards were not rich ; and the house had that speckless appearance which is only observable when the services of the one professional domestic have been eked out by the combined forces of all the feminine inmates.

As I have said, Rose sat in the little drawing-room with its well-worn rep furniture, its centre-table, with a photograph album and a few gift books, in which somebody's selection from English Christian poetry was conspicuous. On a side-table was a stuffed bird under a glass case. In the window between the stiffly-starched lace-curtains, a live bird swung triumphant in a brightly-gilded cage, untouched by any sympathetic instinct to tell him that just under him, in a vault of glass, a brother with moveless wings and songless throat was preserved perpetually in state. Likely enough the dead bird had once upon a time made merry in the cage where now the live bird lived. Just so had *he* shrilled out his song in the warm spring sunshine ; just so had *he* prodigally dashed afar rape seed and canary in search of the dearly-loved and baneful hemp ! Just so in the pauses of song had *he* communed with

himself in low notes which could mean nothing else but serene self-laudation. "Yes, dear, you have done well indeed," they seemed to say. "Will Beauty try it again?" which Beauty, after a little demur, would proceed to do. So had *he* hopped from perch to perch; so had *he* revelled in the swing depending from the roof of his house, and known—had *he* known—the terrible episode of green, glaring eyes, as the cage swayed dreadfully in the clutch of the clinging claws, and fluttered feathers flew this way and that. Had he, too, heard the rush to the rescue and the wail of the defeated enemy? he, too, by night, with head tucked safely under his wing, dreamt of those dreadful eyes of green flame, and, dreaming, sounded a strange unbirdlike note, making any one who might be in the room wonder what could be the matter with Beauty?

As it is with birds so it is with men! We chirrup and we sing, we swell our feathers with pride or flutter them with fear; then we pass, and others succeed to our positions, and as after death we are not available for stuffing and putting under glass cases by way of reminder, we are very soon out of sight, and very soon out of mind, to those who have loved us best. Something in this strain ran Miss Bellward's thoughts as she listened to the canary's song. You see she could remember Beauty the First, upon whose glass vault Beauty the Second was now raining his seed and splashing his water. Still she was not being sentimental over a dead bird.

Of what *is* she thinking, then, this 25th of May, while men pass the window with their flower-laden barrows, shouting as they go, with that peculiar intonation only adopted by their class: "Fine flow-ers! All a blowin' and a growin'!" And Beauty's cage as it swings in the light flashes with almost dazzling brilliance. Is she thinking of a 25th of May, six years ago, when she had waited—not in this room, but in a room overlooking the British Channel—for some one to come, some one whose step made her eyes shine and her heart beat—some one on whose grave the grass has now been growing greenly for four years? Fools are we who try to keep anniversaries with the living! They are meant for the dead alone!

I do not mean for a moment to imply that Rose was giving her right hand to a living lover while her left retained that of a dead one. Her young romantic love had been genuine, and genuine had been her grief when death frustrated her hope,



and a fever, brief but virulent, stopped for ever the gentle and chivalrous heart which had beat with such loyal love for her. But as the flowers grew on her lover's grave, so, though not perhaps with quite so quick a growth, hope grew again in her heart, and when, four years after her lover's death, Reginald Longhurst, a struggling young artist, with a manly figure, clear-cut, handsome face and splendid dark, passionate eyes, laid his heart at her feet, she was nothing loath to take it into her keeping. Still, when the anniversary of her birthday came around, she could not help thinking of a certain grave within sight and sound of the sea. Yet her look then was not the look of one who is entertaining ghosts, saying: "Yes, I remember what you said that day, what I wore, what kind of a day it was—indeed, I remember it all! all! though the ghastly smile about your faded lips would seem to say I have forgotten!"

Beside Miss Bellward on the table lay a superb bouquet and a beautiful and costly fan. Looking at these, her deep violet eyes grew grave and earnest, with the look of one preparing to meet some crisis.

She was worth looking at, was Rose Bellward, with her rare, violet eyes, her pale, proud face, her lips at once sensitive and resolute. The dress she wore, though simple in texture, fitted so as to show to advantage her beautifully moulded figure. Round her head, which inclined to be massive, her abundant brown hair, with gold lights glittering in it, was coiled fold on fold. She was evidently deep in thought, regarding the flowers and the fan with wistful eyes, when a quick, impetuous application of the knocker to the street door made her start. Forestalling the servant, she hastened into the hall and opened the door herself. The next moment she was caught close in strong arms; the door closed, and lips met lips.

"May all good things be with you on this day, my darling!" said the man. His voice was pleasant till heard under the influence of a great excitement, when it became shrill. Reginald Longhurst would have been a perfectly handsome man but for a painfully weak, receding chin.

There they stood in the hall, she with her hand in his, her head resting against his shoulder, while his lips caressed the soft, shining folds of her hair. Then, "Come, dear," he said, and with something almost like a shadow of reluctance she let herself be drawn into the parlour. He placed in her hand a modest

bouquet of flowers, saying they were not worthy of the occasion, but the best he could manage. She raised them to her lips, praising their sweetness. As they entered the room the scent of other and rarer flowers penetrated their senses.

Reginald stood arrested, his eyes fixed on the bouquet. An instant change passed over his face, which, but a moment ago, had looked radiant. Now it looked like a sea, in nautical language, "in dirty weather."

"A birthday gift?" he asked, in a hard, constrained voice.

"Yes, dear, of course. Now, mind, you are to be good to-day!"

"Whose gift?" he demanded, in the same hard tone of voice.

"My cousin Will's."

"Then you have no need of mine!" He took them from her hand, and with no consideration for Mrs. Bellward's faded but still much respected Brussels carpet, he set them beneath his heel, while his brows really did contract and his face grew darker and darker.

"I am sorry you should be so petulant," she said, drawing back, while a smile, in which scorn and pity were blended, grew round the corners of her mouth.

"And the fan?" he asked, catching sight of it, and speaking with a rising inflection of tone; "is that also a gift from the same liberal hand?"

"It is."

Then with a sudden impulse she went to his side, and putting her arms about his neck, said:

"Dear, don't be cross! How can you misjudge me so? Surely, it is natural that my own cousin, who as a boy was my playmate, should pay me some attention on my birthday?"

But the demon of a naturally violent temper, aggravated by insane jealousy, was roused in the man, and he thrust her from him almost roughly. She drew back to the other side of the room; there was a dangerous light in her eyes, a dangerous red spot on either cheek. In the window the unregarding bird shrilled on, then ceased, and Reginald spoke:

"Will you fling those flowers out of the window, send that man back his gift, and swear to see him never more? Will you do this?"

"No, I will not do it," and her voice was firm.

“ You will not do that to please me ? ”

“ I will not do that to please you. I will be your wife ; I will not be your slave ! ”

The man answered, swept away in a storm of rage : “ Then, by Heaven, we part now and for ever ! I thought love might have tamed the flirt in you, but I see my love is powerless to do that ! Marry you ! and have my life rendered a hell by that long, lank, sentimental, brainless fool ! I’ve seen how he would look at you with those sawney, school-girl eyes of his when he thought mine away ! ”

Here she interrupted him.

“ Please vent your stream of abuse elsewhere ! You are growing offensive to me. ”

“ Then that is because you love him ! I’ve seen how things have been going ! Had you respected either of us— ”

There she interrupted him again.

“ Wait ! I must speak here ! I know I should have said before what I am going to say now, ” she went on, her voice softening as she continued. “ Our engagement, Reginald, has not been a happy one, though there have been hours in it which I shall always love to remember. There has hardly been a man to whom I have spoken of whom you have not been jealous, till the feeling has culminated in this insane idea about my cousin. You say I am a flirt, and that you had hoped your love might tame me ? I am no flirt, but I hoped—and now I see how vainly—that tenderness and forbearance might cure you of your jealousy. The last time there was a painful scene between us because of it you were penitent, and swore it should not happen again. I thought you meant your words—and see what has come of them ! Another woman might have concealed both these gifts ; but I could not respect a man from whom I had to conceal things to win his favour ; and I will marry no man whom I cannot respect. You have said more than once before that it was better we should part, and when you pleaded for forgiveness I forgave you ; but the words you have said to-day I take as final. Don’t think that I misjudge you ! I believe in spite of your words that you love me still ! and, dear, ” here her voice faltered, “ indeed I love you ! I shall love no one else ! But, as I have said, I can consent to be *no* man’s slave. You would be always suspecting evil where none existed, and the frequent

repetition of such scenes as we have had to-day would in time wear out the strongest love ; and love worn out might even turn to hate ! There are qualities in you, attractions about you, infinitely dear to my heart. I shall pray for your success. There are plenty of women meeker, less sensitive than myself, whom you might make happy, and who in their turn would make you happier than ever I could have done ! It is better to be lonely apart than desperately miserable together. Remember, it was you who said that we should part—but do not let us part in bitterness ! ”

She moved towards him, but he turned from her, saying bitterly :

“ You could bear with my moods well enough till this rich fool of a cousin came back from his travels ! ”

“ That is unworthy of you, ” she said.

But he went on :

“ If you marry him, may you be as miserable as I would have made you happy ! ”

There was a pause. Beauty in his cage ransacked his seed tin for hemp. Reginald gazed at the woman he loved with hot, bewildered eyes ; then he said, brokenly :

“ Good-bye—and good-bye for ever ! ”

“ And no more ? ” she asked, her voice trembling.

“ No more ! ” he answered, tearing his eyes away from her and moving to the door. He opened it, and then turning back quickly, dashed something violently on the table. The next moment, not only the room door but the street door closed upon him. He was gone indeed.

Miss Bellward opened the small case he had flung with such violence upon the table, and saw there, reposing on a bed of white satin, a cross to wear at the neck—a cross of roses carved in ivory. About it was a strip of paper on which was written “ Roses to the Rose ! ” She knew that he was skilful in carving, and that this gift had been the loving labour of his hands, taken out of time that he could ill afford to spare ! and as she gazed the hot tears crowded into her eyes, and her life to come looked gray and empty as a winter sea, without sail upon it or gull above it. The bird’s song seemed to lacerate her brain ; and she did what every woman in trouble does—she went to her bedroom, cast herself upon her bed, and cried as if her heart would break.



It is a curious habit that women have, of taking their troubles at once to bed. It seems to be their one and only resource. A woman takes her trouble lying, while a man, if he can, always takes it walking. But take it how we may, that is a bitter hour when we seem to be closing, to open it never again, the thrilling book of romance—for, after all, youth means only the power to enjoy romantically.

“That youth’s sweet-scented manuscript should close!”

Reginald strode away through the glorious May sunshine. It is what may be called the trivialities of grief which makes the pathos of it. The heart of the trouble is tragic, and tragedy is never pathetic.

As Reginald was storming on through the London streets, toward the quarter of the town in which he had his rooms, he was encountered by a Bohemian acquaintance, pipe in mouth—a clever fellow, destined one day to make his mark, though now clad in clothes decidedly the worse for wear. He gripped Reginald by the hand, and thus accosted him :

“Heart alive, man! What a swell you are! Off on a spree?”

“Yes,” replied Reginald, “and only just in time to catch the train!” and he hurried on, in no mood for talk.

“When I’m going spreeing,” meditated the other, “I hope I shall look more like it!”

It was true that, for him, Longhurst was quite a swell. For the occasion which was to have been so festive, the old rusty velvet shooting jacket was replaced by a carefully-brushed, tightly-fitting frock coat. The disreputable and comfortable wide-awake had given place to the uncomfortable but respectable chimney-pot. The truest humour has just a suspicion of pathos, the truest pathos has just a suspicion of humour in it; and there was something, surely, very sad and just a little funny in the idea of a man putting on his most respectable clothes to receive such a blow as this man had—though in a way it was one which he himself had seemed to court.

Arrived at his quarters, he assumed his old work-a-day coat; and turning to his pipe, as a true smoker in his trouble always should, he began to smoke and to walk up and down.

He had lost her! lost her through his own violent jealousy! and the thought wrung his heart so that he groaned and swore.

As the day wore on Reginald tried to work; but it was no



good ; he even forgot what the thing was he meant to do. In those days life was a hard fight with Longhurst ; he did the illustrating for some of the cheap papers ; also he did the reviewing for some of the weeklies, and by these means just managed to get along in the present, and hoped for better things in the future. The apartment which served him for study, studio, and bedroom was a veritable workshop, and lacked both grace and comfort. This room was in a tall, shabby house standing in a shabby street. Feet tramped up and down stairs ; bells rang ; somewhere a baby squalled prolongedly and painfully ; all these things he noticed, and they all seemed to him fraught with a special significance. A length he took up his hat and set his face westward. After walking some distance he stopped before a handsome house, the door of which was opened by a stately footman, of whom Reginald inquired if Mr. Fullerton were within.

“ Mr. Fullerton was at home,” the man replied ; “ but he was at work in the studio.”

“ All right,” rejoined Reginald ; “ he’ll see me. I know. Just tell him that Mr. Longhurst wishes to see him.”

The man disappeared, and swiftly returning, led the way to Fullerton’s studio. No mere workshop this ! The walls of it were hung with costliest tapestries, the floor strewn with Persian rugs. In different corners stood wonderful antique vases from some of which great lilies bloomed. The room was pervaded with the scents of latakia and coffee ; and moving softly to and fro in this artistic paradise, was the spirit of the place, Edward Fullerton, very dear to the heart of æsthetic London. He was tall and slight, with long fair hair, and a dreamy, far-away look in the large brown eyes ; yet he was known to be a sharp hand at a bargain. Between these two men, who were close friends, there could hardly have been a greater contrast—the one every inch of him the practical workman, the other every inch the useless æsthetic. Still they liked each other. Fullerton’s luxury interested Longhurst, whose strong manliness in turn stimulated the other.

“ What’s the matter ? ” asked Fullerton, in the softest of voices, when the door had closed. “ You look even wilder than usual ! Besides, I thought you were going to take a holiday with your young woman, as you call her ? ”

“ I have no young woman,” replied the other, lighting a cigar.

"Broken off?" asked Fullerton, with genuine sympathy.

"Yes, that's it. We quarrelled about something, and I told her to go." Then, after a pause, and something like a gulp, "she went ; that's all."

There was silence for some time. Then Fullerton said, laying his hand on the other's shoulder :

"You must live for art?"

In reply to which Reginald d——d art, and got up, saying, "Well, I'll be off now! I thought I'd just look in to let you have the news. I'm not company yet for any man. Good-bye. Look you up soon again," and with a pressure of hands they parted.

Getting in everybody's way, Reginald wandered aimlessly about the London streets. When it was evening a sudden faintness reminded him that he had eaten nothing all day long, so he went into the bar parlours of a tavern he knew, and had himself served with bread and cheese and beer. This simple meal over, he filled his pipe and called for whisky and water ; and there he sat smoking, and again and yet again having his glass replenished. No romance to be got out of such a lover as this, is there ? None at all ; he is as unromantic as the pipe in his mouth, as the glass of spirits at his elbow ; as unromantic as any of the horsey gentlemen who share the room with him, and who look sometimes, without being noticed by him, at the man sitting there with the dark scowling brows, smoking hard and drinking steadily without the process seeming in any way to lessen his gloom.

The floor of the parlour was strewn with fine shavings, and henceforth their smell will always recall to him the desolation of that night. From out the clouds of tobacco raised from many pipes, her fair face seemed to float and look at him ; and he heard again her voice, so appallingly quiet, passing sentence after his mad outbreak of jealous rage. At the same time his ear registered all the sounds going on around him, the hammering of glasses on the table by customers desiring to have them refilled—the frequent demands at the bar for "fours of Scotch whisky," "goes of gin," and such like, and the eternal query of, "Well, old man, what shall it be?" Then the tavern boasted a club, and it happened to be club-night, and from an adjoining room came many a shout and many a music-hall ditty, the chorus being given with true British spirit ; and all

these things, and all the hot reek of the place, became fused with his despair. A romantic lover? Not he! He should be down by the dark water's edge meditating his final plunge, instead of boozing here at the "Gray Horse" like a veritable toper. But he will not booze all night. At length he settles his account, pulls his hat down over his eyes, and goes out.

He was one of those stoutly-built, strong-headed men who can imbibe largely without showing any ill effects. He walked erectly and steadily back to his room, entered it, threw himself heavily on the bed and turned to the wall with a sigh of infinite weariness. In a few minutes the sound of heavy breathing that filled the room showed the whisky had done its work. The man had drunk that he might sleep, and he slept.

And how fared the day with Rose? Well, she cried herself into a desperately bad headache, for which she drank copiously of strong tea. Very early in the evening she undressed and went to bed, and being unhappy and wakeful, took a novel to read herself sleepy. That was the woman's way of getting sleep, as Reginald's had been the man's. She will never forget that evening. For ever the novel she read then will be associated with her trouble. Roses stood on her dressing table. She will "never again be friends with roses!"

The feet of the passers-by, as from her bed she could hear them, seemed to be treading into her brain. At length the book grew indistinct to her sight, she blew out the candle, and slept.

The next morning Reginald awoke weary; his head throbbed, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He took a bath and put on fresh clothes. His work awaited him and he began upon it. So he made up his mind to face the life which lay before him. The next day he commenced painting his first large oil-picture. The weeks went by, and brought one specially hot July day—one of those real sweltering days on which London is absolutely unbearable, one of those days in which the sun seems to have burnt up the very sources of the winds, a day to make all the London odours painfully manifest.

Reginald Longhurst was working away in his shirtsleeves, a pipe in his mouth and a jug of beer by his side, thinking that if any money were his he would fly from London, and somewhere within sight and sound of the sea, would rest his weary brain and his yet wearier heart—when the studio bell rang sharply;

he opened the door and admitted Edward Fullerton and a little sharp-nosed man, introduced by Fullerton as—

“My friend, Harry Jones, who loves art and whatever is distinctly precious!”

Longhurst did the honours of the studio as well as the hot weather would allow. Mr. Jones asked the price of a small drawing. With not the least expectation of selling it, and hardly knowing what he was saying, Reginald put a price upon it which was far in excess of its value. He was, therefore, quite thunderstruck by Mr. Harry Jones making himself the possessor of the picture.

“I like your touch, Mr. Longhurst,” said that gentleman, “and I like your choice of subject. I hope we may have many more transactions of this kind. I’ll look in again some day this week if I may. Just now I’m rather pressed for time. Good morning, and many thanks.”

So saying he withdrew himself, and Longhurst drained off his beer, washed his hands, assumed his coat and took the train some miles out into the country. Getting back late to town he dined well for a man whose dinner was often no more than bread and cheese. Besides tasting good food he had tasted pure air, and he had heard the nightingales. Fortune in one way, at least, seemed to be turning her wheel in his direction. Two or three days afterwards he had another visit from Mr. Jones, who bought with a most lavish hand, and talked of a commission for the great picture. Now a more prudent man would have harboured his resources; but Reginald had only one idea, which was to go to Italy; so that autumn, being now rich to the amount of £600, he started for Florence, taking his big picture with him. He returned in March, having all but completed it; also, he brought with him many small paintings and drawings, which found an eager purchaser in the highly appreciative Mr. Harry Jones.

“Well,” said Reginald, when he had displayed his picture to his friend Fullerton, “what say you? You are my first critic.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Well, I like it very much. I book it for a success!”

Reginald’s pale face flushed with pleasure, for Fullerton was known to be a first-rate judge of pictures.



"I hope Jones will bid for it," went on Reginald, looking at the picture lovingly. "It's something wonderful, the way in which he buys up all I do! But what the devil, Fullerton, are you smiling at so? Because you think he gets a lot of trash?"

"Well, he certainly does get some amount of it."

"But that was not the point?"

"No."

"Well, then, what was it?" and Longhurst flushed almost painfully, as is the wont of sensitive people when they fancy they have somehow made themselves ridiculous.

"Our friend," rejoined Fullerton, "knows no more about it than a cat."

"But all the same he buys!"

"No, he does not."

"Once again, what do you mean? I didn't know you went in for mysteries."

"I go in for no mysteries. I repeat, that he does not buy the paintings! He is but acting for some one else who is the real purchaser. Is there anything mysterious in that?"

"Do you know who the person is?"

"I do; and though I was enjoined to secrecy, as was my informant, I half think that you ought to know, as to know it might change your life happily. The purchaser, then, is no other than Miss Rose Bellward."

"Impossible!" answered Reginald. "Miss Bellward is not rich."

"*Was* not!" rejoined Fullerton, "but *is*. Unexpected fortune left her—or something of that kind—didn't pay much attention, but heard the facts. Really, old boy, she must be very fond of you still."

"Wait a minute," said Longhurst; and for many minutes there was silence between them. Reginald's face had grown white as death and his lips quivered. When he spoke, his voice sounded hard and strange. He began:

"Fullerton, we have been friends for some time now?"

"Surely."

"And I have never yet asked a favour of you, though I have been a very poor man and you a very rich man. Will you give me £1,000? I don't say *lend*, because I don't believe I should ever be able to pay it back!"



“Are you prepared to do something for it?” replied the æsthetic. “For cash down, as they say?”

“I would give you my soul!”

“Yes, but I don’t at all *want* your soul—besides I’m not sure that you have one! and if you had, I find one quite enough. But I have a proposal to make——” he lit a cigarette and looked hard at his friend, who cried, impulsively :

“I accept before hearing it !”

“No, that won’t do. We may be æsthetic, but we must also be business-like.”

The proposal was then formally declared, and formally accepted. When Fullerton took leave of his friend, he left in his possession a draft for £1,000, which Longhurst lost no time in converting into Bank of England notes.

The stormy March twilight was closing in. Miss Bellward sat alone in the drawing-room, listening to the wind as it thundered about the house, and gazing into the fire with her large, sad-looking eyes. Suddenly, at the sound of a firm, impetuous knock at the street door, the colour rushed into her face, and her heart beat so violently that it seemed as if you could hear it. No, she had not been mistaken as to the knock. In a moment more the door opened, and the servant announced, “Mr. Longhurst.”

The door closed again, and they stood facing one another. There was something in his look, just visible in the twilight, at which she flinched, and she began timidly for one who was not lacking in courage :

“You have come to——”

“To pay you !” he hissed between his teeth, coming close to her, and fairly striking her hand with the roll of notes he held, in his exultant, triumphant rage.

“Reginald !” she said, pleadingly, but he went on, every word coming with calm, concentrated bitterness :

“After the way in which we parted how dare you to put this humiliation upon me? Did you think I should not come to hear of it? Do you think that in my grave I could have rested with one farthing left unpaid? I say again, how dared you do it? How dared you give what I would rather die than accept from the woman who chose to shatter my life, forsooth, because of a few impatient words? But, pardon me, I came not to talk with you, but to pay you !”

And crowding the notes into her hand and fastening her fingers tightly upon them, he left her without another word, while she with a low moan sank down like one stricken.

But after that interview the heart in Reginald seemed to fail him for everything. Did he give the finishing touches to his picture? Who shall say? Anyhow his name was not among the artists exhibiting at the academy. But Edward Fullerton's was, and he rushed into fame suddenly. His picture, which was called "The Shadow of Death," represented a girl and a man on the point of parting. The man, evidently a rejected lover, was kneeling, and raising to the girl eyes full of passionate pleading, while she half turned her face away, as if to conceal the look of weariness upon it. Towering close behind them, unseen by either of them, yet overshadowing them, was the awful figure of Death, with a grim, fateful smile which seemed to say: "What matters it? In such a little while, for you who love and for her who loves not, it shall all be as one! You are broken-hearted and she is weary, and you see not that *I* am close at hand."

In this case, success in art meant success in love; for all who knew her at all said that the girl of Fullerton's choice would never have married him unless he had done something to distinguish himself. They said that he knew it, too, and that the knowledge had stimulated him into doing that noble work! So the æsthetic circles gushed over Fullerton and his bride, and made quite a pretty little romance out of them.

Longhurst took to painting again, and had a picture well hung in one of the galleries. "A good picture enough in itself," said the critics, "but so dreadfully under the influence of Fullerton! Fullerton's touch—Fullerton's choice of subject—Fullerton's very method of colour—in fact, everything but Fullerton's genius!"

Finding it vain to compete with his successful rival, Reginald devoted himself almost entirely to journalism. But in the small, still hours—still, except for the wandering cats, an occasional hansom, or the shriek of some woman drunken or ill-used, or it might be both—he managed to write a novel.

To his surprise it was accepted! nay, more, he could see that the publishers were pleased with what they had got, and evidently hoped good things from it. But a man does not burn the candle at both ends, as Reginald had done, without paying for

it heavily. He corrected the last revises in bed, the hand in which he held the pen burning like a live coal, his resolute eyes combating the type that they might decipher the text. But at last the work was done, and while for once a burst of applause greeted the first important effort of a new writer, the new writer himself lay stricken on his bed, in all the horrors of brain fever—from which, however, he awoke one day to life and consciousness.

A man was standing by the bedside, in whose features Reginald slowly recognized that handsome cousin, William Ash, of whom he had once been so insanely jealous. The young man explained, as soon as Reginald could hear and understand him, that he had then the distinction of being Rose Bellward's brother-in-law, having married Clara.

"Clara, you know, was always very fond of you," he said, "and when we heard, through a mutual friend, how ill you were, we took a room in the house to look after you ; that is all."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart," said the sick man ; and then Clara, who had been out, came in, and laughed a good deal and cried a little, and let fall something about Rose being so glad to learn that he was better, and at the mention of that name, Reginald looked ashamed and turned his face away.

It was then pleasant May weather, and in a week's time the invalid was strong enough to be removed to the Ashes' pleasant house at Kensington, with an old-fashioned, high-walled garden at the back, lined with pear trees, where you could sit and dream that you were miles away from the largest city in the world, and where Reginald *did* sit, feeling not unpleasantly weak, but unpleasantly abashed for some things in his past life. And there Clara and her husband read to him the wonderful critiques on his novel, and there he read a whole heap of letters from editors and publishers alike beseeching the favour of his pen. Fame was his already, and fortune lay before him.

One day, a May day, and a warm day, too, he was sitting by himself on the garden seat, when some one came out of the house towards him. There was no mistaking the undulating grace of that walk !

"Good morning," she said, in the low voice which had in it a note of very special and pleading music. "You are getting stronger now every day, are you not? No, don't try to rise—

I am going to sit down beside you. Do you know what day it is?"

"No, I lose count of days in this pleasant langour of convalescence."

"It is the 25th of May—my birthday."

"Is it, indeed, the 25th? Then I wish you all happiness—if I still may do so?" and his hand reached out and faltered on hers. She did not try to draw her's away, and there was silence between them. His eyes yearned into hers, which filled and shone with quivering tears.

"Don't mind me," she murmured, "but I cannot help thinking of old days to-day."

"Rose," he said, taking her hand now in both of his, "Rose, is it for ever impossible that we should go back to old days—only with a man deeply ashamed and penitent for things done in the past?"

"Dear," she replied, coming close to him—while his arm went round her and folded her to his side—"it is better far to be unhappy sometimes, and happy sometimes, together, than for ever lonely apart!"

"But, darling," he said, "I am a different man now! I have learned my lesson—I have seen what life meant without you, and I will *not* make you unhappy! I have longed to implore your forgiveness; but I could not when I heard you were rich! Your wealth angered me; and you behaved like an angel and I like a fiend!"

She was silent.

"Oh, Rose—Rose!" he asked, passionately, "do you really still love me?"

"Yes, my dear," came her low answer, "I love you very, very dearly!" And then, because he was still weak, and his great thankfulness had somewhat shaken him, he half reclined on the seat, leaning his head against her bosom, while her hands played in his hair—which trouble of mind and illness of body had done much to thin. It is a good day for them both—so let us leave them to enjoy it, as lovers should, by themselves.

It was about a fortnight after that happy day when Reginald, being much stronger, drove with Rose to her mother's house, which was but a short way from the Ashes. He was to try and walk back.

"I am rather pleased with the drawing-room," said Rose, as



she led the way into a lofty, spacious, artistically furnished room ; but a large picture hanging on the wall caused Reginald to start.

“ Do you like my purchase ? ” she asked, observing him.

“ Whose is it ? ” he asked, somewhat dazedly.

“ Whose ? ” she answered. “ And you don't know your own work ? ”

“ No,” he replied, decidedly, while a sudden light seemed to rush in upon his brain. “ It is not mine ! It is Fullerton's, of course—Fullerton's great picture, ‘ The Shadow of Death.’ I saw it while it was in process of painting—but how came you to possess it ? ”

“ It was bought for a large sum by an English gentleman, who took it with him to his house in Italy, where he passed most of his time. I became acquainted with him when I went there last winter. He died suddenly ; his property was sold by auction ; I bid for this picture, and I had to bid high, but I was resolved to have it, because I knew, in spite of the name marked in the corner being ‘ Edward Fullerton,’ that—unaccountable as it might seem—some fraud had been practised, and that the picture was not his, but yours.”

“ No fraud has been practised ! What should make you think the picture not his ? ”

“ See, Reginald,” she said, “ the girl's face is my face, as you have shown it to me many times in sketches you have made of it. She wears the dress which was your favourite dress of mine. Round her neck she wears the very necklace which has been in our family for generations, which the most experienced jewellers have said it would be impossible to imitate ! Besides, do I not know the attraction which Death, as a presence waiting in the background, has always had for you ! And you ask how I know it to be yours ? ”

“ In justice to Fullerton,” he rejoined, “ read this ! ” selecting a letter from his pocket-book. She took it from him, and read in a hand which was certainly not Reginald's :

“ PARK LANE, March 5.

“ MY DEAR LONGHURST—Your praise of my just completed picture, ‘ The Shadow of Death,’ was so unstinted and generous that I fear I did not seem to appreciate it to-day as I should have done, though indeed I did. I flatter myself the subject is



something in your way. I did work very hard to get into the girl's face just that look of weariness which I am sure a girl feels when listening to the ravings of a man for whom she cares nothing. The necklace is, as you remarked, very rare. The man who sold it to me said he believed there were only two more like it in the world, so I counted myself fortunate in having secured a treasure. Hoping the world may endorse your generous verdict,

“I remain,

“Most sincerely and gratefully yours,

“E. FULLERTON.”

“So you will not trust me!” Rose said, with a proud, hurt look, as she gave the letter back.

“I am going to trust you most absolutely in everything! If now I ask you to trust me in one thing will you not do it?”

In his tenderness her pride melted as snow melts in the sunshine. She flung her arms around his neck, saying she could do anything he asked her. So the sunlight dissipated all clouds, though to Rose the picture still remained a mystery.

They had been married about three months, and one evening were alone in the drawing-room after dinner, when the servant handed in the card of Mr. Fullerton, and was at once followed by that gentleman in person.

He had not long lost his wife, who had ailed, report said, most unaccountably, ever since her marriage, and had died of a painful and lingering illness. In consequence of having lost the woman he had really loved, the man's face looked worn and weary, as if he slept little, but had a more earnest look than it had ever worn before. After a few words upon the weather, or what not, he informed them that he had joined the Roman Catholic Church, and designed eventually to become a priest.

“I have come to speak about that picture,” he went on, looking first at it and then at Reginald, “and what I now say I wish the world to know. That, my confessor tells me, is my duty, and that I myself feel it to be. I may be a superstitious man, but it seemed to me an ominous sign that my dear wife's health should begin to fail in the first week of our marriage.”

Reginald replied gravely:

“Do as you think right. The matter is one out of which I myself do not come with clean hands.”

“My confession is briefly this,” said Fullerton, addressing himself to Mrs. Longhurst. “This picture, in which you must see, now, your own face, which has won fame for its creator, is not the work of my hand, but of your husband’s. Just when the picture was finished he asked me for a thousand pounds.” Rose shuddered, and her husband looked uncomfortable. Fullerton continued :

“I knew the picture had been shown to no one but myself. I knew it could not fail to be a brilliant success. I believed that as a successful man I could win the hand of the girl I longed for. The talk had come to be whether I was merely a pretender, or really a man of genius. The temptation was too strong for me. I paid the £1,000 on the condition the picture should pass as mine. To guard against any discovery in the future I gave your husband a letter from myself, which he should be bound to show in case of the question ever arising. I knew I could depend on his honour to do this. I doubly armed myself by having from him a letter supposed to be in answer to mine, recapitulating his admiration of the picture and enumerating some of its most salient features. While she lived I do not think I *could* have borne the disgrace of an exposure—for her sake ! But she is dead, and God has pardoned me.”

“And man, too,” said Rose Longhurst, in her gentlest tone. “But I knew the picture was Reginald’s from the first moment I saw it.”

## AN ÆSTHETIC FLIRT.

—:o:—

PERHAPS because he was called Paul Clarkson, which, we must own, is a very romantic name, or perhaps because his family loved old china, or perhaps because he had five sisters and no brothers ; from one of these causes, or from quite a different cause—what matters it, since the fact remains the same?—Mr. Paul Clarkson was without doubt an æsthetic flirt. How much of a flirt he was, perhaps he himself hardly realized, it all came so natural to him. He was a handsome fellow, young Paul. He had a tall, well-made figure, a pale but very expressive face, and a good deal of warm brown hair. No woman with such eyes could have kept from flirting ; so let us not be too hard upon this man, especially as for some time he did no one any harm. He wrote poems, which his fair friends greatly admired. Ye gods, what sad poems they were ! In them Mr. Clarkson flirted with Death just as he flirted with women. He sat at her feet, and called her pretty names. If his stern mistress had turned round sharply, and made him take her for better or worse, I hardly imagine he would have been a very willing bridegroom ; but as the grim lady just then seemed to want none of him—as lungs, liver, and heart were all they should be—this verse-flirting with Death was all very nice.

Mr. Paul was apparently very much distressed at having to live. He wanted no good dinners, not he ; he wanted no books—of course not ; he wanted no club ; he wanted no pretty

women to flirt with. What in the world did he want, then? He wanted to be absorbed in the spirit of things; he desired to grow part of the infinite; he yearned to be mingled with the heaven's blue, or to be a rose-leaf, or a cloud, or a sunbeam, or a weed; in short, anything but what he was. A very sad man was Mr. Paul Clarkson. Being so sad, was it not natural that he should turn for sympathy to the softer sex? One friend could not have satisfied his great nature; his comforters were many. Let us see now who they were.

To begin with, there was Miss Blandon, very strong on the question of women's rights—a clever, handsome, if somewhat masculine-looking woman, of whom men mostly stood in awe. Clarkson found out a tender place in her heart, and walked into it. I think she thought for quite a long time that he was going to ask her to be his wife.

Then there was the beautiful Miss Sandford, with the pale face, and the large, lovely, sad-looking eyes; was she not beauty itself, and, as such, should she not be worshipped?

Then there was Mrs. Clifford—quite young, and very nice to look at, too; and she wrote poems almost as sad as Mr. Clarkson's own. Her marriage had been a great mistake. She was thrown wholly away on the commonplace Clifford; so she resigned herself to the writing of melancholy verse. O, bards, bards, what would you be without your griefs! Even as children are who have no pretty playthings.

Mr. Clarkson's grief was that he had once been engaged to a girl of whom he was really getting rather tired, when, in the most unexpected manner, she got tired of him, and threw him over, and endowed him with a wrong. Mr. Clarkson felt very badly, or said he did. It is quite impossible to say what he did not get out of that grief of his. Of course its prime use was as a seasoning to his poems. Then it was a great help in those nice flirtations I have spoken of. A man with blighted affections may go much further in flirting than a man who is heart-whole. The dear creature comes naturally for consolation.

Did Clarkson make the best of his opportunity. I think he did. He wrote, I don't know how many poems to his faithless lady; these poems he recited to other fair ladies; he plunged into all sorts of dissipations, not because he was naturally addicted to such things, but because he was so extremely unhappy. He was a very desperate man, and cynical; why, he believed

in nothing, always excepting friendship, between men and women.

I have mentioned three of his friends ; let me not forget Miss Kinlake, who played so beautifully, and, besides, composed such wonderful music.

The amount of friendship with women, and the amount of good wines Mr. Clarkson's grief required to console it, were most surprising ; but we all know how bad is an affair of the heart.

It chanced one night that Mr. Clarkson met at a reception Miss Hilda Ford. She was not a girl. She was about thirty ; she was very pretty, and not at all æsthetic. She had a good intellect, though, and loved poetry genuinely. Her voice was unusually low and sweet ; it had a strange, thrilling music in it. She lived with her mother in the country, but they made frequent visits to London.

Now when Clarkson saw her he fell in love at first sight. He loved everything about her—her full, beautiful figure, her sensitive face, with the deep, dark blue eyes, the red, passionate mouth, the long, slender hands, the way she carried herself. He was quite bowled down. His love-grief—that had seen so much service, had been paraded, O, in how many poems, had been talked over, sighed over, laughed over, with what awful laughter—was put away ! Mr. Clarkson no longer wished to die ; he wished to marry Miss Ford.

He loved his dear friends ; but there had been till now no one that he had quite wanted to marry. Truth to say, he was rather hoping that some one in whom he could take a very decided interest would turn up, when, lo ! she appeared upon the scene. I think a man should respect a really useful grief more than Clarkson did. He thrust it away without a tear—what do I say?—without even a farewell sonnet. Heart and soul he went in for his new love. O, bards, bards, are ye not an ungrateful lot ?

Paul Clarkson, then, loved Hilda Ford ; and what is very much to the point is, that the kind feeling he entertained for her she entertained for him. So, why not say at once that he proposed, and was accepted ?

“ Hilda,” he cried, looking into her eyes passionately, “ tell me how much you love me ? ”

“ She pressed his hands, and said, “ I love you with my



whole heart. Your love is the crown and glory of my life ; it is my supreme rapture and my supreme rest."

And then, perhaps because her face flushed so, she leaned it on his shoulder, while he kissed her thick gold hair.

All this was very nice, and just as it should be ; but troubles came. As it happened, most unfortunately, Miss Ford had a jealous temperament, and she got to find out about Paul's flirtations, to which she very much objected. Of course nothing would have been easier than for Paul to have given up such flirtations, to which I think Miss Ford was quite right in excepting. Only that was just what he did not do. Easy, I said ; no, far more difficult than we dream of.

To be in love, and to play at being in love, are two very different things, and, in their own way, they are both pleasant enough. Playing at being in love is a very fascinating game, and, like most games, it takes at least two players. This game Miss Ford liked not : a fact which he could not tell to these dear co-players.

" When our engagement is made public," he said to himself, " I will knock all these affairs on the head."

So he very wrongly—wishing at the same time to have and eat his pie—told his beloved that he would forswear the close friendships that so much troubled her ; and all the while he privately indulged in them. She found him out once. He rushed down to her house in the country, where, as can be easily imagined, a scene took place.

It was the beautiful Miss Sandford that Hilda specially objected to. He promised faithfully that he would see her no more ; but the old habit was so strong that, as soon as he returned to London, he went back to his Platonic worship of her. He kept, however, his proceedings very dark indeed, I can tell you, but, as we all know, murder will out.

As ill or good luck would have it, an intimate friend of Miss Sandford went to visit some friends who were neighbours of the Fords. To the pleasure of all parties concerned, it turned out that Mr. Clarkson was a mutual friend. Then came the question from our friend's friend.

" Was Mr. Clarkson going to marry Miss Sandford ? "

Every one knew what a flirt he was ; still, his attentions in that quarter were extremely marked.

" Perhaps so," said Hilda, quietly.

She wrote a few words to Paul that night, asking him to come down and see her.

Jam was nice when we were young ; but was it nice to be detected in the act of priggish it ? When we thought every one was far away, to hear a door-handle turn sharply, and be faced by a father, a mother, or an old servant sure to tell ? It was with feelings similar to those then experienced that Paul read Hilda's letter. It contained only a few words, asking him to come down, but he had instantly a sense of something being wrong ; he suspected the truth, that his sin had found him out.

The Fords lived in a remote country village. It was a hot June evening when he found himself walking up the long garden that surrounded their house.

Mrs. Ford greeted him very warmly.

" I'll go and send Hilda to you," she said, in her kind, cheerful voice.

She left the room, and a few minutes after Miss Ford came in. He heard her dress whispering as she walked.

" Good-evening," she said. " It was kind of you to come when I asked you."

She sat down in a low chair, her hands clasped loosely in each other.

" But I shall not," she resumed, " have to tax you again in this way."

" Have I done anything to displease you ?" he answered, turning very pale. " Tell me at once, and let me have it over."

" What I have to say is," she rejoined, " that everything between us must be over, now and for ever. If it is hard for you, it is harder for me ; you meant my all of life."

" Some one has been telling lies about me," he burst out.

" It is you who have not told the truth," she said, with perfect quietude.

He turned on her desperately, seeing that she knew everything.

" Hilda," he cried, " I have acted meanly to you ; but this shall never happen in the future."

" For us two together," she answered, " there will be no future."

" You can't mean that !"

" What else should I mean ? I love you, Paul, but I should

never trust my happiness in the hands of a man who could deceive me twice. I forgive you, love you, but I trust you no more."

Outside the birds sang on through the still evening; the air of the room was heavy with the scent of roses.

"You must take back these words," he said; "you don't begin to know how I love you."

"Perhaps not," she answered; "but I mean what I have said."

"Hilda, till I met you it seems to me that I really never lived; you must show me some pity."

He threw himself on his knees before her, caught her hands, and kissed them.

"Vain, vain," she cried. "It is done, and it cannot be undone."

"Do you really mean what you say?" he asked, his voice trembling. The man was in earnest at last.

"Yes," she answered, sadly and unwaveringly, "I mean it most absolutely."

"Then I must abide by your decision," he said, rising, a certain pride in his voice. "Good-bye, then."

He had got as far as the door when she called him back.

"Don't be too angry with me," she said, laying her hands in his; "kiss me."

He did kiss her, long and very passionately; then he left the room, left the house, left the village, and reached London by a late train, bringing a real grief in his sham grief's stead. Resolved on doing something desperate, he cast himself at the feet of the beautiful Miss Sandford; but, to his surprise, she did not appreciate her happiness.

"I never believed all the fine things you said," she remarked. "I knew you to be a flirt; but you amused me, and for that I am grateful."

He went away very considerably humbled. The real grief, unlike the sham one, was totally useless. It inspired no poem; it stimulated to no pleasant flirtations; it lay at Mr. Clarkson's heart a great, heavy, unremovable weight. Like a wounded animal, he shunned his fellows. He thought grimly to himself as he roamed about the London streets, now grown to him so dreary, that at last he knew what the real thing was.

In the course of a month or two there came to him a desire

in some way to do something which might at least lighten the gloom that wrapped him round. "I've spoilt my own life," he mused ; "still, it might turn to some good account for others ; I have money, and great sympathy with the people, and they need both. To spend my life helping them is what Hilda would approve of, if she knew it, and that is what I will do."

The very next day he carried out his good resolution ; for he was perfectly in earnest. Still, the man had been so in the habit of posing that he could not help at first surveying himself with a little melancholy satisfaction as the people's helper, given to them by a great sorrow. When he got really into his work, however, he ceased this sort of exhibition upon the stage of life, with himself as spectator. Things seemed to him too serious to incline him to strike an attitude before them. For the first time he forgot himself, in view of other people's calamities. Truly his labours were not light ; and he felt no disposition to toy with his work as once he had toyed with love. Daily he risked his life, sometimes from interfering to protect some woman from the drunken violence of her master, sometimes through long night-watches beside a wretch ill of some frightful contagious disorder. He held not his own life dear unto him, and perhaps it was for that reason that he came alive out of every peril. Often, before the world was well awake, he would return home from a night passed beside the dying, only to snatch a little sleep and go forth again to his self-imposed tasks. He saw sights and heard sounds before which a less determined spirit would have quailed ; but his strong purpose upheld him.

Among his many friends at the East-end was a family of the name of White. Mrs. White was a widow. She let cheap lodgings. Her eldest child, Sara, added to their small income by playing humble parts at East-end theatres. She was a good girl, this Sara, with laughing blue eyes, a prettily-shaped, sensitive face, and a great deal of fair hair.

Mrs. White would exclaim :

"It's not, sir, because some folks never look where they are going and drag their skirts through every puddle they can, that others can't walk in clean places."

Clarkson became very fond of Sara—not at all in a sentimental way ; he had quite done with that. He regarded her more as a father might regard a pet child. She believed in



him, too ; and that was nice. Often, on fine Sundays, would he come and take her off to Richmond or Kew, or somewhere where she could gather wild flowers, in the season of them. To see her pleasure always pleased him.

Mrs. White herself was not at all an ill-meaning woman. She was shockingly untidy, though, in her appearance ; and she had a temper of her own.

One gray October Sunday afternoon Mr. Clarkson found himself, after a two months' absence on his summer holiday, again near Mrs. White's house.

It was a depressing day, and at its most depressed time—between three and four o'clock. As he walked down the dingy streets, with the dirty houses on either side of him—houses that had a look of grim content about them, as if they had now grown proud of their dirt, and would not, if they could, be different—I say, as he walked along, smoking a very good cigar, he heard the melancholy cry of “Water-cresses ; fine water-cresses !”

In front of him, with a short clay pipe in his mouth, a man was forcing a reluctant donkey drawing a barrow, the contents of which the driver roared out, from time to time, in a voice suggesting that he would speedily do violence to the passers-by if they did not purchase his nuts and apples. “Tang, tang” kept on all the time from what, to judge by the sound, must have been a very cracked church-bell.

Mrs. White resided at No. 19, Upper Poplar-row. I wonder if, at any time, any poplar had grown there or thereabouts ?

Nineteen was the dingiest house in the row ; it certainly was, thought Clarkson, as he once more came in sight of it. The bell-handle was off ; the knocker had long parted from the door. Clarkson applied his walking-stick. Mrs. White's voice could be heard within.

“Go downstairs, do, Bob, you bad boy ; you're enough to kill me, that you are ! Take that now, and be off !”

And very evidently Mrs. White's hand came in contact with her offspring's face. Then followed a howl—perhaps, under the circumstances, not wholly unjustified—a sound of feet hastily retreating to lower regions ; then the door opened and disclosed Mrs. White. It cannot be said that her face was clean. Her dress was in holes ; it was fastened at the throat by a



tawdry brooch. Once, however, she must have been quite a pretty woman.

“La, sir, is it you? I’m glad to see you back. Such worries as I’ve had—these people in the first floor not paying their rent. I’ll tell you what that man is, sir. He’s a nasty, low, good-for-nothing, rum-drinking fellow. And as for beer, he was at home one day, and it was nothing but send, send that young Bob to the King’s Head round the corner for pints of half-and-half, till the child got that tipsy with the sips he took going, that I assure you I put him to bed in a really disgraceful condition. As for his wife, she’s no better than he is. She’s the kind of woman that I wouldn’t trust for five minutes with sixpence of my money—no, nor a penny, neither!”

With this, Mrs. White, who had spoken at a breath, paused. What she had said had been delivered in the passage, probably for the benefit of her first-floor lodgers.

“Now, sir, come down. You aren’t too proud, I know, to come into my kitchen. It’s not tidy. I thought I should get to cleaning it yesterday, but no; and my children worrit me so. It’s my impression, sir, that they would like to see their mother dead and in her coffin! young Bob would, I know!”

His mother always called him young Bob; though the truth is, that he was a singularly old-looking child for his age, with a very crafty expression. They were, by this time, in the kitchen, which certainly was, as the landlady had described it, in no nice state. She cleared a chair for her visitor, then, rushing to the window, addressed a boy smaller than Bob, who was examining with grave interest the contents of the dust-hole.

“Well, my son, you are a nice clean little boy, aren’t you? Upon my word, you are. I wouldn’t leave off, if I were you. Look long enough, and you’ll be sure to find something—a roast shoulder of mutton, with baked potatoes under it, perhaps. Or, I shouldn’t at all wonder, a fine turkey and a plum-pudding.”

Then, finding her withering irony produced no effect on Master Tommy, who continued just as gravely, and just as silently, his careful inspection of the dust-heap, the enraged mother darted from the room and swooped down upon him with a very heavy hand, and an impressive admonition.

“There! take that for being a bad, dirty little boy, and for not doing what you’re told; and look you, my young gentle-

man, every time I find you out here playing with dirt, I'll serve you just the same."

At this alarming prospect of ennui on the one hand and of punishment on the other, the hero of the dust-heap roared louder than ever.

"I see, my dear Mrs. White, that you are a good deal troubled," said Clarkson, when the sound of grief had somewhat subsided; "but now let us leave the culprits, and tell me how is Sara?"

"That's just the worst part of it, sir. Sally's down with something dreadfully bad; the doctor says it's consumption, but I don't believe in what doctors say."

"Tell me all about it at once," said Clarkson, who was most genuinely pained.

"Well, sir," began Mrs. White—"well, you hadn't been gone above a week when it seemed to me that she was getting a bit lazy and off her food; but I didn't think much of that, girls often are that way. Perhaps she may have eaten less than I noticed. Lord, when you're as worried as I am, you can't be counting how many mouthfuls of food a child takes to-day, and how many to-morrow; there's no fear of my boys not doing their share. We got some very cold weather just at the end of July; and one night, when she was playing at the Crown Theatre, it came down one of those nasty cold rains. She was much later than usual coming home that night! perhaps I wasn't in the best of tempers, for young Bob had been more troublesome even than he is generally. It was just one when she walked in, the rain streaming down from her. 'I couldn't get a 'bus,' she says; 'that's what makes me so late. It's so cold and wet, mother, I thought you might have had a bit of fire.' 'Fires in July!' I said. 'We can afford that, can't we? Perhaps you expected a cold fowl and a bottle of port wine? Eat your bread and cheese and drink your beer, do,' I says, 'and get to bed; that's the best place for you.' She took a little bread and beer, but I saw she couldn't stomach the cheese; then she began shivering and crying, and saying she was so cold. Well, I got her to bed, but she coughed through the night. In the morning she felt very hot, and didn't seem to know what she was saying; so I sent for the doctor—not that I, in most cases, hold with doctors. He said that she had taken a bad feverish cold, and that it had gone to her lungs. However, she seemed to get

over the worst of it ; only she don't get her strength up, and sometimes she has bad fits of coughing. The doctor says he can't do anything more. I say it's a good thing we don't depend on doctors ; it's nature that will bring her round. You see she eats hardly anything—not even that nice fried fish, which I get from King's opposite, where you can always count on getting it sweet, and just done to a turn."

"We must see what can be done, Mrs. White ; I suppose I may see her ?"

"Yes ; and it's my belief it will do her good. She has often wondered when you would come back. I'll just go and tell her that you're here." And away went Mrs. White.

As Clarkson sat there in the dreary room, littered with unwashed things, he thought very sadly of the sick girl upstairs. He was in deep reflection when Mrs. White returned and showed him up to Sara's room. It was a very small room half way up the stairs ; it had no fireplace ; there was just space for the bed to stand between the door and the window. It looked a hard, uncomfortable bed on which the sick girl lay. One hand, which had grown painfully thin, rested on the threadbare coverlet. Her long golden hair brushed out looked like sunlight on the pillow.

"Well, Sara, my child," began Clarkson, "you haven't much room for receiving visitors here, have you ? It isn't the room I should desire for an evening party."

"No," she answered, with a faint, sweet smile ; "and I wish the bed wouldn't shake so every time the street-door closes."

Here Mrs. White put in with :

"Now don't you mind that. She's got a fancy into her head that when the bed shakes a little bit it does her harm ; just as if it could !"

"I am so glad you have come," Sara went on, in a tone of voice that sounded hollow and already far away. "It has been so dull. I've been very ill ; I can't eat anything now, and I'm not strong enough to get up ; but I suppose I shall some time get stronger, and then I shall be all right."

"And hungrier than ever."

"Oh, yes, hungrier than ever, because I sha'n't have eaten for so long, you know. Please tell me where you have been, and all about it. Have you been far ?"

He sat down in a very rickety chair, and told her as amusingly

as he could, though heavy at heart, all that he thought would interest her. When he had rattled away for half an hour she was quite in spirits. She must have Mrs. White produce the new dress that she had bought before her illness out of some extra money she had made. He admired hat and dress to the full.

"I must wear them the first Sunday you take me out again, mustn't I?" she said, as simply as a child, and her eyes brightened. "I got something for them all;" then, rather shyly, "and I got you a cigar-case if you don't mind." Here she produced her offering. He took it from her hand, admiring it, and thanking her.

"I filled it with cigars. Bob got them. They cost threepence each; is that too little to pay? They were the best I could get here."

"Little! Why, it's ever so much too much, you dear child. Why, you can get a cigar for a penny."

"Yes, but not such as you like to smoke."

He laughed, and said that she oughtn't to spoil him. Then she made him try one, saying it would be like old times; adding very piteously, "If you don't smoke, you will never like to come and see me again."

"Smoke or not smoke," he answered, gaily, "I am coming every day till I see you really better; and to-morrow, as I don't think much of your present doctor, I shall send down a man in whom I have confidence. Now I must be off; I shall come round early to-morrow;" and kindly pressing her hand, he was gone.

The next day Sara received all the comforts that an invalid could desire, and early appeared upon the scene the noted and kindly Dr. Forman.

"Well," asked Clarkson, as the physician came down from the sick room, "what do you say?"

"Say, my dear sir?—alas, I have nothing to say that you would like to hear. All we can do is to make the end as gentle as possible, and I don't think that it can be far off."

"Thank you," said Clarkson, "for coming so far;" and there were tears in his eyes.

He went to break the sad news to Mrs. White, who, poor woman, quite broke down, though, through her tears and sobs, she again and again protested her utter disbelief in all doctors.



While she was trying to calm herself, Clarkson went to sit with Sara.

“What did the doctor say about me?” she asked.

“He said you were ill.”

“Did he say I was going to die soon? I want the truth please; let me have it.”

There was something swelling in Clarkson’s throat. He strove to speak, but vainly.

“Please tell me,” she entreated; “I want to know at once which way it is.”

Then Clarkson just managed to articulate, taking her hand in his:

“Dear, he does think that you are in great danger.”

“Thank you; that means that I am going to die.”

Then she was silent; but her eyes had in them a strange look, as if they were trying to picture the land whither she was going. At last she said, with a pressure of his hand:

“I don’t mind much. I almost think it is better as it is. You have been always so good to me. I know you didn’t mean me to care too much for you, and I myself didn’t seem to know how it was going till you went away this summer; and then I knew—when I found everything so hateful just because there was no chance of seeing you—I knew then that I loved you too much.”

“Sara,” he said, much moved, “I never thought of that as possible; you will believe that, at least.”

And indeed he spoke truly. No shade of anything warmer than friendship had ever stained the purity of his kind feeling for the poor, pretty child. With the passion of love he believed himself done for ever; and it never so much as crossed his mind that he could inspire it in another, least of all in such an one as Sara—so young, so out of the pale of all the thoughts and associations of his life. That she could feel toward him other than as a sister toward an elder brother had never crossed his mind. Nor had even Mrs. White, a far-seeing woman in her way, foreseen the slightest possibility of danger to her daughter’s peace of mind. She was only glad that Sara should have so kind a friend. “A true gentleman,” she used to say, “and just as much to be trusted as a Bank of England note.” “How blind he had been!” he thought, as he waited for Sara’s answer.



"Yes," she said, after a little silence, "I do know that you never thought of it."

She spoke very gently and very sadly, and tears were darkening her eyes—the eyes that had once been like streams the wind and sunlight surprised together.

He put his arm round her, and very tenderly kissed her lips, that even then, with death waiting so near at hand, thrilled under that first pressure of his.

"Heaven bless you, Sara ! as my child I have loved you."

Then they sat for some time without speaking, and all the things incident to the daily life of a house like No. 19, Upper Poplar-row went on. The lodgers at Mrs. White's did not trouble themselves because poor, pretty, good little Sara lay there dying. They scrubbed out their rooms ; they called messages to each other from floor to floor ; the pot-boy from the King's Head tramped up the stairs to Mrs. Smith, who occupied the third floor front, and announced his long-desired presence by a great bang at the door, and by a shrill cry of "Cans !"

Presently Mrs. White came in, and made, poor soul, a desperate attempt to seem gay.

"Have you told Mr. Clarkson about your grand visitor that came this morning ?" she asked.

"No," answered Sara ; "you tell."

Then Mrs. White unfolded how a fine lady, who busied herself a good deal with East-end folk, had heard of Sara, and come to see what she could do.

"She wished to send a doctor of her own, but was told how a kind friend had already sent us one. She stayed some time chatting, and said she should come again," continued Mrs. White. "She seemed to take to my young lady ; but then most people do."

Again Mrs. White had to disappear to prepare something for the invalid. It was then about two o'clock of a bright, rather warm October afternoon. A bell was heard ; that noise, one of the very dismallest, poor school-board children know, for it summons them back to their lessons.

"Shall you care to keep your cigar-case ?" asked poor Sara.

"I shall always keep it and prize it dearly."

"Then don't tell your wife, or she might make you put it away ; some women are so very jealous. I want you to use it ; it is nice enough to use, isn't it ?"

"I shall use it always."

"I am glad of that." And after a pause she said, "Say good-bye to me now, while we are alone, then go as soon as mother comes back."

He understood. He kissed her, and laid her head upon his shoulder, and called her many a dear and tender name. "Good-bye, Sara," he said, as they heard Mrs. White making her slow way up.

"Good-bye," she answered, almost passionately. "You will never know how I love you ; it is much better for me to go, much better." Then once more, and for the last time, their lips met. Weak with that strain of love, she fell back quite exhausted, only able to whisper "Go !" nothing after that.

He did as she wished, feeling almost sure that he should see her no more ; and he was right. That very night the sweet, pure spirit passed away, to make its unknown journey all alone. Poor child, young as she was, she had known one of life's greatest experiences—that of loving where there was no hope of love being returned.

When Clarkson the next morning saw the blinds down in Sara's room, he was not surprised. He had brought with him, on the chance that she might still be able to enjoy them, some beautiful flowers. The door of the house stood open, so he walked straight in and up to Sara's room. As he entered he saw that some one, who was kneeling by the bed, rose hastily ; then he saw that it was Hilda Ford.

They took hands silently ; he went over to the bed, and placed the flowers on the girl's bosom. Then, leaning down, he kissed, very reverently, the cold lips that this time did not thrill under his ; he looked long and lovingly on her face, which wore a look of unearthly rest ; then he rose and turned to the door.

"Do you know where Sara's mother is?" he asked.

"Seeing after her other children. They have to be seen to. I have promised Mrs. White that I would do some errands for her in the neighbourhood."

"Are you going now?"

"At once."

"May I walk with you?"

"I should only be too glad if you would."

"Thank you, then I will."

So together they left the house of death, and walked out into

the bright October morning. After they had walked on a little way in silence, his first question came :

“Was it you that called at the Whites yesterday?”

“Yes ; and even in the short time I saw her, I grew quite fond of Sara. Poor child ! she is at rest now. I have heard a great deal about you from them. You seem to have been their good angel ; nor are they all whom you have befriended about here. Before yesterday I heard of you from more than one household ; you have been doing good work.”

“Thank you,” he said, simply, hardly able to realize that he was with the one woman he had ever really loved. The minutes were passing. Soon she and he would part to meet no more. She was a little paler than usual, but lovelier than ever. He would have liked there and then to have gone down on his knees before her.

O bards, bards ! ye who prate of the romance of lovers in gardens, lovers in woods, and where not besides, so long as it is a place where romantically-inclined persons would like to be, why not at once own the truth that there is often as much sentiment connected with places of the most unromantic kind ?

Write, O poet novelist :

“The scent of lilies growing in a high-walled garden ; the nightingale’s passionate strain ; all the charm and music of a summer night—will these not always bring to his mind, if he could ever for one moment forget it, that face of hers as he saw it in the full moonlight, and recall the low music of her voice ?”

Write, O prose-teller of facts :

“The sound of jingling tram-bells ; London Bridge with great ships visible therefrom ; open stalls, with men calling out their wares ; the smell issuing from overflowing gin-palaces—these, though he is perfectly familiar with them, will for all time be to Paul Clarkson associated with the woman he loved.”

He was so silent that at last she said to him :

“Why don’t you talk to me ?”

“Because I’m thinking of you so much. To see you again is like great light falling on eyes but just opened. I am dazzled by you.”

She did not answer, but walked on in a very business-like manner.

Presently she said :

“Sara was very fond of you ; do you think she was too fond of you ?”

“I am afraid she was getting to care for me at the end. I never meant her to ; but I suppose you won't believe that ?”

“Yes, I will. I don't think you did flirt with Sara, poor child.”

At length the commissions were all of them executed, and they returned to Upper Poplar-row. What a strange day it was for Paul and Hilda ! Mrs. White was too much upset to see after anything ; and, as she was a woman who quarrelled with her neighbours right and left, there was no one to whom she could turn but the friends who were with her, poor dear ! She sat in her dirty kitchen and sobbed ; while Hilda, with the sleeves of her dress rolled up, displaying her large, lovely arms, washed up accumulated cups and plates. Paul looked after the fire and kept Bob in order. At length Mrs. White grew quieter, and by evening they came to the conclusion that she might be left.

“Good-bye, and bless you both,” she said. “No one had ever a word to say against my Sally ; well, she's out of the bother of this bad world. I don't see what's the good of being in it ; slave, slave, day and night, and then, some day, like an engine driven hard, the boiler bursts ; but what's the good of talk ? I say, if there's any power looking after the world, it doesn't trouble itself much about us that's in it.”

So they left her and stood out in the cold, clear night.

“Now ?” said Paul.

And she answered, “Yes.”

“What are you going to do now ?”

“The most natural thing I can do—take a hansom to our apartments in Westminster ; and you ?”

“I ?” he answered, somewhat bitterly, “I ? Oh, I feel in a mood of exploring London by night. I might come in for an adventure. Perhaps you will see in the morning papers, ‘Murder in the East-end.’”

“I think,” she replied, quietly, “you had best see me home.”

“That of course I should like to do ; but I feared my presence would only be an offence to you.”

“No ; you were mistaken.”

So a hansom was called, in which they rattled away. How pretty the lamps on London Bridge looked, shining in the

water, as our two passed over it ! “ How very fast he is driving ! ” she said. “ We shall get there quite soon, at this rate, sha’n’t we ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered, absently ; he was thinking of something he wanted to say to her, and wondering, as we have all wondered in similar positions, whether he should say it or not.

“ What are you thinking of,” she inquired, “ that you say nothing ? ”

“ I was thinking of the past.”

“ I want us to forget that. I want us to be friends.”

“ Hilda, that could never, never be.”

“ And why not ? ” in her lowest and most subtly sweet tones.

“ Because I love you too desperately to make it possible.”

“ Do you still love me, Paul ? ”

“ Love you ? My God, I should think I did. Have I not shaped my life as I thought you would have me ? To see you once again has been my prayer ; yet what will it do for me but make me more in love with you than ever ? I had a dream of you some nights ago. I thought I lay dying, and you came in, and leaned down over me, and kissed me, and I put my arms round you. Oh, the heaven of that dream ! Hilda, I am a changed man. Is your love utterly dead ? Would it ever be possible for you to trust me again ? ”

She drew quite close to him, put her hand in his, and rested her cheek upon it as she said, “ What do you think, dear ? ”

“ Hi, there, cabby, down with the glasses.”

What cabby himself has shut down, shall we seek to raise ?



## HEAVY STAKES.

—:0:—

“YOU or I?” Mr. Middleton had written so far on his new story, which was to appear simultaneously in England and America, when he threw down his pen, and, flinging up his arms, leaned back in his chair and sighed wearily.

He had been writing late ; glancing at the clock, he saw that it was 4 a.m. In the house everything was very still, but outside there was a hurrying March wind, which drove rain up vehemently against the window-panes.

God help an unhappy man at all times, but most of all when, conscious of his own pain, he knows that all those round him are havened in sleep. At such hours there can come no help or hope from outside ; whatever his ghosts may be, they have him at their mercy then. He said to himself : “ I am not the unhappiest man in the world, but, heaven help me, I am the weariest ! ”

And this was quite true ; there was upon him an unutterable sickness of life ; he was tired of men, tired of women, tired of books, tired of the loud life of cities, tired of the country's peace ; he was too tired even to combine the different stimulants with which he had for some time striven to rouse his jaded nature. Now so great was his apathy that he did not seek to make an effort, though it might have been an injurious one. In these days he even forgot to smoke.

This death in life, this horrible darkness in which his soul could distinguish nothing, was all brought about by the mistake

of his life. He had quarrelled with the one woman he ever loved, ever could love. He had said to her once :

“ You are a flirt ! ”

“ Yes,” she answered, with provoking quietude, turning her engagement-ring round upon her finger.

He looked at her for a moment or two in silence, and then said, passionately :

“ By heaven, no flirt shall ever be wife of mine.”

She was a proud woman ; she turned very white, and then said calmly, in a tone of frozen sweetness :

“ I can bear your dismissal, I think, and live ; remember you have made your choice.”

“ I know I have,” he rejoined, fiercely ; “ and I will stand by it ! ”

They parted ; that evening he went abroad, and remained absent from England several years. When he returned he could discover no trace of Grace Townsend, the girl he had loved, did love, must always love.

“ Fool, fool ! ” he had cried aloud, in the extreme bitterness of his spirit—“ fool, not to know that she was in all the world the one only woman for me ; because my wretched man’s will, forsooth, clashed with hers, I let her and heaven go out of my life. I should have said my life is in your hands, do with me as you will, I am yours—brain, heart, soul and body. It was fate,” he went on, “ not of my own free will could I have been such a madman ! ”

Presently he took his candle and went wearily to bed. The streets were full of life before he fell asleep. Then he dreamed that he was walking down a street, which was like, but which was *not*, a London street. From a passer-by he asked the name of it, and was informed that it was Wall Street. “ Then I am in New York,” he said, not at all wondering how he had reached that American capital. The man who had given him the information, then, and as it seemed most causelessly, assumed a threatening attitude. Middleton was placing himself on the defensive, for it appeared that blows were inevitable, when he awoke and said to himself : “ The dream is fate : I will go to America.”

He was a man naturally prompt in action, so that very day he booked his passage on board the *City of Chester*, which sailed on the following Thursday, it being then Saturday. He

hoped but little from the change—indeed he and hope had some time since parted company ; still it would be a change, and that alone was something ! But Mr. Middleton was not to sail on the *City of Chester* ; she was to leave Liverpool at four o'clock in the afternoon, and the nine o'clock express which was to convey him with others to the north, met with an accident. The line was consequently blocked for several hours, and those persons desirous of sailing in the *City of Chester* were deposited in Liverpool just four hours after she had departed from that place.

Mr. Middleton did not love Liverpool more than most people do ; so, as he had to wait a week somewhere till there should be another Inman ship sailing, and had nothing to draw him back to London, he decided on passing the week at Chester, and before ten that night found himself installed at the Grosvenor Hotel in that place.

It was a very tranquil March day when he awoke—such a day as we do get sometimes in March, when she has got over the first violence of her stormy youth, and is tending Aprilwards in very earnest. The placid sunshine was pouring in at his bedroom window.

He rose late ; reluctant, as men in his condition are, to face the uneventful day.

He took his breakfast in the coffee-room, which looked large and deserted. Then, because he might as well do one thing as another, he went to make a tour of inspection.

He visited the cathedral, where he lingered, listening to the organ music. Next he roamed through the streets—noted a house which proudly boasted itself as being the only one spared by the plague. Then he went for a walk on the walls of the city, round which there had once rung such a clamour of fighting men, but which now seemed sleeping in the placid March sunlight. By turns he remembered and forgot that he was going to leave England in a week's time. He was wondering how much longer he could manage to toil through his so empty days, and saying over to himself, mechanically as it were :

“ Only my love's away,  
I'd as lief that the blue were gray,”

When suddenly he almost fell to the ground, for he saw her coming towards him. The swift, gliding movement she had in

walking was hers alone—hers alone, too, the proud carriage of the head. In another moment they stood face to face. The graciously curved mouth, with the red, pliable lips; the quiet, gray eyes; the white, wide forehead, on which the soft yellow hair was worn low. He strove to speak and failed; she, with greater self-control, in a very clear, musical voice, in a tone of slightly high pitch, the result of nervous excitement, said:

“Why, Mr. Middleton! who in the world would have thought of seeing you here?”

“Why not?” he rejoined. “Why should I not come to Chester as well as you? Can you give me any good reason why I should not? I confess I cannot see the cause of your surprise.”

He had spoken so rapidly as to be scarcely intelligible. He had tried, with these words, to cover his emotion.

“It would have been a surprise to see you anywhere,” she answered. “I somehow fancied you could not be in England.”

Their conversation had been overheard by a young man with a very do-nothing look, who was lounging about with a cigar in his mouth, and who had no idea from the commonplace words that in one of those two persons' lives a crisis had been reached.

For a moment they were silent; then Middleton asked:

“Where are you going?”

“To the town to do some shopping.”

“I will walk with you, if I may.”

“Thank you, I should like it.”

So they walked swiftly away together.

“Do you live in Chester?” he asked.

She hesitated a moment, and then replied, looking on the ground:

“My husband resembles Mr. Gladstone in two things—his politics are liberal and he has a house near Chester, that is to say, about two miles out.”

“I have often wondered whether you were married,” he said, unable as yet to realize anything but that she was there.

“I have been married three years. Mr. Barrett, my husband, has permanent business in Chester. I like the neighbourhood; so, you see, it is quite as well as it is.”

“Yes, quite as well,” he echoed.

They walked on for many minutes in silence. Suddenly Mrs.

Barrett came to a stand, and, looking around her perplexedly, said :

“ I thought I knew this old town, but I have come precisely in the opposite direction to that I wished to take. If you don't mind, we will try the right way now.”

“ I'm very gladly at your service, Mrs. Barrett,” he answered. Something like this things went on for the next half-hour :

*She*—“ What a wonderful day for March, is it not ? ”

*He*—“ We get such days in March much more often than is commonly supposed.”

*She*—“ You always did make a specialty of defending the English climate. If you do not mind, we will stop at this library. I have some scolding to do. I cannot get from them the books I want.”

Scolding administered and walk resumed.

*He*—“ Are you well ? ”

*She*—“ Yes ; I am well now. I was ill for a year before my marriage.”

*He*—“ I am sorry—very, very sorry ! ”

*She*—“ Thanks. I am all right now.”

Here a diversion, caused by a visit to a grocer's. Walk resumed.

*She*—“ You are working ? ”

*He*—“ Yes, yes ; laboriously.”

*She*—“ Why do you say that ? ”

*He*—“ Because it is so, because I have not one throb of interest in my so painfully manufactured creations for which the world is good enough to applaud me. Had I not achieved unusual success by my first book, people would never have stood the stuff I give them now. Yet it costs me infinite labour to produce it. I detest life as a sick man does food, and what cometh after it I know not.”

*She*—“ I am sorry you are so tired all the time. I, too, have my very weary days.”

She said these words in a very gentle tone, as if speaking more to herself than to him.

When the shopping had been completed she said :

“ My pony-carriage is to meet me in the High Street at three. Will you not drive back with me ? Mr. Barrett is at home to-day, and will be so pleased to meet you. He would not agree with you in the estimate you have formed of your later work.”



"Thank you," he replied, uttering the words slowly and emphatically.

As the chimes of the cathedral pealed the hour of three through the soft air, a charming little pony-phaeton rattled down the High Street. A few minutes after a woman with a singularly graceful figure, with a tall, slight man by her side, might have been seen in possession of it.

The grays were swift goers, so that in what seemed quite a short time they had reached "The Shrubbery," as Mr. Barrett termed his house.

The day had changed very suddenly, the wind having shifted and risen, bringing into the sky a look of hard, windy light.

"Just to look at such a sky would make one feel cold, would it not?" said Middleton, as they drove up to the door.

"Yes; if I see a sky like that in a picture I always shiver, if it is well done."

They went straight to the library, where Middleton was introduced to Mr. Barrett as an old friend of his wife's—with whose name he was very familiar. Mrs. Barrett had not thought it necessary to inform her husband of the circumstances of her former engagement, saying to him, when he pleaded for her hand, "I cannot give you what I could have given you once, but I am lonely, and I am fond of you. If you can be content with what I have left to give, then it is yours to claim."

He had, however, heard all about her engagement to Middleton; but as she, presuming him to be ignorant, had not chosen to enlighten him, he let his supposed ignorance remain undisproved. He was, as Middleton now saw, about the average height, with a well-made figure and a handsome, resolute, intellectual face. There was, nevertheless, a rather sneering expression about the corners of the mouth, and a look of hardness in the somewhat cold blue eyes, though they could be tender enough when used in love-passages. On the whole, his voice was a pleasant one, though under the influence of excitement it was apt to become almost shrill. Middleton accepted the invitation to stay to dinner, till which time he chatted with Mr. Barrett, inspected his books, which the latter was very glad to show off, having in his collection some really valuable specimens of old editions.

After dinner his host asked Middleton if he played billiards. Hearing that he did, they went to the billiard-room, where Mrs.

Barrett, who much liked to see the game played, watched their prowess. As it happened, they were well matched against each other, both being fine players.

It was past ten when Middleton took leave. The sky was brilliant with moonlight, and as he came out into the night, he could hear the wind hurrying through the leafless trees which bordered the road he had to take.

After the first shock of meeting his old love, Grace, he had felt little if anything. He had seemed dead to all emotion but that of profound weariness so long. Yet he knew—and it was strange to know—a great change was going on within him, to realize that he was about to feel, to know that light was breaking in, though it might be light to blind him.

Reaching his hotel, instead of going straight to bed, as a man wearied out in soul and body, he sat down by the fire in his sitting-room. Then, remembering that he had not smoked once all day, he filled and lit his pipe, and as the soft curling cloud of smoke went floating away, he seemed to see again the fair face and graceful figure which had so often lightened through his dreams, and to hear again the clear, rapid voice. To himself he said, and half aloud :

“To think that she is really within two miles of me—that I have seen her, heard her, felt her hands in mine! Can it by any possibility be true?”

When at length he really did go to bed, and after some time fell asleep, it was to dream of the events of the day. When he awoke in the morning it was with such a feeling as a man recovered from blindness might experience at awaking to light. There was something to live for in the day. He was conscious of a mental thirst, which only the presence of one woman could allay. He had resigned every idea of going to America ; so he returned his ticket to the Inman line offices, saying circumstances had compelled him to change his plans.

Thinking it too early to call at The Shrubbery, he took a long walk out beyond it.

It was about three o'clock when he was shown into Mrs. Barrett's drawing-room. She was sitting in a low chair, drawn close to the fire, which was burning cheerfully in a large, old-fashioned fireplace. In her hand—and what a small, pretty hand it was!—she held Middleton's last book. Her warm, claret-coloured dress, which was of a rich, heavy material, fitted

closely, and set off to perfection the soft outlines of her figure. A simple gold locket flashed at her large, lovely throat. There was a look of eager interest in her eyes. Altogether, Middleton thought he had never seen her look so lovely before. In the matter of beauty, the woman of twenty-eight had quite eclipsed the girl of nineteen.

"Did you expect me earlier?" he began, taking a seat by the fire.

"I did not expect you at all," she answered, a slight quiver in her voice.

"Did you not?" he replied; "that surprises me."

Then he went on, speaking with that slowness and emphasis which had something half-boyish in it, and which had been a great charm to her in the old days.

"When I came here it was with the intention of going to America; indeed my passage was taken in the *City of Chester*. An accident delayed me till she had sailed. She will return to Liverpool and depart—but still *without me*."

He paused and looked at her.

"What has made you change your plans?" she asked, looking down; but he caught her face with his warm brown eyes, and held it till a burning blush overspread it. "I think you acted foolishly," she said.

"Do you?" he rejoined. "It seems to me that I did well."

Then he leaned back in his chair and thirstily drank in her beauty.

"Well," she asked at last, being defenceless against his eyes, "am I greatly changed?"

"Developed rather than changed; you are more beautiful than you were as a girl."

"Time has not cured you, then, of your old trick of flattering."

"You thought me sincere once."

"Yes, once upon a time, as children say."

"Don't you feel that we blundered?" he said, after a brief silence.

"If you don't mind," she answered, speaking in a very low tone, "we will say nothing about that," and her face was very white.

"I shall do your will in all things," he answered. "I hope it cannot harm you to see me."

Then they were silent, knowing what was between them.

Presently they got talking of books and of people they had known, and the afternoon passed rapidly. When Mr. Barrett returned it was to find them in the midst of a very animated conversation.

"No, no—a thousand times no!" Grace was saying. "If he knew before marriage that he had ceased to love her, he would have been doing her the cruellest wrong he could do to marry her, even if the shock had killed her. Death would have been far preferable!"

"You see, said Middleton, shaking hands with Barrett, "I have availed myself of an old friend's privilege to call again. Mrs. Barrett and I have many things to speak of. When you came in we were discussing the plot of my new novel. The point of contention between us is this—The hero is to get sick to death of the girl he is engaged to marry, but feeling himself in honour bound to her, he turns away from the girl he has fallen in love with and marries the first girl. I say he was right, and Mrs. Barrett says he was wrong; now let us have your opinion."

Mr. Barrett, standing by the fireplace, reflected for a moment, and then said:

"I agree with my wife, though probably not upon the same grounds. I am a fatalist, and as such think he ought to have let things take their course. It was fate which threw the second girl across his path. He had no right to struggle against fate. It was requisite for him to yield to the force of circumstances."

"My man," said Middleton, "was not a fatalist."

"No," said Mrs. Barrett, her eyes flashing, "he was only a coward, who, having failed towards the girl, was not man enough to tell her so! It was not pity for her, but for himself, that kept him silent. He could not bear to face the disgrace of infidelity!"

"You always were hard upon my men," he answered, smiling, after which he again accepted Barrett's invitation to dinner.

"You must tell me," he said, very quietly, to Barrett, "if I intrude. The truth is, I am rather a friendless man."

The other replied that he should be always pleased to see him.

In the evening, when they were in the drawing-room, Middleton asked Grace if she would not sing.



“ You had a fine voice in the old days,” he said. “ Do you remember the duets we used to sing together ? ”

“ What shall I sing now ? ” she asked.

“ ‘ When first I saw your face, ’ ” he replied, promptly. “ Do you remember under what conditions I last heard you sing it ? ”

“ Yes, I think so. It was at the Bensons’. You were very cross that night. ”

It was on the day after that night that the fatal quarrel had taken place.

“ You always did take my character away,” he said, laughing, “ and you are just the same now. I am glad the years have not changed you. ”

As he turned over the music for her, and breathed the scent of some violets that she wore in her bosom, her clear, expressive voice singing the song he had heard her sing so many times before, brought all the past back upon him—the house in Kensington where Grace Townsend had lived with her aunt ; the prettily-furnished drawing-room, always pervaded at that time by the perfume of mignonette—for the month when he had asked Grace to become his wife was May. It was November when the quarrel that we wot of came to pass, but he had somehow associated the scents and sights of the spring with the one love-romance of his life. As she sang, he saw again, through an open window, the garden with its one big May-tree in the centre—the sweet-smelling, though dusty-looking, pink May-tree. Once more, in the gentle May weather, between the sunset and the moonrise, they are together by that window, he lying at her feet in the low light, rather conjecturing than absolutely realizing how fair she is, while the words they uttered came back to him.

“ Grace, what would my life have been if I had not met you ? ”

“ You would have loved some one else, you foolish boy. ”

“ That I might have done, but not as I love you. ”

“ I should like to think that, ” in her sweet, low voice.

“ Then you may ; I tell you. it fills me with terror to think I might have missed you—that the transcendent bliss of calling you my wife might not have been mine. Kiss me, my heart’s heart, and tell me if you are happy—if you love me as much as you did yesterday. ”

In his retrospect she clasps her arms about his neck, bows



down her face to him, and lays her full, soft lips on his in a long, electric kiss. Then she says, still leaning above him :

“What do you think?”

“That you have answered me divinely, my poet, for a poet in love you are.”

By the warmth of her cheeks, he knew the red love-light must be flushing them.

Oh, long, lingering hand pressures, words steeped in love, soft looks of love, and ardent kisses, hopes and heart throbs! are ye not remembered well to-night! Too well, it may be.

The song ceased, and they forgot not to look at one another—their lips said nothing, their eyes said too much.

“This song seems to have had a strangely overpowering effect,” remarked Mr. Barrett, who was standing with his back to the fire.

“You are right, my dear sir,” replied Middleton, at last looking away from Grace, “it has had a most overpowering effect.”

“Yes,” put in Grace, “it seemed to make a dead time live again.”

Then Barrett challenged Middleton to a game of billiards, and the challenge was gladly accepted, Mrs. Barrett, as usual, watching the play with interest. It was a hotly contested game, but at length Mr. Barrett won it.

As Middleton walked home that night, he seemed to hear, all the way, the roll and click of the billiard-balls. When he fell asleep, it was to dream of playing a great billiard match. His opponent was dressed in black. The table on which they played was black—so were the cues. All the while they were playing he seemed to hear Grace singing—

“Since first I saw your face, I resolved  
To honour and renown you.”

Then, with a fatally bad stroke on his part the dream ended, and he awoke to find that day had already dawned.

By a little after eleven o'clock he was once more on his way to The Shrubbery. As he walked along through the keen March air, he was haunted by the recollection of his last night's dream. What a grim game of billiards that had been! Suddenly he came face to face with Mr. Barrett. They shook hands, and Middleton said, in clear, measured tones :

"Coming again, as you see—to entreat your wife's pity. I believe I am the most dreadfully lazy, good-for-nothing kind of man in all England."

"You seem able to dispose of your time as you like," answered the other."

"I am haunted by a dream I had last night. I have a strange kind of belief in dreams. I dreamed I was playing billiards with a fellow, dressed all in black. It was a black game, altogether. The table was black, so were the cues, everything was black, except a blood-red spot on the table, and the balls, and they only seemed to make the black blacker. Well, I must not keep you from business by prattling of my dreams."

So they went their several ways, and the memory of Middleton's dream abided with Mr. Barrett all that day—ay, and for many days to come. Mrs. Barrett was sitting at the piano singing—

"When first I saw your face, I resolved  
To honour and renown you."

when Middleton was announced.

"Good morning," he said, as naturally as though they had been staying in the same house. "I hope you slept well! I had a most horrible dream, which I could not help imparting to Mr. Barrett, whom I met on the way."

"Did he ask if you were coming here?"

"He did not, but I generously informed him of the fact."

"Are you mad?"

"Not now. I was once, when I let you go out of my life; and, for the matter of that, you were mad when you let yourself go. We were both mad together. Not in vain has Fate thrown you once more in my way."

"Don't," she cried, with a sharp ring of pain in her voice. "That we did wrong once is no reason why we should do worse wrong now."

"Do you think we could do worse wrong than to be false to ourselves?" he asked. "That was the sin of our lives. I seek to do you no harm, only as long as I can I will see you."

"And Walter?" she put in.

"He can do as he likes. If he wishes for it he can have the whole truth. I should enjoy telling him that you never had really loved him—that I, and I alone, have been the love of your life. Answer me, as you value your soul—is this not true?"

Middleton took both her hands, and his eyes burned with tears.

"You have no right to ask me such questions," she protested. "It was of your free will that you lost me. I tell you, often when I wake up in the dark, dead night, I can hear you say again, just as bitterly as you said it that day: 'Yes. I know I have made my choice, and I mean to stand by it!'"

"You must answer me," he said, not noticing her words, and speaking with an enforced calmness. "You are in love with me still, as I am with you."

"I love my husband," she answered.

"I know that," he replied, "but you are *in love* with me, Grace. Oh, my life's one love, be pitiful. You must let me kiss you once as of old!"

He caught her to him, and with a sob, half of pleasure and half of pain, she flung her arms about his neck, and once more their lips met. It was all very wrong, of course. Still, things even worse do occasionally come to pass, both in life and fiction.

For an hour or two they almost seemed to dream themselves back into the past. With nightfall, however, and Barrett's return, they awoke from their dream to realize the gulf that lay between them—a gulf she had no idea of crossing and he none of tempting her to cross.

Barrett would have been an obtuse man, indeed, had he failed to notice the nervous gaiety of his wife's manner. If he thought anything he kept his thoughts to himself.

As for Middleton, the man must have been mad. He did not even strive thinly to disguise his admiration of Grace, but would sit silent for half an hour at a time gazing upon her. A fortnight went by in feverish and dangerous happiness. In the violence of the reaction from apathy to excitement, it seemed to Middleton that he had never before lived at such high pressure. Perhaps he never had, but it could not last for ever.

On resigning the idea of going to America, he had written to have all his letters forwarded to him at Chester. He found on his breakfast-table one morning a letter in a very familiar handwriting. It was from the one intimate friend he possessed. He broke the seal and read:

"DEAR OLD MAN,—I am desperately ill. It came on suddenly, but seems a big affair. Indeed, I can see that the doctor thinks I shall be beaten this time. You will get this on the 1st

of April, but it is not fool's play. Come and see me if you can. Nothing would do me so much good. Yours, as ever,

“R. BOWLES.”

The letter was very characteristic of poor Bowles, half poet and half cynic ; clever with his pen, and not quite at sea with a gun. Middleton had a real affection for the man, and he felt that he must go to him. He must go, too, without taking leave of Grace, as she was that day to go on a visit to some friends who lived several miles off. She would soon be on her way to them, but there would yet be time for a telegram to catch her. He was, as we have seen, a prompt man. There was a train in half an hour's time. This he determined to catch, first, however, sending this telegram :

“Called up to London to see a friend who is dangerously ill. Shall return as soon as possible. Will write.”

Now as ill luck, or good luck—whichever you like—would have it, this telegram fell into the hands of Mr. Barrett. His wife had driven away just half an hour before it was handed in. He himself had been delayed in going to business. Of course, he opened the telegram and read it. He locks it carefully away, and telling the servants they need say nothing about it, walked into Chester. All the rest of that day he was a rather pre-occupied man. He ate his dinner alone ; the room seemed strange without his wife and his wife's friend. He sat after dinner smoking intently as a man does who is trying to solve some difficult problem. About nine o'clock Mrs. Barrett returned. He started as he heard the wheels of the carriage grate upon the gravel. She came in looking very pretty ; a delicate rose colour on her cheeks, an expectant look in her eyes.

“It has been such a beautiful evening,” she began. “I quite enjoyed the drive home—but I don't see Mr. Middleton's familiar face.”

He noted the change which came over her own.

“Mr. Middleton, knowing that you would be absent, evidently did not think me alone worth a visit.”

“You are mistaken ; he told me he was coming.”

“Then I own to being wrong.”

She sat down on the arm of her husband's chair and began playing with his hair.

"Grace," he said, suddenly, "are you quite sure you love me?"

"Sure? Of course, I am sure; but is it not rather late in the day to ask such a question, my dear?"

"No," was his short, decided answer. Getting up, he moved to the door, but turning back, said: "I should think Mr. Middleton must be ill, as you have not heard from him."

"Oh, I don't think so," she returned, with well-affected carelessness. "Perhaps he has made some new friends, or is beginning to think that he has given us too much of his society."

"You do not think, then, that there is any necessity for my looking him up to-morrow?"

"Oh, most decidedly not," she replied, over vehemently, "he has behaved very rudely."

And there the matter dropped.

The next day was a hard day for Grace. She sat in her drawing-room trying to read, but unable to fix her attention, or wandered aimlessly about the house, listening for the loud familiar ring of the house-bell, which came not. She wished now very much that she had let her husband call to inquire about Middleton. She fretted herself ill, and looked white and jaded when Barrett returned to dinner.

"You look ill, Grace," he said, at once noting her with quick eyes.

"No! I am not ill; I have a headache; that is all. Have you had a busy day?"

"Yes, a very busy one."

Following the French fashion, Mrs. Barrett took early breakfast in her bedroom. The morning letters were all placed before Mr. Barrett. On this morning, the 3rd of April, there was only one for his wife. It bore the London post-mark. He knew the handwriting well—as Middleton had asked him to read a chapter of his new novel, about which he wanted advice on a point of business.

Let us concede at once that a husband has no right to open his wife's letters, but let us add that under the circumstances Mr. Barrett thought he was quite justified in doing so, and did so accordingly. The letter which he read ran as follows:



“ April 2nd.

“ DEAR GRACE,—I am writing to you with the shadow of my friend’s rapidly approaching death falling upon me. It is strange to stand thus as I do between love and death—the bliss of your love and the sorrow of knowing that he must lay down his life before he is weary of it, as so many of us are who have yet to go on living, perhaps nearly as weary as I was before I met you again. How weary I was you will never know—no one will ever know—because there are no words which can express it. Yes, though we can never be man and wife, it is a bliss to me to know that I have your love ; that, though you may love that other man, you are *in love* with me—mine by right of soul, if by no other right. Swinburne makes Mary Beaton say, at the end of Bothwell : ‘ But I will never leave you till you die.’ So say I—unless I should die first, as I hope it will be, as I think it will be. God knows I thought I had no hope of ever meeting you again, but I think now that deep, underlying all, there must have been a hope, and that that hope kept me from ending my days. I hope you are missing me horribly. I want you to find comfort in two things only—hearing from me and writing to me. I shall write to you daily. Often I close my eyes that a vision of you may float before my soul. I seem to hear your low, eager voice, and to feel once more the blessing of your hand on mine. It is now about mid-day ; poor Bowles is sleeping feverishly : from time to time he moans and mutters of a very worthless girl who treated him shamefully. It is a day of bright sunshine, which does not penetrate into this darkened room. Poor Bowles ! He is a handsome fellow, but so changed from what he was when I saw him last. How I do long to see you ! There is something awful in this quiet waiting for death ! He seems so close at hand, yet his foot delays to cross the threshold. If I were to die suddenly, I am glad to think that your life would never again be the same as it would have been if I had not recrossed your path, if I had not done the right thing—renounced all my plans—that we might be as much in each other’s lives as possible. You realize now that I was made for you, as you for me. I see poor Bowles is waking up, so I must end at once. Good-bye, my heart’s one treasure !

“ Yours, through life and through death, most absolutely,

“ JOHN.”

A look of intense hatred, which he quickly repressed, passed over Mr. Barrett's face as he locked the letter away.

Just then a servant came from Grace to say that if Mr. Barrett did not mind stopping at the Grosvenor Hotel and asking if Mr. Middleton were well, it would be kind, as she really was beginning to think, from his silence, he must be ill.

Mr. Barrett replied that he would do as she wished, and left the house. It was an exquisite April morning; besides the bright sunlight there was a laughing light of green leaves, through which the soft stress of the wind made a sound like that of running water; but the birds, especially one thrush, seemed to enjoy the day a great deal more than did poor Mr. Barrett. He did not look a happy man, or a strong man, as he walked into Chester. He went to Middleton's hotel, and asked if they had any news of him. They had not. They expected him back in a few days.

"Will you kindly see, then," said Barrett, "that he has this note at once on his return. It is on a matter of great importance."

There was a strangely perplexed look upon his face. As he was about to leave the hotel he heard the roll of billiard balls, and with the sound, flashed as it were before his sight, the black game of billiards which Middleton had dreamed of playing. Remember, the man was a fatalist.

"Well," said Grace, coming that evening into her husband's library—a thing very rare with her—"well, what news have you of our friend? Is he ill?"

"Not that I know of. He left for London two days ago."

"Left for London! and without letting us know!" exclaimed Mrs. Barrett, with undisguised astonishment.

"Do you think," inquired her husband, calmly, "that he is bound to inform you of every movement he makes? I thought that was scarcely required, unless of lovers."

"He is my dearest friend," she began, but did not get on very well. There was something in her throat that made it difficult to speak.

"He *was* your lover," remarked Barrett, letting his eyes do their full work upon her face; hers, however, did not fail under his, as she answered with quiet dignity:

"You are correct—he *was* my lover, and a man worthy to be loved."

"It was because of him that you could only give me half a heart."

"Yes, because of him," she said, speaking gently, as if she were sorry for the pain she had to give.

"Grace," he said, and his voice was broken, "come to me, my darling. I have striven, have I not, to make you happy?"

Then he threw his arms round her; he felt on his face her kisses and her tears.

The days went by, and regularly every morning came Middleton's letter to Grace, and as regularly Mr. Barrett locked the letter away unopened. He was naturally an honourable man; he might have read letter after letter for the purpose of discovering just how things stood between his wife and Middleton; but, his mind being completely satisfied on this point, he did by Middleton as he would have been done by. He was waiting.

How seemed these days to Grace? At first they seemed to tell upon her heavily. She went about white and hollow-eyed. Do you think Barrett noticed the change? The absent man had a strange magnetic power over her, but when he had been gone a week the power he had exercised over her began to fail. She grew less restless—indeed she began to feel as if a weight had been lifted from her soul. She became more like herself of old days; but there was still a great difference from that old self. There was often a look of strange longing in her eyes, and she would start whenever the house-bell sounded, and then colour all over neck and face to know she had started. I think we can imagine something of what Middleton felt at not hearing from her. I wonder what he said in those letters, of which we shall never know the contents.

One day, near the end of April, Bowles turned his face to the wall, and spoke never more. Death's awful silence filled the room, yet, even at that moment, as Middleton leaned down and closed the eyes of his friend, the thought of Grace was not absent from him. He waited in London till the funeral was over, meaning to leave that night. Unexpected business, however, detained him until the following day, when he left by a train which brought him into Chester about five in the evening. I suppose most of us know the pleasure of arriving at some place where we shall find the one person who has drawn us hither. A great sense of elation took hold of Middleton as he stepped out on the platform. He felt as if he must come upon Grace

instantly. His heart beat very fast as he walked to his hotel, and he had a strange sense of something impending. As soon as he reached the Grosvenor, he was handed a note. He read thus :

“DEAR MR. MIDDLETON,—There is something of great importance about which I desire to speak to you. If you reach Chester at any time before six, please come at once to my office. If after six, then please come to The Shrubbery. I remain, yours very truly,  
WALTER BARRETT.”

Hastily disposing of a biscuit and a glass of brandy-and-water, Middleton at once proceeded to the office of Barrett, whom he found looking over some papers.

“Oh, good evening ; you have returned, have you ?” said he, as he gave Middleton a cold, firm hand. “Your friend is dead ?”

“Four days ago,” answered Middleton. He did not say, “How did you know my friend was ill ?” The whole mystery of Grace’s silence was now, as by a flash of lightning, laid bare. The blood burned in his face at the discovery that his letters had fallen into Barrett’s hands. They had compromised the woman that he loved—what curse could be heavier than this ?

“Pray be seated,” said Mr. Barrett, quite coldly, “if you do not mind waiting a few minutes, I have one or two things to settle here, and we might then walk back together. Of course, you will dine with us this evening ?”

“Thank you,” replied Middleton. “I will do so gladly.”

For some time there was no sound but the rustling of documents, as Barrett turned them over. “What does this man mean ?” thought Middleton, as he sat silent, the bright sun flooding the office. At length Mr. Barrett struck a gong that stood on the table before him, and, giving his clerk, who appeared in answer to the summons, directions as to what to do with his papers, placed himself at Middleton’s disposal.

As they went out into the street Middleton remarked on the beauty of the evening. Barrett responded, lighting a cigar and offering his case to Middleton. Then the two walked away at a quick pace.

The late afternoon was wild and cold and sweet. Throughout the day heavy thundershowers had prevailed, but now the high



easterly wind had swept every vestige of cloud out of the sky, in which the sun shone intensely golden. How madly the green eaves seemed to dance ; how, still wet from recent showers, they shone in the sunlight ! The songs of birds seemed blown about by the wind ; besides the scents of flowers and wet earth, there was on the air that nameless fragrance which so frequently accompanies a high wind. Ah, me ! from what gardens, from what fields that we know not of, may not these high winds have strength to bear it ?

They were well clear of the town, when Barrett began with :

“ You do not seem surprised that I should know of your friend’s illness ? ”

“ I should be glad to know how you came to hear of it,” answered Middleton.

To which rejoined Barrett :

“ I shall be glad to tell you. Your telegram, meant for my wife, fell into my hands. Seeing that your admiration for her had undergone some trials since the time when you were engaged to each other——”

“ Did she tell you we were once engaged ? ”

“ She did not. But though I said nothing to her, I knew it before I married her. Well, naturally wishing to know how affairs stood, I considered myself justified in—opening and keeping back your telegrams and letters. Now, Mr. Middleton, I wish to make no sensational scene,” and here the speaker raised his voice a little, as was customary with him when speaking under great excitement. “ If we were Frenchmen, we should settle this matter by swords or pistols. If I were like most Englishmen, I should do my best to give you such a horse-whipping as should leave you marked for life. However, I am not a Frenchman, neither am I a representative Englishman. Before everything else, I am a fatalist. I will grant to you that you have a certain kind of right in my wife ; you loved her first, you have been faithful to her ; you love her still.”

“ Heaven knows I do ! ”

“ But what interests me most are not *your* feelings, but *hers*. You see I am frank with you. At this moment I believe you hold her heart, but I believe if she never saw you again, never heard from you or of you, if even your very name were blotted out, that I could regain her love. Of course, I could deny you the house ; but this is a half-way measure, about which



I do not care. Besides I know, as a man of the world, that I could not insure your never meeting. I have a proposal to make, to which I think, from what I know of you, that you will accede. I think I can trust your word, if you feel that you can trust mine."

"Surely," returned Middleton, and Barrett continued :

"Do you remember telling me of a dream you had of playing a game of billiards, where everything was black, except the balls and the blood-red spot on the table?"

"Yes ; I remember it well. The dream made a great impression on me."

"So it did on me, as a fatalist. I must believe that you did not dream that strange dream for nothing. Does the dream suggest nothing to you?"

"It does—death. Now I take your meaning. I accept your proposal. Either you or I shall hold this woman's heart absolutely. You may trust my word. If I lose, my name will be blotted out indeed. Shall it be to-night?"

"Yes—why not?" returned Barrett. "If I lose, you will never let her know our compact?"

"That I swear!"

"I only opened one of your letters," said Barrett. "They are all locked up. I will tell you where. You will not tell her that you wrote, and whoever survives will destroy the letters."

To this Middleton at once assented. The sun was setting as they entered the grounds of The Shrubbery. As they approached the house they could hear, mixing with the sound of the wind in the trees, and wildly and fitfully sweet, the sound of a woman's voice, singing :

" Since first I saw your face,  
I resolved to honour and renown you ;  
If now I be despised I wish  
My heart had never known you."

The two men stopped for a moment listening. Then they went forward. When Grace saw who it was that entered with her husband, she coloured to the roots of her hair, and said, as she gave him her hand :

"Why, what a stranger you are, Mr. Middleton. What have you been doing?"

“Nursing a sick friend,” he replied, “who is now where he will need no more nursing.”

He sat down and fixed his eyes upon her hungrily. Under their compelling magnetism she felt hers drawn to regard him.

“You look as if you had been worried—watching late, and getting little sleep.”

“Yes, but I shall have time enough now for sleeping,” he said. It was pleasant to be thus pitied by her. Just then Barrett was called from the room, and they were alone together.

“Why did you not write?” she asked, feverishly. “Oh, what I have suffered.”

“Grace,” he whispered, coming close to her, “ask me no questions. I love you more than ever. Have faith!”

“Our love is sin,” she answered; “why don’t you help me to be strong?”

“Because I love you too madly for that, Grace. Kiss me—who knows? It may be for the last time.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, nervously.

“Nothing, nothing!” Then he caught her to him, and held her lips with a long, slow kiss.

When Barrett re-entered the room his wife was sitting by the fireside in her favourite low chair. Middleton was leaning against the mantelpiece, and saying:

“Yes, I fear these violent winds will make sad havoc among the tender young flowers.”

Dinner that evening was not a cheerful meal. Conversation flickered and went out. The three persons concerned in it were glad when it came to an end. As Grace had no objection to the smell of a cigar, when Barrett challenged Middleton to a game of billiards, they all three proceeded at once to the billiard-room.

“Did you ever hear,” said Middleton to Grace, “of the two men who fought a duel with billiard-balls? It was on some question of the wife’s honour. I suppose they wanted to be original in their choice of weapons, so they stood—one at the foot, and one at the head, of the table. It was a very complete duel. As the second cried, ‘Now,’ both men raised their arms. The balls flew through the air; before they clattered on the floor there was a dull sound: both men had aimed well—both fell dead. You can imagine what it would be to have this ball strike you full in the forehead,” and he pressed the ball into her hand.

She shuddered and said :

“What a horrible story !”

The game was then fixed for a hundred up, and the play commenced, Barrett leading off. For some time the scoring was slow. Barrett, however, had put together his first twenty before Middleton had marked half that number. It seemed, so far, less the aim of each man to score than to leave nothing on the board for his opponent.

“What a tedious game,” said Grace, who had assumed the duty of marker. “You are neither of you at your best.”

Both Middleton and Barrett were courteous men, but neither replied to the lady’s remark.

Leisurely Middleton crept up, and when Barrett’s thirty was announced he was but two behind him.

“You both seem to be terribly in earnest,” laughed Grace ; “perhaps if you were less so, you would do better.”

Barrett’s look justified his wife’s comment. Securing a fine position, he got far away from his antagonist, while at each stroke his face assumed an expression of compressed energy, which would be poorly described by the word elation.

“One would think you were playing for really heavy stakes !” cried Grace, as she noted the fixed look and rigid posture of Middleton while her husband scored.

At length Middleton’s turn came. The caution, almost timidity, which he had at first shown, was now exchanged for a prompt boldness, which, for a time, realized all that he attempted. When he again made way for Barrett his score was seventy-five to the seventy-three of the latter.

Barrett replied but faintly. In three or four minutes the chance fell again to his adversary.

Barrett chalked his cue. Suddenly he walked to the stand as if to replace it.

“No,” he said, returning to the table. “I will abide by my choice.”

To the last the man was a fatalist.

“Now, Mr. Middleton,” cried Grace, with elation, “a little more of your former prowess, and the game is yours.”

But, perhaps, because success had produced over-audacity, he was this time less successful, adding only some half-dozen to his score.

Barrett, now uniting wariness to brilliancy of touch, played a

game not more remarkable for the results which it achieved than for the perils which it avoided. As the velocity of the earth's movement is rest, so the very intensity of his feelings showed itself in the dead calm of his expression. His face was a mask—his movements seemed those of an automaton.

“Ninety-seven!” exclaimed Grace. “Mr. Middleton, it is all over!”

Was it this very prediction of triumph that broke the spell of resistless, relentless success? Barrett's next stroke was tremulous. The cannon he played for was all but made. Slowly his ball quivered towards that of Middleton's. Would it touch? No—yes—no! It retreated as if it had been conscious of his defeat—and stood still.

“There is yet a forlorn hope,” said Grace.

Middleton turned to her without speaking, but with a look and a slight wave of his hand which at once imposed upon the hitherto volatile Grace a silence almost of awe. Such was the deliberation of his play that the number he had yet to make occupied a third of the time of the entire game; but every well-considered ball, every *finesse* of grouping, told. He crept out, rather than ran out, a winner.

“That scores game to Mr. Middleton,” said Grace, almost in a whisper. By some strange infection the event had grown solemn to her.

“It was a well-contested game,” remarked Barrett, as he laid his cue aside. “Come, Middleton, let us spill a brandy-and-soda in the smoking-room over this success of yours.”

Thither the two men then adjourned. The feelings of Middleton may be easily imagined; a wild delight, to think that some day, after all, he should call this woman whom he loved so passionately his own—his wife—conflicted with horror to think that, in a sense, he was her husband's murderer. As they stood by themselves in the smoking-room, an impulse seized him, and he said:

“Barrett, if you will consider this off, I won't say no.”

Nothing could have better disposed of sentiment than Mr. Barrett's way of answering. He rolled up and lit a cigarette, and then said, somewhat scornfully:

“If you please, we will have no sickly sentimentality brought into the situation. You did your best to kill me, as I did my

best to kill you. Had you lost, I can tell you I should have felt no compunctions."

Middleton made no answer. He found it difficult to speak. The blood was rushing tumultuously through his veins. Sparks of fire were in his eyes. Was she calling to him, in that she sang, from the drawing-room :

"Since first I saw your face,  
I resolved to honour and renown you ;  
If now I be despised I wish  
My heart had never known you."

Why was she always singing the song so intimately associated with their love ? Now the room whirls round with him. There is a sound in his ears as of the rushing of many waters. What sudden pain is this, as of a pin-prick in the centre of his heart ?

"Lost !" he gasped, and fell forward ; the carpet blushed with blood. The excitement of his success had over-strained his diseased heart. He was dead. As he had said himself, that very day, he has now, indeed, " plenty of time for sleeping."



## MISS BERESFORD'S MYSTERY.

—:o:—

THE London season was dying, and dying hard, in broiling, dusty July weather, when Mr. Walter Davenport walked into Charing Cross Station, purchased a ticket, and took his seat in the four o'clock train for St. Danes.

Davenport came of a good family, and but for an elder brother would have been Sir Walter Davenport. He had passed the last three months reading for the bar and doing the London season, and with the two-fold strain he was quite wearied out. Yet he had enjoyed it, as only young men do enjoy such things. There had been staircase flirtations in Belgravia, and Bohemian champagne suppers with fair actresses, and there had been jolly bachelor parties, and there had been headaches as well, and sometimes a parched throat, and bores who would button-hole him when he would fain have been talking to fair women. Still, I repeat, on the whole he had enjoyed it well. Let him, for the joy of such things perisheth soon.

He was a handsome young fellow, and looked handsomer when feeling less weary. He had bright, dark eyes, thick curling hair, and an animated face, marred by a rather weak chin. His long, graceful hand indicated the pure old blood that ran through his veins.

He was on his way to visit the mother of the girl that, before long, he was to make Mrs. Davenport. Staircase flirtations, as I have said, had been his through the late months ; eyes,

dazzlingly beautiful, had interchanged significant looks with his ; but never for one moment had his heart been diverted from the girl of his choice, and now, as the train rushed on its way with him, and passed fields already yellow with corn, his heart gave thanks to know that every minute was bringing him nearer to the one person in whom he found unfailing rest and refreshment. He craved for her just then as men on desert islands can crave for water, or people blistered by sunlight for shade. It was good to be going to her ; good to think that in a short while dove-coloured eyes would be looking into his ; that a little lily-white hand would be enfolded in his own, and that a low, restful voice—a voice which seemed designed by nature to make glad wounded hearts—would be giving him welcome. He had written to her many and many a time, but written words can never take the place of words spoken. He thought, as the train rushed on, how much they would have to chatter about.

At length St. Danes was reached. He had not sent word of his coming, wishing to take his sweetheart by surprise, so that there was no one at the station to meet him.

He gave directions to have his portmanteau sent on to The Cedars, where Ursula March lived with her mother, he himself walking. St. Danes is one of the oldest towns in England. Once it had known the sea, and the wild sea nights, and had felt all through it the shock and shiver of great waves. Its oysters were famous in the old Roman days. It was one of the Cinque Ports hymned by Longfellow, but the sea wearied of it and left it, and now, in its crazy and fatuous old age, it broods on what it was when the sea loved it. Its streets, with the grass springing up in places, and its crumbling walls, where ivy and lichen cling, seem to be musing on old-world days—so old that they seem to belong to another world.

Though it was only seven o'clock when Davenport walked through its streets, most of the shops were shut, and the keepers thereof, who lounged in the doorways, gazed at him with a sort of dazed look. He wondered if people really lived there or only vegetated—was it possible that men and women loved there, were happy or unhappy, as the case might be ? Even the dogs and cats in the streets had an aged and toothless look. Where were the gay young bucks of London dogs, and those combed and pampered darlings that ride in carriages with fair women—

and women very often not fair, too? And the sleek young London pussies, where were they? Alas, they knew nothing of St. Danes.

Davenport walked on quickly, and was soon on a broad road which ran between gold corn-fields. In St. Danes itself things had seemed more than three-quarters dead, but here the sunset air seemed absolutely to pulsate with the songs of larks ; or they were like unseen springs of delicate music divinely intersecting the gold and blue of the sunset sky. There was no wind, and no sound save that of their singing. Davenport drew a long breath of satisfaction, as people do when, after London smoke, they inhale pure air.

In half an hour he was passing through a meek-looking village. It was Friday night, and in the village church the modest village choir was practicing. He lingered for a moment or two in the churchyard where

“The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.”

He lingered listening to the words, and the really pretty air to which they were set blending with the evening :

“Jerusalem the golden,  
 With milk and honey blest,  
 Beneath thy contemplation  
 Sink heart and voice opprest,  
 I know not, oh, I know not,  
 What joys await us there ;  
 What radiancy of glory,  
 What bliss beyond compare.”

Henceforth words and air were for ever to be associated in his memory with that evening walk. The hymn ceased, and he pressed on. In a few minutes more he was pausing outside the high gray wall of a garden, over which the trees thrust their branches, in which the birds were busy saying “good-night.” Then from behind that wall there came on the air a sound almost as sweet. It was only a girl’s laughter, but there was an unusually wild sweetness in it, albeit it was not loud, and it had a penetrative quality in it, penetrating as is the odour of a flower. It seemed full of joy till it was dying away, and then it seemed to fall in a suppressed sob.

Davenport walked on to the gate and rang the bell, his ring being responded to by the barking of many dogs. Then the gate was opened and he walked in. It was a delightful old English garden in which he found himself—a garden lined with wise-looking trees, which seemed well content with their home; a garden aglow with flowers as fragrant to smell as they were fair to see. In the centre was a wide, well-kept lawn, and on the lawn, making a very pretty picture, were two girls. One was sitting in a low garden chair; she was slight, but well formed—the face calm and beautiful, with sweet, serious lips, and calm, dove-like eyes. She was dressed in white, that shimmered in the evening glow. This was Ursula March, Davenport's wife to be. The other, who was standing as if she had just risen, was her friend, Rose Beresford. She was tall—almost too tall but for the wonderful grace that carried off her height. She had lustrous black hair, which seemed to rebel against restraint. The eyes were large and dark, and they could be in their expression restful almost to slumbrousness or passionately scornful. The beautiful eager face was clearly pale, the full red lips making by contrast a superb piece of warm colouring. Her wonderfully moulded figure looked as lithe as a willow. As he gazed at her that first evening, she seemed to him to be like some beautiful dark human lily.

When Ursula saw who it was coming up the garden, she also sprang to her feet, and uttered moreover a low cry of delight.

"Surprised?" he asked, in that tone of utter indifference generally assumed by an English lover when addressing the lady of his heart in the presence of a third person.

"Yes—ever so much surprised. I did not look for you for days yet." Then remembering herself, "How stupid I am. You haven't been introduced to Rose yet. Miss Beresford, Mr. Davenport."

"I think I have heard of you from this young lady," said Rose, touching the cheek of the girl, whose head did not come higher than her shoulder.

Miss Beresford's dress was of some heavy and rich material. It was made with loose, wide sleeves, which partly revealed the exquisite shape and fairness of her arms. A massive pearl locket, which seemed to suit her well, hung at her neck.

"Confess now," she went on, "that your name is Walter."

"I would conceal the fact if I could," he went on, with mock

gravity, "but, alas, I cannot. I think, you know, it should be considered a criminal offence to call a boy Walter."

So for a little while they chattered lightly. Then Davenport went to the room which was always kept ready for him to change his dusty clothes, and when he had done this he had not passed far down the thickly carpeted passage leading to the stair-head when he discerned a slight figure by an open window, gazing down intently into the garden, now gray and indistinct in the falling twilight. Of course it was quite chance her being there just then ; she couldn't foresee that somebody would have to pass that way and would be arrested by so slight a figure against the soft dusk, and that some one's arm should go about her waist, and a hand fall over her shoulder and rest just underneath her chin. But this was just what did happen.

"Well, sweetheart," said Walter, and there was no indifference in his voice now, "are you really a little pleased that I have come before you expected me?"

"No, not at all glad—very sorry."

"No, dear, speak seriously," in rather a protesting tone. "Are you a little bit glad to see me?"

"Yes," in a passionate whisper of delight.

"Very glad?"

"More than ever glad."

"That is well then. Is any one in the garden now?"

"No, Rose is talking to mamma."

"Well then let us go and walk there. I wish you hadn't a visitor ; I sha'n't see you alone now ever, shall I?"

"Yes, certainly, if you care to."

"Care to ! you *know* how much I care to. But tell me who she is, and how long she means to stay, and everything about her."

"You seem *very* much interested,"—in tones used by women who are perfectly sure of their lovers and husbands when they play at being jealous.

"I am very much disappointed at finding some one here, who must greatly spoil the time we have together. No—you shouldn't have arranged it so, Ursula. It wasn't fair to me. Upon my soul it wasn't—and I think if you cared for me at all as I cared for you, you would not have had it so."

"But, my dear boy," answered Ursula, her sweet voice just a little raised, and pressing both hands upon his arm (they were



walking about the garden then), "I had nothing to say to it. I could not help it. Listen, and I will tell you all about it, that is if you are good, and if you are bad you shall be told nothing."

It was not much that Ursula had to tell. She and Rose had been school friends. Rose was an orphan, and on being twenty-one had gone to live in a remote part of the country, with a lady so old that she seemed more dead than alive. Mrs. March, who thought that Rose must lead a lonely life, had made her promise that if ever she felt dull she would make The Cedars her home. Rose accepted gladly, saying that she should take Mrs. March at her word. This she had done. A week ago the post had brought a letter from her, saying she should be with them that very evening.

"If you are too full of visitors to have me," the letter went on to say, "why, it can't be helped. There are plenty of nice old inns at St. Danes, where it would be rather fun to put up; but unless I do things suddenly I never do them at all, and I do want, nay *need*, to see you and Ursula."

"So she came. Now be quiet—could I help it?"

"Well, no; I suppose really you could not. But how do you like her—what do you make of her?"

"I don't know. There is something in her which at once attracts and repels me. She seems at once tender and cruel—overflowing and reserved. I wonder how you will like her."

"I expect neither to like nor dislike her. That is my attitude toward most people, I think. But tell me if you have missed me, and why you did not write me longer letters?"

So in the young, tender moonlight, with his arm about her shoulder, his hand clasping hers, they went to and fro and talked, much I suppose as lovers always have talked since the world first was and will talk till the world is not. Ah, friends, be happy while youth lasts, for it is a frail flower, and every moment the bloom is fading. When it has all faded quite, to return no more for ever, what shall some of us do then with the bloomless, scentless, unlovely stalk of life remaining?

Presently Mrs. March, who deemed that the lovers had had quite long enough talk, appeared with Rose, and made some platitudinous remark upon the beauty of the night.

"And it has been so hot all day," said Rose. Her voice had the same sweetly penetrative quality that belonged to her laugh. It was a voice through which you could often hear the pulsations

of a minor chord. It was a voice that haunted you as certain music does, music whereof the sense is with you though you cannot perfectly recall the melody.

"How glad all things are at night," she went on. "I think the flowers must be so happy when the sun hands them over to the moonlight and the dew. I wonder what they dream of through the long, still hours."

"Butterflies and bees," put in Walter, lighting a cigar, permission having been duly granted.

"I should think it more likely," answered Rose, "that they dream of thunder-storms and bleak days when the wind cuts them to the heart."

"And why," questioned Davenport, "should they not dream of pleasant things instead?"

"Because it is more like life to dream of what terrifies us—just as people who have fear of death are always dreaming of it."

"But you see," responded Walter, "these flowers are dear little innocent things that have done no harm in their lives. Rose has not betrayed rose, nor has lily fought with lily, so their dreams are not remorseful as ours are so often; neither do they speculate on the end of things, so their dreams are uninvaded by any thought of death."

"Indeed! You seem to know all about them. Perhaps in some former life you *were* a flower!"

"No," he laughed, "only a weed—a worthless weed."

"A stinging one?"

"I most sincerely hope so. I would rather have stung than done nothing. It is something in this world to be dreaded."

So between grave and gay the talk went on till the ladies retiring left Walter to smoke a pipe in the garden. He fell asleep that night trying to recall Miss Beresford's voice.

"Well," Ursula asked him the next morning, "how do you like her?"

"Better than I thought to do. She interests me."

Now what the acute reader has divined would happen *did* happen. From being rather interested in Rose Beresford, Mr. Davenport became desperately interested, and then, being a sincere man more or less, he owned to himself that she had swept him away. He was in the rapids, and he knew it. Perchance it might never have been if Ursula, who was always

delicate, had not been attacked with a feverish cold, which kept her to her room for many days. Rose would at first gladly have devoted all her time to her friend, but this Ursula would not hear of, saying it would be so dull for Walter. So, poor child, her own unselfish nature and delicate health militated against her, and while not absolutely in pain, but very weary, she sat up in bed propped by pillows, or, wrapped in her pretty dressing-gown, lay on the couch in her bedroom, looking fair and frail as any flower, she read, trying to interest herself in what she read, but not succeeding very well, for her faithful thoughts went ever following her lover. They followed him through the hot, still days, or through days when the month seemed panic-stricken, as if it knew it must die, and melancholy winds went moaning under gray skies, and the rose-leaves showered down as if, indeed, very autumn had come before its time. In the meanwhile two persons were going through dreadful sufferings, alternated with transports of joy almost as dreadful.

Mrs. March was a chronic invalid, so that Rose and Walter were often alone together. In the house, in the garden, in walks, in drives. Very soon he felt how desperately fascinating she was to him. Her beauty stormed him. The worship of it came to be almost a religion with him. Then she had strange, swift ways of passing from grave subjects to light ones, which he thought charming. She was a fearless horse-woman, too, and looked splendid in the saddle.

One day—before they realized just how they stood to each other—when she had been talking bitterly, he said :

“The world is tragic for most of us, I know, but surely—surely not for you. You are young—you are ten times more beautiful than any woman I have ever seen, or ever shall see. You have intellect with which to enjoy the higher blessings of life, and money to procure you its creature comforts, which, I grant you, are in their way quite as necessary to anything like perfect enjoyment.”

They were alone together in Miss March's pretty little pony carriage. Rose was driving.

“You do not know of what you are talking,” she answered. “You talk cruelly because you talk ignorantly.”

“I am not ignorant of your beauty nor of your charm,” he answered.

"Don't," she returned, in a whisper of fear that thrilled through and awed him. "Suppose," she went on, "I were to tell you that I am the most unhappy woman in the world?"

"I am afraid I should say that you know very little about the world. Surely it must make you happy to be so beautiful. Just to look at you is a rapture. Do you know how I thank God for having made anything so beautiful? Tell me—tell me—do you know?"

"I don't know that I am so glad you think me so beautiful," she said, and her tone of voice forewarned of tears as the south wind forewarns of rain. "Men have called me beautiful before, and I have been their curse."

"Because you could not love them—but you shall love me, because I love you."

"Don't!" she cried, in a tone of command, and she struck sharply the ponies, who, unused to the whip, reared and dashed forward.

"Ursula would never forgive you," remarked Davenport. "She never touches them except to caress them."

"They have a different mistress for the present," she replied, and again she struck them, and yet again. "See, I am as Fate driving them as it has driven me." The beautiful arm was raised to strike again, when Davenport, interceding, took her wrist in his hand and held it back.

"No," he said, dexterously dispossessing her other hand of the reins. "I will drive now."

She made no resistance; indeed, she looked rather ashamed.

"Do you hate me?" she asked, in clear, unfaltering tones, "and think me a fiend?"

"Hate you?" he groaned. "No, Rose, I do not hate you, nor do I think you are a fiend; but I should not mind if you were. I think only of how beautiful you are."

The twilight was drawing on—a still, ominous twilight, amber-flushed. Not a soul in sight, not a sound but the forlorn tinkling of sheep-bells. On one side of them broad fields stretched away, on the other side of them was a small wood.

Davenport drew up the ponies by the roadside to rest them, and threw the reins upon their necks. How still everything was. As he drew very close to Rose their eyes met in a long, passionate gaze—their hands met and closed—and then with a quick rush of blood and a low cry, their lips came together and



clung desperately. Then they started apart, knowing just what it all meant. The drive home was a silent one. They both passed the night feeling how criminal it seemed to have sat with Ursula, trying to cheer her up, when they knew the guilty secret there was between them.

The next day they tried to avoid each other, but not for long.

"Rose," he said at length, "I can bear this no longer. If you are not mine I shall go mad."

"Oh, why, why did we ever meet?" she moaned, wringing her hands.

"Why?" he answered, "because we were made for one another."

"But you are bound to Ursula."

"Whom I will never wrong by marrying while I feel to another woman as I feel to you."

"But if Ursula freed you," she answered, hope and terror blending in her voice, "you might not choose to marry me. Other men have been in love with me, and have heard what you must now hear, before taking the step you talk of taking. You may choose to cast me from you too."

"Nothing could come, or shall come between us, I tell you. You have bewitched me, you have made me faithless to the woman I loved, whom I thought I would rather die than pain, yet whose heart I shall now go near to break. You have made me false to all the most cherished traditions of my life, and you talk as if anything could come between us."

He had spoken rapidly, his eyes aglow with passion. They had gone for a country ramble, and had paused to rest on the root of a fallen tree. It was a bright, soft, breezy afternoon—with a veiled mystery of sunlight over everything—while birds sang dubiously.

"You do love me a great deal, don't you?" she said, her voice seeming to vibrate with her love, while her passionate dark eyes seemed to draw his whole soul out to her. She laid her hands in his, and said quickly under her breath :

"Kiss me."

Then when their lips had parted, she began speaking with restrained excitement.

"Strange as it seems, on him—him who marries me, as much as I may love him—I must impose conditions. First, that I may be allowed to settle always where we shall live. Secondly,



that I may be free to absent myself for as long a period as I may think good. Thirdly, that I shall be asked no questions. Fourthly, that I shall not be followed, and that my movements shall be in no way investigated. These are the conditions." She paused, and looking up, saw that his face was pale.

"Rose," he said, and his voice was grave, "your conditions are harder than I thought they would be, but, feeling as I do for you, I have no choice. I accept your terms."

"How noble you are," she said, drawing a sigh of infinite relief.

"No, Rose; there is nothing noble in me at all. Whatever you say, I pray you do not say that. You have created a something in me of which I am almost frightened. If need were, I would barter my soul for you."

"Would you?" she said, laughing the wild, sweet, penetrative laugh he had heard that July night come from behind the gray old garden wall.

"Is it matter for mirth?" he asked, half in wonder.

"Yes, I think so. It is good to be loved like that, but I am worth no living creature's soul," she said, and then, bending down, put her fair, strong arms around his neck and drew him forward till his cheek rested against her perfect bosom. Then, in tones wonderful for sweet seductiveness, she asked him if he knew how well she loved him, while he answered:

"Oh, my queen; you are worth all the souls of all the world!"

Mr. Davenport was right. Feeling as he did for Rose Beresford, he had no right to marry Ursula March. It is cheap cynosism, indeed, that declares the men and women of the nineteenth century incapable of love, or strong passion. There may not be as much exalted love as in the fabled age of gold, when the women were faultlessly faithful, and the men as pure as they. The fires of modern creeds and modern greed may have destroyed in many hearts the power of love; still, friends, there is a good salvage left—quite enough to do some good and a great deal of harm.

That evening Ursula was sitting in her charming special sitting-room. It was filled by the soft, gray twilight, and the sweet presence of her, when Davenport entered.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, hungrily, in her low, earnest voice, reaching out her hands and laying them in his.

The evening was wonderfully still. There was no sound save that of an occasional owl, who thought it was time to rouse and be after mice.

"How are you to-night?" he asked, a trouble in his voice which her quick ear at once detected.

"I? Oh, I am getting much better, quite strong. But something is troubling you. I can see it in your face. I can hear it in your voice. I want to know what it is." She would have drawn him to her, but he let her hands go, and stood back, saying :

"Yes, Ursula, you must know. It is right that you should know ; though to know will pain you for a little while."

"Yes," she replied, in a hushed tone of voice. "I am listening. Go on, if you please."

"Oh, Ursula, how can I? How can I let you see how unworthy I have all along been of your love, and now you are my saint—my spirit's ideal——"

Here she interrupted him, and said in tones intense, but calm :

"But not the woman you would wish to make your wife?"

"Ursula, God forgive me, it is so. I cannot explain it—even to myself ; but she has bewitched me. Sleeping and waking, my thoughts are with her, and I am in fever till she is mine."

"You mean Rose?" she said, with dreadful certainty in her voice.

"Who else but Rose *could* I mean?"

"I forgive you," she said, "indeed, I have nothing *to* forgive. If you had married me, loving another woman, that I would never have forgiven as long as we two lived. Still, I entreat you, not for my sake, but for yours, to conquer this feeling. Travel ; fall in love elsewhere ; marry whom you will, but do not, I beseech you, marry Rose Beresford. She will make you wretched. She has told me of the men she has enslaved, but who, when it came to the point, would not marry her, because of the conditions she wished to impose upon them. But you, I know, are reckless where you love. Oh, before it is too late, before you are irretrievably lost, be strong, and break through this fascination."

She looked so dreadfully distressed, as she sat there with her hands clasped closely in one another, that his heart bled for her as he answered ;

"Dear, upon this matter it is vain to talk to me. My mind is made up. I have accepted the conditions, hard as they are. Whether or not I shall be happy with this strange girl I cannot tell, but I know I could not endure life without her."

Then he blessed Ursula for her nobility, and left her alone in the twilight. Now that he had told her a great weight seemed lifted off his heart, and she sat there in the summer stillness thinking of all that had been between herself and her lover. Weep, poor gray eyes, for the heart which is yours no longer. Weep fast-falling, bitter tears for the memory of passionate love-words, of hand-pressures, tender kisses, and what not. She locked the door of her sitting-room, and then, opening a cedar box, began to examine its contents—mostly faded flowers and letters—the reading of which had made heart and pulse beat faster. She read some of them over, and felt sure that at one time he must have loved her very dearly. Once she had held him, and there was such sweetness in the thought as comes from the scent of dried flowers. So to bed, poor sweetheart, and, like a child, cry yourself to sleep.

When Ursula was crying over her old love-letters, Rose and Walter were walking about the garden, and she was saying :

"Did Ursula say she hated me? But of course she must do so."

"Ursula," he answered, "is too noble to hate any one."

"Is she?" she replied, indifferently, and then clung to him and asked him again and again if he was sure that he loved her as much as he had done the day before.

Rose wished to leave The Cedars, but Ursula would not hear of her doing so, and after some time made her mother see how much better it would be that the marriage should take place from there. The wedding-day was fixed for early October, the newly married pair arranging to go afterwards for a month to the sea-coast.

Those were of course hard days for Ursula to live through, but her brave spirit kept her up, and though she suffered she shed no more tears after that first outburst.

The house chosen by Rose as the one they would occupy was situated in one of London's most remote suburbs, so remote as to be virtually in the country. The house, which boasted an ample garden, stood on a high hill in a somewhat isolated position. It was known as The Priory.

So the days went over and brought *the* day which was to make these two man and wife. The marriage was solemnized in the little village church. No one but the Marches were present. When it was over the little party returned to The Cedars, where refreshments were served, after which the bride and bridegroom proceeded on their way.

It was a gray, featureless afternoon when Ursula shut to the door of her little sitting-room, to realize that the curtain had fallen for ever upon the romance of her life. In the presence of the lovers she had striven hard to maintain her cheerfulness, but now the strain was over, and the reaction was terrible. Poor little woman, she did not cry, but she lay there on her couch gazing at the trees as they stood outlined against the pale gray sky, cowering in the coldness of her life, from which the heart and light of love had gone for ever. Her hands were cold—cold as her heart, it seemed to her.

And Mrs. March, thinking much of her child, sat alone in the big drawing-room, and there, all to herself, wept for her daughter, who did *not* weep.

Poor Ursula, how full the place was of him! It was in this very room that he had told her of his love. Oh, shrine of love, on which love's fire burns no longer! After a time she arose and went into the garden where they had so often walked together. The gardener was there, sweeping away the fallen leaves. Ah, if we could only so sweep away our fallen leaves!

"Dear," said her mother's kind voice, as Ursula entered the drawing-room, "don't you think a change would be pleasant?"

Ursula longed for nothing so much, and she answered at once:

"Yes, mother, I should like it, if you are strong enough for travelling."

Mrs. March was sure that she was *quite* strong enough to travel by slow stages, so it was arranged that mother and daughter should pass the remainder of that autumn and the whole of the winter in Italy. It is a good thing that heartaches are not infectious, or to some of us travelling for pleasure might prove a doubtful kind of amusement. Fancy your young, strong-limbed, whole-hearted Oxonian falling asleep happily at Venice, his mind full of sightseeing and memories of the past, awakening in the morning with a dreadful apathy upon him, alarming in-



difference to Venice and everything else. But let us be thankful that such things cannot be.

In November the Davenports came to reside at The Priory, and Rose had to run the gauntlet of her husband's friends, most of whom knew that he had been engaged to a girl named Ursula March, and that he had forsaken her for her friend, and as he had been supposed not to be anything of a gay Lothario, but quite a steady young man, a good deal of interest was felt in the woman who had made him to swerve aside. So a house-warming, dinners and parties were given, to which his friends flocked most eagerly, and Rose shone as a hostess. Her utterance was rapid and her talk brilliant. She put her guests at once at their ease, and yet when they discussed her among themselves they owned to a something about her which they could not quite like—a something which, in some inexplicable way, repelled them. She had fine eyes, certainly, but the light in them was almost too intense. They thought—that is most of them thought—that she was just the kind of girl to try and take another girl's lover away from her. Well, as Walter had let himself be taken, they hoped she would make him happy, that was all.

And was he happy? Surely, yes. Sweet and potent was this wine of life that he quaffed. Existence seemed to him like a wonderful fairy-story. The Priory was no common suburban house which had been advertised in the papers as :

“This most desirable residence, standing on gravel soil, in a most healthy locality. Trains to and from the city every quarter of an hour.”

No, it was an enchanted castle, and she was the queen of it.

He was passionately fond of music. Rose had a beautiful, rich, thrilling voice, and often in the fire-lighted dusk he would have her sing to him, her voice seeming to come and go, to rise and fall, like the wind. It had in it a sweetness that was almost poignant. She sang German songs in which his soul delighted. She could interpret Wagner's music, while, on the other hand, she could sing an English or Scotch ballad with exquisite expression. Oh, those were happy hours, yet they were too happy, because they made the hours when he had to be away from her (and such hours had to be) too great a contrast.



"Oh, Rose, come here," he said one December afternoon shortly before Christmas. She had been singing to him in the dusk. The curtains had not been drawn. The season was intensely cold, and white wings of snow could be seen drifting down. She had ceased singing, but made no answer.

"Rose, sweetheart," he said—still no answer. Then he heard her rise, and the door close after her. What did it mean? Had he done anything to offend her?

He rose and went at once to their bedroom. As he approached it he heard a sound of an uncontrollable weeping. Entering, he saw his wife lying on the bed, her face pressed into the pillows, her body, as it were, broken up with sobs.

"Rose," he cried, raising her in his arms, and trying to turn her face to him. "Rose, my love, what is it, tell me! Oh, tell me what it is or you will break my heart."

But with a strength of which he had not thought her capable she wrenched herself from him, and again burying her face in the pillows, sobbed more bitterly than ever. Almost beside himself, he entreated her to speak to him. At length she raised herself and said, her words seeming almost to choke her:

"If you love me you will leave me. I shall be better soon."

He saw he could do nothing but humour her, so he left her, remaining, however, in the dressing-room which adjoined, and the hours went by, the bright, bitter, snow-winged hours, and the dressing-bell sounded through the house, and when Rose's maid tapped at the door with hot water, Walter took it from her, saying that her mistress was not very well, and would not need her services—indeed, might not be well enough to come down to dinner.

Then he sat down by the fire and listened to that dreadful and prolonged sobbing—and the pitiless winter moon glared in upon him. The dinner-bell sounded, and James, the butler, took up his place behind his master's chair, and the clock struck the dinner-hour, and the quarter past, but no master came. Then a servant went, and, tapping at the dressing-room door, informed him that dinner had been served more than a quarter of an hour. He replied that it could be removed, as he did not know when he should dine. Then he resumed his seat by the fire, and in the moonlight still heard that wild sobbing which so tortured him. At length it subsided—then at intervals it ceased. At last it ceased altogether. He sat still, dreading its recurrence,

but no, for an hour there had been perfect silence. He opened the door and went in softly. His wife lay on the bed, with her face turned to him. The beautiful eyes were closed. The red lips were parted. Her regular breathing was just audible. She was sleeping in the pure, deep way that children do. The pillow on which her cheek lay was drenched with her tears. He looked at her with hungry love, kissed her hand lightly, and then withdrew—but only to the next room—still flooded with the pitiless winter moonshine.

Many hours after, a slight noise in the next room told him that his wife had awakened. He hastened to her.

“Walter,” said the low voice as he came in, “is that you?”

“Yes, dear,” he answered. “You have been ill or unhappy, but you have slept. You are better now.”

“Much better. Did I frighten you?”

“Dreadfully.”

“Why, it was nothing but one of those fits of hysteria to which some women are liable. You should not have been frightened, my poor dear. But you did well to leave me to myself.”

“Rose,” he said, “tell me one thing. Were you crying because I do not make you happy?”

“Come here,” she said.

He leaned down, while she, reaching up, flung her arms round his neck, and after a long kiss, said:

“Now, are you answered?”

Yes, he was answered. He could not doubt that she loved him, and that he made her happy.

The next day Mrs. Davenport appeared to be in her usual high spirits. Still, through all her mirth, it seemed to Walter that he detected a note of minor music.

The day following was Christmas Eve. Davenport went to town early, to transact some business with his wine merchant. Christmas was to be celebrated the next day by a large dinner-party at The Priory. All day a cold, bitter, shrill wind blew, and the snow fell fast, being blown into drifts by the roadside. Such a day had not been known in London for long years and years. The snow made its way into the strongest houses. Progress was difficult and slow, and the trains that did run went only at a snail's pace, so that it was nearly eight in the evening when Davenport, a veritable snow-man, found himself in his

own house. Knowing his ring, Rose generally came into the hall to welcome her husband back, and to-night, of all nights, when she might not unnaturally be supposed to be somewhat anxious about him, he was surprised not to see her.

"Mrs. Davenport is in the drawing-room, I suppose?" he said to the servant who was helping to divest him of his coat.

"I don't think Mrs. Davenport has returned yet, sir," replied the man.

"What!" ejaculated Davenport, hardly able to speak from horror. "You don't mean to say that your mistress is out a night like this?"

Just then his wife's maid appeared on the scene, and handed him a letter with which her mistress had charged her.

He went into the dining-room, tore open the letter, and read:

"MY DEAREST,—You will think I am your curse, but you remember the conditions on which you married me. I can help neither of us. Believe me, and remember what you vowed. As soon as I can I will come back to you, but I cannot—cannot—cannot say when that will be.

"Your wife, "ROSE."

With a low cry he sank into a chair. Then he rang for his wife's maid, and questioned her. The girl said she had done all she could to dissuade her mistress from going out on such a dreadful day, but she only replied that she must go to a friend's. The girl asked her which carriage she would use, but Mrs. Davenport had replied that she was going on foot. She could not tell how long she should be absent. She took a fair-sized bag with her. The girl had asked if some one should not carry it for her, but she said "No" very decidedly, and went, and that was the last the servant had seen of her.

Davenport dismissed the girl, and walked to and fro, half-mad with grief. So absorbed had he been in his fresh happiness, that he had almost forgotten the fatal conditions of his marriage.

Now he remembered them—the solemn vows he had taken, that if ever she left him he would make no inquiries after her, would neither follow her himself nor cause her to be followed. But abroad by herself, and on a night like this! Good God! what did it mean? She might be dead or lost. Ah, when

would she come back, if ever! Then an awful thought flashed across him. Could it be that she was in the power of some man who could draw her to him when he pleased? Bitter as the night was, the thought set all his blood on fire. Well, it was too late. He must play the part of a strong man, and face the situation. For his own sake as well as hers, he must meet his guests of the next day, and lie to them, saying that his wife had been summoned to a dear friend who was dangerously ill. Did ever man before, I wonder, pass such a frightful Christmas Day.

Fancy a man in that position having to play the part of a cheerful and genial host, proposing healths, pulling crackers with the women of the party, and making lively complimentary remarks on the mottoes and headgear contained therein. And later on, only the men left, animating the smoking-room, where he had to tell and listen to racy stories. Yet all these things Walter Davenport accomplished. He thought the last man never would leave, and he felt more than once he must go mad. At length the man, pulling himself together, announced his intention of toddling toward London. Walter raised no opposition, for he felt he was at the end of his resources. He closed the door on his guest, and returned to the smoking-room for the purpose of extinguishing the lights there, when all of a sudden the room whirled round with him. For a moment there was a blood-red light before his eyes, and then he fell heavily to the ground, striking his head sharply against the brass fender. The strain had been too much for him; he had fainted. Half an hour afterward he had recovered consciousness. There was a dreadful pain in his head, and blood was trickling from his forehead.

"I must have dropped down in a faint," he said to himself as he rose, feeling strangely weak. "I am glad I was not found like this by the servants! They would certainly have said it was intoxication."

He went to his room and bathed the wound, which, however, left a long scar right across his forehead. He went to bed in the first gray light of the wintry dawn, but worn out as he was, in heart, brain and body, he could not sleep, kept awake by two thoughts—Where was Rose? What could have been her reason for leaving him? When, some hours later, he came downstairs to make a pretence of breakfast, the servants said



among themselves that he looked more like a ghost than a living man, and they did but speak the truth.

Weeks ago he had accepted a dinner invitation for that day, and ill as he was he forced himself to keep the engagement. All the friends he met at the dinner said how ill he looked, and when he left, shortly after it was concluded, his host felt that he could offer no friendly opposition. They all agreed that he looked more than physically ill. Some one suggested that he was fretting for his wife.

That night sleep visited him not again, and the stress of continuous thought of ever asking himself those two questions: "Where was his wife?" and "Why had she left him?" almost drove him wild. The next day he armed himself with chloral, and through this potent drug obtained a few hours' sleep.

His friends really had a kind of notion that he was pining for his wife, as indeed he was, but not because of her absence, though that would, of course, have grieved him, but because of the dreadful mystery surrounding that absence. Well, his friends, thinking he must be lonely, came much to see him, and as the days grew into weeks, and Mrs. Davenport returned not, and her husband grew more and more haggard-looking, forgetting to shave and letting his hair grow long, hardly eating anything, living chiefly on brandy and chloral, these friends talked among themselves, and said they were sure if she knew of his state she would return. He had acquired a hollow, hacking cough, which he had no strength to throw off. They thought, and with reason, that his condition was alarming. All their entreaties to see a doctor he positively refused—then they began to speculate about Mrs. Davenport. This newly-made wife, who proved such a much more devoted friend than wife. Surely the friend she had gone to nurse on Christmas Day had died by this time, or else was out of danger. Then they began to wonder if there could have been a quarrel.

The middle of January came, but she did not return. He had a kind of presentiment that she would come in at twilight, and always at that time he would sit by himself in the drawing-room where she had sung to him. The winter twilight came, but she came not, nor any word. Could she not in some way have communicated with him? Surely, surely she might have done so, he thought in the bitterness of his great despair. And January passed and February came, a sweet, compassionate



February, with soft blue skies, bland sunshine, and mild airs, and twittering of birds, and things growing green before their time. These things came, but she came not, and day by day Walter's strength seemed to ooze from him.

One February twilight he was sitting as usual alone, when there came a ring to the house-door which made his pulses throb violently and his heart almost to stand still. She had come back, his wife! She would be able now to explain. The door was thrown open and the footman announced Mrs. and Miss March. The blood which had rushed to his face now as suddenly left it. The candles were lighted.

"We called specially to see Rose, Mr. Davenport," Mrs. March began in her pleasant voice, "but hearing she was from home, we thought we would pay *you* a visit. We are just passing through London on our way to The Cedars. We have been in Italy since the middle of October. We did mean to stay much longer, but we got homesick sooner than we thought. And now what about Rose, and how long have you been a bachelor? I can't say that bachelorhood seems to agree with you. Seriously, Walter, you look very ill."

"Really," he answered, "I am a little pulled down; it is nothing. Let us talk of something else."

He would have waved the subject off, but Ursula put in:

"You are ill, and you know you are."

"I see," he said, "it is no good trying to deceive your women's eyes. I am not just now, for the time being, as strong as I used to be, but I shall be better soon."

Mrs. March asked if Rose had been apprised of his condition, and he said no. Then Ursula asked, fixing her earnest gray eyes upon his face:

"Don't you think she *ought* to be told?"

He answered, almost sharply:

"No, I do not. I only can act in this matter for good or ill."

And then, as if wishing to apologize for his abruptness, he added, in much gentler tones: "I know all the same how good it is of you both to take such a friendly interest in me."

His visitors did not stay long, and they went away both troubled on his account—one very much troubled, indeed.

"Ah, me," she sighed to herself, "I had a presentiment that she would not make him happy."

At the foot of the hill on which The Priory stood lay a large

common, extending many miles. The winds, as they swept over it, had in them something of the freshness of the sea. This night Walter was restless instead of apathetic, which was his more usual condition. He left the house, and descending the hill struck out across the common. The high west wind came rushing past him. Above him the white moon sped on, occasionally veiled by soft, fleecy clouds, but soon sailing free again. The wind was life-giving, but it brought no fresh life to the weary man who breasted it. He walked on, not because he had any pleasure in doing so, but because he was urged by a dreadful fiend that would not let him rest in one place.

Suddenly a wild, piercing cry—like that of an animal run to earth, only much more dreadful—sent a horror through his blood, and made him recoil. As he did so, something darted at him, and gripped his throat. He wrenched them away, and held them with a grasp of iron.

“Let me go! let me go!” shrieked the woman whose hands he was holding by force.

Oh, what horror was here! Distorted as the voice was by terror and suffering, he knew it for his wife's. He knew that it was she before the moonlight, which had been veiled for a few minutes, poured full upon her face—dreadfully changed from the face he had known. The eyes protruded unnaturally from the head, and had in them a terror which it was pitiful to behold.

“Rose,” he cried, “speak to me. Tell me what this means?”

But she only struggled desperately to free herself. Seeing that she was powerless to do so, she bent down and made her teeth meet in his hand. At the same moment a man's voice cried, evidently to a companion:

“Here she is. I knew she couldn't have gone far. I hope she hasn't badly frightened you, sir. I see she has bitten your hand badly.”

The two men had now got hold of the unfortunate woman, and held her captive between them.

“It's seldom she has such a bout of it as this, or that it lasts so long.”

“She must have got away while the reading was going on,” remarked the other man.

“Yes, that's about it,” returned the other. Then, addressing

himself to Walter, he observed : " Quiet as a lamb now, you see. Lord, she knows us. I wish you a good night, sir."

" Stay," said Davenport, rousing himself. " You mean that this poor thing is mad?"

" We could hardly mean anything else, sir," replied both men together, with something of contempt in their tone. " An escaped patient from Dr. Cross's asylum, the other side of the common."

" I will walk back with you," said Walter, " as I must see Dr. Cross to-night."

Arrived at the asylum, Walter obtained from Dr. Cross the interview he desired.

The doctor said, concerning the patient about whom Walter questioned him, that she had been known to him for some years as Rose Beresford. She was liable to temporary fits of insanity, preceded by violent sobbing fits some two or three days before. While in these fits of insanity it was necessary that she should be placed under restraint. During her mother's lifetime a private keeper had been sent for when one of these fits was known to be approaching, but after her mother's death she became so sensitive of any one knowing of her affliction that she preferred to come to him of her own will and be put under restraint till the fit had passed. These fits of insanity generally occurred about once a year. Nor was hers at all an exceptional case.

" This attack," said the Doctor, " has been an unusually long and severe one. Indeed, as you can judge for yourself, it is not over yet. She ought to live a life free from any excitement, either pleasant or otherwise.

" She was married last October," said poor Davenport.

" Married!" echoed the Doctor. " Then, of course, that accounts for the unusual length and severity of the attack. Ah, what a dreadful thing!"

" She is my wife," said Walter.

" And she never told you anything of all this?"

" Upon my honour, not a word."

He then explained to the Doctor the circumstances under which he had married Rose Beresford, and how, since his marriage, he had suffered.

He was destined never again to be recognized by the woman who had desperately but vainly striven against her fate, and who

would guiltily, as I think, have brought children into the world to suffer, perhaps more fearfully even, that curse which had so darkened her own life. She succumbed to an illness contracted that night when she made her brief escape.

Davenport took his trouble to Ursula, and came out of his wild fever-fit, which might not have lasted even had his wife lived—came back a wearied wanderer, back to the pure, serene, restful nature of his first true love. And when, two years after the death of Rose, he asked Ursula if she could forgive the past and accept a heart which was now wholly hers, and be at once the glory and the blessing of his life, a warmer light than ever came into her clear eyes, and a soft rose colour stole into her cheeks. Her voice was low, and it trembled a little as she answered :

“ Are you sure that you'll know your own mind this time ? ”

“ Ursula,” he said, and their eyes met.

## A LETTER TO EVA.

—:0:—

NOW that you have left my life as one leaves a house in a strange land to which there shall be no return ; now that I move on alone in the darkness, the coldness and desolation of my days, only one thing holds any hope of comfort for me, and that is to live over in my memory the only happy days of my life. I think of them ; I dream of them ; and now I have bethought myself to write out a connected account of them, and address it to you, just as if you would one day read it :

Yesterday I walked up to the house where I first met you, on the first of July, five years ago. I saw that the house was to let ; and I got permission to go over it. As I stood in the large empty drawing-rooms, the place was changed for me, as by magic. It was again richly furnished—again brilliant with light, thronged with people. I heard again a clamour of voices, as when I stood that night in the doorway. A hand fell on my arm, and my hostess said :

“Mr. Archer, I want at once to introduce you to a most charming woman, a great admirer of your novels. She has had a romantic story of her own.”

So saying, she piloted me across the crowded rooms, and we stood before you.

“Miss Linton, here is Mr. Archer, I told you I would bring him.”

“I have very often wished to have the pleasure of meeting you,” you said, turning to me, and frankly putting out your hand,



Those were the first words you spoke to me. For the first time I heard my ideal voice—the low, subtle, thrilling, sympathetic voice, with a note in it of tender, pleading music, unlike any other voice that I have ever heard. Did I take in all its beauty that night? Hardly, I think, yet I felt it keenly, and from the first you charmed me.

Oh, fair, gracious face, lit by the fair gracious soul! Oh, perfect, passionate mouth, such as the old Greeks loved—formed for kisses and music! Oh, beautiful, deep, changeful eyes, and white, thoughtful brows, with their crown of soft brown hair—in how short a time they began to come to me in my dreams at night! You know, too, that I thought you had the queenliest figure that ever woman had. No woman ever held herself so proudly or so graciously. There was something in the touch of your white, smooth, small, but withal strong hand, that seemed to speak to me. You wore that night a soft, luminous dress; you had a red rose in your bosom, and a red rose in your hair. I sat down by you and we began to talk. Our talk was about novels, poetry, English and American, and of the places we had visited. When you rose to leave, I went with you to your carriage, and you asked me to come to see you. I had been longing for you to do this. Looking back, now, I see that, though I did not realize it then, I must have been in love with you that night.

I went back to the house after you left, but remained only a few minutes. It seemed so worse than uninteresting when you were gone. All night I lay awake thinking of you, recalling your voice, longing to hear it again.

I turned away yesterday, sadly as one leaves a friend, from that house over whose floors your feet had passed, that had been swept by the hem of your dress, and where I had first seen you. I came back into the heart of London, and walked for some time to and fro in front of that other house you had till so recently occupied, over the threshold of which I had passed so many times. As I walked up and down in the raw air of the November night, hearing the discontented wind sweeping along the leaves that had fallen from the trees in the London square, the pain and loneliness of my life seemed more than I could endure. A boy with a basket stopped in front of the house and rang the servants' bell; a light appeared for a moment at one of the upper windows and then vanished. I should have liked to

kneel down and kiss the dear stone steps which your beloved feet had crossed so many times.

Slowly I turned back then to my chambers to think of you, then finally to find some rest from thought by means of kindly chloral. It will kill me in the end, perhaps, but what matter.

That night I had such a wonderful dream of you. I thought I was walking in a strange, lonely, sunset country, something like country I have seen, but unmistakably dream-country. No one was in sight, but from the tranquil field, and from the patient hill, I heard a sound of many divine voices singing, and I knew they were singing of you, and my heart leaped and thrilled in me, and the song told that you were coming; and just for great delight to think that I should see you again, the tears burst forth and I wept like a child. Then all in a minute you stood before me, your face more beautiful than ever, in the sunset light of that fair dream-country. It seemed to me that you were the queen of it, and when you saw my tears, thinking them tears of sorrow, you threw both your beautiful arms around my neck, and I laid your subtle lips to mine. I felt your clinging close to me. I thought I should have fainted from the joy of it; instead, I awoke—oh, the bitter awakening that it was!

The day I next saw you after the first meeting was the 5th of July, the day on which you told me I might call. It was a brilliantly fine day, too intense for most people, but not so for me. Besides, your drawing-room, with its tempered sweetness, its flowers, its delicate tints, was a heaven of shade. Not as I saw you on one day only do you appear to me in memory, but as I have seen you on many days. Still, visions of you, as I saw you on certain special days, beset me specially, and very often I see you as I saw you that day. Your soft dress was veined with blue; you looked a divine blending of heaven and earth—you might have been a saint to die for; you were a woman to live for. I remember the tone of voice in which you said, "I am very glad to see you." Just as if really you *were* a little glad. Then, of course, we fell to talking of what a hot day it was, and from that of people who like compromises with nature as with all things. I said I was always in extremes; but, all the same, a great believer in compromise; and you laughed, a little, a half-perplexed laugh, and said that you believed only in things that were absolute. You seemed to draw me on to talk of my,

self, which, as I told you at the time, is not a favourite subject with me. Before I left you, you knew, I think, the lonely, reserved man I was—made cruelly lonely by a nature utterly insufficient for itself, yet not finding in any companionship that for which it sought, for which it still craved ceaselessly.

When I rose to leave you I saw tender sympathy for me in your then grey and so compassionate eyes, heard sympathy in the tones of your voice, felt sympathy in the touch of your fair, firm hand. I went to the club that night, but did not hear what any one said, so lost was I in trying to recall the way in which you spoke. I fell asleep and awoke early, my heart flooded with the thought of you. This interest which I had in you—I, who until then, had been interested in no one—seemed to remake life; for when I looked back on the internal loneliness of the days before I knew you, I wondered how I ever could have borne them.

That day I made some pretext on which to write to you. Two days after I called upon you, in the evening, as you had told me I might. It was a hot, windless evening, with a storm brooding. You received me very kindly, and we sat for a happy hour in the twilight. Presently you said :

“Is there no chance of cure for your loneliness?” and I answered : “A week ago I should have said no such chance could be. Now I say there is ; it rests with you.”

“With me?”

“Yes, with you ; will you be my friend? Will you let me be yours?”

“I think *I* need a friend as much as you do,” you answered, with a little sigh. Then, with one of those dear impulses, which were so adorable in you, you put out both hands, and I took them, and held them in mine for a minute.

When did the feeling first burn home to me that what I felt for you was love—love in the sense of being in love—not the friendship I had imagined? I could not keep away from you; could not keep from writing to you. In one letter, I remember, I asked you to explain me to myself. Here I have your answer—the handwriting is faded with time, that beautiful handwriting, which, like everything about you, had on it the impress of your own gracious individuality. Oh, dear letter, once warm from your own hand; a letter in which I almost seem to hear you speak. You say :

“DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter, half-sad, half-glad, came to me this morning with many others. I turned at once to yours. You ask me to explain yourself to yourself—to tell you why it is that while you are glad in my friendship—gladder, you are good enough to say, than of anything else in your life—you are yet so restless at times, even so despairing.

“As a rule, no woman is more stupid at explanations than am I; but I think this is a problem that I can solve. By your own account, when you met me you were a lonely, reserved, self-contained man, never having known a real friendship. You say that your friendship with me made you, for the first time in your life, *live*. I have made a new world for you, you tell me—given a meaning to the summer it has never had before.

“My friend, a sudden friendship stimulated you thus; but you see now, don't you, that it is not by any means all you thought it would be? Hence your restlessness; hence your despair; but I, your new friend, am hopeful for you. Your power to feel so much shows me a capability of feeling still more. It has been my good fortune in life, when I never thought to be of any more good at all, to rouse you from lethargy, to plant in you some knowledge of what life may be made. Am I a little sorry to think that another friend must complete what I have only begun? Perhaps I am—I know I am—selfish. I suppose I should have liked this friendship, which came to you so unexpectedly, to have been the completest of your life; but I will try to be glad of what is best for you.

“Will you come to-morrow, and talk over with me the plot of your new novel? I want this, your next book, to be very much alive. I half feel as if the sun of our friendship were setting. Come to-morrow, and tell me that it is not quite sundown yet—it often turns so very chilly in the twilight.

“Your friend,

“EVA.”

The next day I reproached you with your letter, which all the same, had been so dear to me, as evidence that you did value my friendship. Your face brightened when I told you that never another such friendship could come to me.

“I am glad that, at least, you think so now,” you said, in a tone that was as sweet almost and as subtle as a caress. I passed the evening with you. You did not know then, my



Eva, how I longed to kneel down by you—to kiss your lips, your hands, your dress, the heavy gold locket hanging at your white, wonderful throat. And I had to sit at a little distance from you, and dared not even reach out and take your hand. You were gay the early part of that evening. Talking of an acquaintance of ours, supposed by most women to be very dangerous to men's peace of mind, you said :

“ She is a bright, noisy little brooklet of a woman—pretty to look at, but too shallow to drown in.”

Do you, at this date, remember describing to me a sunset you had seen once on the coast of France—a wonderful opal sunset, in whose strange light shore and sea seemed translated ?

“ It was a sunset that hushed you,” you said. “ It seemed like the glorified ghost of a sunset.”

I have seen in your eyes, my love, when talking of anything that greatly moved you, a look of passionate inspiration, as if they saw deep into the mystery of things. In your voice, too, at such times, was a rapture I knew well, which corresponded to that look which I have seen in no eyes but yours, as I have heard that subtle, thrilling tone only in your voice.

As the evening wore on you fell sad ; thus, sometimes, after a day of brilliant sunshine and perfect stillness, just at sunset a sad little wind begins to moan among the trees, and the sky grows gray and hopeless. So seemed to me the change in you ; nor was it the first time I had noted this sudden transition. Do you remember my asking you why you were so sad ? You answered :

“ How do you know I am sad ? Have I said so ? ”

Then I did take your hand, and I said : “ Eva, could we be the friends we are, and I not know, without your telling me, when you are sad ? Will you not tell me what makes you so ? ” Oh, my God, how I longed then to draw you close to my heart, and kiss all shadow of trouble from your face ; to banish all trouble from your heart !

“ What are you thinking of ? ” I asked.

You answered, looking down, “ Of something that is over. I will try not to be sad when you are here. Indeed, I ought not, remembering how cold and lonely I should be now without your friendship.”

Soon after it was time for me to go, but all that night I could not sleep, so haunted was I by your sad yearning, pleading,



almost hopeless eyes ; by your low voice, which had in it that pathetic elemental music, that soft, rainy trouble, which we hear in the summer wind that comes before the rain.

“ What is her trouble ? ” I pondered as I lay awake that night, and owned at last to myself that I loved you madly—that if by dying for you I could make you happy, I would so gladly die.

You may remember my calling on you the next afternoon. You were going for a walk, and you let me go with you. Your very sad mood of the past night seemed to have passed away. You were gay—gay in your own bright way.

Oh, love of my life, who shall say what it was that most of all in you enthralled me—the wonderful voice, changing with every emotion as the beautiful eyes changed, or the delicate imagination, that divine sense of ideality which contrasted with your strength of will, your power to conceive rapidly and execute surely, and made you not only a beauty and a refuge in the world, but a positive good ? or was it for that exquisite, unnamable fragrance of womanhood which escaped from you—the rose-scent from a rose ? or was it for your moods of sweet waywardness, like the shadows of April trees shaking in the sunny, windy course of a rapid brooklet ? or was it for your sadness, which sounded in me unknown depths of pity ? Oh, my poet ! oh, my busy, kindly worker ! I loved each separate charm of yours ten hundred times more than the most passionate lover ever loved the whole united force of his mistress’ attractions. You were, even in those days, what you are now, what you must always remain to me—my beautiful wonder of women. It was the fifteenth of August when I left England for Rocherville, on the coast of Normandy, where you were to follow in a few days, with a party of friends. You thought it best that I should go first, and I obeyed you. We passed the evening of the fourteenth together. I wonder if you remember it at all ? You were sad and said you should miss me. I asked you to write to me, and you smiled as if pleased, and answered, “ I don’t think the sun of our friendship has begun to set as yet.”

I remember how a street piano played under your window. It was playing the “ Carnival de Venice.” Whenever I hear that tune now it brings back to me your drawing-room in the twilight ; yourself lying on the sofa—for you were tired that night—while I sat close by, worshipping you, yet not daring to

tell you of the great love which was making me afraid of myself.

Do you remember telling me to talk, and calling me stupid? You did not know then that I could not talk because I was so full of grief at parting from you, even for a few days. Oh, did not the shadow of that parting forecast this greater shadow, which is even as the shadow of death?

Shall I ever forget the twentieth of August? I did not expect you until the twenty-sixth. I had been roving all day about the shore, thinking of you and longing for you, when, coming back, about nine o'clock, passing the window of the hotel, I saw you sitting there, your dear eyes bent down, the lamplight shining on your warm brown hair. I entered without your having seen me, and in another moment we stood face to face.

"I have been wondering where we should meet,"—those were your first words. "You are surprised to see me before my time. It was the sudden arrangements of my friends. They found they could leave London earlier than they had hoped."

"Heaven bless your friends!" I said, as I pressed your hand close in mine.

Then we joined your party, and sat all together on the beach. Oh, the joy of that night—the supreme comfort of knowing you were with me. Unseen by the others, you let your hand rest in mine. All that night I could not sleep for thinking of you. To the immaculate moonlight and the everlasting sea I told my love. Whichever way I looked I seemed to see you before me, as I had seen you so unexpectedly in the *salon* of the hotel, the lamplight falling on your soft brown hair, the face bent down, the dear eyes never meeting mine.

How I must always love Rocherville for the sake of the days that followed? For a week you seemed lest sad; but after that the old pensive moods came back very frequently, until there arrived that never-to-be-forgotten seventh of September.

It was a bright, gusty day, and we were walking along the high road when heavy raindrops began to come down, so we took shelter under some trees. The ground was carpeted with leaves, and on them we sat down. I came nearer to you than I had ever dared to do before. Then my love could no longer be kept under. I flung my arms about you, and you did not move from me. My lips clung to your neck; just then we heard voices of people we knew approaching, and, rising, we were on

the instant once more only friends. I did not see you alone again until evening ; we had been visiting your friends, the Stones, you may remember, and it was my good fortune to see you back to your hotel. Do you, I wonder, remember the brilliant moonlight of that night, and the high west wind bringing to us, as we walked, the sound and the smell of the sea ? We walked on until we came to the beach, and there we sat down together. Then, for the first time, I kissed your lips and felt your kiss answering mine ; then I lay with my head in your lap, while you leaned above me and your fingers played in my hair. The white waves, exulting in their strength, shimmering in the pure, potent moonlight, filling the spacious night with their own wild, matchless music, will be for ever associated in my mind with the memory of that night.

The next day I called to see you at your hotel—a wild, windy day it was, with occasional bursts of rain ! A bitter day for me, my love, that dead day was.

I found you restless and sad, pacing up and down the room. When I went to kiss you, you drew back, and I hear again the tone, half of pity and half of terror, in which you said, as you shrank from me: “No, you must not ; I have wronged you enough already. You must hear me !” Then you sat down, clasped your cold hands closely together, and told me about yourself and Frank Leinster. Then I heard that the man you loved, whose wife you had promised to be, had, without one word of explanation, left you ; that he had last been seen on his way to France, in the companionship of a woman about whom report did not speak too favourably ; that notwithstanding this, you had for five years cherished the belief that he would, in the end, return to you, as the only woman he could ever really love, as he was the one man that you could ever really love. All this you told me ; and told me how, the day before, you had been for a few hours betrayed into thinking that you would give up all hope of a future with him and draw from my love what happiness you could ; but that, alas, this could not be ! “Some day,” you said, “ I feel certain he will return ; for were we not made for one another ? And then, dear, if you were my husband, what could we do ? Would you not even suffer more than we ? Can you forgive me for having given you false hopes ?”

Did I not forgive you, Eva ? You let me kneel beside you and kiss your hands. Then, just as a child might, you leaned

your head on my shoulder and the tears came ; and so full of pity was I then, my darling, I hardly felt my own suffering. I realized how terrible must have been those long years of vain waiting ; how day after day hope would rise, only to fall stricken at night, when no word came from him ; and still, after all, hope was not dead. Then I asked you to let me be your friend, one always longing to do your will ; and if, I said, "in the course of many years he should not have come, or you should hear of his marriage, then perhaps you will be mine, though you can never love me as you loved him."

You answered, with a faint smile through your tears : "What ! do you think you shall love me like this when I am old, as I should be then ? I am not a young woman, even now."

"To me," I cried, "you must always be the same. You will let me be your friend, then ?" I pleaded. And you answered, earnestly pressing my hands :

"Yes, my very, very dearest friend in all the world."

At the end of September you left Normandy, and shortly after I followed. I came back to town to find vast masses of work awaiting me. I wrote hard through the gray, hopeless days ; then how good it was to come to you in the evening ! What rest, what joy I found in you, my pure of heart ! Of course, seeing us so much together people began to talk, to wonder why we did not marry ; but we cared little what they said. You were the whole world to me, and you felt me nearer to you than any but that *one*.

As I write to you, here in my dreary room, this gloomy November night, I have your picture before me and a packet of your letters. As I turn them over, what a fragrance seems to escape from them ! Here is one dated the sixth of December. You write :

"DEAREST FRIEND,—I have to pass this evening with an old school friend. I shall greatly miss seeing you. Moreover, I am very sad to-day. God bless you, my friend, for all your tenderness to me and patience with me ; but, dear, I want to write to you what I can better write than say. It is that I feel I am doing you a wrong in letting you devote yourself to me as you do. I feel still that *he* will come back to me ; but, if he does not, could I, even after many years, marry any one else ? I am shadowing your life with the sorrow of mine. I am sad.



This cruel waiting has worn my health away. You think me pretty now—in a little while you will not think me so. You must try to see less of me—must try to take interest in some woman happier and younger than I am. I shall be lonely when I see you less often ; but I shall know that it is best for you. As tired children long to go to bed and sleep, so it seems to me that I long to be out of the pain of living. I think sometimes that *will be* before very long.

“ Because you are not coming to me this evening, do not pass the time in working. You looked ill yesterday. We shall miss each other I know, but I know, too, that it is for the best.”

Did you not know, my love, that I would not, could not, keep away from you? Do you remember how sometimes we would sit together quite silently through the long winter twilights, seeing visions in the fire? I can hear your voice come softly through the twilight, “ Are you tired, dear?” Tired ! was I ever tired in your presence ?

To me that winter passed like a troubled yet happy dream. To love you had been the supreme revelation of my life. I had before been, as it were, my own prison-house. It was you who broke down the bars—you who led me out into God’s light—you who made me know the divine possibilities of life. Had I not reason to worship you, my heart’s queen ?

Do you remember that April day when we took our first spring drive together? You were gay that day, my poor darling—in one of your glad, childlike moods. To me you would always remain young. It was the day that we went over Hampton Court together. A few days ago I went there by myself. Along the paths I seemed to see flutter again the hem of your dress. In the palace I seemed to have a vision of you standing before a favourite picture. I got strangely in people’s way, I know, being blind to all but that vision of you.

When the third year of our friendship had passed, and still he came not, stronger than you knew grew in me the divine hope of making you my wife. Yet I reproached myself for being glad, knowing how you pined for him—for that other man. Did I think that my love might, in the end, come to make you love me more? Perhaps I did. You never, I think, really understood just how well I loved you. Yet that I loved you



well, you did certainly know. Sometimes you would say, so piteously, with that sad look in your eyes :

“ No one, I think, will ever be as good to me as you are. It is not often that a man loves a woman as you love me.”

Ah ! but when before had there been such a woman to love ?

You can hardly forget the first of May, 1871. I had sat up all the past night working, and came to you to be rested and refreshed. I was strangely alive, as people often are for a while, when they have been sitting up through the night. What a spring day that was—a haze of heat hung in the windless air ! It was a day when sounds could be heard with wonderful distinctness. Long after he had passed the house we could hear a man, with a barrow, crying, “ Fine flowers, fine flowers—all a-blowing, all a-growing ! ” and you said the sound lingered in the air as if it had not strength enough wholly to pass away. Your rooms that day were fragrant with blossoms. You wore a soft, blue, clinging dress, such as I loved.

Do you remember how, before I could prevent, you came and knelt down by me, and said, laying your dear, cool hands on mine : “ I have been thinking of many things. I am not happy as things are. Dear, if I give you all that I can—all that has been saved out of my existence—do you still care to make me your wife ? ”

You know what answer I made—with what rapture I folded you to my heart, to be at last my very own. How happy I meant to make you ! Ah, that was my life’s crowning day !

We arranged the marriage for early in October. Yet, my love, I knew even in those days that though you took the shelter of my love, and longed to make me happy, you still remembered that other man. Often I saw that your gaiety was forced ; I saw, as it were, the tears quivering behind the smile. When we were silent there would come into your eyes a strange, far-away look, and at such times I knew that your thoughts were with him. Was I pained ? Was I not proud to be anything to you ? Had you loved me as I loved you I could not have suffered for you. I did not hint to you that I knew how often your heart was far away from me, and you were grateful, I know, for my silence. As the days went on your health failed more and more. It was the last day of July that you went, for change of air, to visit a relative at Dover. Dover is

dear to me, for your sake, ever since, yet sad withal now as a graveyard, where the heart's beloved are buried.

Were you wasting away? Were you going to die? The cold drops stood on my forehead at the thought. I remember how, one day when I had gone out, thinking to take a long walk to induce sleep at night, these fears so possessed me that I turned straight back, and, entering the room where you were, found you lying on the sofa, and crying softly to yourself; only because you were weak, you said, drawing my face down to yours—your dear face, wet with tears. It was that day that I persuaded you to go to Dover, where I soon followed you, arranging to go up to town once a fortnight for consultation with my publishers regarding some works then in progress. What strange, sweet, sad months were those of August and September. We were to be married the second of October. The sea air seemed not to do you the good it ought. Should I lose you before you had ever been really mine? I suppose it was good for me that I had to work. I used to hurry through the mornings feverishly, and then go to you. How sweet you always were—sad as death, I used to think sometimes, but sweet as the after-peace of heaven! One day I could bear it no longer. I knelt down beside you, and I cried out:

“Eva, *is* my love killing you? For God's sake, tell me the truth.”

Oh, how sad your voice was when you answered me! and it seemed to come like a whisper from some far place beyond my reach. You said:

“No, dear, no! It will save me if anything can.” And then you said, over again, still more faintly, “*if anything can,*” and you put out your hands to me, and I saw how the bracelets fell back from the little, wasted, blue-veined wrists, and realized more than ever what a mere shadow of your former self you were. But I thought no more of giving you up. You had said that my love could save you if anything could, and I clung to that. Of what use was I in the world *but* to save you—to help you—even if to do so had been to break my own heart? I looked forward with a feverish, unreasonable hope to our marriage. I thought, vainly perhaps, and foolishly, that when I could take you into a new life, and amidst new scenes fill up your time with new interests, you would forget at last—*you*, with your passionate, faithful heart!

I remember — God pity me, how well I remember! — the thirtieth day of that September! I spent the whole day with you. I was going to London early the next morning, to make the last arrangements for our marriage, then so nigh. I gave myself, that day, a long holiday with you. I thought you seemed a little better. I read to you in the morning, while you lay upon the sofa, some poems that we both loved. “The Haystack in the Floods” was among them, and your eyes kindled at that with something of their old fire. In the afternoon I drove you myself for miles along the sea, and we listened to it, throbbing its heart out against the shore, as you said. Then, when the tide began to ebb, and a low wind, sad with prophecy, arose, I took you home.

That night when I bade you good-bye I held you close in my arms—I, your lover, so soon to be your husband. I kissed your dear, consenting lips; but all the time the far-away look never left your eyes, and a pang pierced me, for I felt that some presence I could not see came between you and my kisses. And yet what a *good* night that was, if I had only known!

The next morning I went up to town; and, first of all, I went to leave some copy at my publishers. There quite a packet of letters was handed to me, and the first one I looked at gave me a sensation something as if I had seen a ghost. It was the very peculiar, unforgettable handwriting of a man who had been my closest friend at Oxford, yet of whom I had lost sight utterly, since, a year or two after our university days were over, he had gone to America for his health. I do not believe much in presentiments, but there was something in the very touch of that letter which gave me a cold chill. I opened it, and this was what I read:

“MY DEAR ARCHER: I have long lost you from sight, though not from memory; but I will not stop to fill up the gaps now, except so far as is necessary to what I have to say. I pretty well recovered my health in America, studied medicine, and have got on well. Last spring I found myself getting run down again, and I put my practice in the hands of a friend, and came abroad for the summer. I have spent the last two months in Paris, and here I have formed an intimacy with a French physician, who asked me, three days ago, to go with him to the hospital to see a very interesting patient, a countryman of my

own, just released from long incarceration in a French prison. I went with a languid sort of interest, and found—is not truth always stranger than fiction?—Frank Leinster, a friend of long ago, of whom, however, you will never have heard me speak, as we met first on the steamer that carried me to America, whither he was bound for a pleasure trip. I was very ill during the voyage, and he nursed me like a brother, and with that our intimacy began. When he returned to England we corresponded for a time, but a little more than eight years ago sudden silence on his part fell between us, and I have never heard of him since till I found him, three days ago, lying more dead than alive on a pallet in a French hospital. Since then I have learned his story.

“He was always a half-mad Republican in theory, and at one time he got himself naturalized as a French citizen, and joined a secret communistic or socialistic association, binding himself by all sorts of oaths to obey, on the instant, the orders of his superiors. At the time of his mysterious disappearance he was suddenly summoned to Paris. He went in company with a Madame Vautrin, a fellow-conspirator, summoned at the same time with himself. No sooner had he reached Paris than he was betrayed by a spy who had been set to watch his movements, and thrown into prison. He was only released six days ago.

“Figure to yourself what those eight years would have been to any man. They were something worse to him. He was engaged to a woman whom he adored. Her name was Eva Linton. When he started at an hour’s notice for France he meant to write to her the moment of his arrival, but he was arrested before he had even reached his hotel. For eight years she has had every reason to believe him faithless. She is married, very likely—or dead, perhaps—who knows? But he judges her by himself, and clings to some wild hope that she has trusted in him through all, and waited for him. ‘They seem to think I’m booked for death,’ he said, when he told me the story, ‘but, Grey, you must find her first.’

“He told me that she was living, when he left England, with an aunt at 10, York Road, South Kensington. I at once telegraphed, and found that neither Miss Linton nor her aunt had been heard of there for more than five years. I can see that to find her is the one hope for saving my friend’s life. His anxiety



about her is consuming him, as the swift flame burns the oil in a lamp. I am not willing to leave him. I will only do so as a last resort. In this extremity I bethink myself of you. I know your old passion for ferreting out mysteries—I used to tell you you ought to be a police detective. I fancy it was this turn of mind that made you a novelist. You know London, and the ways of London. I can reach you, no doubt, through your publishers. My appeal to you is a forlorn hope; but I know you will spare no pains to help me, were it only for the old time's sake.

“ Yours faithfully,  
“ JOHN GREY.”

I suppose men do not usually faint or cry out when the ninth wave strikes them; at any rate, I did not. I read this letter through as quietly as if it had been on some ordinary matter of business. Then I folded it deliberately and put it into my pocket, and spoke a few civil words to the man who had handed it to me, and went out into the street. There was no more to be done about my marriage. Not for one moment did I doubt what that letter meant in my life; and in the midst of my keenest anguish I thanked God that it had not come too late. I wandered about the streets, I know not how long; but I took the afternoon train to Dover, by which I reached there a little before seven o'clock. How it rained all the way down! When we stopped the howling wind drove the rain in volleys against the carriage. All the way I was trying to realize what life would be, now I had lost you.

I shall never forget shivering through the streets that first of October to your friend's house at the East Cliff. When at length I came level with the sea, and heard its dull, heavy waves, dark as night, breaking on the beach, it seemed to me that sea was not more dreary than my life, without you, must henceforth be. Then bitter remorse of heart took hold on me that I could be so unhappy when I had the supreme blessedness of bringing back to your life that light and joy which you had thought lost for ever.

You knew my knock at the hall-door, and came to open it yourself.

“ My poor wet darling,” you said; “ what a night it is ! ” Then you put both arms round my neck and raised your lips to



be kissed, and drew me into the dining-room, where all things looked so warm and bright. I thought that dinner would never come to an end ; but it was over at last, and then we went together into the little sitting-room at the end of the drawing-room, which had come to be regarded as your own, and seemed pervaded by the sweetness and potency of your presence.

Oh, my love, how well I remember everything about that evening ! You wore a dress of silk and velvet that made a soft swish upon the floor as you walked. You had pearls in your ears, and your pearl locket was hanging at your throat. You had never looked lovelier or seemed so at rest since I had known you.

Outside we heard the falling of the rain, the bitter complaining of the wind, and through all the troubled voice of the sea. I remember just how you turned shivering to the fire, and how, kneeling down by it, you leaned your cheek against my hand. Dear, I cannot help lingering over that night. If only you had been in one of your sad moods, that might have given me strength ; but no, you seemed at rest, and of your own accord began talking about our marriage.

“ I am going to try and be just the best wife that ever was,” you said, half playfully, yet earnestly meaning what you said. You went on : “ How happy it will be when we are together all the time. I never seem other than alone now when we are parted. I am quite lost without my dear.”

“ Bless you ! ” I said, under my breath, and then you leaned your dear head on my shoulder.

God knows I take no credit to myself for what I did that night—I could have done nothing else ; but oh, my love, my love, your divine tenderness made it all the harder, for I began to believe that I could have made you happy at the last, even I ; and it hurt—God knows how it hurt—to think I must put you out of my life just when you were beginning to be so fond of me, and go on my dark way alone. You remember questioning me why I was so silent ?—“ Did I love you less ? ”—“ Was I afraid of to-morrow ? ”—“ Should you read to me ? ” And then the warmth of the fire and the silence within soothed you and being very weak withal, you fell asleep there, with your head upon my shoulder, just as confidingly as if you had been already my wife.

I had made up my mind to tell you all at half-past nine, and

just before the half-hour struck you awoke with a start, opened wide your eyes, and said tenderly, as you fixed them on me :

“ I am so very glad to have you back, my dear. I dreamed that you had not returned, and I was most unhappy, and began to think something dreadful must have happened. And I thought what it would be if I should never see you again. I shall not let you go again without me.”

Oh, my love, when I remember that I do think I might have made you happy in the end, but who knows? I said to you these words in answer :

“ Eva, my darling, I *shall* go away from you. You will never see me again ; but you will *not* miss me.”

Can I ever forget the tone of voice in which you said, lifting your head from my shoulder, and with a light I had never seen there before blazing in your eyes, while the blood came and went in your cheeks :

“ You have news for me? Quick ! What is it ? ”

For answer I put John Grey's letter in your hand. When you had read it through I think you forgot my presence for a moment. There was a wonderful light of rapture on your face, and you said, in a voice as low as a prayer, “ Faithful and true through all, faithful and true ! ”

Then I saw a cloud pass over your face and the light fail in your eyes, and I knew that you were thinking of me and of your promise to me, and I made haste to tell you that you were free, quite free—that I knew all must be over between us now ; and you were by no means to be unhappy for me, because your good and your joy *must* be mine. And then, one dear last time, you clung to me and wept—a great flood of healthful, saving tears—for sudden joy is as dangerous as sudden grief.

I offered, I remember, to take you to Paris the next day—the day that was to have been our wedding-day ; but you spared me that. You told me your cousin would take you, and I was thankful. When it was time to go, you told me how good I had been to you, and once more you gave me your lips to kiss.

I walked about long that night in the wind and the rain ; and when I went home and slept at last, I dreamed of you, and that to-morrow was our wedding-day, and we were never more to be parted. Then I woke again to the whole bitter truth, and I heard the clamorous wind and the cry of the empty, hungry sea ; and the rain fell upon the roof as if it were falling upon a

grave, and I knew that my life was dead, but that its ghost would haunt me until I, too, who have outlived my life, shall cease to be.

\* \* \* \* \*

[The writer of the foregoing letter has now been four years dead. I, his friend, have printed it, using other names than the real ones, but making no other change. Its publication will harm no one ; and if some time it should meet *her* eye, it will not be amiss that she should know how well he loved her who loved in vain.]

## HIS TRUST.

—:0:—

WHEN Mr. Tom Rainger, who described himself as a travelling photographic artist, was not on the road, he lived absolutely alone, in an humble cottage on a wide patch of land, adjoining Thornton Common, a high, wide stretch of grassy ground, and a place much resorted to in the summer.

The village of Thornton, from which the common took its name, was seven miles from the nearest country town. It was a meek little village with an old-fashioned parsonage, an unpretending church, a school-house, a forge, and a public-house called the Three Jolly Boys.

To return to Mr. Rainger—when he was not at home he lived on wheels; that is to say, he journeyed round the country in a kind of cart-house. He travelled mostly in the winter, finding through the warm weather no stint of people in Thornton willing to pay from a sixpence to a shilling to see their faces reproduced by the artist's glass. Besides being an artist, our friend was a musician. He really played the violin skilfully, and between fiddling and photographing he got on quite well.

At the time of which I am writing he was a middle-aged man, strongly built, and rather short of stature. His weather-face had on it a look of weariness, and also of resolution. Other things than the sun and the wind had had their will with that face. A life's tragedy had scarred it deeper than ever the elements could. His scant hair was iron gray. Tom Rainger was

not popular in the village. He would sit for hours at the Three Jolly Boys, smoking and speaking to no man. When he did talk there was something overbearing and aggressive in his manner. He never went to church, but he might often be seen coming out of the churchyard, where, under grass and flowers, lay what had once been "the desire of his eyes"—his friend, his companion, his good angel, his wife.

"It was the loss of her," said the landlady of the Three Jolly Boys, "that turned him sour, as thunder turns milk sour."

After five years of happiness, her fresh gay voice, the blue light of her eyes, and the light gold of her hair, and all the dear caressing ways, she had gone out of his life and left him, as we have seen, a soured man.

One midsummer's eve, a time to become memorable henceforth in Mr. Rainger's life, that gentleman sat in the bar-parlour of the Three Jolly Boys. It was a club night, and having for the benefit of the Jolly Boys performed twice on his violin, he put the instrument away, and shouldering his case, and with his pipe set fast between his teeth, passed from the mixed fumes of tobacco and spirits into the clear, moonlit night. The Jolly Boys were hard at it when he left them, but the sound of their jollity was soon behind him; the common was about a mile from the village.

It was a warm, luminous night. Every leaf and every twig of every tree was distinctly visible, such a power of moonlight was on everything. A note faltered through the warm, compassionate stillness. Then from a clump of trees a nightingale began singing.

There were hot tears in Rainger's eyes as he walked along. It seemed to him as if the moonlight, the warm air, the singing bird, had some message from his dead wife—a message which he could not interpret. Ah, with what a passion of worship he thought of her!

When he reached the cottage, instead of entering it, he passed on to the common, where moonlight and unbroken stillness reigned. Standing there, it came to him to take out his violin and to begin playing with all the expression of which he was capable, and he had no small measure, "The Last Rose of Summer." It was one of the airs his wife liked best to hear him play. Under his hand, which then seemed to acquire the very master's touch, the music rose, and quivered and floated



far away. He wondered if beyond the moonlight she heard it. All his heart was intent on this, when he heard a sound which made him start. It was the sound of feet hurrying as if one were running a race for life. In another second or two, with a low cry, something caught his hand and dropped at his feet ; then a girl's voice said, in a whisper of terror :

"Save me ! hide me ! they will find me if you don't ! They are following me, I know !"

Rainger raised the girl, and, acting on impulse, led her to his cottage. As they walked along, she said :

"As I was running I heard you calling me. That was you, wasn't it ?"

"It was my music you heard," he answered.

"Your music ?" she repeated, simply. "I don't know what that is."

Just then they reached the humble cottage, with its wholesome garden of sweet-smelling flowers. Rainger struck a light, then he turned and looked at his companion. He started back with an involuntary cry ; for, in the girl fronting him, he seemed to see his wife again—the same shape of face, the same light of gold hair, the same soft, blue eyes, only in these there was a strange pleading, questioning look—a look which seemed to say : "Where am I ? Oh, save me !"

He came near, and his hand fell on her shoulder. He started again, for the shoulder he touched felt warm and wet. He looked down and saw that blood was soaking through her thin dress.

"They beat me so," she said, "that I ran away to-night."

"Who beat you ?" he asked.

"I don't know ; but they did beat me, and made the blood come."

Then the whole truth flashed upon Rainger. About five miles off was an asylum, and the girl to whom he was talking was an escaped patient.

"You won't let them take me from you, will you ?" said the poor thing, grasping his hand with painful earnestness.

Again his wife seemed to be looking at him out of those eyes. His wife's voice seemed to whisper through the room : "You must keep her, and be a father to her, for my sake."

"What is your name ?" he asked.

"Kate."

“ I will never let them take you from me, Kate ; but you must always do what I tell you ; if you don't they will find you and take you away.

“ And beat me again ? ”

“ Yes, worse than ever.”

Then he looked at the poor mangled body and dressed the wounds. I am writing of a time, happily past now, when the unfortunate inmates of lunatic asylums underwent horrors which it now sickens one to think of.

He made Kate lie down upon his bed, and then casting himself on the floor, fell into a broken, uneasy sleep. Finally, when the dawn had well come, and birds were talkative, he rose and went to look at his charge ; she was sleeping as peacefully as a child, one hand half hidden in her long gold hair.

Mr. Rainger felt that something very precious and very beautiful had come to him, but what was he to do with it ? Fortunately there was one person in the village who loved and trusted him, and whom he in return also loved and trusted. This person was not beautiful to look at, and also she was old. Her name was Martha. He resolved to take her into his confidence. She had nursed his wife through her long and fatal illness, and had been his friend ever since. Unwilling himself to leave the house, as soon as it was light he sent one of the boys of the village to Martha, asking her to come to him at once. She complied with his request, and while Kate continued to sleep, Rainger and Mrs. Wakefield talked of what was to be done. One thing was clear, that, if possible, Kate's presence in the cottage must be kept a secret. Mrs. Wakefield would send in some fresh clothes for the poor girl, and when night came Rainger would take those which she now wore, and which seemed to him a badge of the asylum, and bury them in some wonderful caves close at hand, holding in their depths miles of night and of darkness. When Kate awoke, Martha went to her, washed and dressed her, and shuddered over her poor, wounded body. When she was dressed she was brought to see Rainger. She bade him good-morning, and put up her face to be kissed.

As a rule Rainger prepared his own breakfast ; to-day Mrs. Wakefield saved him that trouble. Kate's was taken to her in an inner room, lest any of the neighbours should catch sight of her in their passing by.

It was little work that Rainger got through that day, so occupied was he in studying his charge. Mrs. Wakefield had lent her a picture-book, which seemed to delight her. Once in the course of that day, when she was alone with Mrs. Wakefield, she said, fixing her eyes intently on that good woman, and speaking in a tone which, in its intensity, corresponded to the look in her eyes: "Where's Tom?"

She had heard Mrs. Wakefield call him by his Christian name.

"Do you want Tom, my pretty," answered the widow.

"Yes, I want Tom," replied the girl, dreamily. Then she fell to looking at her hands, as if they had suddenly grown strange to her.

Mrs. Wakefield went for Rainger, who was not far off. The girl threw her arms about his neck, buried her face on his shoulder and sobbed and laughed by turns. Then she asked for the music, so he got his violin and played to her. As he played, it seemed as if her poor spirit, wandering in lands lit by dubious lights, echoing with unjoyful laughter and sad singing, haunted by shapes terrible and indescribable, was striving desperately and vainly to grope its way back to the land of reason and reality. What could there be to apprehend in her? She seemed strangely gentle. Her voice was very low, and had in it a subtle inner music which went right to the hearer's heart.

I cannot set forth in words the passion of tenderness with which Rainger thought of his new charge. When he was on the common he left her locked up in the house with doll or picture-book. So passed a couple of months.

One cold, wet, windy August night, a night when nature seemed shudderingly to realize the impending desolation of the end, Rainger lay asleep in the room adjoining the one occupied by Kate. He was a sound sleeper. Suddenly, however, he was awakened by some one shaking him violently. He started up to see Kate standing by his side. She carried a light in her hand, and her gold hair was all unbound. There was a look in her keen eyes that he had not seen there before—a look of protest and infinite horror; the look of an animal about to undergo some torture from which it knows there is no escape.

"What are you doing, Kate?" he asked; "has anything frightened you?"

She placed the light on the table and her fingers began working in one another. Then she said, in a tone of voice scarcely louder than a whisper :

“ I am going to scream.”

She had scarcely uttered the words when she flung back her head and stretched out her hands, while from her lips there broke a shriek so terrible, so unearthly, as to make the blood of any one who heard it turn cold. It was a cry which seemed to rend the senses of hearing. It was so wild, so unlike anything ever heard before, that it suggested some new agony of body and soul—a fresh discovery in the realms of torture.

Fortunately there was no cottage within a mile of Rainger's. He came near her, but she sprang at him like a wild thing, her eyes flashing, her lips drawn back and showing her gleaming teeth. At length breath failing, she fell to the ground, where she lay cowering as if she expected every moment to feel the stroke of a rod. It was clear that she was liable to these terrible and dangerous outbreaks of insanity. Before morning she was taken with another wild fit of screaming, after which she grew strangely quiet, and then fell asleep.

When she awoke she was again the gentle, trusting, childlike Kate.

“ What if such a fit should take her in the daytime ? ” thought Rainger, and he shuddered.

Every day she seemed to cling more and more to her protector, whom only she and the old woman loved.

Often, for long hours together, he would hold her slight form clasped against his heart, as if she had been his child, her bright head leaning upon his shoulder. He told her fairy tales and simple rhymes, of which she liked the sound ; but most of all she delighted in hearing him play. He was seen less and less at the Three Jolly Boys, and became still more unpopular. Then people grew curious to know how and where he spent his evenings.

One evening a man stole to his cottage door. It was closed, but the man thought he could hear Rainger talking to himself ; he was telling Kate a story.

For four months the patient search had been made for the escaped mad girl, but with no good result. It often happens that when we have searched long and diligently for some object, and have at last given it up as lost for ever, we

come upon it by accident when there is no thought of it in our minds.

So chanced it with Dr. Prince, a shrewd, hard, implacable-looking man. He had quite given up the hope of finding his escaped patient, when fate led him to the very place where she was. The doctor, who enjoyed bodily exercise, was returning on foot one evening to the asylum. His way lay over the common. He had counted on a moonlight walk, but instead of moonlight, a fog fell over everything—a fog, too, that wetted one like rain. Doctor Prince was perplexed to know what course he should take, when to the left of him he spied a gleam of light, which proceeded from Rainger's cottage. The doctor gave thanks for it, and pushing open the gate, stood in the little garden, which, because of the season, smelt then only of decay. "A pest on these November fogs," thought the doctor, before rapping at the door. Then he stood there arrested by what he heard from within, though what he heard was simply a man's voice saying :

"Well, when the good fairy saw how sad little Alice was, with no books, no pretty pictures, no nice dresses, and no dolls——"

Then a girl's voice, questioningly : "Didn't she have any dolls?"

Then the man again : "No; no dolls at all, not one."

Then the girl : "Did she have any music?"

"No; no music, either."

"Then she must have been a very sad little girl!"

"So she was; but let me tell you what the good fairy did."

"It must be she!" ejaculated Doctor Prince. "I should know that voice anywhere. Run to earth at last, my dear."

Without more delay he knocked on the cottage door. The man left off talking, and said "Hush!" in a low tone of voice; then feet moved across the floor and a door shut. Then the door that led from the garden into the sitting-room was opened by Rainger.

"I have lost my way most hopelessly in this horrible fog," began the doctor; "and, catching sight of your friendly light, I thought you might be able to oblige me with the loan of a lantern."

The unsuspecting photographer replied that he should be



happy to supply the desired object ; and, while he was getting it ready, the doctor came in, sat down and made himself at home. There was something in him that Rainger mistrusted and disliked.

“ You live here alone ? ” questioned the new-comer.

No answer.

“ I say, you live here alone.”

“ Yes, I live here alone.”

“ I thought when I came to the door I heard voices.”

Mr. Rainger stopped in preparing the lantern, raised his eyes, fixed them on the stranger's face, and said, insolently it must be owned :

“ Perhaps you did and perhaps you didn't. What business is it of yours whether I speak the truth or not ? ”

“ As it happens,” answered the doctor, “ it is my very special business. I believe—nay, am almost certain—that you have concealed in this house a dangerous and escaped lunatic, for whom the closest search has been made.”

“ That's nonsense ! ” returned the other, brusquely, busying himself with the lantern. “ There is no escaped lunatic here.”

“ I am sorry to doubt your word,” replied the doctor, “ but, really—— ” and as quick as lightning he darted to the door of the adjoining room and opened it. At the same time a shape sprang from it, rushed past him, and, falling at Rainger's feet, implored him wildly to take care of her and not to give her up.

Doctor Prince looked on with a satisfied smile—he had recaptured his victim.

“ It's too late to remove the patient to-night,” he said. “ I will send for her in the morning. I assure you, my friend, she will be well punished for this.” And his cruel eyes gleamed.

“ I'll keep her against the whole gang of you,” answered Rainger, sullenly. “ Have no fear, my darling ; they shall not touch you.”

“ She will be removed as early as possible in the course of to-morrow,” said Dr. Prince, quietly. “ I shall pass to-night at Thornton ; ” and taking up the lantern, he walked out into the night.

Rainger closed the door after him and locked it. Then he sat down and considered what he could do, and Kate crouched beside him, crying from time to time, “ Oh, Tom, save me ! ”

"Yes, my love, yes," he answered, "I will save you still;" but he asked himself, "How?"

At one time he thought of getting out his wandering house and driving her away in it; but what good would that be? They would be followed and soon found. What was there to be done? He had always prided himself on being a man of resource, yet now he seemed resourceless. Presently he got up and went into the garden. A strong, keen wind had sprung up, and had wholly scattered the fog. The cold air was radiant with moonlight.

He walked up and down sorely distracted as to what he should do. Suddenly he stopped in his walk and exclaimed, "Yes, better even that than to give her up to them." He took another turn to and fro; then he went on. Kate was sitting just where he had left her, her face buried in her hands.

"Kate," he said, "I can save you if you will do just what I tell you."

"I will be good," she answered.

Shortly after this a man, powerfully built, though somewhat low in stature, and a slightly made girl might have been seen walking together in the direction of the noted Thornton caves, in which once Druid priests had performed their dread sacrificial rites. The girl carried a violin case, the man carried a lantern and a spade. The two soon reached the mouth of the caves.

"Where are we going?" asked Kate.

"In here, dear," he answered.

She sprang back, saying, "It looks so dark in there, I'm frightened."

"It won't be dark with this," he said, turning up his lantern to the full. "In here you are safe. Here they will never find you."

"Are you quite sure they won't find me?"

"Quite sure; bend your head very low. There, that's it; you can stand up now."

They were in the everlasting night and winter of the Thornton caves. Indeed in that mighty darkness the rays of the lantern seemed just a faint protest of light.

The ground was thickly covered with sand, which rendered their steps noiseless. In parts this sand collected in drifts, forming regular hills.

"I am frightened," she said, beginning to cry, "I want the music."

Giving her the lantern to carry, he took the violin from its case and began playing, and so he drew her on as Orpheus drew his Euridice. The caves are cold and the caves are dark. They stretch for miles, and wind as snakes wind.

At length they reach a remote part. Rainger leaves off playing, and restores the violin to its case.

"Kate, my own darling," he says, drawing her close to him, "I love you, as I should have loved *her* child and mine."

"What are you crying for?" she asks, putting her hands to his eyes, from which, indeed, the tears are falling fast. "I'll be good; don't cry, Tom," and she lays her face caressingly against his.

He draws one arm away and feels for something in his coat—a flash, a sharp report, a whizz of something through the air, a puff of smoke, a cry, a thud on the sand—then absolute silence.

Rainger stood for several minutes without moving; then he took the lantern from the ledge of rock where he had placed it, and, kneeling down by the fallen form, looked closely at the face, and felt pulse and heart. Yes, she was past all earthly detection, all earthly dread. He replaced the heavy old-fashioned pistol in his coat, and using the spade he had brought with him, dug under a projecting slab of rock a rough grave, wherein he reverently laid the fair body.

"God bless you," he said, as he turned away from her he had loved so well. He was at home in these caves, as very few people were, so that he had no trouble in retracing his way to the entrance. Oh! the deserted little cottage to which he returned! Kate's empty bed; Kate's empty chair! Still he said to himself that it had been the only way. He had loved her too well to let her live for suffering worse than many deaths could be.

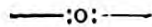
The next day, with a force of keepers, Doctor Prince presented himself at Rainger's cottage.

"I have come to remove my patient," he said.

To which answered Rainger, "She has removed herself; the bird has flown out of the cage. Look long enough and perhaps you will find her."

It was a strange case; but, after all, what evidence could be alleged against Rainger, unpopular as the man was? I, however, think that his *trust was well kept*.

# L I L I A N .



## CHAPTER I.

SOMETIMES I cannot realize that she is lost to me for ever, so strong a sense have I of her personal presence. Often in gray autumn twilight, when all is quiet, and damp mists come floating up from the near-lying river, she seems to come into the room, and to take her accustomed seat in the low chair we called hers, and which still stands in its old place by the fire. Again I seem to see the fire-light playing on her red-gold hair and on the folds of her dress. Or in the daytime, when the winds are loud, I see the hem of her gray dress fluttering away through the trees. On returning to the house I open the door of her own particular sitting-room ; all there is just as she left it, and she—is she not lying on the couch, shaken with the cruel anguish of those last days ? Or in the warm June nights I hear her full sweet voice singing round the garden.

“ Are you going to bed ? Do you know how late it is ? ” I ask.

“ Yes, dear, going in a moment. Only one more song and then good-night, you dear nightingales.”

But she will never again come in and kiss me. The nightingales sing now, but wake no answer save in fancy.

Oh, my Lilie, my bird, my more than child, the beauty and the comfort of my life, surely in some new fair world I shall find you again, shall have you with me through infinite years !

She came to me when my brief summer of romance was over ;

with the beauty of her own she clothed my life anew, my life which now is so bare and unlovely ; but what am I doing talking this way about myself? Only, dear Lord, give back to me my darling some time. Let me believe that we are not parted for ever.

Kate Winslow was my most intimate girl friend. There were many reasons to draw us together. I was an orphan, and lived in the charge of an aunt. Kate had no mother, and her father was a wanderer upon the earth. His story was a romantic one. When he was a young man, seeing life in Paris, he fell in love with a danseuse, who, moreover, sang. What ultimately would have been her fate had she gone on singing and dancing and making eyes at an admiring audience, it is impossible to say. At that time she was new to her life, and as pure as a woman could be. She danced and sang young Winslow's heart away. Altogether the Winslows were a strange family ; the present Winslow's great-grandfather had died by his own hand, and his son had ended his days in a madhouse.

Whatever Arthur Winslow resolved to do, he did quickly, so he married out-of-hand his fascinating danseuse. Fortunately she was unencumbered by relatives, and the old man in whose charge she had been left was glad to have her off his hands. So for a couple of years they wandered about with their marriage still undeclared. At the end of this time old Mr. Winslow died, and his son, who inherited a pleasant little fortune, came back to England, and no longer made a secret of his marriage.

Now when his relatives knew what were his wife's antecedents they with common consent cut both him and her—a proceeding which did not in the very least trouble Mr. Winslow. But when, five years after marriage, his wife died, that did trouble him. Poor, pretty dancing feet, poor, sweet, red, singing mouth, done for ever with all steps and songs. Kate was then four years old. He left her in the care of a most respectable maiden lady, and he himself travelled.

When his daughter was ten the lady with whom she lived received instructions to send her to a thoroughly good boarding school. It was at this school that I first met Kate Winslow. I was her senior by five years. Even at that early age she was the light and animation of the school. As I write I seem to see once again the tall, slight figure, the bright changeful face, the



abundant brown hair, the clear blue eyes full of mischief and mirth. Once again from the past rings out the fresh buoyant voice, the long quivering laugh. She was by far the cleverest of us. We became very great friends. When Kate was thirteen, and I was about leaving school, Mr. Winslow arrived in England. He took a pleasant little house in Kensington, with a large garden running all round. Ah! how many a summer evening have Kate and I passed in that garden. In the midst of it stood a great pink May-tree, and now the smell of May always brings back to me that one friend of my youth.

There was something I liked about Kate's father, though I could never quite understand him. Sometimes he would seem hard and cynical, but in a cold, half-humorous manner, at other times he would read or recite poetry to us, he would come and go unexpectedly, he composed a kind of melancholy music, which had a certain charm of its own. Besides this, he painted pictures, which were perfectly in harmony with his music. He was fond of having artists and musicians at his house.

When she was eighteen, I saw that my Kate was an incorrigible flirt. I don't think I altogether approved of it. I certainly loved her none the less for it.

My aunt's health failing, she was ordered to spend at least half the year out of England. This was a great blow to Kate and me, as it separated us so much. However, we wrote to each other daily. I soon saw, from her letters, that a certain Mr. Bedford was paying her great attention.

"He is an artist," she wrote to me, "only twenty, and with not even a beard." Still I saw she liked him, and the news of their engagement did not surprise me. That year my aunt was taken so ill in France as to be unable to travel, and Kate and I were parted for twelve months. Her letters came to me—very brief and at irregular intervals—and after the first two or three months, they contained no mention of Mr. Bedford.

I shall never forget one certain spring day. My aunt was seriously worse. I was watching by her bed, as she slept a feverish and uneasy sleep, when a long-expected letter from Kate was brought to me. With a sense of misgiving of something being wrong, I opened it and read :

"MY OWN DARLING MARION—

"I can no longer put off confession, though I know you will

be horrified at me. Whatever I say, I can't, even to myself, make it sound well, for really I know he did, poor fellow, care no end about me. I think too I may have been cruel in the matter. I am afraid I *am* cruel with respect to men. Well then, instead of telling him straight out, as I ought to have done, that I had transferred my youthful affections to Colonel Hale (a very different sort of man, I can tell you), I let him come just the same, and find out the agreeable fact for himself. I know it was wicked of me, but his looks, when he would find John here two or three times a week, used nearly to kill me with laughing in the night when I woke up and thought of them. At length, my dear, we came to the point. I thought there would have been a scene, but fortunately no ; he began very gravely. He thought he had seen a change in me. Who was this colonel that I saw so much of? Then I told him everything. I can tell you, my dear, he looked badly. He went quite white. I could not think which he looked the more like doing, cursing or crying. You used to say I should have made a good actress, and I am inclined to agree with you. So, though I felt a wicked smile of satisfaction to see what power I had coming round my mouth, I sternly repressed it, and made myself look as solemn as seven judges. Even you must own that women are curious, and I *did* want so to know just how he felt, so I said to him, in the most compassionate little voice : 'Do you love me so very much, Robert? Don't you think you will get over it very quickly when you don't see me any more. I hope you will.' I got up from where I was sitting and put my hands in his. 'How is it you love me, my poor boy?' I said. This seemed to be more than he could bear, and he answered in a hoarse whisper and crushing my hands in his :

" 'I love you so much that I wish the whole race of woman might feel for ever what I feel.' Then he caught me in his arms and would, I thought, have killed me with kissing. Then he almost threw me from him, and before I could say another word he was gone. Now my confession is made. I am to be married the first of September. I do hope you will be back in time for it. I know when you see John you will lose your heart to him. He is only thirty ; is not that young for a colonel? He is six feet three, with the most magnificent shoulders I have ever seen. His manners are adorable, being a perfect blending of strength and tenderness. Of course I have told him all about you, as I

did the other poor fellow who has quite vanished from the scene. Of course you will scold me, but I pray you, my darling, not to be more angry with me than you can help. I was always a good child to you, wasn't I? How I do want to see you and introduce you to John.

“ Ah ! there he is, so I must bring this letter to a hasty conclusion. However little you approve of me, you will always be loved the same by yours,  
KATE.”

I confess the letter did shock me. I had been prepared for any account of flirting on Kate's part, but that anything like this would happen I never dreamed. My heart ached for the poor young fellow she had treated so cruelly, and by the next post I sent her a piece of my mind.

She received it with her customary sweetness.

By August my aunt was well enough to come to England, so that I was enabled to be present at my friend's wedding. Certainly her husband quite bore out the praise she had bestowed on him. Her marriage seemed to be the signal for troubles to begin. Before the honeymoon was over my aunt died, and I was alone in the world, and one dull November morning Mr. Winslow was found dead in his bed from the effects of an overdose of laudanum. He left a brief note for his daughter, in which he told her that he could no longer bear the agony of remembering his wife, and knowing he should never see her again.

It was an awful blow to Kate, for she loved her father dearly. I was glad that at that time, notwithstanding she had a husband, she still seemed to find comfort in my friendship.

Before the new year, the colonel was ordered to India, where as usual some skirmishing was going on. He did not expect to be away more than a year, and would not hear of his wife going with him, for there was another life now dear to them both, of which she had to be careful. She bore up as well as she could without her husband. Nothing would suit her but for me to go and stay with her, and glad enough I was to go, for I loved her dearly. With what interest we used to read the colonel's letters ! So the months wore on and brought one awful June day. It was in the afternoon ; Kate had been for a short walk ; I was sitting reading. When she returned she was trembling so and looked so pale that I cried in horror, “ What in the world has happened ? ”

"There has been an engagement," she replied. "A hundred English killed—ninety men and ten officers. The papers publish a list. I could not find a paper. You must go and get one."

I bade her not to be downhearted, and went with all the haste I might on my expedition. I had to go very far before I could get a paper. At last I got one. I unfolded it with feverish excitement, and among those who had fallen, the first name that I saw, as it was the highest in rank, was that of Colonel John Hale. I turned sick and almost fainted. I took the first cab I saw and drove back. It was twilight when I reached home. She was walking up and down the drawing-room when I came in.

"Well?" she cried sharply, turning round. There was no need of words, my face was answer enough. "It is so, then," she said; "I knew it. Oh my God, my God, have mercy upon me!"—and she fell senseless into my arms.

What followed needs to be only very briefly related. The shock to mind and body resulted, as I had feared, in a case of premature birth. However, this baby lived to grow my Lilian. Of her mother's recovery the doctors entertained but small hope. She made her will, appointing me sole guardian and trustee. "I should like you to call her Lilian," she said, "I always thought it such a pretty name. Isn't it?"

On the first of September—having been married precisely one year—she died. There was a dignity in her dying which I had not seen in her life, dear as she was to me.

I took the little Lilian to love and cherish for my dear dead friend's sake. It was in the first year of Lilian's life that my own romance was begun and played out. It did not take very long to play, but when the curtain fell, I knew that it would rise never more. From the glory and shadow—from all the wonders of love—love of man for woman—love of woman for man—I turned to find what comfort I might, in pink, shell-like, baby hands—in the little flowerlike as yet unuseful feet—in the face which, even in babyhood, had such a striking likeness to the face of my first friend. I would often at night delay going to bed, so absorbed would I be in contemplating the little sleeping face of my treasure, and wondering what sort of future would be in store for my friend's child, and I took a vow to do all that I could to make her life all that her mother would have had it to be. Oh my baby that I have so often sung to sleep in my



arms! No other baby hands shall I warm in my bosom—no other heads shall lie there—no other childish kisses seek my mouth.

---

## CHAPTER II.

TO-DAY it seems to me such a little while ago that Lilian was eight years old. I can see her so plainly, as she used to look in her Sunday frock, out of which gleamed the snow-white, snow-soft shoulders, with their blue ribbon knots, her wonderful bright hair flowing down her back.

Surely there never had been a dearer little girl than this Lillie of mine, with her complexion dazzlingly fair, her large deep blue eyes — later they turned gray — her brilliant hair. She was literally like sunlight in the house. There was never a child more full of gaiety, but she had strange, sweet, restful moods. Sometimes when I would be doing nothing—just sitting by the fire—the door would open and shut gently, and she would come in and stand quite still beside me, then I would lift her to my knee, and the small arms would twine closely round my neck, and the bright head bury itself in my shoulder.

So often we would sit for hours—only little kisses from time to time and little pressures of the arms about my neck showing me that she was not asleep, but deeply and happily at rest. Now my heart and my arms are alike empty.

On my darling's childhood I will not let myself dwell. When she was twelve, I placed her at the school where her mother and myself had been before her.

"How I hate to go away from you," she said, when it came to be our last night together. "But oh, sha'n't I look forward to the holidays!"

The next day we went to London, and having left her at the school, I returned to our house in Rockshire, this house in which, to-day, I sit alone and weep bitter tears for her as I wept for her that day, seven years ago.

At length came the Christmas holidays, and I made the little house bright for my darling's return. I invited my neighbours



and their young people: my Lillie moved among them like a queen. All manner of games were set on foot, but charades were the great thing. Exiled from my own especial sitting-room, because it made such a splendid green-room, I could hear merry tones and bursts of laughter from the young actors and actresses.

"*No, no,*" Lillie would protest — she had been by common consent appointed stage manageress—"you must not talk in that voice, it doesn't sound a bit like a housemaid; and you don't leave off your h's; you don't hold your broom either in a professional manner. Have you never seen a room swept? You sweep as if you were afraid of hurting the broom or the carpet—I'm sure I don't know which. This is the way they sweep." And from the shouts of laughter following, I knew how spiritedly she was enacting the part. The only fault which I could see in Lillian was intolerance of stupid people. Whatever she did, she did well, and did it too with all her might.

Well, the weeks grew into months, and the months into years, and when Lillie was seventeen the education she had acquired was so good that I thought she might leave school. Then followed three happy years. Lillian had no desire to hurry into the whirl of a London season. She loved nature as very few people do. She loved the flowers in the garden—especially the wild-growing things—with a very passion of tenderness. "Oh you *dear, dear* thing!" she would cry as she knelt down to smell or pluck them. Great flaming marigolds excited her as music excites some people. Different moods of nature seemed to affect her strangely. In summer twilights, large and august, she would sit moveless and wordless, her hands locked tight in one another, so still she sat, that it almost seemed as if she were listening to beauty.

Autumn twilights made her miserable, "If I am by myself in them," she said, "I am as frightened as children are when they wake up in the dark alone. It seems to me I smell death in them. Can't you tell me why I feel so?"

Brilliant moonlight would drive her almost wild with pleasure. I was in the habit of going early to bed, but long after I had been in bed I could hear her voice from the summer garden singing against the nightingales till I hardly knew which notes were the sweeter.

One brilliant June evening I was sitting by myself letter-

writing, when a card bearing the name "Edgar Lawson" was handed to me. I was quite unfamiliar with the name.

I went at once to the drawing-room. I saw at a first glance that my visitor was not, as I had imagined he would turn out to be, one of those persons who are for ever wandering about the country with charity lists in their pockets. Now I saw before me a man probably a little over forty, who was evidently well acquainted with the ways of the world. He was a tall, slightly built man, with a handsome, clear-cut face—he had fine eyes as I came to see afterwards.

"I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss Harper?" he began. I replied that was my name.

"The intimate friend of Mrs. Hale, wife of Colonel Hale, who was shot in India just nineteen years ago to-day?" he went on.

"Yes, I was the same."

"I was a great friend of poor Hale's," rejoined the stranger; "I was with him at the time of his death. He told me that had he lived longer he should probably soon have heard of the birth of his child. He conjured me whenever I returned to England to seek out his wife, and to give to her and to that child his parting blessing. If by any sad chance his wife should be dead before I reached home, he referred me to her most intimate friend, Miss Harper, of Hampton Hall, Rockshire, who would doubtless apprise me of all that related to his child. But I was not destined to return to England for years. In Calcutta I found sufficient encouragement in my career of artist to induce me to stay there; gradually ties of friendship and interest rendered my return still more and more difficult; and in fine it is not till now, when the morning of life is past with me, that I have been able once more to see my own country, and to execute my friend's commission."

I briefly told him of Mrs. Hale's death.

"There is a child?" he resumed.

"There is," I answered; "Miss Hale has been passing the day with some neighbours, but I expect her in very shortly. Won't you wait till she returns?"

Mr. Lawson said he would wait gladly, and asked me if I would not show him around the garden, what he had seen of it from the window having roused his admiration.

"Love me, love my dog," with me was translated, "Love me,

love my garden." So we wandered round the garden for about half an hour. He made himself very agreeable, passing lightly from one subject to another. The sun was setting golden, in a blue and cloudless sky, when Lilian flashed suddenly upon us. She was dressed in white, with red roses in her hair and bosom.

"Isn't it a splendid evening?" she began, but stopped short as she caught sight of the stranger. I introduced them, and then Mr. Lawson, very delicately as I thought, touched upon the subject of her father, and explained the cause of his visit.

"I'm down here," he added, after a pause, "with a friend of mine—a rather clever artist of the name of Bedford. Some of his sketches are really excellent; he has just done the 'Village Blacksmith and forge.'"

I could not help wondering if by any strange chance this should be the same Bedford that Lilian's mother certainly had treated so cruelly.

"How interesting!" cried Lil. "I don't know what I would not give to see the sketch of the smith himself; I love him. I'm afraid your friend won't make him nearly handsome enough. Please ask him to."

"I will," he replied, with a smile. "In the meanwhile, since you care so much about seeing the sketch, I am sure Bedford will only be too delighted for you and Miss Harper to see it, so if I may, I'll borrow it and bring it up." Then turning to me: "I should really be glad to know what you think of his work. Some of his heads are good, I think. May I bring a specimen?"

"Of course," I said, "I should be only too delighted," and it ended in my asking him to lunch for that day week.

"Quite an adventure, is it not?" cried Lil, when our visitor had gone. Then, very emphatically, "He is the very *handsomest* man I ever saw."

"I don't think," I answered, "you would say that if you had seen more men. Wait, child, till you have gone through your first season."

"Well, at least," she said, "I don't desire to see a handsomer. His eyes seem to look through you."

"His eyes," I answered, "are doubtless his strong point."

At Lilian's earnest request, I asked the people of the rectory to meet our new acquaintance — my child and the rector's daughter were close friends,

At length the time for our modest little entertainment came. It was a brilliant June day; we were sitting on the lawn waiting the last arrival. "Oh, do tell us what he is like!" cried Helen. She was a rather romantic young person.

"Let me see," rejoined Lillie. "Well, to begin with, he's tall and slight, but there's no suggestion of weakness about him, indeed, you feel sure he is very strong. He has rather a cold face. His eyes are wonderful. I know now what people mean when they talk about speaking eyes—no least little movement you make seems to escape them. I defy any one to forget such eyes."

"How delicious—how delicious!" cried Helen, in a transport, clasping her hands.

"Doesn't it make him sound quite interesting, in the language of lady novelists?" answered Lillian, and she burst out singing one of the old English ballads.

It was brought, however, to an abrupt conclusion by the appearance on the scene of Mr. Lawson.

"Won't you finish your song?" he asked. "You don't know how cool and charming your voices sounded through the trees."

"I'll finish it with pleasure," she returned, smiling.

In the whole of her nature there was not one grain of affectation.

"Thank you very much," he said, when the song was over.

Then the luncheon bell sounded, and we went in.

Through the meal Mr. Lawson kept us all entertained. He had travelled far, and had plenty of good stories, which he told with admirable effect. Lunch over, he produced his friend's sketches, over which we all bent with interest. We felt, as all people who live in the country do, a sense of proprietorship in the lions of our neighbourhood, and were accordingly very anxious that they should receive full justice from the hand of the artist. On the whole we were satisfied; but I was most interested when he turned to ask me aside my opinion of his friend's power in drawing heads. At the second one he showed me I could not help starting, for there looked out at me the eyes of my dead friend. This Bedford was the same then.

"How like Miss Hale," he observed, looking intently at the drawing.

"That is hardly surprising," I replied, "seeing that this is a drawing of her mother's head."



"That is very interesting," said Mr. Lawson. "May I tell Bedford?"

"Most certainly you may; moreover, I feel as if we ought to know each other. Pray ask him if he will not call some day with you."

"I am sure he will be only too delighted," returned Mr. Lawson—he was putting the drawings away as he spoke.

We spent the rest of the afternoon very pleasantly lounging upon the lawn. The conversation, led that way by Mr. Lawson, and eagerly responded to by Lilian, ran on poetry.

After Helen saying that she thought Mrs. Hemans sweet, and the rector asserting on his part that no poet had come to take Cowper's place, they left the field, and gossiped with me of indifferent things, while the other two went on talking and quoting against each other.

About five, the rector and his wife and daughter left, and Mr. Lawson soon followed.

"I'll bring you round that Persian poem, if I may, then, for it really is one of the grandest things that have ever been written," he said, as he shook hands with Lilian.

It seemed to me that he looked at her with evident admiration, and what wonder if he did? Was she not good to look at? Tall and graceful, with a pale, serene face lit by large, changeful gray eyes, whose light seemed, somehow, to me like the altar flame. The white, spacious forehead was crowned by its red-gold hair. There was a great difference between her and her mother, and yet how strong a likeness!

"He is charming, isn't he?" she said, when we were again alone together.

"Yes, dear, very agreeable," I replied. I could give no reason for it to myself, but I did not want her to care too much about him.

"You don't know how wonderfully he talks about poetry," she went on. "I have learned more from an hour's talk with him than I should have done from pages of written criticism. Didn't you notice what a strange, sudden way he has of smiling?"

I laughed, and answered that I had not paid so much attention to him as she had.

The next day I had to go to our nearest post-town on business. Lilian drove well, and liked driving, but that day nothing would induce her to accompany me. It was hot, she said, and



the sun would give her a headache, besides this she was in the third volume of a most exciting novel.

“I will have everything ready for you so nicely when you return, dear,” she said, in her pretty coaxing way. “You won’t be back to lunch? Well, then I’ll see that you have the finest strawberries and freshest cream for tea; you shall find it all spread under our favourite tree. Now, don’t you see how much better it is that I should stay at home and play house-keeper?”

Then, at this moment the ponies being brought round, she ran to pat their necks—to tell them to behave themselves, and not to be too unhappy because she wasn’t going to drive them. Then with a parting kiss to me, and a parting injunction to her ponies to behave like the angels they were, she ran into the house, singing as she went. She sang just as naturally as birds sing. Oh! subtle sweet voice, which I hear now only in the land of sleep, or fancy sometimes that I catch a strain of its old sweetness borne on the melancholy outcry of an autumn wind in the dark boughs of the fir trees!

I had a tiring day at —, having much to do there, and it was late in the afternoon when I reached home. As I came up the garden I heard a sound of voices. Mr. Lawson was lying on the lawn. Lilian was sitting close by, in a low garden chair, and looked very beautiful, flushed, and animated. I saw then, in a moment, and wondered at my own stupidity in not having seen before, her reason for wishing to remain at home. Had not Mr. Lawson the day before asked permission to bring a certain Persian poem, and was there not, to say the least of it, a strong chance that he would avail himself of the permission granted at the earliest date he could? Nor did it escape me that she had put on one of her prettiest gowns.

“I am afraid, Miss Harper,” he said, rising as soon as he saw me, “I am afraid you must have had a very tiring drive in this great heat. . . . Let me see, how many miles is it?”

“Six,” I replied.

“Is it, indeed? It was even farther than I thought. Miss Hale has been so good as to let me make myself at home under the shade of your glorious trees. In this poem I have brought, there is a verse which is capable of two interpretations. I have my interpretation and Miss Hale has hers; but which is right or wrong, we are going to leave to your decision.”

I refused to be umpire till I had had my well-earned tea. Of course I could not do otherwise than ask Mr. Lawson to stay to tea, and to my great disappointment he accepted the invitation gladly, but I was disposed to be cross. I was tired, and perhaps too was a little old-maidish, but I had looked forward to being very quiet when I reached home, chatting or being silent just as I liked. Now I had to arrange my hair, to change my gown for a better looking one than that which I had put on to confront the dust of the roads. I had to put on also my company manner. Lil often used to joke me about this company manner of mine. Perhaps she was right. I think I was naturally formal, owing to a cold, very reserved temperament. I never could get quickly intimate with people, and this was, I suppose, the reason why I made so few friends, and why my Lilie came to be so wholly the light and comfort and interest of my life.

Shortly after tea was over, Mr. Lawson took his leave, reluctantly as I thought.

"Lilian," I said, "did Mr. Lawson tell you he should call here to-day?"

"No."

"But you thought it very likely he would call?"

"Yes."

"And that was why you stopped at home?"

"Yes."

"Lil," I went on, "you are getting too much interested in this man."

"Am I?" she answered, throwing her arms round my neck, and burying her face in my bosom, to hide the blushes with which I knew it was all aglow.

"Take care, my dear," I said; remember that we know nothing of him"—to which she answered, looking up and with some pride in her tone: "We know he is a gentleman. What more need we to know?" Then she left me.

As fate willed it, through that month of June, my child was to see a good deal of Mr. Lawson, for the rector had taken a profound liking for him. That he went so often to the rectory was probably owing to the fact that he was pretty sure to find Lilian there. I could see now that he hardly tried to disguise his admiration of her. It became the subject of talk.

He informed me that his friend Bedford had been much

pleased by my invitation, and hoped some day to be allowed to present himself, but just then he had been called back to London on most pressing business. I wished pressing business would call Bedford's friend back, also. I thought that he and Lilian were just interested in each other for the time, and that, when they were parted, all must naturally end. He must have been at least twice her age, and had his years been nearer hers, there was something about him which made me feel he was not in all ways the kind of man I wanted for my Lilie; yet it was hard to describe what it was in him that I did not like. Perhaps it was because it seemed to me that at times he would talk in a perfectly heartless vein, while at others he would be almost sentimental. Lil evidently thought this contrast fascinating, but, for me, I confess, it repelled me.

It was the last day of June: evening had fallen, and I sat by myself in my sitting-room, whose French windows, standing wide open, led out upon the lawn. Through the dusk a nightingale was beginning to sing, the peace of heaven seemed to rest upon the earth. I was in one of those rare moods of mind when sadness is almost sweet, when nothing stands out sharply defined. The night made me think of other far-off nights, just like this, when Lil's mother and I had sat together in the garden running round the Kensington house, and where, waxing very sentimental in the moonlight, we had planned out our futures, always in some way to be connected, and described what manner of man we would be graciously pleased to take for a husband.

And now the moon was shining on Kate's grave! Then I wondered about young Bedford, whom she had treated so badly, wondered if he had quite forgotten her, or if he still cared anything about her memory.

Lil had gone to play the harmonium in the church. There was no service, she had only gone to practice. She was later in coming home than she had said she should be, but this did not surprise me, because the rector often looked in, and took her home for an hour or two, and then walked back with her. Still, as the time went on, I wished she would come, for it was later than was usual with her, even on such occasions, and I knew the rectory people to be early in their habits. I was growing very uneasy, when I heard the garden gate open and shut, and the light step of my darling coming up the path.

"In the moonlight only," she cried, "how nice!" Then she came to the sofa where I was lying, and knelt down beside me.

"I was getting dreadfully anxious about you," I began.

"Were you?" she answered, in what seemed to me a strangely irrelevant tone of voice, as if she had found in my words an almost incredible sweetness.

"You don't seem in the least sorry," I said.

"Yes, I am," she answered, with a start.

"You've been to the rectory, I suppose," I went on.

"No."

"Where have you been all this time, then?"

"Part of the time in church, and part walking about."

Was it purposely that she leaned her cheek against my hand, that I might feel how warm it was?

"Who were you with?" I asked.

"With Mr. Lawson," in a very low tone of voice.

"Lilian," I cried, "something has happened."

"Yes," she said, in a voice that seemed possessed and hallowed by a great joy. "The divinest and sweetest thing which could happen to me in all the world *has* happened. He loves me—he loves me. Hush!" seeing that I was about to speak, "let me tell you about it first. I was sitting in the church. The moon had just risen, and I was playing from memory, when I heard a footfall close by me. I knew quite well whom I should see when I raised my eyes. 'Please play that last piece over again,' he said, 'I have been listening outside for more than an hour. It was some time before I could make up my mind to enter—it is so long since I have been in a church, but you drew me, and here I am.' I said: 'I wish you would come to church sometimes.' He replied, 'Do you? Then I will; don't you know I want to do in all things that which you wish? Now play me my music.' And I played.

"When I said it was time for me to close the church, and leave the key at the sexton's, he said he would walk with me there. Then he said, 'Let us walk a little this way. I have something that I want to tell you,' and then"—here the sweet voice faltered, but resumed—"then he told me how he loved me; how, to make me his wife, there was nothing he would not do, nothing he would not give up."

"And you," I asked, "what did you say?"



"What *could* I say?" she answered, "but tell him the truth; how with all my heart and soul I loved him—how the thought that he loved me flooded my life with heaven. He is coming to see you to-morrow, early. Dear, you don't know how I love him. I am possessed by a great unutterable peace. Then, at times, the thought comes sharply home to me that it is no dream, and that he does love me. It stings me with a rapture so keen that it is almost like exquisite pain, and I have to dig my nails into my hands, and bite my lips to keep myself from crying out in my bliss, as people cry out in their agony."

We neither of us, I think, got much sleep that night. Indeed, dawn was clearly visible before we made a move in the direction of bed.

I was sorry that she should have cared so much about a man whom I could not like better; but, since she did so, since he seemed to love her in a way so pure and ardent—if other things proved satisfactory—no personal prejudices of mine should stand in the way of their happiness.

The next morning, at a very early hour, I had an interview with Mr. Lawson. Of course we were quite to ourselves. I fancy, on the whole, he hardly liked me any better than I liked him.

"Well," I began, "my ward has told me of the very flattering feelings you entertain for her."

"Don't let us waste time in pretty speeches," he put in. "This is how the case stands, Miss Harper. I"—here he hesitated a moment, and then went on—"I love your ward. She honours me by returning the feeling I have for her. Under these circumstances, you naturally want to know something more about me than you do. My father, General Lawson, now in Bombay, will, in such an event, promptly answer any letter you may care to address to him. I have been called to the bar, but do not practice my profession. I dabble a little in painting. Occasionally I write rhymes. With the settlement my father will make, I shall, I hope, be able to keep my wife as becomes her station in life and mine. If you wish to know my views about a future life, I am not so confident of it as you are, still, I trust for the best. Up to the present time, I have led neither a worse nor a better life than is led by men who don't consider the mortification of the body as the first and necessary step toward a fairly worthy life. For the rest, our family lawyer,



Stockwell, of Chancery Lane, will furnish you with all the information you can desire. He is at present out of England, but will be back by the middle of next month. Now, Miss Harper, while these things are pending, may I consider myself as your ward's accepted suitor?"

He had spoken, as it were, in a breath. Then he paused and looked me full in the face.

"She seems to care very much for you," I said. "You have been frank with me, I think; I will write to your father, if you please. In the meantime I am prepared to raise no objection."

"Thank you," he said; "then we may consider the interview over, I suppose?"

"Certainly, I have nothing more to say. I think you are pretty sure to find Lilian on the lawn."

"I shall find her somewhere, I have no doubt," he rejoined. "Good morning!" and with his most courteous bow he went, and I sat there in the beautiful summer weather and cried myself blind.

---

### CHAPTER III.

WAS my darling as happy in this engagement as she had expected to be—as I had hoped she would be? It would have been hard to say. Sometimes I would see in her eyes a clear intense light of joy; at other times she seemed feverishly anxious, as if she feared she might lose what she held so dear, and once when she and Lawson had been together, I saw she had been crying. Coming upon them one day, quite unexpectedly, when they were sitting on the lawn, I heard him say:

"No, Lil, what I say is the truth; you don't love me."

"I don't love you?" she replied; "if I don't, then, I never heard of a woman who did love."

I was passing on, when he called to me.

"Please stay, Miss Harper, if you don't mind. Miss Lilian says she loves me, and I say she doesn't. Do let us have your opinion."

"Really," I answered, not well pleased, smoothing my child's

hair as I spoke. "I think there can be only one opinion upon that subject."

"Very good," he replied, "now let me tell you a pretty little fable. Once upon a time there lived a certain little boy. He lived in a small country village, alone with his father and mother. Truth to say, he was a grave, and not at all a brilliant child. His parents were poor people. They spent their time in drinking and beating their son. At length it occurred to the father that if they beat him all the time, he would get so hard as not to mind it. So the boy was left comparatively in peace. He spent his hours of freedom in wandering round the village. He was an unhappy boy, as you may imagine. He had in him a poet's soul. He took a great delight in beauty, and there was not such a thing as a pretty girl in the whole village. Well, a good fairy, seeing this, took pity on him, and made one of the very ugliest little girls you ever heard of look like an angel of beauty in his eyes. She had hardly any flesh on her bones. Her face was as yellow as butter. Two of her front teeth were gone. Her eyes were small and dim, and there were always red circles round them, and one had a cast in it. Her hair was long and coarse, and of a nondescript colour. A few people in the village said that she *did* wash her face once a week, but the rest asked for a sign, and would not believe. The boy worshipped. Will you tell me *what* he worshipped?"

Mr. Lawson ceased, and looked round with a well satisfied expression of countenance.

"To all practical purposes," said Lilian, "he loved the girl. Your fairy, I suppose, is intended to symbolize that spirit of idealism by whose spell those we love seem nobler and more attractive than in reality they are. Our power to idealize, born with love, may strengthen it. Then its work is done. If we have once really loved we may be disillusionized, yet go on loving all the same."

I said, jestingly—

"I ask not, I know not, if guilt's in thy heart,  
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art."

To which Mr. Lawson replied, with a long laugh. There was something in his laugh that I could not like.

"I knew an old lady once who, on hearing a young girl quote those lines, burst out, raising eyes and hands to heaven—'Why,

he might have been a pickpocket ! ' ' Then he went on, with a grim smile : " And there are worse things in the world than pickpockets, let alone murderers. There are pickers of hearts, and these are more dangerous than pickers of pockets—women, Miss Harper, who play with men's hearts as cats play with mice. "

He fixed his eyes full on my face, then looked at Lilian, and said to me :

" She's like that drawing of her mother, isn't she ? "

" I never knew you had one, " said Lilian.

" Yes, " he replied. " I borrowed it from a man who knew her once. I borrowed it that you might see it. " Here he drew out the head and put it in her hands.

" She must have been very beautiful, " was Lil's first remark.

" Was she, Miss Harper ? " he asked, looking at me. " You can tell us better than any one. "

" Certainly, " I replied, " she was a beautiful girl. "

" So I should think, " he remarked, " and fascinating, too. She had sweet, bright, unexpected ways with her, which you remembered when she had gone, and for which you loved her. She could be very scornful. With those she loved she got easily angry, being jealous and sensitive. You could not tell which was the more captivating, her anger or her repentance. She could bring you to her feet by a simple gesture. When you took her hand it seemed to cling always in yours. So was she, according to Bedford's account. "

He had been lying on the lawn smoking. Now he got up and threw his cigar away, and stood looking at us both in silence.

" She must have been charming, " said Lil.

" One man thought so, " he replied. " Good evening, I'm off now. "

" You're not going so early, are you ? " she asked, her voice quivering with a dreadful apprehension that he was.

" Yes, I am, " he answered gaily, " ' for men must work, and women must weep. ' "

" But I'm not going to weep, and you're not going to work, " she broke out. " I won't be left at this hour ; you can't have any important work to do down here. "

" I must go, " he answered, as I thought sharply and shortly.

" Oh, very well, then, " she said, with sweet, sudden dignity, " good evening. "

I was curious to see how this little scene would end. He took her outstretched hand, smiled, and turned away. There was an awful silence, neither she nor I spoke. I saw her breath was coming and going quickly. All colour had left her face. In her eyes was visible an agony of suspense. Five long minutes we kept silent. At the end of that time, Lawson, who I suppose had not got farther than the gate, returned, and threw himself down once more in his own place. I saw how she strove, but vainly, to keep the colour from mantling in her face, and the light of joy from surprising her eyes, but her voice was perfectly calm, as she said :

“So, after all, you have concluded to give up work?”

“Come and sing me a song,” said he, suddenly. “Your mother used to sing well, Bedford says. Do you sing any of her songs?”

Here I put in : “Only one.”

“And what may that be?” he asked.

“Green Sleeves,” I said.

“Green Sleeves let it be, then,” he cried.

Lilian began to sing, he joining in the chorus with feverish animation :

“Green sleeves was all my joy ;  
Green sleeves was my delight ;  
Green sleeves was my heart of gold,  
And who but my Lady Green Sleeves?”

I left them, and an hour or two afterward, just in the quiet moon-rise—herself as quiet as moonlight—came Lilian, and stood beside me.

“He is gone?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Have you had a happy evening, my dear?”

“So happy,” she answered, in a low, rapturous tone.

“He does not always make you happy,” I said.

“No, not always ; but, if I could, there is not one way in which I would have him different.”

“We must have the rectory people here to-morrow,” I said ; and we must, my dear, call on those new people.”

But she made no answer. I saw that she did not hear me. She was smiling all to herself, recalling some speech or look of his. One day he said to her in my presence :

"Suppose, Lil, you were to find me out a retired burglar, or an escaped convict. What would you think of me then, eh?"

"I should think," she answered, gravely, "just the same as I do now, that I love you. But, please, don't talk any more like that. Now, I have to drive to ——. Who wants to come with me?"

"Oh, I do, of course," he returned, "may I?"

"Yes, you may, if you'll be very good, and not want to drive more than a third of the way."

"I promise," he said, laughing, "whatever I may want, *not* to drive more than a third of the way."

That day she was in one of her brightest moods. The July days went by. Such brilliant summer weather had not been known for many years. The want of rain, however, began to look serious. One night—it was the last in July—Mr. Lawson stayed particularly late. When my darling came to wish me good-night it seemed to me that she was disturbed. "Is anything the matter?" I asked.

"No, no," she replied, a little doubtfully; "he was just a little strange to-night; that is all. Talked as he does sometimes, in a way that I never can understand."

She was just leaving the room, when she turned round suddenly and said:

"Do you love your child?"

"What do you think?" I answered, putting my arms round her, and drawing her very close to me.

"I think you do."

I sat up late that night, thinking of long past days. In long spells of hot weather there comes one crowning day of heat, when the sun burns yet more intensely; when the sky is more intolerably blue than ever; when no least breath of wind stirs anywhere. Such a day was it which opened that August. Great heats, like great frosts, make a silence. Birds were sick with heat in the shade. The only sound audible was that produced by the garden-roller, passing from time to time across the garden walks. We had just finished breakfast when a hand-delivered letter was brought in for Lilian. Her face fell woefully, as she said:

"It's from Edgar. Of course that means he isn't coming to-day."

"Do you expect him to come always every day?" I asked.



"I'm afraid," she said, smiling rather faintly, "that I do."

I turned to finish my own letters, and she opened hers.

"Can't you and Lilian," wrote an old friend of mine, "join us in Switzerland? Till you have seen the Alps you can form no idea how beautiful they are."

I had read so far, when a cry, not loud but like nothing I had ever heard or imagined for anguish, made me drop my letter and lift my eyes in horror. Lilian was leaning back in her chair; her face was white as death. The look on it was like the cry that had broken from her lips. The letter was crushed in her hands.

"My darling!" I cried, springing up and going to her, "you are ill! Lil! Lil!"

She moved her lips as if to speak, but could not; yet she did not faint. At length she managed to say in a whisper:

"Read it."

Sick at the thought of what I might have to read, I took the letter, and this was what I read:

"When you receive this letter I shall be some way from you, and I trust, by the grace of God, that we shall meet no more. Nineteen years ago your mother was engaged to a man named Bedford. How that man loved her no one will ever know. Without note of warning she cast him off for a richer man. Not only this, but she did not tell him his fate—only let him find it out by degrees. Such exquisite delight did she anticipate from his suffering that she would not have it come too soon. When he knew his fate, he knew too that his life was blasted. He left England and roved about the world for nineteen years. Coming back, Fate led him to this place, that through him the daughter should expiate the sin of the mother. I am that man. If you suffer to-day, I pray that she may know it. The pain will not go very deep with you. You will cry to-day, and to-morrow, perhaps; but the day after you will laugh. Now, good-bye, for ever.

"MALCOLM BEDFORD."

"Is it true?" she asked.

"It is too true," I answered, as well as I could, for my great indignation seemed choking me. I turned sick with loathing. She had risen and stood with her eyes fixed on me. I was trying to speak, when she put up her hand, and said:

“Don't. How he must have suffered!”

I longed to cast my arms round her, but dared not. She stood there looking strange and awful in her quiet. Then she left the room. I can hear again the door shut behind her as on that silent summer morning. I knew she wished to be alone, so I did not follow her.

I sat there not oblivious, but morbidly conscious of everything about me. Bees were buzzing near the window; the gardener was still working his roller quite unconcernedly; and as on the eye of a murdered person is stamped the image of a murderer—the last thing seen before death—so in my brain kept ringing the last words my eyes had rested on before I heard Lilian's cry and looked up. “How beautiful the Alps are! How beautiful the Alps are!” The silences and the sounds of summer always now bring back to me that terrible morning. How long I sat there I don't know. Then I began to wonder what would happen next. *Something* must happen. Where was Lilian? Surely now the time had come when I might go to her, so I rose. The house was flooded with summer. It seemed that flame, not air, came in at the open windows. At the door of Lilian's sitting-room I listened. All there was still. I opened the door softly and looked in. No, she was not there, nor was she in her bed-room, where I went next. Equally vain was my search for her in the garden. Her ponies were not out; no, to be sure of being quite alone, she had gone wandering far away. There were some woods two or three miles off. She loved them, I knew; perhaps to these then, as to a refuge, she had gone. I could not bear to think of her being out in this burning summer weather, but she had wished to escape from the house, from me, and the wish of her grief I was bound to respect. I went back to my sitting-room and gave myself up to hours of awful waiting. It seemed to me strange that the servants should go about their work just the same as usual. At the accustomed hour the luncheon bell sounded. I got up and went to the dining-room. The parlour-maid wished to know if she should not tell Miss Lilian.

“I don't think Miss Lilian will be in to lunch,” I said.

I swallowed a few mouthfuls and left the room. When *would* Lilian come? God pity us who have to wait and agonize. The heavy, burning afternoon wore itself away. I went often to Lilian's room to see if she had not returned, but every time I

went I was disappointed. At five o'clock came the usual cup of afternoon tea.

"Miss Lilian has not returned yet, I suppose?" I said, hardly daring to venture the question.

"Not yet."

The answer was what I had expected, yet my heart sank within me. Awful and dark fears beset me. It seemed to me that there was no trouble I could not bear if only she were with me again. All her sweet ways came back to me till I felt the tears crowding to my eyes. What should I do if night fell and still she had not come? It began to seem to me as if it were impossible for her to return. I knew this to be morbid, and strove to reason it down. I was too restless to keep quiet any longer, so I went into the garden. A great change had taken place in the weather; the sun's light was no longer visible in the sky, save where, in the extreme west, one lurid patch shone out like the flame of a bale-fire, and this was soon hidden by the great masses of cloud that were spreading all over the heavens.

"We shall have a storm soon, I judge, ma'am," said the gardener to me, as I passed.

"Don't you think it may pass over?" I asked.

"Not a bit of it, ma'am, and the more we have of it the better."

In an adjoining field sheep were bleating loudly and all together, as is their wont when rain is imminent. Even at that moment came a low rumbling of thunder; or, rather, it was more like an immense prolonged shudder of the air.

I went to the house. It seemed as if the earth were in a state of awful expectation. Then came another peal of thunder, louder, as if giving the countersign to that which had preceded it. Then, for a moment, it seemed to me that I heard the earth and heavens gasp. Then from the immense, black, impenetrable vault of heaven the rain burst in a deluge, and sang and shouted as it came. The thunder followed, crash upon crash, as if God, at length provoked out of God-like patience, had taken His mace in hand, and had smitten again and again, with the strength of His terrible right arm, the old wrong-doing world, that quailed, being stricken to its centre. Then suddenly a cold wind sprang up, and came rushing through the trees. In a few minutes it had grown to be a hurricane, driving

the mad rain before it—the rain through which the lightning flashed. How the rain hissed against the hard, cracking earth! What a strange odour rose from it like steam? There was an instant closing of all doors and windows. Already in rooms surprised by the rain, pools of water were standing. My sitting-room, in which I was, stood at the back of the house. I walked up and down, half frantic to think of Lilian out in this storm—and where? I summoned one of the servants and ordered a fire to be lighted in her room. Then I resumed my walk, shuddering at every fresh flash of lightning and at every fresh burst of thunder. Slowly, however, the thunder and the lightning ceased, but the wind raved round the house, and the rain kept on pouring steadily. I was thinking I could *not* bear the suspense, when sharp and suddenly the house-bell rang.

“Thank God!” broke from my lips. I rushed into the hall, flung open the door, and clasped my darling in my arms. I drew her into my room—the extreme tension had been too much for me, and, as I clasped and kissed her, I burst into tears. “Oh, my dear,” I cried, “I thought you were lost, or that something dreadful had happened to you,” and then I laughed for joy to have her back.

“I’m not lost, you see,” she said, quietly, “only so tired, so tired. I think I must sleep, don’t you?”

The rain was streaming from her clothes; they clung close and heavily round her limbs and figure—the rain poured too from her loosened hair.

“You must go to bed at once,” I said.

“Yes,” she answered, “I am quite ready.”

As I undressed her, she said no word, only from time to time she shivered.

“You are cold?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” she answered, “very cold.”

As soon as she was in bed, I brought her a glass of hot wine and water and a biscuit.

“This is only the first course,” I said, with what I felt was a ghastly attempt at a joke. “More substantial things are to follow.”

She drank the wine, and swallowed a few mouthfuls of biscuit; but when I brought her a small piece of chicken, and told her she *must* try and eat it, she burst out crying, and said:

“I can’t—it would choke me. Won’t you let me be in peace? I pray you to be good to me, now.”

I could do nothing but sit down by the fire and wait. I determined not to leave her. Before long she fell into a broken, feverish, uneasy sleep.

"Come here," she called to me, suddenly waking up. "Don't let him go. He won't go, if you ask him not to. You will ask him, won't you?"

"Yes, dear, of course," I answered, seeing that she was delirious. Then she began crying, and tossing from side to side.

"Are you in pain, my darling?" I asked.

"No, only so tired," she answered; "he makes me go on walking all the time. He won't let me sit down for a moment."

Then for a while she grew quieter and closed her eyes; but before long they opened again, and fixing them full on my face, she asked, with that supernatural earnestness characteristic of persons in delirium:

"Where have you taken my rose-tree? My beautiful red rose-tree."

"Dear," I said, "no one has touched it. You'll find it quite safe in its old place."

"I don't think so," she replied. "I think the wind has it. Oh! why won't he let me sit down?" and she began crying again. Ah! me! that was a fearful night; but in the cold, wet, windy dawning she fell into what seemed an almost quiet sleep.

At a very early hour I sent for the doctor. By the time he came, she was awake again. She was feverish, but no longer delirious, though she had a sharp pain in her side, which would not let her draw her breath in peace. Did we know what that meant?—that even then the deadly work was begun?

---

#### CHAPTER IV.

ALL through that terrible August I had to watch the inroads made on my darling by the most pitiless of all diseases. We saw consumption making its fatal way, and could not avert it. There was only one least little chance, said the doctor, and



that was to build up her strength that she might, before the winter, be enabled to travel to the south of France.

“And is this all the hope you can give me?” I said.

“I wish I could give you more,” he replied, gravely.

Lilian was not kept in bed, as we judged it was better for her to have the open air, so a sofa was placed for her on the lawn, where for hours together she would lie silent; or, if feeling even weaker than usual, she would lie on the couch in her sitting-room, at the open window of which the bright glowing summer weather would stream in.

One day, when I was unnaturally gay, in my attempt to hide from her the awful grief that was ever uppermost in my heart, she said, faintly, but sweetly :

“Dear, why will you try and play a part? I know that I am dying, just as well as you and the doctor know it. I knew a girl that died of consumption. We won't talk about it, if it pains you,” she added, seeing I could no longer keep the tears out of my eyes.

The summer wore away and brought September. Lilian remained just about the same. To-day she would be too weary to leave her bed; the next day she would seem a little better again, and able to lie upon the lawn. One unusually warm September evening, I was with my darling in her sitting-room. We had been on the lawn all through the afternoon, but at the first suggestion of evening I brought her in. There was a comfortable ground-floor room that used to be called her library, and I had had this converted into a bedroom for her. She was leaning back in her chair, propped up by pillows.

I was standing by the window, looking out into the wonderfully peaceful sunset. I thought she was too exhausted to speak. Suddenly she called me, but in a voice sounding so faint and far away that it seemed like the phantom of a sound. In an instant I was by her on my knees.

“Do you want anything, my darling?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said.

Then she asked, as I put my arms round her, just as she had asked that night before the blow of which she was then dying had been dealt her :

“Dear—do you love your child?”

“Yes,” I cried; “more than ever a mother loved her dearest.”

"Will you do something for me?" was her next question. She was leaning her cheek against my hand—that was one of the sweet caressing ways she had.

"There is nothing I would not do for you, my darling," I answered.

"Nothing?" she cried, almost eagerly. "Remember, you've said that."

"Always providing," I answered, "what you want is not bad for you."

"It would be good for me," was her reply.

Then, for some minutes, she was silent, looking out into the clear gold sunset, with those beautiful, fathomless eyes of hers. I kissed again and again her long, lily-white hand, the fingers of which had grown so slim that she had had to put aside the pretty opal ring she used to wear. It had belonged to her mother, and its changeful brightness always delighted her eye. Ah, not in vain, from my dead friend's mother to her, and from her to this my child, had the beautiful, baneful opal been handed down.

At length Lilian broke silence, and said in a passionate whisper, trying to press my hands—hers were so weak that they could only indicate a pressure :

"I want *him*. That is what I want—I want you to bring him to me."

"Lilian!" I cried, springing up; "you can't mean this?—you wouldn't ask me to do that? If I were to see that man again, I believe I should somehow kill him."

I turned away, and went to stand by the window. How could I look again upon the murderer of my child? Presently I turned and came to her. Her hands were clasped loosely in each other, and upon them the large tears were falling fast.

"You mustn't cry," I said, "it's so bad for you."

"I can't help it," she answered, simply. "I'm not strong enough to keep from crying all the time."

"Lil," I cried, desperately, "it shall be all as you wish—I will bring him to you."

At these words her tears ceased almost instantly, and she looked up with something like a smile in my face, and said :

"Thank you, dear—and when will you go?"

"We'll talk about that," I answered, "when you're in bed. It's high time for you to go now."

As I had resolved to carry out her wish, I determined to start as soon as possible. Fortunately, our housekeeper was a woman in whose care I could safely leave my treasure.

How to find the man was the point which at once occurred to Lil and me. We knew some people in London of the name of Brooks. Mr. Brooks was an artist. It was possible that from him I might obtain the information I desired. Anyhow, to go to him was the first thing to be done.

"Doesn't the night seem long?" said Lilian. "It seems as if it never *would* go."

I knew why she was so impatient for the night to pass. That she should still love this man, was an excruciating pain to me.

The part of Rockshire in which we lived was not a long journey from London, and by twelve o'clock the next day I found myself on the platform of Charing Cross Station. Mr. Brooks lived in Fitzroy Square. I called a cab and drove straight to his house. I was relieved to find only himself at home, his family not having returned from the seaside. All I told him was that it was a matter of the utmost importance, that I should have Mr. Bedford's address at once. Mr. Brooks did *not* know the address, but he thought he knew a man who did—the fear was lest he should have left town, as he had talked of doing. He would go at once, he said, and see.

Shall I ever forget that terrible hour of suspense, when I sat and waited in the large sombre studio? It was pervaded by a subtle odour of paint, and now paint always smells to me of suspense. In a recess of the room was a cage containing doves, which from time to time gave forth their peculiar, soft, shuddering, melancholy music. With the sensitiveness of one too keenly alive, I sat and listened to the passing to and fro of the vehicles. A man passed with a barrow of autumn flowers, calling out, "Fine flowers! fine flowers! all a-blowing, all a-growing." Drawn by an irresistible fascination, my eyes kept themselves fixed on a lay figure. It had, thrown round it, an old-fashioned cloak of a very faded red. I had only known this room as crowded with people and loud with voices, so that it seemed to me quite strange to be in it alone. I began thinking how different was the life of this artist from the one I led, and I thought of my own sweet-smelling Rockshire garden, at that moment brimmed

with pure air, and with the ardent sunlight, which my child was doubtless watching from her window.

At length I heard a quick-going hansom pull up sharply in front of the house. In another minute the heavy street-door opened and closed, and I heard a quick step coming up the stone stairs. Then Mr. Brooks came into the room.

"I am glad to tell you," he said, kindly, "that I have procured the address you wish. I see, Miss Harper, that you are in a hurry, so I will not try to detain you. Some other time I shall hope for the pleasure of a chat. By the by, I kept my hansom, thinking it might be of use to you."

I thanked him as best I could for all his kindness. He closed the doors of the hansom, telling the driver where to drive. "It's only a few streets off," he said, and then we rattled away.

In a few minutes I reached my destination, a tall, ill-cared-for looking house, in a dull dingy street.

"Is Mr. Bedford in?" I asked of the poor little drab who opened the door to me.

"First floor. You can go and see," was the answer I received.

The house seemed filled with the combined odours of washing and tobacco. As I went up the stairs, I heard men's voices and laughter from what I should judge to have been the second or third floor. My heart failed me as I knocked at Bedford's door.

"Come in," called out a voice that I knew for his. He was standing with his back to the door, and called out, as I came in, without turning round:

"Why the deuce didn't you come before?" Receiving no answer, he *did* turn his head, and that very sharply too. Seeing whom it was, he looked remarkably confused, and made a hasty apology.

"I thought it could have been no one but a model," he said, "who should have been here two hours ago. Pray take a seat," and he cleared a chair for me as he spoke. "I'm highly flattered at a visit from you," he went on, "but I am afraid I have hardly anything worth showing just now."

"Can you imagine," I said, with difficulty controlling myself so as to speak calmly—"can you imagine that after what has happened I should come to see your pictures? Can you



think that of my own will I would have set eyes on you again?"

"As a piece of autobiography," he remarked, with a sneer, "what you suggest is very interesting, but still more interesting would it be to me to know to what I can owe the pleasure of this visit—as you did not come of your own will. I am at a loss to see what force would have compelled you *against* it!"

"The force of death close at hand," I answered—"no *other* force could have brought me here. Oh, when I think that I have to ask something of you, the words seem as if they would choke me. How can I speak them?"

"I am more puzzled than ever," he observed. "What can death have to say to your visit? I am neither a doctor nor a parson, and those I believe are the important actors in death-bed scenes."

"Please," I said, "have the taste, if you have not the feeling, to refrain from sneers."

After a pause I went on:

"My child is dying—*dying*, do you hear me? And you, Malcolm Bedford, are as clearly the cause of her death, as if with your hand you had stabbed her. Then you would have been hung for it—nor shall you now go quite unpunished, for I will have the truth of this known about you everywhere, and men shall shrink from you, as they would from a leper."

"Enough of that," he said, with a wave of his hand—his voice was changed; "now, if you please, we will proceed with this lie, for if you say she is dying it *is* a lie."

Then, as briefly as I could, I told my story. When I had finished, I looked at him. He was leaning with his hands on the back of a chair, and his face was very pale.

"How does one feel," I asked, "knowing oneself a murderer? Don't you think the ghost of my darling will haunt you all through your life?"

He stepped up to me and caught hold of my hand, while his eyes flashed full in mine.

"I tell you," he said, the words coming painfully, "believe it or not, as you like, I love her more than even you dream of loving her. How her mother treated me—how that woman wrecked my life—I believe you know. Well, returning from abroad, Fate, as I thought, brought me to your village. I heard of you—of her. A desire to see if she were like her



mother overcame me, and, as you know, I called at your house. She was too like. In a moment it came to me that Fate had led me here to avenge my murdered youth on the daughter of the woman who had slain it. I strove to hate, but I loved ; yet I would not give up my purpose. And this is the end of it—my God !” and he groaned aloud. “Have you no least little pity for me ?” he asked.

“No,” I replied, ice-cold, “none : rather I hope you may drink to the lees this cup which you yourself have prepared. Now there is nothing more to say.”

“Nothing,” he rejoined. “I must make some arrangements here, but I will come by the first train possible. Oh, one thing more, tell her all that I have told you.”

We did not go through the form of shaking hands. In another moment I was on my way to the station, where I was fortunate enough just to catch a departing train. By six o'clock I was once more at home.

“Why, dear, how ill you look,” was the first thing Lilian said. Indeed, I was just on the point of fainting, for I had eaten nothing since eight o'clock ; but before I took any refreshment, I made her understand that my expedition had resulted in what she wished. Afterward I told her all that Mr. Bedford had told me. When she had heard it, she looked almost happy, and then said with a long-drawn sigh :

“Ah, me ! how happy we might have been !”

It was all in vain that I tried to persuade her to let me put her to bed. At about ten or a little after, the dogs began barking, and then the house-bell sounded. She raised herself on her couch, her cheeks flushed, a warm light shone in her eyes. There was a quick rap at the door.

“Come in,” she cried, before I could answer. The door opened, and Bedford walked in. He went straight to her. Something like a low cry broke from them both. I saw her arms fall round his neck as he dropped beside her on his knees ; I saw his face bowed on hers ; I heard her murmur passionately, “Oh, you have come—you have come ! my darling—my darling ! And you love me ?” I could bear no more. I left them and went to my own room, and there in the bitter comfort of the darkness I sobbed as if indeed my heart would break.

An hour afterward when I went downstairs, I found them just in the same position.

"Lil, dear," I said, "it is time for you to go to bed."

"Yes," she answered, tranquilly, "I am quite ready."

So, saying I would be back in five minutes, I left the room. However, I let a quarter of an hour pass before returning.

"Good-night, my very own," I heard him whisper, passionately. Then he held her lips with a great, long last kiss, rose and left the room.

I asked her if she was ready.

"Yes," she said; "but let me have a few minutes to rest in. No one in church rises from his knees the very moment the prayer is over." I pretended to busy myself with doing some things about the room, but I saw on her face a look of ineffable peace, an exultation of rapture far beyond reach of words to express. She drew her breath as people who love music do when the last crowning harmony has been struck, and the silence which follows is a consecration, and a respite from things almost intolerably sweet.

Presently she said of her own accord, "Now I am ready."

When she was in bed, she said, as I leaned over to kiss her :

"Such a happy hour, dear. I never guessed he loved me as he does."

Thoroughly worn out by my tiring day, I sank toward morning into a profound sleep. It seemed to me I had hardly closed my eyes when I was awakened by the sound of a little hand-bell which always stood by Lil's bed in case of her wanting anything when I was asleep, for I was always near, a bed having been made for me in her room.

"Yes, dear," I said, sitting up, "what is it?"

"It's eight o'clock," she said; "won't you get me up? I thought you never would wake. I've heard Malcolm in the garden for over an hour talking to the dogs."

"But," I said, "you don't generally get up till past noon."

"And is this '*generally*'?" she answered, half pleadingly; "don't you think we want to be with each other the little time we have to be together?"

I got up at once and began to dress. She watched my movements with evident impatience. Once she said with a sigh, "I think you never were so long before."

Her own toilet was much more elaborate than I had been in the habit of allowing, or she of desiring. At last her hair was arranged to her content, and she bade me place a red rose in it.

I made her take a little bread and cream, settled her on her couch, and then went in search of Mr. Bedford, whom I found in the garden. He thanked me, and went straight to the house. Surely I was glad for any happiness that came to lighten those last days of my darling's life; yet was it not just a little hard to think that in the end it was not me to whom she turned—who had loved her so—but to *him* whose hand was taking her from me?

Of course I had to be in and out of the room all day, for I would trust to no one else my charge of her. They were always close together. Once I found her in a violent paroxysm of coughing, which left her in a state of dangerous exhaustion.

"I am afraid she has been talking too much," I said; "perhaps it would be as well if you left her now for a little time."

He rose to go, but she made a movement with her hand, and whispered, "No, stay, don't go—" He kneeled down again by her, and round his neck fell her tired arms. There was no sound in the room but that of her quick, uneasy breathing. She grew better as she had done many a time before.

"I'm quite right now," she said. "If I want anything Malcolm will tell you. I know you want to be seeing after household things. Stroke my ponies for me."

So I went, and ah! with what a heavy heart!

At length the day wore away, and when night came, I had again my child to myself. The pleasure and excitement of being in the presence of the man she loved, and ought to have hated, had on her the effect of a temporary stimulant, to such an extent that, supported by Bedford, she was able to take a short turn in the garden, and one day even got as far as the stables.

"I never thought I should see you again, my dears, in your own house," she said, kissing the necks of her ponies.

She became quite gay, and took more nourishment than she had done for a long time.

"I shall give her back to you, and then take her from you as my wife," Bedford said to me one day when we were alone together.

"No," I said, "this improvement will last, you will see, but a very short time."

My words were cruelly verified. That very night she became

dreadfully feverish and delirious, in consequence of which she was too exhausted in the morning to rise.

“Malcolm,” she said, “is he up?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Bring him, then ; it is so long since I have seen him.”

Of course I did as she wished.

That day was one of the last in September. The sky was cloudless, and the sun, oh how warm ! Through the day Lilian dozed from time to time, great blue-bottle flies buzzed in and out, or struck against the ceiling.

Bedford sat by the bedside, she had dropped one hand in his.

He [put his other over it to keep the flies from vexing it. Sometimes she would open her eyes and moan, but as if she hardly knew for what. At other times she would smile to see that he was still beside her. Once I heard her whisper to him :

“Dear, don't you want to go and smoke?”

“I want nothing,” he answered, “but to be with you.”

She smiled for reply ; she was too weak to speak again then.

So that autumn day wore away, and we two, who watched in the sick room, scarce dared to draw our breath lest we should wake her from the light slumbers into which she fell ; but we knew that she was going from us—that the end must be very near. After sunset she seemed to grow a little more awake, and took a few mouthfuls of jelly. Then again she lapsed into a state of half-unconsciousness. It was getting on for midnight. Malcolm Bedford had gone into the sitting-room which adjoined. I knew he had gone there to hide from me the extreme agony that was rending every nerve of him. My darling awoke ; her breathing became painfully difficult. I went to her. She put her arms round my neck and said :

“Good-bye ; I love you ; you have been so good to me. Don't be too unhappy. Kiss me.”

I kissed her, and cried :

“Oh, how can I live without you ?”

“Malcolm,” she said, “where is he ?”

I called him. In another moment he was by the bed.

“Lilian, my love,” I heard him say.

“You mustn't fret,” she said.

She was propped up by pillows, but she moved so that he might put his arm round her. For a moment there was com-

plete and awful silence. Then I heard her speak, and at the last almost distinctly.

“Good-bye, my love ; perhaps some day together, forever together.”

Her head dropped forward on his shoulder, from which she would raise it never more. Into the wind, which was beginning to rise and moan round the house, had gone the emancipated soul—gone wither? Some four or five hours afterwards I found Bedford walking up and down the garden-path in front of the house. The morning was wet and chill.

“Can I go to her?” he asked, in a hollow voice.

“Yes,” I answered.

We walked back to the house together, and there I left him alone with his beautiful, cold dead. When two hours passed and he did not return, I went gently to the door of the room. From within I heard such a bitter sound of weeping that my heart was moved to him. I went in very quietly. He was kneeling by the bed, his face bowed on her breast, his frame shaken by sobs.

“Don’t be too hopeless,” I said, taking his hand and kneeling down by him.

He gave me a look which I shall never forget ; so there, in the darkened room, we knelt hand in hand.

On the evening of the day of the funeral, Bedford came to me and said, his manner calm and grave :

“When she left us I wished to follow her. It seemed to me that I could not bear to live and remember ; but it came to me that to do so was my punishment, and that I would bear it. I am going to give up painting. I have some money. I think I know something of the poor of the world. Anyhow, I have some new ideas concerning them. For her sake I am going to try and make the best use of what remains of my life. May I sometimes come and see you ?”

“Do,” I said, “and may you prosper in your good work.”

Before leaving Rockshire he bought ground for a grave adjoining hers.

“If I die suddenly,” he said, “directions as to where I wish to be buried will be found in my possession. If I think I see death coming, then I can myself give them, and I should come here to die.”



One night, two years after this, he came to see me. He was shivering, though the night was warm, and looked ill.

"I know," he said, quite quietly, "that I have taken my death. I wonder it hasn't happened to me before, I have been so much in the midst of fever and pestilence. I have come down here that I may not only be buried near her, but die where she died."

He had long ago taken a small house near mine, and to that dwelling he now betook himself. As he wished it, so was it to him. He died in the place where she had died, and was buried by her side. As I stand by those two graves, I wonder if the last words of my darling have come true, and they are indeed together forever.

## MISS STOTFORD'S SPECIALTY.

—:O:—

AGATHA STOTFORD was unfortunate. She lived in the midst of an artistic and literary circle, without being herself either artistic or literary. Her father was a painter of eminence, her brother a poet, while her sister composed music which was supposed by the knowing to be not far removed from that of Wagner—Wagner being the music god of the particularly æsthetic circle in which Miss Stotford revolved. Moreover, all the women of her acquaintance were remarkable for something. One was distinguished for her subtle interpretation of music ; another for her pictures ; a third had tried her hand, not unsuccessfully, at sculpture ; another still was noted for her conversation ; and yet another for her novels ; and perhaps the most successful of all for her great beauty.

So far, Agatha had been without a specialty. She was not a fool. She could tell a good picture from a bad one. Given a clue, she could discover beauties in a poem ; but she had no scrap of original genius. Her father had spared no pains in teaching her to draw, but, after laborious efforts, the highest result was a pitiful little water-colour sketch of a forlorn cow, drinking at a village duck-pond. She made her tilt at poetry, also, and addressed some lines to her canary, which began :

“ Thou pretty warbler, singing all the day,  
Thy song doth melt a cloud from off my breast ;  
It seems to drive each evil thought away,  
And bringeth to my weary spirit rest.”

But she stopped there, and accomplished no more in either of these directions, though no doubt she has preserved both poem and picture to this day as unappreciated achievements in art and literature.

She was certainly nice-looking, with a good, shapely figure, a fresh complexion, clear blue eyes, and bright, golden hair. But the men who frequented Mr. Stotford's studio wanted something more than prettiness to atone for the lack of intellectual power. Had she been as beautiful as her tall friend, Mrs. Liddell, the woman with the slightly hollow cheeks, and the wonderful eyes which seemed to have half solved the mystery of death, they could have overlooked her want of other gifts. But as it was, she was treated more like a kitten than anything else, and against this Miss Stotford's spirit chafed and rebelled.

She finally formed a resolve to produce an effect of her own, or die in the attempt. After much thought, she determined to be "noble"—specially and distinctively "noble." She would do some "grand thing"—not, be it understood, for nobility's sake, but for the sheer longing to produce an effect. Some large, picturesque crime would probably have suited her quite as well; but since she had not the courage for vice, she resolved upon virtue—or, rather, I should say, upon nobility, for the small sweet trifles of self-sacrifice and devotion that belong to every day carry with them no special distinction.

Now, let it be known that, among the *habitués* of Mr. Stotford's studio, was George Singleton, a young hump-backed art-student, who worked terribly hard, so his most intimate friends said, to preserve the life about which he cared so little, since he felt, with a morbid bitterness, his physical deformity. Hitherto, Agatha had scarcely ever thought of wasting words upon him, but now there came to her a grand resolve. She would make Singleton fall in love with her, and she would marry him. Her father had a kind heart, and was not very worldly: she made sure, therefore, that his consent could be gained. People should see what a power of noble devotion she had, if she had nothing else. Already she seemed to hear a chorus of wonder and admiration; then would come remonstrances, which she pictured herself as smiling down. Yes, all the circle which had taken so little account of her should admire her noble self-sacrifice, and see in her a heroine.

The thought first came to her as she was lying awake one

night, and when she appeared at breakfast next morning, there was a warmer glow on her cheek and a brighter light in her eyes than her family had beheld in them before.

When she next saw George Singleton, it was on a Wednesday afternoon, the day set apart weekly by Mr. and Mrs. Stotford for receiving their friends. Agatha had often wondered why Singleton came at all, for he said little, and seemed shy and ill at ease. This day, however, she determined, if possible, to make him talk. It chanced that he had been absent for several weeks, and that fact was an opening.

"What a stranger you've been," she said, as he came where she was sitting.

"It's kind of you to notice it."

"Is it work that has kept you away?"

"No. I've been staying with a man in the country."

"Did you like that?"

"Not much. I think there is hardly anything I do like."

"That must make you feel very lonely," she said, with a little shiver of sympathy, and such tenderness in her eyes.

He took the vacant chair beside her, and said :

"It is the loneliness of death to see your life stretching out before you like a plain, without tree or flower, without even a hillock in sight, to break the dead monotony."

"But your work?" she suggested, looking at him as no woman had ever looked at him before. "Surely, you care a little about that?"

"Perhaps I might, if any one else were interested in it."

"Oh, but many people must be. I, for one, should like so much to hear all about it."

"Would you, really?" he asked, his face brightening.

"Yes, of course I should. Is that so difficult to understand?"

"It seems so to me."

There was a pause. Then she said, oh so gently :

"Will you really tell me about what you do?"

"Need you ask me twice?"

Were this anything more than a short study, I could dwell at length, and with some pleasure in their skilfulness, upon the various wiles with which Singleton was beguiled—the sighs, the little bursts of enthusiasm, looks full of subtle sympathy, tones as subtle as looks, low under-tones meant to reach his ear only.

Indeed, she gave herself much more trouble than was necessary, for Singleton was very easily conquered. But, as we all know, it is one thing to get the horse to the well, and another to make him drink ; so it was one thing to get Singleton in love, and another to draw from him any declaration of his passion.

"Surely," thought Agatha, recalling his looks of adoration and the eager way he listened when she spoke, as if fearful of losing a single intonation of her voice—"surely he must love me."

Still, when they were alone together, which they frequently were, he never said nor did any of those things which unmistakably proclaim the lover. As a rule, men are not very grateful for the friendship of the women they love ; but Singleton had so schooled himself not to expect even so much as friendship from a woman, that he was really thankful for Agatha's, and did battle with himself to keep down the greater hunger in his heart.

One twilight they were sitting together by the open French window.

"How sweet it was of you," said Singleton, "to come and see me in my den, to-day."

"It was a pleasure and a privilege."

"You've made me in love with the room," he went on, "and I used to hate it so."

"Then I wish I had come before."

"I wish you had. Do you know how you have blessed my life?"

"I should like to do so much, much more," she said, with that simple, direct earnestness which Singleton always found so irresistibly captivating. Then, quite involuntarily, as it were, her hand rested on his. Of course she would have drawn it away in a moment, but he pressed it between both of his and held it. Then, as his blood kindled, he went through moments of the most exquisite agony. He saw, as in a vision, what life might have meant for him had he been formed like other happier men. The peace and passion of love, the glory of unmeasured light, the depth of unfathomable shade, the close intimate companionship, the stimulus to work and the crown of work—he realized them all. Just then his fate pressed heavily upon him. The sound of Agatha's voice roused him from the anguish of self-pity which had almost broken him down. Had



it been light enough for her to see him, she would have known that his face was fairly blanched with pain.

"George," she said, speaking in her lowest, and most earnest tones, "will you tell me something?"

"Whatever you may choose to ask."

"The whole truth?"

"The most absolute truth."

"Then I want to know just how much you care about me."

His heart began to beat violently. There were sparks of fire in his eyes. It would be a consolation to tell her just once how he loved her; yet he felt that she must be grieved by his disclosure. He was silent. Outside, one bird twittered persistently.

"Please, won't you tell me?" the girl's low voice entreated.

Still no answer.

"Is it that you are afraid to tell me how little you care for me, lest I should be grieved?"

"My God, Agatha," he cried, kneeling down beside her, and kissing her hands and the rings on her fingers with passionate adoration, I love you as the martyrs of old loved religion, when they went singing to their deaths. I could die for you like that. I love you with all the strength of a heart that has never known love before. If I had been like other men, I would never have rested till I had won you. But, Agatha, my darling, my saint, since I can never be more to you than a friend, I will be that. To do you service shall be the one purpose of my life. I know you did not mean to make me love you, but it was my doom."

He had spoken in a headlong impulse of passion. He paused now, and there was a moment's silence, through which, presently, her clear voice fell.

"Why, how mistaken you would have been not to tell me," she said, "I had a right to know, for I love you."

"Yes, as my friend."

"No, not in that way, but as a woman loves the man whose wife she would gladly be."

"Agatha, do you know what you are saying?" he cried. "It is not possible you could mean this."

"Can you think I should say it without meaning it?"

"You are mistaking pity for love."

"No; I have said that I love you, and now you must decide for yourself whether you believe it or not."

And I am bound in justice to say that if ever Agatha Stotford came near loving any one, it was in that moment. The fervour of his speech had moved her ; and then she was grateful to him for gratifying her heart's desire, and affording her the opportunity to make an effect.

"I must believe you," he said, as one half dazed ; "but oh, my love, how can it be?"

They sat together through the failing twilight, and on in the fragrant night. They were both almost silent. Singleton was trying to count over and realize his untold bliss. Agatha was wondering what would be the most striking form in which to make a general disclosure.

Singleton was anxious to go to Mr. Stotford at once, but Agatha begged him to leave that to her. And that night, after her lover was gone, when the hall door had been barred against all visitors, and Mr. Stotford was sipping his nocturnal brandy and water, and smoking a massive meerschaum which always made its appearance at that hour, Agatha came behind his chair, and rested her hand on his shoulder, while she said :

"Papa, dear, I want something from you."

"My dear, I'm not surprised to hear that. How many new dresses is it this time?"

"It's not dresses. What I want is your consent to my engagement."

"Your engagement to be married?"

"What other engagement could I possibly mean?"

"What! You mean to say," cried Mr. Stotford, fairly astonished now, and regarding the smoke from his pipe as if he had some slight hope of finding therein a solution of his difficulty—"you mean to say that some fellow is in love with you, and you are in love with him?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"Well, it can't be Edmunds ; and it can hardly be young Claymore?"

"No."

"Then who is it?"

"It is Mr. Singleton."

"What! That poor, hump-backed young fellow?"

"It is George Singleton."

"My dear child," said Mr. Stotford, gravely, "this is indeed a more serious matter than I conceived."

But it would be unnecessary to repeat all the father's arguments on this occasion.

"Well, my dear, I won't oppose you. I have seen so much trouble in the world from interference that if you can really love this poor fellow I won't stand between him and his chance of happiness."

"Thank you, dear, thank you," Agatha said, warmly, and then she kissed her father.

Just then Mrs. Stotford and her other daughter, Addie, came in and Mr. Stotford told the family news. The mother, good soul, had always felt certain that her Agatha would somehow distinguish herself, and now the hour had come. Both she and Adelaide were enthusiastic and tender-hearted, and they both wept; and somehow Agatha, who was not at all of a melting mood, felt quite out of place and embarrassed with her own dry eyes.

When her brother Ernest, the poet, came in, he too heard the news, took his sister in his arms and kissed her, saying, very earnestly :

"God be praised that there is one woman left who knows how to love."

Ernest was at that time about five and twenty, and rather cynical concerning women, because the beautiful Mrs. Liddle obstinately persisted in preferring her own husband to himself, sonnets included.

The next day, the news spread like wildfire. Mrs. Liddle drove out to see if it were true; and, when she heard that it was, embraced Agatha, and murmured something about Aurora Leigh. Of course, there were not wanting those who felt bound to remonstrate, and asked Agatha very emphatically if she knew what she was doing. When she assured them that she did, they shook their heads solemnly, and expressed their hopes that her nobility would be rewarded.

On the whole, Agatha was not at all disappointed. She had produced quite as startling an effect as she had anticipated. Men who had never noticed her before began to come around her. She went among them by the name of St. Agatha. Painters idealized her prettiness into beauty, and painted her with a halo around her head.

Agatha liked being seen out with her lover. It was a perpetual advertisement to the world of her nobility.

But, alas that wonders live but nine days ! Our elopements, our marriages, our sudden deaths—who can pause for long discussion of them ? We all know how charming is the existence of convalescence ; but as soon as we get a good appetite for our dinners, we are rubbed off the sick list. Our irritability, which was so lately hailed with joy as a sign of our recovery, is set down now as genuine ill-temper, and is considered all the more ungrateful in one whom illness had so long made a candidate for household forbearance. There is no pedestal on which we are allowed to stand for long, unless we are made of stone. Like the rest, Miss Stotford had to come down from hers. It was a depressing day for her when she found that people had quietly accepted the fact of her engagement, and had ceased to praise or pity her for it. Even Singleton himself had ceased to question the reality of his own happiness, and was actually beginning to make plans for the future, and growing eager to have the marriage-day fixed.

“ Surely, there is plenty of time for that,” she said. “ We can settle about it in October, when I come back from Switzerland.”

It was just at the end of August when Mr. Stotford took his family abroad for their summer holiday. George could not leave London just then, but he said to his betrothed :

“ Don't mind for me, darling. The memory of your love will keep me happy, and I know you want a change ; you have been looking quite pale lately. And then you will write to me.”

Perhaps Agatha would hardly have allowed to herself how glad she was to get away ; but to a perfectly cold nature like hers, persistent “ spooning ” was a heavy price to pay, even for the pleasure of having produced a great effect.

In Switzerland, the Stotfords made the acquaintance of a family by the name of Gardiner. Agatha and Miss Maude Gardiner struck up an intimate friendship, after the manner of young ladies. The elder members of the two families found little in common, for the Gardiners, though people of good social position, were not over-weighted with brains ; but Maude suited Agatha, and Maude's brother, Reginald, was a fine, handsome young fellow. Very pleasant were the mountaineering expeditions the three made together, and three more intrepid spirits could hardly have been found.

Of course, she at once told Maude all the particulars of her



engagement, and Maude was enchanted. She had never heard of anything so beautiful.

"You are going to build up his ruined life," she cried.

"I hope so, dear."

"And you must let me see him as soon as we get back to London."

"Oh, yes ; we must all be the best of friends."

One morning, as they were leaving the hotel for a day's ramble, Agatha remarked that she hoped she should find a letter on her return.

"Do you mean *the* letter?" Maude asked.

"Yes, Miss Inquisitive. It should have come yesterday."

"Ah? Then let me suggest a telegram," put in Reginald, who had joined them in time to overhear the last remarks. "You don't look pale over your disappointment, though."

Agatha blushed becomingly, and they set out.

They returned at dinner-time, in excellent spirits, and Agatha hurried to her room to dress for *table d'hôte*. They were very merry at dinner, and all the evening through, as they sat in the lighted garden listening to the band.

When Reginald said good-night to Agatha, he asked, with a slight but expressive smile :

"Did your letter bring you good news, Miss Stotford?"

Agatha blushed now in good earnest. Every one knew the English mail came in at five o'clock ; and she had forgotten to ask for her letter.

"It's only a straw," thought Reginald, as he went toward the billiard-room ; "but it's certainly a straw."

It was a cold day toward the end of October, when the Stotfords and the Gardiners returned together to London. Maude had not long to wait for her introduction to George Singleton, for he was on the platform, ready to greet his betrothed.

"Is it not noble of Agatha?" asked Miss Gardiner of her brother, when they had parted from the Stotfords.

"The fellow has been rather hard hit by fate ; but he has his compensation, certainly," Reginald answered, with a frown on his face, as he turned away from his family to go to dinner at his club.

Of course, Singleton dined that evening with the Stotfords ; and when he and Agatha were alone together in her little



sitting-room, he was very affectionate,—“oh, more affectionate than ever,”—as Agatha thought, ruefully. He had brought with him a small manuscript book, in which he had carefully set down all the details of his days, interspersed here and there with a lover's ravings.

“I thought it might interest you,” he said.

“Oh, yes, thank you,” she answered; “so it does, very much,” and she turned over some of the pages.

When he took his leave, she suggested that he was forgetting his book.

“Then, you don't care to keep it?”

There was a wistfulness in his question which her ear failed to detect.

“No, thanks; I think I've seen in it now all you have been doing. Monday seems very much like Tuesday, and Thursday repeats Wednesday. You have been very good.”

Singleton sat long by his fire that night. He took the diary out rather tenderly from his pocket, and looked at the fly-leaf, on which was written: “A record of what I do, kept by me for my dear in her absence.” Then suddenly he thrust it into the fire, and called himself an unworthy fool. Why should she understand his sentimentality? Her love showed itself in grand actions,—had she not chosen him? And he went to bed, a good deal ashamed of his diary episode.

The marriage-day was at last fixed for early in January. From the first, I have been frank with you about Agatha. I have not at any time striven to enlist your affection for her, nor will I even make any further claim for her on your respect. I must frankly own that the nearer her marriage-day came, the more she shrank from the prospect of it. As Singleton's wife she could not hope even to make the sensation she had created as his betrothed. The pleasure of producing her effect had been great, but she had obtained it on credit. She had enjoyed it to the full; and now the time for paying the price was drawing nigh. What wonder if she rebelled! At times she almost thought of throwing herself upon Singleton's generosity, which she well knew would not fail her, and begging to be set free from fulfilling her obligation. But what of all her admiring friends? How could she bear to step down from the pedestal of saint, whereon their homage had placed her, and become the commonest of all common things,—a woman who found herself

utterly unequal to the sacrifice she had undertaken to make? No; this humiliation was more than she could endure. But surely every woman before being bound for life to one man, has her right to her meed of homage from others—in a word, to have her fling. And if Singleton would but be jealous,—if he would quarrel with her on this account,—why, then surely the fault would not be hers. Maude was her most intimate friend, and she could not see much of Maude without seeing a good deal of Reginald, too. Besides, she liked Reginald, and her friendship with him as well as with his sister was a fact to which George must speedily make up his mind. So one night she said to him :

“ Oh, I sha’n’t see you to-morrow evening—Maude is coming.”

“ May I not look in after she goes?”

“ Oh, you may come in, if you like, but you would not see me alone because Reginald is coming for her, and they’ll be sure to stay late.”

“ The next evening, then?”

“ Oh, I am going there.”

“ Then I may call for you, may I not?”

“ Yes, but not before eleven, please. We are going to the theatre.”

“ Well, dear, I hope you’ll enjoy yourself. You’ll find me very punctual at eleven.”

If it had been difficult to draw a declaration of love from Singleton, it was yet more impossible to elicit from him any expression of jealousy. His attention and devotion remained undiminished, and he preserved the utmost serenity of temper under circumstances which might easily have ruffled the sweetest nature. Only Agatha noticed one change, and that was that he talked less about their future than he had done at first. For this she could not help being grateful to him. The day for their marriage, however, was drawing near, and work on the trousseau had begun.

The night before Christmas Eve, they were alone together in Agatha’s sitting-room. A wild north-east wind was sweeping around the house and wailing through the leafless trees. Now and then the sleet was driven up vehemently against the window.

“ I think I never shall be warm again,” said Agatha.

She was sitting in a low easy-chair, drawn close to the fire, her

feet resting on the fender, her head lying back on a velvet cushion, her small white hands sparkling with rings clasped on her lap. She looked the very embodiment of indolence and comfort.

Singleton made no answer. He was standing with his arms resting on the mantel-piece.

"Why don't you speak?" she asked, with some asperity in her tone.

"I didn't hear what you were saying."

"You never do," she rejoined, promptly, "when I speak about any suffering of mine."

"Are you suffering, dear?" he asked, looking up.

"Yes, of course I am. You know how this weather makes me feel."

The clock struck half-past ten—the hour when Singleton always took his leave.

"Agatha," he said, a little nervously, "I want to ask something of you."

"Do you?" she replied, wearily; "well, what is it?"

"I want to stay with you to-night until eleven."

"Oh, not to-night," she said, perhaps with more protestation in her voice than she was even aware of. "My head aches, and I want to go to bed, and see if I can't get warm there."

"Only this once, dear," he entreated.

She made no reply.

"Forgive me, Agatha; I was a selfish brute. You aren't too angry to say good-night, are you?"

She could not fail to see the effort he made to hide the quiver of pain in his voice, and glancing up she saw in his eyes such a look of pleading, that even her not very susceptible heart was touched.

"There, there, you needn't go," she said. "I spoke to you more crossly than I should have done. Half an hour longer won't kill me; and if you will be vexed with me I can't help it."

"Vexed with you?" he said, kneeling down beside her. "How do you think that could ever be?"

Then he put his arms around her, and drew her head on his shoulder.

For the next half-hour there was complete silence between them. Inside, the fire flickered, and held low converse with

itself; and outside, the insatiable wind wailed on. When the clock struck eleven, he arose, and Agatha arose too.

"Thank you," he said, "for letting me stay. I know you won't be sorry for it, hereafter." And as he stood there, holding both her hands in his, she saw again in his eyes that strange, pleading look.

"Aren't you happy?" she asked. "You seem as sober as a judge."

"Could a man who believed in your love be other than happy?"

At the door, he turned back, drew her close to his heart once more, and kissed her again, long and lovingly. Then he went.

"Gone at last," she thought, with a sigh of relief, as she heard the hall-door close behind him. Then she went straight to bed.

Miss Stotford was not an early riser. Before meeting the outside distractions of the day, she perused the first delivery of letters over morning coffee in her own room. This morning's mail brought her many seasonable cards, but, oddly enough, only one letter. She was familiar with the delicate, almost feminine handwriting—it was from Singleton. Shortly after their engagement he had been much addicted to the habit of posting her a letter before going to bed, but latterly he seemed to have broken himself of the practice. Indifferently at first, yet with ever-increasing interest, she read:

"HARLEY STREET, 24 December, 1 a.m.

"MY DARLING,—I wish this letter to be as little of a shock to you as possible. On the 24th of May last, seven months ago to-day, you told me that you loved me. That you were sincere then in thinking so, that you even try to think so now, I do not for a moment doubt. Indeed, I believed in your love most implicitly till your return from Switzerland. Then a doubt of it grew into my mind. I watched you carefully, and watched my own heart carefully, too." ["Now for the jealousy," thought Agatha, as she settled herself more comfortably for a further perusal.] "I know something of the human heart, and I know how a woman appears when she is really in love with a man. At length my doubts grew into an unalterable conviction that if you had ever loved me—if, indeed, you had not from the first, out of the very nobility of your nature, mistaken pity for love—the feeling, unconsciously, perhaps, to yourself, was dying out. Only great love on your part could ever have rendered possible



the life you would have led as the wife of a man so unfortunate as I am. But I do not offer to free you " [Agatha's heart dropped a little], "for I know your exquisite sensitiveness would suffer from a mistaken sense that you had failed toward me. I know you would repudiate all I could say ; for in your noble desire to build up a ruined life, you would, for once, be capable of deception. But, Agatha, my love, what would it be to me to see you slowly fading before my eyes? Yet I am a weak man, and if you held the cup to my thirsty lips, could I help drinking? No, I do not offer you your freedom : I give it to you—my Christmas gift. When you read this letter I shall be so far away from you that no pain and no joy can follow me.

"Had I never known your love, I could have had keen pleasure in your friendship ; but after knowing your love, your friendship would be an intolerable torment. Life holds nothing more for me ; but my death will be painless. I shall die happy, for I shall conjure up from the past, to take with me out of the world, a vision of that dear May evening. Do you remember, I wonder, how I came in, and found you in the twilight? You were lying on the sofa, and I took a low chair and sat close by you—the chair which stood between the windows. You had a gray silk dress on, and a red rose in your hair that I thieved before I went away. I shall hear again the tenderness of your voice, as you told me that you loved me. I shall feel again—ah, no, I shall not feel that—my blood thrill under your touch, under the first confident answering pressure of your lips. Never to feel that again !—this it is which unmans me and makes me weak. Last night, in that extra half-hour which you granted me, my heart kept crying out to me : ' Here is Agatha, Agatha, to see, to touch, to kiss,—and in a few hours she will be just as far off as the first day of creation ! ' Oh, my love, never to see you again !

" Later.

"Dear, I am quite calm, now. In a very little while I shall long for nothing any more. I want you to know how in these last moments my whole heart goes out in blessing to you. But for you, perhaps, I should have lived out a long and painful life, productive of no joy to myself or others. I have neither father nor mother—no one to sadden by my loss. I should never have done anything really good in art,—Mr. Stotford will tell you so,—so I am small loss there. You gave me three months of divine



happiness, and I shall now turn to the thought of that time as a bridegroom turns to his bride. Good-bye, my darling, and may some power ever bless and guide you.

“G. S.”

Many times the letter had fallen from Agatha's fingers while she read. Now she held it crushed in her hand. Did Singleton mean all he had said? Could this thing really be? Was her lover no longer in this world, and if so, was she not, in a way, guilty of his death? Her blood turned to ice and her teeth chattered. Then, with a sudden impulse, she rose and dressed. She half thought she might do something, Yet what *could* she do? Only one thing she knew. She must appear ignorant of what this letter had revealed to her.

When she went to the breakfast-table, there was no gainsaying the fact that she was ill, for her face was as white as death. She tried in vain to eat.

“No, I can't take anything,” she said at last. “I will go to my own room, and try to get warm there.”

Mrs. Stotford and Adelaide followed her, with the kindest intentions.

“I hope, dear,” said Mrs. Stotford, in her cheerful voice—more cheerful than usual, by virtue of the season—“I hope you made George promise to be with us early to-morrow.”

Poor Agatha! What exquisite agonies of remorse she experienced as she remembered that she had promised to go to church with the Gardiners, and then to lunch with them.

“I don't think he'll come before dinner,” she answered, faintly.

“I do think George is an angel,” said Miss Adelaide, emphatically, “to be so sweet over your friendship with the Gardiners. I know if I were a man I shouldn't like it.”

“Please don't talk,” entreated Agatha, “I know it's all kindness, but I would rather be let alone. My head is bursting.”

“Well, come away, Addie,” said Mrs. Stotford. “We have enough to do with putting up the holly and mistletoe. You can't trust matters like that to servants. Of course, it's not their fault that they can't do it artistically. Perhaps when Agatha's a little warmer she'll lie down on the sofa and get a sleep. That will be the best thing for her. She just has a bad, feverish cold, as any one could see.”

So they left her, and she crouched before the fire, shivering and shaking as with ague.

Surely, he might yet have repented of his rash resolve. Still, if he had, would he not have sent her word? The silence was ominous. All the time she kept asking herself how far she, Agatha, was responsible if he had done this thing. If he must go away, why not have gone to Australia, where he need never have seen her again? Of course, it was not in her to understand how the thought of love won and lost can turn life into a present hell. At the sound of every footfall, she started as if a ghostly hand had been laid on her shoulder. At the postman's sharp knock her heart leaped in her, and then stood still.

About four o'clock came Reginald and Maude Gardiner to see her.

"We heard from Mrs. Stotford," said Maude, "that you were ill; but you look frightfully, child; what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much," moaned Agatha. "I shall be better soon."

"This hand is cold," said Reginald. "Let me see if the other one is equally ill-behaved."

"Don't," she said, almost fiercely, drawing her hand abruptly away.

"Are you cross with me?" asked Reginald, in his sweetest tone of voice.

"I am ill. Don't you see I am?"

"Low-spirited," observed Maude.

"Precisely so," replied Reginald. "Perhaps it would cheer you to hear the contents of the evening paper."

Then, taking a *Standard* from his pocket, he began reading.

"The latest telegrams from the seat of war.' Ah! it appears we have done wonders. Actually, five hundred soldiers of the English army encountered and defeated two hundred natives, with considerable slaughter. 'Christmas in the East End.' How I do hate all this cant about the season! 'Alarming Fire in the City.' 'Those Cabmen again.' 'Police Reports. Anything there you'd like? 'A Strange Breach-of-Promise Case.' 'Great Wrecks off Dover.' I should think so, with such a devil of a wind as we've been having. 'The Suicide in Harley-street.'"

"Ah! what's that?" asked Maude. "I'm always interested in suicides."

"Morbid propensity, child," in Reginald's tone of brotherly superiority.

Agatha's heart leaped in her with an inaudible cry.

"We must have light on the subject," said Reginald, stirring the fire into a bright blaze.

"Really, Reginald, you should *not* jest on such a subject," remonstrated Maude.

"Jest? I'm sober as a judge at a coroner's inquest, Listen :

"'Mr. Jno. Harrison, surgeon in Harley-street, was summoned this morning, about ten a.m., to No. 26, where he found ——'"

And suddenly Reginald stopped.

"Why don't you go on?" inquired Maude.

He turned the paper toward her, pointing to the paragraph.

"Oh, great heaven! It can't be. Oh, Agatha, darling!"

And she flung her arms round Agatha's neck. But Agatha seized the paper, which Reginald feigned to detain from her, flashed her eyes down the column, and saw what she knew she would see, Singleton's name.

"Hush! Hush!" said Reginald to Maude, who, with difficulty, stifled her sobs. Then the three sat for a minute or two in awful silence.

Then Agatha rose, stood erect for a moment, as if she were about to walk out of the room, and then suddenly, with a wild cry of horror, fell forward in a deathly swoon. She would have dropped to the ground, but Reginald caught her in his arms.

"How she did love that poor fellow!" he thought, while Maude ran in haste to find Mrs. Stotford.

Of course, Agatha was at once put to bed, and the family physician was sent for. When he heard all the circumstances of the case, saw Agatha's unnaturally bright eyes, felt her quick pulse, and listened to her incoherent wanderings, he could not disguise from the family his apprehensions of brain fever.

"It was a critical case," he said; "but if she could get a night's sleep, the danger might be averted."

About the small hours, Agatha's wanderings ceased, and a heavy sleep fell upon her and saved her.

It was three o'clock on Christmas-day when she awoke. The bells were ringing for afternoon service. At first she thought it must be Sunday morning, and that she had slept late. Then she began to wonder at her strange feeling, as if she had been

bruised all over, and the sense of blended weakness and clearness in her head. Then very gradually, yes, and very gently, too, she remembered all the events of the preceding day, and accepted them as one too weak to feel surprise. There were two great facts—Singleton was dead, and she was free.

At the expiration of a week, Agatha once more appeared in her little sitting-room. The friends who saw her said that a saintly resignation had beautified her face. The truth was, she had settled with her own conscience very satisfactorily, and decided that she was in no remotest way chargeable with Singleton's death. She had certainly flirted no more during her engagement than many other women do, and it was Singleton's own fault if he had deceived her by keeping from her what he really felt, and so prevented her from behaving differently. No, it was his own morbid sensitiveness that had driven him to his own rash act.

In her heavy mourning, and with her face so pale—for she really had been ill—she looked far more interesting than of old. Only four men were privileged to come and see her, and they only as ministering angels. There was William Poynter, a captivating young tenor, for music soothed her; then, by way of gentle stimulant, Mr. John Barker, poet and critic, came to read and explain difficult passages in Browning. Then, as her religious opinions had got somewhat out of order—she was the only one in that set who had any, and was inclined to make a point of them—the handsome young High-church clergyman, Mr. Augustus St. Clair, came in to overhaul the spiritual machinery. And lastly, and by right of the family friendship, most frequently, came Reginald to divert her by planning an Italian tour for the autumn.

But, after all, decorous flirtations in recently assumed crape are but tame. Sighs and looks of gratitude must take the place of laughter and repartee. Agatha grew tired of long-continued endeavours not to look quite so resigned as she felt. The tenor's music palled on her; she got sleepy over "Balaustion's Adventure;" she regained her usual tranquil satisfaction with the state of her religious views and functions. She dismissed all her ministering angels, except Reginald, with whom she felt more at ease than with the others.

When the summer came, she was glad to escape from London. Sea-side and hill-side brought her their balm. She

concluded that even without a specialty life might be a very good thing. She returned to town bright and beaming. I do not think that Singleton's ghost haunted her, even on the day before Christmas.

The next summer, she fulfilled her natural calling by marrying. The bridegroom, however, was not Reginald. He proposed, indeed, but she took three months to consider. During that period of probation, she met the son of a very rich picture-dealer. As was natural for a painter, Mr. Stotford furthered this alliance ; and the young man, if not quite so handsome as Reginald, was very much richer. Like a dutiful girl, she obliged her father, as he had before obliged her. Reginald, I must confess, found speedy consolation. It is not the handsome Reginalds of the world who die for love.

The reputation for nobility which had been purchased by her engagement to Singleton never quite forsook Agatha.

"Ah," said her romantic friends, "her life was really over when that poor fellow died. She married just to please her father."

Of course, there were not wanting unfeeling people to make irreverent remarks ; but of such persons we have nothing to say. She lived as tranquilly as such women do. If she had no vivid joy in her days, she had no keen pains. As time wore on, sometimes, in the dead watches of the night, or in the glare of a crowded theatre, she would suddenly be confronted with the past from which she had escaped, and meet the look of sad, beseeching eyes—eyes sad, but never reproachful. At such moments she would feel suddenly faint, and grow dizzy ; but the evil moments passed, and save in these rare visions, she was never disturbed by the memory of her first engagement.



## BRYANSTONE AND WIFE.

—:0:—

WILLIAM BRYANSTONE was going to be married, and those friends of his who knew him best said, "God help Mrs. Bryanstone." They said this not because Bryanstone was a poor man, for he was quite a rich one ; nor because he was out of health, or yet ill-favoured as to personal appearance. They expended their pity upon his wife in advance simply because he was a poet, and was cursed by what people sometimes call the artistic temperament ; that is to say, a temperament nervous and excitable in the extreme.

William Bryanstone was a poet, but, alas ! not a successful one. He said himself, that it was his misfortune to belong to this Blue China period, on the lyrics and love sonnets of which he looked down with lofty scorn. His own soaring ambition led him Milton-ward. He let the small game of his *confrères* alone, therefore, and poured out his mighty soul in stupendous epics, and dull, unwieldy poems, which he called dramatic ; and the critics went to sleep over them and woke up at the end to abuse them. He was between thirty and forty when the last of these lofty flights which he was to write before his betrothal fell into the hands of these his enemies, and they abused it worse than ever, for they were out of patience with him ; and Bryanstone's often wounded heart grew sick, and his temper suffered in consequence.

He bored most people, this man whose conversation turned chiefly on himself, and who spoke always of himself and Milton,

as if they had been fellow-workers in the same great cause, and of not very unequal merit.

“Yes,” he would say, languidly, as if the commonplaces and conventionalities of life had exhausted him—“yes, the work that Milton commenced I will carry on, as well as I am able. In these days of sham passion and sham sentiment, across this jingling of lute-strings, shall sound my trumpet-note of the heroic. The task is a hard one, but the spirit of Milton, and may it not be of Homer also? I will call to my aid, and before I go hence I may have made men a little in love with the larger life.”

To do him justice, he laboured diligently in the good cause, but he worked to no purpose. Men hearkened not to his Epics of Heroes, nor were they at all more attentive when he published his grand dramatic poem, entitled “The Abnegator;” still he worked on, disheartened indeed, but never hopeless. Of his work it must be said that it was by no means without merit. Many a good line, many an original fancy, might have been culled from it; but he was ruined by his ambition. He was for ever striving to reach impossible heights, and naturally he got many a tumble. However, if the London journals either ignored or scoffed at his frequent volumes, the provincial papers regarded him as a star of no small magnitude; and his fame penetrated even to the quiet village of Litchvale—at least to a certain Miss Ethel Johnstone, the daughter of the village doctor. She read all local journals she could get hold of, and through them became in time quite familiar with the name of Bryanstone. The papers quoted from him, not infrequently, and she diligently pasted these quotations into her scrap-book. They had a lofty sound which pleased her. She was contented to admire without understanding them. Why not? Are not many of the admirers of Browning thus content to worship an unknown and uncomprehended god?

Ethel Johnstone was, after all, rather an uncommon young woman to find in a small country village. Her mother had died when she was quite a little girl. She had no brothers or sisters, and rather shrank from the companionship of other children, and in the hours when she should have been healthily romping she would sit, if it was winter, curled up by the fire; if it was summer, out in the garden, reading, always reading. She was not, however, one of those remarkable little girls who delight in

books of history and travel. She hated school, and everything savouring thereof. What she liked was, first of all, stories, and then, oddly enough, poetry, and her father, knowing her tastes, gave her for her birthday present, when she was fourteen, a small but fairly well selected collection of poets.

As a rule there is something of jarring and tumult about the development of a human spirit. Childhood is shaken by fits of mirth and passions of unreasoning sorrow, both alike brief of duration. Girlhood has its uncertainties, its unreasonable despondence, its too eager hope ; and womanhood, like manhood, imposes upon the human soul the terrible responsibilities of life. For most of us there is little peace from the cradle to the grave, but Ethel Johnstone seemed to mature placidly and silently. From a rosy-cheeked, large-eyed, yet grave little girl, she grew into a rosy-cheeked, large-eyed, quiet young lady, hardly pretty, but delightfully wholesome and healthy-looking. If her face was not too full, and her mouth too large, her brown eyes were good, and so was her figure, though the latter was, for some tastes, a trifle too ample.

As I have said, she matured silently. She had no child friends nor had her girlhood known any of those romantic intimacies which so often exist between girls, before the rightful lover appears on the scene.

Sitting by the fire in winter, or among the rose and currant bushes of Rose Cottage in the summer, reading, mending, shelling peas—Heaven knows what—she dreamed, she too, her own unspoken dreams. In her favourite novels the girls who lived in the country always somehow got up to London, and then what exciting things befell them ! So should she, surely, get up to London, and then hey, presto ! would not her turn for exciting things come ?

She was about twenty when the Vicar's son asked her to marry him, but that would have been quite too tame a conclusion to her dreams, and she said "no," out of hand. And then six more years of dreaming went on, varied by occasional visits to relations in London — disappointing visits, since nothing more exciting happened in them than going to the play, or an occasional drive in Hyde Park. Perhaps in her twenty-sixth year she began to regret that she had dismissed the Vicar's son—but she did not say so. She was as quiet and uncommunicative as ever, managed the affairs of the household most compe-

tently, and waited for that surprise of fate which had been so long delayed, but which came to her at last.

It was the 16th of June, and the roses were in blossom, and birds and bees were making love to them. She gathered a great bowlful and put them on the dinner-table, and was half surprised that her father did not notice them when he sat down to dinner. Dr. Johnstone *had* a pompous manner, and it seemed more pompous than ever this particular day. Soon Ethel discovered the reason. A gentleman from London had been among his patients that afternoon—a gentleman who had set out on a walking tour, but had unfortunately sprained his wrist just as he reached Litchvale, and had concluded to stop there a few days and be treated by Dr. Johnstone, of whose skill he had heard from the landlord of the village inn. And this patient, the doctor announced, with an air of importance, was none other than the distinguished poet, Mr. Bryanstone.

“Oh father,” cried the girl, “are you quite sure it is the same?”

“Quite sure, for I asked him. And I told him if he would dine here to-morrow I would introduce him to a great admirer of his, in the person of my daughter. And he really seemed very pleased,” added the doctor, in the tone of one well satisfied with his performance.

“And you think he’ll come?”

“No doubt of it. He promised to come without fail. Indeed, he seemed quite flattered by the attention.”

And, sure enough, the next evening Mr. Bryanstone did present himself, and Ethel saw him in the flesh. She was not disappointed. As to the flesh, there was a good deal of it for a poet; and there was a certain solidity of face, which befitted, perhaps, the quality of his aspirations and his work. But to Ethel’s eyes he looked like a descended god. His voice was cultured and gentlemanly, if his tones were a thought too measured; and Ethel felt that she could have listened to him for ever with ever-fresh delight.

After dinner Dr. Johnstone was summoned to a patient, and then Ethel breathlessly asked the poet if she might tell him how dearly she loved all of his poetry that she had seen. The subject proved eminently congenial to them both — so they pursued it at some length. When they ceased to speak of the man’s poetry, it was only to take up the yet more interesting



subject of the man himself, and this topic proved quite as congenial to them both as the other had done. The upshot of the conversation was that when Bryanstone walked away, through the rose-scented summer night, Ethel had to own to herself that, for the first time in her life, she was distractedly in love ; and Bryanstone, on his side, confessed to his own soul that she pleased him—she was a most appreciative person.

Two days after he called to be appreciated and sympathized with once more. He could absorb any amount of appreciation and sympathy. He took it in as sand sucks in water.

His wrist got better and he talked of returning to London. He kept on talking of this as the days went by, but somehow the end of July saw him still in Litchvale. In June he said the nightingales kept him, and he would go when the very last one had ceased to sing. In July the nightingales had left, but Bryanstone had not left ; and Ethel began to wonder if it could be anything but herself that held him in that dull little village. Surely her time had come at last ! Her fate had found her out, and it was as romantic as anything she had ever read in a book—nature had a new meaning for her. The sun and moon shone with a divine inner light.

Bryanstone, meanwhile, was deliberately asking himself whether he should propose to her or not. He recognized in her what he called worth ; and certainly she was thoroughly appreciative of him. On the other hand, she could hardly be called pretty, and he knew that he was not one whit in love with her. But then he never *had* been in love in his life. He had often wondered over this fact, and had ended by persuading himself that his ideal was too high to be realized. It had never occurred to him to suspect that he was too self-absorbed, too much in love with William Bryanstone to have any heart to give any one else. Should he marry her, or should he not ? Over and over he balanced the pros and cons. On the one hand, he would have to renounce a certain amount of freedom ; but on the other, how pleasant it would be to have unfailing sympathy and appreciation always at hand. His friends had their own interests, and did not sympathize enough, but here was one who would not fail him. No fear of wearying *her* with his longest epics, his most imposing dramatic poems. He could not make her happier than to read to her. Yes, on the whole, he thought the ayes had it.

So it came to pass, on a languid afternoon at the very end of



July, the words were spoken which made Ethel Johnstone think herself the happiest woman in the world.

In November Ethel went up to London. The marriage was to come off on Christmas Eve, and the prospective bride, under the guidance of a sister of her father, was making her purchases for the great event. The short, yellow November days were devoted to shopping and the trying on of dresses. Ethel became, for her, quite buoyant, so full of hope and joy was she.

Bryanstone passed his days in a very different manner. They were occupied in correcting the proofs of his new volume, "The Damnation of a Soul," and in working away at the already begun and still longer poem that was to follow it ; for no sooner did Bryanstone give one volume to the press than he plunged, heart and soul, into another one. He did not in the least repent his engagement, but neither was he jubilant over it. No dreamer he of love-sick dreams. He looked forward to the honeymoon as a great but necessary bore, for which he consoled himself by the thought of the subsequent domestic fireside in the house he had chosen—a house with a westerly outlook on a rather quiet road, where he thought by the aid of double windows he might shut out the noise sufficiently to do his great work.

He usually dined with Ethel and her aunt, and, when the dinner things had been taken away, then came his golden hour. Then unfolded he his manuscript and read. To read the elder Miss Johnstone to sleep did not take long, but he made no lover-like use of her evident slumber. Ethel wondered sometimes that he never laid down the manuscript to kiss her and say such things as lovers said in the novels she had read ; but she reflected that her destiny was glorious among women. Those other lovers had not been poets like her hero ; and when he would pause to say, "*You* are my critic and my judge, and I cannot be contented till I have had your verdict upon my work," her heart would glow with pride and satisfaction.

At length the great day came. Bryanstone locked up his MSS. as one resigned to his fate. Little as he really knew of the state called being in love, he yet foresaw that while away on his honeymoon something other than writing epics would be expected of him. He mentally shuddered at the amount of sight-seeing that lay before him ; but he concealed his forebodings, and did his very best to look festive on the auspicious occasion of his marriage.

After the wedding there was the usual breakfast, with the usual speeches, and when it was over the happy pair started off for the Continent. In their carriage, on their way to the station, Bryanstone took his bride's hand in his, and said :

“ So, my dear, you are at last a poet's wife.”

And she answered, “ Yes, dear, yours always and for always,” with a look of devotion in her eyes worthy of a better—Bryanstone.

As such things go, the honeymoon journey was quite a success, and the pair returned to London in a state of mutual satisfaction. Then a change came to Ethel ; she no longer had that all-day-long companionship with her husband which had been so delightful. All the earlier part of the day he was busy with his pen ; and in the afternoons he was wont to go for a long, solitary walk. When she proposed to accompany him, she was told that he found solitude after his morning's work absolutely essential ; but they would pass the evening together. Once she ventured on a timid little remonstrance, and then Bryanstone lost his temper, and said he had been a fool to think any woman *could* understand a poet's needs, but he should know better in future, and look for no comprehension. Then, indeed, Ethel took alarm lest she should prove herself unworthy of her high calling.

When the great man returned from his walk he found her dressed to look her prettiest. Her manner was most loving, her face smiling, and the dinner good. He noted all these facts with satisfaction, and generously consented to be reconciled.

Ethel was one of those women with whom love is a religion rather than a pastime—that is to say, she loved more with her soul than with her senses. She was a poet's wife—*her* poet's ! She gloried in this thought. Some day, when the world recognized his greatness, it would know her also, as the lady of his choice. She bore with solitude patiently ; smiled at little gusts of temper ; and, when “ The Damnation of a Soul ” was most completely damned by a merciless press, she remained faithful and unchanged in her admiration. Even when that awful weekly, calling itself *The Balance*, said, cruelly :

“ Why Mr. Bryanstone should write verse is of course nobody's business but his own. We should think he might find more amusement in lawn tennis, but he knows best. Why he should publish what he writes is a still greater mystery,

since it can hardly be a pleasure to him to be compelled to see himself as the reviewers see him," and then went on for a column farther in a similarly cheerful strain ; yet her faith did not fail her.

"Read *that*," cried Bryanstone, flinging the paper on the table before her, and she *did* read it, and, having read, she came over to him, and said :

"Darling, what *does* it matter ? It is only a question of time. Whether it is one year, or two, or more, before they know you for the poet you are, it *must* come in time. *I* can wait—can't you ?"

This was just what she ought to have said. Bryanstone felt that she came up to the point required of a poet's wife, and answered, quite emotionally for him :

"Yes, dear, I can wait. We may have to wait longer than you think, but with you beside me I *can* wait."

All the same, waiting was hard. Women know what it is to wait for love that comes not ; and their lonely hearts ache, as they see other women praised, courted, married, while they are neglected. Even so do some men ache for fame, and Bryanstone was among them. Books of verse he fully believed far less worthy than his were praised, but not one word of praise or recognition as a poet from any London journal ever came his way. The literary circles he frequented were only neighbour to the rose—men and women who knew some one distinguished, perhaps, and promised introductions that never came ; and even among this set Bryanstone found scanty appreciation. He tried to think he did not care—that it was all because his work was above their heads. He comforted himself with legends of unappreciated great men, and reassured his wife that he could bide his time. All the same, the cup was bitter, and he who drank thereof was not altogether a pleasant person to live with ; and those friends who had said, when they heard of his marriage, "God help Mrs. Bryanstone !" had known what they were talking about.

Ethel proved herself a very remarkable woman. Did her husband ever think how much he gave her to bear ? Probably not, for he was eaten up by self-love ; and yet, in his own selfish way he grew very fond of her—as the cat is fond of the warm corner by the fire. If he went out without her she must sit up for him, no matter how late the hour at which he returned,

that he might have her to talk over the evening with. When he wrote, he wanted her, not in the room, but within easy call, that he might summon her to give her opinion at every progressive stage of his work. He was cold and affectionate by turns, and expected her to be contented and in harmony with either mood ; and so she always was, or at least she successfully pretended to be.

She was a wonderful woman, certainly ; but then she gloried in her misery, and consoled all her sorrows by thinking what men would say of her and of her poet when they should both be dead. Her health, however, began to fail. Her long spells of confinement to the house were alternated with walks of a length far beyond her strength, whenever her husband took a freak to desire her company. The premature birth and death of their first child left her a confirmed invalid. Of course Bryanstone was very sorry for this, he found it so desperately inconvenient. She had to go early to bed ; nor could she even bear to be read to for very long at a time. Thus he came to pass more of his leisure in the society of other people. She saw this change, but she made no comment on it. Sometimes she was more glad of rest than she could be of anything else in the world. She was sure he loved her—but he was a poet, and poets, she had been told, were not as other men. She must not grudge him the larger life he needed. He had his art to love, besides his love for her ; and she must be content that he should do what was best for that. Thus she reasoned it all out in her lonely hours ; and when he came home welcomed him with her unflinching gentleness.

It came to pass that one afternoon Bryanstone went alone to a reception where he thought it well to appear, though he honestly expected to be very much bored. And there, wonderful to relate, he was for the first time taken out of himself. He, William Bryanstone, fell in love. It was an American girl from New York, a certain Blanche Vandervoort, who wrought in him this sudden and amazing change. She was the first American he had ever met ; and perhaps her novelty had something to say to her charm for him. At any rate, he went down before her, at once and hopelessly. Her bright eyes, her soft colour, her perfect figure, her exquisite toilet, her voice, with its slight suggestion of sing-song—each was a separate charm.

“I hear that you are a poet ?” she said, when they were



introduced. "I like to meet poets, but I might as well tell you that I never understand poetry. I *do* know what some of Longfellow means, but that is all I can make out."

"You *shall* understand other poetry than Longfellow's," Bryanstone said, determinedly.

"And *how* shall I? Who'll make me?"

"I'll make you."

"Oh, I shall be much obliged. I'm afraid you can't, don't you know? but, *if* you can, I should like it. Are you sure you won't fail?"

"Quite sure. Why you *are* poetry."

"I don't rhyme," she said, softly. Was she making a pun, or gently laughing at him? At any rate, whatever she was doing she was adorable. Then some one separated them, and Bryanstone did not have an opportunity to speak to Miss Vandervoort again until just as she was leaving. She shook hands with him, and then turned back to say, with her pretty American accent:

"Remember, Mr. Bryanstone, you have promised to make me understand some poetry beside Longfellow's. I am at home every Wednesday afternoon, from four to seven," and she put a card into his hand. "Will you come some Wednesday, and commence my poetical education?"

"That I will, most surely."

Then they parted, and Mr. Bryanstone walked away to dine at his club, the happiest man in London. The man who has lived to middle age without ever falling in love is perhaps a man to be pitied; and yet is not the long-deferred passion all the more intoxicating when it does come at last?

"Yes," said Bryanstone, confidentially to himself, as he walked along; "I am hit, and there is no mistake."

And in very truth, hit he was, and hard hit at that. Here was a woman the very tones of whose voice moved him as no caress from any other woman had ever done. He recalled every shade of expression on her lovely face, every detail of her dress. The touch of her hand lingered on his palm, and thrilled him still. It was not in the man's nature at this crisis to think very much about poor Mrs. Bryanstone. It was all he could do to think of himself—of this wonderful, new emotion, which had revealed him to himself, and of her who had caused it. How was he to live until the next Wednesday?



He went home at last. His wife had not yet gone to bed. *She* was not changed. She was just as barren of anything like fascination as she had ever been. It seemed to him there was an air of untidiness about her, poor tired woman, and he thought he had never noticed quite how shockingly her gowns fitted before.

She welcomed him tenderly, and thereat his conscience gave him one little twinge, but he remembered that he had made *her* happy, though she had failed to make him so ; and he kissed her wan, uplifted face with quite a glow of virtuous satisfaction. But he left her immediately, bidding her go to bed, for a mood of work was upon him.

When he had told Miss Vandervoort that he would teach her to understand some poet beside Longfellow, he had thought, of course, of himself. She might not rise to the heights of his most important work, but for her sake he would descend from those heights. He had scorned to write simple love-lyrics, hitherto ; but for her sweet sake to these would he devote himself, and he was sure he could beat his rivals on their own lines, now that to him, in his turn, had come the inspiration of a genuine passion. He would read her these poems without letting her know that they were his ; and when she had sufficiently admired them she should find out that not only was he their author, but that she was their inspiration.

To work with this end in view was easy ; so it came to pass that when he presented himself in Miss Vandervoort's drawing-room on Wednesday, he had already quite a goodly amount of verse with which to regale her. When he saw that she really liked it, which indeed she did, for it was simple, eloquent, and impassioned, he told her that it was all hers—she had inspired it—he had written it for her. She blushed very prettily, and said :

“ Is that really true, Mr. Bryanstone ? No one ever wrote *me* any poetry before. Don't you know you'll make me proud ? ”

“ It is you who make *me* proud by caring for my rhymes. Ah, if you knew how inadequate they seem when I look at you ! ”

Let *us* look at her, also, this girl who had touched Bryanstone's long slumbering heart. She was rather pretty, perhaps, than beautiful ; but she was *very* pretty. She was rather tall, light, certainly, but with an exquisitely-moulded figure. Her

clearly-cut face was healthfully pale, her mouth small and red, her hair soft and abundant, sunny brown, with just a glint of gold in it. Her eyes were blue, large, serene, beautiful in shape as in colour, with black lashes ; real Irish eyes, bequeathed her by some remote ancestor. They were smiling eyes, with no particular depth of expression, but who asks for expression in such eyes as those ? Her voice was low, and the soft sing-song of her American accent had an especial charm for Bryanstone's unaccustomed ears ; but she had little to say for herself.

Bryanstone could not have told what in her charmed him so profoundly ; but charmed he was ; and it never occurred to him for one moment to resist the spell. Ah, those were good days for him. He believed himself terribly in love, and, for him, so he was ; though his feeling would not have seemed over deep, measured by the standard of other men. He gushed love-lyrics from morning until night whenever he was out of his charmer's sight ; and he was desperately happy except when he was in his wife's presence. At such times a kind of dull remorse gnawed at him, and this made him moody and ill-tempered, and poor Mrs. Bryanstone thought it was because, by reason of her illness, she could not devote herself to him quite as fully as she had formerly done. So she bore with his moods like an angel, and her forbearance begot yet more remorse, and he was glad to get away from her, and forget his slight compunctions of conscience in the delicious employment of writing verses to Blanche Vandervoort.

As for that blue-eyed young lady, she never dreamed that the man was married, though certainly she had not the faintest idea of marrying him herself. Hitherto, she had had plenty of admirers, rich men in her own country ; a handsome guardsman or two since she came to England, and one solemn member of Parliament. But Bryanstone was the first poet she had brought down, and to be the object of his rhymes and his rhapsodies was dainty food for her vanity, of which she had plenty. She was one of those women who delight in mild excitements, and, safe in their own coldness, enjoy playing with fire.

So, in Bryanstone's case, she allowed herself various harmless little unconventionalities. She drove with him in the park, she rambled in Kensington Gardens, she went to the opera, and he recited poems to her between the acts, and in her secret soul

she was bored alike by the poetry and the music. In conversation he contrived *not* to bore her, usually, for he talked to her chiefly about herself, and that was a subject in which she was unfailingly interested. Sometimes, however, he began to talk about himself, as a separate individual dissociated from her, and that wearied her frightfully. However, she never bore it long. She would bring him up short, in the midst of some thrilling account of the birth-throes in his soul of one of his great epics, by asking him how he liked her dress, and did he think blue or rose-colour suited her best.

Much as he adored her, he began to feel that she could not comprehend the poet-nature, and that, in that one sole respect, his poor wife at home was undoubtedly her superior. Many a man, so situated, would have grown to dislike his wife. Not so Bryanstone. He was quite willing to admit all Ethel's good points, yet in those days he certainly wished very little of her society. One night after he had returned from Miss Vandervoort's his wife said to him :

"Dear, I think you must be writing a great poem, you look so happy."

"No," he said, exultingly, "I am *living* one."

He was thinking of the other woman ; but poor Ethel took the words to herself, and went over to him and kissed him with such loving trust that he groaned in spirit, and feeling once more the sting of his remorse, hurried out of the house, saying he needed a longer walk.

One day Bryanstone came to Miss Vandervoort with a radiant face.

"My new book is in press," he said. "It will be quite different to anything I have ever before done. It will contain only the sonnets and lyrics that *you* have inspired, and I shall not even publish under my own name. My former volumes have been so different that the reviewers would not do me justice if they saw I had betaken myself to this so unaccustomed vein. We'll see what they say of some one who will seem to them quite a new man."

"Oh, that will be lovely," Miss Vandervoort cried, with unusual enthusiasm. "And will you dedicate it to me?"

"That I will," he said, earnestly, "even as I dedicate my life to you."

The summer separated Bryanstone for a time from his heart's

delight. She went with some friends to Switzerland. He took his wife—who needed sea air—to Whitby. In the autumn, when people were coming back to town, a volume of love poems appeared with a new name on the title-page, and a dedication to Blanche Vandervoort. And then Bryanstone tasted the sweets of an altogether new experience. The book was a triumphant success. Even *The Balance* failed to sneer, and said of the new volume: “It is long since we have seen such genuine and beautiful expressions of lyric love. If these poems are less fanciful than Herrick, less passionate than Burns, they have a simplicity which the former lacked, and a delicacy sometimes foreign to the latter. That a new and highly gifted poet is in our midst is not to be doubted.”

Many other reviews were scarcely less enthusiastic. To Bryanstone’s own great surprise, he was in a sense famous, yet he could not openly wear his laurels. His secret must, at all cost, be kept from his wife, whose health was at that time even more delicate than usual. This sudden fame for his disguised self was very curious to him. It was strange to be asked if he had read his own book, and to hear all sorts of comments upon it. These comments were usually favourable. Only one bold man said: “Love-lyrics, are they? Pah, the writer has no blood in him. He does not know what love is. A very pretty poet, though.”

Of course, Miss Vandervoort was immensely pleased at the success of the volume, and with her pleasure and the world’s applause Bryanstone’s cup seemed overflowing. Only it was curious, the persistent longing he had, deep down, that his wife should know of his success—that she, who had believed in him so long and so faithfully during his adversity, should be witness to his triumph. That this could not be was the one bitter drop in his full cup. But, on the whole, he was happier than he had ever dreamed of being before. Even at home his face beamed, and Ethel was glad at heart, taking his good cheer in token that he did not repent his choice of her, even now, when through lack of strength she was in some wise failing him.

But, alas for Bryanstone! In the very midst of his rejoicing trouble was brewing for him. It is an old story that women cannot keep secrets, and Miss Vandervoort proved no exception to the rule. In the strictest confidence she confided to a married lady, one of her friends, that the real author of that lovely book



of poems dedicated to her was Mr. William Bryanstone. Now it happened that this very lady knew Bryanstone, and, moreover, was one of the few who knew that he was married—a fact of which many of his acquaintances were unaware, as Mrs. Bryanstone was so seldom seen with him in public—and her existence was a fact to which her poet-husband did not consider it necessary to call special attention. Mrs. York, however, chanced to know, and knowing, her ire was roused against this married man who could write love songs to another than his wife. “Traitor” and “villain” were her mildest names for him.

Miss Vandervoort was less violent in her anger against him ; but very angry she was, all the same. It was true that she had trifled with him in her lazy way, and that she had never for one instant contemplated the idea of marrying him, but it was also true, as she said to herself, that he would have made her love him, if he could ; and she felt herself extremely ill-used. It was to be owned that she had broken her promise of secrecy ; but that went for nothing with her in summing up the affair. She had found him out—and she would tell him so, and send him away with the scorn his deception merited. Of course she meant his deception toward herself. I am sorry to confess that his deception toward his wife did not trouble her one whit. But she was very capable of resenting her own wrongs.

Bryanstone found her at home the next day. She was exquisitely attired, as usual. She was one of those fair women who can wear white ; and she had on a heavy, softly-falling white gown, with a bunch of crimson flowers in her belt. She sat in a low chair before the bright fire, but she rose and shook hands with Bryanstone, and then sat down again, the subtle perfume she loved to use escaping from the folds of her dress. They were silent a moment after they had both sat down, and she held her painted fan between her face and the fire, and looked at Bryanstone with her blue, Irish eyes. A moment more and he would have been at her feet—but something in her glance—or was it a little curl of scorn about her mouth?—restrained him.

“I’ve something to say to you,” she said, moving her fan slowly to and fro. “Do you know Mrs. York—Mrs. Reginald York, don’t you know?”

“Yes, a little. What of her?”

“Well, only that I told her you wrote the book, and she says



that you have been married all this time. I shouldn't like to be hard on you—but I just think you misunderstood the kind of woman I am. I *don't* have married men make love to me, don't you know?—*not as a rule.*”

Bryanstone felt his breath choke him. He could not speak just at first. He looked at her. Yes, she *was* pretty, as she sat there, leaving her words to quiver in his heart like arrows, and swayed her painted fan softly, keeping it always between her fair face and the fire. And then his wrath began to kindle.

“Pretty, yes,” he said to himself, “but shallow, unimaginative, selfish, languid—ah, what was it in her that got into the heads of men like wine? Yes, it *had* been his head! Where *was* his heart? At home with Ethel, or asleep still—who knew?” He breathed more freely now. He looked steadily into the blue eyes that mocked him.

“There was such a thing, Miss Vandervoort,” he said, “as a promise that you gave me. You pledged yourself to keep my secret, and you have betrayed me. Why, I loved you—do you understand, I *loved* you—and for that love I risked all my life. I put all I was at your feet.”

“Yes,” she said, quietly, “all but your right name and your place in the world. I *was* flattered, don't you know? I don't mind owning it. I didn't care much about you—it isn't easy for me to care much about people—but I *was* flattered. And then to think I mustn't even tell who wrote the book! And as for faith—why, if I had loved you, as you wanted me to, what could you have *done*? You couldn't have married two wives, don't you know? It's hard on poets; but you couldn't, really. And I don't think *you* can say much about broken faith, for you must have promised something to Mrs. Bryanstone—now didn't you?”

Bryanstone looked at her still—this only woman with whom he had ever been in love. Her mild anger had lent to her pretty face new charms. A mocking light shone from her blue eyes, and on her cheek an unusual colour flamed. And this was the end. He dared not so much as touch her hand to say good-bye. His dream had come to its death. He made an exit worthy of himself, however. The special copy of his book that he had had bound for her lay on the table, and he took it with scornful, passionate grasp and put it in the very midst of the hot, glowing coal fire. And then, as if in an evil dream, he heard her say—

“ Ugh ! burnt leather *does* smell so, don't you know ? ”

And then he had shut the door between them for ever ; and he was out in the street, and the gas-lights winked at him through the fog, and the cold assailed him, but could not chill him more, for his heart was colder still.

He walked rapidly home through the unfriendly November dusk. The square where his house stood seemed pervaded by a malignant east wind, in which the gaunt tree-boughs shuddered and complained. East wind and an ended love ! Bryanstone shivered as he let himself in at his own door. He found his wife reclining on the drawing-room sofa as usual. He was prepared to be more than usually tender to her. He was just the kind of man to console himself for the cold elsewhere at the fireside of peaceful domesticity. In fact, peace was precisely what he wanted to-night. Was there an east wind blowing indoors also ?

“ You are home earlier than usual,” said his wife.

The words were simple, yet at the sound of them an awful misgiving struck to his heart.

“ Yes,” he said, “ it was too cold for a long walk.” And then he added, for somehow he had desperate fear of a pause in the conversation, “ Are you feeling very ill to-night, dear ? ”

“ Rather—yes,” and then she said hurriedly, “ William, I have had a letter to-day which I cannot make out at all. Will you read it ? ”

And with the words she put a letter into his hands, of which he knew the purport terribly well before he had read a word. It said :

“ DEAR MADAM,—Though I have never seen you, I am acquainted with Mr. Bryanstone, and toward you I feel the duty that one woman owes to another. I think it is right that I should tell you that your husband has been figuring in society as an unmarried man ; that as such he has been making love to a young lady of my acquaintance, and that to her he has dedicated a volume of love-poems, which, however, he did not publish under his own name. In telling you this I am but doing as I would be done by. I enclose my card, and should you wish other proof than my word, I can give it to you.

“ Yours truly,

“ ELIZABETH YORK.”

Bryanstone read the letter through and crushed it angrily in his hand.

"It is a lie, is it not?" Ethel asked, with a little quiver of hope in her voice.

A man stronger than he, and more a man of the world, might have answered "Yes"—might have persuaded her that the letter was a vile slander, and carried it all off with a high hand. Not so Bryanstone. His one refuge seemed to him to be in humble confession. He was very pale when he knelt by Ethel's sofa, and said, sadly and penitently enough :

"Dear, you must try to forgive me. Your illness has left me a good deal to myself; and I *did* drift into a flirtation with the girl of whom Mrs. York speaks. It was wrong, I know. It may be that poets are more easily tempted than other men; but it's all over now; and surely, darling, you who are so good will forgive me, won't you?"

"I don't know; I suppose so," she answered, in a dazed way, as if she hardly knew what she was saying. "I feel strangely to-night. I don't think I could talk about it."

Yet in a few moments she resumed the subject of her own accord.

"You *did* write the book, then? Was it that volume of love-poems I have seen on your table?"

Bryanstone bowed his head in assent.

"And it *was* a success. I've read the reviews of it, and been angry in my own heart that the reviewers never treated *you* like that. Ah, *I* shared your failures, and *she*—she shared your success! She had a right to it, though; since she could inspire it, and I never could. But it hurts—*it hurts*," and he saw her clench her hands hard, like one in extreme pain.

"Ethel," he cried, "I was mad, mad." Yet even to him, and at that time, his words seemed like mockery; for he knew that he had not been mad at all, but more in earnest than ever in his life before. He drew near to her, and would have taken her in his arms, but by some supreme effort she thrust him from her, and rose, and stood before him looking into his eyes, while her own glowed with unaccustomed fire.

"No, you were *not* mad," she said. "You were in love, and it was that other woman who moved you. I have seen things in you which I thought were strange—things which might have made some women die of mortification—but I, I said to myself

that poets were not as other men, and she who would be a poet's wife must pay the price of it ! She must share him with his art. But now I see that you, poet though you are, *can* love as other men love ; and that you have never loved your wife. God help me, I believe I hate you both, you and her."

And then she went out swiftly ; and in a moment he heard her shut and lock her bedroom door, and he knew that she was locking him out of her heart as well.

With a more real pain than ever he had known before he went again into the sullen November night, and walked long about the windy, wintry streets. He had never dreamed until then how fond he really was of the wife he had neglected. The tears coursed down his face as he recalled all her patience, all her unfailing faith, all her sweet ministrations. He had wandered for some hours about the streets when a sudden fear smote him. What if she had resolved to bear her unhappiness no longer ? What if she were to flee from him to death ? He walked homeward as if he were walking for his life, and the gas-lights winked at him more knowingly than ever as he went. Everything seemed changed and unreal to him, but he hurried on.

He found his wife's door unfastened now, and he went in. No, thank God, she had not put an end to herself ; but her nightly feverishness had greatly increased. She put out her hand to him as he drew near the bedside.

"It is you who must forgive me now," she said. "I was wrong to say I hated you. I *don't* hate you. *You* could not help it. The failure was all in me. I was not the woman to find my way to a poet's heart through his imagination, and she was. That is all. And you meant to be kind to me in keeping it from me. I see it all rightly now."

Oh, how her gentleness shamed him—how it stung him as no reproaches could have done ! He sank on his knees beside her.

"Ethel, darling," he said, and his voice trembled, "for God's sake do not speak like that !"

"No, dear ; not if it grieves you. Only, when I am not here you must not think that you do me any wrong, when the time comes to marry her. I have loved you, and I have had my day."

"Ethel," he said, "you shall *not* die. My care shall save

you. But if you went from me no other woman should ever be my wife. I told you that other dream—madness, fancy, what you will—was all over. Don't you believe me, dear?"

And it is possible that his words comforted her, even then. She was a woman, and she loved him.

Why should we linger over her life's decline? *She* did not linger on her way to death. There came a day when, seeing that she breathed with much difficulty, her husband lifted her in his arms, and so upheld she whispered faintly, "Good-bye," and then a great shudder ran through her body, and Bryanstone knew that he was alone. He had never been thus alone before, for that egotistic self, deluded by vain dreams with which he had lived before he knew Ethel, was dead with her.

He had not killed his wife, perhaps; but undoubtedly he had hastened the end. And now what was left? He had had his little excitement—his dream of being in love, where love was forbidden fruit. He had worn by stealth his ill-gotten bay-wreath. Already the love-dream was over, and the withering bay-wreath pricked his forehead. For the first time he found no consolation in his muse. His desolation was too real to be turned into a sonnet. He was worse company than ever. Let us not stay with him. His punishment had overtaken him. The one creature who had believed in him utterly, sympathized with him unfailingly, loved him tirelessly, was dust and ashes, and on his life's hearthstone the fire was dead.







