That is to say

by

"Rita"

TAUCHNITZ EDITION

C. L. M. Rothschild

Massel

X. 1910.

No. 159.

Most Stories
not worth the
rereading -

Reread 1917

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 4206.

THAT IS TO SAY—. By "RITA."

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

SOULS	1 vol.
THE JESTERS	1 vol.
THE MASQUERADERS . . .	2 vols.
QUEER LADY JUDAS . . .	2 vols.
PRINCE CHARMING	1 vol.
THE POINTING FINGER . .	1 vol.
A MAN OF NO IMPORTANCE .	1 vol.
THE MILLIONAIRE GIRL, ETC.	1 vol.
THE HOUSE CALLED HURRISH.	1 vol.
CALVARY	2 vols.

THAT IS TO SAY—

BY

"RITA"

AUTHOR OF "SOULS," "QUEER LADY JUDAS,"
"CALVARY," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1910.

CONTENTS.

THAT IS TO SAY—

THE TELEGRAM.

DR. HULBERT dashed hastily into the little post-office of Sedgely-on-Sea and seized up a telegraph form. After a moment spent in writing he returned to the sleepy-eyed girl at the counter and threw it before her.

"Can you make it out?"

She followed the words, pencil in hand, dotting them so as to reckon their number.

"Reserve bedroom double——" Here she paused.

He snatched back the form and read it out:

"Charing Cross Hotel, London. *Reserve bedroom, double—fire—to-morrow night.*—HULBERT."

"Ten words. Sixpence, please," said the girl, handing a stamp.

The doctor affixed it in the same hurried manner, and turned to go out. He had not noticed another occupant of the post-office—a thin figure in a water-

proof, with a shabby toque worn well down over sleek red hair. She was standing at the farther end of the dingy little office, her head bent over something she was writing. But her keen ears, sharpened by malice, had heard every word of that message, and her eyes, furtive, yet keenly observant, had noted the haste and perturbation of the sender.

"Wasn't that Dr. Hulbert?" she asked the sleepy girl, as she waited for half-a-dozen halfpenny stamps.

"Yes, ma'am."

"He lives near here, doesn't he?"

"Close by. High Street. Two minutes' walk. Old-fashioned corner house with creepers. You'll see the plate on the door. Stafford Lodge."

"Thank you."

The inquisitive stranger gathered up her stamps, affixed one to the post card she had been writing, and left the post-office.

Miss Jane Griddle had only arrived the previous evening, actuated mainly by a desire to see for herself where Judith Grierson was living.

It was two years since she had married. In these two years brief accounts of their welfare had filtered to the inmates of Blythe Hall, as Mrs. Goodenough's modest domicile in Bloomsbury was designated. Jane Griddle had stored them up in her heart for consideration. She had always pretended a sincere admiration for the pretty music teacher, and even when by her "sly ways," the girl had secured the prize for which she, Jane, had been vainly angling, she had managed to conceal her disappointment with a fair amount of success. Though she had never forgiven Judith, she had

impressed her with the idea that no one in the whole boarding-house was so genuinely delighted at her good fortune as herself.

A few letters had passed between her and Judith Hulbert; but none had brought the promised invitation —for which Jane longed—the invitation to stay for awhile at Stafford Lodge. Now, suddenly, Miss Griddle had come down on her own account. Her health required a change from London fogs and London gloom, and Sedgely struck her as both convenient and salutary. Besides, she would be able to renew acquaintance with the doctor and his wife, and judge for herself how the marriage had turned out.

It was assuredly a coincidence that on the very first morning of her visit she should see Dr. Hulbert. As she went back to her lodgings—a bed-sitting-room in one of the back streets of Sedgely—she found herself repeating that telegram. It had an odd sound—unless, of course, he and his wife were bound for London for Christmas. That would indeed be a misfortune. This was the 22nd of December, and the telegram had said "to-morrow": that would be the 23rd. Well, there was still to-day. She would call on Judith after her early dinner, about three o'clock, which was a probable hour to find her at home.

She spent the morning in altering her winter hat and brushing and mending her well-worn blue serge coat and skirt. Then she tried to dress her hair in a new fashion by aid of a "frame." The results were not very satisfactory. However, by dint of many hairpins and much patience, she got a fairly presentable effect.

By half-past two she was at Stafford Lodge. She

was shown into a charming drawing-room, all chintz and quaint, old-fashioned furniture, and palms, and late chrysanthemums. Enviously she regarded the pretty room. It ought to have been hers. She would have made a more fitting mistress of the place and helpmate to the doctor than Judith could possibly be.

During these reflections Judith ran in, with glowing eyes and outstretched hands, eagerly welcoming her visitor.

"But why didn't you tell me you were coming?" she exclaimed. "I'd have been delighted to offer you a room. As it is you must come to me. Max is going to town to-morrow morning, and I'll be so lonely. Why, it's quite a piece of good luck your being here! Now, just tell me where you're staying, and I'll have your box fetched and put you up as long as you like!"

Jane Griddle, hearing the kindly welcoming voice, might surely have banished the demons of envy and ill-will from her soured and envious heart. But on the contrary, that radiant beauty, that sure appropriation of Max Hulbert's person and interests, that security of position and evident good fortune, increased her jealousy a thousandfold. However, she accepted the invitation to stay at Stafford Lodge, only stipulating that she must return to her room and pack her box and arrange with the landlady.

"Very well," agreed Judith; "I'll see about the spare room, and expect you back by tea-time. You dear old thing! It's just like old times again. Oh, what talks we shall have! I've such heaps to tell you, and I want to hear all about Mrs. Goodenough and the boarders.

Are they all just the same? You are—you've not changed a bit!"

Tactless creature—and that new *coiffure* took at least two years off Jane's age, and struck the *mode* at all events. "Old thing!"—to be called an old thing even with the prefix of "dear"! Jane was furious, but she dissembled. Her hour of reprisals might come, and then——

When she returned in a ramshackle fly, with her trunk and dressing-bag and umbrella case, she was taken up to a pretty, airy bedroom, with a view of the sea and the jetty. Having disposed of her luggage she went downstairs to the drawing-room, to find the doctor and his wife and one or two callers having afternoon tea. Dr. Hulbert greeted her cordially, if not with any great manifestation of joy. He had so many uncomfortable reminiscences of a displayed preference for himself, that her presence under his roof seemed undeserving of special welcome. But Judith had pitied her, and said how ill she looked, and how uncomfortable she would be in lodgings for Christmas, and therefore he made no objection. "Thank goodness I sha'n't see much of her," he added as they were waiting for dinner.

"But you'll be home on Christmas Eve, of course!" exclaimed Judith.

"I hope so."

"*Hope!* But you *must,* darling. Fancy Christmas without you! Why, I should—well, I don't know what I should do. It doesn't bear thinking of."

The pretty face looked so sad that he could not but kiss it back to smiles, and promise that, if his own will

or wish could do it, he would be back with her on Christmas Eve.

"Meantime you must console yourself with Jane," he added, laughing. "I wish you'd teach her how to dress her hair. She is a positive eye torture."

"Poor old soul, she can't help it," murmured Judith plaintively. "It isn't everyone whose hair curls naturally." She glanced with pardonable pride at the loose shimmering waves about her own brow.

But it happened that Jane Griddle had overheard the remark as she came stealthily into the room. A deep flush stained her faded cheeks; her eyes glittered with anger. And the attitude of the two as they stood there on the hearthrug, with clasped hands—why, it was positively indecent!

They turned swiftly at her apologetic cough, inwardly wondering if she had overheard anything. The sound of the dinner gong was a helpful break to the momentary embarrassment, and the doctor hurriedly offered his arm and led his unwelcome guest into the dining-room, talking of anything that came uppermost.

Later in the evening he was called out to see a patient, and Judith had the task of entertainment on her hands. It proved somewhat harder than she had anticipated. There were long gaps of silence, disconnected sentences, and occasionally she found Jane regarding her with a sort of pitying commiseration. It weighed on her natural gaiety and light-heartedness. She seemed unreal even to herself, and the fact was too novel to be easily explained. Gradually Jane Griddle began to drop hints as to the deceptions of husbands and their general untrustworthiness. Boarding-

house experiences pointed many a moral. Grass widows and deserted spinsters seemed to have taken up their abode in those lugubrious dwellings and the histories of Bloomsbury or Sedgely-on-Sea might—according to Jane —be summed up as desertion or divorce.

Judith Hulbert listened with pursed-up lips and unbelieving eyes. Was it possible that the world could hold husbands who were monsters, lovers who were false? If so, how thrice blessed was she in *her* most fortunate choice!

Again, as the proud boast left her lips, she met a commiserating glance, heard a sigh. Then Jane observed suddenly:

"I suppose you know where Dr. Hulbert is going to-morrow?"

"To London," answered Judith. "I told you so."

"A vague address. Has he to see a patient, or attend a hospital? Or is it merely—pleasure?"

Judith hesitated.

"I really don't know; I never asked. I take it for granted it's medical business. If it was anything he wished me to know, he would have told me."

Again that pitying glance swept over the trustful face.

"If I had a husband and he was a medical man," observed Miss Griddle, "I should make a point of knowing all his professional affairs."

Judith laughed.

"My dear Jane," she said, "if Max told me half of *his* professional affairs, I should be bored to death. We have much more interesting things to talk about than patients and diseases."

"I suppose you know your own business best," snapped Jane. "Will you excuse me if I say good night? I am not strong, and roast duck never *did* agree with me."

"Oh, how unfortunate that we had one to-night! Max loves them. May I get you anything—a little brandy?"

Jane accepted the brandy under protest, as one who only partook of strong drink under severe provocation. Then she went off to her room, leaving Judith to sit up for her husband.

It was eleven o'clock when the doctor returned. He seemed tired and dispirited, and went at once to his dressing-room to pack his bag. He had to be up at seven o'clock next morning to catch the first train to town.

It was a wet, gloomy day, and Jane Griddle refused to stir from the fireside, where, in a comfortable arm-chair and with her usual knitting and the last number of *The Lancet,* she passed hour after hour.

Judith had household affairs to attend to, and left her friend to herself. But in the evening they once more sat by the fire and exchanged confidences. Once Judith glanced at the clock.

"This time to-morrow he will be back," she said, smiling softly.

"Are you *sure?*" enquired Jane.

"Quite sure. Unless, of course, something very urgent detains him. But as Friday is Christmas Day, he is certain to come home."

Miss Griddle gave a portentous sniff.

"When your husband goes up to town does he al-

ways have a double-bedded room?" she asked suddenly.

Judith stared in astonishment.

"What an extraordinary question! What on earth makes you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Only that I happened to be in the post-office the other morning when he was sending a telegram, and I heard him read it out to the girl."

"Well?" said Judith sharply.

"He distinctly ordered a double-bedded room, with a fire in it, at the Charing Cross Hotel."

"Charing Cross? Are you *sure?* He never goes there—always to the Cecil."

"I heard him say Charing Cross Hotel," repeated Jane firmly.

The delicate colour died suddenly out of Judith's cheeks.

"How odd! And why a double room? It must be a mistake. I expect he meant single."

"No doubt," said Jane, with an expression that belied her words.

"Besides—oh, but it's ridiculous! Are you sure you heard him say that?"

"I daresay you could verify the telegram at the office if you wished."

"I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing," snapped Judith hotly. "Do you imagine I mistrust my husband?"

"Other husbands have worn two faces, and lived double lives," observed Jane acidly. "I hold no brief for any man's honour."

"No—because you don't know—you can't tell. I mean—well, you've never been married."

"I'm happy to say I have not been so unwise as to put my life into any man's keeping."

A little smile hovered round the corners of Judith's pretty mouth; but presently uneasiness again took possession of her. Well, at all events she would not have long to wait. To-morrow Max would be home again, and of course he could explain that mysterious telegram. Still——

A knock at the door was followed by the entrance of the parlour-maid. She handed her mistress a telegram.

Eagerly Judith tore it open. Then her lips quivered. An angry gleam shot into her grey eyes.

"No answer," she said curtly.

"No bad news, I hope?" said Jane Griddle.

"No—o, oh—dear no!" Judith gave a little hysterical laugh. "It's only to say the doctor fears he can't get back to-morrow."

A grim smile touched Jane Griddle's hard lips.

"Unavoidably detained, I suppose?"

"Well, and why not?" burst out Judith tempestuously. "It's quite possible. If there's a consultation, or something, he isn't his own master."

"Exactly. Does he say there's a consultation?"

Judith flushed.

"Oh—see for yourself!" she exclaimed passionately, and then sprang up and left the room.

Jane Griddle picked up the telegram, smoothed it out, and read:

"Can't possibly return to-morrow. Hope Christmas Day. Love.—MAX."

Her lip curled contemptuously.

"There's something behind this," she said. "I wonder whom he went up to London to meet?"

. . . . .

The pricks of doubt and disappointment were tormenting Judith Hulbert, and not one prick but was sharpened and poisoned by her friend's pretended sympathy. Never had she passed so miserable a day. As they took their tea by the fire in the cosy drawing-room, Jane Griddle suddenly remarked:

"It's only a two hours' journey to London from here, isn't it?"

"Two and a half. Why?"

"Only—I was thinking that if I were in your place I'd just run up to town myself and find out what was detaining him."

Judith looked quickly at the sharp, soured face. All her instincts were trustful and generous. And yet —now—in these two days all sorts of unpleasant, disturbing thoughts had tormented her. How easy it would be! There was a train at six o'clock. By half-past eight she would be in London. Another half-hour would take her to the hotel. . . . Ah! A sudden sharp misgiving shot through her mind. In his telegram Max had not mentioned his address. He would wonder how she found it out. No matter. In her present state of mind anything was better than suspense. She *would* do it. She would go. She sprang to her feet.

"I'll take your advice. Perhaps—— But supposing anything really detained him? Would you very much mind spending Christmas Day alone?"

Jane Griddle smiled grimly.

"I'm used to being alone. I sha'n't quarrel with my own company even on Christmas Day."

Fired with her new scheme, Judith flew upstairs, thrust a few articles into her dressing-bag, and with a hurried farewell to her visitor departed for the station.

. . . . .

Towards midnight on this eventful Christmas Eve a change took place in the weather. A furious blizzard came on, and heavy snow seriously impeded the Christmas traffic. Jane Griddle awoke to a world of semi-darkness and blinding snowflakes. She drew her comfortable eider-down about her and ordered a fire to be lit in her room, and her breakfast to be brought up to her there.

It was close on five o'clock when the hall door suddenly opened and someone entered the hall. Jane Griddle went to the door and looked out. It was the doctor, blue with cold, covered in snow, and a picture of forlorn discomfort.

"Hullo! Is that you, Miss Griddle? You see I've managed to get back. Only seven hours late! Where's Judy?"

"Judith? Haven't you seen her? Isn't she with you?"

"With *me!*" He stared at the questioner. "How could she be with me? I've come straight from town. Surely she didn't go to the station to meet me?"

"No—o," faltered Jane. "Not to the station, but to town. She went up by the six train last evening—to the Charing Cross Hotel."

"The Charing Cross Hotel! What the devil are you talking about? Why should she go there?"

"To meet you, I believe," answered Jane curtly. She was not accustomed to violent language.

"Meet *me!* Nonsense! Why, I wired I was coming back to-day."

"You only said you 'hoped.' Judith grew uneasy. She determined to go up and see what was detaining you."

"Most extraordinary! I never knew her do such a thing before. And — you said Charing Cross Hotel. Why, I was at the Cecil. I always stay there. She knows it."

Jane Griddle began to feel uncomfortable. Had her meddling been productive of some mischance? Sulky and ill at ease, she stood there with the doctor's impatient and angry exclamations rattling like hailstones about her ears. At last, with offended dignity, she went up to her own room and locked the door.

Hour after hour passed by, and no news, or possibility of news, cheered their long suspense. Dr. Hulbert was seriously uneasy. He had been snowed-up for hours himself, despite snow-ploughs and double engines. He pictured Judy in a similar predicament — Judy with her delicate lungs and susceptibility to cold. And then he marvelled again what could possibly have induced her to do such a mad thing as follow him to town. Who had put it in her head? That old cat upstairs? She was capable of any mischief, yet there seemed no object in such a trick. He tried with what fortitude he could to pass the time. Never had he put in such a Christmas Day. If only he knew—one way or other!

At last he went to bed, and fell asleep for very weariness. It seemed as if hours had passed when the

night-bell above his head rang out its shrill message. He started up and stumbled drowsily to the speaking-tube. At first sound of the voice he flung on a dressing-gown and, seizing a candle, rushed downstairs to the front-door. A small, muffled figure, snow-powdered, half-frozen, fell into his arms.

"Judy! Thank God!"

He carried her upstairs in his strong arms, and took off her damp, snow-weighted clothes, and put her between the blankets. It was morning before she had recovered sufficiently for explanations, and faltered brokenly the story of the telegram so distorted by green-eyed jealousy. Then the hurried journey. The discovery that the room ordered at the Charing Cross Hotel was for a patient, by whose dying bed her husband and another physician had to meet in consultation. Then her efforts to return. The storm. The break-down of the engine. The long, terrible hours of suspense, and at last the endeavour to toil homewards in the snow. It was all so foolish, and yet so tragic. How sorry they were for each other!

"That you should ever have distrusted me, even for a moment!" exclaimed the deeply injured husband.

"But Jane made me. She kept on about that telegram until I was half distracted. Oh, Max, dearest, forgive me! This will be a lesson for life."

But it was a very sharp and severe lesson—a lesson complicated by bronchitis and pneumonia, and many an anxious week of invalidism—a lesson that may or may not have been salutary to Jane Griddle, who received a curt hint from the doctor that her qualifications as a

mischief-maker were not such as to make him desirous of any prolongation of her visit.

So Jane returned to London and the Bloomsbury boarding-house with one friend the more crossed off her visiting list. So ungrateful is human nature for good intentions, unless accompanied by equally good results!

NO PREVIOUS INTRODUCTION.

"It would be the very thing for her," said Lady Allonby.

"And for him," added her friend and chosen associate of many years, Mrs. Dudley Chetwynde.

"For them both, if they would only see it in the right light."

"Which of course they won't."

"Young women, nowadays, are so strong-minded and self-willed. It all comes of golf and women's clubs, and those dreadful books that tell them so much about themselves, until they fancy they are something quite complex and wonderful, and look down upon men instead of——"

"Well," interposed Mrs. Chetwynde drily, "you must allow there are very few a girl can look up to. The modern young man is a 'living picture' of the sins of his ancestors—dressed by a modern tailor, whose one aim seems to be to make animated fashion plates of his customers; since clean-shaven faces have come into fashion, I confess I have the greatest difficulty in telling one of my young male acquaintances from another. I really think they ought to have name plates affixed to their coats, in some conspicuous place, so that one could identify them."

Lady Allonby laughed. She was a stout, pleasant-faced woman of some fifty years, who was unfashionable enough not to colour her plentiful grey locks, and had left her face as much to Nature and as little to her maid as was possible in an age when paint and powder had been made fashionable by crowned heads and leaders of society.

She had a passion for matchmaking; and as she had never had any daughters of her own, had contented herself with helping her friends to marry off theirs as suitably and brilliantly as circumstances permitted. She had one son, however, and it was this son whom she was now desirous of marrying to her favourite god-child, the lovely youngest daughter of Mrs. Dudley Chetwynde.

The girl was beautiful, well-bred, highly accomplished, and, best of all, possessed of an independent fortune left to her by an ancient maiden aunt.

The Hon. Henry Breton, Colonel of the 54th Light Infantry, and lately returned from Egypt, was the only son of Lady Allonby. Needless to say she adored him, and with better reason than most mothers with only sons have for their adoration. Her present terror was that he would marry someone of whom she disapproved, and who would render him unhappy.

Society is not apt at illustrating the success of the modern marriage market, and Lady Allonby had not lived in society and been "of it" for nearly thirty years without good and sufficient opportunity of judging it by the light of her own shrewd commonsense.

Her son was a tall, distinguished-looking man, somewhat grave of speech and aspect. He had never given

her an uneasy moment, never been anything but tender and considerate. Yet for all that she knew very little of his real character. He was not a man given to confidence and self-betrayal. And yet she wished to marry him to a girl of her own choosing, and had called in her friend and ally in order to discuss ways and means of doing so.

"So much depends on a first meeting, or a first introduction," she explained. "They have never seen each other at all, and if they meet at a ball, or in any of the usual crowds and crushes, probably they will make no impression on each other. We must be diplomatic, my dear."

"Yes, of course," agreed Mrs. Chetwynde. "It will require some thinking out. Fortunately Cecil is away just now. I told you she had gone down to Charteris. Poor Clare was in such trouble. The governess was taken suddenly ill, and had to go home. Clare was obliged to be in town for the Drawing-room, and of course her husband wouldn't stay down there in the season, so they asked if Cecil would help them, and I sent her. She is so fond of children, and has such a good way with them, and she loves the country. I have put off her engagements for a month. After all, it is early yet. She won't miss much."

The young lady who was the subject of this discussion did not certainly appear to be missing "much." She was roaming through green woods, and fields golden with buttercups; chasing the children to and fro, herself as gay and merry as any child among them, her eyes as bright, her laugh as sweet and careless as only

the magic of youth and innocence can make eyes and laughter.

Her young charges, aged respectively five, four and two, consisted of two boys and a girl. They were lovely, healthy, merry children, and adored their young aunt in a hearty, boisterous fashion, which did not fear to show itself in varying demands on her time and patience and caresses.

Tired out at last, she threw herself down on the soft, green sward, and bade them gather wild-flowers and amuse themselves for awhile. Keeping well within the boundaries of the hedge, she took out a book from her pocket and began to read it, glancing up every now and then to see that the children had not strayed too far. She was quite unconscious that from the high-road beyond she had been watched for the last half-hour by a touring cyclist, who was resting after a long spin, and had thought the scene, which had suddenly come into his view, a very charming and idyllic one.

"Governess, I suppose?" he said to himself, as he watched the recumbent figure and the hands that idly turned a page of her book from time to time. "Very young and very pretty, I should say, judging from hair and figure. What a bore it must be having to look after a tribe of brats like that! I'd like to speak to her. Suppose I asked her the way to Vale Airon? These cross-roads are so confoundedly puzzling!"

A gate led into the field whose occupants had so interested him. He opened it and walked across to the pink-gowned figure, whose face was hidden by a wide straw hat, on which a cluster of scarlet poppies nodded in the cool spring air.

"Pardon me," he said, and the figure started suddenly into uprightness; "I have lost my way among these twisting lanes. Can you direct me to the village of Vale Airon?"

The girl looked up. The tall figure in knickerbockers, the dark face, the courteous manner, impressed her as being not quite of the "cycling tourist" type. She rose gracefully, and without haste. "Oh yes," she said. "The village is about four miles from here, by the highroad; there is a shorter way through the park over there."

"Thank you," he said, "but short cuts are useless to cyclists, as doubtless you know. I suppose I must keep along the highroad."

He raised his hat, and she bowed slightly. The ease and grace of her manner had a certain charm for him. He saw she was very young, but she had none of the *gaucherie* or self-consciousness of youth.

"I have done twenty miles this morning," he observed presently, and he pushed the tweed cap farther off his brow as he spoke. "How cool and pleasant it is here, after the dusty roads."

"That is the worst of cycling," she said. "It is all hurry, rush, unceasing motion, the scorch of sun, the blinding of dust. You have no time to see the beauties you fly past. It always seems to me a sort of individual railway travelling whose economy is its sole recommendation."

"I believe you are right," he said with a smile. "But it has its conveniences as well as its disadvantages. Think of the poor city clerks who rarely get a chance of enjoying the country save in their brief holiday times.

Now they can reach regions of green fields and pure air at least once a week."

Why she should have remembered that it was a Saturday, and put him down as one of the city clerks he had commiserated was no more intelligible to her mind than his own impression that she was a governess was to his. But they parted and went their several ways, unconscious of an error, and haunted by a memory.

The following evening Cecil Chetwynde took it into her head to go to a very old church some three miles from Charteris Park. It was a small, insignificant building, ivy-covered, dusky and picturesque. The service was simple, and the rector an easy-going, old-fashioned, scholarly man, to whom ritualism had sounded vain appeals, and in whose quiet parish the very mention of choral celebration and "matins" would have savoured of Rome and papal supremacy.

To Cecil there seemed something strangely reverent and soothing about the whole service. The organ was not a very superior instrument, but she noted that it was remarkably well played, and the choir of boys and girls from the Sunday school sang tunefully and correctly. She waited for the voluntary, and was gratified by hearing a portion of Gounod's "Messe Solennelle" beautifully and artistically rendered. She felt curious as to who was the player and lingered long enough to see the curtain of the organ loft drawn aside, and a man's figure come out. There was something familiar in its tall easy grace. She rose from her seat, and walked down the aisle. He was close behind her. As

they emerged from the dim light into the bright April evening the recognition was mutual. He hesitated, as he lifted his hat, but she spoke frankly. "Was that really you who played? I marvelled that any organist could produce such effects from such a worn-out old instrument!"

He smiled pleasantly.

"I am only an amateur," he said, "so your praise is very gratifying. The rector here is an old friend of mine. I am staying with him for a few days, and he allowed me to do the service this evening as the lady who usually plays is not well."

"You found your way without any further difficulty, I hope," she said. "Of course that is needless to say, for I see you here. I wonder why one always makes absurd observations about self-evident facts."

"So do I," he answered; "I suppose it is because it is so difficult to begin a conversation."

They were at the lych-gate now, but they lingered a moment; he was wondering which way her road lay, and wishing it might chance to be his own.

"This is the first time I have ever been to this church," she remarked. "It is quite historically old and famous, I believe, but it lies rather far from Charteris Park, where I am staying."

"Yes," he said, "you will have three miles to walk. Are you by yourself?"

"Yes," she said. "It was too far to bring any of the children. Besides——" She paused.

He completed the sentence in his own mind, and was rash enough to give it words: "Besides, you must be tired of having them perpetually with you. I think

governesses must be the most patient and self-denying of their sex."

A quick gleam of amusement came into her bright hazel eyes. To be taken for a governess by a city clerk who was an amateur organist—it was really funny. How shocked her mother would be—and Clare. Did men really judge so much by externals, and was her simple checked tweed no guarantee of Redfern after all?

She answered him readily. "Oh," she said, "I am very fond of children. I never get tired of them. You have to understand them, of course; but I assure you they amply repay a little study."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "I wonder," he said, "if I might have the pleasure of accompanying you part of the way? The Rectory lies in this direction."

"He would have said 'home' had he not taken me for a governess," she thought; but aloud she answered frankly that she had no objection to his escort, although footpads and beggars were unknown in this rural Arcadia of Vale Airon. The situation amused her. It was unconventional, and it was novel. She treated him with a good-humoured frankness that was quite apart from "society" manners. She talked pleasantly and sensibly on books, music and art—all such subjects as she imagined a governess would talk about. She gave him an impression of independence and culture and good sense such as his experience of women had failed in giving him hitherto; and yet she looked so young, and was so very, very pretty.

The charm of her speech and grace of her manner affected him as no woman's speech or beauty had ever done. He wondered who she was, but had not the

courage to ask her. Their conversation dealt only with formalities, but the three miles seemed very short indeed. When they came to the small iron gate, by which Cecil entered the Park, she paused and contemplated her key with a demure smile.

"I must say good-bye now," she said. "And I suppose it is unlikely we shall meet again. Of course, you return to London to-morrow?"

"Why—of course?" he asked, with a smile.

"I thought—I understood you were in business; that you only ran down to the country from Saturday to Monday."

"In business?" he repeated. "Not exactly. It is true I am a professional man; but this is holiday time for me. I—I am staying for a week or two with Mr. Rutherford."

"Oh," she said, somewhat puzzled: "I understood that you were engaged in the city."

A light dawned upon him. The temptation of playing the part of Lord of Burleigh to a country maiden seemed unimportant in comparison with that of enacting the city clerk to a pretty governess.

"So I am," he said eagerly. "But even quill drivers have a holiday now and then. So, in spite of what you said, I hope it is not altogether unlikely that we shall meet again."

He raised his hat, and they parted for the second time—their interest in each other strengthened, but quite ignorant of their respective names, or social positions, or the schemes for their introduction going on in that fashionable centre to which they had both bidden a temporary farewell.

Colonel Breton stayed on at the Rectory for a week longer, but he had but stray glimpses of the charming young governess who had so interested him. Then suddenly a wire from Military Authorities recalled him to town, and he had to depart without the opportunity of a farewell.

His mother welcomed him warmly. She was always happy when he was under her eye. Her plans were matured now, and she and Cecil's mother had agreed that the introduction should take place after the Jubilee Drawing-room, at a tea to be given by Lady Allonby to a few selected dowagers and *débutantes*.

Cecil was to come up for it. Her dress had been ordered and fitted long before. She was to burst from the chrysalis state of immature girlhood into the butterfly brilliance of the introduced and acknowledged society belle.

Diplomatically and with true maternal caution did Lady Allonby convey to her son that his attendance on this occasion would be rewarded by an introduction to one of the loveliest girls the eyes of man had ever beheld. "Besides, she has an independent fortune," she added.

"What a pity," said the Hon. Henry languidly. "She will be spoilt the sooner."

"I am sure you will like her, Harry," said his mother again. "I have often wished you had met, but you were generally away or abroad when she stayed with me."

The matter ended there for a time—and the eventful day came round and produced no special interest or anticipation in the breast of the person most concerned. Indeed, but for the promise his mother had exacted,

Colonel Breton would have shirked appearing at the "Drawing-room tea" altogether. That promise, however, led him into the cool flower-decked room in Upper Brook Street as five o'clock struck. He saw some rouged faces —some dyed and diamond-crowned heads—one or two simpering and self-conscious *débutantes* peacocking to and fro with their snowy trains trailing, and their shower-bouquets held languidly in gloved fingers. He stood a moment in the doorway. Then suddenly there flashed before him a lovely laughing face—crowned with its own sunny hair; the tall lithe grace of a figure in costly satin and cobwebby lace. Their eyes met. She looked scarcely less startled than himself. He knew his mother was beckoning to him, and like one in a dream he made his way across the room to her side.

"Harry," she said, "I must introduce you to my dear godchild and special pet, Cecil Chetwynde. Cecil dearest, this is my son!"

They bowed. There was no word of any previous introduction. He asked her to take some tea and led her across the room in her superb young beauty, and wondered why Fate had been so kind to him. "You might have told me," he said reproachfully.

"Told you that I was not my sister's governess," she said, laughing. "Why should I? You were equally reticent—you allowed me to believe you were only a city clerk doing the usual 'biking tour.'"

"And are you sorry that I am—something else?"

"Just as sorry as you are that your friend the governess turns out to be your mother's godchild, and a society *débutante,*" she answered.

They sat down and talked of the green fields and

the budding chestnuts—and the Arcadian Vale they had left behind. The two mothers compared notes, and agreed they got on remarkably well. They were friends at once. The plot had succeeded admirably.

It was not till the end of the season—when a certain ceremony at St. George's, Hanover Square, had been pronounced the "prettiest wedding of the year"—that the two people most concerned in that function ever whispered the true secret of their mutual interest in each other.

Then Lady Allonby and Mrs. Dudley Chetwynde looked crestfallen. They had taken so much trouble about that first meeting—that all-important introduction, and after all it had been taken out of their hands long previously by a chance that might have played them false.

"However, it has all come about exactly as we wished," said the mother of the bride.

"And they *have* seen it in the right light," agreed the mother of the bridegroom. "Though you said they wouldn't," she added.

"Perhaps that was because they managed it for themselves," was the wise rejoinder.

A MARRIAGE DISARRANGED.

"You are quite a stranger," she said with a beaming smile.

That smile had been wont to set my heart throbbing —not so long ago. Even now it quickened its pulsation ever so slightly. But I hailed symptoms of improvement, and smiled back.

"I have been away," I said. "Ruralising."

She drew her skirts aside. I looked at her. Then dropped into the vacant chair.

"Were you keeping it for—someone?" I asked.

A little conscious flush just hovered over a quickly-averted cheek. She gave me no other answer, so I interpreted it to my own satisfaction.

"When did you return?" she asked suddenly.

"Yesterday," was my prompt rejoinder. "In time for this."

My glance wandered over the rooms. We were in a charming alcove—the *coup d'œil* before us was one of silks and satins and tail-coats mingled in a graceful entanglement, representing a "barn dance."

I never danced it. I had a prejudice against violent exercise, and I saw quite enough of frills and *lingerie* from my half-guinea stall at the Gaiety to dispense with it in private life.

Miss Muriel Montressor might possibly have shared

my opinions. I did not ask her at that moment. It is always a pity to disturb existing peace by a rash introduction of alien subjects.

"You remembered—this?" she asked softly.

"Naturally. Mrs. Hargreaves impressed it on me so strongly and aromatically."

She laughed. "That new perfume is rather—rather——"

"Eucalyptic?" I suggested. "Of course it is a wise prevention—and seasonable."

"You are just as ridiculous as ever," she said, with the suspicion of a pout.

"I had hoped," I said, "that absence might have made you more charitable, even as it has made me more——"

"What?" she asked, with a quick flash of blue eyes straight into mine.

"You would be offended again," I answered virtuously. "Let us talk generalities. It is safer."

"Begin then," she said, and the eyes dropped on to the loosely-tied posy of yellow and mauve orchids on her lap.

Those flowers meant money. I wondered whose purse had favoured the fashionable florists. I knew it was not that of Papa or Mamma Montressor. Everything in that household was conducted on strictly illiberal principles. Report said they were hard-up, and a once familiar *entrée* into their home circle led me to conclude that report was not altogether inaccurate.

But then they had daughters to marry.

I availed myself of Miss Muriel's permission, and my eyes sought a suitable subject for discussion.

"Ah!" I said cheerfully, "I see that odious little cad, Lord Weedon, is here. Pity titles can't breed gentlemen. He is about as common-looking as an ostler in an omnibus yard. Can't you fancy him sucking a straw and saying 'hiss-s-s' to the horses? But it's no wonder he looks horsey. He's never happy away from a racecourse or a training stable!"

"You are certainly complimentary," she said. Her tone was the reverse of amiable.

"Well," I went on, "you needn't be huffy. You used to abuse him enough yourself. Shall I tell you the latest thing I heard of him at the club?"

She nodded permission.

"He had dined," I said, "not to put too fine a point on it, not wisely, but well. He was exceedingly humorous on the occasion, and nothing would serve him but to go to the Covent Garden Ball as a wind up——"

I paused, on principles of discretion.

"Well?" she said impatiently. "Why don't you go on?"

"That," I said, "is what he did—in a ballet girl's costume."

She bit her lip. Somehow she did not seem so much amused as I expected. I tried another anecdote. Little Cuffy (as we called him) was rather the butt of the club, and stories, many and varied, were told of him.

"Did you hear of his great bet?" I went on.

"Bet? No. . . . Oh! do tell me."

I hesitated. Prudence had returned.

"On second thoughts," I said, "I prefer to tell your mother."

She flashed her eyes once again. When she did that, I always obeyed her and grew meek.

"If it is fit for *her,*" she said sternly, "it is fit for me. I insist on hearing it."

"Well," I said dubiously, "I know the Modern Young Woman is more particular about her mother's morals than her own, but . . . I never thought you were quite . . . quite that sort of girl."

"For to-night," she said, "pray consider that I am that sort of girl. What was the bet?"

"It had something to do," I stammered, "with the height of a kick. The girl was Dolly Dennison of the 'Friv.' . . . You've seen her dance?"

"If you call it—dancing!"

"I don't—but Cuffy and the 'Boys' do, and Cuffy himself in particular. He has spent a small fortune on gloves, and flowers, and jewels, and suppers, and things for her—I beg your pardon, perhaps I shouldn't mention these things."

"The Modern Young Woman has no objection to being enlightened in the ways of the Modern Young Man."

"That," I said, "is very encouraging."

"But I haven't yet heard the bet!" she said.

"It was £100—to £5 that . . . well, that her celebrated kick would . . . no—really, I can't express it delicately enough. You must excuse me.

She blushed divinely.

"Who won it?" she said in a low, scarcely audible voice.

"Oh—he did—of course. They said he gave Dolly a hint. There was a row about it I know."

"And," she went on in the same suppressed sort of voice, "is that the way he generally amuses himself?"

"Oh, I could tell you a hundred stories worse than that," I said cheerfully. "Only you see you're not a man."

"I never envied your privileges so much before," she said, lifting her beautiful clear eyes to my face. "You are rightly termed 'Lords of Creation'——"

"Ah, well," I said apologetically, "we're not all so bad. You've selected a rather poor specimen for illustration. Everyone knows Cuffy. It's to be hoped he'll never marry. I pity his wife."

"Do you mean that?" she asked in the same subdued voice. Somehow I missed the old ring and mirth of it.

"Indeed I do," I said. "But then—talk of an angel . . . he's coming this way. Do you want to speak to him, or will you let me take you for an ice?"

"No, thank you," she said. "I have something to say to Lord Weedon."

I rose at once, I was quick to take a hint—I wondered dimly why Muriel was so changed. Not half the fun and life in her of a month ago.

Not ten yards away from that alcove Lord Weedon met me and I could not avoid him. He grinned in a manner that no Cheshire cat would have demeaned itself by imitating. His hand went out to me in the idiotic pump-handle fashion beloved of his set.

"Ah, old chappie—back again. I thought I'd missed you. . . . Where was *she,* eh? Monte Carlo—Paris? Ha! Ha! We know what change of air means, dear boy!"

He winked knowingly—I looked stern, or tried to,

and endeavoured to pass him. He held on to my arm. His little bull-dog face came nearer.

"I say . . . heard the news? Saw you sitting out this dance with her. No poaching now, you know. Honour among thieves—eh, my boy?"

"What do you mean?" I said shortly, and shaking off his hand.

"Mean? Didn't she tell you—shy perhaps? . . . Well, look up your *Morning Post*. Yesterday's. . . . Marriage arranged, you know, and all that. I take your 'congrats.' for granted, and don't send us salt cellars whatever you do! Ta-ta. I'll invite you to the ceremony, I know you're old friends."

. . . . .

He went on to the alcove. I went home and looked up *The Morning Post*. I soon discovered the paragraph:

"We understand a marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Miss Muriel Montressor, second daughter of Crawford Montressor, Esq., Hyde Park Square, and Lord Weedon, eldest son of the Marquis of Ashfield."

And I had chosen the delinquencies of this eligible and virtuous youth for a subject of conversation with his *fiancée*.

"Poor Cuffy," I said as I lit a cigarette, and thought of the *tête-à-tête* that even now might be progressing in that alcove.

. . . . .

A week later I was again perusing *The Morning Post*

at my club, when my eyes fell upon this surprising announcement:

"We are informed that the marriage arranged between Miss Muriel Montressor and Lord Weedon will not take place as announced in our issue of 13th inst."

My heart gave a quick throb. I told myself it was one of pure friendly interest. Still Miss Muriel had had an escape, and it was not—unpleasing—to know that she was free still.

MEPHISTO.

I.

"Remembering days that were."

"AND so Maulrever is back?" drawled young Standish of the Guards to a brother officer, as they stood watching the circle of dancers in Lady Fortescue's ballroom.

"Yes; queer thing, wasn't it, his disappearing like that? Thought that marriage didn't suit *his* book. Family and everyone cut up rough, you know. Couldn't stand *her*. Pretty girl too, but bad style—awfully bad style. Just a second-rate actress, with a good voice; no great genius or anything. But he simply went wild about her. Remember when he used to go every night to the Folly to see her. Only some trumpery little business she had too."

"He hadn't the best reputation in the world," said Jack Standish thoughtfully. "But yet at bottom he was an awfully good fellow. We used to see a lot of him at one time, and Cora looks upon him to this day as a sort of Admirable Crichton."

"Your cousin knows him?"

"Oh yes, but they haven't met for years. She was only a child when he went away."

"And now she's the beauty of the season?"

"Who owns that enviable reputation?" asked a pleasant voice near the young man.

Jack started.

"Ah, Maulrever, is it you? We were speaking of my cousin. You remember Cora, I suppose?"

"Yes," he said briefly. "Has fashion enthroned her as its presiding goddess?"

"It seems so. Ah, the dance is over. You can judge whether the *dictum* is deserved. Shall I reintroduce you?"

"Certainly not. I will trust to her memory. I suppose I have not grown out of recognition, though upon my soul she has!"

He looked at the beautiful girl who stood like a young queen among her courtiers, at the end of the room. His eyes, dark as night, but with a softened gleam in their sombre depths, rested half tenderly, half regretfully on her face. His thoughts wandered from the brilliant scene around him to a child running wild about the sunny Devon lanes, with a heart as light and a soul as clear as her eyes.

"The beauty of the season." The title haunted him like a refrain that one hears long after the song has ceased. He moved along, and in and out of the maze of silk and lace and black coats and trailing satins that filled the ballroom. Many eyes followed the tall figure with its easy grace of movement and soldierly bearing. Jack Standish turned abruptly to his companion.

"What was the origin of that *sobriquet?*" he asked with some curiosity.

"What—Mephisto? Well, I hardly know. He was

supposed to be very bad, and he had the devil's own luck at everything."

"But was there nothing special—nothing more than just an ordinary reputation for badness—and luck?"

"Not that I ever heard of. I was only a youngster at the time, you see. He looks a regular fire-eater, doesn't he?"

"By Jove—yes! But a splendid fellow all the same. I don't wonder at the women spoiling him. How they must have gone on about his marriage!"

"They did."

"I wonder what Cora will think of him?" muttered Jack. "But he's quite an old fogey to her. Reminds one of the fellow in that thing of the Laureate's, 'I played with her when a child.'"

"Which didn't prevent his falling in love with her as a woman."

"Falling in love," said Jack uneasily. "Oh, no fear of that! Cora's not sentimental, and Maulrever's married —at least we never heard of his wife's death."

"Besides, somebody else 'played with her as a child,'" laughed his companion. "Eh, Jack?"

"Oh, I'm very fond of Cora, and our people want us to hit it off; and I suppose we shall—some day. But there's plenty of time to think of that."

They passed on to seek respective partners, and at the same moment Cora Tresillian turned from the group surrounding her and found herself face to face with Colonel Maulrever.

No need to ask if she remembered—no need for formal question or reply. Fan, flowers, programme, all fluttered unheeded to the ground—her eager hands

went out in eager greeting, and into her eyes came such a light of gladness and of welcome as might have flattered a man far less vain than Stuart Maulrever.

He looked in unconcealed wonder at the girl. It was not so much her beauty that struck him, as the bright, happy, sunny look that told of the innocent girlish soul, unspoiled and unsoiled by the world that had crowned her its queen—a fair young queen, indeed, and one whose life was only a rose-path, its thorns still hidden under leaves and blossoms.

Looking at Cora Tresillian's face, it was impossible to associate it with any thought that was not fair, and pure, and hopeful as herself.

Now—it was radiant.

"Is it really—*really*—you?" she cried. "To think we should meet like this—in a London ballroom—and after all these years."

"It is really—me," Maulrever said, laughing. "How well you remembered me!"

"Have you seen Jack? How long have you been home? Why didn't you come to see us?" she went on rapidly.

"What a string of questions? Am I to answer them all at once—here?"

His glance seemed to recall her to the exigencies of the occasion. People were looking at her, and at him—her flowers lay at her feet unheeded. He stooped and picked them up, and gave them to her. "May I have a dance?" he said quietly.

"With pleasure," she said. "The next—it belongs to Jack, but cousins don't count."

Jack appeared to think they did, as he saw her

walk off on the arm of Stuart Maulrever. "This is our waltz, Cora," he said reproachfully.

"I can't dance it," she said coaxingly. "Don't be cross, Jack. You shall have two to-morrow night instead. I want to talk to Colonel Maulrever. Think of the ages since I have seen him."

Jack could only succumb, but he felt piqued at being thrown over so coolly. He felt still more annoyed presently when he passed a group of men, and heard one say to the other, "Mephisto at his old games again! It's to be hoped he won't go in for the beauty. She's no end too good for him!"

"If he does go in for her," laughed another, "we may as well throw up the sponge."

. . . . .

Meanwhile Maulrever and his companion skirted the crowd of dancers, and took their way to a small room leading out of the ballroom.

It was quite deserted now—a cool, dimly-lit little chamber with seats scattered here and there, and tall plants and ferns everywhere about.

Cora took the chair he offered her, and looked closely at him as he seated himself beside her. "How changed you are!" she said abruptly.

"Changed! in what way?"

His eyes did not meet the frank girlish gaze.

"In many ways," she said softly. "It is so long since I saw you," she went on as she opened her fan, and waved it slowly to and fro. "I remember so well the last time—the day you came to bid me good-bye. We were in the garden——"

She broke off abruptly; something, a sigh, a move-

ment of his, had seemed to warn her against pursuing the subject. Cora was possessed of quick sympathies and intelligence, as well as rare loveliness. She changed the conversation. "What a wild tomboy I used to be! What lectures you used to give me for torn frocks and dirty hands! Do you remember?"

"Perfectly, but it seems impossible to think I should have ever had the presumption to lecture you; or that the belle of the season could ever have been guilty of——"

"The torn frocks, etc.," she interrupted, smiling. "It is true, though, however much your memory may try to flatter you into any other belief. And so you have *really* come back from India at last. I am so glad—so very glad!"

"Why?" he asked, laughing. "The days of my self-appointed guardianship are over. My little wild rose is transformed into a hot-house blossom."

"No, not a bit of it," she said decidedly: "she is just the same; but you——"

"Aye! there's the rub," he answered bitterly. "I am—not. My dear child, it is no use saying we will remain the same; we never can. The years bring changes to ourselves, to others, try as we may to prevent their doing so. It is the law of nature, and of human lives—nothing ever remains unchanged for long."

"I feel just the same," she answered quietly.

The white feathers of the fan fluttered close to her cheek, touching its faint flush. He looked up and sighed.

"You are to be envied then," he said gravely. "Will the world leave you that feeling long, I wonder?"

"I do not trouble myself about the world," she said petulantly. "It is pleasant to be admired, and have plenty of fun and pleasure and amusement; pleasant—for a time. *Après*——"

"Après?" he questioned, as she left the sentence unfinished after meeting his eyes.

"There are so many other things," she said, the colour wavering fitfully in her delicate cheeks. "One cannot be blind—one must see the sin and the sorrow and the suffering. It seems to me sometimes as if I were heartless to enjoy life as I do; to feel so happy; to have so many to minister to my whims and fancies."

"My dear child," cried her companion in mock astonishment, "has not your first season taught you that the supreme essence of happiness is selfishness? Trust me, the dark days will come soon enough. Don't anticipate them by fancied sorrows, or sentimental regrets."

"You misjudge me!" she said indignantly. "I am not given to morbid or sentimental fancies. What I said I meant. I thought you at least would know me better——"

Her voice broke. The fan fluttered quickly, the sweet lips were tremulous with emotion. Maulrever noted the signs of agitation with a feeling of genuine surprise. His hand touched the small gloved fingers and stayed the movement of the snowy feathers that they held.

"Pardon me," he said gently; "I did not mean to offend you. The world is a bad school for faith."

"In men or women?" she asked quickly. "Ah, don't answer. I know what you will say—but I am

not of your world, Colonel Maulrever. You might judge me differently, if only for the sake of the child you were so good to in years gone by; the child who has never forgotten—you——"

"And whom I can never forget."

The words were very low, but she heard them, and looked up with such gladness as might well have repaid a memory more faithful than his own.

They were both silent.

Something of his own youth came back to his memory; some remembrance of higher, purer, better things. To him Cora was not "the beauty" of the season, but only a lovely, wayward child, with all the future unmapped before her careless feet—a child who had pelted him with rose-blossoms in the sunny lanes —a child who looked at him now with a woman's soul dawning in the wistful, tender eyes.

And how could he guess he was the hero of her life?

II.

"Of dreams now dwelling where dead roses dwell."

Cora Tresillian sat in the pretty morning-room of their town house, lazily sipping her chocolate and chatting to her mother of the last night's ball.

She was a spoilt child. Her parents had never crossed wish or whim of hers in their lives. It said much for Cora's sweet nature and sterling good sense that neither flattery, nor love, nor indulgence had in any way marred her perfect temper, or that honesty of

thought and speech which were so characteristic of "the beauty."

This morning she seemed a little more thoughtful than usual. Her descriptions of the partners of the previous night lacked the good-humoured mimicry with which she generally reproduced them for her mother's benefit.

Mrs. Tresillian was extremely delicate, and the duties of a chaperone were too arduous for her. She had therefore given her daughter into the care of Lady Fortescue, at whose house Cora had been the night before. It was her greatest delight, however, to hear of the admiration her child excited. Not that Cora was vain of that admiration. She took it as lightly and graciously as a young queen takes the homage of her subjects, and though she did an infinite deal of mischief in her way, it was not intentional mischief. She was too frank and gay—she enjoyed life too thoroughly for any serious thought of the future to trouble her.

"And you wish to know why Colonel Maulrever went away?" said her mother in answer to the eager question that followed the girl's description of that meeting the previous night.

"Yes, mother. Tell me all about it. He is so changed—he looks so unhappy. Young as I was, I remember hearing about some mistake or folly—something that had spoilt his life."

"It was simply this," she replied: "he made a foolish marriage. The girl was a dancer, or actress, or something of the sort. Her father had been a private in Maulrever's regiment, and was shot in some hare-brained

exploit that Maulrever had led. He promised the man to look after his child, and when he came back to England he found she had gone on the stage. He fell in love with her and married her. They were not happy, I believe, and no one would receive the girl, of course. What they quarrelled about I don't know, only he went suddenly off to India again."

"And—she?" Cora's voice was very low and troubled as she put the question.

"She remained behind, I suppose. I never could hear anything definite, and I did not like to question Maulrever."

"But now," persisted Cora impatiently—"where is she now? Is she alive, or what?"

"I cannot tell, my dear," said her mother, somewhat surprised at the petulant tone. "Perhaps Jack would know. Ask him when he comes to take you for your ride."

"He looked unhappy," Cora said dreamily. "I wonder if he cared for her very much? I wonder if—she—cared for him?"

"How this story interests you, Cora!" exclaimed her mother. "But then you were always so fond of Stuart Maulrever—even as a child. But, my dear, he must be quite old now. Let me see——"

"Old!" interrupted Cora impatiently. "He isn't a bit old! He is worth a hundred of the young fops I see every day. He at least looks a *man*."

"Not a good man, my dear," said her mother gently. "Not a man to trust in, or to love."

She looked after the girl wistfully as she walked off to prepare for her ride. "I hope—I do hope they won't

meet often," she murmured. "If Cora should take a fancy to him of all people in the world—it would be terrible! And then there is Jack. . . ."

Cora meantime cantering down the Row on her pretty chestnut, with Jack Standish as attendant, caught sight of a tall figure leaning negligently over the railings, and disregarding Jack's frowns made straight for it.

All her eighteen years she had never been crossed in any fancy—should she be so now? She laughed the idea to scorn. If it pleased her to talk to Colonel Maulrever she would do so. So the chestnut was reined in under the April foliage of the trees, and Stuart Maulrever became the cynosure of all eyes, and the object of much jealousy and evil speaking.

"Give a dog a bad name," says the proverb. Maulrever had had a bad name for years past. It had troubled him very little then—it troubled him less now. Cora was only to him his little pet and plaything of old —the child, with her gay spirits and enchanting ways, who had amused and been petted by him in the beautiful old house by the bright Dart waters where he had spent most of his leisure time in England.

He loitered by Cora's side while the sunshine poured through the softly-stirring boughs, and the tramp of horses' hoofs and the babble of voices and laughter sounded pleasantly in the morning air. The scene had something of novelty to him after all these years of absence and hardship and bitter memories. He chatted gaily to the beautiful girl, who looked even more beautiful in the morning radiance, and in her perfectly-fitting habit, than in the satins and laces of the previous night.

And she, feeling too content for anything to disturb her, talked as gaily as himself.

"I must not detain you any longer," he said at last, for he saw what she did not—the covert sneers and impatient glances of passers-by. "If one is unconventional one must always suffer for it," he thought regretfully, for the girl's face clouded over at his words.

"Will you come to lunch?" she asked. "Mother will be so delighted to see you. Do say yes. It is quite time you paid your respects to them."

For an instant he hesitated. Her hand lay in his—the sunlight played over her hair, turning its rich brown tints to gold, and her eyes looked lovelier than ever with that soft pleading in their dark blue depths. Stuart Maulrever dropped the hand he held. That look had vanquished him.

"Yes," he said, "I will come."

III.

"What is love worth, pray?
Worth a tear"—SWINBURNE.

AFTER that day Stuart Maulrever and Cora Tresillian were almost always together.

They drifted into that frank, careless intimacy into which people *do* drift, who suit each other, and like each other too well to think of consequences. Jack Standish had been right when he said Cora had made a hero of Maulrever in her childish days, and that fact in a measure accounted for her predilection in his favour now.

"It is refreshing to find someone who can talk sense," she would say if Jack ventured to hint that Maulrever monopolised all her attention, and her cousin took himself and his wounded *amour-propre* to another shrine. He was very fond of Cora, but he did not relish her total indifference to his by no means small attractions. He thought sometimes he would give his aunt a hint, and then again he feared that any remonstrance would only incense her daughter, and bring about the very mischief he wished to avoid. He was very uncomfortable altogether, and grew so uncertain in his moods and temper that Cora began to notice the change and rallied him mischievously on its cause. She never for one moment attributed it to herself. Her parents had never hinted at their wishes, and Jack himself had always felt sure that when he felt inclined he had only "to ask and to have." Perhaps this fear that had come to him of late had done him good—had aroused some genuine feeling on his part in place of that serene indifference with which he had looked to the future that was to link his cousin's fate to his.

In any case he was seriously aggrieved, and the change soon made itself known to Stuart Maulrever. He had always liked the young fellow, and he knew that Cora had been destined for him. He did not consider Jack worthy of her, but then, as he told himself with a lazy shrug of his handsome shoulders, he knew no one who was; and, after all, if a woman's life was safe and placid, it was infinitely better for her than if she indulged in romantic fancies.

He began to allude to Cora's future as a thing assured, and to praise Jack's good qualities, and she

listened to him with a strange pain at her heart, and wondered sometimes what he meant.

. . . . .

Cora and Colonel Maulrever sat together at a morning concert in Park Lane, given by some wealthy *dilettante,* who culled talent from all known sources to charm a crowd as heedless and as fickle as herself.

Cora glanced at the programme which Maulrever had just handed her. "Mrs. Vivian!" she cried. "Oh, I am so glad she is to sing! She has such a beautiful voice, and is such a charming woman too; I was introduced to her a few weeks ago. Now you may expect a treat, critical as you are."

"I suppose she will be very much like other singers," murmured Maulrever lazily, "and I have heard so many."

And as he spoke he glanced at Cora's face, thinking it looked somewhat more delicate of late. She was dressed all in soft creamy Indian silk, with touches of lace, and at her throat nestled a pale yellow rose. The sweeping feathers of her hat rested on the gold-brown hair, and shaded her face a little as she looked at her programme.

Bending thus, she did not see the woman who swept across the platform and stood facing the critical eyes of the aristocratic crowd, nor did she see the sudden pallor which crept over Stuart Maulrever's face, but she heard his startled exclamation—looked up and saw, and understood.

Usually so calm and impassive, now Stuart Maulrever literally trembled as the sweet rich notes of that voice rang over the room, waking in him memories so sweet and bitter, he could have groaned aloud as he heard.

He sat on, forgetful of his companion, of time, place, surroundings. The past held him in its spell, and every note of the clear pathetic voice was like a throb of pain in his breast.

There was intense silence throughout the room. The song was simple enough. Perhaps that was one reason of its charm—that and the sweet sad face of the singer, in her simple white dress, and with a cluster of white flowers in her hands.

"The days of love—ah! brief and sweet
As days of youth, as hours of bliss;
Brief as the life of rose in June,
Sweet as the touch of lips that kiss.
The days of love—ah! short and sad,
And wild as dreams that dreamers miss,
Too brief to live in, and be glad,
The days of love—the days of love!

Only to wander hand in hand,
Only to read what eyes betray,
Only to feel for me—for you—
What love may make of night or day,
What light of heaven may bless God's earth,
While stars may pale or shine above,
Only to dream, and fear to wake,
In days of love—in days of love!

The days of love—ah! sweet, our dreams
Have died as all such things must die;
Brief is the rose's life—and brief
The hours we knew of—you and I.
We hold a mem'ry sad as pain;
We see grey skies stretched wide above,
But, ah! for us will dawn again
No day of love—no day of love!" *

* Copyright.

Never during that song had Stuart Maulrever looked at the singer—never had Cora Tresillian looked at him. But she was conscious to her very heart's core that he was suffering; that this woman held it in her power to move, and touch him, as never she had done, or could do.

A strange, blank feeling crept over her—a sense of shame, of pity, of sorrow new to her young, bright life, and from which she shrank, as all young and happy things shrink, in terror and in pain.

A sense of passionate resentment stole over her as the song concluded, and the singer left the platform only to be recalled again and again.

What was this woman to him? She was not very beautiful, nor very young, and yet—and yet—he suffered for her sake. She knew that as she glanced now at the pallor of his face.

What a light of anguish burned in the dark eyes that gazed after the retreating figure!

The concert went on. When the first part was over there was a movement among the audience—a quarter of an hour's interval for gossip, or refreshment. Some strolled into the tea-room, some remained in their seats.

Cora touched Maulrever's arm.

"Take me into the conservatory over there," she said. "The heat is suffocating."

Then she seated herself on a low chair and glanced up at her companion.

"I want to ask you a question," she said quietly. "You may believe me, it is not only curiosity that prompts me. You know Mrs. Vivian, do you not?"

"Yes. Or, rather, I know the woman who calls herself so."

"It is not her real name? I thought as much," said Cora.

She had grown very pale, and her eyes held a pained and wistful entreaty that startled him as he met their gaze.

But his own heart was too troubled to dwell on so vague a fancy.

"I—I wish you would trust me enough to tell me all," Cora said gently. "We are such old friends; and it has needed no words to tell me you are unhappy."

He moved restlessly.

"Oh, child—child!" he said. "Who is there in all this earth who is not—*that?* I am no worse off than my fellows, and if I am, why should you care?"

"I do care," she said quietly. "I wish to help you."

"No one can do that," he answered. "I am not the first man who has made a mistake, and lives out his life regretting it."

She was silent for a long time, and Maulrever forgot even her presence. Her voice recalled him at last.

"I wish you would find the others and ask them to come home. I have a headache," she said. "I cannot stand any more music to-day. You will come to-night?" she added, as he led her away to the carriage.

Her voice was almost entreating; but she did not look at him.

"If you—wish," he answered hesitatingly.

Then she summoned up courage. Her great soft

eyes looked frankly back to his own. But in them he could read nothing.

"I *do* wish it," she said very softly.

As the words echoed in his ear, he stood alone in the warm June sunlight.

. . . . .

It was past nine o'clock that evening when Colonel Maulrever found himself in the drawing-room of the Tresillians' house in Grosvenor Square. The blinds had not been drawn, and a shaded lamp near one of the windows was its only light. He found Cora there alone. He could not help seeing how white her face was, but he put that down to the headache of the afternoon.

"You see I have come," he said, smiling, as he took her hand in his. "But I thought I should find you arrayed for the fray. Don't you go to Lady Gresham's ball?"

"No," she said as she seated herself again on the low chair by the window. "I don't feel inclined to go out to-night."

There was a pause. He was studying the delicate face, and marvelling a little what was the change in it. Her voice broke across his thoughts.

"Don't think me impertinent," she said hurriedly. "I know, I mean of course, like everyone else—I heard of your marriage. Was—was Mrs. Vivian——"

"My wife?" he asked quickly, as she stammered over the words.

"Yes." She had found her voice again.

"She was—or rather, I should say, she is."

"You—would you mind telling me why you parted?"

"I don't like to speak of it. The story has been sealed up in my heart for five long years. If, in all these years, I have not known one happy hour, I have but my own cursed folly to blame!"

There was a long silence. Then with a heavy sigh he suddenly roused himself.

"After all," he said, "why should I not tell you? I wanted you to think well of me, child, but it is better you should not—far, far better."

She said nothing. She was strung up to the utmost pitch of endurance. Not noticing her silence, he began his history.

The story was nothing very uncommon had she known more of life. Like most unequal marriages, there had been much to condone on both sides. He had loved this girl very passionately—very nobly—thinking naught of sacrifice on his own part. But though she loved him with equal tenderness, she had been jealous, exacting, suspicious from the first. His friends ignored her—his world would have none of her, and she laid the blame on him.

Quite suddenly she left the shelter of his roof, declaring she would go back to her old life of the stage—the life he so disliked and despised. He had written to his lawyers bidding them make her an allowance, and then, without farewell, they parted, and he returned to India, full of rage and indignation at her conduct.

He had never seen or heard of her till, in the Mrs. Vivian of the concert-room, he recognised his wife.

If he had deemed the old wild, impassioned love a dead and bygone thing, he fully realised his mistake when that fair face met his gaze once more, when the

passionate cadence of that voice thrilled to his soul, wakening the old rapture with the sharpness of a new regret.

The world that knew him, the world to whom he was only "Mephisto," would have laughed to scorn the idea of his holding one tender or faithful memory of womanhood; but the world knows few, if any, of us as we really are.

Cora listened to the whole story without a word or sign.

"And you—love—her still?" she asked faintly, as his voice ceased.

"I do; God help me!"

"Why do you not go to her; tell her——"

"You forget," he said proudly. "*She* left—me."

"But if she, too, suffered—if she loved you—if she was longing to forget the past——"

"Do not madden me by such fancies, child!"

A sudden flush crossed the girlish face. "Ah," she said softly, and rose from her seat and faced him there in the summer dusk, "how little you know of—women. You may be too proud to go to her, but—she—she who has suffered so—who has so much to forgive—she will come to you."

"Cora——"

"Hush," she said. "If I have done a rash thing, a foolish thing—forgive me. But you said you were unhappy, that no one could help you—and I have—tried."

"My child—my darling——"

But she was gone.

. . . . .

The door softly opened—a woman's voice murmured brokenly, "Stuart!"

They stood and faced each other: the woman whom Cora's letter had summoned to the man who had been the hero of her dreams—the husband and wife who for long years of estrangement and misunderstanding had stood apart and suffered in silence and in pride.

They looked at each other silently and long. Eyes cannot lie, and soul spoke out to soul, of sorrows, and weariness, and remorse.

There was no need of words. Not then—as the tears rushed hot and swift to her eyes. Not then, as that great light of love and welcome leaped into his own. Not then, for she was in his arms and held to his throbbing heart ere ever her trembling lips could sigh, "Forgive."

. . . . . .

"'The beauty' has never been the same since Mephisto took her up," said society.

But "the beauty," carrying herself bravely through the ordeal before her, cared little for what the world said. She only felt that, since her hero owed his recovered happiness to her, she was repaid.

POOR MARY ANN.

It was a puncture, and undoubtedly a bad puncture, and the place was a bad place for the happening of an accident, being one of the worst of the many bad roads winding and twisting through the mountain passes of North Wales. The Siddeley stood panting and thrumming in the middle of the road, with that exasperating appearance of doing its best under adverse circumstances which is a characteristic of motors.

The driver and his friend stood side by side, regarding the car. If they could not put her to rights there they must stick, for neither town nor village was visible, and the December dusk was already shadowing the dusky slopes of Cader Idris.

"It's no good patching; it must be done at a garage —vulcanised! Well, we've got the Stepney. We must chance it! It will never do to be caught here in the dark. How far is it to the Castle?"

"About eight miles—now," answered the fishy-eyed youth. "Pity we didn't bring Alphonse!"

"He couldn't have done more than this. Do throw away that rotten cigarette, Arthur, and give me a hand!"

Arthur Chickering, to whom the car belonged, was one of those individuals who seem to exist in order to prove that he who has much shall receive more. He

was the only son of a wealthy city merchant, who allowed him £1000 a year and paid his tailors' bills and club subscriptions.

His friend, O'Brien, was as direct a contrast to himself as could well be imagined. Tall, handsome, ambitious, and impecunious, he had spent three years in London in the service of journalism, and with a rooted belief in his own *métier* for authorship that had gone no further—as yet—than paying extra postage for a systematically returned novel. He lived in one room in Guildford Street, and wrote humorous articles and sketches for such illustrious periodicals as *Merry Thoughts* and *Thrice a Week*. But his great work, his novel—*the* novel, so unlike all other novels—was as yet unpublished. If it had not been for his happy-go-lucky temperament—that temperament of his nation which can laugh at misfortunes even while deploring them—O'Brien might have lost hope both in publishers and publishers' readers. As it was, he only resolved that Tom Moore and Sheridan should not have it all their own way. Besides, literary biographies had proved satisfactorily that the most successful and most popular books have been those for whom rejection has been a first experience.

A Bohemian club had led to O'Brien's first acquaintance with Arthur Chickering. It appeared that Chickering senior had literary tastes and ambitions, and in the earnest desire to be considered a man of letters and patron of art had insisted on his son joining such clubs and institutions as included literature and literary men in their members' qualifications. Arthur Chickering and Harry O'Brien had become acquainted, and the

friendship—on one side—had developed into that devoted yet grudging admiration of unattainable gifts which marks off effort from ability. As the brighter star outshines the lesser, so did the gifted young Irishman outshine the plodding plebeian. Yet, in gratitude for his notice, the said plodder would have lavished upon his friend all those benefits and advantages of fortune so undeservedly his own. But a certain pride and instinct of superiority kept Harry O'Brien to the attitude of giver, not receiver, of favours.

Even in the pursuit of motoring, which was his one passion—apart from authorship—he had studied the mechanical part of the business so thoroughly that Arthur Chickering could have dispensed altogether with a chauffeur, as he had done on this special occasion.

The two friends were motoring to Llyn Hafod, an ancient and historical Welsh castle recently purchased and restored by Chickering senior. Here he intended holding Christmas revels for the first time since his ownership, and to the castle and the revels he had invited his son and his son's friend. He had met O'Brien frequently in London and greatly admired his brilliance and wit, and, above all, his *grand seigneur* manner, as if the world of wealth were really more honoured by his indifference than by its advantages. O'Brien might have been one of the family, so to say, had he chosen, for Berkeley Square was thrown open to him with an unvarying welcome, but for some reason best known to himself he had been very chary of accepting invitations. His friend's father grumbled, but his friend kept his own counsel, as men of small minds and petty jealousies can

keep their private feelings in secret chambers known only to themselves.

Arthur Chickering's mind was as small as his stature, and filled with that dog-in-the-mangerish jealousy which before now has worked shipwreck in human affairs. From childhood he had been jealous of his sister Marjorie. She had all the advantages he lacked. She was tall, she was pretty, she was clever, and, above all, her father adored her. Added to this, she possessed the physique he lacked—could play tennis and golf while he muddled balls and cheated at "foursomes"; could dance all night and be as "fresh as paint" next morning. Also, she was keen on motoring, and would have been able to drive his car herself had he not grudgingly refused her the chance. It was of this chance and its surrounding complications that he found himself thinking as he watched Harry O'Brien struggling with the Stepney—that useful adjunct to motor-cars which, like most inventions, has made a fortune for the owners, though not for the inventor.

"What a good chap you are, Harry!" he exclaimed suddenly.

O'Brien looked up. Then he laughed. "Can't you tell me anything I don't know?" he enquired ironically.

"Joking apart, I mean it," said Arthur—a little uneasily, so it seemed. "Here I'd have been stranded but for you."

"You forget that but for me you'd have had Alphonse with you, and he could do all this as well, if not better, than I can."

"Oh, d——n Alphonse! He's such a conceited ass! I say, Harry——"

"Well?"

"Oh, never mind. I was only going to say—something——"

"Then why don't you say it?"

"Well, you see, it's like this——"

But what it was, or what it was like, Harry O'Brien was not destined to know, for suddenly turning the corner, without sound of warning, swept a huge motor-car. With a cry of terror Arthur Chickering sprang aside; but his friend, who had been stooping over the Stepney, had scarcely a second of time to evade the monster. It swerved, struck the Siddeley on the right side-wheel, and sent it against the stone wall guarding the road from the precipitous descent below. Two muffled and goggled figures threw back a hurried glance at the injured car, then, without apology or offer of help, sped on their way.

O'Brien sprang forward with an angry shout. Arthur Chickering was trembling and shivering with fright, and as helpless as a baby. And there stood the Siddeley, hopelessly injured now, beyond their skill to repair or to use.

"The d——d scoundrels!" swore O'Brien. "What a beastly shame! Did you see their number, Arthur?"

No; Arthur had seen nothing except the car and the muffled figures dashing by in the fast-falling dusk.

"Now—what's to be done?" exclaimed O'Brien. "The car is useless. We might have managed with the Stepney, but the right wheel is smashed up. We'll have to light the lamps in case of any other vehicle coming along and make our way to the nearest village."

But Arthur Chickering began to whimper, and he declared he could never walk so far.

"Then you must sit here and wait till I come back. We must get a cart and horse to tow the car. She can't move. Poor old Mary Ann! I'd like to wring the necks of those brutes! Hark! What's that?"

It was a weird and eerie noise, piercing those dark solitudes. It was followed by a slow, steady "thrum-m" —the well-known signal of a motor.

"Another car!" cried Harry, dashing to the seat and sounding their own horn. The signal was sufficient to make the approaching car slow down. It was a small, sturdy-looking little motor, driven by a woman.

"Hallo! What's up? An accident?" she cried.

O'Brien started as he heard the clear young voice. "Why—I do believe it's your sister, Arthur!" he exclaimed.

Chickering drew himself together and advanced eagerly towards the muffled figure.

"Marjorie! Good heavens!"

"So it *is* you, Arthur? I thought so. What's happened? Is that Alphonse?"

"No. We didn't bring him. Harry said he'd drive."

"Oh! Is it Mr. O'Brien?" said the voice, sounding suddenly icy and constrained. "You seem to have got into a nice predicament. What a pity you didn't bring your own chauffeur, Arthur!"

"No chauffeur in the world could have prevented this!" exclaimed O'Brien hotly.

She laughed. "If I remember rightly, you said the same thing that day at Richmond. You have a predilection for unpreventable catastrophes."

O'Brien looked angrily at the demure, laughing face. It had haunted him often enough since that day at Richmond of which she spoke—a red-letter day in motoring recollections, when she had sat by his side and watched him drive, and displayed so much interest in his personal concerns.

"Another car ran into us," explained Arthur gloomily.

"And the d——d cads didn't even stop to see what damage they had done!" added O'Brien.

"Did you take their number?"

"Couldn't see it. What with the shock, and the suddenness, and the rate they were going—it was impossible."

Meanwhile Harry O'Brien was lighting the two Blériot lamps on either side the car. Then he unfastened the head-lamp and lit that.

"What are you going to do?" enquired Arthur sharply.

"I shall walk into Towyn and get assistance."

"Why not go to the Castle?" asked Marjorie Chickering. "You are only eight miles away—six if you take a short cut to the right of the next hill. Some of the stable men could soon come down and help fetch the car. It's a danger lying there."

"That's true," said Harry ruefully.

"I wish I could take you both," continued the girl; "but, you see, I've only one vacant seat, and I suppose Arthur——"

Yes, most decidedly. Arthur was the one to have it, he agreed, and Harry must walk. Not that he minded that. What he did mind was the unfortunate coincidence that had placed him in so unfavourable a

position on two occasions. Why had Mary Ann behaved so badly?—for, of course, any motor accident is the fault of the chauffeur! However, there was no use in delay. He saw Arthur get into his sister's little De Dion, and the two sped away into the deepening dusk, leaving him to follow.

"I didn't know you'd got a car of your own," said Arthur, as they swooped down the next hill. "And how have you learnt to drive it yourself?"

"How have I learnt anything?" she answered, somewhat sharply. "By determining to do it—and then doing it. So your Fidus Achates is still taking Alphonse's place?" she added irrelevantly. "He seems to have landed you in a tight corner for once. I wonder what you'd have done if I hadn't appeared?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. Had to walk it, as Harry is doing, I suppose. Who's at the Castle, by the way?"

"Oh—Aunt Matilda, of course, and the two girls, and Julia Mannering, and young Poynder, and father expected that publisher friend of his and his son tonight, but——"

"Do you mean old Greenberg?"

"Yes. I believe he is invited solely on account of your friend. By the way, how is he getting on?"

"Not at all. Can't work up to a couple of hundred, for all he's such a clever chap."

"No hope, then, of that—engagement—coming to anything yet?" enquired Marjorie carelessly.

"Engagement?" echoed her brother.

"Wasn't there some girl he went out with every Sunday evening? You told me so."

"Oh, Mary Ann!"—and Arthur chuckled. "Yes, yes. We named the car after her, you know."

"An odious, common name!" scoffed Marjorie.

"He admires it," her brother informed her. "He thinks it lovely."

"I suppose the owner is equally—lovely? Have you ever seen her?"

"No," he answered, with another chuckle. "Harry's so jealous. He keeps her to himself. Determined no other chap shall have a chance. Do take care, Margy! You're going much too fast in this uncertain light."

But Marjorie seemed in a reckless mood, and sent the little car up and down hill in a switchback fashion that kept Arthur's nerves on the rack.

"I hate these small cars," he muttered. "And after Harry's steady pace, you don't have a look in as a driver. We can do forty miles an hour, and never a jerk or twist like your machine gives."

Marjorie did not reply. They were near the Castle now, and saw its lights shining from the rocky eminence above which it perched. It had a modern mediæval gateway, and towers and battlements, and only wanted a drawbridge and portcullis to be as reminiscent of the Middle Ages as its owner would have liked.

Arthur went straight to his own room to dress for dinner, while his sister gave orders and despatched assistance for the relief of the disabled car. It might —or might not—have been pure kind-heartedness that suddenly prompted her to drive back and see if she could pick up that forlorn pedestrian who must still be some miles from the Castle. At all events, the De Dion was once more speeding recklessly along the road

towards the scene of the accident. Mile after mile gave itself up to the gallant little car. At last a small star-like gleam showed her the figure of which she was in search. She stopped and hailed it. O'Brien advanced, with astonishment depicted on his face.

"Miss Marjorie! But how good of you to return for me. Really, I——"

"Don't waste your gratitude," she said. "I knew you'd be late for dinner, and that meant sitting down thirteen. Jump in, please! I can run home in a quarter of an hour."

He said no more, but took the place at her side, keeping his lantern on his knee for the greater assistance of its powerful rays. Somehow the little car did not make quite such a record as when it had conveyed the previous passenger. But then, speed is not conducive to conversation, even if of an acrimonious and unfriendly description. Two young people bent on misunderstanding one another present a delightful comedy to those little gods of mischance who seem to exist for the purpose of complicating human affairs. So many of life's tragedies spring from the veriest absurdities, or from some easily avoidable mistake, that one is inclined to believe that poor humanity is really the sport of the fates. Here was a case at issue. An instantaneous attraction for each other had been circumvented by the jealousy of the brother of the one and the friend of the other party. It had not seemed desirable to Arthur Chickering that Harry O'Brien, the struggling author, should fall in love with his sister. He had "nipped the affair" in its very earliest "bud," so to say, by hinting to Harry that the said sister was to marry a certain

Lord John Poynder—second son of the Earl of Bolsover. Then, by way of further proving his Machiavelian capabilities, he had so twisted up the affairs of "Poor Mary Ann," the novel, with a real Mary Ann who owned O'Brien's affections, that Marjorie Chickering now merely saw the young author in the humiliating condition of some lodging-house entanglement, and treated him accordingly. The very name of Mary Ann was abhorrent to her, and yet so firmly rooted was it in her mind that it would have been almost impossible to detach that name from a living personality.

When O'Brien learnt that Lord John was among the guests at the Castle he became as gloomy and as reticent as was necessary for further complicating the situation. Even the knowledge that Isaac Greenberg, the famous publisher, was also a guest scarcely cheered him. What use would fame or success be to one whose interest in life had been rudely dispelled, for whom the one and only incentive to fame had been dashed to the ground by cruel fate? He was working himself up into a mood which threatened wholesale destruction to the happy ending he had recently (by a publisher's reader's advice) given to "Poor Mary Ann" when the car dashed into the courtyard of the Castle and his young hostess led the way into its mediæval halls. The warm welcome he met with from the suzerain of that imposing fortress in some measure dispelled his gloom. Time being brief, he was hurried off to his room to dress, without a very full explanation of the accident. Fortunately their luggage had been sent on by rail, otherwise he and Arthur Chickering would have been minus evening clothes. As it was, the party had all assembled

before O'Brien came down, and Arthur Chickering was in the midst of an exciting exaggeration of what had delayed them. Two amongst his audience looked decidedly uncomfortable. They were Isaac Greenberg and his son, the former a patriarchal-looking gentleman bearing a strong resemblance to General Booth, and the latter an epitome of the overbearing, money-worshipping young Israelite in whom there is much guile.

Harry O'Brien's entrance was closely followed by that of Marjorie Chickering—a vision of shimmering satin and red-gold hair—who was immediately claimed by Lord John, and whose place at the dinner-table was just near enough to Harry to confuse and disturb his wits in a novel and altogether unusual manner. Still, he did his best. His fame as a humourist and a *raconteur* held him in high esteem in the estimation of Chickering senior, and he had often shone as a "bright particular star" at that gentleman's dinner-table in Berkeley Square. To-night, however, his wit seemed heavy as unleavened bread, and the only story he could remember was one of an old Irish nurse of his own who, under the visitation of such infirmities as loss of sight and hearing, could still cheerfully thank Providence that, though she had only two remaining teeth, they were "opposite one another." The people who laughed at this were so much in the minority that O'Brien was suddenly struck with a sense of its inappropriateness, and the fixed and glittering smile of Greenberg senior seemed to further that impression. True that old Chickering roared till the tears ran down his cheeks, but then old Chickering was by nature hilarious on small provocation.

When dinner was over, the whole company adjourned to the great hall, where Waring & Gillow's had done their best with old armour and ancient oak, and even a row of "restored ancestors." A small flutter of excitement was raised by Arthur Chickering's discovery that the Greenbergs were the cause of the accident to his Siddeley, and by old Greenberg declaring that if his "fool of a chauffeur had only shown a tail light, it would never have happened." This assertion reached O'Brien's ears, and in vindicating himself he lost sight of the fact that the pompous publisher was the present arbiter of his destiny. A heated argument, in which the patriarchal Crœsus was considerably worsted, did not improve matters. So far as "Poor Mary Ann" was concerned, her fortunes were in as jeopardous a position as her prototype of the car had been.

The evening was at last enlivened by the introduction of a juvenile Welsh choir from the village. Marjorie Chickering ranged them in duly picturesque order, and seated herself at the piano. It might—or might not—have been a fortuitous circumstance that prompted the selection of "Poor Mary Ann" as a preliminary effort. Certainly the accompanist threw a glance at Harry O'Brien, as if challenging his sympathies.

But Welsh singing and the Welsh language generally have a somewhat depressing tendency, and though the company applauded the children and admired their quaint costumes, they did not press for encores. Old Chickering, who was in a festive mood, as became the owner of a mediæval castle, suggested a country dance. But as the ladies of the party were but five, including Aunt Matilda—who was rheumatic—the proposition did

not meet with much encouragement, and might have fallen to the ground had not the said Aunt Matilda offered to play a waltz if the four young ladies would take partners. Thereupon ensued a momentary confusion, which ended in Harry O'Brien leading off with Marjorie to the strains of the old-fashioned "Soldaten-Lieder," much to the annoyance of Lord John.

Old Chickering and Isaac Greenberg sat aside under a suit of chain armour and a decoration of holly and evergreens and criticised the couples. There was no doubt that O'Brien could waltz as well as he could drive a motor-car. The gyrating pair looked so charming and so suitable that old Greenberg remarked the fact.

"Deuced handsome young beggar, that Irishman! What is he?"

"A gentleman by birth, and an author by profession."

"An author? I don't know the name."

"No. He can't get published—poor boy! Writes for papers, and all that, but the book seems to hang fire. I've often thought I'd give a helping hand to it, but he's so deuced proud."

"You like him?"

"I wish I had had such a son. You know my taste for literature—and—all that?"

Old Greenberg laughed. "I know—oh yes. But about this book? Novels are a glut in the market—too many written, and too many published."

"But one good one is a chance you don't often get."

"True; but—is this 'special one' good?"

"I'll swear Harry O'Brien couldn't write a bad one!

He's so bright and witty himself. And, after all, Greenberg, humour's the thing. Look at Jerome and—and —I forget the other chap—Salthaven, isn't it? Why, they're read and enjoyed fifty thousand times more than your purpose and problem novels. And they make thousands!"

Isaac Greenberg considered the point. "I might have a look at it," he concluded. "Ask him to send it in. I don't suppose he's got it with him, has he? If so, a couple of hours in the library——"

"I'll ask him when the waltz is done," said old Chickering eagerly. "And I'll tell you what, Greenberg, I don't mind standing the publishing expenses if you see your way to bringing it out. Eh? I've done you a good turn before now, you know——"

"So you have; and I must say I like the young chap, though he was so cheeky over that accident."

"Well, you might have killed him. He was on the off side, near the wall. And, as it is, the car's pretty well done for, so he says—and it cost me seven hundred twelve months ago!"

"Did it? I'm sorry—'pon my word. Well—a *quid pro quo*. I'll take his book if it's worth anything, and pay him a decent royalty to set him going. Is it a bargain?"

"Right you are! I'll go and ask him if he's got the MSS. or could send for it."

With every possible good intention Chickering senior approached the young couple, who were resting after the energetic conclusion of Aunt Matilda's waltz.

"I say, O'Brien," he exclaimed, "I want a word with you."

Marjorie looked swiftly at her father. Was he about to——? But no; he seemed all good humour and kindliness. She drew a little aside. It was perhaps in some degree unfortunate that a few chance words of the eager colloquy should catch her ear—and that the words should be "Mary Ann."

With a flush of annoyance she turned to Poynder, who was hovering near, with a desire for "next dance" plainly displayed. She gave it, and moved down the room by his side; nor did she again vouchsafe word or look to the unfortunate Harry O'Brien. But that young man, in the sudden elation of feeling produced by the extraordinary condescension of the great Isaac Greenberg, scarcely seemed to notice her altered manner. A future of glorious possibilities floated before his eyes. The book only needed to be read by a discriminating mind to be accepted; only needed to be offered to the public to be received with acclamation. True there was one drawback. Greenberg had objected at once to the title; every publisher had done that—a thing that only made Harry the more determined it should remain. Why, what more did they want? It was expressive, it was simple, it was easily remembered, and, above all, it *was* the story. The book was Mary Ann, and Mary Ann meant the book, and she alone should have the honour of entitling it.

Perhaps when old Greenberg read it he would be of the same opinion. Meanwhile he meant to enjoy himself for once. But as enjoyment meant more dances with Marjorie, and as Marjorie informed him she had no more to give, he lapsed into despair. After all, what right had he to expect her to favour him with any

notice? There was Poynder forever hovering about, and had not Arthur hinted that a match was on the *tapis?* Still, she had seemed glad to see him again; and now, when at last fortune smiled on his efforts, he might at least claim—another dance. He stood gloomily aside. It was close on midnight, and old Chickering was having a "wassail bowl" sent round, and insisted they should all sing "Auld Lang Syne."

They held hands and stood in a circle under the great mistletoe bough and shouted the familiar words more or less tunefully. Harry O'Brien managed to hold Marjorie's hand, managed to convey reproach in "should *auld* acquaintance be forgot?" but when the song was over and the party were uttering Christmas wishes, she only said, "How you must wish Mary Ann was here!"

He looked at the pretty, half-contemptuous face. Then he laughed. "Why, so she is," he said. "I brought her."

Marjorie crimsoned. "Brought her! Brought—Mary Ann!"

"Yes—only she's got left behind in the car."

"Left behind! What do you mean? Only Arthur and yourself were in it."

"Mary Ann was under the seat," he said—"in a brown paper parcel!"

"Under—the—seat!"

She gasped each word in an odd, breathless way, staring up into his laughing eyes in mute bewilderment.

"Why, where else should she be?—a square solid packet, too! And wasn't it luck my bringing her, for old Greenberg wants to look through the MSS. himself

while he's here? And if he takes a fancy to her, my fortune's made! I only need a good start to become a popular author. Why, in a year or two I may be making my thousand a year! I suppose that doesn't seem much to you, but——"

He stopped abruptly, for she was laughing almost hysterically.

"So Mary Ann is a *book?*" she faltered. "And all this time I've been made to believe she was a real person—a girl—at your lodgings!"

It was Harry's turn to look surprised. "But what in the name of goodness should have made you think that?" he asked.

"It was partly Arthur's fault, partly my own stupidity. Oh, I'm so glad——!"

She stopped the injudicious remark, and, turning to the piano, began collecting the music in a hurried and perturbed manner. O'Brien deemed it necessary to assist her.

"Before I murder Arthur and pitch young Poynder into the moat—if there is a moat—please tell me *what* you were glad about?—that Mary Ann isn't a girl, or that old Greenberg stands as sponsor for her future?"

"I'm glad of—of both," she said, colouring furiously beneath his laughing eyes.

"All right," he said. "This is a blessed Christmas Eve for me. Perhaps now you'll be nice again, like you were that day going to Richmond?"

"That's quite a long time ago," she said demurely.

"It has seemed a hundred years! But tell me one thing more. Are you engaged to that bounder Lord John?"

"Certainly not! What an absurd idea!"

"Nor to anyone else?"

"At present—no," she said softly.

"Then—may I go out in your car to-morrow, and will you come with me?"

"What for?"

"To fetch 'Poor Mary Ann.'"

STEPHEN WYNTHORPE'S PRESENTIMENT.

"It's not much of a place, but 'twill serve," said Wynthorpe.

"Any port in a storm," said the O'Malley.

"Besides, one can't always judge by externals," said the Cornishman.

The three friends and fellow-travellers drew near a recently lit fire, and listened to the lashing of waves and howling of winds without.

They were sheltering in a little inn in a Cornish fishing village, an inn of historical interest and little else, for it was dark, low-roofed, bare of carpets or chairs, and possessed no sleeping accommodation worth speaking of. Still the three men, who were doing a walking tour in Cornwall, had been thankful to find it. The autumn day had closed in with storm and rain, and they were away from the beaten track of any village or town. The Cornishman had suddenly remembered this little fishing hamlet—it had once been a famous smuggling resort—and guided them thither. Just as they reached the sheltering portals of the Tregeagle Arms the storm broke in all its fury. But the storms of centuries had been unable to work any harm against the solid stone walls or the great square porch of the quaint old inn,

and this special one had no better success than its predecessors.

As the fire began to blaze and the great logs to crackle, the room looked more comfortable, and the men drew a wooden bench up before it and lit their pipes, and waited with such patience as they could command for the arrival of the meal they had ordered.

The O'Malley, whose spirits were inexhaustible, and apparently independent of external influences, cracked jokes and told stories. The two others listened, well content to be amused without trouble on their part.

They were an odd trio, but had been college friends, and had never lost sight of each other since. Gerald O'Malley and John Trevenna were artists. Stephen Wynthorpe was that lucky or unlucky personage—a young man of independent means. But he, too, had artistic tastes, and dabbled in water-colours, and sketched in an easy and original fashion that amused his friends, and, as Jerry O'Malley put it, "kept him out of Satan's mischief" while he was making up his mind what to do with himself.

His latest idea on that point had been to go to America, spend a winter in Canada, visit Salt Lake City, and return by San Francisco and Japan. He would give himself a year to do it all, he said, and then settle down as a landed proprietor on his estate in Wiltshire. He wanted the O'Malley to go with him, but that lively Hibernian was at once too proud to accept favours and too poor to be independent of them. So he had refused firmly, and was now entertaining the project of setting up a joint studio with his friend Trevenna in a little nook of Cornwall, and there working hard for the name

and fortune that were to both as yet only a Fata Morgana, whose streaming locks waved tantalisingly on the wings of possibility.

"There's a fine bit of sea out yonder," remarked Trevenna, glancing out through the small dirty window to where foam and spray were madly dashing against the walls of iron-bound rocks—"surely as fine as anything we'll see at Cape Cornwall, or the Land's End."

The others followed his glance, and then Stephen Wynthorpe rose and walked over and looked out.

A more wild and desolate spot it would have been difficult to discover. Everywhere towered the great cliffs —destitute of tree or herbage—the home of screaming gulls who were now wheeling and shrieking above the dashing spray. Huge waves rolled and broke in thunder at their base. The sunlight like a bar of red flame gleamed for one angry moment upon the turmoil of mist and wind and water. Then the dark clouds massed themselves stormily once more, and all of daylight was hurled into the fierce arms of night.

There was something awful and awe-inspiring about the scene, and young Wynthorpe shuddered as he turned away and went back once more to the fire and the smokers.

"What an awful place to live in," he said, and then began to make a tour of inspection of the room, examining the oak, the carving, the quaint old settle black with age and glistening with the polish of generations of backs and elbows. An old cabinet stood in one corner. It had glass doors, and on the shelves were arranged queer china ornaments, and cups and saucers,

and the hideous china dogs that one sees so often on the mantelshelves and cupboards of Cornish cottages.

Stephen Wynthorpe examined them, and made disparaging remarks on their beauty and use, and then turned his attention to one or two oil paintings hanging on the walls. They were so grimed with dust and dirt that it was almost impossible to discover their subjects. Before one of them he paused so long and seemed so critical that O'Malley noticed it at last.

"What work of art have you discovered now, Steve?" he called out in his rich Irish voice. "You look quite an Academy critic trying to make up his mind whether the subject or treatment is to be slated."

Still the Englishman said nothing. He drew a few steps away, his eyes still on the picture. A sort of fascination seemed to hold his gaze.

"O'Malley," he said suddenly, "have you ever had a presentiment?"

"Faith! no, boy; not myself. They run in the family, I believe, but they've not troubled me so far, save in the matter of spending a shilling and hoping it will bring in half-a-crown. I know a good deal about them, though," he added thoughtfully. "Have I ever told you about Biddy Connor?"

"No," said Trevenna, bending forward to stir the fire into a fiercer blaze. "Let's hear it. Who was the lady?"

"She lived near my own home," said O'Malley. "She was as fine a woman as you'd wish to see——"

"I've heard you say that of some score or two of the females in 'them parts,'" said Trevenna dryly.

"There must be quite a galaxy of beauty in your village. I live in hopes of——"

"Ah, now! shut up with your chaff," said O'Malley. "How can I be telling you the story if you won't listen to it?"

"Go on!" said Trevenna. "There must be one of those same lovely females in that old picture frame, I should say, judging from Steve's moonstruck condition!"

"Well, to continue," said O'Malley, stretching out his legs and taking a long whiff at his briarwood. "This same Biddy Connor had two lovely daughters——"

"Also," suggested Trevenna.

"Am I telling this story, sir, or are you?" demanded the O'Malley with dignity. "Another interruption, and I'll——"

"All right. I'm mum," said Trevenna, laughing.

"Two daughters," continued O'Malley. "And they were as—ahem—they were good, sensible girls, I mean, and very fond of their mother and father."

"Were there any uncles and brothers about?" murmured the incorrigible Cornishman.

"And one day they came to our house in great distress and said that Biddy was bad with rheumatism that——"

"Excuse me—but where does the presentiment come in?"

"Ah, you unbelieving haythun!—will you just keep your tongue still for five minutes. Well, she was quite crippled and couldn't move her hands or legs. So the housekeeper gave them some liniment and things and they went away. And on their way back they met a

knowledgeable woman who was mighty clever at doctoring and that sort of thing, and they showed her the liniment and said where they'd got it. 'Ah,' says she, 'girls, don't be trying such stuffs on the poor soul. There's only one cure for that sort of rheumatics,' she says. ''Tis I knows it, and I've cured many, including myself.' 'And what may that be, Mrs. Mulligan?' asked the girls. 'It's saltpatre,' she says. 'You get some and mix it wid everything she drinks, and she'll be well in three weeks at the most.' 'Are ye sure?' they says. 'I've a presentiment,' she says. And they went home and told their mother, and they got the saltpetre and began to give it to her that very night. But you see they had never asked what quantities to give it in—and they began with basinfuls of it—and the poor soul drank it and drank it, and she began to swell, and every day she got bigger, and they thought 'twas the good effects of the stuff, and gave her more and more, and her husband couldn't make out the meaning of it, and thought he'd try suppression, and took the door off the hinges and laid it on her, and they all seated themselves on it by way of easing her a bit, and as they were thus employed in comes Mrs. Mulligan. 'God save us all here,' she says. 'I just stepped in to say that I had a presentiment'—and faith what more she had I don't know, for at that moment poor Biddy gave one sigh, and the whole family found themselves dispersed about the potato plot."

Trevenna took the pipe out of his mouth and looked at him in wholesome horror. "O'Malley," he began sternly.

"'Twas a grand explosion," said the Irishman. "You asked if I had ever had a presentiment, you know. They gave a beautiful funeral to—the pieces."

Trevenna rose in speechless disgust, and walked up to Wynthorpe.

"What on earth are you gazing at that picture for?" he exclaimed.

The young man turned and looked at him in a half-dazed way.

"I don't know," he said. "Do you see anything remarkable about the eyes, John?"

"Devilish bad ones," answered Trevenna.

"Don't they follow you—turn after you? Come here. Now look."

"No, I can't say they follow me."

"What's it all about?" asked O'Malley, coming forward with curiosity.

"Wynthorpe says those eyes follow him wherever he goes."

"Steve, my boy," said the Irishman affectionately, "I besought you to spare the Scotch last night. You see what it is to despise a friendly warning."

"Trevenna—O'Malley—don't chaff, there's a good fellow! Listen a moment. You know I'm not a superstitious fellow. You've never heard me say I believed in ghosts and spirits and things."

"Save for a trifle of old Scotch," said the O'Malley, laughing.

"Ah, stop fooling for once!" exclaimed Stephen impatiently. "Well, I tell you both that the strangest feeling came over me when I saw that picture. Mind you, it's perfectly unknown to me. I know nothing of its original or its painter. I never set eyes on it till a few moments ago, and yet I feel, I know, that its eyes

will have some strange effect upon my life—will look upon me as I die."

. . . . .

In the ups and downs, the vicissitudes and troubles, the storms and calms of life the friends drifted apart, and the walking tour, the old inn, and the strange picture became things of the past, put aside on memory's dusty shelves.

The Cornishman became a famous artist, the lively and tender-hearted O'Malley returned to his own country and his farm acres, and married a wife, and gave up art as a bad job; and Stephen Wynthorpe never returned from that tour. At first his letters were frequent, then they grew few and far between, and in their brief pages gleamed the story of an unhappy and ill-fated passion. For sake of it he sacrificed home, fortune, friends. He became a gambler and a drunkard. He was heard of as being seen in strange, unholy places, and with strange and ominous companions.

His property in England was sold and the money sent out to him in New York, and gradually, as he wrote no more to any of his friends at home, they gave him up as one of those against whom some passing memory can only write, *"vie manquée."*

It happened, however, that some ten years after the incident of the inn, business took John Trevenna out to New York. He had been a week in that most celebrated and most virtuous of cities, when one night he found himself in an unknown and obscure quarter. He had missed his way, and after some hesitation he went up to a shambling, ill-dressed figure, and asked to be directed to his destination. The man lifted his haggard

face, and glanced up at the big Cornishman. Something in it seemed familiar—and yet so awful were the ravages of dissipation and misery that Trevenna could not quite place its identity in his mind.

But, on the other hand, he was not so changed that it needed an equal effort on the part of the poverty-stricken wretch to recall him.

"Trevenna!" he gasped, and his trembling hand and drink-sodden eyes said all the rest.

The Cornishman gazed in horror at that wreck of youth and health and manhood.

"My God! Wynthorpe, can it be you?" he cried.

The poor wretch reeled and stumbled against him. He seemed in the last stage of drink and exhaustion.

"Trevenna," he sighed, and sank, half unconscious, into the outstretched arms.

The Cornishman looked out for assistance. Near where they stood was a low-class public-house. Men and women were drinking at the bar. He half led, half carried Wynthorpe in, explaining that he was ill, and asking for some room to which he could take him. The proprietor of the place came forward. He was an ill-tempered, ruffianly-looking man, and seemed distinctly averse to offering any assistance.

Trevenna, however, tossed him a couple of dollars in advance, and he showed them to a dingy, wretched sort of parlour furnished with a rickety couch and chairs to match. On this couch Trevenna laid his friend, and then asked if someone could go for medical assistance.

The host gave it as his opinion that the man was just done for, and that no amount of "fixins," medical

or otherwise, would be of much benefit. Still, he left the room, promising to send for the nearest doctor.

In a few moments Wynthorpe opened his eyes, and gazed wonderingly at the sympathetic face bent over him. He uttered a few faint, disjointed syllables; he seemed to be back in England once more with his two chums. His glance wandered round the room as if in search of someone. Suddenly, to Trevenna's unspeakable horror, he sprang from the cushions and sat up, his face working convulsively—one grim, skeleton-like hand pointing to the wall opposite.

"The eyes!" he gasped—"the eyes again! They will see me die; d——n them." And he sank back—his face livid, the damp of death upon his clammy brow. One long convulsive shudder shook his limbs. Then he lay quite still.

Trevenna straightened the poor, wasted limbs. He saw that all was over. As he turned to summon the landlord, his eyes glanced involuntarily at that portion of the wall where Wynthorpe had been looking. To his amazement he saw hanging there the very same picture that had so interested them in the old Cornish inn. He remembered Stephen Wynthorpe's presentiment, and his words, "Those eyes will see me die."

They had seen him. But how had the picture come here to a wretched public-house in a common quarter of the American capital? His curiosity for a moment overpowered his sorrow at his friend's miserable fate. When the ill-favoured landlord entered he asked him eagerly how he came by that picture.

"It was my father's," was the answer. "He used to keep an old inn in the West of England, and things

went all wrong with him and he gave it up, and we came here to try our luck. From the look of you," he added, "I should say you were from those parts, sir."

"Yes, I am a Cornishman," said Trevenna simply. "And," he added, "I have seen that picture before, and in your father's own inn parlour, if I mistake not. Did he not keep the Tregeagle Arms near the Land's End?"

"That's so," said the man; "and when we came out here he would bring that picture with him. Said it was for luck—guess it was the other way round. Tarnation bad luck I've had ever since I came here!"

Trevenna said no more. He looked at the rigid face, the secret of whose wasted life he could only guess.

The tragedies of life, like its ironies, are sometimes only remarkable for their insignificant causes.

A WEDDING GIFT.

THE presents lay piled about the large and beautiful room set aside for their arrangement. The long table that ran down its centre held its share, but still there were jewels and silver and scores of dainty trifles awaiting the attention of the girl, whose business it was to place and ticket them.

The jeweller's assistant, sent by a special Bond Street firm, had just completed his task. He professed himself tired of "the show." Such things were no novelty to him. The girl, who was an employée of another firm, noted for the artistic presentment of wedding gifts, was just as tired as the assistant.

They made a brave show, those presents: silver plate—exquisite glass—delicate china; cutlery, jewellery, ornaments; books, cheques; toilet sets in silver and ivory; laces, fans; household furniture of Sheraton or Chippendale; Rose du Barri mirrors, Sèvres and Saxe china, paintings, engravings, albums, and photograph frames; scent cases; glove boxes and sachets—all the hundred and one dainty and expensive trifles that wealth lavishes on wealth.

Kate Perren stood for a few idle moments surveying these costly gifts, wondering a little whether the bride cared about them; wondering also a little what that

bride was like; if this was a love match or a mere society marriage; if she were happy or merely passively miserable, as so many brides she had seen.

Of what sort or condition was this present martyr —this Miss Doris Carisford, of 101 Princes Gate?

"Well, I'm sure you can finish all right," said the jeweller's assistant. "There's not much more to do. I'm off now."

It seemed odd to Kate Perren that she should be employed in such labour—she who once had been rich, beloved, honoured—and now knew herself friendless, parentless, and fortuneless.

The door opened quietly, as the girl stood arranging the last row of bewildering uselessness. She was stooping over one of the numberless jewellers' cases. It was still in her hand as she half turned her head. The November dusk had crept on apace, and she had switched on one electric light. Through the open door came a gleam of ruddy firelight, the tinkle of cups and spoons, the chatter and laughter of girlish voices. The man who had left that group, and had been ordered to see how the presents looked, stood staring at Kate as if she had been a ghost. She—pale as death—stood staring back at him. He closed the door and came quickly forward.

"Kate! God in heaven! You . . . and here? What does it mean?"

She caught hold of the table. It seemed to her as if the whole room spun round.

"Gerald! It can't be! . . . I—I heard you were dead."

"Was that why I could find no trace of you—hear

nothing. I was reported 'missing,' I know. I had been badly wounded, and the Boers got me. I was six months in hospital, then I woke to my senses and to reason. I came home at once. I sought for you immediately. You had disappeared—no one knew where. I advertised, I did everything I could—all no use. Kate, why did you do it—why keep me in ignorance? Unless——"

"Oh no! Gerald—no! I had not changed. But my father was ruined. The shock brought his death, and my mother's followed it. I had to go out in the world; to earn my own living. I had——"

"Oh, Kate! Kate! my poor, pretty Kate!"

He had his arms about her. For one blissful moment she rested in them: safe, sheltered—happy once again—for one moment. Then she felt their release of her; the eyes to which her own turned in sudden bewildering appeal were eyes in which the old love and the new joy struggled against some invading foe. They were not Gerald's eyes; only the haggard, agonised eyes of a man distraught, perplexed, desperate.

"Kate——" he groaned. "Oh, my God, is it possible you don't know——"

"Know—what?"

He looked from her white face to the table, with its glittering array.

"Oh, my darling, what am I to do? How can I tell you?"

She drew back a step. Her voice rang out sharply. "Gerald! What is it? You're not married?"

"Not—yet," he said.

"Not yet . . . that means——"

"It means," he said with a harsh, dry laugh, "that

you stand here to-night arranging the presents for—my wedding day."

"Gerald!" she gasped, and would have fallen but for his supporting arm. "Oh! No! No! Not yours —not yours, Gerald! This is some horrible jest—or am I dreaming? I have dreamt so often that you returned—but always to me. Oh, my dear, always to me. . . ."

Her voice broke. She looked at him with all her wounded soul in those brimming, anguished eyes; looked for denial—for answer—for anything save what she saw—shame and despair.

"Oh, why did you come back?" she cried suddenly. "Why . . . if only——"

"I don't love her," he broke in with sudden passion. "I never have nor ever shall love any woman save yourself, my Kate. But—how can I explain? I was hurt —angry. I thought if you had really loved me you would not have left me to this blank silence. I thought perhaps you had ceased to care—had married—and then she——"

"Ah! She . . . Who is it, this girl you will marry to-morrow? Does she—love you?"

"Yes," he said bitterly. "That's the worst of it. I don't know how it came about. These things happen every day. A few meetings, a few dances—the routine of the season—a moonlight night—a glass too much of champagne—the flattery of a girl's open preference—one or all of these, and a man finds himself fettered to a promise—and—and this!"

His hand pointed contemptuously to the crowded table, the splendid gifts.

They stood there quite silent, eye seeking eye, and heart speaking dumbly to heart. Between them lay a gulf of suffering that nothing could bridge. Then the girl gave one long, quivering sigh.

"I think," she said calmly, "you had better go back to the other room—to her."

"Do you tell me to do that?" he cried bitterly.

"What else can you do? Your word is pledged. To-morrow is the day, is it not?"

He said nothing. He was looking at her, and from her to that laden table—and then desperately to the closed door.

He came close to her. "Kate, listen. I am like a prisoner seeing before him one last and only chance of escape. You are that chance. Without you—your love——"

But she silenced him with a gesture.

"No. No. All that is over. You would not have promised yourself to another woman, you could not have let matters go so far as this—if you had still loved me."

"What is she like, this bride of yours——" asked Kate suddenly. "I have not seen her. She has not been here once to-day. Perhaps she is too—happy—she does not care for this side of the—the——"

"Don't!" he cried fiercely. "I can't bear the word on your lips now. Oh! Kate—Kate—is it too late? Think—all our lives, yours and mine, spoilt for ever!"

"It was your own doing, Gerald," she said gently. "No one forced you into this marriage. There could only have been one reason for it. You cared, or thought you cared, for this girl. I will not snatch another

woman's happiness from her hands—I will not spoil her life, as mine has been spoilt."

"This—this farce of to-morrow will spoil many lives, I fancy," he said bitterly. "Kate, think a moment. I could speak to Doris—I could explain——"

"You said she loved you?"

His colour faded, his lips quivered as they gave the fatal admission. "Yes, I know she does."

Almost on the words the door was flung open a second time. A gay young voice cried out:

"Why, Jerry, what a time you've been. You could have counted every one of the presents, I should say!"

Kate drew suddenly away, and bent over the cases beneath her shaking fingers. Gerald Fortescue was idly staring at a silver claret jug.

The girl came in. Her pretty dress rustled softly. Her face was flushed, her eyes bright and eager, and full of joy and excitement. She gave a little cry of delight.

"What a show! Oh, how beautifully you've arranged everything, Miss Perren."

"I am glad you are pleased, Miss Carisford," said Kate.

Her voice sounded cold and strange in her own ears. Her lips were stiff. But the other girl noticed nothing amiss.

"I must call Edie in," she exclaimed. "My principal bridesmaid," she added softly to Kate. "I'm sure she'd love to see the things."

The girl swept off again.

Kate watched her, and all the colour and softness died out of her own face. Nervously her hands went

on with their work. Doris had left the door ajar. The sound of her voice was clear and distinct as she spoke to her friend.

The figure in the corner still stood absorbed and silent. He was nerving himself to face an ordeal—a harder and more terrible one than that of Rorke's Drift, or Mafeking—than glint of steel or hiss of bullet.

The door opened again; the bride-to-be returned with her friend. Behind her came her mother—half tearful, wholly proud and adoring. Doris was an only child, and both parents idolised her. The morrow's silver cloud wore a heavy lining for that mother-heart. But the child had been denied nothing in all her spoilt and cherished life, and when she had openly and frankly declared in favour of the heroic young soldier, who had seemed so cold and distant an adorer—well, the heroic young soldier had been left in no doubt as to the fact. All had gone smoothly. The wedding was fixed for the morrow, and then the young bride was to spend the winter in sunny and more favoured climes than this of her native land.

Hers was no strong nature fit to buffet with life's adverse winds—only a tender, graceful, clinging plant; its tendrils twining round every offered support; its roots embedded in the soil of home and protection.

"It would kill her," thought Kate. "She could never face it—the agony of humiliation, the shame, the shock. Oh no. No! I could not bear it myself in the same position!"

Bravely and calmly she held up her head, and spoke to them all, and listened to their remarks. She heard

the girl's tender raillery of her lover, her little innocent jests; marked her pretty ways. How sweet she was, and how lovely. Surely any man could not but grow to care for her once he stood in so close and intimate a relationship as Gerald would stand on the morrow. What madness had been his to offer to break it off!

The pretty fairy was speaking to her. "You look so awfully pale and tired, Miss Perren. How selfish of me not to think of you all this time. Come into the next room and have some tea. Do!"

But Kate shook her head. She must get the ordeal over. She must leave this place. She must not speak to Gerald again, or——

How her hands trembled, and how cold she was! If he would only go—only leave the room. At last he came forward hastily. He made some excuse. His voice was hurried and strained. Lady Carisford went away with him into the other room. The bridesmaid followed. Doris and Kate were alone.

Breathlessly, suddenly, the girl seized the hands of the pretty fairy who was to be her lover's wife.

"Let me wish you happiness and—and all joy," she cried brokenly—"as—as one girl who will never know such joy may wish it. My work is done now. I must go. You—you don't mind my saying—this?"

"Mind! Why should I? I am so happy myself that I should like everyone in the world to love as I love—and to be loved as I am loved."

"God bless you," faltered Kate. "I—I am sure you will be happy. I shall pray for you to-morrow."

"How pale you look! Tell me, is there—has there been anyone who cared for you, and you have—lost?"

"Yes," said Kate. "I too was to have been married once, but——"

The little bride's face grew awed and solemn. "Is he—dead?"

"To me—yes," said Kate.

And saying it, she laid on that glittering table one wedding gift that bore no giver's name.

HE STOOPED TO CONQUER.

THE old Castle perched high on the cliffs was like a fortress. Indeed it had been one in days of old, when storm and strife of marauding hosts had set Welsh chiefs to fight for liberty and life, and, what was more precious still, the sturdy independence of their own special country. It had been destroyed and rebuilt and modernised in matters of interior comfort, and had known many owners and masters before coming into possession of the Bryderns, or Brynderwyns, as the old name was spelt.

At the death of old Sir Evan, his eldest son, Caradoc, was at college in England. A hasty summons had brought him to the Welsh home too late for aught but the last sad, inevitable duties of mourning. These over, his mother's entreaties kept him in close and willing attendance on herself, and left him free to face new responsibilities and, if it pleased him, follow up his father's efforts at compiling a new history of King Arthur of Round Table fame, with due regard to Welsh authorities. The precious manuscripts, and the contents of a goodly row of bookshelves, gave Sir Caradoc ample employment. The work was also highly congenial to one of poetic and scholarly temperament. His library was a lofty but gloomy room facing south-west. From the windows he could see the curving bay, where the

wild birds hovered and the sea horses tossed their foaming manes to the gale. He loved that view, and the contrast between its clamour and fierceness, and the comfortable room with its air of scholarly peace, its wide open fireplace on which the great logs blazed atop of the coals from his own collieries. He told himself that the winter, which had threatened isolation from social pleasures, would have a great and special charm of its own spent as he desired to spend it—in an atmosphere of scholarly repose and congenial work. He was the idol of his mother's heart—that fate of all only sons—but she was friend and companion both, and as keenly interested in his late father's literary trust as Sir Caradoc himself.

The first quiet weeks passed into months, and found him still well content. Her fears of his return to the university life began to abate. Not since childish days had she so possessed him for herself, and the knowledge that she was already gliding down the vale of years with appreciable swiftness made this time of companionship a halcyon period for both. Like all mothers, Lady Brynderwyn was possessed of fears for her son's future. She dreaded his falling a victim to some syren unworthy of him—or his heritage. Her views tended to domesticity; a sweet and gracious presence combining both the duties of wife and mother—nothing of the bold, unmannerly advanced type. Good Mrs. Hughes—who was both housekeeper and friend to her mistress—shared her confidence and her views. To neither would a new mistress of the Castle be desirable. But should such a thing happen, they joined in prayers that the lady of choice might be worthy of the honour.

Like all students and writers, Sir Caradoc had a morbid horror of domestic interference with his room, his books, and his papers. But, also like most students and writers, he was apt to be somewhat disorderly in his methods, and oblivious of the fact that broom and brush and duster were absolutely needful even in a retreat sacred to the pen of genius! It annoyed him sometimes to find his scattered pages in a neat pile when he had forgotten to number those same pages; to have to hunt for books of reference that the previous evening had been scattered over the table.

As his work progressed, and his enthusiasm with it, these "tidying" propensities of housemaids became seriously annoying. He resolved to speak to the culprit. It happened that his mother was confined to her room with a severe cold, and that fact, coupled with unusual dispatch over the morning meal, sent him to the library some ten minutes earlier than was usual. It was a chill October day. The door was ajar, and as he entered he saw a neat, slight young figure bending over his scattered sheets of MSS. Her back was towards him; the ruddy coils of hair caught a stray gleam of sunshine and shone like burnished gold under a white cap. The dark blue cotton gown was only to his sight the ordinary housemaid's morning dress, but the figure had a certain charm of dainty youth and grace that he was unfamiliar with under such conditions as the duster in her hand portended. He walked quickly to the table, and at sound of his step the girl looked hastily up. A wave of warm colour rose to the very roots of her brilliant hair.

"The—— Your study isn't quite finished, sir," she said.

"It's finished enough for me," he answered. "I'm glad I've caught you at last. I don't want my table dusted, and I don't want my papers touched, and I don't want my books interfered with. Will you remember that?"

She drew herself up. She was taller than he had imagined, and her figure was divinely beautiful.

"If you please, sir, it is one of my duties to put this room in order," she said. "Mrs. Hughes, the housekeeper, she will be very angry if I do not keep it so."

"Bother Mrs. Hughes," he answered, laying a detaining hand on the papers. "Are you Welsh?"

"Oh yes, indeed." The demure lips smiled. The long lashes curtained the blue eyes.

"How long have you been here? I don't remember seeing you before."

The shy lids lifted. There was evident surprise in the glance. "And why should you remember, sir? When my work here is done I am not to be seen anywhere in the Castle whatever!"

She drew back a little from the table.

"You speak very good English for a Welsh girl," he said irrelevantly. His eyes fell on her hands. They were white and smooth and of beautiful shape. He could not help thinking how refined and ladylike she was for a housemaid. But he kept his thoughts to himself with a reserve highly creditable to his twenty-four years. He moved to his usual seat at the table and drew his papers together, and bade her go on with her work in the room. She obeyed at once, moving quietly from place to place, dusting the books, ar-

ranging the chairs, watched closely by his puzzled eyes. Something in the way she handled the old leather-bound volumes appealed to him. As a music lover touches an instrument, so does a book lover touch books; reverently, gently, as if they were living and beloved things.

At last she approached the fireplace and lifted one of the logs from the great open coffer beside it. He suddenly sprang to his feet. "That's too heavy for you," he said. "And it's not part of your duties. Jones attends to the fires."

"After ten o'clock, yes indeed, but to that time it is my work, sir."

He had seized the tongs which she held in her hand, and she did not release them. The action and position brought them very near each other. The blue eyes were dancing and laughing in contradiction of the demure lips. Sir Caradoc in looking into their mirthful depths was apparently unconscious of the long time it took to relieve her from her burden.

"There's foolish you are, sir," she said softly, "wasting my time and your own."

"Have you so much to do?"

"Yes, indeed, and Mrs. Hughes is mighty strict with us all."

He quietly unclasped her hold of the tongs, and put the log on the fire. "Are you fond of books? I suppose you have some time for reading, haven't you?"

"Oh yes, indeed, sir! I love books."

She looked at the teeming shelves, and then half enviously at the beautiful ancient room. She was thinking how delightful it would be to sit here with some

poem or romance for companion in these bleak winter days.

"Would you care—I mean I'll lend you some if you like."

"I'm not sure that Mrs. Hughes would approve whatever."

"What has she to do with it? If you have leisure and inclination to improve your mind why shouldn't you do so?"

She looked at the shelves, the table, then at the earnest young face of the Master of Brynderwyn.

"Because I'm only a servant, I suppose," she said.

"That's hard on you, and hard to believe. What is your name, and antecedents?"

"Esther Wynne is my name. I was born at Aberystwith. My father and mother are both dead. I was sent to live with an aunt in England. She gave me good schooling, and was very kind, but I wanted to earn my own living, and so went to service. It was either that, or be a nursery governess. I tried one, and now I'm trying the other."

"And which do you prefer?"

"Oh! I hated being a governess. Yes, indeed. But it's only a month since here I am in service. So I cannot say yet how I like it. Ah! it's striking ten. I must be away and out of this room or I shall be scolded. If you have no wish that I disturb your papers again, sir, I will try and dust around them for the future."

"Yes, do," he said eagerly. "And look here—about books, you know. If you can manage to elude Mrs. Hughes' vigilance, I shall be pleased to lend you some, on condition you always bring them back to their

place. I—I have great belief in the educating powers of literature. The things of most value in life are the things we are never taught at school."

"Indeed, yes," she said, and turned towards the door, but he could see the laughter in her eyes and on her lips.

"If he knew how much I have learnt," she said to herself, and hurried away to tell Mrs. Hughes that the "young master" had deemed fit to finish her literary education.

The worthy housekeeper laughed with her and in no way agreed with the description of "dragon" and martinet that the demure housemaid had seemed to imply. But then Mrs. Hughes alone knew of the freak that had set a Welsh minister's daughter masquerading.

Sir Caradoc meanwhile pursued the quest of Arthur by means of Welsh and Latin historians who sang the knightly virtues of that hero-king. But it seemed to him that on this special morning the quest grew somewhat wearisome. He found his pen flagging and his attention wandering. He pushed aside the work and began to pace the room with restless strides.

He stood at the window and watched the strife of wind and waves. He took up a pamphlet on socialism and studied its confusing sophistries. He told himself that it was a hard thing that women should have to work, especially when they were young and beautiful, and calculated to inspire a chivalry worthy to rank with that of the Sir Launcelots and Sir Gawaines of Arthurian days. Why such thoughts should have crept into his researches and disturbed his mind, he was at a loss to imagine. They had never done so before this special day.

At luncheon time he questioned the old butler, Powell, as to certain arrangements in the servants' hall about which he had never before concerned himself. It was all probably the result of the socialistic pamphlet, and very praiseworthy on the part of a young knight-baronet of ancient lineage. The information he received was so far satisfactory that it assured him the lady's maid had her meals with the housekeeper, and that the new domestic had been allowed the same privilege, owing to her being one of those new-fangled innovations, a "lady help." Old Powell had had no previous experience of such intruders, and was therefore prejudiced. He gave it as his opinion that class should keep to class, and not intrude upon each other's privileges. Not that he could find much fault with Miss Wynne, as they had to call her. She performed her duties with care and exactitude. She gave herself no airs, and she had a face and figure that appealed irresistibly to the male sex, even at sixty years of age.

Sir Caradoc received all this information with apparent unconcern, and yet with an inward annoyance. He, too, disliked class confusions. He had always drawn a hard and fast line between employer and employed; between labour and capital as prerogative of those for whom labour existed. He knew himself a landowner; the possessor of estates; the descendant of an ancient race. He did not know, however, that with this heritage was associated also a certain chivalry and romance: an incipient fever of knight-errantry; the power of emulating even Launcelots and Gawaines in defence of beauty and distress. As yet nothing had called forth such feelings. Even calf-love and its incipient follies

had been escaped. His chosen friends at school and college had always been those older than himself, and of similar literary tastes. He had admired women impersonally for certain attributes, but no one of the sex had made any special appeal to either sentiment or memory.

He returned to the library and worked steadily on till dusk. Just as he was thinking of ringing for lights came a soft tap at the door. With his permission to enter, it opened and showed the face and figure of the "lady help." She wore a black gown now, the daintiest of "Geisha" caps, and the conventional muslin apron.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but Jones is very bad with the neuralgia in his face. I have come to ask if you would wish the lamps lit, and to say that my lady wishes you to have tea with her. She is sitting up in her own room."

"Lamps? yes; you may light them," he said hurriedly, and walked over to the fireplace, the better to watch her movements. Yet he was conscious all the time such things should not be. There seemed something incongruous about this service of delicate, refined womanhood for sake of rough, strong man.

She at last approached the window, and proceeded to draw the heavy velvet curtains over the outer storm and gloom of the stormy night.

"Wait," he called out, and suddenly crossed the intervening space and stood beside her looking out also at the stormy sea and the piled black clouds, tossed into masses of gloom or ruthlessly rent asunder, as the fury of the gale elected. At the foot of the cliffs the foaming waves dashed and broke with muffled thunder.

Showers of spray were scattered upwards and to right and left of their adamant-faced opposers. Around and about the Castle the wind howled like some greedy monster hungry for prey.

"Heaven's mercy on those at sea!" murmured the girl involuntarily.

"Amen!" he said softly. "Have you ever known what it is to lose anyone at sea, Esther Wynne—anyone you love?"

"Yes, indeed; it was the sea took my father," she said. And very pitiful was the story she told of shipwreck and loss; her mother's despair—her own childish grief. Again that puzzled feeling arose in the young man's mind. This was no mere village girl brought up to servitude. At times she even forgot her Welsh chorus and words—or the respectful "sir" that was wont to punctuate them. She interested him greatly, and when he questioned her on Carlyle, and Ruskin, and Froude, and found her intelligently capable of discussion and argument, he asked himself if indeed class distinction was not a much over-rated idea. Yet he said little. Conventionalities were a chain on eloquence. Yet the storm, and the scene and the foreground were propitious for confidences or allusions. In ten minutes of such confidence, by such allusion, she built up a pedestal of her own on which to sit enthroned in that vast silent chamber, sacred henceforth to another muse of worship: the goddess in whom young manhood sees both ideal and existing divinity.

. . . . .

It was close on Christmas, and that great work of

Welsh research had made amazingly slow progress considering the time devoted to it.

Through weeks of bitter cold and storm the young master of the Castle had spent most of his days in that library—often coming to the room a full half-hour before it was considered ready for his use; often spending that time in eager discussion with its guardian of brush and duster; often bursting with socialistic theories, which he poured into her ears, by way of enlarging her mental outlook. Sometimes she laughed; sometimes she listened; sometimes gave nervous denials to his impassioned ideals, or coldly answered the fervour of his pleading eyes. At times an odd constraint hung over her. She was formal and perfunctory. He, wondering and perplexed, lashed himself into fury of bewilderment; hastened back to work and found work impotent to relieve this sense of irritable instability. He could find no fault with her. She rather discouraged than allured him; never for a moment seemed to forget that her place was the servants' hall, his the Castle's lordship; for ever held before her troubled eyes the vision of his superiority, and strove for barren foothold instead of primrose path made joyous by hopes and dreams of youth. If her heart was afire her soul knew enough of duty to dread a forewarned struggle. She knew it must come if she stayed here. She resolved she would not stay.

"Once Christmas is over I will leave," she told herself. And striving to review the position bravely, she yet knew how much she dreaded that fresh going forth into the world's cold arms; the facing of strangers; the uncharitable challenge of her own sex, the doubtful homage of the other. She had never been treated any-

where as she had been treated at the Castle. She had a room of her own, hours to herself, the safe refuge of housekeeper's parlour, or boudoir, for she was as great a favourite with Lady Brynderwyn as with good Mrs. Hughes. And all this must come to an end. Heavily she sighed as she thought of it; half angered, half regretful, looked at that face of hers under its shining aureole of gold-red hair; sometimes wished it had been plain, even to ugliness, so that at least peace might have been her portion where men were concerned.

It wanted but a few days to Christmas, when one afternoon she received a summons to wait on Lady Brynderwyn in her boudoir. She was required for the purpose of repairing some valuable old lace, an heirloom in the family. She was sitting by the table over her work when Sir Caradoc entered. He held some letters in his hand.

"Mother," he began abruptly. Then his eyes fell on the girl. He paused, closed the door, and came over to where Lady Brynderwyn was seated by the fire.

"I've just had a letter from Arthur Caerlyon," he said. "He wants to come down for Christmas. His people are all away on the Riviera and he's rather lonely. Do you mind?"

His eyes had wandered to that down-bent head, the white hands so nervously busy over their delicate work. He was surprised to see the head suddenly lift itself, the face flush scarlet, then grow deadly white. The filmy lace dropped unheeded onto the carpet. He made a hasty movement to pick it up. He was conscious of his mother's voice speaking, but far more acutely conscious of that white, startled face; the look of dread, or

was it fear, in the wide blue eyes. Yet what should startle her so? His advent or his news? How could the arrival of a visitor concern her? Arthur Caerlyon was his cousin and next-of-kin. To him in due course would fall the Castle and its honours, supposing——

"I—I'm afraid you're not quite well," he said, noting that the girl's hands trembled so she could scarcely hold her work. "Mother, Miss Wynne seems faint. Have you your salts there?"

The old lady rose and held out her gold-stoppered bottle. She was somewhat astonished at her son's eagerness, at the concern on his face as he held the salts to the girl's delicate nostrils, the anxiety with which he asked if she felt better.

By a strong effort she commanded herself, thanked him for his service, pleaded the heat of the room for excuse, and was given gracious permission to retire. But she left two uneasy hearts behind her. The mother's had taken quick fear for that beloved and only son. The son was asking himself distractedly what Esther Wynne could know of his cousin Arthur Caerlyon?

. . . . . .

A week of snow and frost and wintry sunshine had brought interruption to Sir Caradoc's literary work. He had forsaken the library for the outer world. He was his mother's steward in all matters pertaining to his tenants or the villagers and fisher-folk. Christmas was not to be kept with the usual spirit at the Castle owing to his father's recent death, but that fact had not made its kindly mistress forgetful of other claims. Esther Wynne was kept busy also taking gifts and useful articles from one cottage to another. On several occasions she

That is to say. 8

caught sight of Sir Caradoc bent on similar errands, but she had persistently avoided him. The fact was self-evident, and while it puzzled and annoyed him, he was too proud and too suspicious of reasons to force himself upon her. He was convinced that she was of a social distinction far outweighing her ostensible position, and while secretly pleased at the thought, found it presented many difficulties to the iconoclastic forces of professed socialism.

So Christmas Eve approached, and with it the arrival of Arthur Caerlyon. He was no great favourite of the young baronet, and he was somewhat puzzled at his self-invitation to spend Christmas in these bleak and lonely solitudes. It had been different when the Castle was filled with guests and the Yule-log blazed in the great hall and minstrels played in the gallery, and dancing, feasting, and merriment signalised the licence of the season. This year there would be no guests, no merriment, and very quiet feasting, save in the servants' hall. There, on this special night they were permitted to gather their friends and indulge in the quaint customs and ceremonies of Yuletide at their own will and pleasure. By the desire of Lady Brynderwyn all the female domestics at the Castle discarded their black dresses and wore scarlet gowns and lace caps and aprons. A very picturesque and charming group they made as, after dinner, the two young men sauntered into the brilliantly-lit and decorated ballroom, where a huge Christmas-tree was awaiting the master's dispensing of Christmas gifts.

Sir Caradoc's eyes turned from the group of elderly servitors to the more attractive one of the scarlet-clad

brigade. To it also had turned the insolent, appraising gaze of Arthur Caerlyon. He gave a start. Sir Caradoc heard a muttered "By Jove!" and flashing suspicious interrogation saw that his cousin's exclamation answered that suspicion.

So they knew each other, these two; how or where signified nothing in that moment of fierce jealousy. The girl's face was calm and white, and gave no sign of welcome, but when did jealousy ever read in another face aught but reason for its own base suspicions?

Sir Caradoc endured miseries while unloading the tree of its gifts.

Speaking, jesting, smiling as blush and smile answered friendly words, all the time he was keenly conscious of his cousin's marked attention to one figure standing aloof from the merry crowd. When it came to her turn to advance and receive her gift he had no light word or jest at her service. He only handed the little morocco case, containing a plain gold watch and chain, in silence. She received it with one quick glance; a vivid blush; a half gesture of refusal. Then came the usual demure curtsy. As their hands touched the old tyranny of emotion swept his soul to pain and pleasure both. Involuntarily he stooped to the crimson ear beneath its shining gold of heavy hair. "You will give me the dance following the first quadrille?" he said hoarsely.

She looked up—hesitated. "If you wish, sir."

And all unknowing why, the weight of pain and doubt was suddenly loosened in the young knight's heart. Even when he led forth portly Mrs. Hughes to the cheery strains of the quadrille, and found Esther

and his cousin *vis-à-vis*, he was less conscious of annoyance than assured of distaste—on her part.

When the dance ended he noted she at once returned to her quiet corner. She in no way encouraged the visible admiration of his cousin. The moment for which he had longed came at last. They stood side by side. The waltz strain gave itself to the waiting couples. His arm was round her waist. They moved in rhythm to the sad sweetness of "Valse Enchantée," and all the world and all of life seemed concentrated in those brief moments when a crown of golden hair shone before his eyes, and wave upon wave of feeling rose and swelled with the waves of melody that set two hearts atune with music more divine.

. . . . .

"How did you know my cousin?"

"He used to call at the house where I was governess, as I told you—Mrs. Polwyn's."

Silence; and once again that floating tour of the room; scarlet flashes of holly; white gleams of mistletoe; the droop of shy blue eyes, the quick beats of a heart too near his own for peace or memory or prudence.

"Esther, you—you don't love him?"

"Love him! I *hate* him. His persecutions drove me to—to this."

Strange that joy and servitude should be so near akin. "To this." He drew her aside out of the jostling crowd. "To my home, my heart! Oh, Esther, you don't regret that?"

She grew white to her lips. "I regret that you should think so ill of me as to follow your cousin's example."

"Follow it! Has he asked you to be his wife?"

"His wife—oh no!"

"But that is what I desire, beseech above all things in life. That is what I ask—for myself, Esther."

"Oh no! no! It's impossible."

"Why? You are gifted and beautiful. You are in all ways my equal, and I love you better than all the world holds. Don't you—can't you love me, Esther Wynne?"

"Oh, it's not that—— Oh, indeed, Sir Caradoc, you should not have said this! Think of your rank, your position, your mother."

"You will give to them all the one thing they need," he said. "As for my mother, we will go to her now, this moment, and you shall see if she has the heart to refuse me the first Christmas gift for which I have ever asked."

And, watched by Arthur Caerlyon's savage eyes, she went with him to the great hall where Lady Brynderwyn sat alone. Her startled glance at the two confused, abashed young faces took in the situation. All sorts of strange feelings rose to meet it; stirred her motherly heart to pain; shook from its loosened strings a sweeter tunefulness of sympathy. Had not Mrs. Hughes explained the "lady housemaid's" advent? Had not that adored son administered homœopathic doses of socialism at every possible opportunity? Above all, was not her whole soul bound up in him? And how was it possible to refuse—as he had said—the first Christmas gift for which he had ever asked?—a gift, too, in which she shared. For sweeter daughter or more loving wife had never fallen to Brynderwyn's lot than this fair Welsh maiden proved—vindicating for herself and her chosen knight all the sophistries and enchantment of that brief episode of socialism.

THE "FAITHFUL BILLIUM."

PROBABLY had 'Liza-Lu never had a fellow-servant, and had that fellow-servant not been Irish, like her master, everything would have been different. William Day used to say that to himself as he would stand kicking his heels together in impatient hours of waiting —waiting that seldom had any result now.

Time was when—— Here William would sigh deeply, thinking of happier days—hours hopeful and bright, unshadowed by the gloom and distrust that was his present portion. In those other days his 'Liza-Lu had seemed his own—had been kind and sympathetic; had shown interest in his profession (William Day was a stonecutter, earning good wages); had agreed to "walking out" on Sunday afternoons of spring, what time the youths and maidens of Barrow Vale enjoyed each other's company, and held each other's hands in the lanes, and occasionally grew bold enough to snatch kisses from coy lips under shade of budding hedge.

William had never ventured so far as that. He was by nature a backward and somewhat shy youth. He found it difficult to express himself in words. His big heart ached within his big, shambling body; but he could not explain its aching, its need—or its power of faithful devotion. The girls made fun of him. The bolder youths chaffed and joked in coarse country

fashion over his diffidence and bashfulness. They knew such things didn't count with girls. They liked their swains to be ardent, boisterous, expressive; to pay them compliments, to indulge in sly embraces in unsuspected nooks and corners, to snatch kisses in the shady lanes —to hold their hands and suggest ring-finger measurements. They also had their tiffs and quarrels, their little affected jealousies, their "irrevocable partings," and their still sweeter "makings-up." But to William Day such things were unknown, and to 'Liza-Lu his conduct had been of the worshipping and respectful order. On her side, 'Liza-Lu was inclined to be coquettish, variable, difficult to understand. William had never been able to understand her. She was always a mystery, so lovable and so enchanting that her sweet voice embodied all the music of his life; just as her mere presence lifted him to a region of bliss indescribable. It mattered nothing to him that she teased or tormented, was cold and distant, pettish or sulky. She was herself. She was "'Liza-Lu"—that was to say, Guinevere to his Lancelot of the Lake.

But of late a visible change had come over 'Liza-Lu and their relative positions. She had gone into service in the neighbouring town. At first she had been single-handed, but on the occasion of William's last visit she mentioned that her master—a rollicking Irishman from Tipperary—had insisted the establishment should boast of two domestics. He gave a simple enough reason for the addition: the house was too quiet; he liked to hear voices in the kitchen. Hence the advent of Mary Macarthy, as cook, and the uplifting of 'Liza-Lu into the glorified position of house-parlourmaid—with a surname.

House-parlourmaids, she told him, were not addressed as plain Mary, or Jane, or Betsy, as the case might be. They became "Smith," or "Harrison," or "Pitts," or—as was her proud privilege—just simple "Ash."

But to William she was always "'Liza-Lu," until in some glorified future he might for once essay to cast off the trammels of bashfulness and persuade her that "Day" was as short and convenient and desirable a designation as her own, and that a mere exchange of such foolish things as syllables was no such difficult achievement, if only she would be a consenting party to that exchange.

But these were day-dreams, forms of imagination that William kept locked up in his secret soul; that holy of holies sacred to 'Liza-Lu and her sweet, tormenting ways.

She was always tormenting now since the arrival of this Irish Mary. How he disliked that girl—her saucy tongue, her bright eyes, her impudent turned-up nose! He could not imagine what other fellows saw in her; why she should have sprung into sudden popularity. For the little town being mere walking distance from the village, the swains of those parts thought nothing of going to and fro to visit their respective sweethearts. And of such swains and sweethearts Mary Macarthy had more than fair share. But she was popular with her own sex also. And she and 'Liza-Lu had become firm friends. That was William's chief grievance.

Mary had dubbed him the "Faithful Billium," but she had other nicknames as well. She always made fun of him. She mimicked his slow speech—his awk-

ward movements, his helpless adoration, his clumsy methods of wooing. She made 'Liza-Lu half ashamed of her faithful swain, and more than ever capricious in her mode of treating him. She broke appointments or kept him waiting for hours at places where she had no intention of going. She was cold and indifferent. She refused his humble offerings of flowers or fruit, or choice specimens of local jewellery. She never had a kind word for him, nor troubled herself that he should tramp those weary miles to and fro just to see her on those "Sundays out." When Mary was present, his treatment was worse. And the Irish girl seemed to enjoy this "bull-baiting." She egged her friend on to provoke William's temper, to try his patience; suggested there were Irish lovers who would have shown 'Liza-Lu what courtship meant; that by comparison with these gifted Celts, William, and such as William, were mere boors, not worth a girl's notice, still less her heart.

Such things were very trying, and the "faithful Billium" suffered as neither of these girls would have believed possible. Sometimes he resolved to put an end to it all—to go away to Wales, or Canada, or South Africa, somewhere far removed from the torture and tempting of 'Liza-Lu, and the witty insolence of her new friend. But always his courage failed him at the crucial moment. He could not go into that outer darkness of absence while there was even one faint grain of hope in his heart. For 'Liza-Lu had not absolutely said him nay. And there was his money saved up, and a cottage to be vacant at Christmas, and surely those three years of fidelity meant something. If only that hateful Mary Macarthy had not interfered; if only

'Liza-Lu would listen to him and not to that tormenting creature who called herself friend. A pretty friend, thought William—one who sought to separate two faithful hearts (his own—not 'Liza-Lu's), to turn his sweetheart's fancy in another direction. He felt very bitter against Mary Macarthy. He could scarcely bring himself to be civil to her, and more than once, when he found she was to make a third in the Sunday walk, he took abrupt leave and went back to the village. Such conduct usually brought a scornful letter from 'Liza-Lu on the Monday following. But as her writing and orthography were alike undecipherable, and William's appreciation of written characters equally limited, the missives did little harm. In fact, being the only love letters he ever received, he treasured them in a wooden box locked away in his own trunk—and only took them out to gaze at as trophies wrung from the warfare of his wooing.

But things could not go on for ever in so unsatisfactory a manner. He felt the time for action had arrived. 'Liza-Lu must be brought to book; must decide between him and this officious marplot of a friend; must agree to take him and the cottage, and the seventy pounds of saving by Christmas time, or——

Well, the alternative was so awful that William feared to regard it as inevitable.

It wanted but a month of Christmas, when he screwed his courage "to the sticking point," and issued forth to have his fate decided. It was a bright, cold day when he set out for that Sunday walk, wondering whether 'Liza-Lu would for once keep her appointment at the time fixed.

His heart began to beat in an odd, uncomfortable manner as he neared the trysting place. It was exactly three o'clock, the hour they had been used to clasp hands, and give a formal greeting to each other after a week's separation. As he turned into the road he caught sight of the familiar dark blue dress and sailor hat. He quickened his steps, but the nearer he approached the figure, the faster it walked away from him.

"'Liza-Lu!" he called. "Wait a minute. Ye know 'tis I—William."

But the steps quickened, the girl almost ran now, and half vexed, half puzzled, he ran after her.

When he caught up his tormentor she stopped, turned a red and laughing face to his—and showed him Mary Macarthy.

He stood still, and looked at her with fierce and sullen anger.

"Ye—is it? D——n ye and yer tricks. What's this new sport o' yours?"

She laughed wickedly.

"Sure, Mister Perliteness, ye need some schoolin' in the matter o' addressin' ladies. As for thricks, well—I tould 'Liza that ye were such a born 'omadhaun' ye'd niver be able to tell us which from t'other by our backs. And, faith, ye couldn't. And if ye go back along the road 'tis 'Liza herself ye'll find waitin' for ye at the corner. And 'tis she'll be havin' the laugh of ye after this. And who'll blame her? For sure, a man as can be coortin' a sweetheart for a matter o' three years an' more, and yet doesn't know her figure, nor the colour o' her back hair—why, he's a born fool, and no dacint gurl 'ud be wastin' her time with him."

William's slow wits had gathered in the taunts of her long speech with a sudden sense of hatred of her. To have played such a trick to-day of all days! To have made him look such a fool in the eyes of his sweetheart just when he was most anxious to win a sure place in her favour, to earn some reward for his long fidelity!

He said nothing; speech was impossible. But there was something in his face that sobered the Irish girl suddenly, and made her for once a little ashamed, a little afraid.

Still silent, he turned on his heel and walked slowly and sullenly back to the meeting-place. 'Liza-Lu was there. She wore a new dress and a new hat, and was looking wholly bewitching, amusedly scornful. But when she saw William's face, the words she had been about to utter were silenced almost against her will.

So hurt, so desperate was that face, those usually doglike, faithful eyes, that instead of mockery she was conscious of humiliation. She felt as a child feels when some mischievous trick brings it face to face with a first sense of responsibility.

He made no attempt to take her hand. He only stood for a moment, and looked at her, while the sunlight lit up the glints of gold in her brown hair—and danced in the soft blue of her up-raised eyes.

"'Liza-Lu," he said huskily, "I've come to 'ee now to say as I've had enough, and more than enough of these tricks an' ways o' thine. It's sport to 'ee, I doubt not, to grin at a poor lovin' fule, because he loves 'ee true and has allays loved thee, and maybe allays will. But what's sport to one is death to another, and I'm

about sick o' facing such sort o' death. So I'll say good-bye to 'ee, 'Liza-Lu, you that was my dear and true love all these many years. I know thee doesn't care—nor ever did, not as I do. And so 'tes best to take thee at thy word, and give up playin' the fool to thee and thy friend yonder. Good-bye, 'Liza-Lu—for the last time——"

"But—Bill—what? Do you really mean it?"

"I mean it as true as there's a God above to hear me say it."

"And where are you goin', Mr. Day?" she asked scornfully.

"To—to Lunnon. I'm off to-morrow." He said it abruptly and wondered why he said it, seeing that when he had come out that afternoon no such intention had a place in his mind at all.

"To Lunnon," she repeated. "Oh, very well. I'm sure no one here will miss you."

"That's not a kind thing to say. But there—when was you ever kind to me? And of late it's been worse, and crueller and harder to bear. I bears ye no ill-will, 'Liza, dear, but I hope as no man in this world will ever pay you back for how you've treated me. They say as how wanton cruelty gets its reward soon or late."

"Dear me," she scoffed, "you're mighty eloquent this afternoon, Mr. William Day. Pity 'tis you're tongue hadn't larned its lesson a bit sooner. But pray don't waste any more o' your time with me. I've a—partic'lar friend waitin' for me, and I mustn't keep him too long, or——"

"Him!" said William savagely. "I wish ye joy—both o' ye. And I pray he may be your curse and my avenger if ever——"

But the last word would not come. He saw the little cottage; he seemed to see also that fair face smiling in welcome as he came eagerly home. That word of sweetness he had whispered to himself—the word that henceforth would have no meaning. He dare not trust himself to say more; to look at her again. He had reached a point of finality after all these years of waiting. He had become at once brutal and hard—and savage from this form of suffering.

Better it should end. Human endurance has its limits. He had recognised his own.

. . . . .

"Well," questioned Mary Macarthy, "how did he take it? Was he wild wid ye?"

"He said good-bye, and that he was going away—going to London."

'Liza-Lu's tone was subdued, her face strangely grave. William had been her slave for so long; her little feet had so long trampled his big body in their scorn of his patience, that this unlooked-for revolt rather frightened her. Besides, there had been that in William's eyes which no woman—even the most callous—can fail to recognise, or to pity: the look of something stricken—wounded to death, and too proud to complain of its suffering.

Had he really cared for her so very much?

She grew impatient of Mary's chaff and chatter, and endless bits of gossip. For once she would have preferred to be alone: to think it all over; to wonder if it could be that her faithful, badly-used lover was going away—out of her life for ever? Well she knew that such love and fidelity and devotion are not given to

every woman—or to many. She had other admirers, but none who would bear comparison with "faithful Billium," none who would accept her coldness and fickleness and little tempers and caprices so patiently.

She told herself perhaps he had not meant it. It was only one of those not infrequent quarrels. He could not be really going away. Going to London on the morrow? No. He would come back in the old doglike fashion—come back shamed and humble, and penitent, begging to be restored to her favour. He must. Life apart from her would be impossible. He had sworn that so often; sworn that death were a hundred times preferable to lifelong separation.

Still, she wondered. And as night deepened and she lay wide awake and troubled in her bed, listening to Mary Macarthy's snores, the wonder grew and grew, and sleep vanished. The cold winter dawn found her awake, restless, miserable; unable to decide on any course of action.

"To-day," he had said. And to-day was here. What train would he choose? The first one, that left at six o'clock? How she wished she knew! She might have hidden herself in the waiting-room for a last look —only to satisfy her own mind that he *had* meant what he said; that it was not a mere empty threat.

Suddenly an idea came to her. Suppose she slipped away now, went to the station, watched the train. She would be out of suspense at least. She would know—and he need not see her. She would take good care of that.

She slipped quietly out of bed, and began to dress; she did not want to disturb Mary. But, quiet as she

was, the Irish girl heard her. She watched her movements for a moment or two "out of the tail o' her eye," as she expressed it; then sat up and asked her purpose. 'Liza-Lu hinted at a walk, but a walk on a cold misty December morning was an idea to be scouted. Mary Macarthy read the riddle for herself. She resolved to follow 'Liza-Lu, and see what she was up to. Some foolishness, no doubt. So it happened that when 'Liza-Lu slipped into the cold, foggy little station, her friend was not far behind.

"So it's to give that Silly Billy a send off—is it?" she said to herself. "Maybe I'll do the same thing—just for the pleasure of angering him."

She marched boldly onto the platform, but saw nothing of her friend. There were a few passengers waiting for the train; some bound for London—some for intermediate stations, or the big terminus of East Barrow, where it met the London express. A cold, grey sea-mist wrapped everything in gloom. The shivering folk were grumbling and stamping their feet, and abusing the weather. Mary looked everywhere for William Day. As yet he had not appeared. The station clock pointed to two minutes to the hour of departure when the familiar big, loose-jointed figure slouched out of the ticket-office. He did not see Mary. His face was very drawn and white—his eyes had a queer, dazed look in them. He held an old worn leather bag in one hand that meant all his luggage. Mary's sense of mirth began to bubble irrepressibly. As he came to the edge of the platform, and looked in the direction of the tunnel beyond, from which the train would emerge, she greeted him gaily.

"Good day, and God speed to ye, Mr. William Day," she said. "Now ye look for all the wurrld like them pictures o' the immigrants bound for Ameriky. There's a song I've heard, ye puts me just in moind o' it—

'Wid me bundle on me shoulder,
Sure there's no man could be boulder.'

Not that ye looks very bould yerself, but——"

How it happened neither of them ever knew, and not a soul on that platform could tell, but the girl was suddenly off the platform—lying prostrate on the line. Almost as soon as the fact was recognised came a roar, a flash, the thunder of the approaching train. There was a sudden shriek of warning, a sudden hurried rush of feet, the waving of uplifted arms. Then—ere the horrified group could collect their senses, they were conscious of a figure taking his death leap to rescue the stunned, helpless woman beyond.

Aghast, dizzy, sick, they shuddered back even as the station-master waved his vain signal, and the crash and groan of the heavy brakes essayed to check that fatal advance.

But the engine was there, puffing and snorting, and the amazed driver was listening, horrified, to a tale of horror. Then the dazed group saw the train backing slowly—slowly away from the place. Some groaned, some covered their eyes. One voice sounded in agonised grief: "William. Oh, God! My William!"

And still the engine backed, and the line was clear now. A shudder shook the little huddled crowd—and then came a wondering, incredulous shout. A figure rose up, supporting in his arms the girl who had fallen. He staggered up to the platform. He gave his burden to welcoming outstretched arms. He looked as one looks who has

faced death, and can scarce believe life is still a possession.

In a moment he was up, and the centre of wild enthusiasm.

Could it possibly be that he was alive—unhurt? He declared it to be the case.

"When I sprang down on that line there," he explained, "I seed as how the train was comin'; and I seed also that if I could drag her and lie her flat just under that seat or shelf where the platform stands out, that the train couldn't touch us. I dun' know how I thought o't. There warn't much time, but I got her and held her down, and laid myself just behind her, and then there was a roarin' and a thunderin' as seemed to turn my brains to a jelly. But suddin-like I heerd the wheels a-movin', and I seed a clear space and heerd yer voices up above; and I found I was all safe, and so I got up—and—and that's all!"

All!

But William Day found himself a hero, and Mary Macarthy knew that he had saved her life. Had risked his own to do it, while all the time he hated her. And what could she do in return?

Tell him that Barrow Vale could not spare its hero—so London must do without him. Tell him that she would be proud and honoured to be 'Liza-Lu's bridesmaid on the forthcoming Christmas Day. Tell him that undying gratitude——

But what was the use of telling anything to a man to whom nothing mattered now, save what one pair of pale and quivering lips had told him when the Lunnon train had departed—without William—'Liza-Lu's William.

A SIMPLETON.

I CAME of a representative stock of clever people, and was the youngest of six sisters who all *did* something. In my father's opinion, all women ought to do "something." The days of decorative idleness were for him a subject of forcible invective at which I often trembled. For I was the fool of the family, and had no special gift or talent by which to distinguish myself. So it was suggested I should take up nursing, and for three years I donned the cap and gown which form the chief attraction of a useful sisterhood.

I had looked a plain girl in a conventional coat and skirt and trimmed hat. I was agreeably surprised to find that the neat, close bonnet, the white strings, and flowing cloak were things eminently becoming. It also suited my face to do away with a fringe and wear my dark brown hair off my forehead. Such being the case, I threw myself heartily into a profession which gave promise of future interest, as well as an improved personality.

It sometimes annoyed me that I did not get any critical or interesting cases. But anything that demanded patience, self-control, or good temper would be handed over to "Nurse Ida."

I was treated with tolerance, with chaff, with kindliness, but never with respect; never with any of that admiring awe for skill, or firm nerves, or cool-headed-

ness that brought some of the sisters into public notice and offered high and responsible positions. I grew rather tired of hospital work at last, and told the matron so. She seemed a little surprised.

"Would you really like a turn at private nursing?" she asked, "because I've just heard of a case that would suit you. It's to attend an old lady, a very troublesome, bad-tempered old lady. She's just at that age when everything has to be excused under plea of eccentricity. Only a very patient and good-tempered nurse would suit. The pay is good. What do you say to it?"

I reflected for a time. The case did not sound very promising, but at least it meant change. I resolved to take it, and said so. The matron promised to write and recommend me, and I went home pending the decision.

It arrived sooner than I desired, for I wanted a holiday. However, I was used to disappointment.

My clever sisters gave me frank advice as to how to treat the old lady. My brother suggested that I should "humour her." My father observed, parenthetically, that eccentric patients had been known to benefit their nurses and attendants substantially. Armed with their good wishes and a shrewd suspicion that I was still regarded as the "fool of the family," I bade them a somewhat tearful farewell—(home comforts appealed to me after a long spell of hospital work)—and took my departure for Lincolnshire.

Full directions for travelling had been forwarded by the matron, and a conveyance was to meet me at the station. The distance from the Hall to the town was

six miles, and the journey promised to be cold and wearisome. It was one of those cheerless, rainy days in March when the wind is nipping, the sky gloomy, and spring looks but a far-off promise of better things. However, I wrapped myself warmly in my rug, and dozed or read through the long hours of a journey full of changes, and stoppages and other discomforts. One of these delays was at a junction, where I had to spend twenty minutes. During the shunting and changing and general confusion I went to the refreshment room for a cup of tea. When I returned to my carriage, I found it had another occupant. He was a bright-faced, curly-haired lad of, I imagined, seventeen or eighteen years. He was surrounded by comic papers and journals, as if prepared for a long journey. After the train had started he offered me one. I took it with a smile. Whether its friendliness gave promise of comradeship or not, he seemed to take it as an introduction, and forthwith launched into conversation. We started from a joke in one of the papers, meandered round an article in another, and then plunged into the Boer War. Coming to a pause, he evidently deemed it a fitting moment to be personal. He asked me if I liked being a nurse.

"Yes," I said. "It would be a senseless thing to take up if one didn't like it."

"And how long," he continued, "have you been at it?"

"Three years," I told him.

He then informed me that he was going to be a mining engineer, and that South Africa offered a great future for that profession. He was just taking a run into the country to see an old aunt who had been very

good to him, and from whom he had expectations. "At least," he added, "my mother says so. My father was her favourite brother. But I've my own opinion. There's a cousin whom we all hate, but who certainly has managed to get round the old lady. Looks after her estate; sort of amateur steward, and all that. He won't allow anyone near her except his wife or himself. The mater hasn't been able to see her for more than a year. I'm just going on 'spec.' I hardly expect—— Why, what's the matter?"

I was leaning forward with sudden interest.

"Is your aunt's name Mrs. Sainsbury? Does she live at Cran Stone Hall?" I asked eagerly.

"That's so," he said. "Why—do you know her?"

"I'm going there as nurse-companion."

He gave a long whistle, and then apologised boyishly. "How strange! Fancy that! But is she ill? I never heard of it."

"I can't say. I only know I have been sent for in that capacity."

"I'm sure she couldn't have anyone better," he said frankly. "You look a regular good sort. Oh! I say, if you find out that they're coming any games over the poor old soul, don't you let them. I tell you I distrust that fellow Clifford more than I can say, and his wife is worse than he. You keep your eyes open."

If he had not been so young, and so frankly candid, I might have suspected some reason for prejudicing me against those cousins. As it was, I accepted the caution, and promised to respect his confidences.

We arrived at the station at last, and found a closed carriage had been sent for me. He had not been ex-

pected. We came on together, he chuckling over the annoyance of his enemy when he should find that an unwelcome visitor had arrived.

The rain was still falling heavily. It was impossible to see anything of the country through the blurred windows. The boy had grown suddenly serious too, and our talk was disjointed, and betrayed some restraint.

"I think we had better say nothing about being in the train together," he said at last. "They might think I had been putting you up to something."

"Very well," I agreed.

The situation was becoming interesting, and promised all sorts of possibilities.

Cran Stone Hall loomed suddenly out of mist and shadow—a large, irregular building, none too well lighted. The hall was gloomy, despite a huge wood fire burning on the open hearth. My new friend and I hurried forward to warm our chilled limbs, and as we did so a door opened, and a pale, sulky-faced woman advanced. She stopped suddenly at sight of the boy, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"Hullo, Mrs. C——," he cried cheerily. "How are you? And how's Roger? Didn't expect to see me, did you? I've just run down for a couple of days. Haven't seen Aunt Clara for ages, you know. The mater was getting anxious. How is the old lady?"

"Your aunt is as well as usual," answered the person addressed as "Mrs. C——," extending a cold hand; "and I really wish, Richard, you had had the common courtesy to inform us of your intentions. There is no room ready for you."

"Oh, don't bother," he said airily. "A dressing-

room, a couch—anything will do. By the way, are you and Roger *living* here?"

"Yes," she said, and a faint colour tinged her sallow cheek. "Aunt Clara could not be left alone any longer. She requires constant care and attention."

"I see," he answered gravely. "Oh, I'm forgetting. This lady is the nurse you sent for. We met at the station."

She extended her hand and eyed me sharply.

"I'm glad you've come, Miss Vallary. I suppose you thoroughly understand your duties. It's not a question of nursing so much as cheerful companionship, attentions, and watchfulness. Mrs. Sainsbury is sometimes a little exacting and—eccentric."

"If she wants cheerful companionship, you should have given me the post," said the irrepressible. "Miss Vallary won't suit her half so well."

"I quite understand," I interposed hastily. "I am used to invalids, and I get on very well with elderly people."

"Then, if you are rested, I will show you your room," she said. "As for you, Richard——"

"Oh, I'm all right. Cookson will soon fix me up."

She turned suddenly. "Cookson is no longer here."

The boy looked aghast. "Not dead——"

"Oh no! He left some months ago."

"Left—Cookson has *left!* You can't mean it. Why, he's been in the family——"

"That's quite beside the mark, Richard, and cannot possibly interest Miss Vallary." She moved away, and I followed.

"But here, I say," he called out, "has Mrs. Cookson gone too?"

"Naturally. She would not stay without her husband."

"How could they leave Aunt Clara? And how could she part with them? Why, the place won't seem the same."

She made no answer, only led me into a sort of small hall and up a flight of stairs and through a back corridor, and then, throwing open a door, showed me a wide, low-ceilinged room, furnished and hung with old-fashioned chintz. A bright fire burnt on the tiled hearth. It looked very clean and comfortable.

"Your room," she said. "Your patient has a bedroom and sitting-room farther down. She lives entirely in them."

I began to remove my cloak and bonnet. She watched intently. In the light of fire and candles I saw her as a foxy-haired woman, with cold, grey eyes and light lashes: an unprepossessing face. I felt an instinctive dislike to her.

"I must tell you, Miss Vallary," she said suddenly—"or am I to call you nurse?"

"I should prefer it," I answered—"Nurse Ida."

"Very well. As I was about to say, you will find your patient at times very trying. She talks great nonsense, and, like most elderly people, has a craze for making odd dispositions of her property. In fact, her mania is to draw up wills. Her real will was made long ago, before her—her mind became impaired."

She looked at me keenly, but I only said: "Indeed?" and betrayed no curiosity whatever.

"Yes," continued my informant. "It is in the possession of the family solicitors in Lincoln. Of course

you must humour this idea, and let her have paper and draw up deeds as she pleases. But be careful she does not get them witnessed. The doctor assures us that she is incapable of drawing up a proper legal document."

"Oh!" I said indifferently, wondering, if *that* was the case, why they should have any fear of the deeds being witnessed. I caught sight of her eyes in the glass. Her face expressed a sort of relief, and a satisfied smile parted the corners of her thin lips.

"I believe nurses have to make a—a daily report of cases, have they not?" she asked.

"Yes, for the medical man," I said.

"Ah, well, you must be so good as to report to my husband and myself also. You see, we are her nearest relatives. We have sacrificed everything to live with her, and take care of her, and look after her affairs."

I thought of my friend Richard, and what he had told me; but the value of silence had long been one of those inestimable qualities forced upon my notice by family criticism.

I let her talk on, knowing well that when a person is unanswered he or she feels bound to go on explaining, for the mere sake of speaking. I learnt a great deal more than she suspected. I allowed her to believe me a simple, malleable sort of girl, who would be easily influenced and easily managed. At length I suggested a visit to my patient.

Mrs. Sainsbury was sitting in a large, deep chair by the fire, propped up by pillows. She was a frail-looking old lady, with white hair and piercing dark eyes. She glanced at me vindictively, and shook a thin, blue-veined hand at my companion.

"I told you I wouldn't have her," she muttered angrily. "Spies! More spies! Nothing but spies!"

"Dear Aunt Clara," said her niece, "this young lady will only do you good. She is here to look after your comforts and attend to you in every way."

The old lady looked at the speaker venomously, and then at me.

"Spies!" she said again. "Where's Dick? Why does no one send for Dick? I want Dick!"

Mrs. Clifford's face grew scarlet. I could not repress a start.

"Do you mean your nephew, Richard Hayes?" I said gently. "He is here—downstairs."

"You simpleton!" hissed Mrs. Clifford, with momentary self-forgetfulness. I looked at her in surprise. There seemed no need for mystery.

"Dick here!" exclaimed the old lady eagerly. "Why was I not told? Why does he not come to see me? Send for him at once."

"Of course, dear aunt. Of course you shall see him," said her niece suavely. "He arrived quite unexpectedly. He shall come to you after dinner."

"No—now. At once!" said the old lady fiercely. "Go and fetch him. A dose of Dick's cheerfulness is better than any medicine, and you've kept him from me for a whole year."

I felt somewhat uncomfortable. I looked at Mrs. Clifford. Her face was vixenish.

"I will go and fetch him," she said. "Nurse, it is time your patient had her soothing drops. They are on that table."

She left the room, and I and the old lady took a cautious survey of one another.

"You look a simple sort of fool," she said complimentarily. "I suppose they've told you I'm mad. I'm not. So you needn't think you're going to play keeper."

"I have no intention of doing such a thing," I said indignantly.

"Then why are you here?"

"I was sent for to be your nurse and companion."

She chuckled. "I don't envy you. I've a vile temper. I can't bear being contradicted. I hate these people. I distrust the doctor. The only creature I love is Dick, and he never comes near me."

"Perhaps he couldn't," I said.

"Couldn't! Why not? He's a free agent, at all events. Oh! if only I wasn't crippled with these helpless limbs." She struck her gown savagely. I noticed her feet and legs were supported by a rest.

The impotence of rage and helplessness convulsed her features. I tried to murmur soothing words. Involuntarily my eyes turned to the medicine bottles. She caught my glance and shook a shrivelled forefinger at me warningly.

"Pour out the dose of that medicine and throw it away," she whispered. "It sends me to sleep. They want me to sleep, and get stupid, so that I sha'n't speak to Dick. But I won't take it. Do as I tell you. Throw it away!"

I took up the bottle with some reluctance and read its directions. Then I looked at the pinched, eager old face, and watchful eyes. I felt sure she did not need

a sleeping draught. All the same, I poured it out and brought it to her.

"You can throw it into the fire if you like," I said. "I have *given* it to you."

She chuckled. "Not such a simpleton, after all!" she muttered approvingly. But I turned aside and gave my attention to the room and its appointments. It was a queer-shaped room, and led by two steps into another, the door of which I opened. It was a bedroom, roomy and comfortable, with one large window, over which warm moreen curtains were drawn.

"Your bedroom, I suppose?" I said.

She nodded.

"It is a long way from mine," I said. "Supposing you need anything in the night?"

"I never do, and I don't suppose they'll poison me *yet,*" she added.

"Poison you? What an idea!"

"You'd have ideas if you'd lived my life this last year," she cried in low, fierce tones. "A helpless log. My old servants denied to me. Not a friend to speak to. Stifled in an atmosphere of lies and distrust, and hypocrisies. Have you seen my Joseph Surface?" she added abruptly.

"No," I answered.

"Oh, you will. The dear, careful, kind-spoken, considerate scoundrel!" Each adjective was hissed vindictively. "But there, child, how you stare at me! And you're only another spy, I doubt not. Oh, the misery, the misery of a rich, and helpless, and childless old age!"

I felt a great wave of sympathy overflowing my heart as I saw the gleam of tears in the fierce old

eyes. I advanced quickly to her side. "Believe me——" I said.

She made a gesture of silence. "I hear steps. Yes, it's Dick. My boy at last—at last!"

He came in quickly, went up to her chair, and put his strong young arms around her.

Holding him with both frail hands she looked fiercely at his companion.

"Go away, Roger," she commanded. "You've kept my boy from me long enough. At least I'll have my talk out with him alone."

"My dear aunt," said the man suavely, "how can you so misjudge me? I had no intention——"

"Oh, go, go!" she cried passionately. "Your very voice enrages me. Go, and take that creature with you. She's another of your spies."

I turned a hurt, indignant face towards her. I was about to answer as angrily as she had spoken, but to my amazement she, under cover of Dick's sheltering figure, gave me a slow, deliberate *wink*.

Truly a strange case, and a strange patient.

. . . . .

The man addressed as Roger, and apostrophised as Joseph Surface, seemed to me a most unprepossessing individual. He made a sign to me to follow him, and led the way to the bedroom. Raising what I had taken for a curtain he showed me a door which opened into a narrow passage and then up two steps into my own room. I was astonished to find I was so near.

"Your patient is sometimes very troublesome," he explained. "She labours under strange delusions. Among them is one that we are interfering with her

liberty. Of course there's no need for me to say——" He hesitated. "You have probably formed your own opinion?" he went on.

I hastened to assure him that I had.

"I am sure we can trust you," he then said. "Humour her, but be firm. The doctor has forbidden her to leave her own room, or be excited by visitors, but probably she will try to persuade you to the contrary."

"I should not dream of going against the doctor's orders," I said gravely.

"Quite right. My wife has been devoted in her attentions to the invalid. But her whims and tempers have quite worn her out. We had to get a nurse. I hope you will be able to put up with them—for a time."

His furtive glance swept my face.

"I am very strong," I answered, "and very patient."

He nodded. "Well, now, I think that young fellow had better go," he said. "You may return and dismiss him. She usually sleeps at this time."

I obeyed and returned. I found Dick and Mrs. Sainsbury in earnest conversation, and assuredly the old lady's face, voice, and manner gave no signs of fatigue or failing faculties.

They both looked earnestly at me as I advanced, closing the door behind me.

"Nurse Ida," said Dick, in low, eager tones, "you must help her. Be a friend to her. I—I'd no idea she was treated like a prisoner. All the old servants gone too!"

"But why should she be treated like a prisoner?" I asked. "This is a free country. She is her own mis-

tress. No one can make her do anything she doesn't wish to do."

"Can't they?" said Dick bitterly. "You don't know Roger. Why, she's been for months trying to see a lawyer, trying to get a letter to me, and neither one nor other has been accomplished."

"Then it's odd they have engaged a nurse, a complete stranger, to come in. Surely they don't suppose I'd be a party to coercion?"

The old lady gave me one of her shrewd glances. "Oh, *your* character came before you did, Nurse Ida," she said. "They thought I was asleep one day and I overheard the doctor and Roger talking about you. They said the matron wrote you were a good nurse, but a perfect simpleton."

I laughed. "Perhaps they may have reason to change their opinion," I said.

But I wondered why the matron had recommended me for the place if her opinion had been so unflattering.

. . . . .

Before long I had reason to congratulate myself on having earned a character to which I could play up. The old lady snapped and snarled and was offensively rude to me in public. She petted and praised me enough to atone for it when we knew we were safe and unobserved. I used to give her paper and pens every morning, and at night I would take these strangely-worded documents to Roger Clifford. He was soon convinced that I recognised her mania, and there was no need to fear me. He or his wife were always in the house, and constantly spying on my patient or myself. Distrust was in the very atmosphere. The doctor,

the servants, all pretended to share the same opinion of the old lady's mental aberration. She was denied any liberty, and never permitted to see a soul outside the household limits.

I was now thoroughly in her confidence, and over and over again did I try to contrive some plan by which her lawyer might be brought to the house and have an interview with her. But as long as Roger or his wife were there, I found it could not be managed.

The town, as I said, was six miles distant. I could frame no possible excuse to get there alone. Besides, it would create suspicion, and that I wished to avoid at all hazards. All letters and telegrams passed through Roger's hands. The network of espionage was perfect at all points. Worst of all, my patient's health began to suffer, and her weakness increased as the warm spring days lengthened. I grew seriously alarmed, and the daily request, "Ida, we *must* do something," became more and more pathetic.

I had written to Dick—cautious epistles—but received no reply. Often I begged her to let me go to the lawyers in Lincoln, but she declared it would be useless. They would not be permitted to see her. One day I managed to elude my spies and get to the village. There I posted a letter to Dick entreating him to form some plan by which the old lady's wishes could be carried out. "If we had only a few hours to ourselves," I concluded, "I could manage everything, but our every action is watched and hampered here."

I expected no answer. Besides, the post-bag was always taken to Roger Clifford. The second day after I had sent off my letter I was sauntering in my usual

That is to say. 10

purposeless fashion up and down the avenue. I knew Mrs. Clifford was with my old lady, and I had seen Roger leave the house with the farm bailiff shortly after breakfast. As I wandered about I suddenly saw a telegraph boy on a bicycle wheel into the avenue. As he neared me a sudden impulse made me stop him. "Have you a wire for me?" I asked hastily—"Nurse Ida."

He opened his little leather bag. "One for you," he said, "and one for Mr. Clifford."

I tore mine open. It sounded incomprehensive and was unsigned.

"Clearing coast to-day. Steer for land. Cycle."

I guessed it was from Dick, and hurriedly concealed it in my dress, for I saw Roger Clifford approaching. The boy went on and I saw him deliver the other telegram.

When I returned from my walk the house was all in confusion. Roger had been urgently summoned to London. I could only ascertain some bank had failed, threatening the old lady with entire loss of fortune. The shock and confusion had been too much for Mrs. Clifford, and she was prostrated with nervous headache, from which she often suffered.

As soon as her husband left she retired to her room, and I felt I was at last mistress of the situation.

The telegram began to explain itself, but "cycle" still puzzled me. Dick knew I could cycle. We had discussed the fascinations of the "wheel," and the merits of various manufacturers. But where was I to obtain one?

I took my dilemma to my old lady. Her wits were equal to the difficulty.

"Go to the Vicarage. Minnie Clarke has one. Ask her to lend it you. How long would it take you to get to Lincoln?"

I calculated, with allowance for delays. Then I slipped out of the house unobserved and set off for the Vicarage.

Often as I had criticised and abused "scorchers," I was fain to admit myself an offender for once. Never had I covered ground so rapidly; never so utterly disregarded the caution of "brake," or back pedalling.

I returned the cycle in less time than I had deemed possible. Not only that, but I brought the vicar back with me as a witness—explaining the circumstances, at which he was justly indignant, for he too had been denied admission to the old lady during this past year.

Arrivals came fast upon our heels: first Dick to explain that the telegram to Roger was only a "draw"; then the old family lawyer and his clerk. I brought them into Mrs. Sainsbury's room, despite remonstrance from the butler, who was in Roger Clifford's pay. We locked the door while the legal business was being transacted, and I speedily had the satisfaction of hearing Mrs. Clifford's voice commanding, raging, entreating the meaning of my conduct from the outside passage. She gave herself away rather freely in her anger, and such words as "conspiracy" and "fraud" were hurled at us during the drawing up of the new will.

But when I at last threw open the door and she saw Dick, the vicar, and the family solicitor, I think she

recognised to the full that her own and her husband's schemes had been successfully overthrown.

What she had to hear from the lawyer was very far from pleasant, and the meaning given to her solicitude was, in legal parlance, a very ugly one.

I was standing by the door as she left the room, white with fury and baffled rage.

"It's *you* I have to thank," she muttered furiously. "You, schemer, plotter that you are! What folly ever to engage a nurse, even——"

"Even with such a recommendation as I had," I suggested sweetly.

Her glance was a more eloquent testimonial than the matron's letter.

THE MYSTIC.

"I AM certainly surprised," said the Colonel stiffly, "surprised, my dear Mrs. Conningsby, that you should have asked such a person here to meet—*Me.*"

He pronounced "Me" as though he were commander-in-chief of all the armies. But he was merely a retired Indian officer, who had seen a little active service, and eaten a great many curries, and bullied native forces and native servants for more years than a man with a dawning desire for matrimony cares to remember. At sixty such a desire has attendant disadvantages. But Mrs. Conningsby was an old flame, and now a rich widow, childless, well preserved, and hospitable; inclined somewhat to eccentricities in the shape of new sects and geniuses, and more reckless in expenditure than the Colonel quite approved of, he having a keen eye for safe investments. Perhaps these circumstances first put into his head the idea of taking Cynthia Conningsby's affairs into his own charge, and of including herself in the bargain.

When she invited him on a Saturday to Monday visit at her pretty bungalow on the Thames, the hour was ripe for his venture. She had been so sweet and gracious when they had last met—so interested in his theories (to which the War Office had turned a deaf ear), and her invitation had been so pressing, that he

told himself he was quite safe—as safe as any man can be where a woman's choice is concerned.

Saturday had arrived, and he was at the bungalow, taking tea with various pretty and pleasant personages on the cool, shady verandah, while the ripple of the river shone through a belt of shrubbery beyond, and its plashing music fell pleasantly on tired London ears.

And amidst it all Cynthia Conningsby had announced that she was expecting Baboo Tattahjee, an Eastern professor—a man half mystic, half charlatan, about whom a certain section of English culture had gone quite mad during the past season.

The Colonel was one of those Anglo-Indian magnates who abhor native talent, and can never tolerate its appointment to positions of trust, honour and independence. To meet a Baboo on equal terms seemed a positive indignity offered to the service and himself. How could Cynthia Conningsby have been guilty of such tactless behaviour?

In answer to his remark and his offended voice she merely laughed. "My dear Colonel, what a pity you did not tell me of your prejudice! I should have left your invite over to next week."

His invite! this was adding insult to injury with a vengeance. His yellow complexion took on a hue of deeper saffron. Offended dignity enthroned itself on his high brow and thin, spare form. He devoted his attentions to little Lady Chester, who sat near him in a low basket chair, exhibiting high-heeled "twos" and lace and silk frilleries for the benefit of all and sundry. Lady Chester, whom her friends called "Toppie," was a great flirt, and never objected to any man's admira-

tion, whether he was old or young. She was also Cynthia's greatest friend, by her own showing. Therefore she tried her most subtle arts of fascination on Cynthia's admirer.

Mrs. Conningsby betrayed only perfect indifference. But the Colonel had not studied women for more than two score years for nothing, and he told himself that such indifference could only hide an aching heart. The reflection added sprightliness to his voice and manner, and gave a touch of intimacy to the confidences exchanged between himself and his pretty companion.

In the midst of his apparent absorption a figure stalked through the open windows of the drawing-room and bent courteously (the Colonel called it obsequiously) over the hand the hostess extended.

"Ah, Baboo!" she said. "So here you are at last. Sit down. What will you have? I know you don't drink tea. Iced water? Well, there's no accounting for tastes."

She gave the order, and then went on talking to the new arrival in low, confidential tones. The Colonel was annoyed. He hated to see that fair, graceful head bent towards the dark face and silk turban of the Oriental professor. The racial contrast disgusted him. This fellow had no business to sit in her presence, still less to converse as an equal. Cynthia was happily indifferent to his opinions, and pursued her conversation with a seriousness born of purpose.

"We are all so interested," she was saying. "I think there are no adverse influences. Those who don't believe are anxious enquirers — open to conviction. You will show us something to-night, will you not?"

The dark, strange eyes swept the circle slowly. They rested on the Colonel. "An officer," he observed; "Indian service."

"Do you know him?" asked Cynthia quickly.

"Not of personality. My 'Guru' has told me I should him meet, and I should not his honourableness like."

"Oh, how strange! Your—what did you say, Mr. Tattahjee?"

"Guru—master; he who instructs me in the divine mysteries."

"And he told you you would meet Colonel Nettleton here? How singular!"

"Not at all," said the Baboo calmly. "I do not pronounce any circumstance singular. It is but that people do not themselves give the trouble to think, to consider. They aggsept without pausing to ask why they aggsept. Nothings is too wonderful for komprehension when we think it out."

"Oh, I suppose so," said Cynthia Conningsby vaguely. "Still, you must allow that thinking about a subject doesn't explain it; for instance, materialisation and transmission of bodies, and all those things you lectured about."

"I did not them explain. I will rather that I demonstrate."

"Oh—will you, and here? How awfully kind. And —when?"

He shrugged indifferent shoulders. "Who knows? Perhaps to-night. I shall my directions await. It is with reverence and great humility that I my Guru's instructions receive. It would to people's advantage be if so they awaited and received mine."

Again his eyes swept the circle and rested on the yellow skin and grey, scanty hair of Colonel Nettleton.

"I could resolve your friend into gonstitutional elements and transport him from here," he observed casually. "No one would know why or where."

Mrs. Conningsby shivered in the warm July air. There was a grim ferocity in the voice and words of the Baboo that terrified her with hints of occult power.

"Oh! please don't," she entreated. "He is a very old friend of mine. I should not like anything to happen to him."

"Happen!" A quick gleam that might have been mirth or hatred shot from the Eastern face. "What shall be to happen that shall happen. My Guru is a wonderful master. It to him rests. I but obey."

"Did the—the Guru tell you to come here?" asked Cynthia, with another little shiver.

"Yes. And to show you by demonstration of the will power how the forces of nature be to control possible."

"Oh!" she said. "But isn't it—dangerous?"

"Not to the disciple. To you—yes. To the yellow-faced Indian officer also, yes. He wish to make broposals to you."

"Baboo!" exclaimed Mrs. Conningsby, shocked and blushing.

"Your guilty conscience tells you so," he went on calmly. "Yes, broposals of marriage. Do not listen."

"I—I am sure you are mistaken."

"To say that is my Guru to insult. He has gommunicated the matter since I have arrived. Wait—and you will see."

Mrs. Conningsby turned her attention to her other guests, and the Baboo was seized upon by an elderly lady who was a profound believer in occult science, and very anxious to make his acquaintance.

He told her brusquely the West was unripe for the knowledge of the East, and recommended a journey to Thibet, after which he retired to his room, and did not appear until dessert was on the table. He explained to his hostess that he lived chiefly on fruits, rice, and iced water, so as to cultivate his higher nature. The Colonel, who had been relegated to the lower end of the table, was more wrathful than ever at the appearance of the Oriental "trickster," as he called him. He told Lady Chester that nothing would induce him to be a witness of the fellow's preposterous nonsense. He had seen enough of Indian jugglery in its native conditions to object to its introduction into English drawing-rooms. Somewhat to his disgust, however, he found that all the rest of his party were quite keen on the forthcoming performance. He would either have to be a witness, or enjoy his own company in the solitude of the verandah after dinner.

The drawing-room of the bungalow was very charming—a long, low room, simply furnished with an abundance of comfortable basket chairs, flowers, revolving book-stands, and some good etchings and engravings. It was essentially comfortable and homelike. Mrs. Conningsby always declared that country or riverside houses should be an exact contrast to London mansions or flats. She had carried out her scheme very successfully.

The only light in the room was that of a large standard lamp with a pale yellow shade. It stood in

one corner, and threw a mellow glow as of August moonlight over everything. The shadowy twilight without fell softly on the verandah and lawn. All the windows were open. The sleepy murmur of the river was the only sound.

The party seated themselves in various chairs. Mrs. Conningsby was hovering about the Baboo. He looked a weird being in the faint light. He wore a black robe girdled with a scarlet sash; a curiously-vivid turban contrasted with his olive skin and flashing eyes. At Cynthia's request he seated himself on one of the low, cushioned chairs. She took another close beside him. The Colonel was by the most distant window, a figure of protest and disapprobation. No one heeded him. They were all too intent on the demonstration of "parlour magic."

The occultist leant back in his chair and covered his eyes with one lean, brown hand. The other lay on his black caftan. On one finger sparkled a magnificent moonstone ring. It seemed to gather all the light in its opaline heart, send it forth in flashing rays, and draw it back, again to send it forth. Gradually it attracted the eyes of the circle. There seemed a fascination about it. Those who looked away instinctively glanced back, and found their gaze concentrated on the mystic jewel despite their efforts to avoid it.

Only that obstinate figure in the window refused to look—refused to be, as it were, hypnotised.

The magician suddenly raised his hand. Immediately a peal of bells, silver sweet and musical, rang in various corners of the room.

The audience were astonished, and a little alarmed. Tattahjee merely remarked that it was a sign the con-

ditions were favourable. He then rose and lowered the light of the lamp, so that only a faint gleam relieved the shadowed darkness. Standing erect, he looked at the circle of attentive faces, then wheeled round and directed his gaze to the stiff and indifferent figure of the Colonel.

"Sir, you must not there remain," he said slowly. "Either you to the circle come, or go your ways from it."

"I'm blessed if I'll do either!" exclaimed the irate officer.

"We that shall see—wait just a little moment till I my Guru questionise."

He bent his head. After a moment he raised it. To the astonishment of the watching circle, a faint mist began to creep in through the window. Slowly, and yet with swift-increasing density it fell above and around the obdurate figure in the chair and shut him out from sight.

A shudder ran through the sensitives. This was really uncanny, and tending to the supernatural. The dark form of the Oriental stood silent and solitary; behind him, like a curtain, the mist fell and closed. The Colonel was invisible.

"I will now to you show how I can a tree make spring up from the seed I sow," announced the magician.

He took a flower-pot and set it on the ground. Then from his pocket he produced a paper filled with earth. He slowly sifted it through his fingers into the pot, and when it was full covered it over with a silk handkerchief. The watching eyes became conscious of a movement beneath the handkerchief. It fluttered, spread, was lifted higher and higher. The Eastern sorcerer took it

gently between his fingers and lifted it from the centre, higher, higher, and yet higher. Finally he whisked it off altogether. There, at least a couple of feet about the pot, was a complete shrub—leaf, stem, all perfect.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the room. This was really marvellous! Lady Chester, however, suddenly exclaimed on the absence of the Colonel. She could see through the mist curtain, but the chair was empty.

"He haf disappeared," said Tattahjee coolly. "Perhaps my Guru has transplanted him into the garden or somewhere into space. Be not alarmed, ladies, he will quite safe be. It is but a lesson that my Guru desire to teach. The high honourableness was rude to me; my Guru likes not that I am not well treated. But he no malice bears. The military commander-in-chief will be returned when his lesson learnt has been. There is a brother out on the *chabookra* yonder visible only as an astral form. I gonclude he has your friend in charge of himself."

Mrs. Conningsby began to feel uncomfortable. It did not seem quite hospitable to invite an elderly gentleman on a visit, and then allow occult experiments to be played with him. She strained her eyes in the direction of the verandah, but all was shadowy and indistinct. Only—the chair by the window was certainly empty. Her attention was distracted by this occurrence. But the Baboo certainly performed wonders, and kept the circle in a state of entranced amazement. When he pronounced the performance over, however, there was still no sign of the Colonel.

Mrs. Conningsby went out into the verandah, from

thence to the garden, but she saw nothing of her guest. In twos and threes the others followed, the men smoking, the women chattering to them or to each other of the events of the evening. Lady Chester came up to Cynthia and linked her arm in hers.

"Where has your friend vanished to?" she exclaimed. "He has certainly marked his disapprobation of your entertainment, hasn't he?"

"I can't make it out," said Cynthia uneasily. "He was sitting in that chair by the window, and quite suddenly he disappeared."

"Do you mean to say he didn't walk away?"

"No. I was watching him attentively. He just seemed to fade into that mist, and—vanish."

Lady Chester laughed. "My dear, that sounds rather too tragic for our friend's departure. Probably he is taking a stroll by the side of the river."

"I'm sure I hope so," answered Cynthia fervently. "It would be so dreadful if—if anything happened."

"But what could happen?"

"Oh! I don't know. Perhaps I'm nervous, but I can't help feeling uncomfortable. He has been absent an hour."

"Well, my dear Cynthia, if you think a man who has seen so much service can't be trusted out of leading strings, you must——" She paused.

Cynthia queried pettishly: "Must—what?"

A shrug of pretty shoulders answered her. Echoing it there fell suddenly on the still night air a low, wailing cry.

The two women started. Cynthia's face grew white. "Gracious! What's that?" she exclaimed.

"I'm sure I don't know. It sounded rather—weird."

"It sounded over there, by the river bank," said Cynthia, beginning to run in that direction.

Lady Chester was about to follow her when the cry sounded again, this time close to herself. She started, and gazed in alarm at a belt of shrubs opposite to where she was standing. Then she rushed forward. Nothing and no one was concealed there. She retreated to the path. The moon was clear and brilliant enough to reveal every flower and shrub and leaf. She saw Cynthia coming swiftly towards her.

"There is no one on the river, so far as I can see," she said. "But I heard that cry again in this direction."

"So did I," said Lady Chester. "And I searched behind that belt of shrubbery, but there wasn't a thing, not even a kitten. Yet——"

She clutched her friend's arm. This time the cry was over their heads—so distinct and piteous that involuntarily both glanced upwards to where a large chestnut-tree overshadowed the gravel walk. But nothing was visible. The moon's rays filtered through the fan-like leaves, silvering them till they shone like diamonds. The spreading branches were innocent of any concealment. The two women looked in each other's white faces with real consternation.

"What can it mean?"

"Perhaps Baboo Tattahjee is playing tricks!"

"I'm sure he isn't. Why, look! There he sits in the verandah smoking and old Mrs. St. John with him."

"Well, let us go and ask them if they have heard anything?"

But the Oriental and his companion (the enthusiastic

follower of mysticism) declared that they had not heard a sound.

It was past eleven o'clock, and there was no sign of the Colonel. Mrs. Conningsby ordered ice drinks and whisky-and-soda to be brought into the verandah, and they sat on chatting and smoking and discussing things mystical until close on midnight.

The Baboo was enjoying himself mightily. He was now the person of consequence in the party. His hostess was rich and credulous. He foresaw a future of much benefit to himself if rivals could be kept out of the way. For he had scented animosity and dislike in the whole attitude and appearance of the old military man. He knew that the traditions of India and of caste made it repugnant for him even to sit in the room with a native, much less at table. He chuckled over this. He had many a score on behalf of himself and his fellows of Bengal and Madras to pay off against these pompous, self-sufficient conquerors. His knowledge of magic arts and Eastern trickery would serve him well in this instance. The credulous fools around him were ready to believe all he told them, and he did not spare art and demonstration.

As twelve struck Mrs. Conningsby rose and reminded them of Sunday morning. They all dispersed to their several rooms.

There was no sign of the Colonel. The man-servant declared he was not in his bedroom. He certainly was not in any of the reception rooms. Puzzled and distressed, Mrs. Conningsby retired to rest, leaving orders that the butler should sit up for the absentee in case he returned. Everyone seemed to think he had gone

for a walk, perhaps lost his way, in which case he would probably stay at some hotel for the night. A military man who had seen thirty years of service in India was surely able to take care of himself!

Cynthia had her evening gown removed and her fair hair brushed, and then dismissed her maid. She felt strangely restless and ill at ease. The strange disappearance of her old friend puzzled her more than she had acknowledged. She felt as if sleep were impossible under such conditions. Could anything have happened —any accident?

A gentle movement of the blind attracted her notice. The window was open. She extinguished her light and went over to it and leant out, looking down into the dew-steeped garden, and away to where the quiet river gleamed between its banks. Everything was very still; scarce a leaf moved. The cold, unearthly radiance made all things distinct. As she watched she saw a shadow stealing over the grass—a short, humped-up figure, that crouched into any space of darkness. Alarmed, and yet curious, she withdrew into the shelter of the window hangings and watched it. Her first hope that it might be the Colonel was disappointed. It was a short, rather squat figure, very different from her friend's spare, tall frame. Taking advantage of every bit of darkness, it at last reached the river's bank, and she could see no more.

Alert now, and with her presentiments quickened into living force, Cynthia snatched a cloak from her wardrobe and stole swiftly along the corridor, down the stairs, and so into the library. Its windows opened on to the verandah. Deftly and quickly she unfastened

one, and stood there gazing eagerly across the lawn and shrubbery beyond. Minutes passed. A clock struck the three quarters, each stroke sounding abnormally loud and distinct in the hushed silence of the house.

She glided out of the verandah, down the steps, across the lawn, and reached the spot where the figure had disappeared.

She paused by the river and looked around. At a short distance from where she stood was the boat-house, and the landing-stage. Standing on the stage was a man. He seemed to be gazing far out over the water, and was making rapid motions with his arm. Suddenly a little boat shot into view. It held a solitary occupant. It floated nearer and nearer, the drops from the lifted oars falling in glittering showers as it moved.

Within a short distance of the landing-place it stopped, lying motionless on the river's breast as if at anchor.

The figure on the shore held one arm outstretched as if in command. His voice reached Cynthia.

"No nearer. Stay, and answer me."

"Let me land first," said a voice.

Its tone was entreating, pitiful, meek. And yet Cynthia's heart leaped in glad recognition. It was the Colonel's voice.

"No, you shall land never. Me you must obey. You haf been to and fro to-night some hundred of times. You are tired—yes? Then think, if I so will you shall continue to go to and fro nine hundred million of times! I haf but to say, *'Jao'*—you must obey. You yourself cannot help!"

A faint cry of despair filled Cynthia's ear. It also enlightened her as to the situation.

"Oh, let me land! I'm tired, cold, dead-beat. I give in. I'll not say a word! Only let me land!"

"You shall to me swear that the beautiful lady you make no attempt to win."

"No!" came a fierce shout.

"Then—*Jao!* Make your tour of the river once more. I command it."

"Stop!" cried Cynthia impulsively, as she dashed forward. "Baboo! how dare you behave like this? After accepting my hospitality you insult and persecute one of my guests! I—I don't quite understand, but I suppose it's one of your hypnotic tricks. But I won't have it. It's more than a joke!"

She turned to the boat swaying gently with the current. "Come, Colonel, bring it in!" she cried. "Why, how tired and cold you must be! I've been so dreadfully anxious."

A low, chuckling laugh fell on her ear. "He do not hear, and he cannot spik unless I so choose," announced Tattahjee. "And so, my lofely lady, it is of no manner of use that you scream and excite yourself. I haf played on him a leetel trick—that is all. He so proud and arrogant was, I think it do him good."

"Oh, Baboo!" entreated Cynthia, "do be merciful! Let him land. This may be funny to you, but think what it means to him."

"Yes, I do think. It is not perhaps quite so funny. But why then he insult? Why he mock my powers? Why he say I a black nigger am—I who am high caste: I who the lofely high-born English ladies do invite on terms of intimacy? Tell me that—why?"

"Perhaps he did not understand your feelings,"

faltered Cynthia, her eyes on the motionless figure in its white shirt and evening trousers, each hand holding an oar in forlorn clasp.

The Baboo drew himself up proudly. "No, he did not. For that must he learn what to have feelings is. He haf now to beseech to me; also to my terms come."

"I'm sure he will agree," pleaded Cynthia, shivering now in the chill air. "Oh! do unhypnotise him, or whatever it is you've done. I'll promise you whatever you wish."

"You—that is to say you will his surety be?"

There was eagerness, excitement in the Baboo's voice.

"Yes, indeed I will."

"The promise I exact is that you will never with him commit the indiscretion of matrimony," said the Baboo sternly.

Cynthia began to laugh hysterically. "What an idea! Why, I've known him since I was a little child. I'd as soon marry my father or my grandfather."

"That so is?" exclaimed Tattahjee. "I haf then on no account troubled! To think I so foolish was! But stay. Let me reconsider. You are sure, *mem sahib,* that you play me no tricks?"

"I give you my word of honour. Now, won't you take off your spell? The poor man will catch his death of cold. He hasn't even a coat on."

The Oriental folded his arms and looked steadfastly at the silent figure with its downcast head.

"*Mem sahib,*" he suddenly said, "if I haf played one occult joke for you and for him, I haf played it so that you shall believe there is something in Eastern

magic. He make of me a mock. But you—you haf very kind been. I do not bear for you a grudge. And if this old fool is not to marry you, neither do I to him bear one. So he shall be release. But first, to convince you I am wonderful—tell me, *mem sahib,* who do you say to yourself you see in that boat there?"

"Who? Why, Colonel Nettleton, of course."

"You are sure?"

"As sure as that I stand here talking to you."

He nodded, and a faint smile of satisfaction stole over his dark features.

"Well, then, I go to prove to you how wonderful a man I am. That figure that you see is not the colonel called Nettleton at all."

Cynthia rubbed her eyes, looked at the figure in the boat, then at the figure of the Eastern magician by her side. "Not? But I tell you it is. I could swear to it."

He gave a little satisfied chuckle. "Your friend, the old commander-in-chief, he is at present asleep in your bungalow. I put him so for punishment of his disbelieving my power. This, that is in the boat, is his astral body—his inner spirit in his outer envelope, what I have explained to your friends to-night! Now if I but command back to him it goes and the boat is empty!"

"But I heard him speak!" exclaimed Cynthia.

"His astral voice you heard by my directions. I saw you at your window. I knew you would me follow. The commander-in-chief a bad dream has had. He thinks he haf been condemned to row up and down the river for a hundred of million times."

"What!" cried Cynthia incredulously. "Do you mean to tell me *that's* not the Colonel—that he didn't speak? It's impossible! Where is he, then?"

The Baboo chuckled maliciously. "That you shall know to-morrow morning. It will very funny be. My Guru will not that I am insulted for notings. Now see, watch—I do but my hand wave. So! *Jao!* He haf gone!"

It was quite true. Boat and figure disappeared as if the river had swallowed them up. Cynthia gave a little cry. "If I knew that he was safe—that this was really only a trick!"

"A trick!" exclaimed the Oriental angrily. "It is high, superior occultism, the white magic that he, your Colonel Nettleton, did scoff at. To-morrow you will find he do not scoff any more. I have the honour to wish you a very good nights."

He *salaamed* and left her.

Cynthia was really very much perturbed. Whatever the Colonel's intentions might have been, it was not to be expected that he would appreciate such a specimen of Oriental revenge. However, she was powerless in the matter. The hypnotist had disappeared, and she thought it best to return to the house also, and await the morning and its results.

. . . . .

There seemed to be a good deal of commotion and talking in the corridor on which the bedrooms opened. Cynthia started up, confused by sleep and weird dreams, and listened. The babel increased. Anger and laughter joined in the discord. She rang for her maid. After

some little delay the girl appeared. She seemed struggling between a sense of propriety and a desire for unbounded mirth.

"What is the matter? What's all that noise about?" demanded her mistress.

"Well, ma'am, it's the gentlemen. They couldn't none of them get into the bathroom this morning. And Pearson, he said as someone was there and the gas burning all night. He knocked and knocked, and at last he forced the lock. And——" She paused to laugh again. "Beggin' your pardon, ma'am, but it really was so funny. There, in the bath, just lying asleep as if he were in his own bed, was Colonel Nettleton!"

"Gracious heavens!"

"Oh, don't be alarmed, ma'am, he's quite safe. There wasn't a drop of water in the bath! And that's what all the gentlemen are laughing at. For the poor gentleman must have thought he was in bed, and his coat and waistcoat folded up on the chair beside him, and he—he couldn't, couldn't——"

"Couldn't what? For goodness' sake, Watson, don't go on giggling like that!"

"Couldn't tell how he got there, ma'am, nor why he should spend the night in a bath, and his own bedroom awaiting him at the corner of the passage!"

Cynthia remembered the Baboo's words. She thought she could give a pretty good guess as to how the Colonel had got into the bath, and why.

But no opportunity was afforded for explanation. The Colonel left the bungalow before anyone was down for breakfast, and his matrimonial attentions were apparently abandoned.

At least, in the cold, curt note of farewell left for his hostess there was no hint of any desire to become a permanent resident of the bungalow.

Cynthia Conningsby was less enthusiastic about occult entertainments for her week-end parties after this experiment.

THE CRANK.

He believed that bread was the staff of life, and carried his views to the extremes of simplicity. Man only wanted a staff to support him down the vale of years. Here was one satisfactorily provided—no horrors of slaughter, no shedding of blood, no impurities of adulteration—the simple diet to nourish the simple life. Oh! happy humanity, if only it would believe and accept such pure and wholesome facts!

Like all cranks, Bertram Sallicrust was not content with self-endured martyrdom. He wanted followers, disciples, believers. He wanted to preach and be accepted. So he set to work. Being fairly well off as to this world's goods, he was able to do this on a prepared system. He opened a small and daintily suggestive restaurant, and he advertised it! Being eager for a novelty as well as for the noblest form of serving humanity, he also set about such advertisement in approved American methods, by aid of an American agent.

The agent had very original ideas, and was agreeable to imparting them for a handsome salary. He also claimed complete freedom of opinion—and diet—as far as he himself was concerned. Bertram Sallicrust felt that this was somewhat unpartnerlike, but his will was weaker than his philanthropy, and he succumbed.

Once the business was fairly started it was Bertram's delight to visit his unique restaurant daily: to revel in its artistic simplicity; its wholesome, frigid cleanliness; its spotless purity. The floors and walls were tiled, and washed down every morning. The tables were of metal and covered with spotless napery. The attendants wore Jaeger underwear, and lilac prints and white linen aprons and caps as outward presentment of simple, unadorned grace. The selection of these attendants had been Bertram's chief difficulty. The usual waitress seemed a pert, self-opinionated person, averse to hygienic rules and indifferent to their standard. She refused to believe in the sustaining properties of brown bread, lentils, haricot beans, and hot water. That a cabbage contained as much nutriment as a mutton chop also presented obstacles to faith, and when nuts and dried almonds came into the *menu* she scornfully dismissed them as "firewood."

Bertram Sallicrust, being young and full of noble ideals, was naturally sublimely ignorant of women. As yet they had not entered largely into his plans or his life. At twenty-four a young man either knows everything about a woman, or nothing at all. To Bertram she merely entered into the scheme of creation as necessary, and took the form of neat-handed Phyllis. These pert, quick-tongued claimants for situations disturbed that idea considerably. Finally he took counsel with his agent, Mr. Wharton B. Choke.

"Gals!" observed that individual. "Wall, guess they're kind o' skittish. You can't expect them to take up your fads as well as your wages. Better leave 'em to me. If the place has got to be run, you haven't got

time to go foolin' around after waitresses. If you can get 'em to agree to your style of dressin' 'em, that's about as much as you need cal'c'late on yet awhile."

So Mr. Choke had engaged two as being ready and handy for the opening day, and Bertram Sallicrust kept a look out for a principal young lady who would and should agree to adopt his mode of life, and his mode of diet, and be clerk and book-keeper as well. As yet he was obliged to perform those offices himself. But also, as yet, they were not very onerous. Indeed, he found he had a great deal of spare time on his hands, and the cashier's desk knew more of the daily press than it did of the restaurant's bills and checks.

The "Simplex," as he had named his unique establishment, did not seem to "draw." A chance customer would look in and ask for the menu card, and then remark he'd like a chop. The young proprietor would wax indignant and point to the title page of his enterprise. Occasionally, if the customer were patient, Bertram would take the opportunity of expounding his views, and hold forth on the iniquitous cannibalism of mankind with the rigorous eloquence of a Bernard Shaw. But these methods were apparently not the methods of success. There was still a majority —a large, working-class, ill-nourished majority—who sent for chops as midday sustenance and refused to believe in the sustaining forces of lentils and haricot beans.

For a month the "Simplex" had made eloquent appeal to the enlightened; had shown its purity and simplicity to the callous passers-by; had cooked and presented its hygienic diet in various attractive forms—

and for a month the cashier's desk had been unbesieged for change, and the waitresses left to such duties as befall the unemployed. It had opened on the first of May. On the first of June, being a Sunday, the young proprietor resolved to make holiday. He took a late Saturday-night train to a quiet retreat by the Thames. An idyllic spot he had discovered, unfrequented by the river tripper—a place of rustic cottages, green meadows, sedges, and willows. He put up at a rustic inn, a place sweet and simple and countrified. He slept the sleep of the just, and the non-dyspeptic. He woke to all the poetic sounds of twittering bird and crowing cock, of lowing cows and barking dogs, such as nature and an open window provided.

Six o'clock on a June morning, and the river flowing beneath his casement. Up he rose and drew long breaths of fragrant air, then walked the limited space of his chamber and performed many strange antics which came under his system of "health exercises." Then off to the riverside for plunge and swim, and back once more to the simple fare of home-made bread and new milk. Fortified and invigorated, he could afford to pity all such as knew not, or heeded not, the simple life, and the simple diet. Clad in flannels and bareheaded to the genial day he ventured for a boat. The sunny hours should be spent on the river. He would be his own pilot and coxswain, and his own company too. Sculling and drifting and dreaming, he at last found himself in a dusky retreat where willows arched over the stream, and he seemed the only intruder on solitude. He moored the little skiff to an outstretched bough, and then threw himself on the bank in lazy en-

joyment of peace and a cigarette. With half-closed eyes he meditated on his great project for improving the human race and abolishing the fiend of Patent Medicine from the British Household.

Suddenly he was conscious of an intrusion. A young voice was carolling a song. He caught the words and recognised the air. It was one made familiar by the skill of piano-organs and the retentive memories of street boys. He raised himself on one elbow and stared through the green shades at an advancing figure. A girl was coming through the glade, the sunlight on her bright hair, her hat swinging on her arm, her head bare to the air of heaven, as Bertram deemed all sensible heads should be. She was quite unconscious of his presence, and he made no movement to betray it. But within a few feet of himself her eyes fell on the skiff. She paused abruptly. He saw the glance around for a possible owner. He met her glance and stood acknowledged as explanation of it. At no time a stickler for conventionalities, it did not occur to him to commence to learn that lesson now. He smiled frankly and rose to his feet.

"I hope I am not trespassing," he said. "I was warm with rowing, and this spot looked too restful to resist."

"I believe the owner does not mind," she answered. "This glade is quite a long way from the private grounds and gardens. You would have come on to the boathouse a little higher up stream."

Bertram Sallicrust felt that he had no desire to penetrate further into the mysteries of proprietorship unless this fair maid was in some way concerned in

them. He put the question guardedly. A merry laugh answered it.

"Related to Mr. Fothergill! Good gracious, no! But my father is head gardener here, and I am allowed to walk in the park or grounds on Sundays. The rest of the week I'm working myself."

"Working!" He looked at the dainty figure, the youthful face. Seventeen summers could have scarcely set their impress on its girlish beauty.

"At what do you work?" he went on abruptly. "You look as if——"

But work was one of his theories for improving and regenerating. He could scarcely say it was unbefitting; he did not know that it was—unnecessary.

Now that he was standing upright he caught sight of a rude bench made from a fallen branch. He noted, too, that she held a book in her hand. It occurred to him that she had come to this spot for rest and mental recreation, and that he was an intruder. Yet he felt inclined to linger. He scarcely knew why. Girls had possessed no interest for him as yet. They were irrational, giggling beings, addicted to floral hats, and small waists, and unhygienic garments. But this maid of the meadows wore her own sunny tresses as crown and covering, and a figure of such gracious curves and goddess-like bearing gave nature's sweet denial to any hint of "straight-fronted" or "swan-bill." He looked and looked, and forgot her embarrassment in the wonders of his new powers of appreciation.

She was first woman to his manhood as revealed by the magnetic force of a hitherto unrecognised attrac-

tion. Yet, in spite of, or perhaps because of that fact, he was awkward, speechless, disconcerted.

She came to the rescue at last—not boldly or with any pretence of forwardness. She was just merry nature ready for jest and quip, and he young enough to be held in check for her adventuring arts. So they made friends and learnt of each other, and grew almost confiding as the golden day drifted onwards. Yet the romance had no great subject to work on. She was but book-keeper at the little draper's shop in the village beyond, and he played at being no greater hero than the "Simplex" and the simple life propounded. But she found him heroic enough in contrast with previous experiences, and he deemed her the fairest and wittiest, and loveliest of her sex, revealed to him by some kindly fate of which that morning had given no warning. The talk lasted long and yet was all too short, so much remained untold and unspoken. There came a gentle hint of waning sunshine, and it emboldened him to ask if he might not row her homewards, thus sparing fatigue and prolonging delight. She hesitated, dimpled, blushed, and doubted, then gave bashful permission as far as the gardener's cottage went, but even then expressed fear of parental wrath. Her father was very strict, and kept the family in due observance of its duties. Heroism laughed such fears to scorn. Guardians and dragons go for nothing when young manhood claims its mate, and to Bertram it seemed that the whole meaning of life had only sprung into knowledge with the unfolding of this June day.

She faced him as he sent the boat down stream with slow and powerful strokes. Bare head, strong arms,

strong chest, firm muscles: she noted all. And such things were products of the simple life! of nature's cereals; of temperance and discretion. Truly, they spoke well for their exploiter and his mission.

"I should like to see your restaurant," she said suddenly, and then smiled. "I—I suppose you don't happen to want another attendant?"

Bertram paused and let the skiff drift at the river's will. Was ever temptation set in such a guise? Visions of warning and wages floated before his eyes, and conscience failed to prick with hints of injustice.

"Attendant? No. But I do want a book-keeper. I—I've had to do it myself, because I couldn't find anyone to suit. Are you—could you——?"

She laughed softly. "I could. I am not at all satisfied with my position at Tafferton's. I have given notice several times, but stayed on to oblige them. I thoroughly understand book-keeping, cash entries, and all that. The only question is the distance from town. My father would not let me stay in London. I should have to go in by train."

He assured her the service was excellent, and the hours might be adjusted for her convenience. She looked down thoughtfully, her hands linked idly in her lap.

"Oh no! You mustn't alter your system for me. Besides, that's not all——"

He begged to know what else stood in the way. She gave him frank gaze and franker speech. "I—I don't believe in vegetarianism, and I shouldn't care to have to follow out your rules of living."

It was a blow. There was no doubt of that. He

tried the old specious arguments. But she had answers. She was young, healthy, frankly hungry, and fond of wholesome, sustaining food. Chops and roast-beef were even mentioned, and he did not—faint. To look on that lovely pink and white, that full and vigorous form, gave the lie to scientific faddism. The warm rich blood flowed free and healthy; her clear eyes and dewy lips spoke of the body's virtues. And she was frankly fearless in her confession, nor would she promise trial. "I must go out every day and have my own lunch, and eat what I please. If you can't take me on these terms——"

Take her! Did he hear aright? He was too charged with emotion to speak aught but wonder at her condescension! That she should stoop to commonplace desk and service—his service—was altogether too marvellous for contemplation. At last he was conscious of a challenge from the bank, of a grating keel. She suggested landing and tea.

Tea at the cottage with her. Oh, rapture!

True there was mention of "father and mother," of a sister, a hoyden of fourteen, but such trifles scarcely made themselves evident. He gave her his hand to help her out of the boat. An arched foot in shoe of russet leather, a flutter of snowy frills, were these things of Jaeger utility, or mere fitting attributes to frivolous feminine youth? He did not ask the question. It answered for itself.

. . . . . .

Certain things in life happen easily. Others present obstacles at every turn. The simple system, however, seemed destined to vanquish all that did not appeal to

its founder. The fair Sylvia (her name was Sylvia Berry) was installed as cashier and book-keeper at the restaurant before another week had run its course, and the worthy Choke had been bidden by his chief to beat up clients at any cost. She must not be permitted to gaze at empty spaces and blank tables. Something must be done to prove the system an existent and flourishing one. Mr. Wharton B. Choke agreed that the idea had a certain soundness for its basis. But what was one to do if the blind, besotted public clung ostentatiously to its chops and steaks, its "boiled and roast," its pint of "bitter," its beloved "half-and-half?" The neat Hebes and Phyllises stood at attention. The strange "chef" attended rigorously to his duties, and yet the restaurant witnessed no hungry crowd, no waiting claimants, no eager acceptance of hygienic diet and spartan wholesomeness. Then came a day heralding a to-morrow of mighty import.

She—was to arrive, and be on duty at eleven o'clock. It seemed only polite to Bertram Sallicrust that he should await her at the station, and if employers did not usually have hansom cabs as a means of conveyance for their lady clerks, well, that only proved a lack of chivalry on their part.

"It's awfully good of you, you know," said the river maiden. "I could have found my way quite well. And I like riding on the tops of 'buses!"

She was so fair, so sparkling, so exquisite that Bertram could only fall deeper in love, could only gaze and falter foolish words, and marvel how the world had ever existed for him before she came into it. That was no ordinary drive—through a golden world and

enchanted streets. Sometimes her smiling profile set him wondering at curves of cheek and dimpled chin. Sometimes the whole sweet face turned frankly to his own.

"I wish you would tell me what made you think of doing this?" she entreated.

"Doing—what?"

"Setting up this restaurant. You don't look a bit the sort of—of——"

In confusion she hesitated for a word. He gave it.

"Crank—I suppose you mean?"

"Oh no—surely you're not *that?*"

"Every man of strong individuality, and who has the courage to maintain his own opinions, is called so," he answered sadly.

Sweet sympathy shone out of her eyes and fell from her lips. Oh, happy martyr, to be so sweetly pitied! And why was Oxford Street so near? He saw the green and white of the model restaurant, its sign, its open doorway. Yet what was this? People going in!—not merely looking at the sign, reading the bill of fare on the board, but entering!

The cab stopped. He sprang out and handed her out, and flung reckless shillings into the driver's hand.

She, all curious, was looking around. "How charming! So fresh and clean and dainty! And people at the tables already!"

He could not explain that that was unusual. He led her in, scarcely able to credit his senses. The tables were full, the waitresses busy, Mr. Choke, bustling and important, hovering between duties of master of the ceremonies and cash-taker.

"Oh, I am late!" cried the charming official. "It is all your fault, Mr. Sallicrust. You said eleven, but it's nearly twelve now!"

She hurried in. She threw aside hat and coat, and went to her desk. Bertram followed, to explain and direct and give change—an altogether new experience.

And still the people came, and the waitresses bustled, and the clatter of plates and forks went gaily on, and Bertram Sallicrust, had he not been too occupied with his self-imposed duties as assistant cashier, would have wondered what in the world had set his Simplex "booming" at last. But he had to explain the book for entries and the system of "checks." He had to indulge in the wonder of watching those busy white hands. Sometimes he touched them in accident of direction, and then the world faded into indistinct dimness and his pulses beat a new and wonderful march of triumph. Luncheon time brought yet more customers and kept the cashier's desk busy. It was very wonderful. But all the world seemed wonderful now.

"You have brought me luck," he whispered gaily, and heard her laugh to the echo of clattering plates and hurrying feet, and wondered if fate could hold aught more of blessing or delight.

Yet not all this prosperous advertisement made him oblivious of the fact that the fair goddess of his worship might also lay claim to a natural desire for sustenance on her own part.

"You must be tired. You will want your own luncheon," he whispered tenderly. "I—I remember what you said. There is a place not far off where

ladies may safely go. I will show you the way if you permit."

Dimpling saucily she asked if she was not capable of being escort to herself. "You are my employer. You must keep me in my place. We are not on the river now," she added.

For significant signs had not escaped her. The lilac-clad waitresses eyed her askance. Mr. Choke had more than once to call his employer to attention. It seemed that her duties would be more complex than his system if they needed so much individual attention. So she firmly refused his company for luncheon.

She left the desk. She put on her hat. She was half way to the door when a sudden amazing, unexpected sight arrested her attention. On one of the tables stood a plate. The neat waitress was just removing a cover. Before Sylvia's astonished eyes loomed a chop—a veritable succulent mutton-chop! She stared at it as if it were a ghost, then turned and hurried back to the desk. He was there all eagerness and wonder as to why she had returned.

"I thought this was a vegetarian place!" she exclaimed.

"So it is——"

"Then why—why—do you serve chops to customers?"

"Chops!" he faltered, and followed her glance across the room, and caught sight of Wharton B. Choke, guilty and unabashed.

"Impossible," he murmured, and yet noted that she was unpinning her hat.

"Where there's one there's sure to be more," she

said gaily. "I'll stay here to lunch, Mr. Sallicrust, and give you the benefit of the time I'll save. I suppose there is a room for the staff here?"

There was not one that day, although the fact did not preclude them from lunching together. But before another month had run its course Sylvia Berry had converted both restaurant and master, and turned the one into a flourishing business conducted on rational principles, and the other into a husband instead of a crank!

THE PROUD RELATION.

ERNESTINE sat alone by the fireside pondering gravely over the difficulties of life.

She was young and very beautiful, but of a gravity and dignity and composure of manner far beyond her years. She had often felt she was not understood by her family. Her mother she considered but a flighty matron given up to foolish excitements, fond of society and gossip, and apt to encourage male admiration on every possible occasion. Her Aunt Tabitha was more sedate, but possessed of a weird, romantic nature. She affected minor poets, and moonlight, and long, lonely ramblings. She was fond also of music, and sang plaintive ditties in a high soprano to her own accompaniments. For such things Ernestine had a supreme contempt. She had gone in for the higher education. She liked grave and elderly persons, and had strange ideas of the equality of the sexes: ideas that tended to place them on an—unequal—footing. For the young and frivolous of her own sex she had a rooted dislike. They had no ambitions beyond conquest, matrimony or amusement. She had resolved to abjure matrimony from sheer force of example. Her own mother had been married three times, and had had the temerity to tempt Fate with three separate and distinct families. Ernestine was the youngest of the third. Her aunt

had refused many excellent offers, but Ernestine suspected her of a present weakness for an elderly Adonis who paid them lengthy visits and was assiduous in offering Miss Tabitha his escort for moonlight promenades, and seemed as familiar with poetry and music as herself.

On this gloomy December afternoon Ernestine sat alone in the library looking into the fire and wondering what she should do with her life. She felt no desire to sacrifice it at the shrine of Nature, as her mother had done, or waste its energies and possibilities upon imaginative idylls, as seemed the occupation of her Aunt Tabitha. She felt she would like to be great: to achieve some noble work, to catch the eye of the world, as it were. If sex and temperament debarred her from actual heroism, yet none the less would she have been heroic if occasion demanded. As yet occasion had demanded nothing, and she felt aggrieved. She had wandered about the great lonely library, examined the books, gazed out at the bleak and dreary garden, sighed many times, and finally established herself on the rug. Perhaps she dozed, perhaps she dreamt. In any case she was never quite sure why two people should have come into that room that particular afternoon, and chosen the window seat as a place for confidence. Yet they were there; talking softly, eagerly, yet with a certain sadness in their voices at which she wondered.

There were so often people staying in the house, people of whom Ernestine strongly disapproved: wrongly assorted couples, fast girls, foolish young men, or vicious elderly ones. To which section did these two persons belong, she wondered?

It was rather a pitiful story she heard: a conflict in which duty fought with love and honour stood as foe to happiness. He was going away on the morrow, going so far that return was merely a probability of years at which the girl dared not guess, and he would not.

"Very foolish!" thought Ernestine, huddled there in her quiet corner. "As if one man was so much better than another that a girl should break her heart for him. And a married man too! So improper!"

But she did not move. She heard the voices falter and break, yet struggle for bravery. She heard the man's bitter story of a wasted life and a dishonoured home. It was for his wife's sake he was putting an end to a friendship grown dangerously sweet. The girl was a relative of his own; orphaned, poor, fortuneless. She was ostensibly governess to his children, and but for her care and love they would have been lonely indeed.

"Lonely as myself," thought Ernestine as she crept softly away and hid herself under the table. "Dear me, how very, very strange is life!"

The door opened. There was a flash of light, a sound of childish voices. Tea was brought in, and the little boy and girl rushed to their father's side clamouring that he should stay and have it with them. He agreed, and they sat round the fire, and Miss Ellison poured out the tea. She was very quiet, but the children and their father chatted and laughed and told stories to each other; fairy tales, animal stories, which they loved best: one wonderful story of a cat and its fidelity.

"By the way, where's the 'proud relation'?" asked

Sir Anthony at last. "I saw Lady Muriel in the shrubbery, and Miss Tabitha in the greenhouse, but——"

"Oh, there she is!" cried little Winnie as Ernestine marched in stately grace across the room, intent on cream instead of social problems.

They gave her cream, and made much of her, but Ernestine was not of a demonstrative nature, and merely accepted favours as a tribute to her own deserts. Was she not beautiful, ambitious, and of noblest Persian ancestry?

Suddenly into the midst of the gaiety and homeliness swept an imposing and aggressive personality: no other than the Lady Hardcastle, Sir Anthony's wife. She was in one of her most unamiable moods. She found fault with everything. She scolded the frightened children, insulted Mary Ellison, contradicted everything her husband said, and at last kicked Ernestine viciously from her saucer and her hearthrug.

The proud spirit of an outraged ancestry rose at the affront. Ernestine recovered her balance, growled ominously, arched her back, and with flaming eyes sprang at her insulter. Her fierce claws tore the lace and chiffon of the flimsy teagown, and pierced the delicate skin beneath. The woman screamed, sprang to her feet, and in doing so overturned the tea-table. She lost her own balance with its fall, and in an instant was lying prostrate on the rug. Her airy laces swept over the bars; in a second she was wrapped in flames. Sir Anthony's hoarse cry, the children's screams, the sudden terrified confusion were too much for Ernestine's nerves. She fled from the scene and took refuge in the garden, proudly conscious of well-deserved vengeance, but not

quite certain as to actual heroism. Presently she met her mother, and they discussed the accident and wondered what had been the result. Was Lady Hardcastle much injured? Had they managed to extinguish the flames?

One thing was certain, the Hall was in wild confusion. A groom dashed off for medical assistance. Startled guests gathered for the evening meal with neither host nor hostess to receive them. In one room, looking out on the garden, lights burned the whole night through. Ernestine crept cautiously up the great staircase and paused at that door, from whence came long, plaintive moans. Sometimes a sweet voice answered patiently and soothingly in that strange return of good for evil Ernestine had noted as a trait in humanity; in her own heart she secretly despised it. Wandering yet higher to nursery regions, she found herself in anxious and protecting arms. She heard whispers that foretold her doom.

"Mother says they are to kill you," lamented tiny Winnie, holding her close to her troubled little heart. "But I won't let them, Ernestine, no more will papa. We shall hide you till it's forgotten. Only you mustn't mind being all by yourself in an attic; and Tony and I will bring you food, and then you'll be quite safe."

The "proud relation" shuddered. What ignominy! What martyrdom was to be her portion, and all because she had really helped to advance human interests and achieve human happiness. Really life was very unfair, even to lovely Persians with advanced views and long pedigrees. However, she suffered herself to be concealed, and spent many thoughtful hours in that upper

attic contemplating a mouse-hole. One day she found contemplation her only resource. She was entirely forgotten. No one came near her. No food or milk was brought. She was cold and hungry and miserable. She resolved to face risks and get downstairs to her old quarters. With great trouble she managed to get the door open and crept softly downstairs. She met no one. Rooms and landings were alike deserted. She passed one dreaded door. Never in her life had she ventured within. It was open to-day, and yet no sign or stir of life came from out of its quiet dimness.

And it appeared to Ernestine that all the house shared that dimness. It was strangely dark, strangely silent. She pursued her researches, keeping well out of sight if a servant appeared. But even the servants seemed to share in the general gloom and silence to-day. At last in the snug shelter of the greenhouse she came upon her Aunt Tabitha. From her she learnt of strange doings: of an army of black carriages, wreaths of flowers, the departure of the awed and black-clad children. Like an illuminating flash the meaning of such things came to Ernestine. The hated and hateful mistress of the Hall had been taken away from it never to return. Sir Anthony was freed from the curse and bondage of that dishonouring union. Miss Ellison might yet be happy. "Proud relation" and "poor relation" had mutual grounds for gratitude, though probably such gratitude would never be expressed.

Ernestine drew herself up with conscious pride. After all, even if life was unsatisfactory, and few opportunities of heroism ever offered themselves to the feminine sex, nothing could deprive her of the proud

consciousness that she had helped two unhappy and deserving human beings to happiness in the future.

"People may talk of accidents and fatalities as they please," thought Ernestine, surveying the disordered and dismantled library with conscious pride. "I know I have not lived in vain."

A MADMAN'S MANUSCRIPT.

First Day.

March 6th, 1883.

They gave me pens and paper when I asked. Perhaps they thought I was about to write a confession. A confession, when I am sworn to secrecy. When I had promised—him. But of that no one knows. Only I . . . And he who has sworn to save me.

Yesterday I was brought into the Court for the first time. As I stood in the dock I looked around. Below me were bewigged barristers and reporters of newspapers. Facing me was a raised platform on which the desks and chairs of Judge and Sheriffs stood against a crimson background. The sword of state hung above the chair claimed by Civic dignity. I at first supposed my Judge would sit there. But he took the one to the right of it. Other people came in; curious faces, the faces of men and women, stared at me. The grey sky was not more chill or dreary than those indifferent eyes. My counsel sat below in the well of the Court; the solicitors and clerks also. I looked at them as one in a dream. Of course it *was* a dream. Had I not seen it all a hundred times? And always *he* awoke me, touched my arm, whispered in my ear, "You are safe."

He had not come into this Court—not yet. As I waited there came a sound of three heavy knocks. Everyone rose; I also. A shambling figure, red-robed, wigged, with hands clasped behind, entered: passed along the narrow platform, took the chair beside the hanging sword of Justice.

We were directly opposite one another. Our eyes met in a deadly challenge. In his power lay a human life—*mine.* For those twelve fools beyond I cared not a whit. They would be as sheep following a leader. They would obey what the Law bade them obey.

Had I not seen it all, heard it all before?

My warders touched me. I had forgotten to seat myself. Now I did so. Papers and pencil were on the ledge beside me. I could write, make notes of the evidence, communicate with my counsel as I pleased. But I was only looking for him . . . my friend. The man who had promised to save me. I could not see him anywhere among that crowd of faces. The dingy Court house looked grey and very dreary. Through windows grimed with dust and fog I looked to where blue sky should be. Something caught my eye. A grim scaffolding and swaying slowly and unsteadily in lazy transit a basket filled with bricks, dust, *débris.* They were pulling down an old building opposite the prison and all day long that basket passed to and fro, to and fro, swinging like a pendulum with a dreary monotony that was only less nerve-trying than a voice below me. The voice of the prosecuting counsel. He was opening the case for the Crown. How smoothly and glibly he laid out his facts. How neatly he pieced each little bit of the criminal puzzle into place. Once

he looked at me. His cold grey eyes flashed with well simulated indignation. He held me up to public scorn. Scathing denunciation spoke out "Criminal!" Such was justice. Such was Law. I myself only felt indifferent. For I was safe. It had been promised and *he* never broke word or bond with living man.

. . . . .

The Court rose. My warders hurried me away. Though life and death and a human soul hung in the balance, men must eat and drink.

They gave me food. I took it. The two men sat apart. They did not address me. One was a surly brute. I hated him instinctively. I should love to have struck him with my handcuffs. I pictured the crashing blow on that blunt skull of his. The blood, the bruise . . . the fall of the body. It gave me a singular pleasure as I sat over my meal and watched him at his own.

We returned to the Court. The same crowd, the same wigs, the same foolish ceremony of entrance.

Fresh witnesses came on. I was still indifferent. They were trying to prove me someone else. Well, I *had* been that man. But we had parted company years ago . . . years ago. My present identity was no longer his. What had I to do with that miserable, half-starved alien who had been the victim of persecution and left his own kin and country, hating both with a murderer's hate. Yes, I had known him, that cowed, starved, shrinking wretch. But it was long ago. Long ago. Too long for these people to have any evidence of our acquaintanceship. Why did that man with the cold grey eyes persist in dwelling upon such a trifle?

And that string of people he called up! I knew none, but they all swore they knew me, or rather that other man to whom I had said farewell on the great ship bound for America nearly twenty years ago. Paul Potowski was his name. Yet they looked at me and said I was he. I—Paul Harvey, living here in England, a peaceful naturalised citizen of a great Empire.

I cannot keep my attention fixed on the people, or on what they say. I am more interested in the faces I see around me. Men's faces and women's. For women sit here, keenly interested in what is to them only "a case." Not one, I feel sure, ever stops to consider the human soul behind it. The soul that is mine and mine only, and stands with me to-day in this strange place and bids me be strong and of good courage since I shall soon be free.

The hours drag on. It is growing dark. The sky is darker now. The basket has ceased its monotonous transit. I am very tired. And still he has not come. There has been no friendly face, no glance of encouragement. No echo to that "not guilty" of mine that rolled through the waiting silence so many hours ago.

The Court rises. It is over for to-day.

. . . . .

They took me to the prison van. Handcuffed and guarded I sat there, and we rolled through the busy streets catching a glimpse of the life and light without through the narrow grating of the door.

"It's going badly for you," said one of my warders. I looked at him. At his stupid red face, his neat uniform, his air of importance. I should like to have called him the fool I thought him. But I refrained. After all

it does not matter. To-morrow it will all be made clear. To-morrow the Prince will be there. He will tell the story. He will keep his word. I shall be set free.

. . . . .

SECOND DAY.

I slept well and peacefully last night. My coolness and indifference surprised my gaolers. This morning we drove through sunshine and brightness to the dreary Court again. The van stopped a moment at the gateway before it could back into the narrow yard. As we thus stood I heard a curious sound. The low, fierce hissing of human voices. I started. What had I done that they should greet me thus? That they should hate me so? A cold sweat broke out on my face. My fettered hands grew chill and trembled. I looked at the warders. They were impassive as blocks of wood. "What does it mean?" I asked.

"Well, you ain't exactly popular, you know," said one. "They think you guilty."

"I am innocent," I told him firmly. "To-day will prove it."

"Better give it up," said the other. "Plead insanity if you like. But innocence won't go down this time o' day."

The same scene. The same Court. The same faces. Only I think there were more women to-day. And there was a more concentrated air about the spectators. A deeper curiosity in the eyes that swept my face. They seemed to pierce the quiet mask of composure I had slipped on with my entrance.

The Judge gave me the same cold penetrating glance.

How I hated him! And yet I told myself my turn would come. I should triumph yet. Another string of witnesses. And still, search as I might the crowded Court, that one face that meant salvation evaded me. Prince Casper was not there. While they talked I wrote and passed what I wrote to my counsel, or rather to his clerk, who stood below the dock. Slim and sleek, with dangling eyeglass and a flower in his coat. Some girl's gift perhaps. . . . I remembered with a sudden pang how *she* had loved flowers. She—who was dead. She—whom they said I had murdered.

I looked up to the blue sky. I saw the gold glad light beyond those foul walls. I watched that dreary scaffolding and the passage of that basket to and fro. And while I watched and while I gazed they lied my life away.

The dusk crept on apace. The lights within the Court were lit. A foglike mist hung between me and those faces of my accusers. The second day closed. Again the Court adjourned. Again my friend was absent.

. . . . .

I have written to him to-night. They promise the letter shall be sent. They say the case looks very black against me. But I feel no fear—yet. Surely to-morrow Prince Casper will be there. One word from him and the truth will be known.

. . . . .

THIRD DAY.

Rain and chill and gloom. I shiver as I pass from the prison van into the cold stone passage of the Court house. To-day the waiting is irksome. When I stumble

up the narrow stairs leading to the dock I am conscious of dizziness, weakness, pain. My temples throb. Before my eyes a mist seems to gather. A sound of rushing waters is in my ears.

I seat myself. Gradually I grow calmer. Again my eyes sweep the crowd of faces. How many there are to-day! How many—yet not that one. . . . The rain beats against the windows. Swift dark clouds hurry across the grim sky, I find myself watching them, wondering *where* they are going—why in such haste.

Then a strange fancy comes to me. My hands are free. One of my warders seems half asleep. A spring would land me on the edge of the dock. Another—and I would be at the window. Another—and I should reach that basket in its transit and swing with it across the intervening space. Drop onto the building beyond! Then, flight and liberty would be mine! Mechanically I do it all. I see the astonished faces. The sudden paralysed inaction. I hear the smash of glass. I hurl myself across and catch that swinging chain in its passage! Oh, glory of free limbs, free sight, free movement once again! No bird on wing so swift as my light feet. No rush of air so rapid as my frenzied bounds. None can stop or stay me now. I am free! I am safe!

What stays me? What name breaks across my frenzied fancies—holds me as no chain could hold? They call it through the crowded Court. It peals down and ever down the row of patient waiters. I hear it and I know I am safe at last. Surely, surely safe!

He is here.

. . . . .

"Prince Casper Zaradoff. You know the prisoner at the bar?"

"I do."

How all eyes turned to him. How the women gazed. He was so handsome. He looked so splendid amidst that dreary squalid Court, that monotony of black gown and white horsehair. No wonder he arrested all attention. My eager eyes flew to his face. My whole frame trembled. He was here, witnessing for me. He would keep his word. I should be saved!

Yet why did that strange chill creep through my veins, turning my blood to ice, freezing the very beatings of my heart? Why did my eyes turn swiftly from that averted face to the calm, triumphant one of the Prosecuting Counsel?

Alas! for hope denied, for broken promises, for sworn friendship!

It was not for me that that witness was testifying, but *against* me!

When I grew calm once more, question and answer were still proceeding. I clasped my hands together and averted my eyes. For when I looked at that calm, cold face I saw it only through a blood-red mist. And all the Court seemed full of crimson waters, rising slowly, slowly upwards, bearing all those forms and figures on its breast as a sea bears its freight. And over all a strange, weird silence, a sky of ashen grey, and one voice . . . only one.

The voice of my tempter. The voice of the friend who had lured me to destruction. All ears hung on his words, on the modulations of that beautiful voice. Will they ever ask *how* he came to know so much? Why

he chose for friend and companion one so far beneath his own rank and position? Do they know the true history of the little house in the lonely wood? The house where she died . . . poisoned, so they say, by my hand.

Four o'clock. The daylight is waning. They have kept him a long time. Well—there was plenty to hear and to tell. He never once looks in my direction. Never once meets my eyes. But the calm, steady voice goes on. Proof follows proof. Strange things are handed up and identified and passed round from curious hand to curious hand. I snatch a slip of paper and write a few swift words and hand it down to my counsel.

"It is a lie . . . tell him so!"

He reads, and looks up, and shakes his head. Some foolish rule of etiquette forbids his interference.

Etiquette—and a human life swaying in the balance! I could laugh aloud. I think I do, for suddenly a warder lays admonishing hands upon me and sternly commands "silence." I cower down and hide my face. There is a stir and rustle all about me. The voices have ceased to question and to answer.

No more witnesses are to be called.

My counsel rises and begins his speech.

It is clever, it is brilliant, but never for one single moment convincing! Even I who cling to hope as drowning man to plank—even I feel *that.* The jury fidget, the barristers rustle their papers. There is a flutter of faces where those well-dressed ladies sit, for the heat of the Court is stifling. And my counsel stumbles and falters and goes over weak points of evidence that no power of his can strengthen. He bids the

jury weigh well the medical evidence and be quite sure in their own minds who administered the poison; to remember that none was absolutely found in my possession. He says other futile, foolish things at which even I could laugh. What wonder that those twelve weary men yawn and fidget, and that the eyes of the Judge go to the clock with a reminder of an approaching dinner-time. Dinner—and a human life in the balance! Who can possibly doubt which is the most important?

. . . . .

They say I must have been mad to do it. But I did it!

I rose suddenly from my seat and faced them all. The Judge; the Court; the Jury. I alone. One man holding his life in his hand and claiming only a hearing.

"Listen!" I cried, and as if spell-bound they turned and gazed, nor moved nor tried to stop me as the torrent of my words poured forth.

"For three days," I said, "I have sat here and listened patiently to what you call evidence. On my behalf no one has been called. In my defence nothing has been said. One man could have saved me. One man knows that he holds my life in his hand. And he stood there before you all and *lied.* It is now only a question of moments ere my sentence is pronounced. I claim those moments. I say that as each of you here to-day must at one time face the great question of Death, even as I face it now, so may God deal with you as you deal with me when you press on Him the claims for pardon and self-justification of your sins! I am innocent of the crime for which I have been tried.

That is to say innocent of *intent,* of knowledge. The woman, Vashti Levison, was no wife or mistress of mine though she lived under my roof, and went by my name. Think you that men in high places live all their lives before the world that knows them? That your great dignitaries, lords and law-givers, peers and prelates are less men, lustful, sinning, erring men, than we you call the lower class. As Heaven is above your heads and you hope for Mercy, it is well that that lower class cannot or dare not rise and make common cause against you! Hurl you from power and place and honour, and show you to the world at large as the vile, debauched, and brutal things it knows you to be!

"That man to whom accident of birth has given a title—(desecrated and fouled by every act of his private life)—that man to whom you listened, on whose words you hung, is a professed atheist. One believing in no future and in no retribution. For years he made of my weak will and adoring worship the basest uses. Yet so secret, so clever is he that never whisper has defamed, nor scandal touched him. He called me friend, but I was lackey, servant, pander, all in one. And yet I believed in him. Could the grave give up its secrets there are a score and more of victims to cry out on the name of Casper Zaradoff. In his own land and in many others. And last of all those persecuted sufferers comes the beautiful Jewish girl for whose death I have stood my trial.

"Men and women standing here around, whose eyes are on me now, remember what I say in this most awful moment! I cannot prove my innocence yet none the less I am not guilty. Vashti Levison was the victim of

Prince Casper Zaradoff. To hide his purpose she lived in my house. Have I not said I was his friend? All he had was sacred to me, and he, for recompense, has sworn away my life! I could tell stories of his crimes, his fascinations, his perverse, terrible nature that would sound like madmen's stories in your stolid English ears! Sometimes I think he is mad, and sometimes I think he has made me mad also. For I have dallied with crime and thoughts of crime, and spent long days and nights under his tuition, and still I believed him and, most of all, I believed in his power and his promise to save me in this one instance. It is true I bought that poison. But I bought it at his bidding, and for a very different purpose. It is true I nursed and attended this poor girl and gave her drink and food and medicine, but he was there also. Who should say one tampered with those things more than the other? If poison was administered it was not by my hand. If that girl, Vashti Levison, died by other than natural causes, mine is not the fault! If at this Bar I stand arraigned on a charge of murder—I . . ."

. . . . .

Like a thread snapped by a finger twist my speech suddenly broke. The mist seemed closing around. The blood-red waters below were warm and wet. Darkness swooped down. I was no longer standing a prisoner pleading for life. I was in my cell once more, though of how I got there I had no memory. It was night. A dim light burned, outlining my gaoler's watchful face and strong form. I could see everything distinctly. The shelf that held my simple toilet necessaries. The Bible awaiting my perusal. The stool on which I sat

while in the cell. I lay quite still gazing through half-closed eyes at them all and then my glance fell on the warder's face. Stone-cold I grew, bound in chains of icy fear. *Whose* face—was this? So pale, with eyes so glassy bright, the drooping moustache just touching the vivid crimson lips. Whose, but Casper's? False friend, devil, demon, what-not, there he sat in the lonely midnight hour, and there I lay passive, helpless, as I had lain a thousand times beneath the spell he chose to exercise!

He wore the warder's uniform, he might have been the man himself to all appearance, to any eye that watched the grating in the door. But I could not be denied. I knew him. I knew those eyes. Had not Hell's own fire lighted them? Had he not told me of a compact with the Prince of Darkness? And now he had come to mock me in my helplessness. For as I lay silent and terror-struck he spoke.

"So you thought to save your life at cost of mine," he said. "Life—why, the lightest feather blown by winds of chance is no lighter than are human lives to me. I use them for my needs. When I cease to need—I cease to value. The secret power that pulses in my brain makes slaves of every human thing I choose. *You*—Paul—were my most faithful and most trusted. Why did you break your word at last? Why did you denounce me to-day? But for that I should have saved your life. Now it is forfeit to your broken vow. Ah, your face pales! You are a coward, Paul. I always feared it. You obeyed too easily. You trusted too carelessly. But that I neither love nor hate the miserable human fools amidst whom I dwell, I should hate

you, Paul, for what you have done to-day. Why, you actually moved the blind stone god of justice to a momentary sympathy. A momentary belief in you! But I had a last card to play, Paul. You fell down in a sort of fit. The doctors pronounced you insane. Yet none the less you are condemned. Death is your sentence. To be hung by the neck, friend Paul, till you are dead. Your body to be buried in the prison grounds—unhonoured,—unnamed. And you loved your life, Paul, did you not? You loved feasting and merriment and pleasure and such good things as came your way. I gave you most of them. It was part of our bargain, was it not? Well, my master is yours, and he is generous, is he not? But in the end the debt has to be paid. You are to pay yours, Paul. I resolved on that. You will die a felon's death. You will lie in a felon's grave. I could have saved you, but you foolishly broke your promise. How I laughed when you sprang up and burst into that defiant speech. Yet by sheer force of will, I kept that startled crowd silent and passive! Better than any stage drama, Paul, to see Judge, jury, audience gaping, gazing, listening while a condemned man arraigned justice and defied his accusers? They will never forget it, Paul, never. But it was all no use—*you are to die.*"

I found voice then. I shouted, I cursed, I raged in very frenzy. I threw myself on my tormentor, but my handcuffed hands were helpless. The cell door flew open. Others poured in. My strength was as nothing. They tore me from the prostrate figure I had thrown to the ground. I gazed at it wonderingly . . . incredulous of the sudden transformation. For it was the warder

after all. Not the Prince, my tempter. Then I grew calm. I made no resistance any longer.

Of what use . . . Dear God! of what use?

. . . . .

NOTE.—The above was written by the condemned man after he had been found guilty of the wilful murder of a Jewish girl named Vashti Levison with whom he had been living as man and wife. The sentence of the law was commuted afterwards to imprisonment for life in an asylum for criminal lunatics. There he wrote this confession.

A WIDOW BY PERMISSION.

"I DO hate self-centred people!" exclaimed Vixen, tapping an impatient foot on the carpet of the breakfast-room.

A voice from behind the screening sheets of a scientific journal murmured languidly, "Meaning whom, dearest?"

"Oh, don't call me *dearest!* Those days are over. You don't care, you don't interest yourself, you don't even *listen* when I'm speaking. That's the worst of all. That's what I mean by self-centred. Your mind is a hundred miles away. Your eyes, your thoughts, your very voice, are absent. When I tell you anything you seem to listen, certainly, but you don't take it in. And you've no sympathy, no feeling for what I like, or wish, or *want* to do. That's the worst crime of all. If——"

"Good heavens, Vixie!" The paper went down to the table level, and a bewildered, good-humoured face looked across at the flushed, angry, but extremely pretty little piece of petulance, opposite.

"Don't call me that ridiculous name. You know I hate it! Whatever were my parents about to have me christened Victoria as first offence, and then nickname me Vixen for short! Really I consider I'm a very badly-used person!"

"You can't hold me responsible for your name, at

all events. That was safely yours before I had the honour——"

"There you go again! Honour! Such rubbish! Much honour you think it to call me your wife. I don't believe you know whether I'm in the house or out of it."

"I certainly know when you're—out of it."

"Oh, I suppose that's meant to be sarcastic! Well, this time I mean to go out of it for a long time, let me tell you. A month. A whole month! You say you positively won't go to Croxford for Christmas?"

"My dear child, I cannot go to Croxford. My work——"

"The same old excuse. As if a few days would matter?"

"You spoke of a month?"

"Oh, that was my limit. Gertrude wants me to stay on."

"Then it wouldn't be worth my while to go just for Christmas. Besides, I think Croxford is the most deadly dull place in the whole of England. No hunting, no shooting. And at Christmas, of all times, it would be rather worse than usual."

"You didn't think so—once."

"Is one never permitted to change an opinion?"

She rose abruptly, and gathered up some letters. "Very well, I won't ask you again. But *I'm* going, and I mean to enjoy myself. I only wish I was free, a girl again, as when last I saw it. I only wish——"

She stopped abruptly. Something in the quiet eyes watching her so quietly, arrested the speech she had intended to make.

"I think I know what you wish," he said slowly, his voice low and even with repressed pain, for this stormy, passionate, lovely little creature was at once unending torment and unending joy to Paul Eddison, little as he understood her, or that sex of which she had once meant, "the chief corner stone."

Mechanically he began to fold the pages she so hated; their rustle exasperated her already unstrung nerves.

"If you know," she went on, "you had better say it. I hate insinuations."

"I think," he said deliberately, "that you wish you were free; your own mistress, the sole director of your life and its foolish whims. I think you are tired of me, Vix—I beg your pardon—Vi. We don't get on together as well as we expected. We are one more of the unhappy, ill-matched couples who have made marriage a by-word. I am sorry. I am very, very sorry; for you, Vi—for you."

He rose slowly. He did most things slowly, and she was quicksilver in temperament, speech, movement. She flashed out now, stung by a rebuke she merited, irritated by a patience that all provocations and tyrannies could not break down.

"You may well be sorry for me! Everyone is. I mean——"

Something in his look warned her.

"Everyone? Do you mean our unhappiness, our disagreements, are common talk already?"

She laughed mockingly. "The world has as many eyes as the feathers of a peacock's tail! And I'm always alone. You're wrapped up in scientific things,

and clubs, and societies. Naturally things are said. I'm often asked if I'm a widow."

"That was what you meant a moment ago when you said you wished——"

Her better nature asserted itself at the little break in his voice.

"No, Paul, no! Indeed, indeed it wasn't. I'm not so heartless as that. I . . . I . . . only——"

He raised his hand. "Freedom can only come in one way. Perhaps it's unfortunate that I possess good health and a good constitution."

Then the little spark of devilry in her nature sprang up again. "Oh no, my dear Paul. There are two ways. The other's not creditable, I grant, but it's the way that such husbands as you drive such women as——"

She paused tantalisingly, knowing well enough that he would supply the word she omitted, the word that was as untruthful an interpretation of her real self and her real meaning as any she could have desired.

If he thought it, he did not speak it. Perhaps it would have hurt him too much.

She loved few things less than silence, especially when its cause was embarrassing. "For the last time," she exclaimed pettishly, "will you come with me to Croxford?"

"I have told you I cannot!"

"Oh, stupid excuses. When a man chooses he can do anything. However, I'll not ask you again. I'll go myself, and if I go alone I warn you I'll play 'grass widow' for all it's worth. Have I your majesty's permission?"

The colour ebbed slowly from his face as he looked at the mocking eyes and watched the curves of the pretty lips, rosy and mischievous as a child's.

"You must do as you please, Vi," he said.

"Exactly what I mean to do. I'm sick of being tied down to domestic details. My life here is no better than that of a beetle or—or—a dormouse! And I'm young. You seem to forget that ten years of difference! But by the time I catch them up life will be comparatively over. A woman's day is a short one—at best. If she tries to lengthen it by art, nature is still a bogy that haunts her nights, and grins at her from her looking-glass, and laughs in the eyes of other women behind her back! Oh, I know what I have to expect and I'm determined to make the most of the present."

It never occurred to her that she might also have tried to make the best of the man who loved her so devotedly, whom she so bewildered, and tried, and perplexed; whom she had loved equally once. Had? She put it in the past to satisfy self-accusation; shut it away in a cupboard of her varying moods, and locked the door and pretended the key was only mislaid—of a purpose.

Truly Vi Eddison was a troublesome person to deal with: variable of mood, sharp of tongue, quick of temper, yet withal lovable as very woman when she chose to be so.

When the door closed she stood for a moment quite still; her eyes expectant, as if she feared or hoped it would reopen. But the moments passed and the handle was unturned.

She sighed. "Another quarrel," she said. "I wonder

how many that makes? I have given up counting. After the first I thought I should break my heart. After the second I wanted to break his. Now—I don't even care."

Yet her ear was keen for the sound of a closing door beyond; the study door, behind which lurked her rivals, those occupations and researches for which alone her husband seemed to live. It mattered little to her in these angry, unreasonable moods, that his work required full strength of brain and mind; that Fame was already stretching out its laurel wreath of promise; that the luxuries and dainties and comforts of her daily existence were bought by the very toil she affected to despise. She had loved him, admired him, married him in defiance of opinions and prophecies from relatives and friends. And after two years she had begun to ask if they had not been wiser than herself, if disparity of age and tastes and temperament was not a greater barrier to love than even poverty.

She roused herself at the sound of the closing door, and the colour swept hotly back to a face that had been pale and expectant.

"I will go and pack my frocks," she said to herself, "and I'll leave by the twelve train instead of the two, and I won't be here to lunch, and I won't say good-bye, and——" She paused and looked round the room, small and compact and pretty enough for a London flat, but lacking all the space and eloquence of meaning of that old home she had recklessly flung aside, and all the artistic beauty and elegance of that other home to which she was bound: the home of Lady Vanrennen, her school chum and dearest friend. *She* had not

married unwisely. She had not received condolence instead of congratulation. "Do well unto thyself and men will praise thee" had been Gertrude Vanrennen's motto, and very well it seemed to have answered.

Vixen sighed as she looked from one to another of the familiar objects around her. Then, as if that sound of regret was a new call to defiance, she set her pretty lips firmly and left the room to carry out her resolution.

. . . . .

It surprised Paul Eddison to find a note by his plate when he came in to luncheon, and to see the table laid only for one. Some instinct prompted him to read the note before remarking on the setting of the table. Then he smiled and helped himself to what the parlour-maid handed. He was not aware of what he ate or drank, and the moment the girl's back was turned, brought out a book from the pocket of his shabby coat and propping it against a cruet became absorbed in its contents. These were the habits that had made Vi so irate, and led to many quarrels and differences. He thought now how delightful it was to be able to do exactly as one liked, and what a pity it also was that women could only see in marriage the sacrifices *they* made, and none of those exacted from the unfortunate beings who had chosen to lay liberty of thought and action at their fickle feet.

But when he was once more alone he took out that little note and read it again. This time he did not smile. Perhaps he detected a certain something lurking beneath the recklessness of the words, a something that, breathing and speaking Vi, and Vi's wilfulness, yet carried reproach to himself.

"I will take you at your word" (she wrote). "I shall *behave* as a widow, and pretend I *am* a widow, and play the game for my own amusement and all it's worth. Don't write to me while I am at Croxford, and don't expect me to write to you. VIXEN."

He sighed. "Ah, well, it's only one of her whims. She can't come to grief. And in a fortnight my discovery will be perfected, and *if* it's perfected I shall make a fortune, and then—well, then my little Lady Wilful shall have all she wants, all that money can buy. Perhaps she'll forgive me then, and perhaps we'll get on better. She's had a good deal to put up with, poor child. A good deal—perhaps I haven't made excuses."

. . . . .

The days drifted by: full, occupied, scarcely even long enough for Paul Eddison's work. Christmas was to him as any other day. He took his meals when he was summoned to them, unless he happened to be engaged on some technical point of his all-important work. Of hours, times, seasons he seemed perfectly unaware, and to postal intelligence perfectly indifferent. However, one morning he found a letter beside his plate bearing the Croxford postmark. He opened it and glanced at the signature. An involuntary exclamation escaped him. Between gulps of coffee he read as follows:—

"DEAR OLD PAUL,—You'll be surprised to hear I'm back in England after all these years, and staying here with the Vanrennens. You may remember that Gertrude is a sort of relative of mine. We were almost like brother

and sister. I find she has made a splendid marriage during my absence.

"She asked me here for Christmas, and now I am congratulating myself that I came. There's a very jolly party, and we manage to have an uncommonly good time of it. But first and foremost of all the women is a little widow, Mrs. Eddison (she tells me that she was married to a cousin of yours), the most fascinating, bewitching little creature I've ever set eyes on. Indeed, between ourselves, old boy, I'm hard hit in that quarter, and so are a good many others. She acts, sings, dances and dresses divinely. Indeed there seems to be nothing she can't do. A hard frost has set in and they've flooded the meadows round here, and we're hoping for some skating. Pity you can't come down, dear old fellow, but the lovely widow tells me you're absorbed in work and never go anywhere. Isn't that a pity? Life's short, you know, and there are only a few good years in it to make the best of. But there, it needs a woman to teach us *that*——"

The letter dropped from Paul's relaxed grasp. His face grew suddenly stern. "So this is what she meant! This is why she won't write! How dared she do it? How could Lady Vanrennen permit——?"

He took up the letter again and reread it. The frown deepened on his brow. "A joke may be carried too far," he said. "After all, she is my wife. She has no right to forget that!"

He lashed himself into fierce anger with all a man's indignation against the woman who offends his own *amour propre*. He remembered her provocations, her

restlessness, her discontent, but he resolutely ignored any cause for such offences. That men must work and women—wait upon their moods, their passions, their interests—was a proverb he believed in. And if the waiting sometimes turned to weeping, and sometimes to anger, and sometimes to desperation, *that* surely was no fault of man, but only of the irrational, incomprehensible creature he had chosen as his own special helpmate—or hindrance.

"But to do *this!*" he repeated, lashing himself into a fresh rage of desperation, "to play at being a widow and take in such a good, honest fellow as Geoffrey. It's a damned shame!"

His hand struck the table and set the china jingling. The noise recalled him in some measure to the possible exigencies of the occasion. What was he going to do? Explain to Geoffrey Druce, or write to Vixen, and bid her put an immediate end to the mistake?

But would she?

Full well he knew how wilful she could be, how elusive, how difficult to deal with. And if he explained the position to his old friend, would it not place him in a rather ridiculous light? No. Vi must do it. She had evolved the situation in the first instance, and to her belonged the right of justifying her reasons. Naturally she would not like to do it. But it was quite time she learnt that such tricks could not be played with impunity.

She was no longer a child. She was twenty-four years of age, old enough in all conscience for a woman to be reasonable and—respectable.

That word came out suddenly, and it struck him

as being somewhat inappropriate to apply to Vixen. She certainly was the very antithesis of that sober middle-class distinguishing adjective.

But he would write to her. Yes—certainly he would write to her and tell her his opinion of her conduct, and say also that unless she at once explained and told Geoffrey the truth, he would come down to Croxford and put an end to this foolish masquerade.

The letter was not an easy one to compose. It took so long that much of the morning was wasted; so long that it seemed only a duty to postpone the reply to Geoffrey; so long that, when at last it was directed and sealed, and he was free to devote himself to the last and most interesting process in his new discovery, he had quite forgotten that letters do not usually carry themselves to the post without human assistance.

It lay amongst a heap of papers on his study table, while he betook himself to the experimental one in the window. After two days he expected an answer. After three he told himself Vi must have taken his advice. By the end of the week he was quite sure she had done so. And, meanwhile, every day, every hour was precious with all that his invention meant for him, for Vi, for the future, and for the world it would benefit. He lived for nothing else for the time being; and no letters came from Croxford.

. . . . .

The fortnight was over, and Gertrude Vanrennen and her friend were holding an eager though somewhat anxious colloquy on the subject of the latter's escapade.

"You think he is *really* serious, really means to——?" asked Vixen.

"I'm sure of it. He is madly in love with you. I think it's a pity you encouraged him so much. What will you say if he—proposes?"

A swift change from gaiety to gravity swept over Vixen's face.

"Oh, he mustn't go so far as *that,*" she said. "I've staved it off till now. Surely I can manage it a little longer."

"The marvel is that the truth hasn't leaked out yet," said Gertrude calmly. "Of course my husband was all right, he wouldn't give you away. But one of the others might at any moment."

"Oh, I believe in my own luck!" said Vixen lightly. "And really, as Paul never appears on the scene, people may be excused for forgetting that I possess a husband."

"But, as to you, I really fail to see what good you've done by this freak."

"I've enjoyed myself thoroughly. I wanted to feel as if I were free, and I have kept up the illusion wonderfully well. People should always do what they *want* to do. It's bad for them to forego their instincts!"

Gertrude laughed. "You were always a wilful imp. I can't imagine what made you marry a plodding, clever man like Paul. He was the most unsuitable of all your lovers."

"He loved me—the best," said Vixen. There was a little thrill of triumph in her voice, and she looked at her friend's beautiful, calm face as if daring her to deny the fact.

"And yet—you wanted to play at freedom. You have treated his love and himself as two non-existent

actors in your life. You have flirted outrageously with another man. You——"

"Oh, please, please stop!" entreated Vixen. "Why this sudden change of tactics, may I ask? Why this pity for my poor, wronged husband, who, I may as well state, is not wronged—really; who, if you could only see him, is probably at this moment immersed in jars, or retorts, or abominable odours, making what he calls the discovery of the age. When I go back——"

She stopped abruptly. How distinctly she saw the little room, its simple appointments, the tall figure, with that slight stoop, and the shabby coat. Had he missed her at all? Had he been looked after? Had anyone reminded him of waiting meals, of cooling tea, of any of the common yet necessary needs of humanity, even scientific humanity?

Two weeks. It was not a very long time, but they had never been parted so long before. And she had not wished him good-bye this time, not looked back for that faithful, doglike glance which had always speeded her goings hitherto. What kind eyes he had, this tiresome, patient Paul, and how wistful and perplexed the look she could bring into them when specially tormenting. Poor old Paul! . . . Perhaps she was a little trying to him sometimes. But then she was young and full of life and the joy of living, and he was so much older, and graver, and so preoccupied. Was it any wonder she had grown tired, impatient, restless; any wonder that, as she looked back now, she saw emerging slowly from the shadows the first tragic hint of that oft-played drama, "Divided Lives?"

"How quiet you are all of a sudden!" exclaimed

Gertrude. "What were you thinking about? What you will say to Geoffrey Druce to-night? I'm almost sure he means to ask. He's so rich. . . . What a pity . . ." she murmured irrelevantly. "If he had only appeared on the scene two years ago."

"That would have made no difference," exclaimed Vixen. "I had made up my mind then."

"And now repent it?"

"I'm not sure that I do repent."

"I confess I don't understand you, my dear."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps I don't quite understand myself," said Vixen, with one of her enigmatical little smiles.

"Well, there's not time to pursue the problem," replied her friend, rising languidly. "I must go and dress. There are some old county fogies coming to-night. What a pity the skating is over. I don't know what to do with the people after dinner!"

"Make them dance," suggested Vixen. "Can fogies dance, or do they think it wicked?"

"They'd think your dancing wicked, my dear, and yourself too if you flirt so outrageously. What are you going to wear, by the way?"

"Oh! the black rag," answered Vixen indifferently. "Geoffrey likes those jingly things all over it. And as it's for the last time——"

"Shall you tell him the truth?" asked Gertrude, pausing with her hand on the door.

"Not if I can help it. There may be some way out of it, or—or, I may be clever enough to stave off the evil moment."

"You won't. I've seen it approaching nearer and

nearer. I expect you'll have a very *mauvais quart d'heure,* my dear Vi, when it comes to—explanations!"

Vixen shrugged her pretty shoulders. "I'm not afraid. The only thing is—supposing it got to Paul's ears? You know they were old college friends, and—he might find out our address in town."

"Not unlikely. It strikes me, Vi, that there's a very pretty possibility of complications in the affair. I'm almost sorry I was persuaded——"

"Don't be *mean,* Gertrude! There was very little persuasion needed. Oh! What's the use of anticipating bothers? It will all come right, I'm sure. In any case, don't worry yourself. I can fight my own battles!"

Some half-hour later Lady Vanrennen was speeding along the corridor to her friend's room. She held an open telegram in her hand. She knocked eagerly at the door. "Vi," she cried. "Vi, let me in!"

There was no answer. She tried the handle. A maid was tidying the room and replacing articles in drawers and wardrobe.

"Mrs. Eddison?" questioned Gertrude breathlessly.

"She went down, my lady, about five minutes ago. She wanted some flowers from the conservatory."

Lady Vanrennen turned away and slowly descended the staircase. As she reached the hall two figures standing by the great open fireplace looked up and saw her. At the same moment the glass doors separating the conservatory from the hall opened. Standing there, a knot of Christmas roses in her hand, was Vixen.

She stared at the two men standing so quietly by the blazing logs. One was Geoffrey Druce, the other was—her husband.

. . . . .

For a space of seconds the two women and the two men looked at each other, and took in the situation.

Then Vixen swept forward. "Why, Paul, this is a surprise. You might have let me know."

She extended her hand and he took it. "You're not dressed," she went on rapidly. "Hadn't you better hurry? The gong will be sounding in ten minutes."

"My husband only sent me your telegram a few moments ago, Mr. Eddison," interposed Gertrude Vanrennen. "Would you mind using his dressing-room for the present? He asked me to explain——"

"Such a way to come down on people!" laughed Vixen. "He doesn't deserve a room, or a dinner either. But there, run away like a good boy. We'll forgive you. I hope your studs are all right!" she called after him as he moved towards the staircase.

"Do you generally interest yourself so much in your cousin's toilet?" enquired Geoffrey Druce, breaking in on an embarrassed silence.

"Oh, he is one of those wise, good, helpless souls to whom all the ordinary affairs of life seem trivial," she answered carelessly. "Gertrude, my dear, I hear wheels. The first batch of your fogies, I suppose?"

"I must go to the drawing-room!" exclaimed Gertrude.

She wondered if Geoffrey had learnt the truth yet—if there had been time for Paul to say anything.

As a matter of fact there had been time, but Paul had said—nothing. Vi had not been mentioned between the two long-parted friends. Only that morning Paul, in searching for a paper on his writing-table, had

discovered the unposted letter. It came like a shock to him. A week had passed and there lay the warning he had meant to send. What might not have happened by now? The mistake had perhaps never been contradicted. Vi must have thought he didn't care to write; and Geoffrey, well, Geoffrey would have looked in vain for that answer that never came. The thought of the conversation at breakfast on the morning of his departure flashed back to his mind. "If I go *alone* I warn you I'll play grass widow for all it's worth."

And he had acquiesced by deed and word. He had allowed her to go alone, and he had said she might do as she pleased. The tide of regret and apprehension swept in with vigorous reaction. He knew he should not have permitted that freak of Vixen's. And he began to fear possible consequences. Like most indolent men, Paul Eddison could be alert and decisive enough once he was roused. He sent a telegram to Sir John Vanrennen, packed his evening clothes into a Gladstone bag, and departed for Croxford.

The situation was one of those eminently calculated to inspire the little gods of chance and contrariety with amusement!

The telegram was despatched from the village of Croxford by a small boy on a bicycle. The small boy adventured a steep hill. At the foot he was met by a large sharp stone. He swerved, the stone caught the back wheel of the machine, the boy was pitched over, and the bicycle and himself compared results two minutes later.

He had a sprained ankle, and the cycle a twisted handle-bar. It took him nearly two hours to limp to

his destination, and the telegram only reached Sir John as he was on his way to his dressing-room. He sent it to his wife, who was with Vixen. The maid laid it down on the table with some letters, and Gertrude never saw it until she was dressed. Then she hurried off to acquaint Vi with a possible catastrophe, but only arrived on the scene to witness a meeting. Now her duties as hostess demanded all her attention, and Vi and Geoffrey Druce were left together in the hall.

They stood there, one on either side of the fire, and apparently undisturbed by the passage of unknown "fogies" going towards the drawing-room.

At last Geoffrey spoke. "Your cousin is not much changed," he said. "You ought to be very proud of him, Mrs. Eddison. He tells me he has just made a marvellous chemical discovery which will revolutionise the scientific world. It will mean fame and wealth and many other good things."

"Wealth!" echoed Vi. "Paul has made a discovery that will bring wealth. Are you sure?"

"He told me. He seemed confident. I suppose he'll get married at last. I wonder——"

"Paul *is* married," said Vixen quietly. "Surely you knew, you heard, if you were such friends?"

"Paul married! Indeed, that is a surprise. How long ago?"

"Two years ago," said Vi, still very quietly. "And to a woman who has treated him very badly, who wasn't half good enough for him, poor old Paul!"

Geoffrey threw her a quick, puzzled glance.

"*Wasn't?* Then has anything happened? Are they separated, or——"

"They are separated—at present," she said, and despite herself some of the old mischief lurked in her downcast eye, and played in a dimple on her cheek.

"You know her—of course?"

"Oh yes, very well."

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"The sort of woman that—I am," said Vixen, lifting her eyes to his face.

That look, even more than the words, threw a flash-light of fear over the suspicion of the past few moments.

The colour left his ruddy, healthy cheeks. A dumb, fierce resentment against fate, against her as its present embodiment, seized upon him.

"Will you please explain—more plainly!" he said at last.

"I am Paul's wife!" she said. And the colour, born of shame, of penitence, of fear almost at what she had read in his eyes, swept in a hot flood to her very temples.

"Wife!" he echoed. "Was I the fool? Did I mistake? Are you not free? *Free?* You conveyed as much to me. You must allow that."

"Oh, forgive me!" she pleaded. "Indeed I never thought, I never meant——"

He stopped the words by an angry gesture.

"I must congratulate you on being a most successful actress!" he said. "I am not quite so sure that I can congratulate Paul on his choice of a wife."

"There—I agree with you!" exclaimed Vixen. "Indeed, I am heartily ashamed of myself. Let me explain——"

He moved farther from her.

"What use to explain? It can't alter the fact that you regret, that I must suffer; that between the lifelong friendship of two men has swept the trivial current of a woman's caprice. Thank goodness I have been more loyal to Paul than you have. I, at least, did not intentionally deceive him."

"Nor did I!" she exclaimed, plucking back some of the old spirit from the crushing weight of his evident scorn. "He would never go anywhere with me, and I told him this time that, if I must *seem* a widow, I would play it in good earnest. And he, he said I might do what I pleased, and—then all these complications occurred. It's too horrid!"

Tears of wounded pride, hurt feelings, and a very poignant shame of herself sprang to her eyes. The man who looked at her pitied, and relented. He held out his hand.

"Don't cry," he said. "You meant no harm, I know. It was probably only fun all the time. I—I felt you were never serious."

His quietude masked a world of emotion, but it relieved her. He did not, *had* not cared so very much after all, and here was Paul coming slowly down the stairs, Paul, looking so handsome, so alert, so—*almost* young. She went swiftly up to him, nestling one little hand in his arm.

"Take me in to dinner," she said. "Never mind about the other people. "I'm so tired of them all, of the life here, of—everything!"

"Even of being a widow?" he whispered, looking down fondly at the sweet, wistful, pleading face.

"Of that—most of all. You should never have given your permission, Paul!"

"I think you took *that* for granted, Vi."

"I'm very sorry. And, as the children say, I'll never, *never* do it again."

The gong sounded.

THE TRAMPS.

Across sodden fields, under the lowering autumn sky, weighted with clay and mud, sullen of face and manner, hopeless and penniless, a man slouched in dogged fashion towards the goal represented by a little Cornish town. Following him came two hostages to the ill fortune that had been his lot in life, a woman and a child. He never glanced behind. There was no need; they would follow him right enough. He was the one rock amidst shipwreck, their one hope in all life's hopelessness. Sullen brutal law-breaker and law-hater as he was, he yet represented to these forlorn creatures a tie of habit, a something akin to themselves, a brute strength to fight for them, a cunning which helped to secure the sordid necessaries that kept life in their shrunken, chilled bodies. They toiled after him, not knowing where he led; not caring either if only by nightfall food and shelter might by some chance be theirs.

The child, a boy of some six or seven years, clung to the woman's hand and dragged his shoeless feet over the grassy ruts or sharp flints that meant the roadway. He was very tired and footsore. Childhood had held little of childish meaning for him. Blows and curses, toil and weariness, hunger and misery, these he understood; little else. Sometimes there would be bread and

such comfort as hot coffee at a stall, or a basin of steaming soup at a common eating-house. And on rare occasions there had been a room and a bed. But on such occasions his father invariably got drunk and ill-used his mother, and there would be scenes of more or less animosity that usually found a conclusion in a police court and seven or fourteen days of absence for Surly Jim. That was his name. At least his "pals" and accomplices always called him so, sometimes using the prefix only in moments of unrestrained familiarity.

"Is it much farther, mother?" asked the boy at last.

"I dunno," she said cheerlessly. "There's a bridge ought to be in sight; somethin' wonderful, they do say, and cost a power o' money, and him as made it made a heap of gold and was sent for by the Queen."

The information failed to interest the child. Saltash and Brunel were as Greek to his understanding. A shelter from the drizzling rain, a mouthful of food to stay the craving of an empty stomach, these he could comprehend, but a bridge that had meant a triumph in architecture, and fame and wealth, and an epoch in history, was only so much more of space to be travelled, of weariness to be borne.

Silence fell between them again. The slouching figure before them went doggedly on. The brooding sky above showed transient gleams of red where the sun began to sink. From afar came the gleam of a river, and the chill of salt seabreath blown landwards.

"We're gettin' nigh," said the woman, and braced herself for the last half-mile. "There's the bridge," she said again, hopefully, and pointed with lean and withered

hand to where a graceful airy structure spanned the dividing space between two counties.

The little lad lifted hopeless eyes and looked. He said nothing. Their pioneer slackened his pace as if waiting for them to join him, then kept on about half-a-dozen yards ahead. It was a longer tramp to the bridge than they imagined. The rain had ceased at last and the clouds were drifting seawards. A space of blue above and the river's gleam below showed the fairy structure hung aloft between bank and bank; showed also the quaint little village by the waterside and the woods rich in autumn colouring above its hilly slopes.

A figure coming rapidly along towards the three tramps was suddenly accosted by the man with a question as to direction.

He answered cheerily and readily, and was passing on when a thought seemed to strike him.

"If you cross the ferry you have to pay a penny toll," he said. "I suppose you know that?"

The man uttered something to the effect that he didn't know, and bestowed a curse on a free country that denied the individual his lawful rights. The young fellow who had spoken passed on, and in doing so came up to the rest of the family party. Something in their forlorn aspect touched him. Toll for three would certainly come heavy on the surly individual in front. His hand sought his pocket, and his eyes rested compassionately on the woman's white face and the child's weary one.

"Is that your father?" he asked the boy.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, well, he'll have to pay for all of you if you cross the ferry, and I expect he's none too much money for luxuries of that sort. Here!"

He pressed a shilling into the little damp, dirty hand, and then hurried on.

The boy looked at the coin in wonder. A whole piece of silver given to himself! Such a thing had never happened before. The woman's eyes glittered hungrily.

"What blessed luck," she said. "May Heaven be good to him. Why, Charley, it means food and shelter for all o' us to-night."

"Does it?" faltered the child. He was thinking of the bright, handsome face, the cheery voice, the kindly touch of the strong, warm palm upon his little grimed hand. "It was awful good o' him," he said, "most awful good."

"Come along there! What are you lagging for, hang you?" growled the voice of the pioneer in front. "What did the gent give yer? I seed him put his hand in his pocket."

The woman had secured the shilling. Experience of Surly Jim's habits had taught her a certain caution in all her dealings with him.

"He give the boy a sixpence," she said. "There's a toll or somethin' to pay for crossin' that ferry, he said."

"Toll be hanged," answered Jim. "Well, hand it over. 'Taint much, but it'll get bread and cheese and a pint for me."

"I'll keep it, Jim," said the woman. "Somehow I make money go further nor ever you do. You'll have your pint, don't be afeard."

He laughed surlily. "Afeard, not likely. Hurry up, then. I'm sick o' this ere tramp. Let's get over this ferry and somewhere where there's beer and a bench to sit on."

She paid the toll and they landed and tramped wearily to a little waterside public-house where the long-waited-for food was obtainable at last. By some sleight of hand, born of many cruel experiences, the woman had managed to change the shilling for two sixpences. One she expended lavishly on that ardently desired, salted and arsenical fluid denominated beer, so dearly loved by Surly Jim and others of his class; the change she kept. The child munched bread and cheese, and a compassionate woman, wife of the landlord, gave him a cup of weak tea to wash it down. It was hot and sweet, and to the child seemed as nectar. His mother enquired for a lodging, and was told of a fisherman's cottage where a bed for herself and the boy might be had. She left Jim talking and drinking with some rough-looking men, apparently as desperate and almost as well off in the matter of this world's goods as himself. He had no desire to leave the bar, or that congenial atmosphere of smoke and beer, till closing time should force him so to do. He dismissed his family with his usual blessing and turned his attention to matters of greater interest.

The child was dead with sleep, and lay curled up in a corner, his head against the wall. The woman looked at him doubtfully. It seemed cruel to waken him. She resolved to seek the lodgings and then return. Perhaps by that time Jim would also be ready for his virtuous couch and well-earned repose.

She drifted away and out into the desolate night and the strange loneliness of an unknown place, and while she wandered the boy slept and dreamt.

It was a strange dream that came to him—a dream filled with whispers and strange voices, and odd, half-intelligible words; a dream of something savage and brutal, telling of deeds as savage and as brutal; of hairbreadth escapes, of lurkings and hidings in strange, secret places; of a plot that held something of vengeance, and more of audacity in its coils as the savage mutterings unwound them into intelligible speech.

Still he dreamt on.

"It must be to-night or never, mate," he heard a voice say. The hoarse murmur of Surly Jim gave response, and the talk dropped into hints and directions. He wondered how out of it all there shaped itself a figure of stalwart, handsome young manhood; a face bright with the sunshine of life's hopefulness; a kindly voice; a touch that held neither shrinking nor patronage, but only the cheery sympathy of one common humanity. "He was very good to me; I'd like to repay him somehow," ran the thread of thought, and he sighed and turned in his sleep, and then awoke. The bar was nearly empty of drinkers now. The lights were being extinguished. He saw two slouching figures passing out of the door, and recognised one as his father's. He stumbled to his feet and pushed back the tangled hair from his forehead. The woman behind the counter had her back turned. She was putting away glasses and bottles.

He slipped out.

"I s'pose mother's forgotten me," he said, and stood

gazing down the narrow street, all dark and desolate now. The water lay a dusky, rippleless sheet before him, the outlines of boats and fishing craft and yachts at anchor stood out black shadows against the lesser blackness of the night and the clouded sky. The bridge spanning the dividing chasm looked a strange and spectral thing. He heard in the distance the stumbling steps and hoarse murmurs of voices that pointed the way those men had gone. His one instinct was to follow.

. . . . .

Sleep and food had restored energy to the childish frame. He drew his ragged clothes about him and shambled on. They were some distance ahead, but he kept them in sight, and climbed the steep hillside as they climbed it. A long street faced him then, a street of closed shops, and dimly lit by scattered lamp-posts. They trod the worn, brown pavements. He trod them also. The street passed into a quiet roadway; trees bordered it, houses grew more rare. A baying dog, the hurry-scurry of a cat disturbed in midnight prowling, the sound of some tethered creatures cropping grass, these alone broke the lonely stillness. He smelt the sweets of autumn, the fumes of burning weeds, of crushed dead leaves, of damp earth and empty stubble fields. A few stars twinkled in the wide darkness of the sky. There was no moon. The winding road wound onwards, white against the blackness of surrounding things, and the two figures before him tramped steadily on. And still he followed—not knowing why.

Had his wits been keener, his senses more alert, he

would have noticed that the sound of the tramping feet had ceased abruptly, but he paid no heed until a turn of the road revealed a bare, shadowless space of emptiness. Then he stood still, wondering where they had gone, what to do with himself!

A mound of stones by the roadside invited rest. He sat down, and sighed wearily. His eyes, used to darkness and sharp as a cat's, peered from side to side. He saw beside him a hedge backed by iron railings. Railings meant a habitation; he staggered up and went close to them, and found a gate. It was locked. He stood a moment wrapped in thought. Suddenly a rough hand clutched his shoulder, and a scream of terror broke from his lips. He looked up into savage eyes, saw a mouth parted in brutal gibe, heard a question buried beneath vile words.

His father was beside him. The boy explained drearily. He had followed because he didn't know what else to do. He thought they were still tramping. Another voice interposed. He saw that Surly Jim had a companion. A brief colloquy ensued. The boy could not follow its meaning, but the rough grasp was released and he was addressed by the stranger.

"Look 'ere, kiddie, your dad an' I 'ave a bit o' business in 'ere, and it's most partic'lar pressing. You're just in the nick o' time to give us a 'elpin' and, so to say. Come along, an' do just as I tell you, an' there'll be summat for you in the shape o' reward for good conduct as you've never set eyes on before.

"Yes, an' mind you do as yer told," grunted Surly Jim, "or if yer don't I'll slit that 'ere wizzard o' yourn as soon as I'd choke a puppy that yelped. This ain't

no matter o' play, let me tell you. We're a-goin' to pay a visit to that 'ere 'ouse yonder, an' not stand on the ceremony o' introduction, or a-callin' up the footman to enquire as to who's at home, and who isn't. Now, you're small and wiry and can do the creepin' in by chance window, or that sort. There's sure to be a place 'andy. Then you've got to open a door somehow, or a window if it's 'andier and let us in. Then you can take your hook, quick as you like, an' all the rest you've to do is to keep your mouth shut an' know nothing. D'ye 'ear?"

"Yes. To keep my mouth shut an' know nothin'," echoed the little lad. "'Tain't so 'ard as I'll forget it."

"Come along, then. 'Old your breath and be as mum as we are," said the other man. "I knows the lay o' the place. All you've got to do is to foller me."

In single file they climbed and crept and stole in tortuous twisting ways to where a white stone house lay, silent and impassive, holding sleeping inmates, guarded treasures, lives young and old, and happy and beloved. In careless assurance of this night's safety as of other nights, untroubled and careless and free of fear, they slept that first deep, dreamless sleep which is the signal of safety to house-breakers.

The boy made an easy entrance. A barred window was forced for him by the tools of the experienced gentleman who had just "done" seven years, and was in a state of Christian charity in consequence that only desired to relieve personal necessities by aid of the superfluous possessions of his more fortunate fellows.

The little lad had been supplied with a dark lantern. By its aid he saw where he was: in a pantry, evidently,

to judge by the well-stocked shelves, the stores of food, the piles of good things tempting hunger. Yet the child touched nothing.

He opened the door, and found himself in a stone passage. Following this, he came to a flight of stairs.

He stole up and into a hall, richly carpeted and decorated. He threw his light around. It flashed on carved oak, on the gold of picture frames, on statues and armoury, on all sorts of costly and artistic treasures. It showed him, too, smiling frankly and genially back at his own startled face, the very face he had seen that evening by the bridge. Gay, handsome, debonair, the blue eyes so kindly, the expression so happy in its untroubled, careless youth, his benefactor seemed to give him greeting once again.

The lad gave a gasp, and the lantern slid from his hand and fell to the floor. Darkness seemed to swoop down upon him. He stood trembling and quivering amidst unfamiliar surroundings, not knowing where to turn or what to do. Moments passed, and he still stood passive, lost in wonder and in thought.

Then he was conscious of a flicker of light, a soft footstep, and glancing up the stairs, saw a figure descending holding a candle above its head. The light fell on the face that had made history for his life that day. The face that had smiled on him from the wall was once more looking down at him, in paler, sterner wonderment than he had yet recognised as its expression.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" demanded the voice of his benefactor.

The lad looked helplessly at him. He began to

tremble violently. What could he say? How explain an appearance that was due to parental authority, and yet an unlicensed intrusion.

"Can't you hear? Why don't you speak?"

The young man was at the foot of the staircase now, and approaching the lad with an occasional glance around and before, as if to see if any other presence offered explanation of this visible one.

"Oh, sir, it's you as was so good to me! I knowed your face. *There,"* faltered the boy, "I dunno what you'll think. I was told to do it. 'Keep your mouth shut and know nothin',' was what they said; but I didn't know as 'twas *you* I'd see. 'Ow could I?"

"They!" echoed the young man. "Oh, you're not alone? I thought not. Where are your—friends?"

"It's father," faltered the boy, "and someone as I never seed afore. 'Tain't no fault o' mine, sir. They just put me in by a window, and I was to open a door or somethin' for 'em. But 'ow could I tell 'twas your 'ouse and your door?"

"Well, I suppose that could hardly be expected," answered the young fellow, a twinkle in his eye, an expression on his face that spoke more of mirth than anger. "So it's your father who is educating you in this line, is it?"

"He'll kill me if I don't do as 'e told me; but I ain't a-goin' to do it—now," said the boy.

"Why?" asked his new friend.

"'Cos you're the only gent as I've ever met as ever spoke kind to me. 'Cos you gave me that 'ere money to-day. I 'ad a meal and a rest, and I've you to thank for 'em. I wouldn't do a hand's turn to 'urt

you, not for twenty more such silver shillings, that I wouldn't!"

"This grows interesting," said the young man. "A juvenile burglar capable of gratitude! It's worth seeing into. Look here, lad, pick up that lantern and I'll show you where there's an easy door to open for your friends. I should like to have a little talk with them. The 'enterprising burglar' as he is in his natural or burglarious condition is a new study of humanity that has not come my way yet. And I'm a student of humanity in a small way. I get my living by it. Come along. Oh, your lantern's out! I'll relight it!"

The boy's face grew more and more bewildered. "You're not really meanin' it," he said. "Let 'em in to rob you—perhaps do you an injury! Oh, sir, don't go fer to do such a thing, and don't tell me to do it."

"But I do tell you. Look here!"

He opened a door, and led the way into a vast and, to the boy's eyes, splendid room. Silver stood on the sideboard. Beautiful things of bronze and gold and ebony and marble were employed in a decorative sense to relieve the sombre background of walls and furniture. The young fellow put down his candle, and going over to the sideboard, opened it and took out decanters of wine and spirits. A silver box of biscuits, another silver thing containing cake, a large china dish of fruit, these he placed on the polished oak table. Then he seated himself in a large leather chair, and bade the astonished boy open the window.

It was shuttered, and heavy curtains hung before it. The process was difficult.

The chair stood in a recess, and close beside it was

a carved oak screen. The young man drew it before him, and was effectually hidden. In a few moments cautious steps were audible, then a whispered colloquy, a fierce question as to why the kid had been so long giving admission. He kept to one part of his bargain: he said nothing.

"'Ullo! Look 'ere!" exclaimed Surly Jim. "Seems as we're expected; eh, Bill? Oncommon thoughtful of 'em to place light refreshments at our disposal. What d'ye say? Shall we 'ave a drain 'fore we sets to work?"

Bill opined it would be as well to 'do a wet,' by way of stimulating their energies, and bottles clinked against glasses, and the two artists troubled in no way as to the absence of water, mineral or otherwise. "Neat" was good enough for them. The generous spirit warmed and comforted them. They saw around a sufficiency of the superfluities of life, so affected by the rich and the worldly minded, to enable them to dispense with any mechanical assistance. They had only to take what they wanted, and go their way.

"Cigars, I do declare!" exclaimed Jim. "Let's 'ave a smoke. We are doin' a treat, and no mistake. 'Ere, Chawley, lock that door, will yer! Best to take some precaushuns in case o' surprise."

"There ain't no key to it," said the boy.

"No key! That's a rum go. These 'ere friends of yourn, Bill, seem temptin' Providence like. 'Ullo, what's that?"

For the screen was gently folded aside, and looking at him with the friendly smile and amused twinkle of a congenial soul, was Chawley's friend.

"Pray make yourselves at home, my friends," he said, glancing from one to the other. "I quite agree with you that one half of the world has too many good things, the other not enough. I am pleased to offer you some of my superfluity."

They stared, and their eyes grew savage, and the lowered brows threatening.

"Confound you! What do you mean?" muttered Surly Jim. "What's your game?"

"Just yourselves," he answered calmly. "Tell me what you want, and I'll give it you, if your demands are in any way reasonable. You think there's too much silver about. I quite agree with you. I have remarked that to my father many times. Would you like to relieve us of some? Those cups and dishes date from the days of the Good Queen Anne—as perhaps you—don't know. History doesn't interest members of your profession. Yet that profession dates back also to king-makers. There was one Robin Hood, you know!"

"Oh, stow your rot!" exclaimed Surly Jim. "We ain't 'ere to listen to that. Of course you've got servants and all that to set on us. We're in a trap. What d'ye mean to do?"

"Nothing," answered the young fellow coolly, "except to ask you to favour me with a reason for this unannounced visit. Pray don't be uneasy. No one will intrude. The men-servants are asleep, my father is far out of earshot, and I—am quite capable of taking care of myself."

His hand went to the breast of his loose flannel coat. He took out a tiny revolver—a mere toy, but with something menacing in its shining barrel, though

there was only a cool smile and a mirthful glance to cover the threat of its possible use.

"I assure you, I mean what I say," he continued. "Drink, smoke and be merry, if you can. Inform me of your immediate needs, and I will do my best to relieve them. It's a pity sometimes to break laws, though I'm Radical enough myself to hate them, as interfering with the free will of the human entity! You, my friends, are human entities, and should possess free wills. Again I say: Drink, smoke, and explain your needs to me."

The bewilderment on the men's faces was almost comic, but the awe and admiration on that of the little lad offered a strange and pathetic contrast.

"I gave Charley a shilling to-day," continued the young fellow. "I was naturally surprised that he should take the trouble of coming all this way to thank me. It shows there are grateful hearts still in the world. I hope your mother found a resting-place somewhere, Charley? She was looking very tired, so were you; in fact, so *are* you. I think it's time you went to bed. If your father permits, you shall have a shakedown here to-night, and go your way to-morrow, unless, that is to say, you prefer to remain on as table-help, or something of that sort. But, dear me, gentlemen, what is the matter? You're not going, surely?"

"Goin'!" exclaimed Surly Jim. "Well, I'm hanged if ever I heard such a gaffer as you! D'ye ever stop talkin'? Are you sure your health won't suffer? I'd take somethin' for it. 'Ere, Bill, cut this. I don't want no more o' his chaff. 'Anged if I know why 'e doesn't give us in charge. Anyhow, I've 'ad enough o' it. I don't mind tellin' you, sir, though I don't expect as you'll

believe me, that this is the fust—the *wery* fust—time as I've been in a job o' this sort; and, by Jove! if you'll keep your word, and 'and me over a soverin, say, to keep me goin' till I gets work, I'll swear it'll be my larst!"

"A sovereign—certainly; one apiece, only you'll not trust me, I suppose, to go up to my room for it. I haven't got my purse about me."

"I'll trust you, sure eno'," said Surly Jim. "You're the rummest card I've ever come across, aint he, Bill?"

"'E is," agreed Bill, helping himself to another glass of whisky; "and what 'e means, and why 'e does it, jiggers me. Your good 'ealth, sir, and I wish there was more like you in the world. I'm a bad lot, and I will say 'twas I put Jim up to this 'ere lay to-night; but I knows a gentleman when I meets one, and 'ere's to you, sir, and many of 'em."

The wish was a little incoherent, so was Bill's speech. But when the morning found him and Jim sleeping calmly under a shed in the yard, each held in his hand an unsmoked cigar and a gold imprint from his Majesty's mint. Where they tramped and how they lived was not for Dick Templeton to know—nor did he question it.

But he kept Charley as hostage for the future good behaviour of Surly Jim, and so made one life happy.

THE GHOST OF THE GOODWINS.

"A YARN, lady," said the old seaman. "Well yes, I could spin yer one or two; a matter of fifty if it comes to that, but for a right down good 'un, a creepin', unwholesome kind o' yarn such as young folks like Christmas time, you go to Jan Britton down there, close to the Visitors' Rest, where the boats be. He's the sort you want."

I was spending a week at a little unimportant seaside town on the Kentish coast, unimportant save to its inhabitants, and a certain industry in the sardine trade —of a renowned French brand—at least the cases were.

In order to get away from the smoke and smell of this thriving industry, I had planted myself among the pebbles and nets and fishing boats, and seeing the lounging figure of an old sailor in close proximity to a boat, had entered into conversation with him. After a good deal of local and general gossip he had given me the information contained in my first sentence, and with a view to profiting by it (professionally) I duly interviewed Jan Britton, and approached the subject with caution.

"Jan" was a seaman born and bred, the son of a race of seamen. He had "sailed the ocean wide" from youth to manhood. He knew Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand so well, that the Mission hymn

which glorified them had quite a familiar nursery-tale flavour for him. Then after years of storm and stress and mingled fortune he had married, spent his savings in the purchase of a boat, and now supported a wife and family by fishing and hiring out the said boat to summer visitors. He was a stalwart, well-built fellow, of any age from thirty-six to forty. He had a pleasant face, a merry eye, and a keen sense of humour. I am quite sure he knew what I was approaching as well as I knew it myself, but his playing of rod and line was eminently skilful.

It took, in fact, more than one interview, and a good many sails and rows to get out of Jan Britton his famous yarn. But one day he relented, and in his own words I give here the story of the "Ghost of the Goodwins."

"Talking of kreemashun," observed Jan (*à propos* of nothing that I had said), "which is a mighty queer way o' buryin' oneself it seems to me—there was an old lady as used to come 'ere regular every summer. A good soul; kind wasn't the word for 'er, and the good she did, and the way she 'elped me and my mates, not to speak of the rekommendations—well, it's mor'n I could tell you in a week o' Sundays. Fond o' the sea too she were. Would just live on it. Hired me whole time straight off. Sort o' cabin-boy, first mate, purser, and captin all in one I was. That's neither here nor there. The pay was good, and she was right good company too, and what with lunshon baskits and whisky flasks, and teachin' her to row and fish and set a sail, we'd a right down good time o' it. Storm, or rain, or blow, out she'd come; not a bit afeard o' weather she warn't. A fine plucky sort. God bless her."

He sighed, and I looked sympathetic.

"Yes," he said in answer to the look. "She's gone. 'Twas that made me think of kreemashun. Why, I've seen 'er setting there, same as you might be, lady, with 'er oilskin cap tight on her pretty white hair, and her natty serge jacket (she were a fine figured lady, mind you) and her face all smilin', and brown with sea and sun, and her pleasant way o' talkin' to us—me and my mates." He paused again, and looked away to where the cruel sandbanks were glistening in the morning sun.

"Mighty fond o' those 'ere Goodwins she were," he went on. "Curous sort o' fasinashun they 'ad for her. When tide served 'twas allays, 'Oh, we'll go to the Goodwins, Jan,' and go we would, and many's the time I've 'ad to carry 'er on and off when the sands were too wet for landing. Well, lady, one evening we was a-comin' 'ome arter a day off there. 'Twas in September, I mind it well, and latish in the afternoon. A grey sky, lowerin' like, showed there'd be rain, and the wind was sighin' mournful through the sails. My old lady seemed a bit low in her sperrits that day—her mind I mean. And sudden like, she says, 'Jan, did ever you hear o' kreemashun?' 'Not as I know on, lady,' I ses, thinking maybe 'twas some new kind o' mayterial for dresses; it didn't sound like anything to eat. 'I tell you what it is,' she ses; and she began explainin' as how when folks was dead, 'twas a mighty sight decenter and healthier for to kreemate their bodies, and when that was done put the ashes into an urn, or box, or summat, and bury *that,* if so be one's mind were set on a memorial vault, with inscripshuns. I didn't seem to take it in, for a funeral with no 'earse or

plumings or a grave to visit as a nat'ral kind o' konsequence didn't seem proper respeckt like to a corpse. But she talked and talked, and was mighty set on it as bein' the best way o' settlin' things for 'erself, and said as 'ow 'twas in 'er will, and must be done. I grew kind o' queer hearin' 'er talk, and the sky was growin' gloomy, and the lonesome grey sea looked melancholy, and she warn't a bit cheery like 'erself, so I tacked and made for shore, and tried to get 'er to talk o' summat else. But no. She were a bit obstinate sometimes, and on this 'ere speshal day she would 'ark back to that pint o' the kreemashing. 'Jan,' she says, 'I want you to promise me something. I trust you,' she ses, 'and if you giv' your word I know you'll keep it.' 'Yes, lady,' I ses, 'you can depend on *that.*' 'Well then it's this,' she ses. 'I've a feelin' I sha'n't live much longer——' 'Lor' bless you, lady,' I ses, 'and you that 'ale and 'earty. A perfect female mariner,' I ses. She laughed. 'All the same, Jan, I *feels* it,' she ses. 'And I feels that this is the last year I'll be sailin' in your boat, and a-walkin' over them 'ere Goodwins in your company. Now, Jan Britton, these sort o' feelin's,' she ses, 'are what are called presentermints and they've a meanin', and are sent as a warnin' to us to put our house in order, same as the Bible tells us. So I'm takin' my warnin',' she ses. 'And what I want you to promise is this. When you hear o' my decease,' she ses, 'and I'll take care you do—you write at once to the address I'm a-goin' to leave with you. My only near o' kin and executor is a nephew,' she ses, 'and 'ee's a clergyman o' the 'ighest sort o' 'igh church, and 'ee don't 'old with kreemashun, and I'm afeard 'ee

won't agree to my direcshuns. So this is what you must do, Jan. You write straight to 'im and say as I directed that the urn containin' my ashes was to be sent or given to *you.'*

"I sits up straight at that; goin' to explain as 'ow it were a great honour but I warn't worthy of it no how. But she stopped my words. She were mighty peremptory sometimes, you see, and made a chap feel as 'twere a sort o' royal command 'ee were given. 'Jan,' she ses, 'you promised, and you must keep your promis'. When you gets the urn,' she ses, 'you must take it, *first tide as serves* after you get it' (mark that, lady—*first tide as serves,* it's mighty important to my story), 'and you must then,' she ses, 'row out or sail as is best for you to the Goodwins. When you reaches them,' she ses, 'you must open the urn and scatter the ashes to the winds, and if you like, Jan,' she ses, soft-like, 'you can say a bit o' a prayer in your own honest 'eart for the lonely old soul as is gone to its rest. For I *am* a lonely soul, Jan, and 'ave few friends, and no lovin' 'eart to care very much when my eyes close on life for ever.'"

He paused, and I saw a curious moisture in the keen blue eyes looking over the sunny water.

"She spoke beautiful," he went on. "Seems to me now, lookin' back, as 'twere 'er own funeral orashun she were utterin' that day while the wind moaned through the ropes, and the grey sea lapped the boat sides. Melancholy it were, lady, and I felt it such, and when I wanted to cheer 'er the words kind o' stuck in my throat, and all I could say was, 'D——n persentermints.' Bein' a rough and ready sort o' chap," he went

on, "I could find no fine words handy, and 'twas a silent and lonesome sail back, for she didn't say much more arter I give 'er my word.

"Soon arter that she went back to London, where she lived, and I put it all out o' mind. October and November were wild and stormy, and there were wrecks all around the coast. Me and my mates were kept busy one way and another, and I'd clean forgot all about that persentermint day and my promise, when I gets a paper, and a big cross against one part, and it was the deaths, and there, right a top, was the name of my old lady! Cecilia Jane Rammage. Shock—I believe you, ma'am, 'twas a shock. I felt that took aback—couldn't sort o' believe it true; but next post come a letter written in a fine scholarly hand sayin' as 'ow the writer had been directed by his late aunt, Mrs. Rammage, to inform me of her death when that event should take place. So 'twas in a manner o' ways verified, and no help for't. Nat'rally I waited for that 'ere kreemashun urn to be sent to me, but days went on and it never came, and feelin' kind o' ankshus like I wrote to the gentleman's address and said as 'ow I'd promised his aunt to take her ashes to the Goodwin Sands, and would he send them as soon as convenient. 'Twas gettin' nigh on to Christmas, indeed 'twas the very day before, when a parcel comes for me, and my missus was mighty surprised at seeing a very 'ansom sort o' vase wrapped mighty careful in a box, and thinkin' 'twas an ornament for the mantelshelf, she set it there, and when I come home that Christmas Eve, why there it was!

"'The kreemashun urn!' I cries, and 'ard work I

had to explain to 'er, but when she took it in and 'eard as 'ow 'twas the mortial remains o' that dear old lady she got terrible skeered. You see, ma'am, she 'eld as 'ow buryin' was the right and nat'ral end o' a body. Even the sea won't 'old 'em, you know, but sends 'em up to surface as if to show they oughter 'ave decent Christian intermint. It certainly don't 'old with kreemashing. Well, my missus begged and prayed me to take that 'ere urn away, and do as the old lady had wished, and it seemed as if everything pinted that way, for the tide would serve that very evening, and there was a moon too, and the sea smooth enough to row on, and scarce a puff o' wind at all. So off I sets wi' the urn, and a drop o' rum to keep my sperrits up and the cold out of my bones. 'Twas a queer bizness tho', and when I looked up at the stars I couldn't help a-wonderin' if she were there, and a-lookin' down on me to see if I was a-carryin' out her direckshuns. Uncanny —aye, that it were lady, and I don't mind sayin' 'twas as much as I could do to keep my eyes off that 'ere urn, and the more I looked the more I fancied as the old lady herself was sitting in 'er old place in the stern o' the boat, and a-watchin' me pullin' straight for the Goodwins. I took a pull at the bottle between whiles, I must confess, and 'ad to rest a spell too. So 'twas nigh on midnight when I reached the sands at last. I made the boat secure, and stepped off wi' that urn in my hands, and reached a spot high and dry, tho' the sea was shimmerin' and shiverin' all around. I tried to call her direcshuns to mind—'Open the urn and scatter my ashes to the wind, and say a prayer for me.' That was the sum o' them near as I could remember.

"Well, fust I looked at that 'ere urn, turned it to all pints o' the compass so to say, but blest if I could find any opening, or screw, or lid, so as to get them ashes out. No—not by no manner o' means save personal violence was that 'ere kreemashuning obstacle to be opened. I stood there wi' the sea sobbin' all round, and the moon bright and cold up above in the sky, and the tide a-creepin' 'igher every moment so I knew I hadn't any time to lose. And hammer and shake as I would, no ways that I could see of follerin' out that poor old soul's last wishes! I got desprit like at last. 'Here goes then,' I ses—and prayin': 'Lord have mercy on her soul,' I throws the urn to the winds, instead of the ashes, and hurries back to my boat. A capful of wind had sprung up, and I sets the sail, but what with settin' and tackin', and one thing or another, I s'pose 'twas some considerable time afore I made much headway. Then I sits down, has another pull at the bottle (mighty cold it was now, and creepy like just afore dawn) and fixin' the rope I kept my eyes out for the shore, and my back to them 'ere lonesome sands behind. Sudden-like I hears at the side o' the boat a queer tap—tap—tappin'—like as if someone was knockin'.

"My heart gives a jump, and I feels the sweat a-startin' out o' my forehead. I looks round but I couldn't see nothin', and I tries to think 'twas a matter o' fancy. No, lady, it warn't. Sure as I live that sound comes agin. *Tap—tap—tap.* I summons up courage and looks over the side o' the boat and there—plain as I see you—was that 'ere kreemashun urn keepin' up *beside the boat!*"

At this dramatic point he paused, and I regarded him with the amazement required, although the incident seemed to me capable of explanation.

"What a strange thing—what did you do?"

"I looked at it, bobbing up and down on that grey heaving sea, and it seemed as if the old lady was a-follerin' me, and upbraidin' me for not 'aving obeyed her direcshuns. I didn't like it. I'm not exactly a superstishus man, but gospel truth, lady, I didn't *like* it. However, I 'adn't the 'eart to leave it there floatin' so lonely-like on the lonely sea, and I leant over and took it in. 'Twas a mortial uncomfortable trip, that I will say—creeps and shivers, and the sweat a-pourin' out as I rowed and sailed to make all speed, and the white urn there afore me all that time. But I got home at last, and took it along o' me to my cottage. Not wantin' my missus to see it in the mornin', I cast about for a safe place to hide it, and at last I put it on the top shelf of a cupboard where were a few jam crocks and pickle bottles. It warn't the sort o' company I liked to leave 'er in," he added apologetically, "but 'twas safe—leastwise I thought so. Then I finished the rum, and went to bed.

"Next day, being Christmas Day and a holiday, I lay abed longer than usual, and was sort o' dreamin' and dozin' mighty comfortable when I hears a loud screech from the kitchen, followed by a crash as if all the chiny was smashed!

"Up I jumps and looks in at the door.

"'Why what the——' I ses (axin' your pardon, lady), and there lay my missus on the floor in a dead faint and the children all skeered, and that 'ere kreemashing

urn smashed to bits! As I'm a living man, lady, that's how it was!

"I gets the old woman round, and sets her up, and then she falls a-cryin' and a-laughin' as I'd never seen a sensible, God-fearin' female behavin' 'erself afore. 'Oh, Jan,' she ses, 'we're 'aunted.' 'Rubbish,' ses I. 'What are you a-torkin' about?'

"'Yes,' she ses, ''aunted! *The urn's come back!'*

"'Nat'rally it has,' ses I. 'Seeing as how I brought it. And why in the name of thunder,' I ses, 'did you go a-meddlin' with it? And where,' I ses, 'are the ashes?'

"'Ashes,' she ses. And recoverin' like we stoops and looks about among the broken pieces of the urn, but as I'm a livin' soul this day, there *warn't no ashes.* Not a sign of dust even on any of the pieces. We picked 'em up most careful, and I tells 'er the story as how I'd left the urn on the sands and found it a-follerin' o' the boat. I can tell you, lady, she didn't like it. What to do now I didn't know. Maybe them ashes were so fine and powdery they'd blown away. Howsomever 'twas an awful thing, for I couldn't keep my word, and my wife she'd got it in her 'ed that the old lady would 'aunt us if so be her last wishes warn't carried out. It was what the story books calls a dylemmer, and no mistake! It warn't quite the sort o' Christmas Day I'd expected, and 'twarn't any use tryin' to be jolly, 'cos we couldn't be, rememberin' that accident to the urn. At last I ses: 'Mary, I'll go up to London and see that exercutioning gentleman as the old lady said was her nephew, and tell him what's happened. Perhaps he's kept some o' them 'ere ashes

for 'imself,' I ses, 'and might spare a few, and then I'd cement this 'ere urn together, and bury it 'cordin' to her wishes,' I ses. And Mary she agreed, but she and the children wouldn't sleep there in the cottage, not on no account, and went to a sister's 'ouse in Folkestone, when I goes up to London next day.

"I called at the gentleman's address, and was shown into his study. I didn't much like the looks o' him. He was thin and peaky lookin', and spoke as if he was a-prayin', and kept 'is 'ands together—*so.*" (Jan Britton gave an illustration of High Church mannerism, graphic, and distinctly recognisable.) "And then," he resumed, "I told him my story, and said how sorry I was not bein' able to carry out the good lady's wishes. He listened, and a sort o' curious smile came over his face.

"'My good man,' he ses, 'there ain't no need for you to distress yourself. Of course there weren't no ashes in the urn—for one good and sufficient reason.'

"I looks at him.

"'The reason,' he ses, 'that my aunt wasn't kreemated at all. I don't hold with it,' he ses. 'It would have been against my conscience, and I had her buried accordin' to the proscribed rites of the Christian Church,' he ses.

"Well, lady, I was took aback. I stared at 'im. 'But, sir,' I ses, 'her last wishes—and what about her will?'

"'She left no will,' he ses—'no legal dockiment at least, only a form of words expressing her absurd desires.'

"'But don't you hold 'em binding, sir?' I ses.

"'Certainly not,' 'e ses. 'And when I got your

letter, and remembered the ridic'lous nonsense she 'ad written down I just sent you a vase I happened to 'ave in my study in order to pacify you.'

"Lor', ma'am, I felt a fool, but I can tell you I'd like to have taken that 'ere parson by his two shoulders, and given 'im a jolly good shakin'.

"As 'twas I only took up my 'at, and I ses to 'im, 'You're a parson, and I leaves it to you and your conscience, for you'll have to meet the old lady some day, and then there'll be a reckonin'!'

"Well, lady, he just smiled very sweet like and ses, 'In my Father's 'ouse are many mansions.'

"So I goes back to my 'ome and left 'im to make a choice of 'evenly apartments where maybe he'd not come across his aunt."

THE SECOND EDITION.

"You have forgotten me—naturally?" he said, as he held out a cordial hand.

His voice was also cordial, but his eyes were keenly critical. They took in every change that ten years had made, the most trying ten years of a woman's life—thirty to forty.

Olivia Quirk was now only a middle-aged, discontented-looking woman with ambitions unrealised, and battles, jealousies and animosities written around the hard lines of mouth and eyes. It was a story the man knew well, and had followed from afar. He had felt wonder, sorrow, regret. But now he was keenly conscious of disappointment also. Had she been always in the right after all—always a martyr; always a saint; conscious of no human foibles and weaknesses: the pettiness of women, the crude jealousies and spites of women? He felt instinctively that she was far from perfect—at least as perfect as two people had always insisted upon. One was the husband who had blindly adored her; the other a poor makeshift sort of relative, toady and companion by necessity. To these Olivia had posed as a genius. The one had lived with her but a year. Then death closed his illusions in merciful disillusion. The other—Maria Harrison—had deemed

blindness and subservience her best means of securing comfortable quarters and fair remuneration. It had been a little difficult sometimes to believe *quite* in the gifts and graces and perfections of a mere ordinary woman, a scribbler of novels with a vogue that appealed to an indiscriminating public. But poor Maria had done it so long that it had become second nature. She never contradicted her imperious employer; never disagreed with an opinion or a conviction; never failed to gasp admiring wonder when a chapter or a portion of the new book was read to her; never failed to see that it was the best and finest work the author had yet accomplished; never pretended to notice adverse criticism, or the warnings of publishers; never disagreed with the gifted writer's own conviction that reviewers were fools and bigots, and asses and idiots, or that her work appealed to a far higher and more critical tribunal—that of the public.

As a rule Olivia Quirk treated that appreciative section of the reading world as a possessive noun. "My public," she called it. It existed merely for the privilege of reading each successive book with which she honoured its purse-strings, or its judgment. Whether it had the bad taste to read any other author in no way concerned her. She had levied a considerable tax on the aforesaid purse-strings during her fifteen years of literary workmanship. She had tested appreciation to the extent of a beautiful old Tudor country house, and all the adjuncts of wealth necessary to her position. And it was upon this peaceful solitude that Martin Doyle had suddenly launched himself with Transatlantic effrontery writ large upon personality and judgment. He had been a boy-

hood's friend, as well as a cousin of Archibald Quirk deceased.

She had corresponded with him often (owing to mutual literary tastes and the exigencies of American copyright), and now had offered him the hospitality of her house and home on the occasion of a month's visit to England.

"Forgotten you?" came the brisk, effervescent answer of a welcoming hostess. "Indeed I haven't. How well you look. How little you have altered. Now I——"

"Yes—you haven't worn so well," he said coolly. "Work and worry play the devil with a woman's looks."

She coloured angrily, and not becomingly. She was not used to plain speaking, devoid of all compliment save its truth.

"I have had a great deal of both," she answered, withdrawing the hand she had stretched out so effusively. "But pray sit down. You must be tired. It was good of you to come so soon."

"You asked me to come to you as soon as possible."

"And do you always do what a woman asks you?" she questioned archly.

"That depends on the woman, of course. I hadn't seen you for ten years. Naturally I didn't want to waste more time. So I hired the best motor I could get, and here I am. I've chartered it for a month, by the way, so I can give you a look round the country while I'm here. I guess you haven't seen much of it paddling about the lanes in a pony cart?"

"The sweetest thing!" she exclaimed. "Four piebalds. The smallest in the world. I drive them myself."

"Must look like the advertisement of a circus."

"You're very rude," she said angrily.

"Well, I guess I don't give away much sugar candy," he answered. "But surely a sensible woman who knows life and the world doesn't expect a man to talk to her as if she was a school miss?"

"Of course not. Only—only, well, you *are* rather outspoken, Cousin Martin. I suppose I must call you *that?*"

"Just suit yourself," he said. "I don't lay much account on names. But since I'm Archie's cousin, why, I reckon I've a sort of partnership in the firm, eh?—What's the trouble now?"

For she had sighed deeply.

"Trouble? How very quick you are at reading one's thoughts, Martin. I was only thinking what a pity it was you had gone to the expense of hiring a motor, because, well—I've set myself against them from the first."

"Then the sooner you change your mind the better. It's almost as easy as changing her gown—for a woman."

"*Some* women, perhaps. Not for me."

"I'm sorry. I was bent on giving you some rattling good spins, and—why, who's this?"

He was staring at the slowly opening door; at a small grey figure; an abashed, timid face.

"Oh, that's only Maria Harrison, my companion and secretary. Do come in, Maria, and shut that door. How often I've told you I hate that cringing, silly way you have of entering a room. What's the matter now?"

The companion handed a telegram as apology. "It's just come. I thought it might be—about—about 'Berenice'?"

That is to say.

Olivia Quirk snatched the yellow envelope and tore it open. Martin looked compassionately at the frightened-faced little creature who stood with downcast eyes awaiting her imperious mistress's orders.

"Who's Berenice?" he asked.

"My new book. It's in a second edition! Think of that. And only published last week!"

"Good—if it's true? But it may be bluff. I know a lot about publishers. They're not always strictly correct in their statements. But it's as well sometimes to throw a little dust in the eyes of the public. I'd wire back and tell them to put 'third' next week and so on. It'll do no harm. Glad you're appreciated in England. They don't have you in America now. I expect you know that."

She flashed an angry glance at the speaker. "Considering the wretched stuff that's published over there I feel more honoured by their refusal than by their acceptance."

"Well, that's all right," he said cheerfully. "I've done my best for the last two books, but they wouldn't give them a look in."

Olivia turned sharply to Maria. "You can go," she said. "There's no answer."

"Stay a moment," interrupted Martin Doyle. "Your young friend looks a bit out of sorts. What'll she say to a spin, eh? Do her a power of good, I'm thinking. And as you're set against the automobile and I'm just keen on it—well, what do *you* say, Miss Maria?"

The pale cheek grew warm. The timid eyes flashed delight. "Oh, how lovely! I have only been in a motor once, but I shall never forget it. It was heavenly!"

Then she suddenly remembered her position in the household. Her face took on the old patient expression of downtrodden servitude. "But I forgot. Perhaps Olivia——"

"Oh, never mind Olivia," interrupted Martin. "She's not going to play dog-in-the-manger, I'm sure. She doesn't like motoring herself but——"

"I never said I didn't *like* it," said Olivia pettishly; "only that it would be acting against a principle. I've written so strongly on the subject."

"That's the worst of living in these little country towns," said Martin Doyle. "You set up as an authority and have to maintain the standard. I suppose now you imagine they couldn't get along without you and your little circus, and your monopoly of the one book store?"

"I think you are horribly rude," flashed out Olivia angrily.

"Rude? What have I said? Only what other folks *think*. It was Clement B. Lathers, the Soap King you made such a fuss of, who said that about the circus. First when he saw you driving he thought they were four mottled goats, and he told it everywhere. What—cross again? My! Olivia, you do get riled over trifles! Come and have a motor spin, and show the folks you've as much right to change your mind as any other woman."

But Olivia was in a towering rage by this time.

There was not a spark of humour in her composition, and the very fact that anyone should attempt to make fun of her was an indignity she could not pardon. Martin Doyle read this as plainly as he read smallness of soul and overwhelming self-conceit. But he had come

over to talk commonsense and put her business affairs on a more solid basis than that represented by bogus editions and publishers' puffs. He was rather surprised that she kept her resolution, and that when the great white motor glided up to the gate, only Maria appeared as his companion.

She was trembling with delight and expectation, and also with fear, for Olivia had said very sharp and unpleasant things.

All the same Olivia was furious at her own self-sacrifice, when she saw the beautiful car flash down the village street and out into the wide road beyond.

Martin drove it himself, and Maria sat by his side in an apology for motor dress consisting of a tweed ulster and a small Shetland shawl tied over her hat. But before ten minutes had passed she was too happy and excited to care for anything in the world save just that swift, easy motion, that kindly voice chatting to her with a sympathy and consideration no one else had ever displayed.

He learnt a great deal from her innocent admissions: facts she was unconscious of betraying; secrets of her prison house hitherto rigorously guarded. But all he learnt was only what he had expected. For there is a sort of self-betrayal in authorship, and he had long since summed up his cousin's life to his own satisfaction.

Poor little Maria was no match for American astuteness. It did not occur to her that an assertion on his side could be combated by an evasion on hers. He told her she must be hard worked, and heart lonely, and she simply agreed, and apologised for the con-

cession by saying it was her life and she had grown used to it.

"But you've no business to grow used to it," said Martin, slowing down before the difficulties of a narrow lane encumbered by cows. "You've as much right to freedom and happiness as—as Olivia herself."

"Oh—but Olivia is different. She is a great writer, a great genius—a——"

"A great humbug!" he interrupted, "only she's gone one better than even humbugs usually go. She has succeeded in humbugging herself. She actually believes what she *wants* to believe. This new book now——"

"'Berenice'?"

"Yes. A rotten title. It didn't appear too popular either, judging by the stacks of unsold copies I saw on the bookstalls. And, between ourselves, Miss Maria, I don't seem to trust that wire this morning."

She started, flushed, then grew very pale. "Oh, why do you say that?"

He gave her a keen glance, noted the fright and pallor of the little face.

"Why? How does one account for instincts? You see, I work at the same trade. I know a thing or two about publishers. Say now, was there some *special* reason that Olivia should be put in a good temper? And did kind-heartedness plan a little trick to put her in it? No, don't tell me. I can read your face. What a piece of foolishness you've committed! Don't you know that the first letter, the first royalty account, will let daylight in?"

"Why should you accuse me, Mr. Doyle? How can you possibly know?"

"I don't *know*. I only surmise. And you looked sort of frightened. That put me on the track. However, we'll say no more."

He put on speed again, and for the space of some five minutes neither of them spoke. Then Maria said, "I don't wish to deceive you, Mr. Doyle. I did send that wire. I got it done by one of the clerks in Essex & Sutcliff's office. I know him very well. He won't betray me. I—I thought if it *was* found out it would be considered a mistake, and I did so want her to be at her best while your visit lasted."

"At her *best?* Is that only possible when her vanity is flattered? And why should you think I cared? I knew her long ago, and read her better than you seem to have done. I'm not afraid of her at all events. You are."

"How do you know that?"

"The moment I set eyes on you, I could tell. I'm very sorry for it, Miss Maria. I hate to see a woman bullied. And if you're a cousin of Olivia's, I just seem to *want* to claim you also."

Maria's heart fluttered like a bird's. She had never known a man's interest, a man's help. She scarcely knew whether pride or astonishment predominated in her mind.

"All the same," he went on, presently, "I'd rather you hadn't played that trick. It's bound to be found out."

Maria was silent. Only her cheeks burned, and hot, unwilling tears began to fill her eyes. She kept them downcast, hoping he would not see. But he did see.

"Come, don't distress yourself. If the worst comes to the worst, I'll say I did it. A lie more or less doesn't trouble an author. He writes so many. So just set your mind at rest and let's enjoy our drive. I'm going top speed up this hill."

Maria clasped her hands in ecstasy as the car switchbacked up and down for the next ten minutes.

"Oh, it is lovely! too lovely!" she kept repeating.

"Better than the circus?" he asked. "That's what I call Cousin Olivia's show team. Does she ever drive you?"

"Oh no! You see, she might be photographed, or interviewed, or meet somebody important."

"I see. An eye to self-advantage. That's not unusual with — celebrities. But between ourselves, I bet she'd rather be in *this* car than her own mouse-trap to-day."

Maria laughed; a laugh of youth, of girlish enjoyment. Her companion glanced at her and smiled. He noted the flush and warmth of her cheeks, the soft ripple of fair hair that the wind had blown into disorder about her brow. Why, she was almost pretty — this girl! This poor, downtrodden, hard-worked little creature who had aroused his compassion and awakened his interest.

Yet she had told him very little about herself; her arduous duties, her lonely, unloved life: nothing at all about its drudgery, its multiple exactions, varying from the washing and exercising of Olivia's pet terriers to the tending of her wardrobe and the supervision of her servants. For Olivia insisted on keeping up a certain style on a lessening income, and visited all attendant difficulties and complaints on the long-suffering Maria.

Martin Doyle had formed his own opinion of both women before he turned his car homewards.

"I guess we'll do a spin every day I'm here if you're agreeable," he said, as they drew up at the gate.

Maria flushed nervously. "Oh! but I couldn't. I mean she—she——"

"She can't want you all the time," he said. "And here's the car just begging for use. If you only saw how different you look! Ten years younger—and prettier. That's so."

She was so fluttered and so astonished that she could find no words to answer him. But she ran up the steps and into the hall with some of the old grace and girlishness of her sacrificed youth. It was to this renewed youth and brightness that Olivia Quirk gave astonished recognition as she came downstairs for tea. If motoring was so beneficial to one's looks—and one's age—why, oh! why, had she committed herself by published and well-known abuse of it!

. . . . .

"That's a nice little girl—your secretary—Cousin Olivia," observed Martin, as he drank his coffee and trifled with a proffered cigarette. "Sort of crushed and dispirited, though. I mean to give her a good time; with your permission, of course. I never saw anyone enjoy a motor more, or look so much better for it. Pity you can't come too. Did you walk around the town with those piebalds? I s'pose it's expected of you here, isn't it?"

"I drove to Sherrington. It's five miles off. There's a lovely view from the hill," said Olivia.

"We scouted *that* landmark in about ten minutes.

See what a saving of time my car is! If only you hadn't written against the motoring craze. That reminds me. Why did you try that little game on with Perron's?"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"Well, didn't you first try to get a car on appro'—or half price? When they refused, you wrote that article on motoring. They were pretty sick about it, though I don't see it's done any harm. How I know is, I went to Perron's for my car and said I was coming down here, and the head chap told me about it. You see, cousin, celebrities have to pay the price of their fame sometimes."

"It's perfectly untrue," she stormed. "I detest motors, as I said. These people only wanted me to—to advertise their cars, and I wouldn't."

"Well, there are two sides to every story. I s'pose that's yours. It don't hang with the other, but that's no account. Women never speak the truth with any remarkable degree of accuracy."

"I must say you haven't learnt manners while you've been in America," she said savagely. "I've heard ruder things from you to-day than from anyone else in the last twenty years."

"I told you I was a plain-speaking man. As for the way I talk to women, why, it's just the way I write about them. They must like it, or they wouldn't read my books, or go to see my plays."

"I suppose you've made your fortune by now," she said, somewhat eagerly.

"Leave it at that."

"At what?"

"At supposing. Money's the last thing I care about.

Which reminds me—how much do you pay your secretary?"

"I might ask you what business that is of yours."

"It's part of any man's business to see a woman doesn't work too hard, and has an occasional good time in her life. Now Miss Maria doesn't look radiantly happy, considering she has the honour of living under your roof. She *is* located here, I take it, though I didn't see her at dinner."

"She dines in her own room when I have company," said Olivia stiffly.

"Company! Do you call me company? That's hard on—both of us."

"You seem to take a great interest in my secretary?"

"I do. I think she's a sweet, gentle, kind-hearted little soul, and there's none too many of them going around these times."

"I bow to your superior experience," said Olivia sarcastically.

He smiled. "No woman likes hearing another praised. I wonder why? Now a man——"

"Oh—of course! We all know that men are chivalrous and honourable and large-minded, especially where women are concerned."

He surveyed her critically. "Say, Olivia, we don't seem to be hitting it off very well. Two is company, but sometimes three's better. Ask Miss Maria to come down and we'll play cards or something."

She sprang up trembling with passion. "I don't play cards, but as I seem unequal to the task of entertaining you, I'll go to my study and attend to some necessary work."

"Are you on a new book? Surely not. Why, 'Berenice'——"

He paused abruptly. He was thinking of that bogus telegram.

"Yes?" said Olivia cuttingly. "You were going to say——"

"Well, I only thought it was a bit previous to begin a new book while the old one is hanging fire."

"Hanging fire!" Her eyes were blazing now. "What do you mean? Don't you know the whole first edition is exhausted?"

"'Second in the press,'" he quoted, laughing. "'Third ready to-morrow. All to be issued immediately. Order by telegram or telephone in case you get left.' Oh, cousin, don't quote that sort of rot between two old stagers like ourselves. It's getting a bit too thick for even our side of the water. I'm sorry it's caught on over here."

"You don't believe in my success? You think that my book *isn't* in a second edition?"

"There are two sorts of people I never believe, Cousin Olivia. One is an author when he tells you his publisher's terms; the other a politician who says he won his seat entirely on his own merits. I don't suppose either brand is strictly confined to Amurrica."

"May I ask if you have paid this visit for the sole purpose of insulting me, Mr. Martin Doyle?"

"Insulting you! I—insult a woman, and that woman a relative of my own, and the wife of the best friend I ever had. Good God, cousin, what *are* you saying?"

She swept across the room and opened the door.

"Kindly ring the bell, and order anything you wish.

You will be called at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. Breakfast is at nine. I wish you good night."

"Stop!" he cried. "I can't stand this. Please don't go off like that or I'll just order out my motor and get straight away back to London. Come, be reasonable. What have I said? Only the plain truth as a plain man knows it."

But Olivia Quirk was in a towering passion by this time. She—whom no one ever contradicted, who had a little coterie of flatterers and sycophants serving her as means to an end—she to be arraigned, contradicted, insulted as this Irish-American cousin had insulted and contradicted her! It was unbearable. She banged the door on his last words, and went to her own retreat, where Maria sat at work typing some untidy half-illegible pages of a virulent article directed against one of the author's pet grievances.

The click-clack of the machine irritated Olivia's nerves. So did the change in Maria's appearance: the new arrangement of her hair; the dainty neatness of white muslin blouse and black skirt. She ordered her patient drudge to stop, and at once opened fire on the patient recipient of all her grievances, real or imagined.

"To be insulted, disbelieved, treated as if I were some second-rate writer like himself!"

"But I thought he was quite celebrated and famous," hazarded Maria.

The vials of wrath emptied themselves afresh. In Olivia Quirk's opinion no other author was celebrated or famous in comparison with herself.

It was unfortunate that in the midst of the discussion the imperturbable Martin entered the room.

"I knocked twice," he said candidly. "But you were talking so loud I guess you didn't hear me. There's another wire just come for you, cousin. I told the servant I'd take it in. Possibly it's to say 'Berenice' is in a *third* edition."

The moment he had said it he felt sorry, for his eyes fell on Maria's terrified face, and he suddenly remembered the bogus wire of the morning.

Olivia tore open the envelope, read the message, then turned surprised eyes on Maria and her cousin. "I—I can't make this out. They've telegraphed the same thing *twice!*"

She handed the paper to Martin Doyle. He read:

"Pleased to inform you going to press second edition of 'Berenice.'—ESSEX & SUTCLIFF."

He glanced from Olivia's triumphant face to Maria's frightened one. Would the truth come out now, or could he possibly throw himself into the breach?

"Seems perfectly clear," he said coolly. "A clerk must have sent off the first wire, and this has come from the firm themselves, to sort of ratify Number One. It's often done in business, you know. Well, let me congratulate you most heartily, cousin. There's no doubt about 'Berenice' now. She's going to be a tip-top success, and I'm delighted to have been on the spot when the news came."

"Oh! you do believe in me *now?*" said Olivia haughtily.

"I always have," he answered mendaciously. "What makes you think the contrary? Possibly I've been a bit

too outspoken; fault of American principles grafted on to Irish perspicuity. I was real mad with myself when I thought I'd offended you a few moments ago. Do forgive me and let us be friends, otherwise I'll have to forego your hospitality."

He glanced at Maria, shrinking, flushing, trembling. He saw what that telegram had meant to her—from what disgrace it had saved her. He saw Olivia's triumphant face, and he snatched at the chance of reconciliation.

"Of course I forgive you," said Olivia magnanimously. "For I know perfectly well that no class of persons are so jealous of each other's successes as—authors."

"I believe you're right," he answered gravely.

Olivia smiled graciously. "Maria, just write a few lines to say I'm pleased with Messrs. Essex & Sutcliff's attention in sending me *two* wires. Also that I hope there may be many more editions of 'Berenice.'"

She glanced round the room. "I'll bring you a copy, Martin," she said. "It's upstairs. I'll be back directly."

Martin Doyle crossed to Maria's side. "That's luck. She'll never question about that first telegram. You did look scared, though. Never mind. I mean to stay on now we've made it up, and a few more motor spins will steady your nerves better than anything. We're going to be great friends, aren't we?"

The blue eyes looked an innocent question. "You —and Olivia? Why, of course."

"I didn't say—Olivia. She's not set on motoring; only on Second Editions. What about yourself?"

"You're very kind to trouble your head about me. I don't know why you should."

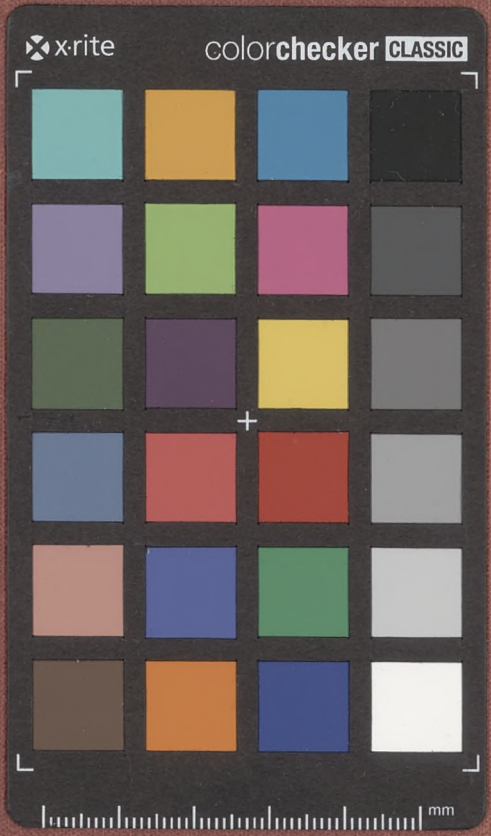
"Maybe you will—some day. I reckon you're not going to be an author's secretary all your life. Maybe not more than a month."

"A—month?"

"I've come over to this country for just that time," he said with a smile that held a world of meaning.

THE END.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.


x-rite
colorchecker CLASSIC
mm