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ALBATROSS
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FAWCETT'S MABEL

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New York

YOUNG FAWCETT'S MABEL.

BY ALBERT ROSS,

AUTHOR OF

"THOU SHALT NOT," "HIS PRIVATE CHARACTER,"
"SPEAKING OF ELLEN," "LOVE AT SEVENTY,"
"WHY I'M SINGLE," "A BLACK
ADONIS," ETC., ETC.



NEW YORK:

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TO MY READERS.

THE story which fills the following pages was not written this year, nor last; and with one exception it took more of my time than anything else that bears my signature. It has long been ready for the press. Why has it not been printed sooner, and why is it offered to you now?

The first reason is this: One hesitates to send a favorite child, in whose merit he believes, before an audience sure to be critical. "Thou Shalt Not" lay in my desk four years before any publisher saw it. "Young Fawcett's Mabel" has been there nearly as long, on account of a fear that my successes have not taught me to outlive.

This is the second reason: There are certain public questions "in the air," as the saying is, and novelists are unconsciously following in similar paths. For instance: "Out of Wedlock" had a plot that was, till its appearance, unique in literature; but within a month an eminent English author published a novel with the same *motif*, and a month later another author did the same thing. I do not consider it safe to leave "Mabel" out of print, lest the day come when I cannot send it forth without being accused of plagiarism.

TO MY READERS.

This summer I have spent in Western and Central Europe. In the intervals of travel I have begun to weave another tale, that will be yours in due time. The winter I intend to pass in Rome, Naples, Egypt and Palestine; the spring in Constantinople. I therefore, in my absence, commend to you this favorite child of my brain, hoping she will prove as welcome as her older sisters were.

ALBERT ROSS.

Florence, Italy, Nov. 1, 1895.

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YOUNG FAWCETT'S MABEL.

CHAPTER I.

A PROSPECTIVE MOTHER-IN-LAW.

I HAVE decided to write the story of the matrimonial experiences of Allan Fawcett and of Mabel M. Fawcett, his wife ; to tell the world, without prejudice to either, the manner in which they became acquainted, the circumstances that led to their courtship and marriage, the reasons why they found each other uncongenial, the way they drifted apart, and the temptations that arose from the infelicity thus developed.

There are few marital difficulties, I opine, that are entirely the fault of but one of the contracting parties. It is the custom, in cases of doubt, to lay the heavier weight upon the shoulders of the man. Possibly those who read this tale may admit that the woman is not always without blame.

I am to tell this story with the full consent of those most interested. No one knows them better than I. They have confided to me their innermost thoughts. During those months when they had lost faith in each other, they confided in me. I believe I am able to give an unbiased account of a series of events that should be of direct benefit to other people who are married or contemplating matrimony.

Of course the first thing necessary is to disguise the personality of my characters. Readers acquainted with the various branches of the highly-respected Fawcett family may recognize neither Allan nor Mabel as familiar names connected with that ilk. It would have been quite as easy for me to call them John and Rebeka Smith, for the titles used are wholly fictitious. But a question of far greater importance is likely to arise. It is probable that thousands will think they see in these people the counterparts of others, and credit me with a wider and more intimate knowledge of domestic affairs than any one man could possess. They will say that I must have known Mrs. Brown or Mr. Robinson, of their village, and have penetrated into the deepest secrets of their existence. They will be wrong. Our Allan and Mabel have an entity of their own.

There is a widespread opinion—which this book will not lessen—that something is the matter with the matrimonial institution. The divorce courts are choked with cases. There are States in which hundreds take up a temporary residence for the sole purpose of severing obnoxious ties. Something is surely wrong; but whether the trouble lies mainly with the husbands, or with the wives, or the climate, or the too free institutions of the land, or the growing contempt for old forms, or the increasing love of ease and luxury—that I will leave to the professional essayists who make a specialty of such matters. It is for me merely to relate the history of a special case, and allow the public to draw its own conclusions.

In the days of my childhood I remember writing, over and over, in my copy-book, these words :

“It is human to err.”

"It is human to err."

"It is human to err."

I have something of the human quality in me. This couple of whom I shall write—these two who have lived in the most intimate relation that God permits to His creatures—may come to regard each other as deadly enemies; they who have hung breathless on each other's smiles may meet with frowns; they who have run swiftly toward the sound of beloved steps may fly as swiftly in the opposite direction. If they do, I cannot help it. The more they err, the more human I find them.

To begin, then, Allan Fawcett, at the age of fifteen, was left an orphan and a penniless one, too. He did not mind in the least, however, the prospect of going out to earn his living. He had health and courage. Some distant relations made vague offers of seeing to his welfare. They had plenty of means to continue the education which he much wanted, even to send him to college, as his father would have done. But even at that early age Allan had developed a pride quite out of proportion to his size. He felt in every nerve that the offers of assistance were not hearty ones, and he would have begged of strangers on the highway rather than accept the bounty of his own flesh and blood under such conditions. He told them he had no need of help, and almost before they were aware of his intention he had taken what little money belonged to him, and put a thousand miles between himself and every one he knew.

He never liked to talk much of this period of his life. I know he worked awhile in a store for four dollars a week, sleeping in a back office as a sort of protection against burglars, and paying three dollars a

week for his meals at a boarding-house. I know he was for a time a newsboy on a railroad, where he "ran" a night train, and got his sleep after midnight on a pile of mail-bags, when he had harassed the last possible purchaser into buying a paper, a book, or a box of figs. Afterwards he lived in a hotel and answered bells; and he went up and down one of our great rivers on a steamer, waiting on table and otherwise assisting in the cabin.

A slender, delicate lad he was then, but with more hope than many twice his size. He did not complain of the longest hours, or of the hardest labor he was able to perform, but would never, even when his fortunes were the lowest, permit any one to address him in an insolent manner without replying in equally cutting terms. Some of his situations were lost by this trait of his, for the employer of labor often believes that the salary he pays entitles him to say to its recipient whatever ill-temper suggests.

Sometimes the very ludicrousness of the contrast between his diminutive bulk and that of his elders saved him from punishment or discharge, as a laugh from the bystanders would greet his indignant words; sometimes, again, the bully who had insulted him used his superior strength to eject or chastise him.

Allan never could realize in those days that any man alive was bigger or stronger than he, until it had been put to the test. When attacked with the tongue he had no difficulty in parrying the thrust with one fully as effective. When met with physical force he lost no time in seizing any weapon that lay within reach and returning blow for blow, no matter when or where the incident occurred.

Although a slender, rather pale boy, at fifteen and

even at seventeen, he began to grow rapidly in his eighteenth year. At nineteen he was not a bad-looking young fellow, though he cared little for dress and had not a single air of the dandy about him. He had begun to get on his feet, as the saying is. Though two years short of the legal age for transacting business, he was already a merchant in a small way, and had a capital. While on the railroad he had noticed that the prices of various commodities varied considerably at the ends of the line, much more in some cases than the price of carriage seemed to warrant. With only twenty-five dollars at his command he made his first venture in buying and selling, and had the supreme satisfaction of seeing the twenty-five turned into thirty-eight with hardly any effort. It was clear that he was destined by nature to be a trader. Other ventures followed, some with equally good results, some with poorer, and some—as is a necessity of trade—with a loss. But even the losses were not unproductive of good results. They taught him caution.

What slight events seem to alter our entire lives! The year that Fawcett was twenty he happened to render a service to a lady on a train. She had forgotten an important errand in the city they had just left—important, at least, to her—and had just discovered, by asking the conductor, that she would be unable to go back and attend to it without staying over night, a thing she did not like to do. In the midst of her discomfort Allan Fawcett, who sat in the seat in front of her, volunteered his services. He was going back in the course of two or three hours, and would be pleased to step into the store and order the package she had forgotten forwarded to her by the first morning train. The lady looked at the card he handed her, and read

these words: '*Allan Fawcett, Commission Merchant, 78 South Street.*' Then she looked at the young man.

"Are you an employee of Mr. Fawcett?" she asked.

"No," he said, reddening a little. "I am Mr. Fawcett, himself."

"Oh!" said the lady. And she was so lost in this discovery, considering the youth of the commission merchant, that she forgot for the moment the subject which had brought on the conversation.

"I am only going to Glendon," said Allan, again; "and I shall be back to Norwood by five. I can step into the store you spoke of and do your errand without the least trouble."

Then the lady thanked him, and accepted his offer. She handed him one of her own cards, with the name of "Mrs. Lucius Morey" on one side and the necessary words pencilled on the other. She seemed to be a widow, judging from her garments, and, as he afterwards learned, the late Mr. Morey had been deceased for a number of years.

There was not time for a very lengthy conversation before the young man reached his destination. In the little that he said he impressed Mrs. Morey very strongly in his favor, and she invited him to call upon her should he ever visit the village of Gleason, where she lived. He said he sometimes had occasion to go there, and would not forget her invitation, and then the train stopped and he alighted.

"He is a bright young man," mused Mrs. Morey, when he was gone. "I hope he will come and see us. He is very bright, indeed."

When Fawcett had done the errand for Mrs. Morey he dismissed her from his mind. He had only accepted her invitation out of politeness, and, in truth, sup

posed that the only reason she had given it. The life he led was a purely business one. He had never been into a private residence since he left his father's after the funeral, five years previous. His acquaintances were mainly business men. His time out of business hours was largely spent in reading, of which he was passionately fond. He found the great novelists, poets, and historians a grateful change after a day spent in selling produce, or in seeking new customers who would consign their goods to him.

Had he been possessed of a fortune he might have written things himself that would have been worth reading, for he had an imaginative temperament, and his ideals were passionate and poetic. The necessity of providing for his own needs, and more than all the solitary life he led, with no one to advise or direct him, kept him along the lines of trade. He had not been long in discovering that God seems to help only those who help themselves, and that poverty was a hateful thing that men should escape as soon as possible.

Still, he had a dream that a day would yet come to him when, in a library of his own, surrounded by the books he loved, he might read away the days and evenings, with the price of butter and the quality of eggs no longer a prime consideration. He had that object in his work, that hope and belief that if he toiled faithfully an end would come to it all in time and the reward be his.

There was not in these vague visions any figure of a woman. Fawcett was not at that period a susceptible man toward the fair sex. He seldom paid particular attention to the girls that he met in his travels or in his walks about the streets. He went to the theatre occasionally, but it was the quality of the act-

ing rather than the physical perfection of the actresses that remained in his memory. As for the church, that great matrimonial agency, he did not go there at all. Of a Sunday he was more likely to be found in his room, buried in a volume of Thackeray, or George-Sand, or Turgenieff, than anywhere else. Sometimes—indeed frequently—he forgot his dinner while thus engaged, and more than once he found the morning sun peeping in at the window as he closed a book he had only intended to read till eleven o'clock of so.

I will not say—I, who have promised to tell the whole truth about this man—that he ever turned his steps toward those habitations which are permitted but not approved in our cities. I will not guarantee that he never rang bells or entered doors at places of which the least said is always considered the better. But I will say that there was nothing about his life that could be called dissipation, whatever be the opinion of its doubtful morality in the respect just alluded to. He spent little of his time or substance with women, and of other vices he had practically none whatever. That is to say—he did not know how to play a single game of cards; he drank nothing intoxicating except a glass of beer at rare intervals; and he did not use tobacco in any form. There are men who dissipate by too much work—he did not even do that. The occasional all night at his books was the only thing that approached it. His health was good, his habits were not bad, on the whole, and his business friends considered him a model young man.

He did not go to Mrs. Morey's, because he thought her invitation a perfunctory one, and also because he did not see what particular pleasure he should do

rive from her society. She was evidently a lady, in the fullest sense of the term, and he had a notion that he would rather spend five minutes talking with one of that description than any longer period. He imagined that his stock of conversational subjects would run completely dry in that time. He did not like to answer personal questions, which she would be likely to ask, nor had he any wish to propound inquiries of that nature to her.

Fawcett was becoming rather eccentric, and prided himself upon that fact. There was nothing about him of the ladies' man, and he did not mean there ever should be. He would not buy a silk hat, and very seldom donned a pair of kid gloves, from a notion that such things were beneath the dignity of an energetic fellow. They seemed to him an effeminate affectation, an attempt to imitate the delicate attire of women. He would have worn a velvet jacket on the street as soon as a pair of patent leather shoes, at that time in his career. And it is hardly too strong a way of putting it to say that he would much rather have pushed a hand-cart along the principal street at the fashionable hour than to have made the same journey with a lady on his arm.

It was a source of wonder to him afterward that he ever was beguiled into the parlor of Mrs. Lucius Morey. The process was so insidious that he could never tell afterwards exactly how it came about. Several weeks after that day on the railroad he saw her at Gleason. They met at a corner, and there was no escape when she stopped and addressed him pleasantly, saying she must thank him once more for the favor he had done her about the parcel. He answered that it was not worth speaking of, and then

paused, hoping this would end the conversation. But Mrs. Morey went on to inquire why he had never called, and to say that she had looked for him daily for more than a week after they parted. Before they separated she had inveigled him—as he always put it—into a definite promise that he would visit her very soon.

With Allan Fawcett a promise was a promise. There was no way out of it, now it was made. The next time he came to Gleason he went to Mrs. Morey's. It was early in the evening, for he had to stay in the town over night. He meant to plead another engagement later, for this sort of polite lying even he considered admissible. Nevertheless the lady was so agreeable and soon put him so much at his ease that the clock struck ten before he knew it was half that time.

Without seeming in the least disagreeably inquisitive, Mrs. Morey learned most of the facts that she cared to know before the door closed after him on that first evening at her house. She had found that he was an orphan, that he was making a business career entirely unaided, that he already had money in the bank, and that his habits were exceptionally good. She could see for herself that he was pleasing in his personal appearance, and that he was apparently destined for a long life.

“And so you have no intimate friends in Norwood,” she said, musingly. “Excuse me for saying that is not good for a young man. It is not well to be too much alone during one's early years.”

She was so kind in her manner that he felt, as she intended him to feel, that she took a real interest in his welfare.

"Don't forget," she added, when he did not reply, "that you are always welcome here and that I shall take it to heart if you ever come to Gleason without calling."

"Thank you," he said. "Have you always lived in this village?"

"Oh, dear, no!" replied Mrs. Morey. "I came here after my husband died, because—well, to be perfectly honest, because it was cheaper than New York, where we formerly resided. The place is a little too dull. I do not think I shall stay here much longer. I wonder if Norwood is much dearer."

Fawcett answered that he could hardly say as to that, never having kept house. He supposed the rents were higher, but other things must be about the same. She secured his promise to look about and see what a small house could be hired for, something with six to eight rooms, and to let her know the next time he came to Gleason.

"If I should move to Norwood I should be likely to see more of you," said Mrs. Morey, brightly. "As I have no friends there and you so few outside of your business, I should hope to have you call often."

A proper reply was made to this suggestion, which did not seem to mean much at the time.

"I am so glad to meet a young man, in these days, continued the lady, "who is not complaining of the lack of opportunities, or hanging upon relations. I sometimes grow pessimistic when I look at the rising generation. I have heard my young friends say that the opportunities to make a living have all disappeared, and that no one can get along nowadays unless he has money to make a start. Your case proves the fallacy of that argument. It takes nothing but push

and pluck to ensure success, the same as it always did. You will have a comfortable fortune by the time you are forty, and be able to take your ease for the rest of your life. There is only one road to success, and that is work."

Fawcett had said this to himself so many times that he was pleased to hear the thought expressed so well by another, and he liked Mrs. Morey better from that moment.

"He is certain to succeed," said Mrs. Morey, reflectively, after he had gone. "He suits me even better than I expected. I will move to Norwood, where I can be near him."

"Yes," she added, "I really think he is the very man I want for Mabel."

CHAPTER II.

"IF YOU COULD HAVE A ROOM."

AND who was Mabel?

Mabel Morey was her mother's only child. At the time of which I am writing she was in her eighteenth year. Relations better off in the gear of this world had invited her to visit them, and she was now in Cleveland, Ohio, where they resided.

In her plans for this daughter Mrs. Morey had no intention to hasten the natural course of events, so far as time was concerned. She would have been shocked at the idea that Mabel would marry before she was at least twenty. But she had an eye for the future. She was so well pleased with the young commission merchant that she thought it wise to cultivate him and

keep him in tow, until the right time came. She conceived a plan of getting him and her daughter acquainted, that friendship might ensue and gradually ripen into love.

There was nothing more important in the life of a young girl than that she should marry well. And it was not the man who had the most wealth at the age of twenty that would be certain to make the best husband or, in the end, the most prosperous one. Habits formed before that time might make or break him. Allan Fawcett had as yet but little wealth, but he seemed on the sure road to success. The richest men of the country had started from as humble beginnings as he. Some of the poorest had inherited property and had squandered it in foolish speculation or in riotous living. Mrs. Morey had thought a good deal about these things, and when she happened to meet this young fellow it came to her as by an inspiration that he was the one she should select for a son-in-law.

I wonder how many married men realize that they were the victims of a carefully-prepared scheme on the part of a managing mamma; that the lane through which they reached the gate of matrimony was marked out for them in the most ingenious way by that expert engineer and surveyor. Certain it is that Allan Fawcett, unversed as a babe in such things, never dreamed that Mrs. Morey had any designs on him until long after his scalp hung, metaphorically speaking, at her belt. She proceeded with the utmost discretion. She kept Mabel at Cleveland until she had engaged a house in Norwood that Fawcett found for her, and had moved her household gods into it and set up her new throne there. **Ay, until she even had him a willing slave at**

her chariot wheels, and had made him a member of her family.

A member of her family? Yes.

"I am afraid I can hardly afford as expensive a house as this," she said, demurely, when she had inspected the premises with her future son-in-law. "I did not realize that rents were so much dearer than in Gleason. There was a time"—and here she breathed a sigh—"when I did not have to think of such matters. My husband never stopped to ask how much anything cost that he or I wanted. Had he stopped oftener I might have been richer now." She looked at Fawcett's sympathetic face and then continued, "Do you suppose it would be possible for me to secure a lodger, who would take one of the rooms? That would help a great deal."

He had a thoughtful expression for a moment, and ended by saying that perhaps an advertisement in the local paper might have that result.

"I don't ask it for the sake of being inquisitive," said the lady, after a pause, "but would you mind telling me what such rooms rent for here in Norwood? You hire one yourself. It would give me an idea."

Fawcett told her what he was paying by the week, and she figured up the monthly rate, after the manner of women, multiplying by four.

"If I could let a room at that price," she said, "I should feel that I could afford to take the house. I have plenty of furniture that is very good indeed. This room we are in"—they stood in the best chamber—"is it as good as yours, do you think?"

It was much better than his, and he told her so, in the same honest way that he had always spoken. His room was up another flight and in the rear at that,

This room ought to let for a dollar a week more, at least.

"I suppose," continued Mrs. Morey, after showing him the closets, and remarking that the street was extremely quiet, "that *you* wouldn't—no, of course, *you* wouldn't like to make a change? If you could have this room at the same price you are paying, or at a slight reduction——"

Allan paused to think before he replied. He did not care particularly for the house in which he was living, but on the other hand he disliked moving, that pulling up of stakes that even a bachelor has to do when he changes his domicile. Then again there was no restaurant in this vicinity where he could get meals, and he did not think it would be convenient to walk half-a-dozen blocks. But the room was certainly a great improvement over the one he had. It was larger, and papered with bright new paper, and painted with bright new paint. Each of the two closets was bigger than his single one.

He began in imagination to place some of his belongings about this room. His bookcase would go in that corner very well, and his writing-desk in this one. The bed, of course, would go there, and the bureau there.

He did not think at all of the gain to this widow from letting her room to him. It is one of the pleasures of telling a true story that you do not have to ascribe superior virtues to your characters. Allan Fawcett was a selfish young man. He did not see why he should make a change in his room merely to oblige another person. Unless it was in some way to his own advantage he would remain where he was. Contact with the business world had taught him that all matters

involving dollars and cents must be considered from a sordid standpoint.

"The room is all right," he said, finally, just as the widow was about to speak again. "I have no doubt you can let it at that price to some one. If it were nearer the restaurants I would say at once that I would take it. All that makes me hesitate is the long walk to breakfast."

Mrs. Morey was piqued for an instant at this statement. She had thought him gifted with a little finer sense of the delicacy of her situation. He evidently considered the hiring of this room from the same standpoint that he would have bought a cargo of butter or a carload of hay. But her strong head controlled her, and the engaging smile never left her countenance. More diplomatic young men there might be, but certainly this one would have a shrewd eye to the necessities of life, and if Mabel secured him for a husband she would not be left in want some day on account of his extravagance. The more she thought it over the better pleased she was at his carefulness.

"I can arrange that for you, I am sure," she said sweetly. "I will have your breakfast at any hour you name, served in my own dining-room. As to the price," for she readily guessed that this matter would have its weight with him, "you shall fix that to suit yourself. After breakfasting so long at restaurants it may be a pleasant change to sit at the table of a private house, even though the variety is not quite as great."

The variety! It struck him for the first time that there had not been much variety of late at the place where he took his meals. He cared little for the luxuries of the table, but he recalled with no very

warm sentiments the everlasting steak, steak, steak, that he had only varied by eggs, eggs, eggs, and the not over-palatable beverage dignified by some strange freak with the name of coffee. He pictured to himself a cosy dining-room, with a table-cloth that was sure to be clean, and an atmosphere that would at least not be smoky or filled with buzzing flies.

"I rise very early," he answered absently. "I am always down by seven o'clock."

The lady smiled approvingly.

"Your breakfast shall never keep you waiting a minute after that hour," said she. "Then we will call it settled. I will take the house, beginning from the first of the month, and in a fortnight from to-day we shall find ourselves settled here."

Fawcett was too good a man to be caught in this way had he not concluded that it was for his interest to make the change. He had no associates in his present lodging-house that he cared much about. His habits were retiring, as has already been stated. He was confident that Mrs. Morey would make a good-natured and obliging landlady. He replied, accordingly, that he would accompany her to the agent of the property to close the agreement, and in a few minutes they were at the office of that functionary.

The agent had a momentary look of surprise when Fawcett volunteered to be surety for the payment of the rent, for the first three months, Mrs. Morey being a stranger in the place. He knew the young man very well, and had the opinion of him that was current. He had never heard him speak of relations, and wondered what there might be in this new development of interest in a rather good-looking widow, even though she was considerably his elder. But business

was business with him, and he said Mr. Fawcett's word was fully sufficient, and that he should consider the house leased.

The fabled parlor of the spider could not have looked more attractive to the little fly than Allan Fawcett's chamber did to him when he next beheld it. Mrs. Morey was one of the best housekeepers in the world, a perfect paragon of taste and neatness. Her furniture was much better than that at his old lodging, but this was not half the change. There was an air of brightness about the room that he had never known in any other since the days of childhood.

The lace curtains were surmounted by white lambrequins, fringed with gold braid. Behind the commode was a splasher, worked deftly in red with a representation of a haymaking scene. On the bureau were mats as fresh and clean as could be. Over the white counterpane of the bed was spread a lace covering to match the shams, which though of an inexpensive kind seemed to the inexperienced eyes of the young man too fine for every-day use. There were mats on the floor, of cheerful colors; and a wicker-basket, to receive the litter from his desk, was tied jauntily with cherry ribbon. The bareness of the walls was relieved by pictures in every possible place, and worked mottoes hung over the doors. He sat down quite overcome with all these glories, and congratulated himself at obtaining them without extra cost, except for moving his few personal belongings from Mrs. Chapin's.

It takes very little to make a room cheerful, and yet how few women are real mistresses of the art. How few understand that there is nothing so cheerful as light! How few realize that things the most costly are not always the most attractive! There were a

hundred chambers in Norwood whose furnishings cost much more than the one in which Allan Fawcett was to lodge, but not one, I am sure, which would have suited him better.

And it was all at the price he had formerly paid. The reader will pardon the young merchant, I trust, for this constantly recurring thought. He had seen the hardest kind of youth. He had spent years when cents seemed bigger to him than dollars do to most people, when hardly anything stood between him and hunger, from month to month. In such a school the pupil learns to count the pennies and to search for bargains.

Mrs. Morey wisely left him to himself a great deal. She knew by intuition that he liked his room, and that it must be an agreeable change from any that could be found in an ordinary lodging-house. The first morning she did not trust her maid-of-all-work to get him his breakfast unaided, but rose at five and put her own hands into the flour that the biscuits might be as light and the muffins as good as they could be made. She fixed the table herself and put the coffee into the pot, and saw that the lamb chops and omelette were done to perfection.

If this young man was to be won, much depended on this first breakfast in his new quarters. Mrs. Morey had done these things even in the years when she had kept three servants instead of one, for her husband had a dainty mouth and wanted his meals well served. He was in the habit of saying that none of his friends possessed such a *chef* as he, and that there was no hotel in the land where he enjoyed the cooking as well as at his home. It may readily be conceived that young Mr. Fawcett, used to the ordinary fare of

restaurants and second-class hostelries, could not find much fault with what had pleased an epicure like the late lamented Mr. Morey.

Allan was punctual to the minute, when he heard the tinkle of the little bell that Bridget rang at the foot of his stairs. He was surprised to find Mrs. Morey awaiting him in the dining-room, for he knew the hour was earlier than most ladies are in the habit of making their appearance. She remarked that she was naturally an early riser, and that now she had some one to keep her company at the meal she would generally breakfast with him. She did not intimate that she had had any hand in the preparation of the repast, however, and it was a long time afterward that he made the discovery.

Fawcett knew that the meal was the best he had tasted for a long time, but he did not understand why. Surely he had eaten chops and omelettes times enough and had drunk coffee and tasted muffins. He tried to discover what gave the different flavor to this breakfast, and decided that most of it must be due to the agreeable surroundings. The silver coffee-pot, milk pitcher and sugar-bowl, relics of former greatness, might have something to do with it; the vase in the centre of the table, filled with fresh flowers, probably did its share, he reflected. The daintiness of the china, another heirloom, and the immaculateness of the linen helped also. He did not believe that there could be so much difference in coffee and muffins as he seemed to find.

Such a room and such a breakfast he had never had during those years of his independence. And they cost no more! He kept thinking of that, and it added greatly to the satisfaction he felt. Had he increased

his expenses he would have experienced a twinge. He wanted to accumulate money as fast as he could for a good while yet. He meant to have a large sum in hand before he began anything that savored of luxurious living. And this was at the same price he had paid before! He decided that he had made a very excellent bargain.

Two weeks after he entered the house as a lodger Mabel came home. She was a slender girl, with brownish hair and grayish eyes, that any one would have been justified in calling "pretty." As she still lacked several months of being eighteen, her mother continued to dress her as a young girl, and her gown left a good share of her boots exposed. Her hair was ordinarily braided in a long plait that hung down her back. She had a yet undeveloped form and a precocious air, such as comes from association with older people, to children who have neither brother nor sister. She looked fourteen and acted twenty.

Her mother's taste was shown in her apparel as well as in everything else upon the premises. In Mabel's gowns and hats Mrs. Morey made a very little money go a great way.

Fawcett paused at the threshold on the morning when he first saw this girl in the dining-room, at the punctual hour of seven, which he never failed to keep.

"Mr. Fawcett, allow me to present my daughter," said the widow, in the most matter-of-fact way. Then, when he had made the customary reply, she added, as they all took seats at the table, "Mabel has been living for some months with relations of ours in Ohio."

The young man's first impression was that he wished Mabel had stayed in Ohio, or somewhere else. Things were very comfortable as they were, and he did not

think the addition of another person to the circle would improve them any. He had been assuming a sort of proprietary air over the whole place, encouraged by Mrs. Morey's frequent requests for him to say what he would prefer in the various departments of house-keeping. This girl was not in his contract, as one might say. He wondered why the mother, in all their conversations, had never alluded to her. She might at least have asked if a daughter in the house would be objectionable to him. These thoughts ran through the head of the unreasonable young man during the progress of the meal; but as Miss Mabel relapsed into a state of complete silence after her introduction, and as the viands seemed to have suffered no diminution in quality from her presence, and as Mrs. Morey was as bright and charming as ever, he dismissed his fears before he rose to go to his office.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked the mother, when the boarder had gone.

"He's a little green and gawky," was the girl's reply.

"Yes, but he's a good business man and doing well. I have heard in a roundabout way that his check is good for a thousand dollars any time, and he's only twenty. If everything goes right he'll be a rich man."

Mabel shrugged her shoulders, as if to say that might be true and then again it might not. She leaned back in her chair and yawned a little.

"It's terrible to get up at this time of day," she said, stretching herself. "At Uncle Zeba's I've lain till nine always."

"At Uncle Zeba's you had no business on hand," smiled her mother.

The girl looked bored.

"You say you don't want me to marry till I'm twenty," she expostulated. "Have I got to get up every morning till then at half-past six? I think that's commencing a long way back."

The mother, who sat next to her, leaned over and kissed the pouting mouth.

"I began earlier than that on your father," she said. "I used to go to the gate and watch for him when I was only ten. He was about twenty-five then, and he used to stop and let me hunt in his pockets for candy that he had bought for me. One day, when I was seventeen, just your age, Mabel, he asked me to marry him. I had been expecting it for fully six years, but when it came I felt terribly frightened."

Mabel looked up with a puzzled expression.

"Frightened, mamma! What was there to make you frightened?"

"Ah, my child!" cried the widow.

The girl shook her head decidedly.

"No man will ever frighten *me*," she said. "I would be willing to marry one to-day. Why do I need to wait so long? If you could marry at seventeen, why can't I?"

A little shiver ran over the frame of the mother.

"You *want* to get married?" she exclaimed.

The girl nodded her head three or four times in a way that indicated there could be no doubt about that.

"What for?"

"What did *you* want it for?" was the rather mocking reply.

"Because I was a little fool!"

"Then I must be one, too," said Mabel, laughing.

"You certainly must," said her mother, "if you

want to take on the cares of married life at your age. Twenty is soon enough for any girl to marry. I would go further, if I had money enough for you, and tell you never to marry at all. I have no fault to find with your father, though he never would give a thought to the future. But marriage is nothing but a necessary evil. Any woman who can support herself without it is foolish to throw away her liberty."

Mabel laughed outright.

"Oh, I never shall do that!" she cried. "I shall be as free to do what I please when I am married as if I were the biggest old maid in Christendom."

"You don't know what you are talking about, poor dear," said the mother, soothingly. "The first thing, however, in the preparation of a rabbit pie, is 'catch your rabbit.' Mr. Fawcett is a rather eccentric young man, but his habits are perfect, and he has no female associates. You will need to be very circumspect with him, as his first impressions are strong. For the present you must say nothing except what ordinary civility requires, unless he addresses you. You will have to come to breakfast, as he believes early rising a great virtue, and if necessary you can take a nap in the afternoon when he is out. I expect him merely to get used to you this year, to grow attached to you in a friendly way next year, to fall in love with you the third, and marry you the year after. If you are wise the programme can be carried out as I have planned it, and you will thank your mamma for placing you in a position where you will be assured of comfort the rest of your life."

Mabel yawned again.

"It's a long programme, ma, but I'll try. I don't think I'll ever learn to really like him, though."

CHAPTER III.

MABEL FALLS IN LOVE.

THAT was the way Allan Fawcett and Mabel Morey met.

Things progressed as slowly between them at first as the mother of the young lady could have desired. All that Allan was doing about Mabel was "getting used" to her. She did not enter into his life any more than the castor that sat on the table or the ornament that hung from the little chandelier. He was very comfortable at that house. His room was cheerful, his breakfasts as good as on the first day, and no one interfered with him unduly. Sometimes he found it agreeable to spend an hour in the parlor of an evening, talking quietly with his landlady, while Mabel sat near by, silent and immovable.

All this went on until Mabel's eighteenth birthday came and went. On that day Mrs. Morey mentioned at breakfast that it was her daughter's anniversary, and Fawcett was betrayed into an audible expression of surprise. He had had an indistinct idea on the subject, but would have guessed her sixteen, at the most. Eighteen! She was not so much younger than himself, after all, but then he was older than most men of twenty. One morning shortly after this he noticed a change in the girl that he could not at first understand. Her gowns now reached the floor.

From that time Fawcett began to include Mabel in his conversations, but, under the instructions of her mother, she answered him in monosyllables at first. She did not mean to appear forward. It happened that he was sometimes alone with her now, for a few minutes, and she let him do most of the talking. He began to wonder if she was a dunce, she said so very little, but on the whole he was pleased much better than if she had turned out a chatterbox.

He talked of little beside business, and she had the hardest work to seem interested. She would listen to his account of the sales he had made during the day, and only respond, when there was a pause, "I should think that was very nice," or "You are certainly doing well." This made him feel that she took an interest in him, and he got into the habit of telling her of schemes that he had on foot. How he intended to buy up all the butter in a certain section and make at least five cents a pound on it.

"You will be very rich, by and by," she used to say.

"Yes," he would reply, "I am sure of that. Any man can get rich if he is determined to. All he needs is pluck and push and hard work. There is the secret in those three words. Some young men think they have only to open a store and put out a sign to bring all the world to patronize them. And there is another mistake that many make. They get married too early."

The quiet little figure lifted its brows, as if to ask what that had to do with the subject under discussion.

"It costs a great deal to keep house," explained Allan, wisely. "My entire expenses for the past year, not counting travel and hotels on the route, which is a business charge, amounted to just \$750. A married man would find that more than doubled. I shall get

married some day—when I am about forty years old, perhaps—and then I shall have enough money and not mind if it does cost.”

“How little he knows what he will do!” thought the girl, as she listened to him.

Mrs. Morey noted the increased interest of Mr. Fawcett in her daughter and was quite content. She left them together oftener as time went on. Once in awhile the young people walked down town together in the evening, when they happened to both be going that way. This could but attract attention from the neighbors, and one of them, who knew Allan well enough to speak to, joked him about it.

“You are getting along very well at the widow’s,” said this man. “There will be a wedding there, the first thing we know.”

Fawcett frowned with something very like anger in his face.

“You must think me an idiot!” he answered, “to couple my name with that of such a child.”

“A child! She is eighteen. Many a ‘child’ of her age has a husband. Look out for yourself!”

The young man was much disturbed. For a week afterwards he carefully avoided Mabel when he went out of doors, and once, when he met her on her way home, he made an excuse to remain down town until she had gone on out of sight. She was certainly old enough to marry, and he did not want people to think such things in connection with him. But the girl was discretion itself. She did not appear to notice that anything in his behavior toward her had changed. He decided finally to walk with her as much as he liked, and let those who wanted to talk about it say what they pleased.

In this frame of mind he strolled through the town with her boldly, when opportunity offered. She came into his office, sometimes, on errands from her mother and walked back with him, if it chanced to be toward night. Before he was aware of it he had become attached to this quiet girl, and looked forward to seeing her face when he reached his lodgings with a suppressed eagerness that he could not understand.

"Did you know I was going away for a month?" she asked him one evening, as they sat alone in the parlor after tea.

The look which he flashed at her was a sufficient answer. He did not want her to go.

"Yes, my uncle has invited me to come to Cleveland again."

"And you are going?" he asked, with slight pallor.

"I think so. Mamma is willing."

He did not know what to say. He hardly knew what he thought about it. He was surprised that it made any difference to him.

"I shouldn't think she would like to spare you," he said finally.

The girl laughed.

"Oh, I am not of so much consequence as that!" she exclaimed. "Nobody cares when I go or when I return."

What was the matter with him! Yes, there was one person who cared, but that person would never tell her so. It was too silly! If he had begun to have such feelings as that, the sooner they were suppressed the better.

Mabel went to her uncle's, and the house was so dull that he could not stay in it evenings, as he had been in the habit of doing. He remained at the office until

late at night, looking over his books, attending to correspondence—doing anything to keep his mind from the missing article at his lodgings.

Mrs. Morey did not mention Mabel for the first week. Then she only said that she had received a letter from the girl, in which she asked to be remembered to him. He nodded, intending to imply that it was of no consequence, but the shrewd match-maker was not discouraged. He could conceal nothing from her. When he left the table she smiled contentedly to herself.

“He is unhappy without her,” she mused. “All is going very well. Things get on fast enough. Nothing can make my plan miscarry now, if Mabel acts her part well.”

As the end of the month approached Fawcett glanced inquiringly about the parlor and into the dining-room when he entered the house. He wanted to see the girl, and he did not like to inquire for her. His appetite was not as good as formerly. Wild horses could not have dragged a word from his lips as to what filled his mind at that period. When at last Mrs. Morey said, “Mabel writes that she is coming home in a few days,” he bit his lips to still the exclamation that rose to them.

Mabel did not return alone. She brought with her a cousin, Miss Mattie Burbank, daughter of her father's sister, whom she had been visiting. Mattie was a rather handsome girl, a year or two older than Mabel. When Allan found the lost child at her home Miss Mattie was with her, and he was presented. His manners were so stiff on that occasion that the cousin had a distinctly unpleasant impression of him. He merely bowed to both girls, made some commonplace remark and vanished toward his room. For once Mabel's *sang-froid* deserted her.

"What a bear!" cried Mattie, when she heard his door close behind him. "And he's your lodger, is he?"

"He's not always like that," replied Mabel. "Something must have troubled him. He is devotedly attached to business."

Mattie made a gesture of repugnance.

"I should hate to have him devotedly attached to *me!*" she said. "Think of marrying a man like that! Ugh!"

"You are not likely to have that unpleasant experience!" was the retort. "He never pays the least attention to ladies."

Miss Burbank from Cleveland tossed her head.

"I could make him crazy in a week if I liked. I've a great notion to do it, too, just for fun."

"Well, you have a good opinion of yourself!" was the sharp reply. "I think you'd find Mr. Fawcett rather different from the empty-headed young fellows you have been practising on. The best thing you can do is to let him alone. We walk on tiptoe when he is around—mamma and I—for he is a good lodger and we can't afford to risk losing him."

Allan did not come down that night. He reclined in a great chair, with his teeth set firmly together, thinking what a fool a slip of a girl could make of a man who ought to have gained sense in his contact with the world. He would see to it that the ideas which had sprung up in his head like a crop of mushrooms were extirpated, root and branch. A good notion would be to devote most of his conversation at the table to the new-comer, while she remained. This notion he put into practice the very next morning.

It is hard to tell which of the three women was the most surprised at the new turn of affairs. Not only

was Fawcett more talkative than they had ever known him, but he seemed hardly aware of the fact that any other person than Miss Mattie was in the room. Delighted at what she considered her marvellous success as a charmer, the young lady from Cleveland encouraged him to the utmost, with the result that he was fully fifteen minutes late at his office that morning.

Though much disturbed, Mrs. Morey did not know how to say anything to her niece without making matters still worse. She had a long talk with Mabel, later in the day, at which she learned Mattie's threat. The situation was very complicated. Mrs. Morey said, however, that if Mattie persisted in her course she would be compelled to speak to her, as Mr. Fawcett was too peculiar a man to allow any one to go too far with him.

For several days the Morey household was kept in a state of suppressed excitement. Miss Mattie was too flushed with her victory to allow it to be crushed too soon. Fawcett really became interested in her, and never dreaming that he was the victim of a plot, gave her the opportunities she wanted. He was glad to find anything that relieved his mind of its tremendous strain.

Mattie was a very bright girl, of a type whose acquaintance he now made for the first time. He felt perfectly at ease with her. He could not tell whose proposition it was that sent them out to walk together on the seventh evening she appeared at the house, but that is what they were doing. And it was not a walk like those he had taken with Mabel, either. There was no pretence of errands to do, or calls to make, on the part of the lady in the case. It was a stroll for the ordinary purpose of a stroll, to enjoy the evening together, and to talk where there were no listeners.

Mattie had already discovered that Fawcett was not as uninteresting as she had supposed. She found him, on the contrary, very entertaining, and had she searched her brain she would have seen that her original plan of teaching him to care for her merely to laugh at him afterwards had entirely disappeared.

Mrs. Morey went to Mabel's room that night, and found the girl in bed, though the strollers had not yet returned. Surprised at this discovery she came to the bedside and kissed her daughter, and was startled at the burning skin with which her lips came in contact.

"You are ill, Mabel!" she exclaimed. "Why did you not tell me? I will send at once for a doctor."

Mabel clasped her mother's hand with a tenacious grip.

"No, no! I am well enough. Don't send for any one."

"But you have a fever. You need medicine. As soon as Mattie returns I will leave her with you and go to the druggist's, at least for some nitre."

Mabel raised herself on her pillow and her features were distorted.

"I'll never speak to that girl again!" she said, with trembling lips. "I want you to tell her to-night that she cannot stay here. I will not have her in my room nor eat at the same table with her!"

A look of comprehension filled the eyes of the mother. It was Mr. Fawcett who had made all this trouble.

"I understand," she replied. "It is very disagreeable, I know. But you must not let her see that you mind it, and above all keep it from *him*. My poor child, I did not imagine you were taking it so to heart.

In a few days she will be gone and that will end it. There is nothing to be jealous of in his sentiments toward Mattie, I am certain. And I thought," she added, smiling a little, "that you could never learn to like him."

The girl shivered from crown to toe.

"Like him, mamma! Oh, I love him! love him as I never thought I could love any man! I was perfectly miserable all the five weeks I was away, and then to return and find every word, every look given to her—it is killing me! I shall keep my room till she goes. Tell her I am very sick,—that I have a contagious disease—anything you like. She must not come here, even to bid me good-bye!"

Mrs. Morey listened with the utmost astonishment. How had this girl, who always told her everything, kept so much back?

"You love him, Mabel?" she repeated. "When did you learn that? And why did you not let me know it sooner?"

The girl sank back upon the bed, burying her hot head in the comparatively cool pillows.

"I don't know when it began, mamma," she moaned. "I didn't realize it at all until I was away from him. You don't think she can take him from me, do you? I could not live if he ever became the husband of another!"

The widow soothed her daughter as best she could, smoothing her hair back from her forehead and murmuring soft assurances in her ear.

"Have no fear, my darling," she said. "He was as unhappy as you, after you went away. He hardly spoke at all, and every evening he came home late. I could read his mind, though he was too proud to say

anything. Don't worry. Mattie will go in a few days and we will not invite her again."

When Mabel did not come to table in the morning, and the announcement was made that she was not well, Mr. Fawcett looked troubled. But Miss Burbank engaged him in conversation and succeeded in holding his attention. At night he came home early, and his first inquiry was for the sick girl. When he heard she was no worse he looked relieved, and presently, as Mattie came to the door with her hat on, he took another stroll with that fascinating young lady.

"I hope the fact that you have taken one or two walks with me has nothing to do with the illness of my cousin," said Miss Burbank, when they had gone half a mile out on the country road.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed her companion, stopping short.

"I didn't know that there was an engagement, or understanding, or anything of the kind," continued Mattie, with inward spite, "or I would have told you at once that I could not accompany you."

Fawcett was very much troubled at her words.

"There is nothing between Miss Mabel and me," he said, "and there cannot be. What gave you an impression to the contrary?"

She looked on the ground, and poked a little heap of dust together with the point of her parasol.

"You are asking me questions that I have no right to answer," she said.

"Excuse me." He was very sober now. "You said, apparently in a serious way, that Miss Morey's illness might have reference to our walks. You owe it to me to retract that or explain it."

There was a quizzical smile on her face.

"Then, as the easiest thing, I will retract it," she replied.

He searched her countenance narrowly.

"You admit, do you," he asked, "that you had no foundation for your insinuation?"

"Oh, you want too much now," she answered, peevishly.

He drew himself up a little, and she conceived a new opinion of his firmness.

"Then I shall be obliged to ask these questions of Miss Morey," said he. "If there is anything in what you have intimated I shall leave the house immediately."

She smiled still, and said he would be a foolish man if he made so much of a light remark, but added that of course he was at liberty to do as he liked. Then, as he stood there, she inquired if he intended to remain in that position the rest of the night, or would prefer to resume his walk. Her railleries were lost on him now, however. He answered soberly that he would return to Mrs. Morey's, if she was willing, and they bent their steps thither.

"I am going home in a day or two," said Mattie, as they neared the door. "If you still think it advisable to do such a nonsensical thing as you mentioned a few minutes ago, I wish you would kindly postpone it till after my departure."

Fawcett said, with some hesitation, that he would do this. He went to his chamber and lay awake far into the night. He could not remember when anything had annoyed him so, not even on that occasion when hay advanced two dollars unexpectedly and he had three hundred tons to deliver at the old rate.

CHAPTER IV.

ALLAN BECOMES A BROTHER.

FAWCETT was so reserved at the table the next morning, that Mrs. Morey knew his "flirtation," if such a name could be given to it, with Miss Mattie, was at an end. Miss Burbank, who had never talked with her aunt in relation to the young man, continued to maintain her silence in that respect. She was somewhat piqued over the result of her efforts, and a little inclined to wish she had let him entirely alone. She had no wish to do anything disagreeable to Mabel, whom she liked very well, but the temptation to see what she could make out of Fawcett had proved too strong for her. Now she decided to "make up" with her cousin before going away, as it was quite ridiculous that they should have a serious falling out over a matter of this consequence. She asked kindly about Mabel's health, not intimating that she had the least idea what caused her illness, and offered to do anything in her power to aid her recovery. Mrs. Morey responded that the child was nervous and only wanted quiet for a short time.

When Mabel learned that there had been something very like a rupture between the object of her new affections and her cousin she rallied rapidly. She did not want Allan to go too long without her at the table, and she resolved to conceal the feeling she had against her cousin and pretend to be the same as usual while she remained. Under her mother's tutelage she realized

the necessity of hiding her jealousy from both the other persons interested, and on the second day she came downstairs and answered in the ordinary way the inquiries that Mattie made as to the state in which she found herself.

"Such attacks are not uncommon with me," she said, with direct mendacity. "I am liable to have them at any time. They soon pass off, however, and I feel as well as ever when they are gone."

The breakfast-table did not rally from the blow it had received, for a long time. Fawcett meant to find out whether there was anything in the hint that Miss Burbank had let fall before he became very communicative with the family. Mattie prolonged her stay for another month, though it cannot be said that she enjoyed it, and the night before she was to leave she intercepted Mr. Fawcett as he came up the walk.

"I am going back to Cleveland to-morrow," she said, in a low tone.

"Ah!"

It was his only reply, and she could not tell what it meant.

"I fear you are not sorry," she went on, after a momentary pause. "We were getting to be good friends, when an unlucky word set you against me. Having done penance for my transgression, I want to know if I may hope some day to receive your pardon."

The words sounded mocking, but the tone was sincere, and Fawcett felt that she merited a serious reply.

"Perhaps it is I who should ask forgiveness," said he. "I was, I confess, much annoyed at the remark you made, and it takes me a long time to recover from anything like that. I do not think, now, that you meant much by it, but at the moment it struck me very

disagreeably. It must be plain to you, Miss Burbank, that I am not in any sense a 'ladies' man.' I like the society of bright women, but I do not think it right to obtain it under false pretences, and as a consequence I have had very little of it. If it were true that Miss Mabel cared enough about me to mind my walking or talking with you—which I am convinced she does not—my duty would be very plain. I should get a room elsewhere."

Miss Burbank shook her head sagely.

"You are wiser than most of your generation," she answered. "Well, as I am going away, I am glad we are still friends, for I like you too well to want to think of you as an enemy. Should you ever come to Cleveland I shall be glad to have you call, and to introduce you to my father and mother. When I tell them of your anti-matrimonial intentions they will be all the more willing to welcome you, I am sure. As for Aunt Maria and my dear cousin here, I hope with all my heart that nothing will cause them to lose a friend that I know they both appreciate at his true worth."

He ignored the compliment and thanked her for her invitation, saying it was not impossible it might some day be in his power to accept it. A day or two after her departure he let fall a few words to Mrs. Morey, to strengthen his position, thinking it better to talk to her than to her daughter.

"It may seem almost like egotism for me to mention it so often," said he, "but you must have known long ago my intention to remain single until my fortune is fully made. I speak of this on account of some silly insinuations that have been made because of my passing through the street several times with Miss Mabel."

The widow looked vaguely at him, as if she could not understand exactly.

"It was hinted, in a joking, bantering way," he explained, "that I was paying addresses to her."

Mrs. Morey threw up her hands and clasped them together.

"With such a child! How ridiculous!"

"It is indeed," he replied, "but it shows you what people with nothing else to do may think. Now, it would not be fair, either for me or her, to have such an idea get abroad. I like your house, and both of you have been very kind to me, but if I imagined——"

The widow laid down the sewing that she had in hand, and the moisture came into her eyes.

"I should say so!" she exclaimed, with emphasis. "I cannot believe any one has said such a thing except to annoy. I hope it will be many years before my Mabel is taken from me. She is all I have, Mr. Fawcett, and I am positive her mind has never yet turned toward such matters. I am more than pleased to hear your views so clearly expressed. I have the utmost confidence in you; and as there is nothing better for a young girl than to have a gentleman acquaintance for whom she can have sentiments of friendship, unmixed with anything more tender, it has been especially gratifying to me that a happy chance threw you in our way."

He could not help being flattered by her language, but desiring to settle this matter once and forever, he asked her to impress upon Miss Mabel's mind his irrevocable purpose of postponing marriage until a very late period in his life. This she promised to do; and that matter disposed of, he was gracious enough to repeat that he liked his home very much, and should be

sorry to have anything interfere with its retention. And Mrs. Morey said more kind things expressive of the regard in which she held him, and her desire to do all in her power to add to the comfort of his condition.

After this ceremonious explanation Fawcett seemed to regain his old footing with the daughter. He decided that he would ignore the baseless glances and half-jesting words which his appearance on the street with her were likely to call forth, trusting that they would soon be exhausted. In this latter opinion he proved to be correct. People came to the conclusion that there was nothing in the fact that Mabel Morey was occasionally seen in company with the young man who was a part of her mother's household. Had he taken her to church, or to places of amusement, or to drive, the gossips would have been sure to notice it. But to walk up or down from the dwelling, or store, even the best of them could make little of that, and soon they gave up mentioning it.

The sudden blooming of the flower of love in her daughter's heart disconcerted Mrs. Morey. She knew that it would be hard for a girl having such sentiments to keep them wholly concealed from the object of her affection. One instance in point had already occurred, and had proved how dangerous it might become. It would not have taken much to upset the entire kettle of fish on that occasion. The widow used to talk to her daughter in her wisest strain upon the necessity of keeping the state of her feelings wholly locked in her own bosom.

"We women never can make the least advance in such a matter as love," she said, "without the greatest danger. Even when the man is convinced, by many signs, that he is **certain to be accepted when he makes**

his proposition, he expects a show of unwillingness, a pretence of coyness, a hesitation to give him the word he has asked. There are foolish girls who confess their sentiments to the adored one, before he has actually asked them, but such conduct will surely be regretted in the end. It is not until the marriage has actually taken place that we are free to give way to our feelings, and even then a feint of unwillingness to submit to caresses is the surest way to retain a husband's regard."

Mabel listened with due attention, as a student hears a professor who is adept at the science he desires to acquire.

"But, mamma, you have no idea how hard it is for me to treat Allan—I mean Mr. Fawcett—as distantly as you advise. And when I think of the long years you believe necessary, it seems as if it was simply impossible to wait."

"Perhaps it will come around all right in less time," said her mother, encouragingly. "I think I am learning to understand him. He cares so much for business, for the money there is to be made in it, that he dreads above all things assuming extra expense. He is not oblivious to feminine charms, as may be seen by the photographs of handsome women of the stage that he frequently brings home to adorn his dressing-case. Now, I will get him to discussing the cost of housekeeping, and surprise him by some of the figures I can show. I will do this in such a way that he will never suspect I have a motive, and if I once get his alarm over expenses out of his head, the rest will come easily enough."

The girl had been growing very sober during the last minute.

"I don't like to have him bring home those hateful pictures," she pouted. "Some of those girls are very likely no better than they should be. If I ever do marry him, I won't allow such things in his room! How can I tell that he hasn't met some of them, personally, during the trips he makes to the city?"

Mrs. Morey bowed profoundly.

"Oh, I could almost guarantee his morals," she replied. "He cares too much for money to associate with women who are fast. The pictures simply prove that he has an eye for beauty, and that being the case I am glad to see them. Mr. Fawcett will be all right when the time comes, my dear. He cares much more for you than he has any intention of admitting. Leave him to me. By and by you must take another week away, and I will watch to see how he likes to have you gone. The last time he hardly ate his breakfasts at all."

Mabel rubbed her hands together nervously.

"I will never go to Uncle Zeba's," she said. "Mattie treated me shamefully, and I don't want to see her again."

"You can go to plenty of other places," smiled her mother. "Aunt Hattie has written for you often. She has a fine house at Boston, and you ought to have a splendid time there."

The girl shook her head slowly.

"I can't have a good time anywhere away from him," she replied. "Every day will seem like three. Then there is Cousin Frank, whom I never could bear. He was always trying to kiss me the last time I was there, though I was only twelve years old, and I don't suppose he's improved any."

Mrs. Morey had to laugh, the girl looked so apprehensive.

"Frank is a man now, and has probably got through with his tricks," she said. "He must be twenty-three or twenty-four. The best thing is for you to go there, until I can watch the effect on Mr. Fawcett. I'll send for you as soon as it is good policy to do so. All we need now is to keep his thoughts in one direction."

So Mabel went away and Allan Fawcett was plunged into new melancholy. As there was no one he could blame for his condition of mind he bore it in silence. He even tried to appear as bright as ever, when at his lodgings, fearing that Mrs. Morey would notice his despondency and guess its true reason. He had no idea that he was in love, indeed he would have scouted the notion. He began to admit that it was pleasanter at the house when Mabel was there, and that she was a very nice girl. If he had had a sister he might have felt toward her, he supposed, as he did toward Mabel. Two people did not make a large enough family. It required three to do that. Then the girl played a good deal on the piano, and sometimes sang. As her mother did not play, the piano was closed in her absence. It must be the music he missed. Yes, he thought it must certainly be the music.

He was betrayed, at the end of a week, into asking when Mabel was going to return. This was progress, and Mrs. Morey's heart gave a quick throb as she heard his question.

"I don't know exactly," she said. "They are no doubt doing all they can to keep her. Her aunt is quite rich and they think a great deal of Mabel. If I consulted my own selfishness I should send for her at once. The house seems lonely without her, during the long days when you are away."

He thought the house seemed very lonely during the long evenings when he was not away, but he had no intention of saying so. After that Mrs. Morey got into the habit of telling him when letters came; and once, when he seemed more interested than usual, she read him an extract in which Mabel spoke of being anxious for the time when she would see her mother and Mr. Fawcett, as she used. It was very pleasant in Boston, but she should not stay much longer. The lodger smiled unconsciously, and when he walked to his office he was humming a tune that he had heard her play.

At last Mabel returned, and there being no Mattie there to interfere with him, he expressed his satisfaction at seeing her, and listened intently while she related the manner in which she had occupied her three weeks of absence. She showed him photographs of her aunt, and of her Cousin Frank, the latter a tall, well-made young gentleman, with an aggressive face that most women would call handsome.

"How old is he?" asked Allen, with a darkened countenance.

"Twenty-four, I believe."

"What is his business?"

"Oh, he does nothing but look after his property. The Seldens are too rich to care for work."

Fawcett showed his dislike.

"A young man has no right to be a loafer if he is as rich as Waldorf Astor," he said, snappishly.

The girl did not make any reply and, still holding the picture in his hand, Allan ventured another question.

"You are very fond of him, I suppose?"

She shook her head.

"No. I took a dislike to him when I was a child, on account of the things he used to do."

"What kind of things?"

She blushed as she looked up at him.

"Oh, he was always running after me, and trying to make me kiss him, and——"

There was a perfect thunder-cloud now on the face of the young merchant.

"Has he got over that habit?" he asked frigidly.

She looked as if she had rather not answer, but, as he waited, she replied, with uneasiness, that she could not say he had, entirely.

"And, being your cousin, I suppose you think it all right?"

Bitter as gall and wormwood was the tone in which he uttered those words. She knew he cared for her, or the simple statement she had made could not affect him so deeply.

"You are not fair, Mr. Fawcett," she said, soberly. "You asked me if I liked him. I not only told you no, but I gave my reason. I was glad to get away from Boston, on his account, and I do not mean to go there again."

He choked down the passionate thoughts that filled his brain, upon hearing this straightforward reply. Why did he hate the original of that photograph, as men hate one who has done them a vital injury? He had never seen Frank Selden. It was not probable they ever would meet. What was Selden, or this fair cousin of his, to him? He was interested in butter, and eggs, and cheese, and hay, and potatoes. Business was prospering. He had laid up fifteen hundred dollars that year, and new patrons were coming to him daily. He looked again at Mabel, who sat very

still, like a child who has been rebuked by her elders and hesitates to speak until spoken to.

"I don't know why I said what I did," he remarked, more gently. "I am sure I have no right to criticise you. But your mother will tell you that a young girl cannot be too careful in her conduct toward men, nor demand too much respect in their actions toward her. If this Selden"—he spoke the word as if it were pronounced Snake—"has attempted any liberties with you of the kind you mentioned, his being your cousin does not excuse him."

Mabel acquiesced without speaking, like one who entirely agrees.

"It is natural," Fawcett went on, after a pause, "that I should take an interest in you, living under the same roof and being almost a part of your family. There are some things which men know that young girls are slow to perceive. I should be sorry to think I had neglected any advice that I ought to give you, for it seems to me—somehow—that I stand toward you, in a certain respect, in the relation of a brother."

The girl rose and put her hands in his, before he was aware what she was about to do.

"I thank you with all my heart," she said, the tears in her eyes. "Whenever you have anything to say to me do not hesitate. I shall always be ready to listen and to profit by your instruction."

She walked slowly out of the room, and seeking her mother related the conversation word for word, as well as she could recall it.

"You did exactly right, my child," said the widow. "You could not have been more discreet."

Mabel had a wistful look in her gray eyes.

"It seems so contemptible," she said, "to act as if I was trying to snare him, when I love him so."

"You will have all your life to prove that to him," was the mother's reply, as she drew the shrinking girl to her side and kissed her.

CHAPTER V.

"THAT WOULDN'T BE NICE."

BEING now installed, by his own motion, in the position of "brother" to Miss Morey, Allan Fawcett found his path easier. He deceived himself into the belief that this justified him in being in her company a great deal more than ever, and in talking with her on terms of intimacy of which he had never before dreamed. As no one else appeared to dispute with him the title he had assumed, and as both Mrs. Morey and her daughter treated him kindly, he grew quite content with his surroundings. A suggestion was finally made that he take his dinner and supper at the house, as well as his breakfast, and he accepted gladly. Those meals had never seemed what they should be since his taste of the superior comforts of Mrs. Morey's table.

Had he actually been her son, the widow could not have treated him with more cordiality. Everything soon came to be looked after in a way that was at once novel and delightful to the young bachelor. His laundry arrangements were seen to, without a word from him. Buttons that had previously given him no end of trouble were found sewn tightly in their places. Little rents were deftly mended. Some of the books that he was most careful of appeared in neat paper

covers. The vase on his table began to be filled with flowers, culled from the garden. It was marvellous how much more attractive his quarters were than those he had exchanged for them when the Moreys moved to Norwood.

Fawcett's temper was usually good, but sometimes he came home disturbed by the vicissitudes of business. On such occasions nothing was permitted to give an additional jar to his feelings. Unless he set the pace of conversation, only the most necessary things were said at the table, and if he chose to retire to his chamber neither of the ladies urged him to remain below. It was long afterwards that it came back to him—the ingenious petting to which he was subjected—but at the time he thought nothing about it.

There are more men nagged to death by women who would like to give them comfort when they seem distressed than by all the intentional vixens in the world. It is well known that one of America's chief actors had to separate from his second wife because she would not let him retire into a half-darkened room for a few hours each day, where he could regain his nervous force and strengthen himself for the labors of the evening. She would come to the door and beg admittance, saying that she hated to have him there alone, and that she was sure she could do him good if he would let her hold his head and kiss away his depression. Though loving her as such men love their wives, he could not bear this strain, and the couple parted with mutual agony, all because the woman could not be made to understand.

Mrs. Morey committed no such error, nor did her daughter, under her wise instructions. Fawcett grew more and more attached to his boarding-house, as he

termed it, or his home, as they wanted him to feel it. As he went to very few entertainments, and as his office-work was usually ended at six o'clock, he spent most of his evenings in the house, and a great deal of that time came to be monopolized by Mabel. Mrs. Morey would often leave them for hours, while she went out calling or on errands to the stores.

His business took him away from Norwood quite frequently, but he was seldom gone more than two or three nights at a time. On one of these occasions, he found, on his return, that Mabel was his only hostess, her mother having been summoned to the bedside of her sister, Mrs. Selden, by a telegram. In speaking of it to me, years afterward, he alluded to the week that Mrs. Morey remained away as the turning one in his career. Day after day he sat at the table with Mabel as his companion, their isolation being broken only by the entrance of Bridget when summoned to clear the plates or to bring something from the kitchen. Evening after evening they occupied the parlor with no interruption, or took short walks toward the wood that bordered the town on their side of it. And when the time came for separation, and he went to his room, he had a new sense of responsibility for this quiet girl, a feeling that she was under his sole protection, and that if harm happened to her he would be to blame.

It was a testing week for them. Loving him more strongly than ever, Mabel realized the absolute necessity of hiding her sentiments until he should have fully demonstrated his own. Impelled a hundred times to some act that might show the more than brotherly affection that was growing up in his breast, he resisted as often as he felt the temptation. The very presence

of opportunity caused by her mother's absence made him more guarded than ever on this point. He had a sense of honor that would not allow him to take advantage of any person in the slightest degree. The pressure on his feelings made him glad to see Mrs. Morey's face again, as a guardsman on picket who hears the approaching step of the relieving squad.

But the week had done its work. There was never afterwards anything distant between the young people. They confided a hundred things to each other. He had called her "Miss Morey" till then, but she suddenly became "Mabel" to him. The three people in that house had become welded into one family as they never had been until that week of absence on the part of the mother.

"I am afraid you have not fared as well with Mabel as when I am at home," smiled Mrs. Morey, as she took her seat in her old place and began to pour the coffee. "A housekeeper is made by experience, and a girl of eighteen cannot be expected to take the place of an old woman like me."

If the meals had been poorer, Fawcett had not noticed it. As a matter of fact they had, without doubt. Mabel knew as much about cooking as she did of scientific chemistry. Bridget did what she could, but Mrs. Morey's oversight was lacking.

"We have done very well," was the young man's reply. "I do not think I have lost an ounce in weight."

The widow smiled gratefully upon him, and then transferred her attention to her daughter.

"You will have to begin to learn kitchen work in earnest, my girl," she said, "before you are much older. Piano and singing lessons will not bake the

bread nor prepare the gravies of the household you may some day have to oversee."

"I shall always have you to show me, mamma," said the girl, with a blush, "and there will never be any household for me except yours."

"How can we tell that I shall always be with you?" replied the mother. "Aunt Hattie came very near leaving us last week, with that sudden turn of illness. What would you do, should I be taken away, unless you could carry on the housekeeping?"

It was touching to see the distress that came into the young girl's face at this suggestion. Of all her virtues love for her mother was most pre-eminent and sincere.

"Don't speak in that way!" she cried, reprovingly. "If you were taken from me, I should not care to live any longer."

Mrs. Morey looked as if she would have kissed the girl, but for the presence of a third person in the room.

"Death does not come at our bidding," she said gently. "Sometimes we are obliged to live long after the things we prize most are gone from us. You must learn to be a famous housekeeper, so that if anything does happen you will be able to keep your home. There are so few things that a girl can do to earn a living. With the house and the furniture you could take boarders and be in a measure independent."

Mabel's smile returned.

"I am afraid I should not get many of them," she said. "Would you still live here, if there were only me to see to you?" she asked Fawcett, with a half-earnest, half-joking expression.

He replied in the affirmative in a way that set them all laughing.

"But, I don't think I should want you to have any more boarders," he added. "I think one like me would keep you busy."

A day or two later, when Mrs. Morey and Fawcett were together and Mabel had gone out, the widow reverted to this conversation.

"My sister's illness has set me to thinking seriously," said she, in a sober tone. "Mabel has relations who would doubtless consider it their duty to look after her if anything should happen to me. But, though they are people of property and standing, there is not one of them who is exactly what I would choose to have the oversight of the formative years of my child. The ones most natural to select are her Uncle Zeba Burbank, father of her Cousin Mattie, and her other cousin, Frank Selden, whose picture I think you have seen. Both are considered rich men, and I am sure would not let her suffer, but wealth is not the only consideration in a matter of this kind."

He felt two distinct blows when she mentioned the names of Mattie Burbank and Frank Selden. If these were typical of all the girl's relations, Heaven pity her! He had conceived a positive dislike for Mattie on that evening when she took her last walk with him, and he felt a bitterness toward Selden for which he could not account.

"Frank likes Mabel better than I wish he did," continued Mrs. Morey, slowly. "His mother has intimated several times that they would make a good match, but I hope nothing will ever come of it. His habits, I fear, are not of the best. She is not at all inclined toward him, but who can tell what influences might be brought to bear on a young girl should she be left without her natural protectors? Oh, Mr. Fawcett,"

she cried, growing more earnest, "if the time ever comes when it is necessary, use every force in your power to prevent such a marriage as that. You have her confidence. She thinks a great deal of your opinion. Don't let her marry a man who is more likely to break her heart than to make her life a happy one!"

The relation in which he stood to this family had widened so gradually that Fawcett was not surprised to have it take this turn. He promised, should the emergency arise, to do his very best to prevent Mabel's making so great a mistake as the one indicated. Then his curiosity led him to inquire what Mrs. Morey knew about Mr. Selden.

"He is anything but a moral young man!" was the reply. "Trouble with half a dozen girls of good family have already been charged to him. His mother insists that the statements are libels, but where there is so much said there must be some of it true. He is very fascinating in his manners, and has plenty of money in his pocket and no one to restrain him. He is my sister's son, and I wish to say nothing against him, but the thought of him in connection with such a pure girl as Mabel is simply terrible."

It was a strange coincidence that Frank Selden should come to Norwood on the very next day, to pay a visit to his aunt and cousin. He had never been there before, and was the last person for whom his relations were looking. When the carriage from the railway station left him at the door Mrs. Morey was filled with apprehension, in which Mabel fully joined. Neither of them knew what would happen when Mr. Fawcett came home, for he was not skilled in the art of concealing his dislikes. They could not forbid

Frank the house, being on such agreeable terms with his mother, and having never had the least open rupture with him. It was in the middle of the afternoon, and as soon as a council of war could be held it was decided that Mabel should go, without saying anything to her cousin, and inform Fawcett of the state of affairs.

"Put on your hat and leave by the back door," said her mother, "for if Frank knows you are going for a walk, he may ask to accompany you. I will tell him, when he inquires, that you have gone on a short errand, and will keep him in till you return."

"But what shall I tell Mr. Fawcett?" stammered Mabel, in much perturbation.

"I don't know. You must do the best you can. Use your judgment. Say we did not know Frank was coming, and we are not over-pleased at it, but see no way except to ask him to remain. Probably he will not stay more than a day or two. I will leave it to you. Remember, much may hang on your success."

On the way to the office of the commission merchant Mabel revolved various plans in her mind. But when she walked in upon him and saw the smile with which he greeted her, she was as far from a definite decision as when she left the house.

"Ah, ha! So it's you, little girl!" said Allan. There was no other person in his private office at the time, and they were not likely to be disturbed. "You are not looking quite cheerful. Nothing gone wrong, I hope?"

She resolved to act exactly as she felt, the easiest way out of what was at best an unpleasant dilemma.

"Yes, Mr. Fawcett, something very disagreeable has happened."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, handing her a chair.

"Well, tell us all about it, and let us see what can be done."

"There's nothing can be done, at least to-night," she replied, frowningly. "To-morrow I hope he will go away, but to-night he must stay, I suppose. He's the only nephew mamma has, and of course——"

He understood, and lifted a hand to show that she need not finish the sentence.

"So Mr. Frank Selden is at your house?"

She nodded three or four times.

"He came an hour ago, without the slightest warning. I'm almost sure he'll go to-morrow. I know you won't like him, and I thought you ought to be prepared, and not come upon him suddenly, in the parlor or dining-room."

He thought a moment, with knitted forehead.

"I guess I'll leave town for a day or two," he said finally. "I can make a business errand. I *don't* want to meet him, that's certain."

A little sigh issued from the rounded mouth of his companion.

"That wouldn't be nice of you," she expostulated. "I don't like to be left alone with him. I was hoping you would stay in the house about all the time he was here."

This sounded pretty and his vanity was flattered. His brows unbent as he contemplated the meaning of her statement.

"Where is your mother?" he asked. "You will not need to be strictly alone with him a single minute—that is, if you don't wish to."

His face had begun to darken again. His moods were instantly reflected on that mirror.

"Oh, don't intimate such dreadful things!" she

cried. "I am never easy when he is near me. I am always afraid he is going to say something. Please don't go away, and please stay in the house as much as ever you can till he is gone."

He ground his teeth together.

"I don't see what I can do there," he answered, with another frown. "He and I will be certain to quarrel."

"Oh, no, you needn't!" said Mabel earnestly. "He is the most polite man in the world, and all you have to do is to say very little to him. You can talk to me—and I will talk to you—and we will act as if he wasn't there."

"A very fine plan!" ejaculated Fawcett. "I don't believe it will work. He is your cousin, after all, and your mother's nephew, and I—I am nobody."

"*Nobody!*" She put her small hand on his arm, with the action of a person who is aggrieved. "I guess you *are* somebody. Mamma thinks more of you than she does of a thousand Seldens."

He could not help it. There seemed no sense in it whatever, but he could not help it. And he asked her, first putting one of his hands over the one she had touched him with, whether she agreed with her mother in that opinion.

"Why, I don't like *him* one bit," she replied, trying to avoid seeming to see anything special in the question, "and *you* are just like an own brother."

There was no sense in the next thing he did, either. He knew it as well as you or I, dear reader, and he did it just the same. He put his arm around her, drew her to him and kissed her—actually kissed her!—on the cheek.

"I'll not run away, Mabel," he said, in a low tone.

"I'll go up with you at supper-time. We'll be a match for this fine fellow."

She thanked him warmly, and said he was as good as he could be. Then, taking up a newspaper that she found on the table, she went over into a corner to let him finish his writing, as she had often done before. And he noticed with positive exultation that she had not seemed to mind his kiss any more than a child of seven would have done.

CHAPTER VI.

NOT AN IMPROPER LIBERTY.

ALLAN FAWCETT was not only unused to women; he was also unused to men. He knew how to trade with them, to be sure; to take their orders and sell their goods, but he was not on intimate social terms with any person of his own sex. His youth had been too fully occupied with other cares to leave him any time for the merely agreeable things of life. The prospect of meeting Mr. Frank Selden was a greater lion in his path than an interview with a dozen wholesale dealers in his line of goods. He despised the type of gentleman he conceived him to be, and knew that Mr. Selden, in the arrogance of his wealth and conceit, very probably would return the dislike in full. There was nothing to be done, however, but to face the music, and as he walked toward the house with Mabel he summoned all his courage, and resolved to make the best of it.

Selden had been talking with Mrs. Morey about Allan

the entire hour before his arrival, and had made up his mind to treat him with the greatest consideration. He felt his own superiority over that grade of person, but he meant to leave a favorable impression upon him, if he could. So shrewdly did he carry out this plan that the young merchant was soon won by his suavity, and began to wonder why he had felt such an antipathy against him. Selden chatted freely with all three of his companions at the supper-table, speaking least to Mabel and oftenest to Allan. He laughed a great deal when anything was said that called forth mirth, seeming in the best of humor. He managed to draw out of Fawcett some things in reference to his business, appearing to be deeply interested in country produce; and he remarked, with a self-critical way, that he wished he had something of use to do in the world, as he was thoroughly tired of the life he was leading.

"You don't want a partner, do you?" he said, in a half-serious manner, that was not at all patronizing. "If I could get into some business where a little money and less brains would be of account, I think it would be the best thing for me."

Fawcett replied that his business was, as yet, but a limited one, and that it took the hardest kind of application and the most rigid economy to get much out of such a mine. Then he went into instances of the close margin of profit, showing how the result of a month's work might be swept away by an unexpected depression of prices. Selden listened entranced, putting in a question now and then, as though anxious to probe everything to the very bottom.

Mrs. Morey and her daughter exchanged surreptitious glances of wonder, for this was a surprise to them of the first magnitude. They had expected anything

else. When they all withdrew from the dining-room, nearly an hour later than usual, Fawcett went to his room with Selden to show him a file of the "Produce Weekly," in which were certain figures bearing on the points at issue.

"Did you ever in your life see anything like that?" exclaimed Mrs. Morey, when she was left alone with her daughter. "I thought those young fellows would be glaring at each other like bull-dogs, and one would imagine instead that they were long-separated brothers. What did you do to Mr. Fawcett to bring him home in such a mood?"

"I didn't do anything," replied Mabel, with reddening cheeks. "But *he* did something. He drew me to him, in his private office and—kissed me!"

"No!"

Mrs. Morey wore an anxious look on her pleasant face. Such a look as might be seen on the countenance of a humane general when the first sound of the screeching shell comes to his ears, showing that the battle has actually begun.

"I hope you were very careful, my child; not forward at all."

"Not the least, mamma. I pretended not even to notice it. It was only on my cheek—right here." She indicated the exact spot which his lips had touched. "It was all over in a moment."

The widow instituted a searching inquiry, after the manner of a military commission, into the minutest circumstances of the important event. Did Mr. Fawcett seem excited? Should the girl say it was a passionate kiss? Did he draw her toward him with a sudden motion, or slowly—like this? She wanted the affair rehearsed exactly as it occurred. Was it **only**

one kiss, one touching of the lips to the cheek and an instantaneous release of the form he had clasped? Very well. There was nothing objectionable in that. Mr. Fawcett deserved no undue criticism.

"Indeed, I quite agree with you, mamma," was the quick reply. "So far from objecting to it, I only wish I was sure he would repeat it often. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do—to act as if I didn't mind it, instead of turning my mouth to his, and giving him one in return, full on the lips."

The mother chided Mabel gently for the freedom of her expressions, and took occasion to impress upon her once more the necessity of a young girl's restraining her emotions to the fullest degree.

"Men never respect a woman after they had seen an exhibition of her feelings," she said. "You must act on the next occasion even more dignified than you did on this one. A little shrinking away must be practised, a show of disinclination to have his arm embrace you."

Mabel looked quite distressed.

"But, mamma, there is nothing wrong about a kiss, is there, when one really loves a man?"

"My dear, it is not a question of abstract right or wrong, but of something hardly less important—that of policy. A woman's whole career may depend on her observance of rules that civilization has hedged about her, not the violation of one of which can be stretched to the limits of a real sin. Before marriage, that is the vital time. Many a bright career has been ruined by a failure to study the operations of the masculine mind. For instance, the very man who will attempt liberties with a girl he professes to love, will despise her as long as he lives, if she permits them."

The girl still seemed uncertain what to make of her mother's attitude.

"But you don't call a *kiss* an improper liberty, do you? I want to understand."

"I say," responded the mother wisely, "that such a kiss as Mr. Fawcett gave you was not deserving of censure, under the circumstances. Had you kissed him in return, especially upon the lips, it would have been a very grave fault. I put it down as a rule that a girl should never permit her lips to touch those of any man but her wedded husband. Perhaps I am too strict in this. I do not doubt that the majority of men expect such a kiss to follow the acceptance of their offer of marriage. But I am sure that, whatever the man's ardor, he will have a higher opinion of a woman who resists, gently but firmly, the full contact of her mouth with his, even at that moment, than of one who gives way to the sensations that thrill her heart. And without a complete declaration of a desire to marry, made in unequivocal terms, and an acceptance on the woman's part, I have no hesitation in saying that such a kiss is dangerous and unmaidenly in the highest degree."

The girl put an arm about the neck of her mother and looked lovingly into her eyes.

"You are not sorry for the little kiss he *did* give me?" she said, pleadingly.

"Not in the least," was the affectionate response.

"And he may kiss me again, just the same way, if— if he ever wants to?"

The mother smiled encouragingly.

"With a little more unwillingness on your part."

"But I'm not unwilling! I'm more than willing, I'm anxious!" said Mabel, hiding her face on the maternal

bosom. "Oh, I wish he'd talk marriage. I can't wait forever. The days are dragging too slowly."

Mrs. Morey said "Hush!" in a low tone, for she heard the young men coming down the stairs. They were talking in an animated fashion, and when they appeared good humor shone on the faces of both.

"I've learned more about business than I ever knew," exclaimed Selden, as he caught sight of his aunt. "I really think I shall open an office and go to doing something. Mr. Fawcett half thinks he will take me into partnership if I show a disposition to reform."

Neither Mabel nor her mother believed this anything more than a temporary mood that would soon pass away, if indeed it was not merely a desire to be amusing. But Selden repeated a dozen times in the course of the evening that he was in earnest, and that if Mr. Fawcett would give him a chance he would prove his assertion. Allan was almost sorry the next morning, when the young Bostonian announced that he must leave on the next train.

"Good-bye, aunt," said Frank, touching her cheek with his lips. "Good-bye, little cousin," he added, taking Mabel's hand and letting go of it again in a quarter of a second. "Come and see us when you can. I don't know how long it may be before I see Norwood again, unless I get my partnership." He laughed brightly. "Come, Mr. Fawcett, there is time to stop at your store before the train is due."

There was a full hour to be spent at the store, and before he left town Selden made a distinct offer to put some money into the concern, should Fawcett ever want to enlarge the business beyond its present capacity. Allen went to the depot with him, and they parted more than amicably.

"He's a good fellow," thought Fawcett, as he walked back to his office. "I ought not to hate him just because he wanted to kiss his pretty cousin. Goodness! I've often wanted to do the same thing myself, and yesterday I actually did it. He won't bother her any more. As for his offer, it's worth thinking of. If I had \$5,000 more to work with I could double the business I am doing."

Mabel Morey could not tell what to make of her mother's boarder for the next month. He seemed almost oblivious of her presence when in the house. He was receiving letters from Frank Selden, relating to the proposition he had made, and the merchant's anxiety to increase his business drove everything else from his mind. One day he announced that he would be gone for a short time out of the State, and taking a grip-sack, with hardly a formal good-bye, he went to Boston.

Mabel could not keep back the tears, though she did not let him see them. She loved him deeply, and his recent coldness toward her was something for which she could not account. She even began to fear that he had seen some other woman whom he liked better. With the fullest confidence she unbosomed herself to her mother, who was equally at a loss to explain Fawcett's conduct. The elder lady said, however, that she did not believe there was a woman in the case; that it was more likely Allan had renewed his old resolutions not to permit himself to get entangled with anything feminine. When he returned she would talk to him. After she sounded him a little she could advise Mabel better what to do.

Fawcett stayed in Boston a whole week. He had become possessed with the idea that he must have the

money that Selden offered him, and secure it without a partnership, if possible. He wished to continue sole manager of his affairs, but was willing to pay a fair sum or share of his profits for the use of the capital he wanted. The debates over these matters took up a good deal of time. Besides this Selden insisted on showing his guest the sights of the city, and refused positively to permit him to pay for anything. Allan would much rather have paid his share of the joint expense of the excursions, or in lieu thereof have limited them to a much smaller cost. But the city young man had a way of buying the tickets and paying the checks before the countryman could even draw his purse; and, though uneasy at the constant flow of money for his expenses, there did not seem to be any way to avoid it.

Up to this time Fawcett's attendance at theatres had been very limited. He had counted every dollar with the greatest care. Selden took him almost nightly to one of the entertainments, saying it was his invariable practice to see everything that came to town.

Being twenty years of age, and having no pretensions to saintship, Allan did not refuse to accompany his new friend to other places of much more doubtful morality, merely, as they both said, to see what was going on, and not with any intention of remaining. At all of these places, Mr. Selden was greeted by the name of "Frank," and fair arms were placed about his neck by the frail occupants as soon as he entered the parlors where they were ensconced. Allan was introduced as "My friend, Mr. Smith," and Selden had to laugh at the fiery glow that came into his face when one of the girls, whose name was "Sadie," began to make love to him. It is to the credit of human nature that there is a

time when even a man is capable of blushing. But contact with vice soon destroys this faculty, and before Fawcett left Boston he could enter a palace of sin as coolly as his companion.

Those who have read the sermon that the reformed roué, Hector Greyburn, delivered in Rev. Arthur Reycroft's pulpit, in "Thou Shalt Not," must have been impressed by his delineation of the blasting character of a violation of the Seventh Command. That week in Boston, under the tutelage of Frank Selden, did more harm to Allan Fawcett than he dreamed of. It shook the foundations he had been so carefully building. He had tasted of "pleasure," he had seen money—not his own, to be sure, but money still—wasted as if it were so much water in a season of freshets. He felt, as he went back to Norwood, that his business was a more insignificant thing than he had supposed it, and that the road he had marked out to travel was harder and more dusty than he had ever imagined.

"The money is yours, whenever you choose," were the parting words of Selden. "The more I think of it, the less I want to tie myself up to real work, but I have capital to invest and confidence in your ability and probity. You can have \$5,000 any time you like. Whether you accept it or not, come up to the city once in a while and have a little fun. I have enjoyed your stay immensely."

He was certainly a very nice fellow! Fawcett said to himself a hundred times that no one could deny that. His morals were a trifle lax, but—and he reddened again at the thought—*he* had no right to criticise him on that score. Had he Selden's money, instead of being obliged to give up the next twenty years to acquiring a quarter part of the sum, perhaps he would be

no better himself. Such girls as Sadle were too attractive to spend much time in lamenting their condition. Allan thought he would accept Frank's invitation to go to Boston again, if only for the sake of meeting that entrancing creature.

But when he entered Mrs. Morey's dwelling and looked into the anxious eyes of Mabel, the contrast between this pure girl and the depraved one from whom he had so recently parted struck him with tremendous force. He thought how abruptly he had left Norwood, and how he had not written a word during his absence to explain the unexpected length of his stay. Instinct told him that Mabel had suffered from this neglect and that his conduct was inexcusable, from whatever point it might be viewed. His landlady happened to be out at the moment of his arrival, and he stood face to face with her daughter.

"Well, Mabel, I'm home."

He put down his bag and drew the girl to a seat on the sofa, by his side. The recollection of the young woman at Boston struck him again, as he did so, and he released Mabel in the very act of embracing her.

This action distressed the girl greatly.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in a whisper. "I feel as if I had done something to make you dislike me."

Forgetting everything, he caught her full in his arms.

"Dislike you! I like you better than any other person in the world!"

She put up her lips for him to kiss, in the suddenness of her delight, but remembering her mother's caution, lowered them again, and received the salute on her forehead.

Then she heard a step on the walk, and hastily left his side to take a chair.

"Hush!" she said, returning the fond look he gave her, "mamma is coming!"

CHAPTER VII.

SADIE WEARS EVENING DRESS.

THE \$5,000 of Mr. Frank Selden was soon put into the business which Allan Fawcett controlled. The arrangement by which this was made was highly satisfactory to the commission merchant at the time. There was not, in the ordinary sense of the term, any partnership whatever. Fawcett merely gave his notes for the sum borrowed, with a mortgage on everything he owned to secure the lender. He was to pay ten per cent. for the use of the money, and a slight additional percentage on his net profits each year until he had paid it all back again.

Selden had the instincts of a capitalist, and had no intention of losing anything through the kindly act he had done. He was willing to give Allan a lift, but he realized that money was not to be obtained everywhere on such security as he had to offer. He satisfied himself that his new friend was thoroughly honest and bound to succeed, and discovered a way to benefit both parties and cause a loss to neither.

For a short time Fawcett was intensely elated at the additional facilities with which he could now do business. He sought for more opportunities to buy goods directly, instead of relying mostly on those sent him to be disposed of on commission. The first venture that

he made netted him a comfortable profit. The second resulted in a loss. The third was again on the right side of the ledger. The only trouble was that he could not help a new feeling of anxiety, a mental unrest that was not good for one of his temperament. He did not sleep as soundly as he had done before. Bad news from the centre of trade worried him exceedingly. Good news raised his spirits to an unhealthy degree. He was continually oscillating from extreme to extreme, and it was nearly as bad for him to hear of a large gain as of a distressing loss.

He told everything to Mabel, and to her mother; that is, after he had secured the additional capital, for he kept that secret back as a pleasant surprise for them. In his joy he did not notice that Mrs. Morey hardly seemed to share his brilliant hopes for the future of the transaction. She would certainly have advised him against it, had she been consulted in time. When the thing was consummated, and he had the money, it was too late to say anything, and she was compelled to hold her peace. She was shrewd enough to see that her nephew had made a good business bargain, provided Mr. Fawcett's judgment held out. The interest he was to get for his money was about double the usual rate. She wished, for Mabel's sake, that Fawcett had continued in the slower but surer path he had begun, but she did not tell him so, nor did she even say it to her daughter. She continued to hope for the best.

It was not to be denied that Allan and Mabel were becoming closer friends every day. A marriage would result unless all signs failed. Things had gone too far now to alter her plans, even if she had desired. Mabel was devotedly attached to her young friend, with what Byron calls "first and passionate love." Allan

liked her, undoubtedly. It needed only time and fair business prosperity to arrange the date.

Being constantly with Mabel, every evening of his life, as well as at nearly all of his meals, Fawcett grew more and more confidential with her. The attack of conscience that he had had on his return from Boston made her seem more beautiful and lovely in his eyes than ever before. Had any one entered the parlor where they were together—and no one ever did, not even the managing mamma, without due warning—they would have been taken for real lovers. Generally they were sitting close together on the sofa, or her chair was drawn against his, his hands holding hers in a close clasp.

One cannot talk with a pretty girl day after day without saying things that grow to have a meaning, and Fawcett, though he tried very hard not to say anything definite, felt in a vague way that he was gradually becoming entangled. And he was not sorry for it, either. Mabel was still very young. There was plenty of time to consider the matter, in its serious aspect. In the meanwhile it was agreeable to have her near him, and to see the sympathy for his cause shining out of the sweet gray eyes.

If he could have read what passed through that young brain it is difficult to say what the result would have been. Day after day the *one thought uppermost* in Mabel's mind was, "Why doesn't he speak?" Was he to go on forever with his talk of prices, of cargoes, of good and bad harvests, of how much \$5,000 at ten per cent. would come to in a year? Was there never to be a time when he would bend over her and say, "Darling, I love you!"

But daily talks with her mother taught her the value

of time in matters of war, and convinced her that the enemy was surely if slowly abandoning his entrenchments and retreating into his central fortification, which he would have to evacuate in turn, previous to a complete surrender.

At the end of three months from the time he had borrowed the money Fawcett went to Boston again. He had other business there, but he thought it a good opportunity to talk with Selden, whom he had not seen since the cash was exchanged for his notes. To Allan, who considered a dollar almost a sacred thing, it was astounding that any one should lend so much money and pay so little attention to it for so long a time. He thought it his duty to lay before Selden the entire results of his business since the additional capital had been paid in. Frank laughed when he heard this proposition, and responded that if there was one thing he hated more than another it was detail.

"Have you been doing better or worse? That is the whole question," he said. "I wouldn't listen to those columns of figures you have there for a farm Down East."

"But I want to show you," protested Allan, uneasily. "You see, the first thing I did, was on the 14th, when I bought——"

"I must interrupt you," broke in the other. "I don't care a rap whether you bought anything on the 14th or the 24th, or whether it was hay, beans or butter that you bought. If you can tell how much you have made in the last quarter I am willing to listen, but not to another solitary thing."

Fawcett looked dissatisfied.

"I can't tell exactly what I've made," said he, "because I have a good deal of stock still on hand waiting for a

rise. When I only did a straight commission business I knew pretty near where I was, my only trouble being that some fellow would put me off occasionally, or perhaps go into bankruptcy before I could get what he owed me."

"Well, how does it look?" asked Selden, impatiently. "You've got some kind of an idea. Or, haven't you?"

Thus compelled to answer in a way he did not like, Fawcett said he had cleared \$850 in the quarter before he had dealt with Mr. Selden, and that if he were to sell what he had on hand at present prices, reckoning interest, etc., on his loan, he would come out about the same.

"Not doing as well as you expected, then?" remarked Selden, sententiously.

"But I tell you it is not a fair way of reckoning," said Fawcett, "for I expect to get a substantial profit from the rise that ought to take place before I sell."

"And if, instead of a rise, there should be a fall in prices?"

Fawcett grew a shade paler.

"That is very unlikely to occur," he said.

"But it may. The thing doesn't look as rosy as it did three months ago, does it?"

Fawcett was compelled to admit to himself that it didn't, but he would not say so to this man. He wished with all his heart that he had never borrowed a dollar. It was too late to talk about that now, though, and he was glad when Selden, of his own accord, changed the subject.

"I've got tickets for the theatre to-night. Will you go with me?"

"Thank you. What is the play?"

"The Black Crook."

"I'd like to see that. I've heard a good deal about it."

"Never seen it!" exclaimed Frank. "Heavens! What a countryman you are! Why, I suppose I've seen that play twenty times."

Allan, abashed, inquired what there was to make it so attractive.

"Legs, legs, legs! Nothing but legs! The man who wrote it got a fortune out of it, just because it happened to be used for a spectacle and filled with good-looking girls. As a literary production it hasn't a particle of merit; as a medium for the exhibition of female anatomy it is absolutely without a rival. The theatre-going public of the present age is demoralized. It passes by the greatest actors and actresses to witness the nearest approach to nudity that the law will permit. If you haven't seen the Crook it will be a great treat to you."

That evening Fawcett, who had never seen a display at all approaching the one before him, justified the prediction of his companion. He was so absorbed in watching the fairies that he hardly heard Selden whispering excitedly in his ear:

"There she is; sixth row, to the right. She recognizes you. Let her see that you remember her, but be careful, as others here may know her."

Fawcett turned in a dazed way toward the quarter indicated.

"Of whom are you speaking?" he asked.

"Your old friend, the seraphic Sadie," whispered Frank. "See her, there, with an ostrich fan. Look out, don't attract attention."

Allan saw the young woman at last, and a glow of

color swept over his face as she smiled significantly at him. The curtain was rising for the last act, and he turned toward the stage with a feeling of relief. The gorgeous effects of mechanic and painter, mingled with the rounded forms of a hundred women lying in attitudes of the most ravishing beauty, set his brain on fire. When the great curtain slowly descended he longingly gazed at the vanishing loveliness with a decided tinge of regret.

"Sadie is going directly home," said Selden, as they started toward the exit. "She has telegraphed me that she shall expect us there."

Fawcett held back in the crowd. His head was in a whirl.

"I—I think I won't," he stammered. "I must get up early in the morning, and I guess I will go to the hotel now."

"Pshaw! Come around, if only for a minute. That's common politeness. It's only a short walk from here. No, I insist. After that I will walk to the hotel with you."

Selden was the stronger of the twain, when it came to an influence of this kind, and Allan found himself yielding. He would go, he said, but strictly for only a word. Nothing should persuade him to remain. If she asked him to, he relied on Selden to help him out.

"You will tell her it is impossible, won't you?" he pleaded. "We will go in just to speak and out again."

Frank laughed, saying he should think Sadie was some dangerous wild animal, of whose bite Allan was afraid. As he spoke they ascended the steps of the house and rang the bell.

Miss Sadie had been to the theatre in full evening

dress, and made a pretty picture as she came in to receive her callers. She professed to be very glad to see "Mr. Smith" again, saying she had recognized him in the theatre long before he saw her, and had spent most of the evening with her eyes on him instead of the play.

"I hope you are going to stay some time in the city," she concluded, in the most bewitching manner.

"N-no," he stammered. "I go on the early train to-morrow morning."

She turned to Mr. Selden with an aggrieved expression.

"Now, Frank! Isn't that dreadful! You know I have asked you, every time you called, when he was to be here again—and now to have him stay so short a time! It is outrageous! What excuse have you for such conduct?" she asked Fawcett, putting her hand affectionately on his shoulder.

"Business demands it," he told her, but already he was weakening.

"Oh, you men! How long will you live if you keep on at this rate!" she cried. "Business, business, always business!"

With a show of doing as he had been asked, Selden interfered, with the statement that "Mr. Smith" had made him promise to remain but a moment on this occasion, as he wished to get to his hotel early so as to have a good night's rest before his early call. He said this, however, with a look that showed the girl he had no interest in the matter, and when he finished she uttered a little scream of dismay.

"It is not true! You would not keep me these long weeks pining for you and then give me merely a word and a good-bye. Come into the next parlor where I

can talk to you. Wait for us, Mr. Selden. We'll not be long."

And before Allen could debate the question with her she had dragged him away and closed the door behind her.

"Why must you go?" she demanded of her companion.

The poet has well said, when speaking of the bait that the devil finds most attractive,

"I fish with a woman the whole year round."

Fawcett did not get the first train the next morning. It was noon when he left Boston, and nearly night when he reached Norwood. Never had he felt so wretched, not even in those days when hardly a penny stood between him and hunger, when his only bed was a hard mattress under the garret roof of a farm-house.

How could he ever meet Mabel!

He went to his office and remained there after the front store was closed. He had no appetite for supper, and he meant to stay until it was so late that he would escape seeing anybody at his lodging until the next morning. The next morning! Could he ever look again into those pure eyes, after the second time he had dishonored her!

He tried to justify himself, or at least to lessen the enormity of his conduct. He was neither married nor engaged. He intended to lead a single life for many years yet, and the common judgment of men allowed some liberty to a bachelor. He was no worse than others; why need he be so severe on such an ordinary fault?

To every question, there came clearly the one re-

sponse—*Mabel!* He had done wrong to *Mabel*. It was not very clear how this might be, but that was the accusation against him, from his conscience. *Mabel, Mabel!* He had sinned against *Mabel!*

About nine o'clock a faint tap on his window-pane attracted his attention. Somebody had seen the light and wanted to leave an order, perhaps. Fawcett remained perfectly still, hoping the caller would think the light an accident that had been forgotten, and go away. But the tapping was begun again, and thinking it might be as well to have it over, he rose and went through the store to the street door and opened it. His consternation was complete when a lithe female figure emerged from the darkness and he saw before him the object of his thoughts for the past ten hours.

"I supposed it must be you," said the girl, entering the store, and closing the door after her. "Nobody else ever lights up the private office at night. It is nice I roused you, for now we can go home together."

She was walking along into the inner room, and he followed her mechanically. As they entered she caught sight of his pale face and turned to him in alarm.

"You are ill!" she exclaimed. "You are in some trouble! Oh, my darling, tell me what it is!"

Years of careful instruction by the most careful of mothers had failed at the vital point. She had called him by the most affectionate name known to the English tongue, in that moment of apprehension, born of the saddest expression she had ever seen on his countenance. And she did still more. She put both hands on his shoulders and held up to him a face it needed no seer to tell him was wholly his own.

With his first thought, that of his total unworthiness,

he thrust her hastily away. Had his touch meant death he would not have felt more like avoiding her.

The tears sprang to her eyes.

"Oh, what is it? Have I done anything to you? Are you angry that I tapped on the window? Don't you want to walk home with me? Tell me what you wish and I will do it, only don't look at me like that!"

He had held this girl's hand in his, he had kissed her on the cheek and on the forehead. And he had been with that other woman—! Could the lapse of time ever make him fit to touch this one again!

"No, Mabel," he murmured, with a gasp. "There has nothing happened for which you are to blame. You must not ask me questions, for I cannot answer them. But this I will say—you never were so dear to me as you are now."

A glad smile shone through the tears as she heard him. She was wise enough not to press him for a further explanation, though she was "dying," as women say, to know what caused his distress. She said she would rather have anything else happen to her than to feel that she had injured him. Each word was like a stab. He thought the best way was to go home with her at once, as that would the sooner place him out of sound of her accusing voice, and he proceeded to put away his things and lock up his desk.

Until now he had not thought to look at the evening paper, but seeing it lying on the table, the business side of his nature impelled him to open it, to glance at the state of the market. There had been an advance in the price of the articles he was holding, and so great was his satisfaction at this fact that he could not help uttering a cry of joy.

"Wait a minute!" he said.

Opening his desk, he took up a pen and began to figure. Five minutes later he seemed to have forgotten that he ever had cause to mourn. If he sold his stock in the morning, at the prices that ruled to-night, he would be seven hundred dollars better off than he had told Selden!

"Mabel," he cried, looking up with every sign of trouble eliminated from his face, "if everything continues as it looks now I shall have a good deal of money by and by. If I should get enough so that I felt justified in asking you to marry me——"

He could get no further, the sudden surprise, following her pain at the reception she had met, was too much for the girl. She gave unmistakable signs of fainting, and he sprang up to open the window.

A few minutes sufficed to restore her, but when he essayed to finish his proposition she gently begged him to wait till some other time.

"Let us go now," she said. "It is late, and mamma will wonder what has detained me so long."

As they passed up the street she leaned rather heavily on his arm, and they walked very, very slowly.

"Let me finish what I started to say in the office," said Fawcett, seeing that they were quite alone. "I shall feel better to have it over with. I intended to remain a bachelor until late in life, because I felt that it would take me a long time to get enough money to support a wife without taking too much from my business. I used to say it was probable I would be forty years old before that occurred. Now, since I have had the extra capital from Mr. Selden, I can get on much faster. If I prosper it may only be a very few years before I am able to marry. I don't want you to feel bound to me, for you are still very young, and there are

so many things that may happen; but if everything should go right, and I get the money sooner than I expect—well, the fact is, you are the only girl I ever cared for, and the only one I should ever think of wanting for a wife.”

It was not romantic, this mixing of marriage with potatoes, of love with the price of grain. The girl felt a sense of pique at the manner of his statement, but she listened with silence, clinging possibly a little less closely to his arm.

“We won’t call it an engagement, exactly,” continued Allan, as if it was a matter for him to settle alone. “Only, you see, I like you immensely, and I want you to understand just how I am situated. We’ll be real good friends, and we’ll wait and see how things turn out. Is that all right, Mabel?”

The girl nodded, without raising her eyes from the ground, were they had rested during the entire conversation. When they entered the house they found no one in the parlor, but after a moment’s delay, Allan went to his room, saying he was tired and wanted to get to sleep.

“I found Mr. Fawcett at his office, mamma,” said Mabel, when she had gone to her mother’s chamber, “and on the way home he said the strangest things to me.”

“Did he ask you to marry him?” inquired Mrs. Morey, anxiously.

“I hardly know whether he did or not,” said Mabel, with a pout. “I’ll repeat it to you as well as I can and see what you think about it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

"HIS WIFE, OF COURSE."

THERE were many ups and downs in the business of Allan Fawcett during the next six months. Some of my readers may smile at the smallness of his capital, and think the loss or gain of a few thousand dollars not a proper thing on which to found important events in a novel. But such a variation meant as much to this young man as a hundred times that amount means to those in better circumstances. The oscillations in his little bank account kept him in a continual state of nervous tension, and accounted for the entire chain of circumstances which brought about the results I have to record.

Mabel Morey was no stranger to the least of these figures. On evenings when another man would have talked to her of poetry or of music, Allan rehearsed the day's business. The commission orders still paid him well, and his entire uneasiness came from the direct purchases he made and his inability to forecast the state of the market twenty-four hours in advance. He was operating on borrowed money, that was the trouble. Mabel listened, with patience, to every word he uttered, though she grew very tired of it.

"If I could get enough together to pay Selden what I have borrowed, without incommoding myself—I never would go into debt again as long as I live," he remarked

frequently. "And I want to tell you another thing, Mabel. If I had that paid, and \$10,000 on hand, I would not wait long to get married, either."

She drew a deep breath, but without attracting his attention. Marriage did not seem very near, on those terms. Her mother, however, still counselled her not to get impatient. She seemed to feel that all would come out right in the end.

There were several times when Fawcett could have paid half his indebtedness, had he been willing to do so; but the chance of investing a little deeper and sweeping it all off at once was too much for his judgment, and the opportunity slipped away. Then there came a sort of miniature "Black Friday" to him, when he would not have been able to pay dollar for dollar on all he owed, had he been called upon for immediate settlement. The alarm he felt was so great that it actually landed him in bed, sick from fear that the very worst was about to fall on him. Mrs. Morey, with the kind interest she always showed, attended him, doing everything she could for his comfort. This was on Sunday, when nothing new could be learned, and he passed the day as he had the night, between the sheets, tossing restlessly about, and getting very little sleep.

"Is there anything more I can do?" asked the widow, sympathetically, when she had bathed his forehead and taken away the remains of the food he had hardly tasted.

"Yes," he said. "You can let Mabel come up here."

Mrs. Morey started. But the young man was certainly quite ill. He was like a real member of the family. It would do no harm that she could conceive of. And she replied, with a few guarded expressions,

that she would let the girl come up for a little while, but that he ought to try and get a nap before long. She went down and had a talk with her daughter, and twenty minutes later the young couple were together, the door being discreetly left a little ajar for the sake of Mrs. Grundy.

"I am worried to death," said Allan, taking Mabel's hand in his. "And I think all the time about you, too. If the market sinks again to-morrow there will be little chance of my being able to provide a home for you in a long time."

She patted the hand gently, and told him he must hope for better news in the morning.

"And even if your worst fears are realized," she added, with a blush, "you will need me all the more. It is not when one is successful that he most wants friends. I have confidence in your ability, and feel that you will come out of this difficulty a better business man than ever."

A grateful sensation stole through his veins as he felt the gentle pressure of that hand and heard those low words of cheer.

"I wish, ever so much," he replied, "that I could afford to get married now. As you say, one needs true friends in adversity more than when the best luck is with him. I wanted you to come up just now more than I wanted anything else, and I was half afraid your mother would not think it proper. If we were married you would help me over such rough places as this in a way you cannot do now."

The thought of marriage always had a soothing influence on the girl. She leaned over the bed and touched her cheek for one moment to his.

"It cannot cost so very much to be married," she

stammered, looking at the pictures on the bedquilt. "I know mamma's expenses are light, and we have everything we need. As for me, I never want much. I have clothes enough now to last almost a year."

It took the girl much longer to utter those sentences than it does you to read them. Every sentence hurt. But she was ready for almost anything now except an indefinite postponement of her hopes. Fawcett was the only man she had ever cared for, and his faults did not seem as glaring to her as if this had not been the case. If she could say anything to arouse the dormant thought in his brain that he could marry without endangering his bank balance—provided there should be any when the next evening's papers arrived—she wanted to do it.

And in this she was successful. All the pleasures of being a husband, the delight of calling that pretty girl his wife, stole in upon the mind of the sick man. With a dream of future happiness he fell asleep, her hand still in his, and when he awoke, an hour later, he was much refreshed.

"I must have slept a long time," he exclaimed, rousing himself. "And you did not move, for fear of waking me! What a good girl you are! Do you know, Mabel, I thought in my sleep that we were really married, and it seemed as natural as could be." He put one arm outside the coverlet and drew her toward him. "Let me get out of this trouble with the market, and I will not wait much longer, dearest."

She let him steal one kiss from her cheek, and then, gently disengaging herself, said she must go for awhile. If he wanted anything he could ring the little bell that her mother had placed on the stand at the head of the bed.

"But I want something now," he smiled, significantly. "I want *you*."

Another kiss would have followed, had she permitted it, but she rose with a laugh, telling him he was improving altogether too fast. When the market had turned, she said, they would talk again. She left the room, waiving a salute to him with her fingers, with which he was fain to be content for the present; and having nothing to disturb him, he went to sleep again. In the morning he was down to breakfast at the usual hour.

The morning paper, placed beside his plate, told him there had been a reaction, to some extent, on Saturday evening, and that the tendency of prices was in his favor. His depressed spirits began to rise, and he went to his office with a good deal of courage. By the use of the telegraph he kept informed of the fluctuations at New York, and as soon as he could clear himself of the loss that had stared him in the face he sold all the stock he had accumulated, to be delivered immediately.

"I'm out of that scrape," he said joyfully, when he came home to supper. "Next time I'll be more careful. I have had a lot of new orders, to-day, besides; take it altogether, I am feeling pretty well."

Mabel was glad, and he felt the effect of her sympathetic smile. She was a nice girl. Could he not manage it so as to marry without that fortune he had always considered a necessary prerequisite. After supper he had her to himself in the parlor and acted the most like a lover since she had known him.

"I guess we'd better call it an engagement," he said with his arm around her. "I want to have it understood with your mother. Perhaps it won't be for a

good while, but it'll have to come. I've liked you ever since I came to live here, and I've tried to push away the feeling, because it seemed as if I must, but I can't do it any longer. I'll tell her about it to-night, when she comes in and explain just how I feel."

An engagement! Could it be possible that he meant it, after all this time! His manner of announcing it was not the most polished, but he had a business air, that convinced her it was genuine. Yes, it was the best thing that could happen, to have the engagement understood. It gave her something like a substantial basis for her expectations.

When Mrs. Morey came back from the stores where she had been to make some purchases, Fawcett called her in and informed her of his latest intentions in the same blunt way he had told Mabel.

"You know I've always said I shouldn't marry till I was better off in life," he explained, "but I've been thinking it over, and I don't want to wait quite so long. So I would like to have it understood, you know, that it's an engagement."

The widow smiled affectionately upon her daughter, and paused discreetly before answering.

"Mabel is very young," she said finally.

"She is nearly nineteen," replied Allan, "and I am twenty-one. We are not exactly babies, and, as I said, we sha'n't get married at once. Only, I want it understood," he added, repeating the phrase as if he enjoyed the sound.

Mrs. Morey took Mabel by the hand and drew her toward her.

"Do you love Mr. Fawcett enough to marry him?" she asked, exactly as if they had discussed anything else together for the last year.

Mabel, with red and white cheeks, answered by a low bow.

"Then," said Mrs. Morey, "I cannot withhold my consent. I have only one child, and my greatest wish is that she may be happy. Marriage is the natural lot of woman. I hope she will make as good a wife as she has been a daughter."

Then the two women shed some genuine tears, for their love for each other was the most real part of their natures.

Fawcett fidgeted uneasily on the sofa. If he hated one thing more than another it was weeping.

"I understand, then," he said, lamely, "that it is understood."

The formality of the engagement did exactly what might have been expected—it hastened the wedding-day. The conversation at table began to drift into the question of household expenses. Instances were given of men who had married without a penny and risen to affluence by the aid—principally, as it appeared—of their helpmeets. It turned out that it was really much cheaper to feed and clothe two persons than one—very much cheaper. In this sort of arithmetic two and two did not make four, but the product amounted in some mysterious way to only about one and a half.

The next morning Fawcett was thoroughly disgusted to see by the paper that another advance had taken place in market materials generally. Had he only been courageous enough to wait twenty-four hours longer he would have been \$300 ahead. The lesson he had believed learned the day before turned out to be but a temporary thing. He was sorry he had been so precipitate, and resolved the next time to wait the

inevitable turn in the tide before selling. He took up a price list for the previous year, and studied out the fluctuations, trying to find the rule by which they were governed. In the midst of his investigations a letter came from Frank Selden, advising him not to sell at present, if he had any stock on hand, as a friend on the inside had told him prices were certain to rise rapidly soon. Fawcett could hardly contain himself for vexation, as he read this letter. If Selden had only known enough to telegraph, it might have done some good.

It turned out as Frank prognosticated. Prices rose steadily for the next month, and every day Fawcett gnashed his teeth as he figured out the loss he had sustained by disposing of his stock. The final figures showed a total of \$2,800, a sum of the utmost importance to him at that time.

"If I hadn't sold till now I would have made enough to feel justified in getting married immediately," he told Mabel, when the time came.

These things would undoubtedly have discouraged most girls beyond repair, but Mabel Morey bore them all in silence. As Allan was the only lover she had ever had, she could not compare him with others, to his disadvantage. She still liked him very much, and waited patiently, as advised by her mother, till the stream should turn her way.

The climax in Fawcett's anger at his bad luck came with a letter from Selden, telling him to "Sell now," weeks after he had let everything go without a cent of profit. He had a great notion to return the borrowed money, with what interest was due, and thus clear himself forever from the unpleasant alliance. But the temptation to try again, the convenience of

having such a handsome balance to draw on, dissuaded him.

Selden came to Norwood soon after this, and when he alluded to the high turn the market had made, Fawcett could not bring himself to tell him the truth. He did not say he had taken advantage of the rise, but neither did he admit that he had lost the chance. And to add to his feeling toward Selden, the latter made several days' stay at his aunt's house, seeming to find the company of Mabel very agreeable.

It was not possible for Fawcett to break out against this fellow, who had done him such great favors, and he endured his torture in silence, though with an aching heart. While he was at his office, Frank was around the house, saying bright things to Mabel, no doubt, and trying to arouse in her a liking for himself, as he had done of yore. Twenty times Allan tried to tell Frank of his engagement, but the words stuck in his throat, and he had to content himself with hinting to Mabel that she ought to be careful with such a man as she knew her cousin to be.

"I don't see what I can do except treat him well," was the girl's response. "He hasn't said anything really improper to me, this time."

"What *does* he talk about all day?" asked Fawcett crossly. "He seems to find your society very entertaining."

Mabel nodded, as if this could not be denied.

"Frank likes me," she said softly. "I wish he didn't. His mother keeps writing to mine that we ought to be married."

Allan started with apprehension.

"Has he said anything to you like that?" he demanded.

"N-not exactly."

"Do you think it right, when you are engaged, to flirt with every man who comes along?" asked Fawcett indignantly.

The girl raised her eyes to his. He felt before she spoke how much graver his accusation was than the facts on which it was based.

"I have never flirted with him, nor with any one," she answered. "He is my cousin. I cannot drive him away from the house."

"Very well," said Allan, determined not to be reconciled. "I shall tell your mother what I think about it. That confounded loan ties my tongue to him, but she shall know my opinion. If he is going to stay here and make love to you, I shall change my lodging, that's all!"

The tears rose to Mabel's eyes.

"Oh, don't do that!" cried Allan, roughly. "I'd rather you'd strike me than cry. It irritates me terribly."

However, he did not speak to Mrs. Morey. On the following morning Selden came into his office with the announcement that he was going back to Boston.

"Yes, this town is too dull for me," he added. "Even Boston is hardly lively enough. New York is the only decent place. I think I should move there, if it wasn't for mother. A fellow has to consider things like that, you know. Well," he added, banteringly, "What word shall I take from you to Sadie?"

Fawcett felt a momentary shock at the commingling, almost in one sentence, of the name of Frank's mother and a woman of the town. It showed him more than anything else how little true sentiment there was in the young man.

"You need not tell her anything," he replied. "I shall never see her again. To tell the truth, I never mean to go to such a place so long as I live. I was disgusted with myself the last time. The more one thinks of it, the more terrible it grows. A girl pretends to love a man she has only known half an hour, and then the next day goes through the same form of affection with another! When you stop to think of it, such things are simply dreadful!"

Frank Selden gave utterance to a low whistle.

"So you have become a woman-hater?" he said.

"A hater of *such* women, yes."

"They are all pretty much alike," laughed Selden. "It is mainly a matter of the degree of pretence they use."

Fawcett grew sober.

"Then the right thing for a man to do is to get married," said he.

"How will he better himself by that?" came the sneering question.

"He will be sure that at least one woman is true to him," said Allan, gravely.

"What woman will that be?"

"His wife, of course."

Selden threw back his head and laughed merrily.

"My dear fellow, where have you lived? Why, wives have got to be watched as carefully as chicken-coops, in these days. The shrewdest men are constantly getting fooled. We can see our neighbor's house, over the way, better than we can our own. Well, I must go. Good-bye. Write me once in a while, and look out for yourself in business matters. I'll tell Sadie what you say, though it will break her heart."

The commission merchant thought a long time of what his visitor had said. It was undoubtedly true that there were false wives in the world, though not by any means as many as his language seemed to intimate. It behooved a man who was about to marry to find a perfectly innocent girl, and to lose no effort to keep her so. Such a girl, he thought, as Mabel Morey, who had spent her entire life at her mother's side, ignorant of wickedness, pure as when she lay in her cradle,—one who could never go astray; who would not even understand what the would-be seducer meant if he tried to exercise his arts on her.

He turned to his books. The commissions that he received were of late rapidly increasing. Deducting the total amount of his indebtedness, and supposing all bills due him to be good, he found by an easy computation that he was worth \$4,250. And his twenty-second birthday had not yet arrived.

Would marriage be a very expensive thing? He wished he knew exactly how much it would cost. This idea of waiting till he was forty for a wife could not be carried out. He was firmly resolved that he never could stoop to an ignoble attachment again. The more he reflected the more he was inclined to ask Mrs. Morey's consent to the fixing of an early day for his wedding. He thought of it as a matter between that lady and himself entirely. Mabel had nothing to do about it, in his opinion, but to get ready when she was told the time had come. It was for older and wiser heads to settle such matters.

CHAPTER IX.

A GREAT DEAL OF SERVING.

"DID Mr. Selden call on you, on his way to the depot?" asked Mrs. Morey, at noon. "He decided suddenly to go away, and said he wanted to stop at your office."

When Allan replied, the lady drew a long breath and told him she hated to say it, but it was certainly a great relief to her that her nephew had left town.

"His mother is my only sister," she said, "and I am under a hundred obligations to her, but I have no faith in Frank. I have been on needles and pins ever since he came."

After dinner Fawcett asked Mrs. Morey to see him alone for a few minutes in the parlor. There he told her what he had in mind. He had concluded that an earlier marriage than the one he had contemplated would be the best thing for him. In fact, he wanted no more delay now than was absolutely necessary.

Welcome as were the tidings, glad as she was to see the near outcome of her long siege at this fortress, the widow was obliged to temporize, for the sake of appearances. She alluded, over and over, to the extreme youth of her daughter, to her lack of acquaintance with the world, even to her need of a longer apprenticeship at the duties of a housekeeper.

"She is a veritable child," she declared. "You would need the utmost patience with her. I cannot imagine her at present in the guise of a wife. And

then, think of the possibilities of becoming a mother at such an age!"

A mother! Little Mabel a mother! Had anything been needed to increase the ardor of his suit, these words would have accomplished it. A vision of surpassing sweetness came to him,—a little form wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in Mabel's arms!

There was nothing so attractive to him as children. He never passed one out for an airing in its carriage without stealing a peep at its little face. Liking money so well, he always found his hand going to his pocket for pennies when he came upon a group of little ones flattening their noses against a confectioner's window. One night, on the railroad, when he was a newsboy, he took a crying child from its exhausted mother, "for a few minutes," and kept it six hours, while she got the first good sleep she had had for days. Under his care the infant's wailings were hushed, and it also sank to slumber. And when the lady offered to recompense him for the long vigil she had unintentionally caused him, he replied that the obligation was on his part and, that he could not think of accepting anything whatever.

"You are hardly consistent, Mrs. Morey," he said, when he came back to earth again. "You were the mother of Mabel when you were scarcely older than she. And I am sure," he added, gallantly, "you are none the worse for that."

Mrs. Morey inclined her head gravely.

"That is true," she replied, after a moment. "But I seem to have been older in experience than she. Years are not everything. Mabel knows no more of life than most children of five."

"And that is one of the strongest reasons why I

admire her," said Fawcett. "I want to marry a girl with a perfectly innocent mind. Say that you will consent, and relieve my anxiety."

Mrs. Morey finally said she would consult with Mabel, and would give her answer in the evening.

"What were you talking about so long?" asked Mabel, as soon as Fawcett had left the house.

"He wants to marry you immediately," smiled her mother.

With clasped hands pressed against her breast the girl uttered a little cry of relief. "I hope you put nothing in his way, mamma," she said. "You didn't think it necessary to skirmish for more delay, did you?"

The widow shook her head in mild disapproval.

"My dear child, you shock me by some of the things you say. As long as you are sure of him, I should think the longest possible wait would suit you best."

"Not at all!" was the honest reply. "I have waited now until I feel like an old maid. O yes, I want to get married. And no man is sure till you have him tied fast by the preacher. When did you arrange it for? Not later than next month, I solemnly hope."

A sad laugh at the girl's earnestness was forced from her mother's lips.

"I left the time unsettled. Arrange it between you to-night," she said. "I shall turn him over to you when he finishes supper. But, let me warn you for the last time, a woman *must profess* a desire for delay. Men expect it. They are disappointed if they do not have to do just so much urging. And so—my little girl wants to get rid of her old mother?"

Mabel nestled close to the loving bosom.

"You are the dearest mamma in the world, but you

can't be a husband !” she exclaimed. “I shall always love you as dearly as ever, but a girl doesn't seem anybody at all until she is married.”

The mother responded warmly to her daughter's caresses.

“He will require a great deal of managing,” she said, in allusion to Fawcett. “He is inclined to domineer, and would make the life of a woman a burden to her if he were permitted to do so. I shall always be ready to give you advice.”

An hour followed, devoted to the general subject of controlling husbands and of the best methods to be pursued under a large variety of circumstances. The advice given by the elder lady, while it would undoubtedly interest the reader, is hardly permissible for me to use, as most of it was imparted under the seal of confidence. It is probably paralleled daily in similar cases by other ladies who think they have discovered a sovereign panacea for all the troubles incident to matrimony, and the reader will have occasion to notice, as this tale proceeds, how valuable it proved to the young wife that was to be.

After considerable time had been consumed in reasons pro and con, Mabel and Allan agreed upon a date for their nuptials. Now that he had decided to marry, and within a short time, he could not endure the least unnecessary delay. The girl found him as ardent as she could have wished. Two months were allowed for preparation, each day of which Fawcett grudged exceedingly.

As the slight arrangements proceeded the young man seemed to change his entire disposition. He grew as sentimental as any lover in poetic fiction. His departure for his office in the morning was delayed beyond the

usual hour. At noon he lingered longer than he had ever done, and in the evening he never left the house unless she was with him. The news of the impending event spread over the town, and to all who knew him well enough to allude to the subject he responded proudly that it was a true report. Those who intended to turn the subject into a jest were taken aback by his manner.

The young business man rose in the estimation of his townsmen. Not only was he one of the brightest merchants of his age that they knew, but he had the elements of a substantial man of family in his composition. They said among themselves that he might have selected a wiser helpmeet than that girl of the Widow Morey's, but it might come out all right. There was no accounting for marital selections.

It always takes a good deal of sewing to prepare a young woman for the marriage altar. There is a recognized list of things to wear that she ought to have, in order to enter on the sacred obligations she is about to assume. Mrs. Morey could not do as much as she would have liked for her daughter in this respect, but she ran the sewing-machine day after day on such goods as she could afford, until it seemed to the ignorant Mr. Fawcett that a shop could easily have been set up out of the result of her labors. Some of the articles were exhibited to him with a sort of bashful pride by Miss Mabel—the gowns, the hats, and that sort of thing. Some, on the contrary, were deemed too intricate, too ornate, or too delicate for his inspection, and when he entered the sewing-room unannounced there were stifled screams, and a sudden cessation of labor, while the forms of the two women were placed by a concerted action between him and the work in progress.

"We shall have to establish a rule," said Mrs. Morey, one day, "that you are not to enter this room without knocking."

"Is it so bad as that?" he inquired, with a smile.

Fawcett's face always wore a smile during this period.

"I would not mind, myself," said Mrs. Morey. "But you can see how confusing it might be to Mabel under some circumstances to have you enter. There are many garments in progress of manufacture that are not supposed to be seen by gentlemen."

The smile on the young man's face deepened.

"And yet I suppose the time will come when I shall see them all," said he.

What was it that brought the tears to the mother's eyes? She had done all she could to further this marriage. She would not have undone it now, had she been able. Why did she turn from him, at his thoughtless words, and pretend to busy herself over the work before her, stopping furtively to press her handkerchief to her face?

Business went on just the same. With his new gaiety of heart Fawcett did not forget that produce was to be sold for others on commission, and that he had nearly ten thousand dollars that would eat its head off, as they say of stalled horses, unless invested. He bought with caution and sold when he thought it wise, and on the whole did well. Some New Yorkers with whom he dealt suggested to him to come on and see them. They knew that he was young, and they had formed a very favorable idea of his ability. One concern, Decker & Co., threw out hints that he might be received into partnership if terms could be arranged. He wanted to see them, but he could not leave Mabel just yet. He could go there on his wedding-tour, combining pleasure with

something that might prove more useful. Yes, he would go to New York on that wonderful journey of which he thought all day and dreamed every night, that voyage compared to which Captain Cook's and Magellan's were insignificant, and even the fabulous trips of Jules Verne not worth talking about.

He would spend hours in the dimly-lighted parlor, with Mabel's hand in his, talking, talking, talking. How very happy they would always be together! Six weeks more! How could he wait six weeks! A month? It was a century! The date could have been set earlier, and it should have been. But each day made one less, after all, and when but a week remained between him and his bridal hour he found himself a little frightened at its close proximity.

Yes! He used to sit in his private office, with his head on his hand, his elbow resting on the desk. It was a great step to take, this step of marriage. There was a responsibility about it that was terrifying when one approached it so nearly. Supposing things should go wrong! What if the market should take a turn to the bad and everything go all at once to the bows! There he would be with a double expense on his hands, for in those days he ceased to believe the stories of the extraordinary cheapness with which a married couple could live. Five days more and it would be too late to retrace his steps!

Thoughts of closing his store and running away came into his head, and held sway there for hours at a time. It would be disreputable, but would it not in the end prove the part of wisdom? Ah, yes! He had been right when he said a man should have fifty thousand dollars and be forty years of age before he perpetrated such a folly.

He told Mabel and her mother that evening that he had a violent headache, as an excuse for going to his room and staying there. Neither of them believed this statement covered the whole truth, and they commented upon the matter when he had left them.

"It is not unusual for men to have queer spells at such a time as this," said the wise elder lady. "I have heard of them being so ill that the wedding had to be postponed. We must deal very gently with Mr. Fawcett in the matter, for it would be awkward to have anything happen now."

"Awkward!" echoed Mabel. "It would be outrageous! Don't you think if I went to his room and bathed his head it would be a good thing?"

The mother did not agree with the idea. She said it was best to leave him entirely alone for the present. It would not do to act as if anything was suspected. She did not know that, at the very minute she was saying this, Fawcett was seriously considering whether to tie his clothes in a bundle and escape by the piazza window, or she might have changed her mind. But he did not carry out the half-formed plan. He went to sleep instead and awoke in the morning with the thought uppermost that he would have been an idiot to have executed the scheme in his head when he retired.

"I am all right now," he said, as he made his appearance at the breakfast-table. "I think I must have caught cold or something yesterday."

He made all his preparations to be gone a week on his wedding-trip. It was with positive glee that he drew \$200 from the bank to take with him, determined to spare no expense on such an important journey. What was \$200? He made it in one day, a little while

previous, by a rise in butter. A man got married but once—at least once at a time. He ought to do the thing up in a proper way.

He was given a private view of Mabel in her wedding-dress and afterwards in her travelling costume. Never had she looked so lovely. As he was not permitted to hug the girl for fear of spoiling her clothes, he did the next best thing. He hugged himself in his delight.

Was there a man in all this world with whom he would exchange places? Not one.

The marriage was to take place early in the evening, in the presence of only the necessary number of people. Neither he nor Mabel wanted a public wedding. Neither had any relations in the town, and it was agreed that it would be foolish to send for those at a distance. The only kin of hers that Allan knew were Mattie Burbank and Frank Selden, and he was very sure he did not wish either of them to see the ceremony. He did not even want Frank to know of it till it was over, as he had a half fear that the wealthy young man might come at the last moment and snatch the prize from his grasp.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the last thing was done, prior to the actual saying of the words that were to bind them. And then, at that late hour, Fawcett felt a sudden giving way of his powers, and alarmed his prospective bride and her mother by collapsing upon the sofa in the sitting-room, where he lay white and nearly nerveless for an hour.

Appeals of Mabel to have a physician summoned were disregarded by Mrs. Morey, who administered homely remedies that she had in the house, and strove by the sympathy of her ministrations to restore the young

man to his normal condition. She even whispered to her daughter to leave the room for a time, so that Allan might be free to say anything he chose without the restraint of her presence. The poor child, overcome at this state of affairs, went to her chamber and cried heartily. She did not see what Allan had to trouble him. If any one was to grow faint on that day it ought, in all reason, to be herself.

Heavens! How thankful she would be when the minister had done his work! And do it he should that very evening, if she had to take the vows while the bridegroom lay where he then was. She had no faith in a postponement. If her mother agreed to one she would raise her voice in protest. There was such a thing as going too far. With these thoughts she wiped her eyes and bathed the lids in camphor water, and put on a determined little frown, such as has before now altered the fates of nations.

Fawcett said many things to Mrs. Morey during that hour, and she replied with great wisdom and diplomacy. A less shrewd woman would have made a mess of it, but she carried her points, one by one, and came out wholly victorious. He wanted to wait another month; he did not feel sufficiently strong to endure the railway journey; he feared he was not good enough to make Mabel happy; he thought he was taking too great a responsibility upon himself; it was better for both of them that a little more time should be spent in thinking on these important things.

At every turn the widow met him wisely. Long before the time for the clergyman to arrive he had risen, and arranged his disordered hair, showing nothing of what he had passed through except by the paleness that still whitened his countenance.

"I shall not get into that state again," he said, smiling at his nurse. "It was caused by a reaction and over-excitement. Go now, Mrs. Morey, and send Mabel to me."

Instructed to the fullest extent by her mother, Mabel soon made her appearance. When he held out his arms to her, she hesitated to go to him.

"You do not love me," she said in a low tone.

"Not love you! My darling! In another hour you will be my wife!"

"And you are not sorry?"

He protested, with all the force he could command, that she was cruel even to insinuate such a thing. He had never been so happy. She walked slowly toward him and let him draw her to a seat by his side.

"I don't think I am wise enough to be the wife of a man like you," she whispered. "I know so very little. Are you sure you will not scold me for my ignorance when you find how great it is?"

He exhausted words in protesting that he never would speak a harsh word to her or harbor a harsh thought. He would always love her for the sweetest, dearest woman on earth.

"To-night," she said, "I leave my mamma, to give up my whole life to you. It would take but little to break my heart, Allan. I love you and——"

She faltered, feeling that she was going beyond the line that her mother would have considered proper. The feeling was intensified a second later, when, in spite of her resistance, real enough this time, he pressed his lips to hers in a passionate kiss.

"If I ever forget my duty toward you," he exclaimed, "may I——"

She stopped him, with an expression of alarm.

“Don't put it in that way,” she replied. “You cannot forget it, any more than I could forget mine toward you. And now I must go to put on my gown, for the minister will soon be here.”

As she vanished, with a bright smile thrown back at him, he felt like an ordinary mortal who had been in the presence of a saint.

CHAPTER X.

THEIR WEDDING JOURNEY.

THE ceremony was as simple as the law permits, but how stupendous the words seemed to which he gave the affirmative. He had thought more than once that marriage meant all it ought to mean—that two people who repeat these sacred vows are barred forever from all others—but the solemn expression, “and keep yourself unto her as long as ye both shall live,” was weightier than he had conceived. His face was very grave as he answered, and his hand trembled as he placed the ring on Mabel's finger. With that act he cut the cord that tied his boat to the shore and let it drift away on the sea of matrimony, that unknown vast expanse the farther shores of which were out of view!

Mabel had no such sentiments as these in her pretty head. It was enough for her that she had won him at last, that when the tiresome minister had finished she would be addressed as “Mrs. Allan Fawcett.” The ring on her finger was the title-deed to the property she had coveted so long. She had wanted to be a wife, and now she was one. Her long preparation had borne its fruit. Her arduous studies were to be rewarded by

the diploma—made out in the form of a marriage certificate—that would show how well she had done her task.

Allan's hand trembled, but hers was firm. It is often the case that bridegrooms show the most trepidation at this moment than most people believe. Mabel saw no more reason why she should exhibit weakness than if the clergyman had been presenting her with any other valuable piece of property. As for a pretence of bashfulness, the time for that was past. The fish was on the hook and could not get away now if he tried.

It had been arranged that the couple were to go away to New York for about a week and were then to take up housekeeping by themselves at Mrs. Morey's, that lady having accepted an invitation to make a visit to her sister, Mrs. Selden. This seemed an excellent plan, as everything needed was at hand, and Mabel could have a chance to exhibit her capabilities before Allan went to the expense of purchasing furniture. Bridget was to be left in the house, but Mrs. Morey would be gone when the wedded pair returned from their bridal journey. There was something romantic in the plan, and it pleased Fawcett well.

The parting of Mabel and her mother was most affectionate, but neither of them intended to allow a scene. They well knew that must prove disagreeable to Fawcett, and had schooled themselves not to give way unduly to their emotions.

The wraps were put on, the baggage made ready, the carriage taken at the door, and presently the "happy pair" were riding toward the station.

Never had Fawcett felt such a sense of exultation as when the carriage door closed and he was actually started on his wedding-trip. With the utmost thought-

lessness he was about to take a quick embrace, when Mabel cautioned him that the curtains were up and that people on the street were undoubtedly watching. He felt an instant's pique that she should mention so slight a matter at such a moment. He did not care if every person in Norwood saw him, and he thought her protest ill-timed. However, he said nothing, and was rewarded a little later by finding her hand in his, placed there of her own accord, and even giving forth a fascinating little pressure.

"I think the whole town is out," she said, as they passed a group. "A wedding is not so common here that one ever fails to attract attention. Some of them told mamma that it ought to be in the church, so they all could come."

A new sense of possession came over him. He was the sole owner of this sweet creature by his side. The others who stood there impotently on the sidewalks must be consumed with envy when they thought of it. He had taken out of the village the prettiest girl in it, and his rivals had not even an opportunity to spy upon him when he did the deed.

Fawcett grew in the stature of a man within the next five minutes more than he had grown in a year before. There was something in life higher than the selling of grain, something dearer than the accumulation of property. What a wonderful thing it was, this joining of a man to a woman, that they twain might become one flesh! He would not have exchanged places with a Vanderbilt as he rode in that hired carriage to the station, with the little hand of his wife—think of it!—*his wife*, in his own.

At the station there was an unpleasant occurrence. When he paid the driver of the carriage three dollars

the man insisted that the price was four. It was certainly aggravating. Fawcett had taken pains to ask the driver's employer a week previous and had been told that the price was three dollars. He had no idea of allowing any one to swindle him and, beside, he considered it a piece of rascality on the part of the man, who doubtless thought he could exact the extra sum on such an occasion, and that his passenger would pay rather than make talk where people were listening.

"The fare is three dollars," said Fawcett icily. "I made the price with Mr. Wyman."

The hackman struggled to win his point, for he felt that he also had a reputation to sustain, and a dozen people gathered near by to witness the outcome of this peculiar discussion.

"There are two trunks, which are fifty cents each," he said.

Fawcett was slightly puzzled by this suggestion. He had certainly said nothing to the stable-keeper about trunks, but he had an idea that they were usually included in a depot fare.

"Very well, I will settle the matter with Mr. Wyman when I return," said he, turning away.

"He told me to collect it," responded the man, doggedly.

Now, while it was literally true that Mr. Wyman had told the man to collect the price of the carriage, he had never intended that he should do it in this manner. He had only said "Yes," when the driver asked if Mr. Fawcett was to pay at the station, and had done so from the fact that it was not his habit to put such matters on the book, except with regular customers. He knew the young merchant well, and would have given him credit for any amount.

The driver's answer angered Fawcett thoroughly. He realized to some extent the ridiculous plight he had got into, and he was more determined than ever not to submit to extortion. He glanced hastily at Mabel, who stood there in her travelling dress, marked unmistakably as a bride, even to the three or four strangers present. A bright color had come into her cheek, perceptible through the thin veil. Allan thought with what a good grace he could have dragged the obnoxious driver from his seat and pummelled him, had he been alone.

"He told you to collect it, did he?" he repeated, with rising inflection. "Well, you tell him that I have three thousand dollars on deposit in the First National Bank, which he can attach if he is afraid to wait a week. I shall not pay you now at any rate."

He would have liked to say much more, but he restrained himself, and turning away took Mabel into the ladies' room. Then, with a word expressive of his regret at the incident, he went to get the trunks checked for Providence, where the night was to be passed, and to buy his tickets.

"You want seats in the Pullman, also, do you not?" inquired the affable agent, who knew Fawcett well and also the fact of his marriage that afternoon.

Fawcett hesitated a second. He had never ridden, as a passenger, in any car of that description. It was a luxury which he had always associated with very wealthy or very extravagant persons. While he was deliberating he made room for another man, who was going through to New York, and who bought three Pullman berths, at \$2.50 each. There was some excuse for such a case, Allan thought, when one was to ride all night, but just to Providence—

"No, I don't think I will take them," he said, putting down the money for the regular fare.

The agent opened his eyes a little wider, but gave no other sign of surprise, and handed out the tickets. Allan went to get the baggage checked and then returned to his bride.

"How much time is there now?" she asked.

"Only five minutes," he replied.

"And you have attended to everything?"

"Yes."

"You have the tickets and the baggage checks?"

He showed them to her with a smile.

"And the Pullman seats?"

His countenance fell. He would have to get them now. He could not go through another dispute.

"You have forgotten them!" cried Mabel. "Well, there is yet time; but you will have to make haste."

He went back to the ticket window. Half-a-dozen people were in line, and they were in no hurry to get away, it seemed. At the last minute he was again at the front, and telling the agent that he guessed he would take the Pullman checks, after all.

"How much are they?" he asked, as they were handed to him.

"One dollar."

He put down a two-dollar bill and was turning away when the agent called to him to take his change. Allan had understood that the seats were a dollar each. He took the money handed to him with a feeling of relief. Only fifty cents! Had he known that he would have bought them in the first place. He hastened back to Mabel, as the train rolled up to the depot, and soon they were seated in the car and off on their road.

"Seats in these cars are not very dear," he said to

her, as they left Norwood behind. "They are only fifty cents from here to Providence."

And these were the first words he had to address to her, as she left the village! Dollars and cents! Would he never think of anything else? Yes, he should. She would take that out of him in time. Quietly but none the less surely she would teach him to give up his sordid views and learn how to take life like a gentleman.

To his statement about the cost of the tickets she only replied by a smile that indicated nothing of what was passing in her mind. They were both silent from then until the conductor passed along. People in the car commented among themselves on the fact that a bridal couple was among them, and one young girl blushed at something a young man in her party said to her when this was mentioned.

Mabel was thinking a good deal. The affair of the Pullman tickets had made an impression on her mind. She knew Allan had not intended to get them, and that, had it not been for her suggestion, they would at this moment have been riding toward Providence in the ordinary cars, something that would have mortified her to the utmost. It was evident that she would have to lead him as gently as she could into spending a little more money on this trip than he meant to do, if it was to be at all what it ought. She realized that it would require a good deal of judgment to accomplish what she desired in a way that would not injure his *amour propre*, and that each molehill of expense beyond what he had decided upon would seem to him like a mountain.

"Of course you haven't written or telegraphed for accommodations," she suggested, interrogatively, when they were nearing the city.

"No. The Narragansett is a large hotel. There will be plenty of rooms."

"I think so," she answered, "but they may not be exactly the ones to suit. You know—there are no many—bridal suites—in any house."

He had a vague idea that he had heard of such things as bridal suites before, apartments that princes and millionaires occupied when on their wedding journeys; but he had never thought of such quarters in connection with himself and this little woman.

"I—I am afraid," he stammered, "that the rooms you speak of are much too expensive for a purse like mine. They probably cost very dear."

She reached across the seat and put her hand in his again.

"But you have three thousand dollars in the bank, Allan, and this is only once in a lifetime."

When the hand came in contact with his, it warped his judgment a little, but he tried to remain firm.

"Remember, my dear," he replied, "that though I have that sum in the bank, I am heavily in debt. If you will deduct from the \$3,000 I have there the \$5,000 I owe Frank Selden you will see that there is not much left."

She did not answer for a moment. Then she reminded him of what he had told her a few days before, about his recent profits, and said he must have considerable stock on hand, which could be disposed of for money at any time. He did not like to have her take up this line of argument, for he considered business matters things that men should attend to exclusively, and he did not fancy, either, the quiet tone she assumed, as she tried to argue with him.

"I must be the judge of what I can afford, my dear,"

he said, squeezing the hand he held. "I will get a good room, never fear for that."

She took the hand from him suddenly.

"One room!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Allan!"

For an instant he felt like a scoundrel, though he did not know why. He began lamely to remind her that they were now husband and wife, and that it was not necessary to put a whole row of chambers between them, but she turned to the window and gave no sign that she heard. He grew provoked at her attitude. This was a pleasant beginning, was it not? He went on to speak of the matter, as he had begun, repeating what he had said of the necessity of keeping within reasonable limits in expenses. After a while it struck him that she was studiously refraining from listening.

"Mabel," he whispered, stopping short in his conversation.

There was no reply. They were entering the city and she seemed occupied in watching the sights in the dimly-lighted streets.

"Mabel!"

This time he spoke sharply, and the face of his wife turned toward him.

"I spoke to you!" he said stiffly.

"I beg pardon; what did you say?"

"It is not polite for you to turn your back to me and look out of the window when I am talking," he said loftily.

"Well, I am listening now."

She did not speak like a two hours' bride, but her tone was subdued, for all that. She had herself much better in hand than he.

"I do not care to go all over it again," he said, feeling that she had the advantage. "The locomotive is

whistling for the station and we must prepare to leave the train."

He rose, gathered up the things he had to take, and stood in the aisle along with the other passengers. She sat still, knowing that nothing would be gained by haste, and that it would be some seconds before the train reached a full stop. Allan construed this action as indicating more of her rebellious spirit, and repressed with difficulty his inclination to say something harsh. In plenty of time to leave with the others, Mabel took her place in the aisle with him, and he helped her to alight from the car steps with a rather dark countenance. Accepting the offer of the first cabman who greeted him, he escorted his wife to the carriage, gave the baggage checks to the driver, and, telling Mabel to get in, waited until he saw that the right trunks were strapped on behind before he took his place beside her.

"Is the hotel far from here?" she asked pleasantly, peering into the street as they rode along.

"Not very," he replied shortly. He could not get into a sweet frame of mind in a moment, and he thought she owed him an apology for her actions of a few minutes before.

"I have heard it is a very good house," continued Mabel, affecting not to notice anything strange in his manner. "Mamma has stopped there."

He dismissed the cabman without a dispute, hardly knowing how much change he got back from the five dollar bill he tendered him. Taking Mabel to the ladies' parlor he sought the office.

"I want a suite of rooms," he said to the clerk.

The clerk had "sized him up," as the saying is, for a newly-married man, the instant he set eyes on him.

But when he heard the short, sharp tones, he telegraphed an inquiry to the porter, who had accompanied Fawcett from the street door. The answer being confirmatory of his first suspicion, he handed the guest a pen with which to register, and looked over one of those large cards on which clerks record the relative condition of the chambers.

"You want a suite with a bath, I presume?" said the clerk, after completing his inspection.

Fawcett glanced up quickly. Why the devil should the man ask such a question as that! Was there anything about his appearance to indicate that he needed washing? The clerk stood there, attentive and expectant, and the idea came slowly to Allan that he might be making a fool of himself.

"What is the price?" he asked, reddening.

"The best we have unoccupied, a suite with parlor, bed-room and bath-room, is ten dollars a day."

Well, it was not so very bad. They were going to remain but one night and take the next afternoon's train for New York. Allan engaged the suite without further parley and went with a bell-boy to take Mabel to it.

When the trunks were brought in, and he had unlocked them, there was a moment of embarrassment. Had it not been for the little controversy that had arisen on the train Allan would probably have folded his wife in his arms and said a hundred pretty things to her. But that affair was still rankling in his brain, and he did not like to do anything in which his heart was not a full partner. So he only said it was getting late and he would go into the parlor so as not to incommode her. Suiting the action to the word, he closed the door carefully after him.

Mabel did not know whether to laugh or cry. She thought he was acting shabbily, but the resolve she had formed to teach him a number of lessons before he was many days older helped her to maintain her dignity. She took off her hat at the mirror, and removed her cloak slowly. Was this the way other men acted on their wedding night? She did not believe it. And it was over the matter of a few dollars to be paid for the rooms they were to occupy! She could see it in no other way. It was all on account of his penurious desire to save a cent or two at a time when he ought to think no sum too great for the happiness of being alone with her.

She knew Fawcett was peculiar. She had married him with her eyes fully open to that fact. She was not at all sorry that she was his wife. She would not have surrendered that position for any other of which she could conceive. Only, she did wish he would act a little different.

But it *was* rather amusing, and after a little while, Mabel laughed softly to herself. Was he really angry with her, she wondered? That was too silly to think of. She would stop that before it went any farther, even if it was necessary to give in a little. Allan loved her; they must not quarrel so soon as this. In this frame of mind she waited until he came.

Then she forgot every instruction. She opened her fair, round arms and took his face between them and kissed him on the mouth.

He had anticipated anything but this, and in a second all the clouds that had gathered disappeared, leaving the cerulean sky, lit by countless stars and a great pale moon!

Good heaven! Had he harbored such hard thoughts

in reference to this angelic being, and on such an inopportune occasion? Never, never, would he repeat it! She was his to love and cherish; to treat like a wife, not like a child.

"Mabel," he began, as soon as she would let him, "I was wrong to-night. Forgive——"

But the sweet lips touched his again, and the sentence remained unfinished.

CHAPTER XI.

"DON'T SPEAK TO ME!"

OF all the ties that are known to men, marriage in civilized lands is certainly the strangest. It presumes that two persons, whose tastes and ideas are frequently as opposite as their sexes, are to be suddenly endowed with similar opinions on the most important subjects, and view life through glasses colored with the same brilliancy. There is no contract in which so much is demanded, none in which disagreement between the partners is so disastrous, none in which it is so likely to occur. And yet marriages continue to be made, and, more wonderful still, are found in a certain number of cases sources of comfort and pleasure.

I have an opinion, though I admit that the data is necessarily incomplete, that in the majority of instances there occurs a time, somewhere within the first three months, when one or both of the interested parties would be very willing, if it could be done without scandal, to sever the tie they have formed. In saying this, I ought and intend to add that such persons, in millions of cases, grow eventually to understand each

other better, and are shocked at the recollection of their former wish to separate.

Mr. and Mrs. Allan Fawcett thought the first week of their married life a dream. Allan paid the expenses that he had dreaded without a murmur, even with exultation. Mabel concluded that she had misjudged him in some important points, and said to herself that he was the dearest man on earth. In a letter which she wrote to her mother from New York she declared that the only perfect happiness was to be found in the matrimonial state. She thought so, and Allan thought so, for a whole week after the reverend minister of the Gospel had given them permission to find out.

But on the very first morning after their return to Norwood everything seemed to go wrong. The breakfast was half an hour late, and Allan fumed, because he wanted particularly on that morning to get to his office early and see what had happened to his business during the first long vacation he had ever taken from it. Bridget was unused to having the whole responsibility thrown on her shoulders, and did not relish being ordered about by the little girl she had never till now had as a mistress. The meal was eaten in silence, and though Allan went to his wife's side and gave her a kiss as he left the house, it was of the perfunctory order—the kind of kiss that might about as well be omitted. He thought it very wrong of her to permit household affairs to trouble him, when they were the only things she had to attend to. She was equally sure that an hour more or less would have no effect on his affairs, and that it was brutal of him to look and act as he did when Bridget was in the room. It was a part of her make-up, however, that things of this kind rested less heavily on

her than they did on him, and she went about her work without feeling serious depression. He, on the contrary, had a weight on his heart all the morning and was inclined to be pessimistic.

The market had not gone to suit him, that was certain. As near as he could figure it out, he was a poorer man than he was a week before, not counting the hundred and sixty dollars he had parted with on his journey. But had the accounts showed a large profit they would not have removed the cloud from his face. He believed the trouble at his home might take a long time to arrange. He had distinctly told Mabel an hour before she rose that it was time to do so. He had expressed his disbelief in the capacity of Bridget to get the breakfast on the table in the right condition and at the proper moment. To this Mabel had given dilatory replies, and had only put her arms around his neck and nestled closer. Was that the way to act, when important business was at stake? She had had a week of coddling and kissing, now it was time to think of something with more sense in it. He meant to have things his way, but he dreaded the ordeal that it might be necessary to go through before things were arranged.

And Mabel, she meant to have things her way, too.

For the next three days the meals were nearly on time, but never exactly so. Allan would walk into the dining-room when the clock struck and sit down to the table, putting his napkin on, and beginning to handle his knife and fork as if he expected to carve the air in case nothing more substantial presented itself. He would do this even at night, when all pretence of business needs were over, and Mabel did not hasten the preparations a second on account of his actions.

"Why don't you have supper on the table at half-past six?" he asked, one evening. "That is the time set for it, and there can be no excuse for this everlasting delay."

"You are not going out again," she replied, "and a few minutes makes no difference. The biscuit are not quite ready."

He fidgeted in his chair.

"The only way to do things is to do them according to rule," he said. "If you want supper every night at a quarter to seven say so, and we will call that the hour. Bridget has all the afternoon to cook her biscuit. The trouble is, you do not go out into the kitchen and see that she goes by the clock. When your mother was here things were not this way. I never knew her to have to make an apology for a late meal."

The biscuits were brought in at this juncture and the conversation temporarily ceased. But in the morning it began again. It was quite twenty minutes that Fawcett sat in his place after the hands of the clock pointed to the breakfast hour before the eggs and coffee made their appearance.

"I can't have this, day after day!" he expostulated, as he broke his eggs into a glass. "No one need tell me that there is any great science in the boiling of a couple of eggs or a quart of coffee that it need keep me waiting."

"The trouble was," explained his wife, "there were no eggs in the house. We had to send one of the neighbor's boys to the store for them."

Fawcett stopped in the act of lifting his coffee-cup to his mouth.

"How long do you think a man would make a living if he managed things that way?" he inquired. "You

ought to have known last night whether there were any eggs, if that was what you intended for breakfast. I think if you looked into your pantry a little oftener it would be a good idea. I have not had **one meal on time** since we came home, and I am tired of it!"

His tone was anything but pleasant as he said this, and Mabel bit her lip with vexation. He had no right to speak to her like that. She quickly resolved that she would return sarcasm for severity.

"If you are in a hurry," she suggested, "**why don't you eat, now you have the breakfast? You have done nothing but talk ever since it was brought in.**"

Fawcett put his spoon down abruptly as he was about to dip it into the egg-glass. He pushed his **chair back** from the table, said "*Well!*" in a loud tone, and checked himself before adding what he evidently intended when he began. Then, rising, he walked into the hall, took his hat and overcoat from the rack and left the house.

For three or four minutes he walked rapidly. He was considerably excited. She had, it seemed to him, insulted him deliberately. When a woman could address such words to a man to whom she had been married but a fortnight, what might he expect later on? But with the reflections of his wounded vanity there came also a great wave of pain. He seemed to be losing her—seemed to see her drifting away from him!

He stopped in the road, kicked the snow a minute with his foot and then turned around. To an acquaintance that he met he said he had forgotten something at the house. He hastened back at a faster gait than he had taken on his way. Yes, he must know the end of this. He would talk to Mabel, kindly and firmly, and see if something could not be done.

She was on the second floor, airing the bed in which they had slept. She heard him coming up the stairs, but did not turn her head as he entered the chamber.

"Mabel," he said, gently.

"Don't speak to me!" she answered, in a passionate voice. "When you want to be so cross why don't you wait till you get to your office? I haven't done a thing to suit you since we were married. Why did you come back? Was it to scold and find fault about something else?"

She looked so pretty, and she seemed so sad, that his anger evaporated completely. He went to her, put his arm around her waist and drew her slightly-resisting figure to a seat on a little tête-à-tête beside him.

"You had better go—you are in such a hurry, you know," she persisted. "Something will happen at the office if you are five minutes late."

He tried to turn her face so that she would look at him, but she shut her eyes resolutely.

"Mabel," he answered, "there is business right here of more importance to me than that at the office. I want to know if we are to have these quarrels every day. If we cannot live together peaceably, we ought to separate at once."

She shuddered at the suggestion, and he felt the shiver in the arm that was still about her. She would have endured anything rather than have relinquished her title of his wife.

"Don't talk foolishly," she said. "The whole trouble is with you. You know I am young and never had charge of a house before, and you expect me to know everything like an experienced woman. Just on account of a few minutes' time in your meals you have acted like a bear for a week. I do the best I can.

Bridget does not like to have me come into the kitchen as much as I do. She spoke to me yesterday as ugly as she could."

Mr. Fawcett sat upright on the tête-à-tête. He was much moved.

"Bridget spoke cross to *you!*" he repeated, with a rising inflection. "I will go and give her a week's notice this moment!"

It is considered by many husbands a direct and unpardonable infringement on their exclusive privileges when any other person uses impolite language to their wives.

"No, don't do that," cried Mabel, rather alarmed to think of the house on her hands without this long-time retainer. "She knows you are dissatisfied, and she thinks it unreasonable, and she is quick-tempered; but it will come out all right."

Still convinced that Miss Bridget ought to be discharged summarily, Fawcett inquired loftily how that young woman knew that he was dissatisfied. He was sure he had never exchanged a word with her.

"No, dear," explained Mabel, touched by his defence of her from the maid-of-all-work, "you haven't spoken to her, but she can't help seeing the wrinkles on your forehead when she comes into the dining-room. You don't know how very thick they are sometimes. And it is over such little things, too! Yesterday noon, when the dinner was only six minutes behind time, you looked furious. I wish you would try to act a little better till I can get things going right."

He saw that she had made him out entirely in the wrong, and perhaps he had been partly so. At any rate, he was relieved when she called him "dear," and

he was very glad he had not gone to the office with the misunderstanding on his mind.

"Very well," said he, "we'll talk it over again this noon. I don't think either of us means to do unpleasant things,—I'm sure *I* don't,—but we haven't got used to each other yet. I couldn't stay down town all the morning and think of you unhappy."

The glad smile that came over her face repaid him for those words, and, taking a liberal allowance of kisses, which she gave him with unconstraint, Allan started again for his office, this time as happy as a young husband ought to be. He walked briskly through the snow, and though the first letter he opened told him of a failure by which he would lose nearly a hundred dollars, he did not mind it in the least. He went on opening the rest of his mail, with the smile still on his face that he had brought from the little house over the hill.

His clerks remarked to each other that something particularly agreeable must have happened that morning at the residence of the "old man," as they irreverently called him behind his back, and various sly insinuations as to its probable character were bandied about. He had been hateful enough, goodness knew, for a number of days past. Well, married people would have their little difficulties, and if Fawcett had got over his, why, it was all the better.

CHAPTER XII.

A HUSBAND'S THOUGHTLESSNESS.

BUT, unfortunately, he had not got over all of them. He committed the great error, the next time a meal was late—and some days elapsed, be it said, in justice, before this happened—of walking into the kitchen and personally expostulating with Bridget over the matter.

“What’s up now?” he demanded. “Why isn’t the dinner on the table?”

“The market man has only just brought the steak,” said the girl, with a toss of her head.

“It’s devilish queer,” he retorted, “that he always brought it on time when Mrs. Morey was here. You ought to keep something on hand, in case of an accident like that. There is no need, especially at this time of year, of buying exactly enough for a meal. A ham hung up in the shed, or a piece of corned beef set away cold, would provide for such an emergency.”

“Tell Miss Mabel, then,” replied Bridget, in a surly tone. She had never been brought to call her late mistress’ daughter by her new name. “*I* doesn’t do the buying, sor!”

There was so much truth in this that Fawcett said no more. He had evidently been blaming the wrong person. He went back to the dining-room and waited with impatience till the steak appeared. That night when he came home he found Mabel toasting bread over the stove.

"This isn't Thursday," he said, in astonishment. "How is it that silly girl is out again?"

"She's left for good," replied Mrs. Fawcett, composedly.

"Left!"

"Yes, bag and baggage."

"Without notice?"

Mabel bowed in the affirmative, as she shook the toasted bread from the wires.

"She won't get any advance wages, I can tell her that!" said Fawcett, angrily. "What was the matter?"

"She said she didn't care to stay in a house where the man came into the kitchen and swore at her. You paid her last night, you know, and she 'threw in' to-day's work. She doesn't ask any advance pay. She's gone at once to Mrs. Cotton's, on Austin Street, where she is to get a dollar more a week."

Fawcett listened with growing indignation.

"She can go to the devil, for all of me!" he exclaimed. "She's the nearest to a born fool of any human being I ever knew. Says I swore at her, eh? If she repeats that anywhere in the town I'll have her arrested for slander. I *wanted* to swear at her badly enough, but I didn't *do* it. I can get a better girl than she was any day in the week, and I'll send one up in the morning."

Mabel was buttering the toast, but she stopped to ask him not to do anything of the kind.

"I want to try a little while to do my work alone," she said. "It seems foolish to keep a girl for just we two. I can do better by myself, I am almost sure. At any rate, I don't want another who will act as if she hired me instead of I her. Will you take that tea-pot

when you go along, and that will make supper all ready?"

With the thoughtlessness of a man the husband attempted to comply with this request without using a holder, and the result was that he burned his hand, and yelled out a mixture of profanity that was quite startling.

"The d——d thing is hot as sheol!" he cried, rubbing the palm that had grasped the handle.

"You should take something in your hand," was the quiet reply of Mabel, who considered it very odd that that any one should have to be told a simple thing like that.

"How should I know?" asked Allan, snappishly. "It was your business to tell me."

Mabel took her apron, and doubling its folds, brought the unlucky piece of culinary ware in triumph to the table.

"If I asked you to get some coals out of the stove, would you take a shovel or your fingers?" she said, as an illustration.

"I might take the tongs," was his rejoinder.

She smiled at him good-naturedly, refusing this time to be drawn into a quarrel. She had actually got a meal alone! She was quite proud of the achievement. The toast was good—Bridget had made the bread—and brewing tea was a simple affair. The preserves were some that her mother put up in the summer. The cake was also a reminder of the lost cook.

"I am sorry about your hand," she said, with sympathy, seeing that he still "favored" it. "But you must congratulate me on the supper. I'm sure it's all good, and—why, look at the clock!—it's actually five whole minutes ahead of time!"

Thus coaxed into good humor Fawcett forgot the burn,

and when the meal was ended he went back to the kitchen with Mabel, in a spirit of fun, and was taught how to wipe the dishes. With the exception of the fact that he broke one by setting it down too hard, he did very well, and began to be rather glad that Bridget had left the house.

Then he had as nice an evening with his wife as he could wish. They sat in the parlor, acting a good deal as they had done in the last days of their ante-nuptial courtship. When he closed his eyes that night he held her hand in his and thought of the time he was sick and she sat so still by his bedside for fear of waking him. Raising himself on one elbow he looked at the sweet face on the opposite pillow and pressed a soft kiss on the cheek. Was there any happiness in the gift of Heaven equal to that of being the husband of such a wife?

The next noon there was scrambled eggs for dinner, and when he looked inquiringly from the dish to Mabel, she reminded him that he had promised to send up a beef-roast and had evidently forgotten to do so.

"Gracious goodness!" he replied. "You mustn't depend on me for such things as that. I have something of more importance to attend to. We will have the market-man and grocer call every day to take orders."

"You said you would attend to it, and I kept supposing it would come," was her answer. "If any one is to blame it is yourself."

From that a long argument grew up, ending in Fawcett's going to the office without kissing her good-bye, and this time he did not come back to do it, either. At night he ate his supper in sullen silence—her first biscuits were not a shining success—and went down to his office to do some work. When he came

home he threw open the window of their bedroom, declaring that the temperature would suffocate a salamander

"You do nothing but complain," said Mabel, from between the sheets. "If it was not the furnace it would be something else. You can't lay that to me, at any rate, for you put in the coal yourself."

He sighed deeply.

"And because I put in the coal you must go to bed leaving the drafts on and the register open!"

"It's not too warm for *me*! If you don't close that window I shall freeze."

"All right!" he exclaimed. "I'll close it; and you can roast here if you want to. I'm going down to see that the furnace doesn't set the house on fire, and then I'll go into another room to sleep, where there is a breath of air that won't stifle one."

She heard him rummaging at the furnace, and then ascending the stairs, and finally the door of the other bedroom closing behind him. The last act, which she had not believed he would perpetrate, annoyed her exceedingly. If there was any right which she supposed indisputable in her married relation it was to the presence of her husband. It was almost as if he had committed open infidelity and avowed it to her face! She had never slept so nearly alone. Her room joined her mother's, and the door between them had never been closed.

She was a little afraid to be left by herself in the stillness of the night. Allan was a brute to shut himself away from her in that way. Perhaps he would return. An hour passed and he did not, and quite unable to sleep from nervousness she rose and, stifling her pride, crept softly to his door.

He was not asleep, either, though he pretended to be when he heard her step, and as she spoke his name he opened his eyes languidly.

"Allan?"

"Yes, Mabel."

"I think I heard a noise downstairs. You don't suppose there is a man there, do you?"

He could hardly keep from laughing at her ingenious stratagem, for he knew if there had been any noise he would have heard it as well as she.

"You've been dreaming, I guess," he answered. "Burglars choose better houses than this for their work. If they are down there they won't get much. Better go back to bed."

She lingered by the door. He could see her white outline by the light that came in at the window.

"The—the room is cool now," she stammered.

Ah! He had won the victory!

"You can sleep here if you like," he said, magnanimously, making room for her.

"The other bed is much the best."

"No, I don't think so. I never slept on feathers before, and I've been wanting to change for a long time. This is my hair mattress, you know, and it seems like old times to have it under me again."

She stood there, hesitating. She did not want to give in too much, and yet she did not mean to go off alone.

"I have always slept on feathers," she stammered.

"And I always on hair until the past two weeks."

"You found the feathers nice enough until you got so cross," she pouted.

"I endured them, but I never liked them. It is all right. You take the room that suits you best, and I'll

do the same. It is said by the best authorities that two people should never sleep together, anyway. Good-night."

Never sleep together! Never! She was possessed of a sudden fright that set her teeth to chattering. She crept slowly toward the bed.

"I will stay here to-night, then," she said, "and to-morrow night perhaps you——"

"Will stay here."

He finished the sentence for her. Now that he had forced the fortress to capitulate he did not intend to let her carry off even her side-arms.

She crept into the bed, all of a shiver from the cold, for the room had no register on, and the mercury stood far below freezing outside the house. Overcome with momentary contrition Fawcett drew her to him and warmed her in his arms. She permitted this, though she did not encourage it. For the time she was quite cowed by the events of the night. Soon they both fell asleep. Their faces looked peaceful enough, but a wrench had been given to Mabel's love that could not be easily repaired.

In the morning she was awake before him and slipped out unobserved, so as to build the fire and get the breakfast. When he awoke he thought she had only gone to the other bed and went in there to tell her it was time to rise. Seeing that she was not there he had a little shock. Could she have taken his conduct more deeply to heart than she seemed to? Had she followed Bridget's example and gone away, "without giving notice?"

Hastily putting on his clothes Fawcett sought the lower floor. Everything was ready to put on the table, but the meal was eaten in almost total silence. He

misunderstood entirely the operations of his wife's mind. He said to himself, when he had touched her cheek with his lips and was on the way to the office, that he would make it all right with Mabel in a day or two. She had tried to rule the household, and that was something no woman should ever do. He had proved himself the master, but he would be all the more considerate now that was accomplished.

Days passed by, during which the wife attended to her duties, as a hired servant might have done, taking his impatience, when it came, with the calmness of a dog, and seeming to find little difference when he was jovial and full of praise for her efforts.

"We will sleep in your room, if you wish," he said, at the end of a week.

"Very well."

"You would prefer it, would you not?"

"It is the same to me."

"Mabel is getting sulky," he thought, looking at her impassive face.

CHAPTER XIII.

"YOU NEVER SAW A GIRL!"

BUSINESS brightened a little with the commission merchant, during the succeeding weeks, and after thinking it over he decided to go to Boston and pay Frank Selden \$2,000 of the sum he had borrowed. The debt had worried him somewhat, for the profits accruing had not been large, and he feared the ups and downs of the spring market. If the sum he owed was reduced he was willing to risk the rest, and he could spare it

now better than at any previous time. He told Mabel his plan, and began to pack a valise for the journey.

"Of course I cannot stay in the house alone," she said. (They had never filled the place of Miss Bridget.) "Some one will have to sleep here."

Fawcett thought the idea childish, but he was not surprised at it, coming from the source it did.

"Oh, very well," he answered. "Get one of the neighbors to come in. I shall not be gone more than three or four nights."

Mabel felt a bitterness at the heart that she managed to conceal. He was going directly to the city, probably to the very house where her mother was living, and he had not asked whether she would like to accompany him! She missed her mother intensely, but pride had prevented her making any sign, and in her frequent letters to Mrs. Morey she had given no hint that anything was otherwise than as it should be. She was sure that most men would have taken their wives on such a journey. She would not have hinted it to him for the world, however, and she saw him depart with no more than the ordinary kiss, that kiss that had come to mean so little to her. After she was sure he had gone and was not likely to return, she went to her bedroom and had a good cry, which made her feel better, if it had no other effect.

Selden was apprised of the intention of Fawcett to come to Boston, but he did not know the object of the trip. When he was told that Allan wanted to lessen the debt he owed, he objected vigorously.

"You are too flighty for a business man," he declared. "Why don't you leave the thing as it is? You are doing well and your transactions are certain to increase in time. If you pay this money now it may cramp you

in an inconvenient way. What is \$5,000 in such a business as yours? Why, there are concerns here who have fifty times that amount, and could find use for more if they had it."

Fawcett made an effort to appear firm. He said he had made up his mind and would like the credit given at once on his notes.

"When are you going back?" asked Selden.

"In two or three days."

"Well, then, for Heaven's sake, let us talk of something besides notes and payments to-day, at least. It's an awful while since I saw you. Why, hang it! it was before you were married!"

This allusion brought a shade of color to Fawcett's face. He wished that this fellow would talk of something else.

"Mrs. Morey is at your house still, I suppose," he said.

"She's at mother's, which just now is hardly the same thing. I sometimes call that my home, but I have a suite over on Boylston Street, opposite the Public Garden, where I am *chez moi*, as the French say. Mother got to talking too much about the hours I kept, so I thought it best to live where there would be no one to tell tales. Come around there—it's not ten minutes' ride, unless the cars are blocked—and see how you like my quarters."

The two young men were not much longer in reaching the place than had been predicted. The suite was indeed a very pleasant one, with a nice panorama in front and an air of cosiness that was charming.

"Who does the work, who keeps things in order?" asked Allan, when he had inspected the parlor and bedroom.

"Gretchen. You shall see her. She's quite a treasure. Neat as a pin about the furniture, and able to cook a steak or chop in case I want to lunch here. I often bring in a party of half a dozen after the theatre. All I have to do is to open that door and say, 'Gretchen, there are seven of us.' She has never failed me yet. The refrigerator is always supplied and the wine-chest contains everything from champagne to beer."

Mr. Fawcett remarked that he did not see how it was possible for such preparations to be made without previous notice.

"Neither do I," laughed Frank. "I consider it quite miraculous. I give her *carte blanche* and she fixes it somehow. It is rather expensive, but it is well worth the money. Why, I can do absolutely anything I like, you know."

And at that he went into a minute account of some things that had taken place in those apartments, which Fawcett did not enjoy hearing half as much as he was expected to.

"I forgot that you are now a sober, married man," smiled Selden, seeing that his pleasantries fell on unattractive ears."

"I never was a very wild one," responded Allan.

"No, but I remember the fair Sadie, and——"

"Don't bring that up, please," was the reply, in a pained tone. "I assure you I would give a great deal if it had never occurred."

Selden shrugged his shoulders.

"That is the way with all newly-married men, I've been told," said he. "Time will bring you around, old fellow."

A look containing something little short of horror came into Fawcett's eyes.

"Do you mean," he gasped, "that I shall some day be false to my wife?"

"Of course," drawled Frank. "Why not you, as well as everybody else? Damn it, man, we live in the nineteenth century."

Fawcett turned pale at the thought. He had quarrelled with Mabel, he had found fault with her, he had wished she were different in many ways, but he would as soon have cut off his hand as to have violated the vows he had made in Mrs. Morey's little parlor eleven weeks before.

"You have a reckless way of saying things, Frank," he replied, when he could speak. "Men are not all as bad as you would make them out. And when you get married yourself, you will find a vast change coming over your views."

Selden had lit a cigar and was puffing it rapidly, sending the smoke in huge waves into the atmosphere of the room.

"When I get married," he repeated, scornfully. "Bless you, and begging your pardon, I never shall be such a fool!"

It was well enough for him to say that, Allan thought, now that the girl he wanted had been gained by another. He remembered the things that Mabel and her mother had insinuated about Frank's desire to marry her, and he wondered if his disappointment had been very great. He was aroused from the reverie into which these reflections brought him by Selden speaking again.

"I have seen lots of nice girls in my time, but not one that I would have *married* if they had been possessed of untold estates. I like some of them immensely, but to marry them, why, it's preposterous!"

A faintness struck through the entire being of the listener. Was Selden lying or had some one else told an untruth?

"You *never* wanted to marry?" he said vaguely. "You *never* saw a girl that you would have made your wife?"

"Never, on my honor! And I have been in love at least a thousand times. If it were not for that same institution of marriage this world would be a veritable paradise to me. When I have won the affection of a girl, when I have reached the point where her heart inclines toward me, perhaps when I have snatched a kiss or two from her rosy mouth and drawn her to my bosom in one fleeting embrace, there always appears on the scene some elderly person who wishes to be informed of my intentions! Confound them, I have none. I want merely to be let alone. I wish to suck the honey from the delicate flower, as the bee does in the garden. I want to love, and they want me to marry! I pause to inhale the sweetness of a rose, and the proprietor comes out to demand that I purchase the whole conservatory! I stroke the ears of a tame gazelle, and, presto, I am asked to assume the care and expense of the creature, and its progeny, as long as it lives! Marriage! The very word disgusts me!"

Some one had lied. And Allan Fawcett did not believe, as he heard this vicious harangue, that it was Frank Selden.

"I wish I could convey to you how ridiculous it seems to me," continued Frank, after a momentary pause. "Say that I fall wildly, madly in love with the prettiest and sweetest girl in the world. Say she is charming, that she makes me for the time believe heaven has been let down in a basket, and that

she is its central figure. No man knows better than I how infinitely sweet such a girl can be. No man could be more sensitive to her excellencies, from one end of the scale to the other. I could take her and love her for weeks, perhaps for months—I would not swear it might not be for years. But look at the bargain that is held out to me! 'If you take this girl,' say her relations, 'you must agree never to go with another; you must guarantee that your affection will not be dimmed by the passing of years; you must undertake the payment of her bills, and those of her children, an endless expense stretching out into the future. If you take her you have drawn your only prize in the lottery of life, and you must be content with it.' 'Bah! She may grow ill-tempered; she will certainly grow old; she is liable to become fat; her hair will turn from brown to gray; or maybe her rounded curves that fascinate and stupefy the senses will disappear; the swan-like neck will become scrawny; on the dimpled face wrinkles will come! And I must still love her, embrace her, turn my eyes in no other direction! She is the only woman for me, though a million others spring up in my path as beautiful as she was when I won her! A nice prospect, isn't it?'"

Fawcett heard this in a dim way, hardly comprehending its full meaning. He was thinking of something else. Had Mrs. Morey and Mabel wilfully deceived him? Was Selden an unconscious stool-pigeon in their hands to hasten the proposal of the desired lover? It looked too much like it to be agreeable. Except for this he might have waited some time longer before entering on the matrimonial state. He wished he had done so. Not that he wanted to give up Mabel—with all their little differences he would not

have parted with her for anything—but he would have taken more time. He would have waited till he could boast a better bank account, till he was wholly out of debt and had a good sum ahead. And the story of Frank's love for Mabel had been used upon him as a make-weight! He would have a talk with Mrs. Morey about this matter before he left Boston.

"Well," said Selden, after waiting some seconds to see what Fawcett would say in answer to his argument, "you are married and happy, and for the present that satisfies you. And how is my little cousin, and why did you not bring her along, that we might see how she takes her new honors and responsibilities?"

For the first time the idea entered Fawcett's head that he might have brought Mabel with him. He wondered, now it was suggested, that she had said nothing on the subject. It was evident to him that she had not cared to come, and he said so to Frank.

"She did not like to lock up the house, and there was no one else to leave."

"Can't you trust your servants?" asked Selden. "They must be a bad lot; but it's often the case nowadays. There aren't many like Gretchen. I would leave the key to my safe with her."

Selden reached above his head and pressed a button inserted in a wall. Immediately a boy of about twelve years of age appeared at the door.

"Tell Gretchen that Mr. Selden and a friend of his will see her when she is at liberty."

The boy vanished, leaving Fawcett in a state of some surprise. He was not used to hearing housekeepers summoned in this manner. Frank went on talking for the next twenty minutes, and at the end of that time the door opened again.

A tall woman, unmistakably German, stood in the doorway. She had an abundance of light hair and a very fair complexion. Her eyes were large and blue. Her figure was of the order called buxom. Her dress was neat and rather expensive.

"Gretchen," said Selden, unceremoniously, "I have been telling my friend, Mr. Fawcett, about you; and I thought he ought to see you."

The tall woman bowed and stood waiting to see if the speaker had any further orders. Her manner was dignified, almost stately. She might have been proprietress of some large establishment, with many employés under her, and not in the least what Fawcett had imagined as the person in charge of Selden's rooms.

The German woman remained on exhibition, as one might say, for what was probably a full minute, though it seemed much longer to Fawcett, who was oppressed by the strangeness of the affair, and was much relieved when Frank spoke and said she might go. With another bow she closed the door behind her.

"What do you think of that?" asked Frank, with a smile.

"I don't know what to think," was the reply.

Selden laughed.

"I found her in her native land several years ago," said he. "She had lost both her parents and was actually begging in the streets. I was a student there, and when I saw how wholesome she looked, I said to myself that I would provide a much better place for the pretty fraulein. But Gretchen had entirely different views on that subject. As the novels say, 'She rejected my proposals with scorn.' I was about to come home, and, as one might toss a biscuit to a dog, I paid her passage over here in the steerage, never

expecting to see her again. She wasn't to be got rid of so easily, however. Within a week she had found me. She said I was the only friend she had in America, and as she could not speak the language she did not know what to do. Once more I offered suggestions, and quite as firmly as before she declined them. So I spoke to a fellow who keeps an intelligence office, and he got her a place where she learned the culinary art and the science of housekeeping. When I hired this crib nothing was more natural than that I should think of her, and she fits the place like a glove."

Somewhat doubtful whether he had heard the whole of this interesting story, Fawcett suggested that Mr. Selden would have to be circumspect in the nature of the company he invited to his rooms, if the fraulein was so particular.

"Oh, she has sense!" exclaimed the other. "If I bring a girl up here for a supper, or several of them in a party, she's blind as a bat. There couldn't be anything nicer than the way she does things. And she's as good as I tell you, on my word, though I never can make the other fellows believe it."

CHAPTER XIV.

A NIGHT AT SELDEN'S.

It was decided that the friends would dine together in a restaurant that evening and at Mrs. Selden's the next day. A dinner would have to be taken at the latter place some time, in order that Allan might see Mrs. Morey. The time passed agreeably, and the two gentlemen returned to the apartments at a seasonable

hour. On being shown to his chamber, Fawcett made the discovery that the suite was larger than he had supposed.

"Why, you've got a lot of rooms here!" he exclaimed. "What do you want with so many?"

"They come in handy occasionally. There are ten altogether, counting the servants' and Gretchen's."

Frank was certainly keeping up a very pretty establishment, but he had plenty of money, and it was his affair. Allan could not help contrasting it with his own home, where Mabel did the work. She did not need to do it; it was her own proposition, but it made the contrast great, just the same.

The next morning, when he proposed to have the business matter settled, Frank escaped it by pleading an engagement. He said he would have to be excused till lunch-time. The pair were on their way to Mrs. Selden's before five o'clock, with nothing accomplished.

Mrs. Morey and Fawcett were permitted, by common consent, to have a long chat together before dinner was served, but little important was said. Fawcett did not muster courage even to ask about the alleged proposal of Selden for Mabel's hand. He concluded that he would reserve that till he reached home and fire the shot at his wife. He said nothing to intimate that matters were strained at Norwood, and Mrs. Morey was well satisfied with the interview.

"I don't know how long I shall stay here," she said, "but you are welcome to the household goods till I decide where to settle. If you should want to buy things I would do what is reasonable on any of mine that you wished to purchase."

This struck Fawcett disagreeably, but he said nothing. He had had an idea that the moveables referred

to were in effect already his property. He had not supposed that Mrs. Morey ever intended to keep house again. In reckoning up the cost of new carpets and furniture he forgot for the moment the question that had previously agitated his mind,

"Come and see us whenever you can," he said, at parting.

It seemed a necessary thing to say, though there was not much heart in the invitation. Not that he had any objection to Mrs. Morey, but his family affairs were not yet arranged enough to his liking to have him care for any company whatever.

"I will come before long," said the widow. "By the way, Mabel writes me that she has never been able to fill Bridget's place."

"No. I wish she could. But you know, Mrs. Morey, Mabel likes to have her own way pretty well, and she prefers the work to a girl who is not willing to be managed."

There was just the least imaginable touch of criticism in this, and Mrs. Morey resolved that she would give Mabel a little advice in her next letter. Her daughter had been so reticent about all her troubles that the mother was completely deceived. She would tell Mabel that the right way for a wife was to defer a good deal to her husband, or at least to have the appearance of so doing. She knew that Fawcett also "liked his own way pretty well," and that men who could not be dragged with a cable might be led by a tow-string, if the proper method was used. She had congratulated herself that her son-in-law and her daughter were getting along so finely, for in spite of her intimate acquaintance with Mabel there were phases in that young woman's character which she had never suspected.

"Tell me everything, dear," had been her final injunction, as the carriage that was to take Mabel away with her husband for the first time rolled up to the door. "Tell your mother everything. My experience may be of great value to you."

She supposed that Mabel had told her everything, whereas she had told her nothing.

The next morning Fawcett insisted on Selden's taking the \$2,000 he had brought for him, and after exhausting all argument against it he consented to do so, and credited him with the amount on the back of his note.

"It's wrong," protested Frank. "I take an especial interest in you, now that you are a member of the family, and I want you to get to be a rich man as fast as you can. The most potent factor in the accumulation of wealth is the ability to control capital. You may grub along till you are gray in that confounded village of yours with six or seven thousand dollars to work with, and that is all it will amount to. But it's your own affair. All I say is, if you ever want it back, you have only to send me a line or a wire."

This looked handsome, and Fawcett felt immensely relieved. Not only had he carried out his intention of reducing the interest he was to pay, but he had without trouble secured the right to take the other tack whenever he should think it advisable. He had both ends of the string in his hand. The rest of the day he passed in going about, for he was to return to Norwood in the morning, and he wanted to make the most of his outing. At night Selden informed him that he had arranged a little dinner in his honor at his rooms, at which three or four good fellows had agreed to be present.

Somewhat to Fawcett's consternation, when the advance guard arrived, he discovered that some of the

"good fellows" were to be of the feminine gender. And it did not require any great discernment to find out that they were not of the most rigid ideas as to propriety, either.

The first one, Miss Dolly Johnson, left her escort as soon as she crossed the threshold, and rushing up to Selden, enveloped him in her arms, declaring in a loud voice that she had not seen him for an age. It was with some difficulty that she was disentangled sufficiently to be presented to Mr. Fawcett. As soon as possible Frank whispered something in her ear that made her laugh uproariously. He had told her to be a little more careful, because his friend was a gentleman from the country.

There was no opportunity for Fawcett to say much, as the other guests arrived a moment later. But he was as angry as a man could be and contain himself when the latest comer proved to be Miss Sadie Reeder, the young woman with whom was associated some of the most disagreeable incidents in his recollection. He bowed to her quite stiffly, and cast a look of indignation at Selden when that young man remarked, for the general information, "Of course you two haven't forgotten each other."

The conversation took on such a brisk turn with the others that Fawcett could not avoid saying something to Miss Reeder without positive rudeness. It was not her fault so much as Frank's that this meeting had taken place.

"Excuse me for saying one thing to begin with," he remarked, when she had mentioned that he was looking well, and that she was extremely glad to meet him again. "I am now married, and—I had no intention—of——"

He paused, stuck in the middle of his sentence, and with ready intelligence she proceeded to help him out.

"Of renewing old friendships like mine?" she said. "I am sure you are quite right, and I will be as correct as possible this evening. Mr. Selden told me of your marriage at the time—a cousin of his, he said, and a very sweet little woman."

The hot blood surged through Fawcett's brain. This creature had no right, with her soiled lips, to allude even in such a manner to his pure Mabel. He wished he could escape from the house without actually running away. Quick to perceive, Miss Reeder divined the cause of his sudden flush and deftly turned the conversation on to a less disagreeable channel. But he could not escape the fact that in the division of favors Sadie had been evidently assigned to him, and he meant to scold Frank roundly for it when he had him alone.

At the dinner, which was soon served in the cozy *salle-à-manger*, Mr. Selden took occasion to allude in set terms to the fact that the affair was held in special honor of his friend, Mr. Fawcett, and great congratulations were showered upon him when the words, "who is now my cousin by marriage," were uttered. The only way in which Fawcett could brace up his shattered nerves was to imbibe more freely than common of the beverages served, and this he did with the result that he ultimately lost his fine sense of propriety and became almost as gay as the others.

I do not intend to tell with anything like minuteness the story of that evening. That the passing hours, in which champagne was drunk freely by everybody, led into something approaching license, I will not deny.

Fawcett missed the early morning train that he had intended to take, and when he went to the afternoon one, it was with puffed eyelids and shuffling gait. He had had an out-and-out quarrel with Selden, whom he accused of having planned the whole affair in order to disgrace him. Frank listened to his abuse with apparent astonishment, declaring that he must be crazy to talk as he did, and that nothing had happened to him except what he had brought on himself. The dinner, he averred, was intended to be a pleasant closing of his visit to the city. If he had swallowed a lake of wine and didn't know how to carry it off, he surely ought to blame some one beside his entertainer. When he had pulled himself together a little he would be sorry for the things he had said.

Fawcett refused to be placated. It was a question at one time whether he would not vent his rage in something more substantial than words. As he took the train he felt that he would not care if it ran off the track and broke his body into fragments. He had disgraced himself beyond repair. He had disgraced his wife—that innocent, pure girl, whose name had been mentioned at that table amid the popping of corks and the sound of indecent revelry! How could he ever go back to her? How could he look her in the face after what had happened?

He entered Norwood, a prey to the most terrible melancholy. The sun had set, and he went to his office first, where he could think what it was best to do. Should he tell Mabel and get the awful secret from his mind? Would she ever forgive him? Ought he to be forgiven? Supposing the case were reversed, and she—! No, such a thought would drive him mad! What should he do? What should he do?

To divert his mind for a moment he turned to a heap of letters that lay on his desk, which had been accumulating during his absence. The first one puzzled him for a few minutes. It was for the sum of \$98, sent by the principal dry-goods store of the town. He had never had a thing charged there in his life, and he wondered what they meant by sending this immense bill to him. What a lot of items there were! Spools of thread, and dozens of buttons, and yards of insertion! What was this—two pairs of corsets! He could not remember making any such purchase. It must be a stupid blunder of their bookkeeper, who had sent a bill to him that belonged to some one else of the same family name.

The next envelope he opened contained another bill that set him to wondering again. It was for two bonnets and a hat, and some feathers and elastic, and heaven knows what all, with the sum total set down as \$37.50. He began to grow angry. "Allan Fawcett to Mme. Celeste, Dr., to one hat lining, 25 cents." He did not buy hat linings separate from the hat, and he had never entered Mme. Celeste's door. Another stupid blunder.

There was hardly anything in that pile of letters but bills. The next one he recognized. It was from the grocer who supplied him, and the only thing wrong about it was the largeness of the figures. Could he and Mabel have eaten all those things in less than three months? What awful appetites! Then there was the meat and butter man's bill, also astounding. Fawcett added the cost of all the provisions together and uttered a prolonged sigh. Those were not the kind of figures Mrs. Morey had given him. It would be **much cheaper to board and have done with it! Mabel**

must waste everything fearfully. Of course they had never eaten all those things. One might have run a hotel on that amount. He would have to talk with her and see that something was done for the future. It would simply ruin a man to have such bills sent in to him!

Accustomed to place the greatest stress on items that were covered by dollars and cents, Allan Fawcett went home with those grocery and provision figures uppermost in his mind. It was but little past nine o'clock, but Mabel had gone to bed. She was alone in the house, having told the friend who had stayed on the previous nights that Mr. Fawcett would be sure to come. When she heard his key in the front door she sat up and waited with expectancy. He had been gone three days, and she had thought a great deal in that time. There had been too much coolness between them, she had said, over and over. There must be less of it in the future. They had become alienated from each other, and they must grow together again. She hungered and thirsted for love as she never had done before. Her heart beat faster as his step ascended the stairs. Conquering her modesty, she slipped from the bed and ran to meet him.

"Allan!" she cried, throwing both half-bare arms about his neck. "Oh, I have wanted you so much! I am *so* glad you've come! Kiss me! Kiss me! Why—what's the matter?"

She withdrew herself from him and looked piteously into his eyes. He had not returned her embrace and the lips her passionate mouth touched were unyielding.

"*That's* what's the matter! And *that!*" he retorted, shaking the grocery and provision bills in her face. "Aren't they nice things to welcome a man home after

he has been out of town for a few days ! We've not kept house three months yet, and that is what you've bought at those stores ! Do you think I can stand it ? Well, I can't ! I'm not an Astor ! What did you tell me when we talked of getting married ? It was going to cost next to nothing. Now take these bills, and the coal, and the rent, and the—and the milk," he added, striving to think of everything that would swell the total, "and tell me how you think a man of my income is going to keep up with this extravagance !"

She stood there, paralyzed. She had run to him expecting a husband's embrace, and she had been struck a blow as real as if he had slapped her face. She looked from the bills to his lowering countenance, and then, to make sure she was not dreaming some frightful thing, she looked at the pictures on the wall, and at the window, and the lamp. What did it mean, this outburst ? If the bills were too large, why was she to blame for it any more than he ? Many of the things had been ordered either by him or at his suggestion. It was too horrible to see him standing there, with that dreadful expression, shaking those papers at her as if they were warrants for her arrest. The tears rushed to her eyes and she threw herself upon his breast.

"Allan ! My darling ! Kiss me just once—that I may know you are yourself, and not some judge come to order me to execution ! Kiss me, for God's sake ! We will talk about the bills afterwards—if they are too large we will make them less in the future—but now, for one instant, let me feel your arms around me ! I have been dying of loneliness ! I have been listening the past nine hours for your step on the walk ! Kiss me ! Let me feel that I am your wife, if but for one second, and then you may say whatever you will."

No man not made of adamant could refuse such an appeal. Fawcett suffered the clinging figure, clad in those thin garments of white, to draw him toward her. Finally he lifted Mabel in his arms and placed her on the bed, taking a chair beside her. Fair she was and sweet, and full of love for him. The reaction began to set in. He gave her the kiss she asked for and a hundred more; and when she had wiped her wet cheeks and wanted to have him tell her what was wrong with the bills he refused to reopen the subject that night. They could discuss it to-morrow just as well. If he had spoken too harshly he was sorry. Yes, he loved her—what a question! He was glad to be with her again—how could she ask so simple a thing as that? He had seen her mother, and she had promised to visit them soon.

He told her about her Aunt Hattie and how things looked at her house. Indeed, he spoke of everything connected with his journey except Frank Selden, about whom she did not inquire, and the supper given "in honor of my cousin by marriage." As to the latter, to tell the truth, he had for the moment forgotten it entirely.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN MORNING CAME.

WHEN the morning came Fawcett thought he had been unreasonable to blame Mabel for the size of the housekeeping account, though he did consider it exorbitant. By studying the figures he found that the cost of living at his house had actually increased since the abolition of the servant-girl department. Mabel

had a good deal to learn about cooking, and doubtless spoiled many things in the process of acquiring knowledge. They had to have a woman, any way, to wash and iron, and to do heavy work, and he concluded that it would be best to look up a good one as soon as possible. If he could find one a little older than his wife, who would use judgment and not get into a clash with her, it would be best.

He went into the intelligence office on his way to his place of business and described what he wanted. He told them he was willing to pay the right salary to the right person. He might as well make up his mind that the old cost of living when he was a bachelor would never be duplicated again. He realized fully that the cooking since Mrs. Morey's day had been much poorer, and that after the departure of Bridget it was far from what it was before that time. But Fawcett was not an epicure. It took something more than a badly done steak or a burned roast to put him out of temper. He had said little when things were at their worst, so long as the meals were served on the exact moment when they were due. However, if he could get a woman to do the work who would act as a sort of housekeeper at the same time he would like it; one who would know, as neither he nor his wife did, whether the provision account was right.

During the day he went to the grocers and market and paid the bills they had sent him. He prided himself on owing no one beyond the time when the account was presented.

A week later he found the very woman for whom he was searching, a Scotch widow who wanted a home, and who was ready to undertake the work of his small establishment at the same wages he had paid Bridget.

It did not require much urging for Mabel to agree to "try her," though she declared that no woman should "boss" her house over her head, and that if Mrs. Angus attempted it there would be trouble.

Fawcett was glad when the arrangement was made. A state of things approaching that of the old times seemed to come again with the advent of the new servant. Everything about the kitchen and dining-room was made as neat as a pin, and on the moment when the clock announced the hour for each meal it was neatly and appetizingly served. The young husband made one or two mistakes by praising Mrs. Angus too strongly to his wife, who resented the imputation that her cooking had not been satisfactory, but this caused only temporary friction. The interrupted honeymoon was resumed with a good deal of ardor, and for some weeks the Fawcett family would have served for a model of good-nature on all sides.

One evening Allen found Mabel looking quite pale, and reclining on a sofa. When he inquired what was the cause she gave him evasive answers. To all his suggestions of various remedies, or of calling the doctor, she turned a deaf ear. There was something the matter with her stomach, that was evident, and he tried to make her think of what she had eaten, feeling sure that the difficulty could easily be traced. All that he said seemed only to annoy her, and the nausea returned at frequent intervals. Much alarmed Fawcett sought the counsel of Mrs. Angus.

"Mabel is very ill," he said, "and refuses to let me get a doctor. Won't you see if there is anything you can do for her?"

The Scotch woman eyed him narrowly. It was evident that his anxiety was real. She wondered how a

man of his size and years could be so woefully ignorant.

"Dinna ye ken what's the matter wi' her?" she asked.

There was something in the tone that told him all. Quite confused he withdrew from the kitchen and returned to his wife.

"My darling!" he murmured, bending over her.

Mabel had taken on a new glory in his eyes. No man more ardently desired fatherhood. Every child in the world was to him a young Cupid; every mother a Madonna, endowed with the attributes of deity. And it was to be his little Mabel who should wear that crown of maternity! He had supposed that it would come some time, but the sudden revelation was nearly paralyzing. She was, in truth, such a child herself that motherhood could hardly be thought of in her case. He reflected, with the utmost regret, that he had tried to mould her too rapidly into a full-grown woman; that he had acted toward her as if she had ten years more on her pretty shoulders. How sorry he was now for every impatient word he had ever let fall!

"Mabel," he whispered, "I wish I could tell you how much I love you!"

She turned her head away and cried on the pillow. She was frightened at what made him so happy. Her first sensations were not calculated to reassure her, and for the time the girl supplanted the woman. She shook her head doubtfully when he told her that she would be dearer to him than she could imagine, and that never, never, as long as he lived, would he speak another cross syllable to her. All this was very pleasant, for Mabel loved her husband, but the nausea would not respond to the mental treatment, and she continued physically

miserable. Fawcett devoted himself to her like a lover, and at the end of a few days she had recovered considerably her drooping spirits.

Nearly two months had passed since Fawcett found on his office-desk the dry-goods and millinery bills alluded to in the foregoing chapter. He had entertained no doubt that they were sent to him by mistake, as there was another Fawcett in the town with whom his mail had at times been mixed. Rather angry at the error, he had thrown them into his waste-basket, and never given a thought to them since that time. It was to his great surprise, therefore, when he received a polite note from the dry-goods dealer, asking if it was convenient for him to settle the account that had been rendered on April 1.

Within ten minutes he stood in front of the cashier of the establishment referred to, wearing no amiable look.

"What do you mean by sending me such a letter as this?" he demanded, showing the obnoxious document.

"Mr. Trask wrote it himself," replied the cashier. "I will call him, if you desire."

Fawcett intimated that that was what he most particularly wanted and when Mr. Trask made his appearance he repeated his inquiry.

"I don't see anything wrong about the letter," said the seller of cloth. "The bill was sent you on the 1st of April, and you have paid no attention to it."

Fawcett spoke in his most sarcastic manner.

"Do you know any reason why I *should* pay attention to it?"

"Why—you—should?" repeated Mr. Trask.

"Exactly. Inasmuch as I never had a cent charged

here, there is no reason why I should bother myself to come and correct your blunders."

Mr. Trask looked at his cashier, and the cashier looked at Mr. Trask. Both saw that an unpleasant scene was to occur.

"Gentlemen do not usually purchase the dry goods for their families," said the proprietor of the store. "Those goods were delivered to Mrs. Fawcett."

At first Allan thought he should fall. Had his wife bought that large bill of goods without consulting him—without mentioning the matter in any way? What had she done with them? He had seen the months of sewing that Mrs. Morey had gone through to prepare her daughter for her new station, and had wondered how one slight figure could find use for such an awful avalanche of clothing. He well remembered how Mabel had said, "I shall need nothing for a year or more," when she was showing how very inexpensive she would be to her husband, in doubt as he was whether he could yet afford to wed. The mists closed around him till he could hardly see; and through it, as ships appear in a fog, he discerned the figures of Mr. Trask and the cashier.

"If that bill is correct," he stammered, "and we have had the goods, it will be paid to-day. I never let an account stand that I know about. The mistake is probably on my side."

He walked out of the store and back to his office with his head in a whirl. He had never felt so disgraced. He had announced to those men in effect that he did not know what his wife was doing—that she bought things and charged them without telling him—which might mean more than it should to a suspicious pair of fellows. **Earlier than his usual hour he made**

his appearance at the house, and before he spoke Mabel knew that something unusual was the matter.

But he did not address her as he would have done a month before. His voice was merely remonstrative, not abusive.

"Mabel, my dear," he said, "I was placed in a very embarrassing position this morning, one in which I would not have been for anything. I did not know you had been buying things at Mr. Trask's. He sent me a bill in April, but I thought it a mistake and threw it away. To-day I got a letter asking me to settle, and I went over, as I naturally would, and said I had never had a thing charged there. It made me look pretty cheap when he said you had got them, for he could see I did not know it. Look over this bill now and tell me if it is right, and please don't ever again, as long as you live, get credit outside of the things for the table."

The young wife felt quite as badly as if these words had been spoken in a very different key. They included a complaint of her actions, and it had been some weeks now since anything of that kind had come from her husband's lips. She took the bill and tried to read the items, but her eyes filled with tears, and she could not make them out very well. She had no head for figures, any way.

"I guess it's right," she said, in a faltering voice, when she had pretended to complete the inspection.

"Did you think there was — worth?" he asked, astonished.

"I didn't add it up. I only got such goods as I had to have."

Fawcett wanted to impress some things on her, and yet he did not intend to give the impression that he was scolding.

"That was in eleven weeks after we returned from our wedding-trip, Mabel."

She bowed, like a culprit detected red-handed in his crime.

He restrained himself from alluding to her statements before marriage, and went on to the more important questions in his mind.

"There was, I remember now, a bill from Mme. Celeste, for \$37.50. Did you get that also?"

The slight bosom began to tremble with the stifled emotions that thrilled it.

"I—I got some feathers—and hats."

Yes, he owed that bill, too. He wondered if there were any more.

"Have you charged goods at other places? I want to know the whole business."

She tried to think, but her mind was far from clear.

"Only—some shoes—and—candy——"

Then she broke down completely at the ignominy of her position.

"Oh, Allan, don't ask me any more! Why did you marry me! I don't do anything right! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I wish I was dead!"

He put his arm around her and kissed her cheek, wiping off the flowing tears with his handkerchief.

"You ought not to talk like that," he said, reproachfully. "There is nothing improper in my questions. I care a great deal about my credit and I want to pay the bills we owe, that's all. But tell me just one thing, dear, and I have finished. Why didn't you ask me for the money? I would much rather you had done so, for if there is anything I hate it is a running account."

She tried to draw herself out of his arms, for she did

not like to be so close to him when he was playing the part of a censor, and she finally succeeded in regaining her sitting position.

“Allan, you don't understand me at all! I *couldn't* ask you for money, not if I was starving and that was the only way to get a crust of bread. You never offered me a penny, now did you? There were some things I had to have, and it was easier for me to go to those stores than to hold out my hand to you like a little beggar. I supposed they sent the bills to you every month, and that you had paid them long ago and knew all about them. We charge the provisions and the groceries, and the milk and the gas, and I thought it the right way to do. But I won't do it again. No, I will go in rags before I'll be a cent of cost to you except for what I am obliged to eat. I know you're sorry you married me! I—I——”

He would not let her finish the sentence she had begun, for her voice had risen steadily until he was afraid Mrs. Angus would hear her. He did not want her to excite herself in her present condition. So he folded her in his arms again, in spite of her protests, and said he loved her with all his heart and wanted her to have everything she needed, and that from now on he would anticipate her wants and see that her purse was never empty. In the most delicate way he alluded to the special reason why she must not give way to her feelings, and finally succeeded in quieting her.

He really held her very dear at that time. She was to be the mother of his child and her person was sacred. Before he left the house she had resumed her ordinary composure, and they parted as affectionately as ever, he promising to come home early and to make no arrangements to leave her that evening.

Fawcett went to Mr. Trask's and paid the bill there, trying to act in a manner that would disarm that gentleman of any ugly suspicions he might have formed. He also visited Mme. Celeste and the shoemaker's and the candy store, and when this was done returned to his office, satisfied that he was again square with the shopkeepers of Norwood. When he received small bills, some days later, from a jeweller, who had mended a chain, a druggist, who had supplied cologne and other articles of the toilet, and a baker, who had furnished considerable cake and bread that he supposed baked in the house, Allan thought he must have reached the end of the list. But later there came a bill from a hardware dealer, for various things used in the kitchen, from a furniture man for repairs on the sofa on which Fawcett had done his courting, a carpet-dealer, for several new mats that he had never noticed, and from half a dozen other tradesmen, for things in their various lines, Allan paid them all, without mentioning a word to Mabel of the circumstance.

The total figure was not great, and the most he cared for was the fact that he had been owing these bills without any knowledge of it. The worst of all was thirty-five cents for oranges, charged at a little store one day when the regular dealer did not have any in stock.

He took Mabel's purse from the table in their bedroom and put twenty-five dollars in it, and from time to time inspected it to see that it did not get too low, but she seemed to have had enough of shopping for the present. Indeed, she went out very little now except when he was with her. Their lives went on as sweetly as that of the proverbial kittens in the basket. And about the middle of the summer, when the air of Nor-

wood was more salubrious than that of Boston, Mrs. Morey came for the first time to visit them.

Mabel had hinted to her mother the condition she was in, and with true maternal solicitude the elder lady wanted to give her advice in person. The meeting between them was very warm, and Fawcett, who had always liked Mrs. Morey, expressed his pleasure at meeting her. After having had a prolonged conversation with her daughter, Mrs. Morey discussed the situation privately with her son-in-law. She had never heard the least hint of any of the disagreements that had occurred between him and Mabel, and was delighted at finding him so elated over the prospect. There were so many husbands who heard of this sort of thing with ill-concealed disgust that it was a relief to know the state of his mind.

"Of course, Mr. Fawcett," she said, "*I would rather this had happened a year or two later. Mabel is very young to pass through this ordeal and assume this responsibility. However, she has been in good health, and I think we may hope for the best. It is a good time while I am here to make all the preparations possible, and I will gladly assist in every way with the sewing. Mabel seems to feel disinclined to talk with you about that matter, so if you like I will go with her to make the purchases, and do exactly as if it was a matter of my own.*"

Fawcett answered to this that nothing would suit him better. He would give Mrs. Morey whatever she should decide was necessary, and trust implicitly to her judgment. He handed her fifty dollars on the spot, which, he thought would be a liberal allowance, and said when that was expended she must tell him and he would provide more. The widow smiled as she took the sum,

remembering the time before Mabel's birth, and the extravagant amounts that were lavished on the coming infant's trousseau. But she knew that Mr. Fawcett had not as yet the income that her husband then had, and also that he was inclined to economy, and she decided to make the money go as far as she could.

"The best way," she said to her daughter, a fortnight later, "would be for Mr. Fawcett to give us an order on Mr. Trask to get whatever we need, and then have the bill sent to him. It seems foolish to have to reckon up every time to see if there is enough money left for what we want."

"Allan doesn't like to owe any one," replied Mabel. "He is quite set about it. Ask him for the money. He will give it to you, and then he will be better satisfied."

Fawcett was lost in wonder when he found how much his future heir needed in advance of his—or her—appearance. Still, his delight at the whole affair was so great that he forgot everything else, and opened his pocket-book freely whenever Mrs. Morey made demands on it. The sewing-machine whirled day after day, until he thought a ship's crew could have been fitted out with the product, supposing that such a crew could have worn any of the tiny things manufactured. Mabel did little except sit and watch her mother and comment on the work as it progressed. She did not feel like exerting herself, and now that her mother was present, and that Mrs. Angus took all the household work from her shoulders, she became in effect the child of yore, and was quite willing to have others do everything for her. Mrs. Morey stayed five or six weeks and then returned to her sister's for the present, as she was

to accompany that lady to the seashore. She promised to come back in the winter and "see them through," but Mabel saw her depart with a feeling of some alarm, for she had constant spasms of terror, and wanted such a confidential friend near by. It was agreed that she would write very often and conceal nothing from her mother, and with this understanding they had to be content.

So the summer passed and the autumn, and Fawcett grew happier as his little wife grew more low-spirited and apprehensive. Business had been only fair with him, and his expenses exceeded any estimate he had ever made, but the coming event cast its bright mantle over all.

Among the news that reached him was the marriage of Miss Mattie Burbank, followed by the failure and subsequent death of her father. He remembered Mattie very well, and he had an idea that Mabel did not like her, but when she told him of her cousin's fortune, and later of her misfortune, she did it without any apparent feeling. The one trouble between them had been caused by Mattie's flirtation with the man Mabel wanted to marry, and that could not occur again, of course, now they were both provided with husbands. Mattie's name was Mrs. Algernon Stuart. Her husband was chiefly noted as being a son of "old Stuart," who had done something or other at some distant date.

Fawcett had never seen Frank Selden since the affair of the dinner at his rooms, and he had no desire to renew his acquaintance. Once in awhile the recollection of that evening came to sting him, for he was heartily sorry and ashamed on account of it. But time passed on and such things wear away. He had too

important a matter in his mind now to think of much else.

Mabel and Mabel's baby! They were enough to occupy his entire attention.

CHAPTER XVI.

"A SMALL BOY ARRIVED."

MABEL FAWCETT did not grow more angelic as the month of February approached, but in the eyes of her husband she was perfect. Fretful, fault-finding, suited with nothing that he did, or that any one else did, she might have worn out the patience of a saint, but she could not exhaust that of her husband. He left the house late every morning and returned early each evening, beside taking two hours instead of one at noon, only to hear the oft-repeated complaint that he neglected her. He never entered the door without bringing something that he thought would please her—a trinket, a magazine, a bouquet, or a basket of fruit; to which she generally offered some objection, demanding something else that could not be found at that season or that was not obtainable in Norwood. It was impossible for Allan to do anything to please her at that time. She held him responsible for the disagreeable condition in which she found herself, and told him many times each day, often with tears, that she could not understand why a man, pretending love for her, could be so thoughtless.

"Do you doubt that I love you, my darling?" he asked driven to desperation.

"Oh, I am sure you don't!" she answered. "If you did, you would do something to make me feel better."

Mrs. Morey returned to Norwood early in January, and used sometimes to commiserate her son-in-law on the hard treatment to which he was subjected. She explained to him the irresponsibility of women under such circumstances, and said he ought not to mind the cross words that his wife uttered so often. To this Allan replied that he was far from minding them; that Mabel was the dearest wife a man could dream of, and that his only anxiety was for her safety. A medical man who was called in cheered him by repeating a proverb to the effect that danger rarely lies where ill-temper gets control. Fawcett was much elated at this. He was perfectly willing his wife should vent any amount of spleen on him provided it insured her own security.

As in all such cases there were alarms innumerable. The commission merchant hardly knew for a fortnight whether hay was ten dollars a ton or twenty. His household had been augmented by a tall and angular nurse named Archer, who gave evidence of her intention to rule like a despot. He was hardly allowed to kiss his wife after this tyrant entered his door, and any prolonged conversation between them was peremptorily forbidden. As all the others of the family were of the feminine persuasion, and as he was the only one to fall under the ban, Fawcett became melancholy and refused to eat his meals.

The doctor, who, as is customary, was allowed to run up a frightful bill long before the wildest imagination could show it necessary, saw the paleness of his employer's countenance and prescribed beef, wine and iron, which was bought, but not taken. And when the

important day actually arrived, the husband was given to understand by everybody that he had no interest whatever in the affair, and that it would be becoming in him to maintain a position of non-interference with what was no concern of his.

But, to save his life, Allan could not help asking questions—now of the doctor, now of Mrs. Morey, as they appeared in the sitting or dining room, from time to time. Once he went so far as to address an inquiry to Miss Archer, but was almost annihilated by the look she gave him, while her compressed lips spoke the volumes she did not utter. About eleven o'clock at night he heard a long wail from the sick chamber. It was the voice of his beloved, and with an anguish that could have been hardly less than hers he went out into the yard and walked up and down a path shovelled in the snow.

“Oh, God!” he groaned. “If I could only take her suffering on myself!”

And at that moment, to make his agony the keener, he thought of the supper in Frank Selden's rooms. Perhaps God would punish him for what he did that night, by taking his wife away! Freezing at the thought, though he had no sensation of the atmosphere, he knelt in the snow and prayed. He was not used to prayer, but a more feeling petition never was sent from earth to heaven. When he rose he could not help re-entering the house, though he dreaded to hear that voice of pain again, and as he stepped into the dining-room Mrs. Morey, with praiseworthy thoughtfulness, came and grasped his hand.

“Allan,” she said, “you are the father of a boy!”

It was the first time she had ever addressed him by his Christian name, and even in the flood of joy that

swept over him he realized that fact. Throwing his arms around the lady's neck he burst into tears.

"And Mabel, is she safe?" he asked, as soon as he could command his voice.

"We have no fears."

"When can I see her?"

"That is for the doctor to say. Have patience, my dear boy, and I will bring word to you."

After the tears, Fawcett felt a reaction that led him into the opposite mood. The danger was really over! He was a father, and above all things of a boy! His five feet nine inches grew to at least six feet one, in the next four minutes.

He was beginning to think himself a man of consequence in the world when Miss Archer passed through the room, and by her presence reduced him to his former insignificant rank. What is a newly-made father compared to that awful dignity represented by a nurse of her description? The Tsar of all the Russias must hide his diminished head before the nurse-extraordinary to his empress.

It was Mabel, in her exhaustion, who thought of her husband next. She whispered to the physician that Allan ought to see the little bundle which had been carefully attended to and was now lying in blankets in the adjacent crib. The good-natured doctor braved the threatening looks of Miss Archer, who glowered over the infant as if she were a lioness and this was her own particular cub. Taking it in his arms, he walked out to the sitting-room, where Fawcett was pacing up and down.

"Is that it?" was the exclamation which the fond papa made, when the image was duly unveiled. "Not very large to have made all this rumpus."

He spoke as if he thought it a very small dividend to get from such a heavy investment, but he did not deceive the doctor. There was a proud look in Fawcett's eyes as he bent over the red-faced little fellow and tried to see if it resembled any one he knew. He was not the first new father to act before third parties as if he had had fifty children and considered them very ordinary affairs.

Now that the danger was over he assumed his natural demeanor. He spoke of Mabel and was assured that she would be around in a week or two. The boy had been weighed and, to use a sporting phrase, "tipped the beam" at seven pounds and a half. He was also, without doubt, to borrow another expression of the fraternity, "in the pink of condition." Allan told the doctor, with a smile, that he guessed he would keep it, and pinched the boy's cheek softly as his bearer took him away.

As Miss Archer set her foot down—No. 6 D.—that he should not see Mabel until the next day, Fawcett thought he might as well try to get a little rest. He went to the room he used to occupy,—the one to which he had gone that night when he and his wife had the difference of opinion about the temperature—and threw himself on the sofa. He thought it all over as he lay there. He could see her again—dear little woman that she was!—standing in the dim light at his door, dressed in her bed-gown, telling him with shivering accents that she was afraid to sleep by herself, and that she thought feathers the only proper thing. What a wretch he was to make her come into that cold room when she was not used to it, just to prove that he could have his way! Fawcett would have liked to punch such a man in the head, could he have conveniently done so. But

Mabel was on the feathers now—poor girl!—and a hard bed it had been for her, at that! Dear child! How he loved her! And she, not yet twenty, was really a mother!

He fell asleep with a smile on his lips and rested quietly for some hours. When he awoke it was daylight. He rose, made his toilet, and went downstairs. Mrs. Morey, who had retired later, was not yet up, and Miss Archer was in command of the infantry forces. Mrs. Angus served him his eggs and coffee and, as there seemed to be nothing that he could do at the house, he went down to his office to open the mail.

A rumor of the arrival at his residence had preceded him, early as it was, for the doctor had been seen by a watchman on his way home, and the clerks knew that the elastic step—in such contrast to those of the preceding days—could have but one meaning. He read his letters through, including one that asked for an extension of time on an over-due account, without relinquishing the smile that covered his face. He wrote the necessary answers, and after he had consulted with his chief employé for a few minutes about the state of business he told him what had happened, leaving him to tell the others if he wished.

“A small boy arrived at my house last night, Barrett. The mother and child are doing well.”

Mr. Barrett tendered his congratulations, and being of a mercenary turn, managed to get a raise of three dollars a week on his salary before he allowed Fawcett to escape.

The first interview that Fawcett had with his wife was very sweet and tender. He secured the consent of the doctor to see her alone for ten minutes, promising to be very careful not to agitate her in any way.

Miss Archer, who allowed no person except the physician even to make a suggestion to her, stalked out of the bedroom with an air of offended majesty, and Allan, who stood by the door through which she made her exit, closed it behind her.

"Isn't it funny?" said Mabel, laughing faintly. "It makes me think of Rider Haggard's 'She.' Well, what do you think of my baby?"

He drew a chair to the side of the bed and told her he thought it was, on the whole, the finest child ever brought into this world. He could hardly believe it was really hers. It seemed as if it must have been smuggled into the house, like some of those children one reads of in history.

"It didn't seem that way to me," she said, with a comical grimace, at the same time pulling him down where she could kiss him. "But the first thing I want you to do is to forgive me."

"Forgive her! What for?"

"For being so cross and hateful so long. I knew all the while I was, but I really couldn't help it. Oh, I felt so dreadfully! There wasn't a time, dear, when I snapped you up that I wasn't ashamed of it; and when you answered me so nice and tried to please me in every way, I loved you more than I can tell. But that's over now. I'll never do it again."

He assured her that he appreciated the case fully, and perpetrated a little joke anent her promise never to repeat the offence. But she reiterated the statement, and this time quite soberly, that she never would—no, never! Nothing should ever happen again to bring unpleasant things to her husband.

"And the baby!" she added. "You don't talk enough about him!"

He took the sleeping child from its crib, though this had not been included in the permission under which he was acting, and laid it by its mother, declaring them the handsomest pair on which he had ever set eyes. Then they talked of important things in which the reader of this novel can have no interest, until he began to realize that his ten minutes was about to expire. He put the baby back in its crib, with a lame attempt to conceal the fact that he had touched it.

"Where the deuce did the doctor find that griffin?" he inquired, glancing apprehensively toward the door. "She puts on more style than an alderman."

"Mamma says they're always that way," Mabel laughed. "She's smart, though. One of the best."

"And how long does she consider herself entitled to hang around here and spoil my disposition?" he asked.

"A month, I think."

Fawcett put on a look of rage and was executing an imaginary decapitation of the Archer when that individual, stiff as ever, stalked back into the chamber and put an end to the séance. He wafted a salute with his fingers to his wife, which act the nurse seemed to take as a personal affront, for she turned toward him and sniffed audibly; upon which he vanished from the apartment without ceremony.

Before the month was over Mr. Frank Selden made an unexpected appearance at Norwood. His time was certainly well chosen, for it would have been well-nigh impossible for Fawcett to show much resentment to any one during that period. Selden had given no notice of his intention to come, but dove suddenly into Allan's office one morning and clapped his whilom partner on the shoulder.

"Gad, old fellow! What a fatherly-looking chap you are!"

If there had been any question of his reception, the form of this exclamation saved him. Fawcett took the extended hand, though perhaps not very warmly at first, and answered the questions that were put to him. Selden was at his best, saying just the right things. He even declared, with an appearance of candor, that he quite envied Fawcett his happiness, and that the only true life for a man to lead was that of marriage.

"Here I am," he said, "knocking around from one girl to another and raising hell, and what does it all amount to? It is a thousand times more sensible to settle down as you have done with one nice woman and see your children growing up about you. By the way, how's business?"

Somewhat surprised at the sudden change of subject, Allen replied that business was fair.

"I met Decker the last time I was in New York," said Frank, "and he told me he would take you into his firm any time. I can't see why a man should moon his life away in this village when he can get a chance like that."

Decker & Co. were large wholesale dealers in the produce line, and Fawcett had had considerable to do with them.

"Mr. Decker didn't mention anything about his conditions, I suppose," replied Allan. "He didn't say that I would have to put up \$25,000, did he?"

Selden shrugged his shoulders as if that was a mere incident.

"You don't pretend that it would be difficult to raise that amount for such a purpose, do you?" he said. "The concern is a stock company, and by pledging the

shares you could easily get the coin. Why, I'd lend it to you myself."

It was a generous proposition, it seemed to Fawcett, and he began to reproach himself for the hard feelings he had entertained toward this man. But the thought of going so deeply into debt frightened him. Even the \$3,000 that he still owed made him uneasy at times, though he could pay it at a week's notice, and still have \$5,000 or \$6,000 left. He told Selden that he could not think of accepting such an offer, but that if Mr. Decker ever gave him a chance to get in by any other way he would take it. He admitted that Norwood did not offer quite the field he wanted.

"You haven't asked a word about Gretchen," said Selden, when they had disposed of the New York affair.

Fawcett reddened violently.

"Never speak to me about that matter," he said, choking.

"About the matter—no. But about Gretchen, why, any one can speak about her. She has asked after you twenty times. Gretchen is as good as a saint. If it was Sadie, now——"

Allan rose from his chair and lifted both hands in protest.

"If you knew how horribly unhappy that has made me you would never bring it up, Frank," he said, with feeling. "Sometimes when I look at—at Mabel, and—and the baby—and think of that night, it seems as if I should go mad. I thought the next day I never could live long enough to forgive you; but, after all, it was my own fault. If Mabel should ever find it out, what do you think would become of me?"

His suffering was so evident that Selden soothed him, thinking it the best policy not to excite him too

far. At noon they went together to Fawcett's house, where, before the dinner was served, the baby had to be brought forth and exhibited to its second cousin. Frank praised the child with well-selected phrases, and its fond papa forgot the unpleasant allusions of an hour before. Mabel was not yet on exhibition, except to her immediate family circle, but Frank sent congratulations to her and said he would come to Norwood again in a month or two to see how she looked as a full-fledged mamma. He was so jolly at the table that he nearly forced a smile to the face of Miss Archer, and when he took the Boston train at night Allan was really sorry to have him go.

"Don't entirely give up that idea of Decker's," said Frank. "You can just as well make a hundred thousand there in the next ten years, as you can ten thousand here. You are too conservative to do business in such days as these. The big firms are skimming all the cream for themselves, and this chance is one in a million. Decker has a high opinion of you, and he only wants the \$25,000 just for the looks of the thing. Well, if you come around to it, remember you can rely on me."

Fawcett thanked him warmly, and promised to think about it, though he did not mean anything special by that. It was nice to have such a good friend, with such a full purse, at his elbow, in case of necessity, though. Frank was not half as bad as he had pictured him. If his morals would only improve he would be all that could be desired.

The end of the stay of Miss Archer came at last, and both Mabel and her husband saw her vinegary countenance disappear with great glee. Mrs. Morey did not remain long after her, and by the first of May

Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett were left alone in their house, with their son and Mrs. Angus.

Nothing unusual happened during the summer that followed. Mabel had regained her full strength and looked about as pretty and young as ever. Allan divided his time between his office and home, in the old way. He was wrapped up in his baby, and never seemed to tire of playing with it, or even of getting up in the night and walking the floor with it if it cried. His was the proud discovery of its first tooth ; his the primary announcement that it could actually bear its weight on its feet !

Everything seemed to go as smoothly as could be desired, till one day there came a letter from Mrs. Mattie Stuart, *née* Burbank, that she was coming to pay her cousin a visit.

CHAPTER XVII.

WANTED—A DIVORCE.

MARRIAGE had made little change in the personal appearance of Mrs. Stuart. She might have still been Mattie Burbank, for all that any one could tell by looking at her. But in reality she was as different from the girl of two years before as could well be. Her union was in all respects a dismal failure, and she had not been many days at Norwood before she made Mrs. Fawcett her complete confidante in regard to that matter.

Stuart was, as has been before intimated, the scion of a respectable family, but without any particular merit of his own. He had been educated to do

nothing, and in that accomplishment took a very high rank. His father had little confidence in his business judgment and left him only a small income, of which he never could touch the principal. This was unknown to Mattie at the time she accepted his hand. She knew Mr. Stuart, Sr., had considerable property, and supposed, as a matter of course, that the son had his full share. On his part, he was attracted quite as much by the wealth which Mr. Burbank was reputed to have, as by the charms of his prospective bride. It was a not uncommon case of being deceived on both sides, and neither could well task the other with a fault in which both had indulged.

When Mr. Burbank went into bankruptcy, young Stuart was disgusted. He told his wife, for the first time, the condition of his own affairs, and intimated that as there was hardly enough for himself in the income he received, she must not expect that a great deal of it would be lavished on her. "If there was enough for two, Mattie," he said with admirable candor, "I would willingly divide; but as there is only enough for one—it is natural that *I* should be the one."

The girl had never been in love with her husband, and it is not likely that this increased the affection she was trying to show. Stuart was not an aggressively bad man, he was simply negatively so. To all her indignant speeches and to her tearful pleas that he would do something to earn a living for himself and wife, he made few replies and no promises. He was as far from protesting against her attitude as he was from doing anything to satisfy her requests. He would not have denied that she was entirely right in her position. It was merely a series of unfortunate

circumstances that had placed them where they were. As to seeking employment, why, of course, he couldn't do it. He did not know enough even to drive a horse-car. He was in a state of chronic weariness, from which he could only arouse himself enough to play an occasional game of billiards or poker, which he invariably lost.

"I tell you, Mabel, it is a hard place to be put in," sighed Mattie, her spirits crushed by her misfortunes. "There have been days when he has left me without a cent, and nothing to eat in the house. I have actually had to go to call on friends, in the hope that they would ask me to dinner. And when he comes back he simply says he met some fellows in whom he got interested, and forgot all about me for forty-eight hours or so."

Mrs. Fawcett listened with deep sympathy. She had had her little troubles, too, but Allan had never acted like that. He had too great a regard for money to let it take care of itself as Stuart did. And never had he been out all night except when she knew he was going and where.

"You don't think, I hope," she said, with a blush, "that there is any other woman who attracts him?"

"Oh, he doesn't know enough for that!" retorted Mattie. "I don't see what he ever got married for. It must have been entirely with a view to the fortune he thought he would get through me. No, he never looks toward a bit of calico, as the saying is. A crowd of disreputable fellows in some saloon is the highest form of vice he follows. If I catch him at the moment he is paid his monthly income, by the executors of his father's property, I get a little of it. If I am an hour late, a good share is gone."

Mabel realized how hard it was for Mattie to confess all these things, for she had been brought up to have everything she asked for, and her family had lived like nabobs till the crash came. It gratified her also to feel that she had been selected as a confidante, when Mattie assured her that she had not even told her own mother half the story. Mrs. Burbank had gone to live with another married daughter in a distant part of the country, and if she suspected that Stuart was not what he should be, she had at least only a faint notion of the whole truth. To have told her would have been to give her needless distress, as she was entirely peniless herself. Mr. Burbank had made the mistake, too common in the United States, of trying to double his entire fortune in one move on the financial board, and had seen it swept away as swiftly as if a croupier at roulette had reached out his rake for it. Broken-hearted at his losses he did not long survive them, and there was not even a life insurance policy for the unhappy heirs.

"You won't lisp a word to Mr. Fawcett, will you?" Mattie would often say, when she had finished some tale of her husband's neglect. "I would not tell it to any one but you, and I always put on the gayest appearance before him. I am glad you and he are so happy together, though it makes such a contrast to my own condition. Your mother was right when she wanted you to marry a man with correct habits rather than one who inherited a fortune made by others. If I had done the same thing I should not now be worse off than either an old maid or a widow."

Mrs. Fawcett said all she could to comfort her cousin, but there was little of that nature at hand.

"Will he come here to visit you?" she asked, one

day, when they had been discussing the everlasting subject.

"No, indeed! It is doubtful if he thinks of me once a week, even to remember that I am living."

"I can't help saying I am glad he won't come," said Mabel. "I detest him so much that I'm afraid I couldn't treat him decently. And yet, bad as he acts, whatever he does, he is none the less your husband. When Allan has to go to Boston, or to New York, for just a night or two, I think it weeks before he returns."

The young wife reddened as she said this. It took very little to color the cheek of pretty, modest Mrs. Fawcett.

Mattie divined the thought that had nearly been put into words, and a slight shiver passed over her.

"If Algy Stuart were to come here to-night," she said, shutting her lips firmly together, "he could not occupy the room with me. No, if there was no other place, I would sleep on the parlor floor or walk the kitchen till morning!"

Mabel opened her eyes in real grief.

"Poor girl!" she whispered. "Don't tell me any more like that. It makes me feel so badly I can hardly keep from crying."

"You are a happy wife," said Mattie, choking down a sob, "and I am wrong to trouble you with my distresses. In the future I will do it as little as I can help. Ah, I hear Cecil! He has awakened and found himself all alone and wants some one to come to him. No, don't move. I like to be the first one he sees when he opens his eyes."

Cecil had not cried a great deal, just enough to sound the only alarm that he knew how to manipulate. When he saw Mattie he laughed and put up his chubby hands

for her to take him. He was now ten months old and a very lovable little fellow. I state this on the unimpeachable authority of both his parents, who, with all their disagreements, first and last, were a unit on this point.

"Look at the young scamp!" exclaimed Mattie, as she brought him into the sitting-room a few minutes later, with his face washed and his hair nicely combed. "No, he doesn't want any one to take him but his aunt, does you, titbits?"

She tossed the child up and down until he screamed with laughter, and then, declaring that he had a cold, cruel, heartless mother, who had weaned him much too soon, she went with him to the dining-room, where she installed him in a high-chair and was, a moment later, engaged in putting bread and milk into his mouth with a spoon.

The wife of Allan Fawcett watched her cousin's actions with a sad heart. Dear Mattie, how she did love children! And she never would have one of her own, never! Mabel knew that the crown of a woman's life was to see her own baby in her lap, and the attitude that Mattie assumed toward her worthless husband seemed to her the bitterest drop in the cup she had to drink. To be a wife—and to be no wife; to call some man "husband" and be barred by an ironical fate from all that this implied! It was simply more than any woman ought to be asked to endure. If it was her case, Mabel thought, she could never bear it. Allan had done exasperating things during the first few months of her married life, but he had always shown himself a man. She resolved to advise Mattie to consult a lawyer and see if a divorce was not practicable.

A woman did not know what life was till she had

had a child. One was enough—Mabel had no question in her mind about that—but every woman should have one. To bear it to such a husband as Algernon Stuart was not to be thought of, and Mattie was right in the position she had undertaken. He was worse than a highwayman who stops people on the road and takes their purses. He had robbed his wife of the right to love some other man—he had placed her on a desolate island and destroyed the boats by which she might escape. Mabel wished she could talk with Allan about Mattie's case, but her promise held her tongue. Mrs. Stuart had said emphatically that she should sink with shame if he ever heard the least intimation of it.

There was one thing that Mabel could do, however, and she decided that she would do that. She could go to a lawyer and put a hypothetical case to him, and see if he could not suggest a remedy. And this she proceeded to do the first time an opportunity presented itself to get down town alone.

Squire Crue, who gave out the law to Norwood, was an elderly gentleman of portly mien. He had never shone as a pleader in the courts, but his task had been perhaps of more advantage to the community, for he had a reputation as a peacemaker, and nearly always succeeded in getting his clients to settle their differences without resorting to a jury trial. He knew Mrs. Fawcett by sight, and when she entered his office and said she wanted a few minutes' conversation, he bowed with the air of a very fat Lord Chesterfield, and crossed his hands over his paunch in an attitude of expectancy.

"I wanted to ask you," she said, her voice shaking slightly, "if a woman can get a divorce from a husband who hardly gives her anything and spends all his time and money with other people."

Squire Crue smiled benignantly and remarked that he could hardly answer a question like that by a yes or no. He said he must have a fuller statement of the case.

"Well," said Mabel, gaining confidence now that the first ordeal was over, "it is this way. He married his wife, thinking her people had money, and when he found they hadn't he said that he hadn't much, either. And he neglects her, and sometimes doesn't bring anything home for her to eat; and she goes away for weeks at a time and he doesn't come to see her, nor seem to care where she is nor what she does."

There was an infantile strain in this presentation of the case that struck Mr. Crue forcibly. He replied that the law was seldom understood by married women, and that he would try to show just what it did and did not provide for. Then he went on to tell her that a husband could be made to support his wife, but that each instance would be considered on its own merits by the judge before whom it was brought. "The amount she is to receive from her husband must depend entirely," he said, in closing, "on his ability."

"But this man hasn't any," said Mrs. Fawcett.

"Hasn't any what?"

"Any ability."

"In that case, supposing it to be strictly true," smiled the squire, "he would probably be sent to an asylum."

"And she could get a divorce!" cried Mabel, joyfully.

"M-m, that does not follow," replied Mr. Crue. "It depends on a variety of circumstances. A wife's opinion of her husband's ability might not agree with that of a commissioner in lunacy. I am sure, to come

down to the case in point, that Mr. Fawcett is a long way from an imbecile."

At the mention of Allan's name Mabel caught her breath.

"Mr. Fawcett!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. You are Mrs. Fawcett, I believe."

There was a riddle here that could not be solved for the moment by the young head in which it had been placed.

"I don't understand," said she, "what my husband has to do with this matter?"

It was the lawyer's turn to be surprised.

"I thought," he said, "that you wanted a divorce."

Mabel gathered up her dress and rose to her feet. It seemed as if some awful danger hung over her head, and over Allan's, and over the baby's. Wanted a divorce! She! What did Squire Crue mean?

The Squire rose also, much perplexed.

"Were you not speaking of yourself?" he asked.

"Of *myself*! You thought *I* wanted—why, what a frightful idea! No, indeed! It will be a long time before you ever see me here on an errand like that! I was asking for a friend of mine, who lives in another city. I should think, if you knew Mr. Fawcett at all, you would know I *couldn't* be talking of *him*! Why, you gave me such a shock I hardly know what to do!"

Quite overcome, Mrs. Fawcett sat down again to compose her nerves, while Squire Crue made the best apology he could command. It was very unusual, he said, for a woman to ask advice on such a matter for a third person. He then inquired if the friend for whom the information was sought lived in that State, and on finding that her legal residence was Ohio, he

said that made a difference, for the laws of the States differed materially. By the time he had taken down several books and read a number of paragraphs aloud, Mrs. Fawcett came to the conclusion that law was a very bungling thing, and that she certainly had not the head to understand it. So she told the lawyer she would have to go, and that she was very much obliged, and when she had paid the small fee he asked, she went home and told Mattie what she had done.

"You are very kind," said her cousin, "but I looked into all that before I left Cleveland. I couldn't get a divorce unless he actually deserted me, and I don't think he could be induced to do that. At present, it is I who have deserted him. Perhaps I could get a part of his income made over to me by applying to the court, but it would cause a public scandal, and if mamma heard of it, to say nothing of the hundreds of people I have associated with, it would kill me with shame. There's nothing to be done but endure my punishment. I would give anything if I didn't have to go back to him, though!"

Mabel's sympathy was so thoroughly aroused that she set her little head to work in hopes at least to mitigate the trouble of her friend. Allan was perfectly willing that Mattie should stay at his house indefinitely, for the baby's love for her went straight to his most susceptible spot. He did not know anything about Stuart, and was unlikely ever to meet him. It looked easy enough to invent a story about Algy having to go to some foreign place where the climate was not suitable for his wife, and of leaving her with the Fawcetts during his absence.

And this is exactly what Mabel did. She quieted her conscience by saying it was a perfectly harmless

lie, and that the case was a desperate one. If it ever was exposed she felt sure Allan would say she had done entirely right. No member of the Society of Jesus ever argued with neater casuistry than this unsophisticated young woman.

It was delightful for Mattie to have this home provided for her, and she was not the one to refuse to accept it on the terms offered. She wrote occasional letters to Mr. Stuart, and sometimes he answered them, but the burden of her communications was advice for him to keep away, which he religiously followed. Several times in the next year he sent her small sums of money, which she needed too much to refuse. In fact all went on as smoothly as life on a steamer that has lost its bearings and is headed directly for a rocky shore.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HE MUST BE A PARAGON."

THAT winter business at Norwood did not go to suit Allan Fawcett. It was true, as Frank had said, that the big fish in this business were bound to eat up the small ones. When Master Cecil was a little over a year old there came a series of disasters that nearly made his papa insolvent. Fawcett came home one evening, pale and dispirited, and told Mabel that he did not know whether he was worth a dollar in the world or not.

"If I were to pay Frank the money I owe him," said he, "I do not think I would have enough left to buy a breakfast to-morrow morning. Everything has gone

wrong. Three or four thousand dollars more might enable me to get out of my scrape, but having nothing, what can I do?"

Mabel was not as much distressed as her husband, except on his account. Business had no meaning for her. The entire arrangement by which men bought and sold and realized profits was as great a mystery in her eyes as the sharpest trick ever performed by a Cazenove.

"Eat your supper," she said to him confidently, "and look on the bright side. It will come out all right, I'm sure."

But Allan could not muster an appetite.

"I don't care so much for myself," said he, "but it will be hard for you and Cecil, if I have to come down and go to work for some one. Salaries are not high these days. Probably we shall have to break up our home and go to some city and board."

This was something definite in the way of unpleasant possibilities, and it came home to Mrs. Fawcett in a way she did not like. It would mean not only a loss of her pleasant surroundings, but it would fall heavily on Mattie Stuart, toward whom Mabel had assumed the rôle of a protector. Anything was better than to send Mattie back to the tender mercies of her hateful spouse. Mabel racked her brains to see whether she could not suggest something.

"I would use every cent there is left if it would get me out of the scrape," she told Allan. "Frank has enough money, and even if you lost it, he would never know the difference."

He made a gesture of intense disapprobation.

"If I should lose that money, Mabel, and be unable to pay it, I don't know what I should do. ~~Commit~~

suicide, perhaps. I have never faced a man that I owed and asked him to wait for his money, and I simply could not do it. There is no disgrace equal to that. No, the sum I owe Frank must be kept intact, at all hazards, even if I go down in the crash."

With a woman's argument she met this.

"I should think, to hear you talk, that you cared more for Frank Selden than for your own wife and child! He took his risk when he lent you the money, and if it's lost that's his affair. You say it may save you, and if you don't take it, and you lose everything, I don't see how you can pretend to love us so much."

"Mabel, my dear!" he exclaimed. "Let me try to make it plain to you. That \$3,000 that I have of Frank's is his. It is not mine. I only have the right to use it. It would be almost—yes, quite—as if I stole the amount, if I put it where there was a risk of loss, when my own capital is used up. If I must rob people I will take a pistol and go out on the highway where there are strangers, instead of picking the pockets of my friends."

She thought him very foolish in his view of the matter, and for some time she tried to have him see the way it seemed to her.

"If you lose this money—and you say you don't think you will if you take it—they can't arrest you, can they? But if you go to rob people in the street, you can be put in jail. I should think that was proof enough of the difference."

Despairing of conveying his ideas to one who reasoned on such narrow premises, Allan lost his temper, for the first time in a year or more. He said he should do what he thought right, and that Mabel would have to take whatever he found himself able to give her

when this thing came to a head. He had done his best to make a fortune, and if he had failed, she must share his ill-luck with him. He was not going to become a swindler for the sake of putting on appearances. And when the only answer his wife made to this was to cry, he got up and went down to the office again, to pore over the hateful figures that annoyed him, instead of getting the sleep of which he stood in the greatest need.

Mabel told Mattie of what had occurred, and that lady agreed that it would be very foolish for a man to sacrifice the comfort of his family merely to pay such a paltry sum as \$3,000 to a man who had no more need of it than he had of three coats at once. Mrs. Stuart had, however, a good deal of the wisdom of the serpent, and she advised her friend not to let a quarrel grow out of the difference of opinion between herself and her husband. She knew Fawcett well enough to understand that soft words would go much farther with him than hard ones.

Mabel profited by these suggestions so far as to receive Allan well when he returned, and so impressed him by her gentleness and sweetness that he resolved to make every effort to save her. In the morning there came another letter from the great produce-buying house of Decker & Co., urging him to reconsider his declination of their proposal, and offering as an inducement to allow him to enter the firm with only \$10,000 cash, the balance of the \$25,000 being taken in his notes of hand. A death in the partnership had removed one of their most reliable men, and Fawcett was flatteringly assured that he could fill the place to the acceptance of the other members.

Fawcett was in a terrible quandary. He could not

see any choice between accepting this offer and of winding up his affairs and seeking a clerkship. Things had altered since he went into business. It was no longer easy for a young man with hardly a cent of capital to get a foothold. As near as he could reckon he was worth less than a thousand dollars after paying what he owed. Three weeks before he could count \$8,000 easily. He wished he had someone to advise with, someone whose judgment would be un-biased and honest. While he sat in his office, despairing of coming to any correct decision, the door opened and Mrs. Stuart entered.

She had come down town on an errand for Mabel, and Allan seized at this very flimsy straw in the extremity of his distress.

"You're not in any hurry," he said, when she had done her errand, "and I want to talk to you about another matter."

Mattie indicated her willingness to hear anything he wished to say, and took a chair near him, looking quite charming in her spring hat and gown; a hat and gown that had been paid for, by the way, out of his purse, though he did not imagine that to be the fact. Fawcett then proceeded to tell her of his troubles and of the offer he had had from Decker, combined with the proposal of Mr. Selden to advance him the money he needed. She heard him quietly, waiting till he had finished, and then spoke her mind.

"You are very honorable, I am sure," said she. "I am afraid there are few men equally so. It is an expression often used that a husband and father owes more to his wife and children than to any one else. You seem to have the opportunity to pay every one that you owe, and thus satisfy your conscience, and at

the same time get a foothold in a large concern where you are sure to do well. There does not seem to be much to hesitate about."

He had revolved this in his mind a hundred times, but somehow it was now made clearer.

"I think you are right," he said with brightening countenance. "And I shall send immediately to Mr. Selden, asking if his offer still holds good."

Then they talked for some minutes about Frank, whom Mrs. Stuart had never seen, and she expressed the opinion that a friend like him was worth having. There were many rich young men in the world, but very few indeed so generous and thoughtful. She developed a surprising interest in Mr. Selden, asking what he was like in appearance, and a dozen other questions that Allan, after the manner of men, found it difficult to answer.

"So he is young, rich and good!" she exclaimed, at last. "He must be a paragon worth knowing."

A sudden vision of a night at Selden's rooms, with half-intoxicated men and women about the board—with one in particular leaning on his own shoulder as the feast progressed—struck in upon Fawcett and gave him a wrench. Could he accept so great a favor from one who had led him into that terrible mistake? If Mabel knew, it would be all over between them! But, on the other hand, the money that Frank was to lend was really for Mabel's use and that of her child. One thing would in a measure offset the other. It would not do to be always blaming Frank for that thoughtless act. It was long past now and ought to be buried. Why was it always coming up, like the ghost of a murdered person, to annoy him?

"Yes," he said, "he is rich, and he is certainly gen-

erous. I will write to him at once. And please say nothing to my wife about my speaking of this to you. She might think I should not have troubled you with it."

Fawcett's back was toward the door, and the whole of the last three sentences were distinctly heard by a young man who had entered unceremoniously; no less a person, in fact, than Mr. Frank Selden himself.

"That's bad—very bad," he drawled, in a comical way, while Allan sprang up and grasped his hand. "A man who has secrets from his wife is going the wrong way. But, I beg your pardon——"

The last exclamation was caused by Fawcett's indicating that a lady was present.

"Mrs. Stuart, let me present to you my friend, Mr. Selden."

Mattie rose and greeted Mr. Selden with heightened color. The first thought of that gentleman in relation to her was that she was a very charming person.

"And now," said Frank, keeping up the air of gayety with which he had opened the conversation, "permit me to make a most impolite inquiry. I overheard you say, as I entered the office, that some one was 'both rich and generous.' As the individual must be a genuine *rara avis* in these days, I want to know if you will furnish me with his name, which I promise, if you desire, to keep a profound secret."

Fawcett looked at Mattie and Mattie looked at him. The situation was so funny that both broke into laughter.

"Do you really desire to know?" asked Allan. "I can show you a portrait of the person I was speaking of."

"Nothing would please me better," responded

Frank, astonished at the merriment his question had caused.

"Very well," said Fawcett, turning the face of his guest to a little mirror that hung in a corner, "there he is."

Selden looked at his reflection and then turned to the others.

"Ah, but this is a joke," he said.

"No," said Allan seriously. "It was of you I was speaking. And to explain further I will say that I was telling Mrs. Stuart about the offer Mr. Decker made, and which he has repeated on yet more favorable terms in this morning's mail."

Mr. Selden did not remember ever to have heard of Mrs. Stuart. He wondered why that lady had been the recipient of this confidence, especially after the injunction he had overheard that she should not communicate the matter to Mrs. Fawcett. He looked at Mattie again in a quick, searching way, that she did not fail to understand. She knew she was placed in a position of suspicion, and hastened to ask Mr. Fawcett to help her out of it.

"I have been advising him to accept both your offer and that of Mr. Decker," she said. "I think you may understand my interest in the case a little better when Mr. Fawcett tells you that I am own cousin to his wife."

Selden was rather sorry and rather glad to hear this. He had been building up a little romance around the pair that this avowal shivered to atoms. It was for that he was sorry, as he had a great love for the romantic, and he had long considered Allan an altogether too slow old poke. But, on the other hand, as the statement of Mrs. Stuart gave the impression that she

and Fawcett were on no particularly close terms, that left the gate open for the exercise of his own fascinations.

"Why, you are almost cousins, yourselves," said Fawcett, pausing to consider. "You are cousin to Mabel, Frank, and so is she. You must have heard Mrs. Morey speak of the Burbanks," he added, to Mr. Selden.

Oh, yes, Frank had heard of the Burbanks. They lived at Cleveland, he believed.

"Well, Mrs. Stuart, before her marriage, was Miss Burbank. Now you know all about it."

Mrs. Stuart said she ought to return to the house, but she added that she would like to know, before she left the office, that the matter of Decker & Co. was settled. Selden was pleased with her business-like manner, and promptly said that, as far as he was concerned, there was nothing in the way. Allan explained to him in a word the new proposition of Mr. Decker.

"I am only sorry you are not to want the whole \$25,000," smiled Frank. "I had rather lend it to you than any one else I know."

"Then you will settle up here and go into the New York firm?" asked Mattie, pausing with her hand on the door-knob.

Fawcett bowed deliberately. It seemed the best thing, and yet he dreaded so great a change.

"And I shall not tell Mabel?"

"No, I will tell her myself. She will have to leave Norwood, you see, and I want to present it to her in the best light."

Mrs. Stuart went her way and the two men sat down to talk matters over. It did not require long to come to a complete understanding. Fawcett was to pay the

\$3,000 he owed, with the interest, and take a check for \$10,000, for which he was to give security on his new stock. Mr. Decker need not learn that this money was borrowed—of course it was no business of his where it came from. Fawcett did not care to have his future partner know of his recent losses and how badly they had crippled him. It might not give Mr. Decker an exalted idea of his capacity, and yet there was nothing but bad luck in it. A large house could stand such losses, while a small one could not. It was a good thing that he was going out of business alone. Combination and trusts were the order of the day, and no one could stand against them.

The letter accepting the proposition of the New York house was sent forthwith, as Selden urged that delays in such cases might prove dangerous. As long as the thing was decided on, the sooner it was arranged the better. Then the two friends went up to Mr. Fawcett's to dinner, where Mabel, having been apprised by Mattie that her cousin was in town received him pleasantly. Frank was in the best of spirits, determined to make an impression upon Mrs. Stuart. The baby was brought forth in the arms of that lady, which gave him an opportunity to say a great many complimentary things to both of them.

After dinner Allan got his wife alone upstairs and explained the full meaning of the course he had taken. To his joy she expressed her entire satisfaction, and said she would be glad to move away from Norwood, so long as it was to a place in or near the metropolis.

"You will be prosperous and happy, and Cecil and I will get along nicely," she added. "I am glad you have got over your prejudice against letting Frank help you. How soon do you suppose we shall move?"

He told her that he was going the very next day to see Mr. Decker, and that he would be able to answer all such questions when he returned. He communicated the successful result of this interview to Mr. Selden, as he talked with that gentleman at the gate, before leaving for the office. Frank was going to stay a little longer at the house, as he intended to leave town that afternoon, but before they parted it was agreed that a certified check for \$10,000 should be sent to Mr. Fawcett's address at New York that evening.

It was for the purpose of saying a little more to the fair Mattie Stuart that Mr. Selden lingered on the piazza of the Fawcett cottage. They had become good friends in a surprisingly short space of time.

"Shall you go to New York with your cousins?" he asked. "You ought not to desert them at such a time, for they will have absolutely no acquaintances there at first."

Mattie answered that she presumed she should go. Her husband, she said, was not likely to return for some time, and Mabel seemed to hate to part with her.

"How long since you saw Mr. Stuart?" asked Selden, bending his bold eyes upon his companion.

"Four or five months."

"And you do not expect him at present?"

"No. It may be a year or two."

Mr. Selden took out a silk handkerchief and flipped the dust from his boots.

"If I had a wife," he said, thoughtfully, "she would go where I went."

"Ah," said Mattie, "but those South American countries are so unhealthy!"

"If *she* could not go, *I* would not," he answered.

"But what am I talking about? I am a hopeless bachelor. How can I tell what I should do if I were married?"

She saw that he was affected by her charms and she liked the sensation. It had been dull enough at Norwood, the Lord knew!

"Why have you never married?" she inquired. "You must have been in love."

He looked her straight in the eyes and told the lie with beautiful earnestness.

"Never."

Mrs. Fawcett came to join them, and the conversation took on a different turn. He promised to come to New York and see them when they got settled. An hour later he gave a kiss to the baby, tossed a compliment or two to Mabel, and lifted his hat courteously to Mrs. Stuart at the gate.

"*Will I* visit them at New York?" he muttered, to himself. "Will I *visit* them! Well, I should rather think I *would!*"

CHAPTER XIX.

COMING HOME UNEXPECTEDLY.

BEFORE the summer was far advanced the Fawcetts had removed to New York and were settled in a house in Brooklyn. It was easier to get a habitation on that side of the river, at a reasonable price, than on the other, and it was not more than forty minutes' ride from the office of Decker & Co., using the bridge, and provided that nothing in the car system was out of order. Mrs. Stuart stayed with them and there was no change

in their household, except that an ordinary servant took the place of Mrs. Angus, who could on no account be persuaded to make the journey. The difference in the table was at once perceptible to Fawcett, but he did not say much about it. He did not see how it could be helped, and, in fact, he now had things of much more importance to occupy his mind.

The business of Decker & Co. was so different from that to which he was accustomed that all of his energies were bent on attending to their affairs. He left home early in the morning, and did not return before seven at night, and sometimes much later. For a while Mabel, who did not like the long day without him, came over to the city to lunch with her husband; but he was in such haste and the restaurants where he liked to take her were so far from his office that he advised her to give this up. This left her with only the baby and Mrs. Stuart to amuse her, and in a short time she got into the habit of going out with Mattie to spend the afternoons sight-seeing, sometimes even attending *matinées* at the theatres.

Mabel did not intend to neglect Cecil, but the boy seemed quite well and could enjoy himself playing with his blocks or tin horses on the dining-room floor, with Mollie close by. The expense of a nurse-girl was not one that Allan would be likely to favor. He would have asked what the child needed more than his mother and Mattie, and it would not have been easy to answer the question. Mrs. Fawcett knew that her husband was morally certain never to be in the house before half-past six at the earliest, and she was careful not to stay out beyond that hour. So it went on for weeks, she and Mattie going out nearly every day for some hours, and Allan none the wiser. He would have had

a fit had he suspected that his idolized boy was left so much in the sole charge of a not over-intelligent servant, who had, beside, other matters to attend to.

There were other things that followed, as a matter of course. It was necessary for Mabel to caution Mollie not to mention the fact of her absences before Mr. Fawcett, and the partnership in deceit thus established gave the girl an advantage that she was not slow to perceive. She slighted her work in a way that she would not have dared do otherwise. She got more evenings out than had ever fallen to her share, and if her temper happened to get aroused she made speeches to her mistress such as no servant is usually permitted to make and retain her position.

Fawcett was oblivious to all these things, as his only business in the house was to eat and sleep and spend an hour playing with the baby. If his breakfast was on the table at the right time he did not mind because it was a very light one, for he was anxious to get across the East River. If his dinner was not what it should be, he recollected that he came at uncertain hours. He made it up by a substantial lunch at noon, taken with other members of the firm, at which the condition of the market was the staple topic of conversation.

Whenever Mabel asked him to take her to a place of amusement he pleaded weariness, and on the few occasions when he yielded to her entreaties he fell asleep in his place, and only got fairly awake when he was roused by the outgoing crowd. He seemed to care nothing now for pleasure, except that of increasing the sales of his firm. If he sat down after dinner to talk for an hour, when the child had been put to sleep, his recitals always drifted to the volume of trade or the

price of oats or cheese. As his wife took not the remotest interest in those things, it was very dull for both, and nobody objected when he yawned and said he guessed bed was the place for him.

At the end of three months, passed in this way, Fawcett came home one evening with a dark frown on his face. A large failure had just been announced that would cause a heavy loss to the Deckers—so large in fact as to make it doubtful whether the new partner had cleared a single dollar in the time he had been connected with them. Owing such a large sum as he did, this occurrence was one calculated to worry Fawcett exceedingly. Hardly swallowing a mouthful of dinner he got Mabel into a private room and unbosomed to her his troubles.

Now, if Mrs. Fawcett had been the kind of wife a novelist would like to depict, she would, of course, have assured her husband that her fullest sympathy and love were his in this emergency. She would have told him that there were small economies in the domestic arrangements of his house that she could make. She would have led him into optimistic views of the future, by reminding him that such a failure was of very unusual occurrence, and that the profits of the next quarter would probably far more than counterbalance the loss of this one. In short, although he might have argued to show that she was wrong, and have shaken his head dolefully at her predictions, he would have ended by deciding that a true wife was the best gift of Heaven to man, and have gained courage from the knowledge that whatever else was lost this fair creature would press her lips to his with equal joy whether he were prince or pauper.

But Mrs. Fawcett was not that kind of a wife. And,

to put my private opinion on record, I might add that she is not alone among wives in this particular.

"We must economize in every possible way," he said, to her in closing. "A few blows like this and I should be not only penniless but saddled with the heavy debt I assumed on going into the firm."

Mabel's pretty mouth was drawn down unpleasantly.

"I don't see how we can spend any less than we do," she replied, peevishly. "I have nothing at all now. We never go anywhere to spend a dollar. It is necessary to eat, and to have clothes that will cover us, and that is all we have had."

In his distress Fawcett did not choose his words.

"If you don't have it to spend you won't spend it!" he replied, with a snap. "I've not got it, and that's all there is to say! I've been giving you \$150 a month and all you'll get after this is \$100. While I'm \$25,000 in debt and paying a heavy interest, and the concern not making a cent, I can't do any better."

The young wife began to cry. It was getting to be a great habit of hers to weep whenever anything went wrong.

"I simply can't supply the table and clothe Cecil on \$100 a month, after the rent is paid," she sobbed. "If you were not the most cruel man in the world you would not think of asking your family to live like pigs."

She had put him so thoroughly out of temper that he ransacked his brain to think of things that would be disagreeable to her.

"It would cost less to supply your table," he said, "if there were fewer people to eat here. I think your cousin, Mrs. Stuart, might cut her visit a little short, unless she chooses to pay her board. And I have

heard of people as poor as we where the woman did her own work."

The idea of parting with Mattie oppressed Mabel worse even than that of discharging the cook.

"Why, Allan Fawcett!" she exclaimed, in great indignation. "What do you suppose I should do here all day long without a soul to speak to, and you over in that New York office from sunrise to sunset? If it had not been for Mattie I should have died of loneliness in this place where there is no one I ever saw before. She is as good as she can be to stay with me, and I will never tell her to leave. As for Mollie, do you think the \$4 a week that we pay her is going to ruin you? I never heard you talk like this even in the first weeks of our marriage, when you were running a little bit of a store in a country town!"

The more they discussed the subject the farther they got from an agreement. Cross words were exchanged freely, and Fawcett's nervous disposition came out of the ordeal a thousand times worse than it went in. He ended by repeating that he should give her just a hundred dollars a month and no more until he could see what the next quarter brought forth.

"And how about my sealskin sacque?" she sobbed. "You promised me one this winter, as faithfully as you could promise anything."

"You get one, if you can!" he retorted, savagely. "You won't get it from *me*, I'll tell you that! A woman who has no more sense than you ought to wear common clothes a little longer. An ordinary sacque will look well enough when you come to look at me through the bars of a debtor's prison!"

Now, out of this grew a good many things, none of them conducive to the best interests of the wedded

couple whose life I am attempting to describe. Fawcett had become so thoroughly angry at his wife, on account of what he considered her unreasonable attitude, that Mrs. Stuart could not help noticing his altered demeanor. His good-mornings, when he entered the breakfast room, were curt enough, and at night even his romp with Cecil had grown subdued, while he hardly spoke to Mabel at all. There came a crash one day when he returned unexpectedly in the middle of the afternoon to change his clothes for a trip he was obliged to take, and found no one in but Mollie and the baby.

"Where's Mrs. Fawcett?" he demanded roughly, as he entered the kitchen.

"Gone out, sor."

"And Mrs. Stuart?"

"Gone out with her."

"You don't mean to say," he exclaimed, "that they have left Cecil alone with *you!*"

There was an innuendo in this expression that might have awakened a less irascible woman than Miss Mollie O'Donaghue.

"What harrum do ye think is going to happen to him?" she retorted. "It's not the furst time he's bin left with me, an' he's niver got hurted yit!"

Fawcett did not mean to get into a debate with this woman, and he contented himself with inquiring when his wife would return.

"Faith, it's not mesilf can answer that!" said Mollie, with a toss of her head. "I suppose she comes in whin she likes, the same as other folks."

Fawcett looked at his watch. It was half-past two. He could take a later train than he intended, as he did not like to leave his boy in charge of this ignorant serv-

ant. Taking Cecil with him into the parlor, he got down on the floor with him and attempted to amuse the child, thinking Mabel must return very soon. He had no idea she had gone any farther than to one of the stores in the vicinity, and his only criticism was that she ought to have taken Cecil with her, or asked Mattie to remain in the house during her absence. But hours passed by and the clock struck six before either of them came. By that time he was in a state bordering on frenzy.

"Well, you are home early!" exclaimed Mabel, as she saw her husband.

"Yes, I am!" he replied, between his shut teeth. "And it's very lucky I came, for otherwise I should never have known the way you neglect your poor child."

Mabel gave him an imploring glance, indicating that she wished he would say no more while Mrs. Stuart was present, but he had been piling up his feeling too long to stop now.

"A nice mother you are!" he continued. "Leaving this little fellow to a kitchen-girl while you gad the streets from noon till night! Oh, I don't care who hears me. Any one who doesn't like what I say needn't stay where I am. Not the first time it has happened, either, Mollie informs me! If it occurs again I'll find a remedy, just remember that!"

Her never-failing resource came to Mabel, and she began to cry. Mrs. Stuart wisely went out of the room, though she resented inwardly the attack that had been made on her presence. As soon as she was gone Fawcett grasped his wife roughly by the arm and asked her what she meant by her conduct.

"Allan," said Mabel, with distorted features, "you are hurting me!"

"Hurting you! I ought to hurt you!" he exclaimed. "When I am worried to death over my business, when you should be doing everything you can to make things easier for me, you leave your child to a servant-girl and stroll through the streets for hours at a time. Is it not enough to drive a man wild? You know the only thing I care for in this world is that boy, and you treat him as if he were some stranger's child in whom you had not the least interest!"

Mabel shivered as though it were midwinter instead of October.

"Be careful what you say," she answered, with chattering lips. "If *Cecil* is the *only* thing you care for, you cannot want any more of me!"

When a quarrel has begun between married people there is no telling where it will end. Each of them thinks it necessary to go on saying the most dreadful things, until one so far exceeds reasonable limits that the other is outraged beyond repair.

"You are quite welcome to go any time you see fit," said Allan frigidly. "But while you *do* remain, you will attend to some of your duties. You have your housework done for you, and you *shall* not neglect my child."

Mrs Fawcett heard him with a rebellious heart.

"Take care!" she answered, the tears still falling. "You say I may go at any time. Look out I don't take you at your word! And if I do go, I shall take Cecil with me. A man so cruel as you are to his wife is not to be trusted with his child."

Fawcett's lips curled in a pronounced sneer.

"Go?" he repeated. "You? Where would you go? Why, you couldn't earn a shilling a week! Don't be an idiot!"

Stung by these words Mabel could not help firing back her shot also.

"There are people who have a better opinion of me than you," she said sarcastically. "If I wanted to leave you to-morrow I can get more than you have ever given me, and not have to listen to such language as you use, either."

It was absolutely horrifying to him to hear the cold-blooded way in which she made this statement. Some one had offered to support her—his Mabel—his wife! And she repeated the offer to him as if it was one that might be accepted!

"There is only one way in which you could secure such a very *honorable* position as the one you mention!" he replied, bitterly. "Am I to understand that you have seriously considered such an offer?"

In spite of all she could do Mabel could not keep back the flood that ran down her face.

"I don't know what I shall do!" she said. "You may drive me to anything. If business goes a little wrong at the office you come home as cross as a wild-cat and act as if I was the one to blame. We had not been married a week before you began to show your terrible temper, and every little while it breaks out again. To-day you have gone further than ever. My arm is black and blue where you pinched it. Now I will tell you, once for all, that I will not live with a man who is going to vent all his spite on me, and insult me, besides, in the presence of my friends! No, I won't! I'll go out in the street and beg first! And if I can't get my bread that way I will try another. And if I go to the bad it will be your fault!"

All this was said between outbursts of sobbing that shook the slight young frame. Fawcett was greatly

affected by the exhibition. He pocketed his pride enough to put his arms around his wife, though for a long time she repulsed him, and to say that he had no intention of driving her away, and that he did not mean it when he said Cecil was the only thing he loved. All he wanted was to feel that she did not neglect the child. Perhaps he had been unreasonable. It was true that business made him very nervous and irritable. If Mabel would only say that she would not leave Cecil without a more intelligent attendant he would be satisfied.

An hour later when they had made up, Allan asked Mabel to tell him who had dared insult her with such a proposition as the one she had quoted, and when she begged him not to say any more about it he added that it was better, on the whole, he did not know, for he would certainly kill the man if he ever met him. They went out to dinner together, where they found that Mrs. Stuart had eaten with Cecil and had gone to put him to bed.

As the air of summer is sweeter after a thunderstorm, so the atmosphere of the Fawcett residence seemed clearer when Allan, with another kiss for good-bye, sallied off to get his train.

CHAPTER XX.

“WILL IT BE BEST?”

It was true that some one had made the offer to Mrs. Fawcett that she quoted to her husband on the occasion referred to in the preceding chapter. And it will not take the reader long to guess that the man was Mr. Frank Selden.

Selden could say things that would have been offensive in the mouth of almost any other person in such a way as to disarm resentment, or at least greatly mollify it. On one of the visits which he made to Norwood, Mabel expressed apprehension as to her husband's success in business.

"Oh, well, Cousin Mabel," he replied, "if Allan ever has to put you on short allowance, you know where to come. I have more money than I've any use for, and you shall take a dip into it whenever you say the word."

As a matter of fact, Selden was by no means the extremely generous person that this speech might make him appear. He had a pronounced business instinct which made him get a *quid pro quo* for every dollar invested, either in direct cash or in some other commodity equally valuable in his eyes. He spent considerable money in dissipation, and would stop at nothing to attain that on which he once set his mind. Mabel might have known, had she understood his character better, that he would demand a heavy interest on any sum he ever lent her, but she chose to take the best view of his offer. Though her cheek reddened a little at the time, she thanked him, saying he was very thoughtful, and that if she ever got into a tight place she would let him know.

At the present moment, however, it is doubtful if she could have drawn very much on her cousin's good nature, unless it had been in behalf of a third party. Selden had not been all of this time without seeing Mrs. Stuart, for whom he had conceived a violent affection. Not being willing to trust Mrs. Fawcett with his secret, he had contrived a clandestine correspondence with the object of his hopes, and Mattie had

already met him several times in out-of-the-way places, where she could listen to his delightful conversation, without compromising her reputation too deeply. With the skill of a veteran fisherman, he had allowed her plenty of line, and had won a high place in her regard by the politeness of his deportment.

The evening of the quarrel between Fawcett and his wife found Mrs. Stuart much alarmed for her future. She had received an intimation that her presence in the house was not agreeable to the proprietor. Although Mabel assured her that she and Allan had parted the best of friends, and that he had disclaimed all of the hateful things he had said in his anger, Mattie began to wish that she had another string to her bow in case the solitary one broke. The next time she met Selden she confided to him a part of the truth concerning her married relations. She admitted having deceived him in saying that her husband was in South America, and completely won his sympathy by the slight glimpse she allowed him of her unhappy connection with the house of Stuart.

"You ought to get a divorce from such a man as that," said Frank, sympathetically.

"No," she said, "there is no way. And if there were, I should dread the disgrace above all things."

They were sitting at a table in a restaurant private room, and the meal had just been disposed of. Selden looked searchingly at the neglected wife, wondering how far he dare go at present. Although she had given him these stolen interviews, there had been nothing otherwise unladylike in her conduct, and he knew that a false step too soon might lose him every thing.

"You have no suspicion," he said, slowly, "that he is untrue to you?"

She answered with an impatient shake of her head.

"On the contrary—" she began, and then stopped short. A deep blush suffused her features. She tried to go on with what she had begun to say, but could not find suitable words.

"Do you mean," said Frank, "that you would not care much if he were? You cannot have a great deal of love left for him."

She indicated by a motion that he was right, and then a shiver passed over her frame. She did not like to think of Algy Stuart, nor to speak of him. He was the most disagreeable thing in her recollection. With her eyes on the carpet, she beat a faint tattoo with her foot, and Selden leaned lovingly toward her.

"Mattie," he whispered, "forgive me for arousing such unpleasant thoughts. But I like you so well that everything about you interests me. I want to know the whole of the story you have been so kind as to tell me in part. You know I am your friend—that I would not willingly say or do anything to wound you."

He had taken her hand in his, and the pressure was very agreeable to her in her loneliness. She was violating the opinions of society in coming to dine with him in this secret way, and it was only a little more for her to permit him to touch her palm. Friends were not plenty enough to justify her in offending the few she had. "I was afraid," she murmured presently, "that you would like me less when you understood the truth—when you knew that I had been deceiving you."

"No," he answered quickly. "You had a right to your secret. A Frenchman once said that language

was given us so that we might the better conceal our thoughts, and he was quite correct."

She raised her eyes timidly to his.

"And is that what you do with *your* language?" she asked, searchingly.

"Sometimes," he admitted, gravely. "Certainly I have done so when talking with people who do not interest me, about things which are not their business. It is very different, however, with those for whom I have an affection. In that case the full truth is the right thing. Don't you think so, Mattie?"

She acquiesced, dropping her glance again; and for a minute there was no sound in the room but the ticking of the clock on the mantel.

"Tell me," he said, suddenly, tightening the clasp he had kept on her hand, "how much do you care about me?"

Her head sank until her chin rested on the bosom of her dress.

"No," he continued, fearing to let her speak just yet, "you need not tell me. It is hardly fair, considering that you are in name at least the wife of another man. I have been hoping that you would learn to like me as well as if you had no tie of that kind. I led a lonely life until I met you. It is you and you alone who brought me to New York—who keeps me here. That is no secret to you. This has gone on for months. We have met often; and yet this is the first day I have dared even to take your hand in mine. You know how dearly I have desired to make you something nearer; how hard it is to me that this barrier has existed whose only use is to separate us. Must this condition continue, or is there a greater happiness for me in the future?"

Frank Selden was a good deal longer in saying this than the reader is in perusing the sentences. At each period he paused to observe the effect of his words on the young wife, and when he found that they had not offended her perceptibly he drew nearer to her and whispered his persuasions closer to her ear. She felt his warm breath on her neck. The magnetic attraction that he had for women thrilled her frame as it never had been thrilled before. But though she remained passive even when he placed an arm about her, and touched his lips to her cheek, there was a horrible fear of a great danger present, above all the rest.

"I value your friendship very highly, Mr. Selden," she managed to articulate, when he had resumed his ordinary position. "It is all the more to me now that I find it unaffected by the confession I have thought it my duty to make."

He drew an impatient breath.

"Friendship is not enough, my dear girl," he replied. "I am a man with no other attachments, with plenty of means and without a place I can call my home. To be sure, there is my mother's house, but I am as much out of tune in it as a bull in a china-shop. I have a suite of rooms too, furnished as well as anybody's, and situated in a pleasant locality. But with two homes, I have none. It takes more than four walls and a lot of furniture to make a home. It takes affection—the presence of those we love. Mattie, I have no skill in telling what I want, but if you would come to Boston and take that suite of rooms—so that I could be with you—I——"

He paused in the midst of the sentence, for Mrs. Stuart had risen and was beginning nervously to pull on her gloves.

He uttered an exclamation rising also.

"I have wondered," said the woman, in a very low tone, after taking a deep inspiration, "if that sort of proposition might not be, after all, at the base of the kind things you have done and said. I tried not to harbor the thought, for you seemed so innocent of wrong intent and you were so long in making advances. I am not finding any fault with you, Mr. Selden. I do not suppose it is easy for a man to make such a suggestion in a more delicate way. No matter how neatly the thought is concealed, its hideousness will stand forth in spite of the covering. You wish me to be your mistress. Well, I must decline. My only regret is that in doing so I shall at the same time lose a friendship that I have esteemed very, very highly, for it will be impossible for us to meet again."

Selden's face flushed with mortification and disappointment. He felt that his cause was in a bad way. The calm, dispassionate manner in which Mrs. Stuart spoke was apparently fatal to his hopes. Had she sobbed, gone into hysterics, called him a bad and cruel man—then he would have known how to *treat* her. He would have waited until her excitement had exhausted her powers of resistance, and when she was as weak as a mouse he would have told her how thoroughly she misjudged him. Her head would have lain on his shoulder within fifteen minutes, and she would have left him with a feeling that she had done him a great injustice. He was not used to the sort of reception that Mattie gave him. However, he determined to retreat in as good order as possible, and trust to another day to repair his shattered fortunes. It was evident above all else that persuasions at the present time would be worse than useless.

"Mrs. Stuart," he replied, with great dignity, "there is something of pride in every man of honor that will not let him reply by direct denial when accused of things for which he would feel the greatest contempt. But this I will say, were I in search of a mistress it would not take me long to find one, and I should not have to make a journey out of my native city, either. If I am not to see you again I shall be very sorry, and I should be still more so if I felt that it was in the most remote way through any fault of mine. I will now escort you to your car or to any point you desire, and then bid you farewell."

Quite sick at heart, and wishing that she had expressed her fears in a different way, Mattie said she would go to the nearest station on the Third Avenue Elevated, so as to cross the Bridge. With the most perfect courtesy Mr. Selden accompanied her to the place indicated, talking on the way of ordinary things, in an endeavor to divert her mind and his own from the unpleasant subject that had divided them. They had nearly reached the railroad and were slacking their pace slightly, each one in the hope that the other would say something to break the bar between them, when a man came around a corner, took a sharp look at the pair, seemed surprised, and half stopped in his walk. Mattie clung tightly to the arm she had grasped in the suddenness of her astonishment, and forced Selden to a more rapid pace in the hope of escaping an unpleasant meeting.

Frank saw at a glance that his companion had a strong wish not to speak to the man, and his curiosity was at once aroused. He thought the circumstance suspicious in itself, and an idea that there might be something compromising to be discovered entered his

brain. He declined, therefore, to be compelled to hasten his steps, and in fact rather slackened them.

"You didn't seem to want that fellow to see you," he said, pausing at the foot of the iron stairway.

"I'm going now," she replied rapidly, not pretending to answer his insinuation. "Good-bye."

She was about to ascend the steps when Selden took her by the arm. She looked into his eyes and saw the flames of a jealous rage lighted there.

"Don't, I beg you!" she said, in a terrified whisper. "He is coming back! Oh, please, please, let me go!"

The man was coming back. He had nearly reached them. A train, bound for the Bridge, was thundering along the track from the north. If Mattie could have escaped the detaining arm on her sleeve she might have caught it and have avoided an encounter she especially dreaded at that time. The second passed, and it was too late. The voice of the man sounded in her ears.

"Well, it *is* you, Mattie, after all. I thought it was, and then I thought it wasn't."

Nothing in the presence of this third party prevented the woman from darting a look of agony into the penetrating eyes of Frank Selden. It said as plainly as words, "Oh, why did you let this happen?"

"Mr. Selden," she said, with an effort, "this is Mr. Stuart."

Instantly Frank was sorry for what he had done. He did not care to meet Mr. Stuart, and he did not care to have Mrs. Stuart meet him. There was an awkward pause of a moment, and then the two men went through the conventional formality—often the most disagreeable of fashion's obligations—and shook hands with each other. Frank thought of the heroes of the prize-ring,

who do likewise, and comforted himself with the conviction that he would knock out this adversary yet, if he were given rounds enough.

"Mr. Algernon Stuart?" he said, to make sure.

There might be a thousand other Stuarts in the world that Mattie knew.

Mr. Stuart bowed. He was not given to prolixity in conversation. He turned to his wife, and seemed to wait for her to begin the talking.

"Mr. Selden," said Mattie, as if she needed to defend herself in advance on account of being seen with him, "is a cousin of Mrs. Fawcett's—Mabel, you know."

Mr. Stuart said, "Ah!" in a way that left Selden in doubt whether he ought, or ought not, to kick him. Had he realized the vacuity of Stuart's thoughts he would have been at ease on that point at least. As he appeared to a certain degree *de trop*, Frank began to say something about an engagement that he had, thinking in this manner to take leave of them.

Mattie shot at him a look of wild entreaty.

"Have you forgotten?" she asked. "You have an engagement in Brooklyn!"

Selden understood. She hated above all things being left alone with her husband. He pretended, with a light laugh, to recollect the Brooklyn appointment, and stood waiting for her next cue. It was agreeable to know that a pretty woman wanted him to go with her so as to keep her husband away. There was certainly something in that to soothe the feelings that had been wounded a half hour before.

"When did you come to the city?" asked Mattie, of her other half.

"A fortnight ago," answered Stuart.

"And when are you going back to Cleveland?" she inquired, with features as impassive as ice.

"Pretty soon. I was going to try and come over to see you in a day or two. I—I've been rather busy."

Selden was apparently engrossed in watching the embarking and disembarking of the passengers on a southern train, but he heard every syllable.

"There's sickness in the house," said Mattie, with rigid lips. "It's the child, and they think it's contagious. The doctor has forbidden visitors."

Stuart was evidently relieved.

"Well, in that case," he said slowly, "of course I won't come."

"No," said his wife. "It wouldn't do. My train will be here in a minute, so I must go now."

Mr. Stuart lifted his hat at the couple as they ascended the stairs, quite as if neither of them was more than an ordinary acquaintance of his, and went on up the street. Selden turned twice before he boarded the train, and he saw that the husband did not look back.

"How far shall I go with you?" he asked Mattie, when the name of the third station on their way had been called by the brakesman.

"You can leave any time now, if it is necessary," she replied gently. "You have done me a great favor, for which I cannot thank you enough."

He gave her a winning smile.

"Then we are not sworn enemies?" he asked.

"No."

"And perhaps, some day, when you have learned that I meant none of the hateful things you imagined, you will see me again?"

Mrs. Stuart lowered her head and looked out of the car window at the tops of the adjacent houses.

"Will it be best?" she asked meaningly. "Of what use can I ever be to you?"

He laughed cheerfully and told her it would be fairest to leave that matter to him. He liked her very much, and would be content with anything except the desolation to which she had that afternoon consigned him.

"I've had a vivid object-lesson in one thing," he said, reaching over to touch her glove with his own. "You have not a very deep affection for your husband."

In the spasm of pain which caught her she pressed his hand till a seal-ring he wore cut the flesh.

"You can't conceive how I detest him!" she said. "I would have given anything rather than have had to meet him even for that minute."

Selden put his disengaged arm over the back of the seat she occupied.

"And you will never go back to him?" said he, his voice trembling slightly.

She faced him squarely.

"If there were no other choice," she said, with vehemence, "I would go to Boston to-night with you, rather than to Cleveland with him!"

It was the time to leave her and he knew it. "This is my station," he exclaimed, as the car slowed up; and there he alighted.

CHAPTER XXI.

BECAUSE MATTIE WAS LONESOME.

DURING the next two years a good many things occurred. A good many things always do occur in two years, if you stop to think about it.

Fawcett's business had a number of striking ups and

downs, to begin with. At times he came home believing that he would have money enough to retire before the next twelve-month had passed. Again, it seemed impossible that he would ever get out of the concern enough to pay Frank Selden his loan. Legitimate transactions, even in such simple things as grain and produce, are scarce in these days. Allan found that his firm was merely a gambler, taking risks as men do on a table at Monte Carlo, fighting with what skill and luck they may have against other players on the same table.

The strain on his mind did not fit him to be a better husband and father. When he thought his prospects improving he was ready to buy his wife and child everything they might think they wanted. When he experienced a reverse he doubted whether he ought to eat a full meal and talked of selling the furniture of the house he hired. And Mabel, not knowing enough to take the average of these conditions, followed his mercurial temper—at one time vowing him an angel and at the other declaring, always with sobs, that he was unfit to live with, and she wished he would leave her at once instead of complaining at everything she did or did not do.

If either of them had been a little different, things would have gone better. But in that case you would not at this moment have been reading the story of their troubles, and perhaps managing to profit by them. It is an ill wind, says the old proverb, that does not bring good to some one.

Among the other things that had happened was the removal of the Fawcetts to a flat in Forty-second Street, not very far from the Grand Central Depot. Mabel had asked for the change, and it made no difference to

Allan. He could get to his office just as quickly from there as from Brooklyn. On one of his waves of prosperity he had bought new furniture, selling all the old to a second-hand dealer, and his home was as tasty as could be desired. Mollie still officiated in the kitchen, and much oftener than he dreamed of acted as nurse-girl beside. There was the more excuse for this, in one sense, because Mrs. Stuart no longer made a member of his household. She occupied a little flat a few minutes' walk away, and when Mabel was not there, Mattie was at the Fawcetts'.

Mabel had done a good deal of plain and fancy lying for her friend. She had crept into it little by little, until she did not mind it as much as she did at first. The capacity for lying can be made to grow to unimagined proportions sometimes. When Mabel told Allan, nearly three years earlier, that Mr. Stuart had gone to South America to engage in business, she plunged at the falsehood like an amateur, and had he thought of doubting the story he could have made her admit its untruth in a five-minutes' cross-examination. But he suspected nothing. There was no reason to doubt that his wife's cousin was what she professed to be. Except on those occasions when he felt like finding fault with everything and everybody he did not at all object to having her a member of his household. So far as he knew she was a suitable companion for his wife, and Cecil certainly had a mad infatuation for her, seeming to prefer her, on the whole, to his own mamma. When Cecil liked any one, she had a passport to the father's favor, other things being equal.

Fawcett believed Mattie's story and though he had a slight suspicion that she was not over fond of a husband from whom she was willing to be separated so

long, he did not think a great deal about it. She behaved well enough when in his presence, and she was not the only woman in the world who was not in love with her marital mate. As long as Mr. Stuart and she were content, he did not see how it was any business of his. Algy must send her money, for she always dressed becomingly. Allan might have understood this better had he known that every dollar spent on her clothes came, during the first year, out of his own pocket, and after that——

But I am getting ahead a little too far in my story.

Twice, when Cecil had violent attacks of illness, Mattie stayed at the house for days, nursing him with the deepest devotion. She did not seem to require rest or sleep, and the boy was content with no one else when his pain was the greatest. Allan could have fallen on his knees to her at those times. Her devotion to the sick child made her a saint in his eyes. Once, when Cecil's life hung on a thread, she came into his room to tell him that a change for the better had taken place and that his idol was sleeping peacefully. His eyes were filled with tears and his voice choked as he tried to thank her. Taking both her hands in his he drew her lips toward his, and would have kissed her had she permitted him. In the gentlest manner she resisted the caress and glided back to the sick chamber.

He went to give the glad news to Mabel and found her asleep! To be sure, she was worn out, but he contrasted the two women to the disadvantage of his wife. Mattie had done enough to be worn out, too, and it was she who had come to tell him that his son would live.

This occurrence, as much as anything, drew him away from Mabel. He used to compare her with

Mattie, and say to himself how much better mother the latter would have made. He got into the habit of staying in a good deal in the evening and raised no objection when Mabel said she guessed, if he didn't mind, she would go over to Mattie's for a little while. Cecil was well again, and Allan used to think it the height of bliss to undress the little fellow and see him drop off to sleep. When the child was in dreamland, the latest magazines or the newest things in literature would occupy the father's mind till he grew sleepy. He did not room with his wife now, as a general thing, and sometimes he had to ask her in the morning what time she came home.

"I don't know—exactly," she used to say. "I got to talking with Mattie, and never noticed the clock. She is so lonesome that she likes me to stay as late as I can."

That made it all right with Fawcett. Mabel had better be with Mattie than with any other woman he knew. He was glad to encourage such an intimacy.

Allan used to see Frank Selden once in a while. Frank called at his rooms to talk with him on business and social topics, and Allan liked him as well as ever. He still had Frank's money, though he paid the interest promptly, and the principal had, on the whole, grown in size, according to the figures on the books of Decker & Co.

Mrs. Stuart spent some of her evenings at Mabel's, but it never happened that Selden dropped in when she was there. As far as Allan knew those two people had never seen each other more than two or three times in their lives. It was not strange that Frank found New York more agreeable than Boston. He required a good deal of excitement, and the Hub was certainly the

duller place of the two when it came to that line of amusements classed under the general head of dissipation.

"When does Mrs. Stuart's husband intend to return to America?" asked Fawcett, one evening at the dinner-table, of his wife. "It seems to me they are having a rather long separation."

Mabel glanced at him quickly to see if there was any hidden meaning in his inquiry. No, there was none, and she drew a little sigh of relief.

"He doesn't seem to say anything about it," she answered. "She read me his last letter and he seemed quite contented where he was."

"He must be a queer fellow," observed Fawcett. "I don't see how a man can be content for years away from a woman like her. There are some wives that a fellow might consider himself lucky to be so far from, but not a sweet, lovable girl like Mattie. The strangest thing to me is that she stands it."

Mabel looked at him again. Could he be drawing comparisons? She dismissed the thought as soon as it was formed. Allan was not one to insinuate. When he had anything to say it was apt to come out like a bullet from a gun.

"Mattie doesn't care for men," she said, simply. And as she uttered the words her cheek grew like fire, in spite of her efforts.

"What did she marry one for, then?" he blurted out. "Oh, these modern marriages, they make me wild. People marry nowadays just as they buy a ticket for a theatre, and if they don't happen to fancy their seat, they go out between the acts. I'd like to know what the world is coming to. Now, I'd wager a dollar that Mrs. Stuart is not so contented at the long absence of

her husband as she wants you to think. There is a species of pride that will make a woman suffer a great deal in such a case without admitting it to her dearest friend. She was made to be loved, that girl was, and it makes me sad every time I think of her living all alone in that solitary flat."

Mrs. Fawcett did not relish over-much this panegyric. She remembered the time when this same Mattie had caused her uneasiness, in the days of her early acquaintance with Allan. It gave her a start to hear him praising her now, in that enthusiastic way. She had never had a moment's jealousy of her husband since their marriage. She had a glimpse for a second of how she should feel if Allan ever gave her cause for a visit from the green-eyed monster.

If Mabel had been told, when her concealment of Mattie Stuart's troubles began, that she would have gone as far in her defence as she was now going, she would have repelled the idea with the utmost indignation. Her loyalty to her friend was the outgrowth of what was really a lovable trait in her disposition. The demands upon her came so gradually that one step led into another before she realized what she was doing. First, it was to pretend that the reason Mr. Stuart did not come to Norwood was because he had taken a journey to the far South. Next, she gave Mattie little things in the way of clothing out of her own stock, as she found them needed. Pretty soon, when the two women were shopping together, new articles for Mattie's original use were purchased with Mr. Fawcett's money.

It was not so very wrong, Mabel said to herself. It did not amount to a great deal, and Mattie needed the things badly. She would use less than Mattie might have a share. The young wife was so deeply attached

to her friend that she could not bear to think of a separation, and whatever was in Mabel's purse was equally at either's disposal.

Frank Selden had had his way, long before Mabel had dreamed of it. Skilled in the art of winning women, he had slowly but surely taught Mattie Stuart to believe that the love she felt for him should be more to her than the flimsy tie the law recognized as binding her to a man she feared and hated. The clandestine meetings came to mean a glimpse of heaven to the disconsolate young woman.

To do Frank what justice we may, he had a real affection for Mattie, and from the time he could call her his own he gave her the fealty that a real wife might have claimed. She did not want to go to live at Boston, for her attachment to Mabel was at least the second strongest one she had, and Selden was well pleased to remain in New York. It was at her suggestion that Mrs. Fawcett persuaded her husband to remove to Forty-second Street, where their homes could be adjacent.

The flat that Mattie occupied was a very inexpensive one, and Mabel was completely deceived when she came to her with the story that her husband had agreed to send her a small sum each month, that would cover the rent and an economical table. She saw no reason why Mattie should tell her an untruth. Algy had a fixed income and it was reasonable that he should have concluded to do the decent thing and let his wife have a part of it. Mrs. Stuart, acting under the direction of a shrewder head than her own, bought her furniture on instalments, and maintained such an air of quiet poverty that Mabel offered assistance in many ways, which was accepted with the warmest thanks. For

six months after she began housekeeping numerous articles were bought on the Fawcett account and delivered at the other flat, with instructions to the grocer not to mention it to Mr. Fawcett when the bills were presented, in case he complained that they were excessive.

To help and protect her friend, Mabel had to disgrace her husband before many people. From the kitchen-girl to the grocer and the coal-dealer there was a row of individuals who knew that Mrs. Fawcett was buying goods in the name of one house and having them sent to another; and every one of them had their own suspicions as to the object which the pretty young wife had in this deception.

The first thing that Mabel discovered was on a winter's morning when she went, at an hour earlier than she had ever selected, to make a call on Mrs. Stuart. Something had arisen which she wanted to discuss with her friend, and she ran over as soon as Allan left the house. She did not ring the lower bell, as a tenant was entering the hallway at the moment, but walked nimbly up the stairs and knocked at the parlor door of the apartment she sought. Hearing no response she knocked again, this time much louder, when the faint whispering of two persons inside came to her astonished ears.

The whispering ceased, and after a moment's pause, Mrs. Fawcett rapped again, this time in a peremptory manner. Then the noise of some one moving was heard, and a form approached the door.

"Who's there?" said a voice, which she easily recognized as Mattie's.

"Mabel," was the answer. "Let me in. I want to talk to you."

There was a new scurrying, and a delay that seemed incredibly long. But finally the door was opened and Mrs. Stuart was discerned, half covered with a dressing-gown that she had hastily slipped on.

"What a terrible time it takes you to open a door!" said Mabel.

Mrs. Stuart looked "as if she should sink," to use a familiar feminine comparison. She had about the limpness of a rag doll, and was totally unable for a few moments to make the least reply. Mrs. Fawcett saw that something unusual was the matter, and thought it the part of kindness to inquire.

"You look like a ghost!" said she. "Take a seat and tell me what has happened to excite you so."

Mrs. Stuart accepted the suggestion and sank upon the sofa. She was so evidently suffering that Mabel sat down beside her and embraced her affectionately.

"Tell me all about it, my poor child!" she said. "I know you have company, for I heard you whispering. Who is it, and why are you so agitated? Your hands are like ice and you are trembling like a leaf."

The hope that Mrs. Fawcett had *not* heard—to which she had clung like a drowning man to a spar—deserted Mrs. Stuart. She could only cry, in a faint voice, "*Oh, Mabel!*" and fall weeping on the other's shoulder.

"Wait, my dear! Don't get excited. Take your time," said Mabel, soothingly. "Whatever your trouble is, I will help you share it. I am so glad I came over this morning. I had you on my mind all night. My dreams were filled with you."

Mattie was not in the least prepared for this visit and did not know what to say. She had never calcu-

lated on Mabel's calling before afternoon, and had not imagined that it was she at the door when she heard the knock. She feared to speak, lest in trying to make things right with her friend she might get herself into a worse dilemma. She remained silent so long that Mrs. Fawcett began to ask questions.

"Who slept with you last night, Mattie? I know that must have something to do with the matter."

Mrs. Stuart gave a gasp. Was there anything that could save her secret now?

"No one slept *with me*," she replied, as if her tongue was partly paralyzed. "I—didn't want to tell you, for fear you would think it foolish, but—I have a lodger."

A lodger! To eke out her slender income! Mabel thought she saw it all now. Mattie had hesitated to tell her, in the pride of her poverty. Well, it was nothing to mind—nothing at all. She was about to say so, when Mrs. Stuart upset the whole kettle by her next statement.

"I—I wanted the money, you know," she went on. "And he will pay well, very well, indeed. He——"

She could get no farther. Releasing the hold she had had upon her, Mrs. Fawcett rose, with a look of horror on her face.

"*A man!*" she exclaimed. "*A man!* And you were in that chamber together—I heard you whispering with him! Mattie—tell me the truth!"

The poor woman rose and stretched out her hands imploringly.

"Don't be so hard, Mabel. You are not right. He was in the *next* room, not in mine. I thought—it was some one—for him, who knocked—for I did not expect a caller so early. No, you accuse me unjustly.

Believe me, Mabel! If you lose faith in me I have nothing left."

Mrs. Fawcett thought rapidly. She did not wish to believe wrong of this woman, but neither did she wish to be deceived.

"Tell me who that man is!" she said, in an imperative tone.

"Ah! You can guess," was the blushing reply, "But he has the further room—oh, believe me, Mabel!"

Suddenly a light seemed to dawn on the questioner.

"It is Mr. Stuart!" she cried. "Well, well! You needn't act so frightened about it. And you didn't mean that I should know! Poor little girl!" She folded Mattie in her arms again. "Is he to stay long? I know it must be unpleasant for you. There! Don't say another word. I'll keep mum. Let me know after this when he's at home and I'll never disturb you. I wouldn't meet him for a diamond necklace. I only came to see if you would go to the theatre this afternoon, but another day will do. The best thing for me is to get out, as I couldn't possibly use him decent if he should come into the room. Come over by and by if you can, and send me a note next time when the coast is clear."

She kissed her friend warmly, not waiting for her to reply, and made a hasty exit. And Mrs. Stuart stood looking at the door through which she had vanished, wondering at the miracle that had saved her from what looked like a bottomless pit opening at her feet.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNPLEASANT SITUATION.

FOR a long time the game of mutual deception went on in this manner—Mrs. Fawcett deceiving her husband and Mrs. Stuart deceiving her. Mabel wanted to tell Allan that Stuart had returned from South America, saying to Mattie that this might make things easier in case he should come to learn that Algernon was in the city, but Mattie begged her above all things to do nothing of the kind. She pretended that Mr. Stuart only came at infrequent intervals, and that she endured him merely for the pecuniary assistance he had begun to give her. It might be weeks at a time, she said, that he would be absent, and she did not want Fawcett to know or think anything about the matter.

Having been so near detection once, Mrs. Stuart was on her guard after that day, and months went by before anything more came to arouse Mabel's suspicions. All this time she was getting used to telling her husband things that were untrue, and became in fact a most accomplished and smooth falsifier. She and Allan got along together without much friction, though his temper depended a good deal on the state of the hay and grain market. They were not companions in the way that marriage is supposed to make people, but they did not quarrel seriously. Mabel was willing to get most of her amusement with Mattie, and he was quite willing she should.

With Fawcett the day was divided into four parts. He attended to business till six o'clock; played with Cecil till eight or nine; read till half-past ten or eleven; and slept soundly—in his own room—till morning. Mabel spent most of her afternoons and some of her evenings at Mattie's flat, when Mattie was not at hers. Often she took Cecil with her. Frequently when there was a *matinée* the two women attended it. Allan was little more in her life than a provider of necessities.

Mrs. Morey came to see the Fawcetts once in awhile, but she did not make long visits. Her sister, Mrs. Selden, was in miserable health and required her constant care at Boston. She saw nothing to cause her to suspect that anything was wrong with Mattie, and quite approved of the attempt on Mabel's part to make her life less disagreeable. The only thing she did not like was the fact that her daughter occupied a room apart from her husband.

"I know it is a modern notion, my dear," she said, in response to Mabel's statement to that effect, "but I do not believe in it any more for that. A husband and wife are in constant danger of being drawn away from each other, and the first thing likely to produce that effect is their separation at night."

"But Allan sleeps as soundly as a bat," said Mabel, "when he is not disturbed, and he likes it better this way. Sometimes I have to get up with Cecil, and then it might wake him and he would perhaps lose the whole of the rest of the night. And then, he does not like feathers, and you know I've always slept on them."

The widow shook her head gravely.

"A woman who loves her husband as she ought,"

said she, "would not know whether she slept on feathers or stone, so that his arms were about her! Be careful, Mabel, not to let Allan get too far from you, while you are young. When your hair begins to silver there will come enough danger of losing him for a fresher and prettier face. In that day give him no excuse of previous coldness to seek another love."

Mabel flushed at the thought—the one thought that could cause her heart to beat faintly. If Allan should ever even look lovingly at another woman it seemed to her that she should die.

"I am not cold to him, mamma," she said. "Allan is a peculiar man and he gets tired out with his office-work. It is his preference to secure undisturbed rest. I can't force myself upon him. You worry over things that nobody can help."

Mrs. Morey was not satisfied with the explanation, but she was too wise to press the matter. She had given Mabel her ideas on the subject and hoped they would bear fruit for good.

One day, after her mother had returned to Boston, Mabel was about to enter the building where Mattie lived when she saw Frank Selden emerging from it. He saw her at the same moment and with the quickness of a flash decided to tell her as much of the truth as he dared, knowing that were she to become suspicious she could interview the janitor with damaging effect.

"Hallo, Mabel!" he exclaimed gayly. "Why didn't you come a little sooner? I've been upstairs looking for Stuart, and if you had been there your cousin might have had the grace to invite me in. Algy's out of town, she says."

Mabel looked at him with some surprise.

"I didn't know you knew Mr. Stuart," she remarked.

"And you evidently don't think it much to my credit that I do," he laughed. "A fellow is pushed for good company in a town like this, sometimes. I happened to meet the Cleveland gentleman at a club that I frequent, and he asked me to call on him some day when I had nothing else to do. It was because I had reached exactly that deplorable condition this afternoon that I came here. I really am dying for something to occupy my time. You might ask me up with you, if you are going to make a call."

Mrs. Fawcett saw no objection to this and gave the invitation accordingly. Selden knew that he was running a reckless risk to go back to Mattie's apartments in Mabel's company without preparing Mrs. Stuart in any way, but he liked sensational things and thought it would be great fun. When Mattie came to the door in response to the knock he spoke at once to set things right.

"My cousin wants to have a little talk with me," he said, smiling, "and she thinks you will let me come in here for a few minutes."

Mattie controlled herself with a great effort.

"Certainly, she is quite right," she answered. "You can have the parlor with the greatest of pleasure."

"Oh, we don't want to drive you out of it," Selden said, with another laugh. "To tell the exact truth, I persuaded her to let me come up, as I don't know what else to do with myself. I was quite disappointed not to find Mr. Stuart in when I called a few minutes ago. I did not know he had left the city."

With these few words he had given her the key to the entire situation. Seeing that Mattie was not likely to

be betrayed into any exposure Frank set about making himself as agreeable as possible to both of them and succeeded admirably. Before he left they had agreed to go with him to a play that was attracting great attention and which neither had yet seen.

"Allan always puts Cecil to bed now," explained Mabel, "and I am out very often till quite late. He goes to sleep early and never knows when I come in."

Selden knew by the way she said this that Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett were drifting a little apart, but he affected to notice nothing. It was enough for him that he could get out of doors with Mattie under the cover of her married cousin. He had been fearful of being seen with her, especially at places of amusement, lest some suspicious person should notice them together. Now it would be easy enough. If he could quiet Mabel's notions of propriety, he could take them both to a hundred places and explain everything by her presence in the party. One was his own cousin—quite the same thing as a member of his family. The other bore the same relationship to her. He was greatly elated when he left the house with Mabel, a little before the time that Allan was expected to dinner, and as soon as she was around the corner he took out his latch-key and went in again.

"We shall have everything our own way now," he cried to Mattie. "We have only to reckon Mabel one of us to go where we like."

Mrs. Stuart loved this man with her whole soul. She would never have sacrificed so much for him had it not been for the deep affection that had moved her heart. His wealth had little to do with it. She took of what he offered her only enough to support the bare necessities of existence. He would have given her an

elegant house, richly furnished; she accepted merely the cheap flat with its ordinary furniture. He wanted her to wear diamonds on her fingers and the finest clothing; she persuaded him that such a course would only lead to the discovery of their secret. She loved him, deeply, tenderly. The contrast which his devotion presented with the conduct of her legal mate was most pronounced.

"I wouldn't get Mabel into trouble for anything in the world," she replied, thoughtfully.

"How could it do that?" he asked. "She doesn't have any too much fun, with that money-grubbing man of hers. Supposing we go to an occasional play, and to a supper or two at a private restaurant, who is it going to harm? And it will be such a god-send to us! If the devil himself should walk in and say to me, 'What are you doing with these women?' I should only have to say, 'Allow me to present my cousin Mrs. Fawcett—my mother's sister's daughter.' And Mabel would rise with equal grace to add, And *my* cousin, Mrs. Stuart, my father's sister's child. Why, there's absolutely no flaw in it!"

And this is the way it came about that Mrs. Fawcett accompanied her cousin and her cousin's paramour to all sorts of places, where they were seen by all sorts of people, who formed all sorts of conclusions. The regard that Frank had for Mattie was too strong to be wholly concealed even in Mabel's presence. In the private dining-rooms to which they went she could not fail to perceive the delicacy of his touch when he took off her cloak or helped her on with it, the gentleness of his voice when he addressed her · the rapt attention that he paid when she was speaking. It all came in such a consecutive order that Mabel did not

mind it. She was glad that Mattie had found so good a friend, and that Frank had apparently changed so much for the better. She was quite prepared to hear without dissent what he told her once, when they had gone to Mrs. Stuart's door with her, and he was pretending to seek his own room in an opposite direction.

"Mabel, I wouldn't like you to say so to her, but if Mrs. Stuart ever gets a divorce from that worthless fellow who has ruined her life, I shall ask her to marry me."

"I wish she could," was the reply. "Can't you find out if there isn't a way? She hates him, and there is no reason why she should cling to such a worse than useless marriage as hers."

"It's an unpleasant situation for both of us," mused Frank. "She can't help knowing how much I care for her, and yet I am not in a position to say anything."

Mabel walked on for a short time thoughtfully.

"Don't they give divorces for desertion?" she queried presently.

"Not when the husband comes and occupies the flat with his wife every few weeks, I'm afraid."

Mrs. Fawcett looked up eagerly.

"Oh, but that's nothing," she said. "He has a room there, but——" She paused, for the rich blood had flooded her cheeks.

"You mean," said Frank, slowly, "that she is not living with him as his wife."

"I'm sure she isn't," said Mabel earnestly.

"So am I," he replied darkly. "If I thought she was, I'd go up there and land him in the back-yard with a broken neck. Yes, Mabel, I will see what the law can do. I will consult my own attorney to-morrow.

In the meantime she mustn't know anything about it. She is very high-minded and might resent such interference in her affairs."

Mabel thought Frank very honorable. It was romantic to be loved in that way by a man who held his dulcinea in such esteem that he would not speak a word that might lower her in her own eyes. She was glad to have the opportunity of helping on that ideal match when the Stuart chain should drop from her friend's neck.

"Why does she allow him to come there at all?" asked Selden. "It would be better if she refused him entrance."

"She would be glad to if she could afford it," explained Mabel, with the utmost frankness. "Mattie hasn't a cent of her own, and I suppose the little sums he leaves her come handy."

Frank seemed lost in thought for some seconds.

"Mabel," he said, at last, "I wish you would help me to solve this matter. I am sure no lawyer would expect to get a divorce for a woman while her husband dwells ever so little in the same apartment. One can't explain such things to a judge. She must absolutely refuse to let him come there."

Mrs. Fawcett eyed him questioningly.

"I'd be glad to help you—to help you both," said she, "if I had the money. I have given her as much as I could, but not enough to support her. I don't have that amount to spare."

Selden addressed her earnestly.

"*You* haven't the money, and I didn't suppose you had. I didn't mean that. I meant that *I* could furnish it myself if there was any way to satisfy her that she ought to take it."

It was a straw and Mabel grasped at it. She wanted very much to see Mattie freed from Algernon Stuart.

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"Couldn't I give you the money, and you let Mattie—I mean Mrs. Stuart—have it, pretending it was your own?"

Mabel shook her head.

"She knows my affairs too well. And beside she has had so much from me already that it troubles her a great deal."

"Well, then," said Frank, positively, "there is only one other way. I must hire that room which Stuart has occupied and pay a liberal price for it."

The listener had a momentary attack of real fright. What was it that Frank had said?

"I looked the ground over one day for myself," he went on rapidly, not wishing to let her speak too soon. "There is an entrance to that room from the hallway. She can bar the middle door up with five-inch plank if she chooses. With the money I pay her for that room she can retain her flat till—till I can gain the right through the law to tear the partition down."

Mabel could not agree off-hand to this proposition, and Frank did not suppose she would when he advanced it. It was enough for that day that she did not give utterance to any violent opposition. She simply shook her head with the air of one who does not coincide with the views she hears.

"Well," said Selden, as they reached the corner that led toward her residence, "you know my views, at any rate. I am ready to do anything that is reasonable to relieve her of her present entanglement, and after that I will make her my own, if she will let me. When you think it over by yourself you may find some better way.

All I ask is that, in whatever you say to her, you will not compromise me."

Selden could hardly wait till he was out of sight before bursting into a hearty laugh. The last words he had spoken to his cousin appealed to his sense of humor when he came to think them over. Still he did care a great deal for Mattie, and he had no intention of doing anything to lose her the friendship of Mrs. Fawcett. He was in constant fear that Mabel would learn of his presence in that house and that, in the flood of indignation which would sweep over her, she would withdraw herself permanently from Mattie's society.

Mabel thought about her friend's dilemma nearly the whole of the night, and could arrive at no solution better than the one Frank had proposed. The more she thought about it the less revolting it seemed. Frank had certainly changed a great deal. He was not the sort of man he used to be. The plotter ended by going to Mrs. Stuart the next day and advising her to let Mr. Stuart's room to some one else.

"But who would hire it?" asked Mattie, primed for her work by Selden's explanation. "There are very few women who could afford to pay as much as I would have to ask."

"That is true," said Mabel. "But there are plenty of men. You could board up that middle door and let them use the outer one exclusively."

Mattie rose to inspect the premises in question and her friend followed her.

"Yes, I could do that," said Mrs. Stuart. "The next thing, though, is to find the lodger."

"Perhaps Mr. Selden would know of some one," suggested Mabel, guardedly.

Mrs. Stuart bowed assent.

"I will ask him to-day," said Mabel; "he has promised to meet me here at half-past two."

When Mabel came at half-past two she found Mr. Selden there before her. It was not uncommon now for him to precede her at these appointments and her suspicions were absolutely lulled.

"I've found a tenant for my room," were the words with which Mrs. Stuart greeted her cousin. She wore a bright smile on her face as she said it. "Mr. Selden says he will take it himself."

Although this was exactly what Mrs. Fawcett expected the negotiations would come to, she was rather surprised to find them so quickly completed.

"I have been intending to make a change for a long time," explained Frank, "and that room suits me to perfection. Why, look here." He led them into the chamber. "How could it be more cosy? You will have to fire these traps out though," he added, to Mrs. Stuart, kicking a pair of his own shoes under the bed, and tossing one of his discarded collars into the closet.

She said she would pack them up and send them to Cleveland without delay, and everybody seemed suddenly imbued with a spirit of joy. Frank would have given a few hundred to have been able to kiss Mattie on the spot, but he knew that would never do. He said he would move his things in before the evening was over, and in honor of the event he persuaded the ladies to go out with him to a little lunch at a nice cabinet particulaire a short distance away.

After Selden had gone through the pretence of moving into a room which he had occupied for the past five months Mabel noticed at her next call that the promised carpenter work had not been done on the middle doorway.

"I've sent for the man, but he is very busy," explained Mattie. "There's a bolt and a curtain there, though, for the present."

Mrs. Fawcett was lost in thought for a moment.

"I don't believe I'd put anything more up, Mattie," she said. "He will know about it and it will look as if you suspected him."

"Perhaps you are right," murmured Mrs. Stuart, contemptively.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHY DID YOU TELL ME LIES."

ALLAN FAWCETT might have gone on in the way he was living until old age, had he continued to enjoy the bliss of ignorance. His life was neither very happy nor unhappy. As far as business was concerned it worried him less now that his transactions were in the hundred thousands than when they were in the minor figures. He had fallen into a certain fatalism in regard to profits and losses. There seemed little probability that he would ever be able to get enough out of Decker & Co. to pay the debt he owed Selden, except by retiring from the firm; but, on the other hand, the security was reckoned good, and he could easily have obtained the amount elsewhere. Decker had looked like a very big fish to the small merchant in Norwood, but in this vast mill-pond of New York it was not much itself compared with the gigantic sharks and whales whose ravenous maws were altogether insatiable.

He drew enough from the safe to make him comfortable, and saw his apparent balance go up and down like a column of mercury in a variable climate. It was

work, playing with Cecil, reading and then bed with him, and nothing else. His wife reckoned for very little in his existence. He hardly thought it interesting now even to quarrel with her, except when he felt unusually cross, or something out of the ordinary annoyed him about the household matters.

There are said to be something like three billions of people in this world, and why Fawcett should have run upon the particular one of them who could arouse him from his lethargy and stir up all that was hateful in him is a mystery. He was taking a journey on business connected with his firm, in the summer following the events narrated in the preceding chapter, when he fell into conversation with a man who occupied the seat with him in the car; and, by that odd sort of fate which leads travellers on common ground, he happened to mention his name and occupation.

"Well, that's odd!" said his companion. "My wife is a cousin of yours. My name is Stuart."

Fawcett eyed the man with a certain surprise. He had formed a not very favorable opinion of Mr. Stuart although he had never seen him before.

"When did you return from South America?" he asked, in the most natural way, for he had never doubted his wife's numerous references to that locality in connection with Mattie's solitary condition.

Mr. Stuart looked oddly at his questioner.

"I never was in South America in my life," he replied.

"Never—in South—America!" repeated Fawcett. "You've been out that way somewhere, haven't you, for the past few years?"

"Not that I am aware of. My home is in Cleveland. You must be thinking of some other person."

No, Fawcett was thinking of no other person. He was thinking of this person, and wondering who was responsible for the report he had so often heard.

"I had an idea that you were out of the country," he said, lamely. "Your wife was at my house for a long time, you know."

"And isn't she there now?" asked Mr. Stuart.

Fawcett almost rose from his seat, in the extremity of his astonishment. Didn't this man know any more about his wife than that!

"Why, of course she isn't!" he exclaimed. "She left us nearly a year ago."

Mr. Stuart seemed to take only a languid interest in this disclosure.

"I never see her or hear from her," he explained. "We didn't seem as well mated as we thought, and she chose to go her own way."

Fawcett hated to exhibit his surprise, but there was no way he could conceal it.

"You never hear from her!" he repeated, acting as if he could not credit it. "You never write to her or get letters?"

Stuart shook his head.

"Never," he said. "We both made a mistake, and separation was the easiest way out of it. She thought I had money, and I supposed her father was rich. She wanted a style of living that I could not give her. I did not tell her to go, and it was not my place to ask her to return."

The eyelids of the commission merchant twitched spasmodically. He wondered how it would seem to have his Mabel living somewhere away from him, without his knowing where, or what she was doing. It came over him suddenly how much he really loved his

wife, for the thought of losing her made him faint and giddy. His contempt for Stuart increased momentarily, and he was glad when he reached the station where he was to leave the train. The air of the street was grateful after breathing the same atmosphere with such a cur.

But the more he thought about it the more nervous he grew. If Mrs. Stuart had left her husband because she was dissatisfied with the income he allowed her, how had she bettered it? He was sure her father's estate was insolvent when he died. Her mother was subsisting on the charity of another child, unless he had been misinformed. It took money to live in a world like this. Whenever he had seen Mattie he had noticed that she had not the appearance of being poverty-stricken. She occupied a flat and had food and clothing, at somebody's expense. Whose? It was not easy to connect her with anything disreputable, but he determined to have this question answered, and without much more delay. Mabel associated with her too intimately to have doubts hanging over so important a matter.

That night, when he reached home, his wife was out. That was not strange enough to startle him. Mollie, skilled in the art of lying from long experience, told him that Cecil had been put to bed by his mother before she left the house, and that she had left word that she would spend the rest of the evening at Mrs. Stuart's.

Allan went into the child's room and kissed the little fellow in his sleep. How like an angel he looked, with his flaxen hair falling over his white forehead! For half an hour the father sat by the crib, content with the sight. Then he went into the parlour, took up a new magazine, cut the leaves and tried to read.

Between him and the pages there came a hundred things that kept him from knowing what was printed there. Over the engravings crept other pictures not at all agreeable. Supposing Mattie was not the kind of woman she ought to be, and that Mabel—too innocent to suspect such evil—had been associating with her all this time, putting her purity so close to the soiled life of her companion!

They had been the dearest of friends. If he found cause to suspect anything wrong they must be separated without delay. His wife would be slow to believe anything against Mattie, and it might not be easy to prove his case, even if the circumstances were doubtful in their character. But he would investigate the matter fully. He would not run the risk of having Mabel continue to go about with a woman on whom the least breath of suspicion might rest.

It was nearly twelve when Mrs. Fawcett entered the house. She came in noiselessly, as was her wont, thinking that if he had returned he would be asleep and she must not disturb him. As she slipped toward her room he called her.

“Why do you creep in like that?” he demanded. “Have you been doing something you are ashamed of?”

Now, during his long wait, he had planned to open the conversation in the gentlest and most diplomatic manner. Her soft and cat-like steps broke this resolution and scattered it to the winds. Mabel entered the parlor with cheeks aflame.

“What is it now?” she asked, defiantly. “Grain dropped again?”

He had been told a hundred times that he was in the habit of coming home cross whenever the market went the wrong way, and she could hardly have said

anything more galling to him. She had, indeed, not chosen the expression because she thought he would find it agreeable. He had hurt her, and she took the first weapon that came to hand to strike him in return.

"No, it's not grain this time," he replied, with clear, cutting tones. "It's something else that's fallen, a good deal heavier. Look out you're not buried under it. Why have you been telling me all these lies about Mattie Stuart?"

The color in Mrs. Fawcett's face left it, and she stood there very white before her judge. Where had he heard anything about Mattie, and what had he learned?

"Has she had any letters from *South America* lately?" he asked, with drawling sarcasm.

Mabel took a chair. She was becoming too weak to stand.

"How do I know?" she said. Perhaps by using generalities she could compel him to reveal the exact amount of his information. "She doesn't tell me everything she does."

The husband paused an instant.

"Did you believe Mr. Stuart was out of this country, all this time?" he asked. "Or did you and she make that story up together to deceive me?"

Allan knew that the South American tales were false. This much was evident. Mabel wanted to get out of the trouble herself and yet she dreaded getting Mattie into it. She could easily see that the tendency was toward making him unwilling the women should continue associates.

"You say therossest things when you get started," she answered, knitting her brows. "What makes you

think he isn't there? You would believe any person sooner than your wife."

"First tell me what made you suppose he *was*," said Fawcett. "You have talked to me about it fifty times, have spoken of letters from him, and of his intention to remain an indefinite period. If she has told you such things she is not the kind of woman I want my wife going to see; for I met Mr. Stuart to-day, and he told me he had never seen South America or any other foreign country, and that he had made his home in Cleveland ever since Mattie left him."

The situation of the young wife was certainly embarrassing. If Allan absolutely forbade her to associate with Mrs. Stuart, she would lose the pleasantest part of her existence. It was better to take all the blame on herself than to have him get such a bad opinion of Mattie. Mabel had been so long acquiring the science of deceit that the simple truth was well-nigh impossible to her. She regarded Mr. Fawcett as a man to circumvent, to evade, to blind the eyes of. His wrath had better descend on her than on her friend.

"You are so quick and so unreasonable sometimes," she explained, "that I don't know what to say to you. When Mattie first came to our house I wasn't very well—it was the summer, you know, after Cecil was born—and it did me a great deal of good to have her there. You were gone all day, as you are now, and I was pining for some one to talk to and be with. She had left her husband for good, though she didn't tell me for a long time, and I thought you would wonder that he never came to see her. She didn't like to say anything to you about it—and—so—I just thought—I would tell you——"

"A lie!" said Fawcett, to finish her sentence.

The harsh expression brought the tears to Mabel's eyes.

"Oh, stop blubbing!" he cried. "If you are able to tell your husband as bald a lie as that, and stick to it for years, making up new ones to help it out, you ought to stand the exposure without acting like a baby!"

She tried her best to check the flow, but it could not be done immediately.

"Allan, you are awful," she sobbed.

"Why, haven't I given it the right name?" he asked. "What do *you* call telling a thing that's not so, and sticking to it month after month, with detail and circumstance? You wouldn't say it was the *truth*, would you? And what isn't the truth is a *lie*. Doesn't sound pretty, does it?"

Mrs. Fawcett blew her nose and dug her handkerchief into her eyes.

"No, it doesn't," she assented. "And you ought not to use a word like that to the mother of your child."

She threw Cecil in as sailors throw oil on the raging waves, but the act had an effect opposite to the one intended.

"How can you bring the name of that pure child into a matter like this?" he retorted. "Would you like him to know that his mother is a falsifier?"

"I wouldn't like him to know," she sobbed, "that his father calls me everything he can think of, whenever he happens to come home cross and ugly."

"Have I called you anything you are not?" said he, sharply. "I depend on your own admission."

Mabel began to unbutton her dress, in her nervousness, wanting something to keep her fingers busy.

"I didn't think it would do any harm," she stammered. "You are not like other men; you won't listen to reason. Mattie never knew what I told you. She was in a great deal of trouble, and I was very sorry for her."

She pulled off her basque, and somehow the sight of her arms and neck began to mollify him.

"You're pretty intimate there," said he. "Will you tell me what she is living on? And don't say it's money from Stuart, for he never corresponds with her in any way."

Fawcett had touched the most dangerous part of the ground he was traversing, but the sight of the half-draped beauty before him caused a lowering of his voice and a banishing of the disagreeable element in his tone. Quite unconscious of the cause, Mabel was fully cognizant of the effect, and she lost most of her fear. Leaning over to unlace her boots, she spoke in her usual voice.

"She has relations who help her, I understand. And then she lets a room or two, which pays the rent. She doesn't have much, just the barest necessities."

Fawcett heard her vaguely. He was looking at her with the eyes of a lover. How sweet and sylph-like she was! It was a long time since he had seen her so closely. He was like one who comes upon a treasure hidden away in a forgotten place.

"I didn't mean to be cross," he said, in a low tone. "Only it isn't nice to learn that one's wife doesn't tell him the truth. Don't do it again, Mabel. Let me know everything, no matter what, for when a man loses confidence in his wife's word, it is a terrible blow."

He came over and kissed her, something he had not done for months. Delighted to have escaped the

threatening danger so easily, she returned his embrace, and in a few moments they wore no appearance of having been so recently engaged in throwing unpleasant expressions at each other.

As soon as Allan left the house in the morning, Mabel hastened to her friend to tell her what had happened. She had to ring three times before she got an answer, and with her ear to the tube she certainly heard a door open and shut in the apartment. Mattie explained to her afterwards that she had thrown a few things into a closet, to make the bedroom look more tidy.

"You're a darling girl, to do all that for me," she said, when she heard the story. "And you feel quite sure that his suspicions are completely quieted now?"

"Yes, indeed," smiled Mabel, prettily. "He was as sweet to me this morning as one could ask. Why, it was like a piece of our honeymoon over again."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TURKISH BATH.

ANOTHER winter passed, during which the most important event that occurred to the characters in our story was the sudden death of Mrs. Morey. She expired at her sister's house in Boston, without the least warning, there having been nothing to indicate that she was in a delicate state of health. Mrs. Selden, the invalid to whose care she had devoted herself for the past few years, was, as is so often the case, to outlive her faithful attendant. Mabel mourned her mother sincerely, and returned from the funeral with a feeling

that Allan and Cecil were more to her now than they had ever been. She spent a good deal of her time as formerly, with Mrs. Stuart, for it was lonely at her own house all day when Allan was not there, and in the evening it was his custom to sit and read, and he was not much company for his wife. He raised no objection when she proposed to "run over to Mattie's" for a little while, and generally was sound asleep when she returned.

Frank Selden still devoted considerable of his time to his sweetheart, and Mabel took innumerable lunches with them, as well as attended many theatrical performances in their company. The longer Fawcett was kept in ignorance of these things the safer they seemed, and if he ever should discover it, why, what great harm could result? It was all perfectly respectable, Mabel said to herself. No one would be likely to accuse Mattie of impropriety, and Frank behaved nicely. The restaurants were good ones, and the plays entirely proper.

Heavens! What would have become of them all if they had not happened to get into this way of amusing themselves? It was the salvation of Mattie, keeping her, as it did, from that execrable husband; it made the days much brighter for Mabel; and Frank Selden, who had not, she feared, always chosen the best of companions, seemed a wholly changed man.

The lawyer whom he had consulted told him that if Stuart remained entirely away from his wife for another year he would try to get a divorce for her on the ground of non-support. Then she and Frank would marry, and everything be like the ending of a child's story.

But the plans of mice and men, we are assured by

the poet, "gang aft agley." One of the partners in Decker & Co., in a thoughtless moment, happened to remark to Mr. Fawcett that he had seen Mrs. F. at the theatre the previous evening with Mr. Selden. He had no idea that he was revealing any secret, and mentioned the circumstance merely in the way of ordinary conversation.

"That was a good play at the Union Square last night," he said. He was reading a notice of it in the "Tribune," and as the paper was in front of his face he did not see the expression that crossed Fawcett's at his next sentence. "I noticed that Mrs. Fawcett seemed very much taken up with it."

The husband, who was writing at his desk, put down his pen abruptly. He wondered why Mabel had gone to a theatre without mentioning the circumstance to him. He detested anything that savored of slyness. If she wanted to see a play she knew he would not object. It was getting to be too much of a habit with her to act in a secretive way. However, he did not intend to let Mr. Hardy guess this, and he replied, in an ordinary tone, that his wife liked the performance very well.

"That Mrs. Stuart is a cousin of hers, isn't she?" pursued Mr. Hardy. He knew Mattie's face, having seen her at the office more than once. "Yes, I thought so," he added, as Mr. Fawcett made an affirmative reply. "A very good-looking young widow she is, too. I wonder if there is anything definite between her and Mr. Selden."

Had the broad sheet of the "Tribune" been lowered at that moment, Mr. Hardy would certainly have noticed a very peculiar expression on the face of his partner; but his eyes were now buried in the financial column.

Fawcett knew in an instant that Mattie's conduct had in some way given rise to the insinuation that Mr. Hardy made. She must have acted like a widow—like a woman free to marry—and in the company of Frank Selden at that.

Allan had never seen these two people together three times in his life. He had not known that they were on terms of the least intimacy. A great cavity seemed to open at his feet, as he considered the simple statement he had just heard. He had a cue that he must follow up. If there was anything like close friendship between a man like Selden and a woman who was legally another's wife, he would not have Mabel going to visit her again. To be found in Frank's society was in itself sufficient to cast a grave doubt on the character of any woman.

Fawcett tried to go on with the letter he had begun, but he made poor work of it, and Mr. Hardy, who had turned his paper again so as to read the editorial page, opened his mouth once more.

"I've always taken Mr. Selden for a confirmed bachelor," he said, "until within the past year or so. He's got the reputation, I know, of being a pretty gay boy. The first time I saw him at the theatre with Mrs. Stuart and your wife I was a little surprised. I remember pointing them out to Mrs. Hardy and remarking upon the matter. Then, when it continued to go on, and we saw them so often, she said—Mrs. Hardy said—'I tell you, Paul, that couple must be engaged.' We go to the theatre a good deal, you know, and afterwards to some restaurant—just as we did before we were married—and seeing them frequently at both places made us a little inquisitive. I promised to ask you a long time ago, but somehow I forgot it. Mrs.

Hardy said it must be something of the kind, for as Mrs. Fawcett is always along, like a sort of chaperon for her friend, there couldn't be any—

“By George, he's gone!”

The last exclamation was caused by a lowering of the newspaper and a discovery that Mr. Fawcett had left the room. Mr. Hardy indulged in a quiet laugh at his own expense, supposing that his partner had been called away by some pressing emergency in the pause between the joints of his harangue.

Fawcett had picked up his hat and coat and walked out of doors without taking the trouble to announce his departure to any one. He was as near insane at that moment as a man could well be and know the way to Forty-second Street. He met people of his acquaintance and passed without responding to their bows or greetings. He did not take any kind of conveyance, but walked on and on, neither seeing nor hearing any of the sights or sounds of the teeming city. He did not know what he intended to do when he got to the end of his journey. He had a dim idea that he ought to be at his domicile—that there was danger to be met there. It was something as if he had heard that a fire had caught between the floorings, and might envelop the entire edifice unless attended to with promptness.

It is a long walk from the vicinity of Park Place to Forty-second Street and before Fawcett had accomplished half of it his mind grew slightly clearer. Disgrace—that was it! He knew Frank Selden thoroughly. If that fellow had been going about with Mattie Stuart he could have had but one purpose in view. If he had been going with her, as Mr. Hardy testified, for a year or more, he had accomplished his intent long, very long.

ago. And Mabel—his Mabel—had gone to places of amusement *with* them, to theatres and restaurants, seen by a thousand people as well as one, piling the shame upon his head! Secretive, sly, hiding her acts from him in that lizard-like way she had fostered of late, she had assisted this notorious *roué* in his liaison! And her husband had gone on, suspecting nothing, playing with his innocent child, reading his books and magazines, and going to bed with the wife still out of the house!

Oh, it was beautiful! Men were in the Tombs awaiting trial for murder who had not half this provocation!

He would see Mabel, and then he would see Frank Selden. If the wealthy young rake gave him one insolent word he would break every bone in his face. Damn him and his money! To take an innocent woman like Mabel and drag her around with him and his paramour where fools might suspect even *her* immaculate purity—it was fearful! The lovers must have been very shrewd not to arouse the least glimmer of the truth in her mind. They must—they must—they—must——

Fawcett stopped in the middle of the street. A horrible thing had crept into his brain. He saw the shadow of a black and slimy apparition across his *own* threshold!

How was he to say which of these two women was deceived and which was the guilty one!!!

A voice at his elbow inquired if he were ill. He saw that quite a number of people had stopped to look at him. In a crowded city it takes but a minute to make a street impassable. Fawcett nerved himself to reply that nothing was the matter, and turned the corner, which was that of Broadway and Twenty-Fifth

Street. He could not go home now. If he were to enter his house at this time no one could say what might ensue.

There were stairs at his side that led into a basement and he saw the words "Turkish Bath" staring at him. Descending the steps he registered his name, took a ticket and entered a disrobing-room. This place was as good as another for the present. It would give him time to think.

In a few moments he was seated in the hot room. There were other men there, but he did not know them. He tried to reason intelligently, but he could not. Whichever theory he must accept, it was not a sweet morsel to swallow. In either case could he ever respect Mabel again. If it was she who had been imposed upon, she was too simple to make a safe wife for any man. If she had been the cunning one—and Mattie had been blinded—that would settle it all, of course. If they had acted as covers for each other—both guilty—that would be quite the same. Could either of them know so little of the world as to be swindled in such a manner? It did not seem possible. And the master-thought came and crowded out the rest: If *Mabel* was the mistress of Frank Selden what ought he—Allan Fawcett—to do?

How could he blame such a man for availing himself of that opportunity, if it came in his way. If a pretty wife chose to violate her marriage-vows was it to be expected a libertine would advise her to the contrary? It was certainly Mabel on whom the blame should fall.

Ought he to go home and kill her?

No, he would be hanged if he did! He would wait till he felt sure he was cool enough to dismiss her with only the few words that his righteous indignation

dictated. He would tell her to go to the devil—to seek the class of women to which she belonged—and then he would take Cecil away with him and try to forget the unworthy mother. That was the way for a sensible man to act. Murder was obsolete in such cases, except among the *contadini* of Sicily or the drunken negroes of Texas. He would not let Mabel add anything to the injury she had already done him, and he had no relish for a term behind the thick walls of a jail. He would wait, wait,—till he was perfectly certain he could control his temper, and could meet her as she ought to be met.

The shampooer came to take him into the rubbing room. Stretched on the marble slab, with the heavy hands of the attendant manipulating his flesh, Fawcett said to himself a hundred times that this was what he would do. He had got to thinking of only one possibility out of the three which he had at first taken up. Mabel must be Selden's *inamorata*. Mattie had only acted as a blind for them, a knowing one he had no doubt whatever. Her flat had been their convenient place of meeting. Mabel had begun this when she told him the falsehood about Algy Stuart's going to South America. How had he been fooled so long? He should have known that a wife who could calmly lie to her husband was capable of yet greater dishonor.

"Please turn over, sir," said the bathman.

Well, she would see before she died what became of such wives. Her path would descend easily into the slums, for her wealthy lover would tire of her as soon as her charms began to fade. Fawcett recalled Selden's expressions, long before :

"I could take her and love her for weeks, perhaps for months. She may grow ill-tempered ; she will cer-

tainly grow old; her hair will turn gray; her rounded curves will disappear; on her dimpled face wrinkles will come. Marriage! The very word disgusts me!"

And after that, what was the next step? Downward, always downward! A few years of misery, and then a frightful death. In that day she would know that her husband, hard as was his lot, had not the worst of this bargain to which she had forced him. He would still be a reputable citizen, regarded with honor by his fellow-men, when the wagon that bore her remains took its way with galloping horses to the Potter's Field!

"Now, if you will stand up, sir."

The attendant placed him under the shower-bath, which was much colder than he usually wanted it, but to-day he never gave the matter a thought. His mind was too excited for him to know much about temperatures. The man rubbed him down and dried every drop of moisture from his skin. Then he was shown to a couch, where he lay for an hour, until some one suggested that it was time to dress.

When he got out on the street again he felt much better. He looked at his watch and saw that it was noon. Should he go home now? No, he was not yet quite calm enough. He had resolved not to enter his house until he could speak to Mabel as dispassionately as a judge on the bench. So he took a long walk over Twenty-third Street to the river and up a lettered avenue and down again. After that he went into a theatre and passed three hours; and then, feeling slightly faint, he got a lunch at a restaurant.

It was now past six, and he walked slowly in the direction of his home. His home! Never could it be his home again! How happy he had been there, and now—it was all ended.

The pain of this reflection warned him that he was not yet in a condition to confront his wife. He strolled up Madison Avenue and beyond, till he saw the Harlem River in front of him. Then he strolled back again, through other streets. At last he entered his dwelling.

Unless things were very different from usual, Mabel would not be at home at that hour. (It was ten o'clock.) He would go up and wait for her and talk to her in an ordinary voice when she came back. Then he would pack the things he wanted and take them away with Cecil that very night. Yes, that was what he would do.

CHAPTER XXV.

“I KNOW YOU HAVE BEEN TRUE.”

HE went in without much noise, for he did not care to meet the servant if he could avoid it. The parlor was empty, as he turned up the low gas-jet in the chandelier. He would go in a minute to see Cecil—poor, motherless, worse than motherless boy! He uttered a sob that no amount of resistance could quite choke down, and immediately there came a low voice from the chamber beyond.

“Is that you, Allan?”

It was Mabel. She was in bed. When he reached her door Fawcett saw by the bright light burning there that she had a very white face—and was undoubtedly ill.

“I’m so glad you’ve come,” she whispered. “I’ve been terribly sick all day. Mattie stayed quite late with me, and Mollie did all she could, but there was no use in their sitting up. Oh, Allan, have I got to go through all that again!”

She had her handkerchief to her eyes when he entered and she did not remove it. She was crying in a subdued key, so utterly wretched that she would not have believed that anything could add to her distress.

Similes fail when one tries to describe the anguish that racked the unhappy husband. The idolatry which he had for his offspring; the sanctity that surrounded motherhood in his estimation; all this was met in its path through the waters by the gigantic iceberg of doubt! If his wife was faithful he could fall on his knees and worship her. If she was untrue the revelation she had given only made her more infamous in his sight.

There was a collision that nearly wrecked the frail craft, but the ship still floated on the crest of the waves. He wanted so dearly to believe in her that he was willing to catch at any hope. But he must have that awful question settled, and at once. He could not postpone it for an hour.

"You were at the theatre last night," was the only answer he made her.

She paused in her sobs behind the handkerchief and stole a furtive look at him. Her heart sank when she saw his face.

"Yes," she replied softly.

"With Frank Selden."

"I went with Mattie. And Frank—we happened to meet him, and he came along."

Mr. Fawcett caught his breath.

"Once in your life, Mabel, try to speak the truth," he answered, in a low voice. "I know it is not easy for you, but do the best you can. You see I know all about it. It is not only last night, that you have been with Selden but fifty other nights. You have been with

him to the theatre, to restaurants, and you know as well as I where else. I found it out to-day. Now, I am going to pack my things and get out of this house to-night with *my* child. That will leave you free to go to him—*with his!*”

Mabel Fawcett took the handkerchief from her eyes and sat up in the bed. For a moment she put both her hands to her temples with the action of one partly stunned. Then she got her feet on the floor and strode toward her husband.

“How do you *dare* speak like that to me?” she cried, with the utmost ferocity.

The astonished man saw a heavy bronze lamp seized from a table and swung above his head. He knew that his life was not worth a penny should it descend. It was not a pleasant position, to be placed on the defensive physically before this slender figure in its night-robes. But there was a greater thing than this in that pose of hers. There was every sign of outraged innocence.

“Explain to me, then,” he answered, “what you have been doing in his company. Why have you been to theatres and to suppers with him, night after night, and never mentioned a word of it to me?”

Mabel went slowly back to the bed, and sat down on the edge of it. She still kept a grasp on the weapon she had taken, though she let its weight rest again on the table. Her gray eyes were like coals and her nostrils were red as blood. A tremor ran over her frame, but her voice was firm.

“What have I been doing?” she replied, loftily. “I have been going to places of amusement. Why have I gone with Mr. Selden and Mattie? Because you never have asked me to go with *you!* Why have

I not told you? Because I do not consider it any of your business! They are respectable people and we have all behaved ourselves. You say you have made some great discoveries. Kindly tell me what they are. But, be careful, Allan Fawcett!" She raised the lamp again from the table. "It is not necessary that you should add inventions of your own."

He shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Put that thing down," he said, shortly. "You don't intend to break my skull with it, and you may as well let it alone."

She smiled satirically.

"Don't I?" she echoed. "I would break the skull of any man who would offer such an insult to me as you did a moment ago, and refuse to take it back. What gives you a right to outrage my feelings? All the privileges your marriage brought you have been kept sacred, but they do not include such conduct as you have been guilty of this night!"

He had not been in her presence five minutes, but he believed that, whatever she had done, she was yet chaste. He believed that her unborn babe was his untainted child. He was impatient with her for the long deceit she had practiced, for the risks she had run of her good name, for her reckless association with a man of Frank Selden's stamp. These things he meant to tell her in the future, but the load that had been removed from his mind made them seem of comparatively little moment.

"Very well, Mabel," he said, in a mollified tone. "I take back what I insinuated about you. You have been frightfully careless and you have done your reputation an irreparable injury, but I am only too glad to think you personally pure. Now it is your plain duty

to tell me the whole story, as there is certainly guilt somewhere. If it is not yours, it is Mattie Stuart's. Frank Selden is a libertine without the least conscience. I assure you I know him thoroughly. If he has not been spending the past year seeking to ruin you it is because he has found another victim. Let us have no more evasions. I want the whole truth."

But even then she had no idea of giving it to him. She did not realize the dreadful condition in which things had been but a moment earlier—in which they still were and would be until his mind was set at rest.

"You want too much!" she retorted. "You had better go to them and try to get the facts in the same way you tried with me—beginning with an insult. I consider Frank Selden a gentleman and Mattie Stuart a lady. I have accompanied them to several places and he has always acted with the utmost courtesy. There is simply nothing to cause all this rage on your part. You have said things to me to-night that I can never forgive. I have borne you one child, but I will not bear you another. No, as true as my name is——"

The horrified man caught her and stopped her words with his hands.

"Are you insane?" he gasped.

"Do you think," she replied, firmly, as soon as he would let her speak, "that I am going to bear children when you question their legitimacy?"

He seemed choking as he heard her.

"I *don't* question it!" he exclaimed. "I *know* you have been true to me! I was mad when I said anything else. But I am equally sure that you are deceived in relation to Frank and Mattie. How would you like to learn that they had been using you as a cover for nefariousness? You owe it to me, and to

your child—and to your dead mother—to have this thing probed to the bottom.”

The mention of her mother was the one thing that could have moved Mrs. Fawcett. She broke down completely and burst into tears.

“If we find that there is good cause to suspect them,” said Allan, gently, “you will consent to give Mattie up, won’t you? That is all I ask.”

“Oh, you never will find that!” she sobbed. “You don’t know her as I do. But it’s no wonder you talk of others after what you said of your own wife.”

“Don’t allude to that again,” he begged. “I take you at your word, but Frank Selden is too deep a schemer for your innocent head. He knew, if you did not, that it would subject you to suspicion for him to be seen at restaurants with you, and your husband never there, but he cares for nothing except his own pleasure.”

Mabel was thinking of her mother. Perhaps she had not been entirely right in this business. She would never go out with Selden in the party again, that was certain. It was easier to make this resolve, however, than to tell it to her husband. She shrank from appearing like a punished child who had to promise not to repeat its fault.

“Mattie is not a bad woman,” she articulated. “I could swear it. She has a good-for-nothing husband, and she means to get a divorce from him. Mr. Selden likes her, and when she is free he will marry her. That’s all there is to it. He has been very kind to her—to us both. If it makes talk, of course I won’t go out with him, but I don’t see how it can, when he is my own cousin. And if I don’t go, Mattie can’t go, either; and perhaps it will break it all up.”

She looked so doleful that he could not help trust

ing her word to the full, but he did not believe in her theory of Selden's alleged intentions. Frank marry? Never. He either had or hoped to gain Algy Stuart's place in a simpler way.

It was two hours later before the Fawcetts finished talking. Finally they went to bed under a patched-up truce, a sort of *modus vivendi* that would do for the present, at least. It had been a hard time for them both, but the failure of Mabel to tell the important fact that Selden hired a room of Mrs. Stuart left the door open for another similar affair.

When Selden learned, some days later, that Mrs. Fawcett could not go out with him and Mattie again he lost his temper.

"Give my regards to Allan," he said to her, "and ask him if he has heard from *Sadie* lately. He won't need the other name—he'll understand. Just ask him when he last heard from *Sadie*."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WHAT MADE YOU MARRY MAMMA?"

FAWCETT had been feeling very tender toward his wife during the past few days. The reaction that had followed the terrible misunderstanding had had its natural consequence. He thought many hours together of the awful suspicions that momentarily clouded his mind—of the great gulf that had arisen between him and Mabel, and of the happy sweeping away of the object of his terror. She had been foolish to allow a man like Frank Selden to impose upon her, but her own conduct had been undoubtedly pure. As for Mrs. Stuart, she might or might not be a virtuous woman;

she had no business, with a husband living, to act in such a way as to lead people to suppose her single.

Allan determined to gradually lead Mabel away from her friend, feeling that Mattie was not the best companion for so artless a girl as he still believed his wife to be, notwithstanding the falsehood in which he had detected her. He thought he could manage, by taking her to places of entertainment himself, and by asking her to remain in the house evenings, to wean her from Mrs. Stuart without creating ill-feeling. He had about as lief take a whipping as to go to the average theatre, having become attached to the quiet of his parlor after the fatigues of the day, but he endured several evenings at the play so that Mabel might be satisfied. On the odd nights he sat and talked with her, though he would have enjoyed much more the reading of a newspaper or book. He was willing to sacrifice a little to make her future conduct surer.

Another thing Mr. Fawcett did, and this on the very day after he had the interview with his wife detailed in the preceding chapter. He went to a professional money-lender to borrow the sum which he owed Selden. When he obtained it, he engaged an attorney to pay the amount and secure the note that Frank held, so that he would not have to meet the obnoxious individual, toward whom he now had only the bitterest sentiments. One evening Allan came home with a light heart, to show Mabel that he and Selden were no longer in business relations with each other.

It was the very day that Mrs. Fawcett had summoned courage to tell Mr. Selden that her husband objected to having her seen in his society, and on which he had given that sententious and to her astonishing reply.

"Ask him if he has heard from Sadie. He'll understand."

It did not need the sarcastic laugh with which Frank uttered these words to distress the young wife to the utmost. She had never had an instant's jealousy of Allan since her marriage, and the thought that there could be another woman in the case was enough to send the blood out of her cheeks in a wave.

"What—do—you—mean?" she stammered, faintly.

"Ask him," retorted Selden. "He thinks *I* am not good enough to associate with you. Make him tell you a chapter from his *own* experience."

Mrs. Stuart, who had long ago heard the story of Mr. Fawcett's relations with the Boston woman, wore a look of the greatest consternation. She would have given anything could she have spared Mabel this pain.

"He doesn't mean anything," she exclaimed, at the same time darting a glance of entreaty at her lover. "What is the use of making things any worse than they are? Tell her you were only joking," she added, to Selden, enforcing the request by facial telegraphy. "Don't you see how seriously she is taking it?"

But Selden absolutely refused to be placated. He was in an ugly temper. His money had been repaid to him that morning through a third party, indicating the state of Fawcett's feelings towards him, and he had been growing angrier all day.

"Let me tell my own stories," he said firmly. "I *do* mean something. If Mrs. Fawcett asks her husband and he refuses to tell her, she can come back to me and I promise to give her the information. He must have been disagreeable enough to her when he attacked us. All I want him to remember is the old adage, that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

Mrs. Stuart was in despair. Her well-meant scheme

had failed and she feared to make another attempt lest she should exasperate him to say even more.

"I don't believe my husband lives in that kind of a glass house!" said Mabel, with rising indignation. "I understand what you intimate, and I know he is not that kind of a man."

It was a very pretty sight, Selden thought—this little wife, smarting under the lash herself, defending the honor of the man who had administered the blow.

"Throw the stone and see," he smiled grimly. "Ask him when he heard from Sadie. Make him think you know, and he will let out the whole truth, I'll wager. Say you mean Sadie Reeder, of Boston. That will be enough. He'll fall into the trap. And if he doesn't, I'll keep my word. If there is anything you don't find out from him I'll tell it to you. You needn't take my word alone, either. There are plenty to corroborate me."

So when Mr. Allan Fawcett came whistling into his apartment that evening, and with a happy smile, shook the note he had obtained from Selden in his wife's face, she responded by propounding to him that unpleasant query.

She had thought, for an hour after she reached home, that she would ignore the whole matter. Frank was angry at Allan and in a mood to invent tales or to magnify any little affair that had occurred. Mabel hated to hear things to her husband's discredit. She had almost rather be kept in ignorance than learn that he had done anything very wrong. But when she got home the poison began to penetrate her veins.

"Sadie!"

She could think of nothing but that disagreeable word. Who could its owner be? There must be some

thing to it, for Frank had told her to try the effect of those magic syllables on her husband, and he would not have done that unless he believed their sound would awaken unpleasant memories.

Could there be, at this present moment, some woman with whom Allan shared his embraces? No! Impossible! He was always at home in the evening, and his days were taken up with the business of Decker & Co. But it was evident that there was, or had been at some time, a "Sadie." What a disgusting name! Mabel knew she should hate any one bearing that disagreeable cognomen. "Sadie, Sadie!" She must, she would, ask Allan the meaning of this unpleasant riddle.

"Yes," she said, in reference to the note which he showed her. "I'm glad you've got it again. And now I want you to tell me," her voice trembled as she reached the question, "if you know any woman by—the name—of—Sadie."

They were equally pale as she finished the sentence.

"Frank Selden told you to ask me!" replied Fawcett, hoarsely.

"That statement is not an answer," she replied, in a low voice.

A dangerous look came into the husband's eyes.

"What do you think of a fellow of that description?" he muttered. "After trying his best to cast reflections on the character of my wife, by making the public believe it is she who attracts him to theatres and restaurants without her husband's knowledge, he wants to make trouble between you and me. I've tried to keep from giving him a piece of my mind, but I shall do it now. If he meddles with my affairs again, he'll be sorry, that's all!"

Mabel sat opposite to him in a chair which seemed much too large for her.

"Now, will you tell me what I asked you?" she said persistently.

He started, and a wild look came into his face.

"Why, there's not much to tell," he replied. "I presume he has made it out already as bad as he could."

She shook her head.

"He has told me nothing—yet. But he says he will, if you refuse."

Fawcett looked very ugly as he heard this statement.

"Very well, then, let him," said he. "If it has got to the point that you go to other men—and to such men—to get information about your husband, why, keep on. We'll see how you come out."

It was the old kind of quarrel. Neither had any patience, neither was ready to put into the scale that slight portion of *love* that would have tipped the beam the right way. After a little more talk of the same kind, Fawcett refused to say another word. The language of both had grown very warm and their tones were high enough to be heard in the kitchen, but they gave no thought to that. Mollie was no stranger to the matrimonial episodes of this kind that had gone on for so long. What was of more importance, however, neither of them thought of the little Cecil, who was playing with his toys in the next room, with the door wide open.

"Papa," he said, after supper, when Allan was holding him in his lap, "what made you marry mamma?"

Mabel, who was passing through the room to reach her chamber, stopped as if shot. The husband and wife looked at each other like people over whom some great catastrophe, suddenly revealed, is hanging.

"I don't see," pursued the prattler, "what made you marry mamma, or what made her marry you. You don't seem to like each other. When you come home I hear you both scolding. Folks that like each other don't do that."

To save his life Fawcett could not reply. A tear started in spite of him and rolled down his face. Mabel took a step toward her husband, and in a second more she had flung herself on her knees with her arms around him and the baby, and was sobbing hysterically.

"I *do* love your papa!" she cried, as soon as she could control her voice. "Oh, I do love him, Cecil! It is he"—the utterance was almost choked in its indistinctness—"who does not love *me*!"

The boy, strangely calm in the presence of his agitated parents, turned to his father, as if to hear his reply.

"Mamma is wrong," articulated Fawcett. "She does not mean what she says."

Cecil drew the sad faces together, telling them to kiss and not quarrel any more. When this was accomplished, for neither of the parents dreamed of exhibiting further feeling before him, he said he was ready to be put in his bed, and Fawcett laid him there with the usual good-night hug from the little arms at the final moment of departure.

Mabel sat sewing on something for Cecil when her husband rejoined her. He went to her side, took the cloth from her lap and kissed her, sorry that even for a brief half-hour he had forgotten the great need of using gentleness toward his wife.

"I am going to tell you all about it—all about Sadie," he said, earnestly.

"Oh, then it is true!" she cried, with a gasp.

He hesitated a moment.

"It happened very long ago," he said, when he proceeded. "It gave me the most unhappiness I ever had in my life. I have wished a thousand times I had come to you at once and confessed everything, but I was too great a coward. Frank Selden led me into it, and as he has aroused your suspicions, you shall know the whole truth."

The wife shook with apprehension. She almost wished she had let the matter drop in the first place, but her curiosity was too great now to bid him cease.

"It was when we had not been married long. He was going to lend me that money, you know, and he seemed awfully obliging. He lived in rooms on Boylston Street, and he got up a supper in my honor. I never thought of there being anything strange about it, and when I found that there were women in the party I couldn't very well make a fuss. They were a rather hard crowd, that's the truth. I got to drinking too much, more because I wanted to drown my shame than anything else, and the affair became a regular revel. In the morning when I woke up I saw that we were all there still. After the others had gone I told Frank my opinion of his conduct, and he made light of my indignation. I went home to you wishing I were dead. It would not have taken much to have made me commit suicide on the way. That is all there was to it. I have never seen any of those people since."

A numbness crept slowly through Mrs. Fawcett's frame as she listened. She knew nothing of this sort of thing, and the revelation seemed to her too debasing to be believed.

"And who," she asked, "was Sadie?"

"Oh, she was one of the women who came. Each of the men brought a companion, and Frank invited two extra girls to make the couples complete."

Mabel blinked.

"Had you never seen her before?"

Fawcett had not calculated on this. There was another and a darker chapter that he had not supposed would have to be unveiled.

"Now, don't be unreasonable," he said, protestingly.

"Unreasonable!" echoed Mabel, astonished. "I certainly have a right to know."

The husband leaned back in his chair, h'mmed twice, and then answered that he had seen Miss Reeder before that night; but he added also that it was before his marriage.

"Tell me all about those previous meetings," said Mrs. Fawcett.

"They were before I was married, I tell you," replied Allan.

"That makes no difference."

He stared at her.

"Do you maintain," said he, "that I have no right to keep to myself what I did before I married—before I was even *engaged* to you? That is preposterous!"

Mrs. Fawcett would not agree with him.

"Is this girl's character good?" she inquired meaningfully.

"Well, hardly."

"And you knew her well enough to meet her more than once—being aware of that fact! Do you imagine I would have married a man who did such things if I had known it at the time?"

There was an absence of the tears that ordinarily ac

accompanied strong emotion in his wife, and Fawcett was struck with the fact that he had encountered a force of new and uncertain strength in her character.

"Perhaps not, if you had known it then," he admitted. "But this was years and years ago. I was free to do what I liked."

"Were you?" she replied. "Supposing the case were reversed, and it was I——"

He drew a long breath of distress.

"You don't mean to claim that the case would be identical?" he said, incredulously.

"Precisely."

He moved his chair and struck one knee with his palm.

"There is no sense," said he, "in such a theory. There never was and never will be the same rule for women and men. It is idle to discuss it. I was drawn into that drunken revel, the thought of which has caused me untold agony; but I'll swear to you, Mabel, if you wish me to, that since our marriage, since our engagement, I have been *true* to you."

Her calmness surprised him. She acted as if they were talking of some ordinary matter.

"I was duped, nevertheless," said she. "I married you, thinking you a good man, and you were a bad one. I repeat, were the case reversed, you would not live with me another hour after hearing the confession of my sin. I shall not take such a course, on account of that child in the next room; but I feel to-night that the date makes little difference to me—that if it had happened since our marriage it would be only a trifle less horrible. And you are the man who criticised my cousin, Mr. Selden, because he took me with a lady friend of mine to a public theatre and a respectable

restaurant! Allan, *we* never got drunk together. *We* never had disreputable companions on those occasions. No one can come to *you* and say, "Ask your wife when she last saw one of her old paramours?"

Mabel arose to leave the room. Allan had a fearful feeling of uneasiness. He thought he had a little rather, on the whole, that she had broken into tears and reproaches of a more violent character. What could he do or say to lessen her grief? He was glad, after all, that he had told his story, for now he had nothing to apprehend from Selden's malignity. He could not undo the old fault, which he still thought Mabel took too seriously. How he wished he could!

Were ante-nuptial sins as gross in men as in women? He went to bed and fell asleep with this question still in his mind.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ACT OF A DASTARD.

MRS. FAWCETT did not wholly cease visiting her friend, Mrs. Stuart, notwithstanding all the trouble their acquaintance had caused. She thought it quite enough if she stopped going out of doors in her company when Frank Selden was of the party. It could not disgrace Allan if she merely went to Mattie's to pass an afternoon, even if Selden was also there, as he generally was.

Frank talked occasionally of the prospective divorce that Mattie was to get from Algy Stuart, but nothing seemed to materialize toward that end. The truth was that this idea of a divorce and a subsequent marriage was only a pleasant fiction of Selden's, designed to

calm any scruples that might arise in the mind of his cousin. He was content with his present condition and had no mind to exchange it for one more irksome. His liking for Mattie was very strong, but he did not think the ceremony of a marriage would make it any pleasanter to live with her. If anything should happen to cause a rupture, it was much easier to pack a trunk and call a cab than to spend a year or two waiting the decision of a judge, not to mention such things as counsel fees and alimony.

And Mattie? Was she also content?

By no means. She loved Frank with all her heart, and yet she never was satisfied for a single hour from the time she became his unmarried wife. Her existence up to that time was miserable enough, and at first she welcomed anything to vary the dull old round. Mattie would have made a good wife to the right man. To be a mistress was not her proper avocation.

Difficulties seemed to environ her. The husband the law had given her had proved himself worse than none at all. This man who had crept into her heart when he had no right there, had caused her to violate all the moral obligations she had been educated to respect. She felt that hers was an entirely hopeless case. The brightest hours in her life were those that Mabel passed with her, and still she felt that even this companionship was a source of danger. Had she been strong enough she would have told Mrs. Fawcett the truth, leaving her to take such action as she thought wise.

When a woman has but one real friend in the world it is not pleasant to alienate that one. Mattie let the future take care of its own troubles, the present had enough for her.

The next act in the drama for Mr. Fawcett came about three months after his confession to Mabel of the circumstances of the revel at Selden's. He had expected to be out of town all night, but had changed his mind late and returned home about ten o'clock. He went into Cecil's room to kiss the boy in his sleep—and found, to his distress, that the little fellow was tossing uneasily in a feverish condition.

"Cecil is ill," he said, going to find a servant. "His head is very hot. Did you hear Mrs. Fawcett say anything about it?"

Mollie replied that the child had not acted very well all day, but had not specially complained. He had not eaten much and had asked to be undressed early.

Fawcett felt a tingling at the ends of his fingers, as if he ought to strangle some one.

"Did she give him any medicine?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

"Do you know where she has gone?"

"No, sir."

The father put on his things and went out of doors. What sort of a mother did Mabel call herself! He must find her. They must have a doctor and nurse. He would go over to Mrs. Stuart's flat, in the first place, and see if by any possibility she were there. As he walked along he struggled to suppress his anger. This was not a time when he could tell his wife how indignant her conduct made him. Another life now depended on hers—another existence was liable to be injured by any pain that she felt. No matter what she did he must endure it with as little protest as possible. He resolved that when he found her he would use the gentlest language, though his heart was ready to burst.

With a push on the electric annunciator at the en-

trance of the apartment house where Mattie dwelt, he put his ear to the speaking tube.

"What is it?"

It was not a woman's voice.

"I wish to see Mrs. Stuart."

"She has gone out."

"When will she return?"

"Before long, probably."

Slowly it dawned on Allan Fawcett's brain where he had heard that voice before. Unless there were two men in the world who spoke exactly like each other it was Frank Selden at the end of that tube!

Fawcett turned away sick and faint, for the most terrible of all suspicions had thrust itself upon him. The green-eyed monster, so often driven out, had made its lair once more in his brain. Mrs. Stuart was not at her home, and Frank Selden was there! Was he spending the evening alone? Not at all likely. Who, then, was his companion? Who? Who but the missing wife and mother!

Another occupant of the building came at this juncture and opened the door. Muttering something about having forgotten his key, Fawcett entered after the man. He crept slowly to the stairway, pausing many times in the ascent. Now he was as weak as a child, again he was strong as a lion. Anon the perspiration broke out upon him until his underclothing was as wet as if freshly taken from a laundress' tub. Then the muscles on his arm hardened like steel cords and he could have floored an ox with his bare fist.

At the end of his climb, when he stood before the door of Mrs. Stuart's apartment, he was ready for anything.

He had shrewdness enough left to tap lightly on the

portal. He wanted to make the occupants think it was Mattie returning. Without a question the door was flung open from the inside.

Fawcett entered, closing the door behind him. He not only closed it, but drew the bolt. He did not mean his prey should escape him, nor that he should be able to summon witnesses or people who might interfere.

Frank's astonishment was extreme. He could not understand how this man should be there, nor what gave that awful look to his white face.

The first words explained all.

"I want my wife!"

"You've got a d——d queer way of stating it," replied Selden, who was at least no coward. "But, to relieve your mind at once, let me say she is not here."

Excited to the inmost core, Allan Fawcett preserved a wonderful outward calmness.

"I shall not take your word," he said. "I intend to search these rooms. And if you try to leave before I have finished I will throw you out of a window."

Selden laughed ironically. He would have uttered the same laugh had Fawcett been holding a revolver to his head.

"Your threats are unnecessary," he answered. "I should never think of leaving you here alone, as I am responsible for the articles you see about you. When you find that your wife is not one of them you will, I presume, kindly take your leave."

He turned to the opposite side of the room and, dropping into a chair, took up an evening paper, which he had put down when he heard the tap on the door. Nothing more nonchalant could well be conceived.

For a few seconds Fawcett gazed at him stupidly.

Then he went through the chambers with the thoroughness of a police officer who imagines he has tracked a thief. And he found nothing of what he sought.

"There is a room behind that curtain," he said, "and it is locked. I wish to enter it."

Selden laid down his paper languidly.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in the tone of one who has not heard distinctly.

"I wish to enter that further room," reiterated Fawcett, raising his voice.

Mr. Selden shook his head slowly.

"Quite impossible."

"For what reason?"

"Because," and the answer came very slowly indeed, "because that room is mine."

Fawcett strode forward.

"I believe," he muttered between his teeth, "my wife is in that room! If you do not unlock it or give me the key I shall break in the door!"

The other man elevated his eyebrows as if surprised.

"A devilish strange idea, and not exactly complimentary to my pretty cousin," he replied. "However, it would be a pity to break such a nice door. I think you will find a key on the mantel."

Two minutes later, Fawcett came back from that room also, convinced now that he had been making a foolish search. But why was Selden living here in this flat, if everything was as it should be? He had seen Frank's clothing in the farther room, garments that he recognized. It was evident that he was at home there. And of course Mabel knew this. If she was not there to-night, that was no proof that she——

Ah! what will satisfy jealousy when it is once aroused!

"Well, you didn't find her, did you?" said Selden, quietly.

Fawcett's eyes were bloodshot. The strength that had come to him had given place again to extreme weakness.

"I did not," he answered. "If I had, you would not now be sitting there asking me the question. As true as there's a God on high, I would have spilled your brains on this carpet."

Selden made a gesture of repugnance.

"You say such disagreeable things!" he replied.

His companion did not seem to hear him.

"For a long time," he went on, "my wife has visited Mrs. Stuart against my desire. I did not absolutely forbid it, though there was something that told me I should. But had I imagined that you were living under this roof I should have made my command imperative. You are a libertine whose contact is injurious to any decent woman. How far this has gone I do not know, but I shall find out. And I tell you, Frank Selden, if you have done anything to disgrace me, or to sully the good name of my wife, I will settle the account with you as soon as the fact comes to my knowledge."

Mr. Selden bowed, with a distant savor of irony.

"Have you any explanation or defence to make?" demanded Allan.

"Explanation? Defence? Certainly not to you."

The husband strove to master his emotions, which were becoming uncontrollable.

"Will you tell me why you have a room here?"

Selden laughed.

"For the same reason that you have yours on **Forty** second Street; because it is my residence."

A sharp pain shot through the eyelids of the questioner.

"You are fully aware," he said, "that such a course leaves my wife and her cousin open to suspicion. You know that the result may be the breaking up of a home and the ruin of more than one reputation. Now, I have this to tell you, no matter what has or may happen you must give up coming here."

Mr. Selden rose from this chair and seated himself loungingly on the arm of it.

"My rent is promptly paid—always," said he. "Really, a matter of this kind should be between me and my landlady."

"Not when it affects my wife and her relations."

Mr. Selden seemed to grow more interested.

"I may be very obtuse," he said, "but I cannot see how my place of living can affect Mrs. Fawcett."

"You do not deny that she comes here?"

The door that led into the hall opened noiselessly at this moment, and Mattie Stuart entered the room.

"No. But I do deny that I have any control of her actions. Now, let's be sensible, just for a moment. My cousin Mabel is your wife. Her cousin, Mrs. Stuart, is, to all intents and purposes, mine."

The brutality of the statement struck Fawcett, but his main desire was to clear Mabel, and this assertion, if true, seemed to do that.

"Mrs. Stuart," he responded, "has a husband."

"Theoretically, yes. Practically, no. You thought your wife was here with me. Well, she wasn't. If you don't want her here, why don't you keep her away? As for me and my affairs, they are not your business."

Fawcett's back was toward the door and he had no knowledge of Mrs. Stuart's proximity. On the other

hand, Selden saw her plainly. He had been nursing for the past ten minutes a desire to hurt the feelings of some one, and the blow fell on the hapless woman who had been sacrificed on the altar of his lust.

Satisfied that his wife was not the mistress of this man, Mr. Fawcett's thoughts reverted to his sick child, and he started to leave the house. As he turned, his eyes encountered the shrinking form of Mrs. Stuart, with her hand raised toward him in an attitude of entreaty.

"Take me with you!" she cried. "Take me with you! Don't leave me here with him!"

Her anguish was evidently intense. She would have fallen at his feet in her supplication had he permitted her. It was plain that she had been a listener to Selden's exposure of the relation she held toward him. Allan was very sorry for her, but he shrank from the suggestion she made.

"Take you *home* with me!" he repeated. "Take you to *my* house—you! I will help you to get some place where you can find an honest living, but after what I have learned to-night I could do no more."

Selden came across the room and laid his hand on Mattie's arm.

"Don't make a fool of yourself!" he exclaimed, roughly. "You're mine as much as if a hundred preachers had married us. Laws are not the only things that hold people together. This fellow came here in a rage because he thought his wife here alone with me. He found she wasn't, and in explaining matters I stumbled on the truth. You never saw *me*," he added, to Fawcett, "rushing into people's apartments and asking if *my* wife was hidden there! When you intimate that this lady is not good enough to enter your door remember Sadie Reeder!"

Fawcett did not wish to get into another argument. He wanted to get home, where little Cecil needed his attentions.

"Take me away from here!" pleaded Mattie, as he crossed the threshold. "Take me somewhere—anywhere—away from this man!"

Tears were running down both her cheeks. Her hair was dishevelled in her distress. Her voice was very low and tuned to an exquisite touch of pathos. But Fawcett had no time to linger. He regretted every minute his jealousy had kept him from the bedside of his boy.

"Cecil is very sick," he explained. "I was looking for Mabel, and I must return home at once. To-morrow, if you will send to the office——"

"No, no!" she pleaded, struggling with the arms that held her. "To-night! *Don't* leave me here! *Don't*——"

Fawcett closed the door behind him and the sobbing voice was heard no more.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEAD, FOR A DUCAT.

MRS. FAWCETT was at home when her husband arrived. She had been with Mrs. Stuart in search of a physician and had been detained at his office. As she did not expect Allan home that night, and as she did not care to say anything of her fears to Mollie, she had gone for Mattie, to consult her in relation to a doctor, without leaving any word with her domestic in relation to the matter. She did not believe Cecil dangerously ill, but

she knew his temperature was too high, his appetite light, and that he was extremely restless. When Mr. Fawcett reached the house he found Dr. Legate awaiting the return of Mollie from a drug-store, whither she had gone with a prescription.

It was with painfully mixed feelings that Allan Fawcett stood by the bedside of his boy, listening to the voices of the doctor and Mabel, alternately. It seemed as if everything he cared for in this world was at stake now. He was not sure his wife was faithful. He could not tell but his child had a fatal illness. And he must conceal both these fears, on account of the delicate condition of the mother. In these days there were two lives to consider. If Mabel had been true to him his regard for her unborn child was hardly less than that for the one now tossing on the sick-bed. It would not do to unwarrantably excite her. He must suppress his apprehensions from fear of the effect on his future heir.

And he *must* believe Mabel true! Yes, he *would* believe it, until positive evidence came to the contrary. She had been criminally reckless in associating with Selden and his mistress, but personally he could not conceive her stained. Nevertheless, the doubts would recur with terrible force, like the repeated shocks of an earthquake.

The doctor gave the child his first dose of medicine, left particular directions, and went away, bidding them call him at once on any alteration of any of the symptoms for the worse. Allan had no idea of seeking rest that night, and his wife refused to accept his suggestion that she lie down. She was genuinely alarmed this time, and could not have slept had she tried. It had troubled her exceedingly when she discovered Cecil's condition, because Allan was away. Now that he had

come she relied wholly on his judgment, but she did not like to leave him. She took a chair and drew it close to his, and together they watched each rise and fall of the little bosom.

"You don't think he's very, very sick, do you?" she whispered.

She knew that her husband's brow was dark, but she ascribed that to his worryment over the child. She had no idea that he had recently been to Mrs. Stuart's flat and learned that Frank Selden had a room there. And she would have been more surprised than he to hear of his subsequent discovery.

"I—I don't know," replied Fawcett, constrainedly.

After that the conversation ceased, and except for a necessary word now and then, neither spoke until nearly daylight. At that time Cecil awoke and looked so badly that Mollie was roused and sent for the doctor.

Another examination, more medicine, wise looks on the physician's part, and similar phenomena, known to all who have ever had anything to do with such cases, followed. Cecil was very fretful and rejected the offers of both his parents to hold him, although he insisted that he wanted to be taken up.

"Won't you let papa take you?" asked Fawcett. The boy had always been very partial to him.

"No, no!" replied the little fellow.

"He wants mamma," cooed Mabel, holding out her hands to him.

The boy did not reply to this suggestion in words, but he drew away as if repugnant to the idea.

"Shall I call Mollie?" asked his mother, and this was received even more pettishly.

The doctor said the child ought to get up for a little while, as a change of position would be beneficial, but

it was evident that Cecil would not let any one in the house touch him without a struggle.

"What *do* you want?" inquired Allan, bending over the child.

"I want Aunt Mattie."

Fawcett straightened himself up with a jerk. The blood rushed to his brain and made him dizzy.

"Whom does he speak of?" asked Dr. Legate. "If it is any one you can get easily, you had best do so. The less he is agitated the better."

Knowing nothing of what tortured her husband, Mrs. Fawcett turned to him inquiringly.

"Shall I run over for her? It will only take five minutes."

"No!" he answered, abruptly.

The doctor saw that something not plain to him was the matter, and said no more on that point. They managed with a good deal of coaxing, and not without a flow of tears, to get the boy into his father's arms while his bed was being changed. At last Dr. Legate, with renewed injunctions to be sure and call him if anything occurred, and with a promise to come back at noon anyway, left the house.

"If you know of any person the boy likes, who can come and help you take care of him, you ought to send at once," were his last words. "He will not be able to be left alone for several days at least, and you and your wife will have to take some rest before long."

Mabel had not failed to note the peculiarly savage tone with which her husband had declined her suggestion that she should go for Mrs. Stuart. She knew he did not like to have her associate intimately with Mattie, though he had not positively forbidden it. She said nothing, however, till when, after another nap, Cecil

awoke and began again to sob, over and over, that he wanted his Aunt Mattie.

"Won't you let me go for her?" Mabel asked, finally. "Cecil was always very fond of her, you know, and she would make the best nurse we could get. I know you don't like her very well, but this is a special case. She would come, I'm sure. Last night, when she went with me to the doctor's, she was almost as much distressed as I."

Last night! Fawcett did not want to think of last night. How could those tainted hands touch his innocent boy? He shook his head impatiently and began to pace the room, trying to think what he ought to do. Mrs. Stuart was a guilty woman. Undoubtedly his wife knew all about her amours, had helped to shield her in them. He could not allow her to enter his door. It would be condoning her great offence.

"Oh, papa," wailed Cecil, again, for the tenth time, "I want Aunt Mattie!"

Frantically Fawcett turned to his wife.

"For God's sake," he exclaimed, with a man's unreason, "why doesn't some one go for that woman!"

Mabel joyfully started to get her hat.

"No, not *you!*" he cried. "Mollie!"

How strangely he acted! But he had been out of his bed all night, and worried extremely over his idolized son. Mrs. Fawcett did not think his conduct meant anything unusual.

"What shall I tell her?" asked the domestic, appearing at the door.

"Wait a minute and I will write a note."

He had no doubt that Mollie knew what was going on at Mrs. Stuart's. Everybody in New York knew it,

probably had known it for months; everybody—except him.

Going to a desk he wrote these lines, sealed and handed them to Mollie :

“MRS. STUART: Cecil is dangerously ill. He cries for you continually. The doctor thinks you can do him a great deal of good. I told you last night I did not wish you to enter my house, but this is an unforeseen emergency. Come if you will, and do what you can for him. Do not think, however, that this exception alters in any way the stand I am compelled to take toward you. A. F.”

When Mrs. Stuart received this note she was alone in her apartments. Selden had gone out early, after an unpleasant night and morning, during which Mattie had passed most of the time in tears. She told Mollie to say that she would be over immediately, and went to her dressing-case to remove as far as possible the traces of suffering from her face. Then she wrote a brief note to Selden, explaining the cause of her absence, and went out.

When she came into Mr. Fawcett's presence he bowed with cold formality. As soon as he could he persuaded his wife to go to her chamber and take the sleep she needed, saying he would follow her example in a short time. He wanted the two women together as little as possible. It was a most disagreeable necessity that had brought Mrs. Stuart there, and he meant to reduce the pain to the lowest possible compass.

Cecil nestled in the arms of his new nurse, and when Dr. Legate next came he was pleased to see this new assistant. But the disease was not taking the course

he had hoped, and he answered the father's queries with a very grave countenance. The boy acted as if in a partial stupor, from which it was not easy to rouse him even temporarily. The physician did not leave the house all that afternoon; and when it was nearly sunset he told Fawcett that no skill on earth could save the life of his child.

Stupidly the father listened to the medical terms that rolled from the doctor's tongue. He understood but one thing—the terrible fact that this child, in whom his life was bound up, was slowly but surely dying!

They stood by the bedside in which Cecil lay—Mrs. Stuart weeping, Mr. Fawcett with dry eyes.

“You had best call the mother,” suggested the doctor, quietly. “It is a matter of only a few minutes now.”

Fawcett beckoned him into the next room and told him of his wife's situation.

“Um—,” replied the medical man. “In that case perhaps it is safer to let her finish her sleep. Then, when she awakes, break it to her as gently as you can.”

Heart-broken, the father returned to Cecil's chamber and watched the gradual extinguishment of the brightest light that had ever shone along his pathway. His despair was so great that he seemed stony to those who looked at him. There are griefs where the ordinary tokens of sorrow fail utterly to bring relief.

“I will break it to Mabel, if you wish,” said Mrs. Stuart, timidly, when all was over. The tears had not ceased to course down her cheeks.

He did not care now. It could make no difference. He had wondered in what terms he could convey the news, tortured as he was. Yes, he said, she might tell her.

Mrs. Fawcett did not awake for several hours, and

when she heard what had happened she sobbed bitterly for a long time. She lay in Mattie's arms, soothed by her cousin, but the tears of the women continued to mingle. At midnight, exhausted with her grief and previous labors, Mabel fell asleep again by Mattie's side. Nature was bound to assert itself.

As for Allan, he could not yet resign himself to slumber, though he tried several times to do so. He walked about his rooms restlessly, after everybody else had retired, going in and out of the chamber where the dead child lay, and still without visible tokens of the loss he had sustained.

At about one o'clock there was a knock at the door that sounded startlingly loud in the complete stillness that surrounded it.

He went to the door and flung it open. Frank Selden stood there, more or less under the influence of liquor. He had followed some belated occupant of the building and ascended to the fourth floor where the Fawcetts lived.

"Tell Mattie I want her," he said, in a rather thick voice.

All the outrage of the intrusion, all the shame of the message, came over Fawcett, but he restrained himself.

"Mrs. Stuart has gone to bed," he said. "She is very tired. I should not like to call her."

Selden realized little except that he was being frustrated in his desires, and he responded in a louder voice that he wanted Mattie, by G—d! and he proposed to have her!

"I've been alone in that d——d flat all the evening," said he, "and I'm d——d sick of it. You tell her to get up and come along. It's none of your business what I do, by G—d."

Selden had passed the threshold, and it seemed to Fawcett that his ribald utterances insulted the still form that lay in the room beyond. Catching the intruder suddenly by the shoulders he rushed him out of the apartment and down half-a-dozen stairs.

"If you know what's good for you, go!" he said, in a harsh whisper.

Had Selden been perfectly sober he could have seen by the dangerous light in the drawn face above him that he had best obey the injunction; but the liquor he had taken weakened his powers of observation and reason. Fawcett had taken several steps back toward his own door when Frank began to follow him. At the top of the flight the foremost man paused.

"Did you hear me?" he asked, quietly.

In a perfect rage Selden started toward him, striking a wild blow at the air as he pressed forward. Then, in some way, difficult to account for, he lost his balance so completely that he fell over the balustrade. It was all a matter of four seconds—and Fawcett heard the body strike with resounding force on the tiled floor, forty feet below.

The commission merchant turned and saw that his door was still open. He waited a few moments to learn whether the fall had aroused any other occupant of the house. As it did not seem to have done so, he entered his apartment, went to a lounge and fell asleep upon it.

* * * * *

The coroner that was summoned by the janitor, five hours later, decided that death was instantaneous. He also reported that deceased had been drinking and had met with his fate from an accident, to which there

was no witness. When Mr. Fawcett was told of this during the morning he merely elevated his eyebrows and remarked "Indeed!"

But when Mattie Stuart learned of her lover's death she went into fainting fits, and for days it was a question whether she would survive the shock.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOR THEIR CHILD'S SAKE.

ALLAN FAWCETT has since said, more than once, that he lived the five months that ensued in a daze. Everything was colored with a heavy tinge of gray. The loss of his child would have been, in itself, sufficient to have given him a severe strain, had there been nothing else to bear him down. He had literally worshipped Cecil. No shadow of the grave had crossed the dreams he knew, the bright castles he had builded with the little fellow as their central figure. It all came upon him with hardly any warning, and at a time, too, when there were other things only less painful to keep them company.

He went about the business of Decker & Co. in much the old way. His partners believed that he was recovering very well from his bereavement. He bought and sold grain, took orders on commission, gave advice to customers, just as before. At night he went home with a set face, climbing the familiar stairs over the balusters of which he had, unmoved, seen Frank Selden fall to his death. He entered his apartment, said "Good-evening" to his wife, ate his supper, took up his newspaper, read an hour or two

and went to bed, wearing the external appearance of a man who has nothing special on his mind.

Mabel did not know exactly what to think of him. She remembered how calmly he carried himself at the funeral, how collected he was when she was convulsed with her grief. She knew he had loved the child devotedly, and she could not understand his reserve.

Finding that he continued as sphinx-like as he began she relapsed into melancholy and brooded a great deal, which was very bad for her health, and for the child that was yet to be born into that household.

It was this child that made Fawcett continue to treat his wife with respect. It was this that made him refrain from any allusion to what he had discovered in Mrs. Stuart's apartment, that night when he learned that Selden claimed her as his mistress. He could not discuss that matter with his wife without endangering the well-being of another whose existence was the only thing he lived to conserve. No provocation could have induced him to speak an impatient word to her while her nerves were connected so intimately with the growing existence. He had not enough deceit in him to pretend a deep affection that he did not feel, but he treated Mabel kindly and waited for the time when he could unbosom his trouble to her with no danger except to herself.

Ten days after Cecil's funeral Mrs. Stuart was able to leave the house, and she did not wish, even had he asked it, to remain longer than was necessary. She knew, without a word from him on the subject, that he had said nothing to his wife in relation to what he had learned about her. Mabel would not have treated her in that polite manner if she knew.

Doubly a widow, though she had a husband living,

friendless and alone in the world, Mattie might have gone to the end of her natural career had not Fawcett voluntarily taken upon himself her necessary expenses. The day she was to leave he put a hundred dollars into her hand telling her to call on him—by mail—for more whenever she needed it, and by all means to live thenceforth a life of honor.

The poor woman burst into tears, but she could not answer him in words. The money seemed to burn her fingers, coming from him, but it was better than the alternative that had arisen dimly in her mind, at which he hinted. She went back to her flat, where everything reminded her of her happy though guilty past, and in a month sold the furniture and took a quiet lodging in a remote part of the city. Then she tried to find some employment that would relieve her from accepting beyond the briefest time the charity of the man she had wronged.

The death of Frank Selden, coming in such a sudden and shocking manner, proved too much for his mother, and within a few days she followed him to the grave. Mabel excused herself from attending the first funeral, on account of her own bereavement, but she went to Boston to the second, accompanied by her husband. That evening, the lawyer who attended to the legal affairs of the Selden family sought Mr. Fawcett at his hotel.

“Excuse me for coming to you so soon about a business matter,” he said, to Allan, as soon as he had presented his card. “It seems necessary, however, to inform you that as both Mr. Selden and his mother died intestate their property will all fall to your wife.”

Neither Mr. Fawcett nor Mabel had thought of this. Allan ran it over in his mind and concluded that the

lawyer was right. He had never heard of any near relations of the family except Mabel and her mother.

After a little further talk he went to ask Mabel to come into the room, and the facts were repeated to her by the legal gentleman.

"Very well," she replied, simply, not seeming to be moved in the least by the news. "Mr. Fawcett will do whatever is necessary."

But Allan shook his head.

"Let it be understood," he corrected, "that I shall have nothing whatever to do about it. Mrs. Fawcett must do her business entirely with you. The property will be hers, not mine, and I refuse to take any part in the affair."

The lawyer smiled obligingly.

"As you please," he said. "Under the law a man and his wife are held to be one, and——"

"Not in a matter of inheritance," interrupted Fawcett.

It was suggested that Mrs. Fawcett had better remain for a few days at Boston, to attend to the more pressing matters, but Mr. Fawcett objected. He said she could sign an application for a probate of the estate and that nothing else would be required at present. The lawyer must take things into his own hands. Fawcett would not leave his wife, and he wanted to get back to his office as soon as possible. And this was the way matters were arranged.

"How much do you think there will be from both estates?" Fawcett asked quietly, as he stood at the door of his parlor, after his wife had left the room.

"Something like four hundred thousand dollars."

Fawcett bowed thoughtfully and the visitor withdrew. Three months later Mrs. Fawcett came to speak to

her husband one evening, as he sat, according to his custom, with a newspaper in his hand. He was not reading it, but he used to sit for hours with it before his face, absorbed in thought.

"I want to ask your permission to do something with a part of my money," she said, almost timidly, taking a chair close to him.

"You do not need my permission," he replied, gravely.

"I know I don't—in law," she said, for the full rights of a married woman in such cases had long since been explained to her by her attorney. "But this is a matter that I want you fully satisfied about. It is something I shall not do unless you approve of it."

Wondering what she was about to say, he waited for her to proceed.

"I have been thinking of poor Mattie," faltered Mabel. She had not uttered the word when his brow clouded as she had feared it would. "She has had a great deal of trouble. Some time ago she—she lost—her—lodger. Now I hear she has broken up her little home and gone into one room. She is even trying to get work in a shop."

She paused again, thinking it would help her if he would say something, no matter what, but he did not change his attitude or look.

"I got my money," Mabel went on, "from my aunt and cousin. It is very much more than I have any use for. You have refused to take it and put it into your business, as I wanted you to do. Now, if I should send a little of it to Mattie, say five or ten thousand dollars, it would be a fortune for her, and she would get along very well indeed."

Still he did not move or speak, and after a few mo-

ments she asked again whether he saw any reasonable objection to her plan.

"I told you, in the first place," he replied, rousing himself slightly, "that I never should take your money, and never should dictate to you what disposition to make of it."

She looked troubled, though his tones were kindly enough.

"I do not ask you to dictate, nor even to advise, if you do not wish to," said she. "I only want to know whether you would care—whether you would rather I did not do it."

He shook his head slowly.

"I do not care," he answered.

"And you are quite willing? I would not for the world do a thing you would not like, if I knew it."

He raised his eyes slowly till they took in the whole of her face, but she was not looking at him now. She was gazing at a distant point in the room, in her aberration.

"I think the idea a good one, if that is what you wish to know," said Fawcett. "When Mrs. Stuart left this house I gave her money to live on temporarily, and I have sent her some twice since then. I am glad you think of aiding her."

Mabel turned toward her husband with a displeased expression.

"I don't see why you did that," said she.

"Some one had to do it. I knew she hadn't a penny. I knew she,"—he hesitated a second—"had lost her—lodger. I knew she could not afford to keep her flat. You had no money of your own at that time. So I gave her a hundred dollars, and I have sent her as much more."

Mrs. Fawcett did not like this, and a half-formed resolution came into her head not to carry out her plan of helping her cousin.

"I don't quite see what you did it for," she pouted.

"Mabel!" Fawcett cried out the words in agony, "she held my dying boy in her arms! She had no one else to look to! I know the natural fate of women well brought up, educated and refined, in such a city as this, thrown on their resources, with no trade or profession! Could I have risked letting the lips my boy had kissed——!"

He stopped suddenly, for his wife had slipped from her chair to the carpet and was sobbing frantically. He had lost one child, he must not imperil the second. So he ceased to talk of Mrs. Stuart, and raised Mabel to a sofa, where, in a short time, he saw with satisfaction that she seemed quite recovered. Nothing was worse, a doctor had told him, for his coming infant than over-excitement on the mother's part. He must be careful that nothing of the kind occurred again till all danger was past.

And at last the day came. In such matters there is seldom any postponement on account of the weather. Reprieves by the governor or a stay of proceedings by order of the court of appeals are not to be counted on. Into that awful valley of the shadow from which each little sun has to rise descended the pretty wife of Allan Fawcett for the second time.

But—oh! the pity of it!—there was a cloud across the face of nature and the young luminary came forth with life extinguished. The anxious father, pacing the floor of the room beyond, heard the news that a daughter had been born, whose slight bosom had never drawn even one breath of the air of earth.

Fawcett put on his hat and went out of doors. Well, it was over, at last.

He knew now what he should do. One thing could have saved his wedded life, that hung by such a slender thread; one thing would have made it possible for him to forget and forgive. As a mother of a living child Mabel might again have taken her place at his side, from which he had excluded her so long. Now his hope of happiness was ended. All he had dreamed of being would be buried in the lot at Greenwood where his Cecil lay.

CHAPTER XXX.

"CAN YOU EVER LOVE ME."

FAWCETT spent a good part of the next fortnight in disposing of his interest in the concern called Decker & Co. Business had taken a better turn of late, and there was a fairly good sum to his credit in addition to the amount he owed. His partners pleaded with him not to desert them, and asked in vain the reason for his sudden announcement of an intention to give up the place he held. He would only say that he wished to make a change and that time was pressing.

He inquired of the doctor who attended his wife how soon she would be able to hear some disagreeable news that he was obliged to impart to her, without injury to her health. The medical man suggested that another month had best be allowed, as Mrs. Fawcett was recovering slowly. Fawcett said nothing until the thirty days had expired. He went out every day at the usual hour and returned at night so that nothing in his

conduct aroused the least suspicion. He intended to make one blow, when the time came.

On an afternoon when, for want of something better to occupy his time, he was strolling in the Park, he came across Mrs. Stuart, walking, like himself, alone. He would have avoided addressing her had she not stopped abruptly in his path, so that he could not help acknowledging her presence without a kind of discourtesy that he did not like to use.

"I have been wanting a few words with you, Mr. Fawcett," murmured Mrs. Stuart, "and I shall hardly find a more auspicious time than the present. I know you hate me, and I will not deny that you have some cause, but there are things which, if you will let me explain them, may mitigate your anger. There is no one here who knows us, and I will delay you but a few minutes."

She was looking at him wistfully, for there was the darkest cloud on his face she had ever seen there, a cloud that seemed absolutely impenetrable.

"There is nothing that you can say," he replied, "which will be of the least value to either of us. If it is in defence of yourself it is unnecessary, as you are not in any way responsible to me. If it relates to my own family it is equally useless. My life is broken beyond repair. I have sold out my interest in my business and shall soon leave this part of the world."

Mrs. Stuart started at his last words.

"With Mabel?" she asked, earnestly.

A shiver passed over him.

"Is it likely?" he demanded, with a shade of haughtiness.

"And why not?" cried Mattie, her voice in a tremble. "No matter what you have thought, I swear to you

that she has been an honest wife—that never has she been or dreamed of being untrue !”

He controlled himself with an effort, and asked if she thought he had any doubt of that.

“I am glad if you have none,” she replied. “But in that case how can you speak of going away and not taking Mabel with you?”

He drew a long breath and shut his lips together for a moment sharply.

“Do you not realize,” he said, “that there are things a wife may do that are no less terrible in the sight of a husband than actual infidelity?”

“What things?” asked Mrs. Stuart, dropping her eyes before the blackness of the gaze he bent upon her.

“For instance, associating intimately with women of loose morals,” he answered, bitterly.

She shrank, as if the blow had been a physical one.

“You mean me?” she said, interrogatively.

“Yes, I mean you.”

She cleared her throat of something that impeded her attempts to answer.

“Then,” she said, huskily, “I swear to you that she never knew, never even suspected my guilt.”

“In that case she is too simple to be a safe wife for any man,” he answered, tartly. “If she could see you, day after day, so intimate with such a man as Frank Selden——”

Mrs. Stuart raised both her hands pleadingly, while hot tears rushed to her eyes.

“Oh, Mr. Fawcett, remember! He is—*dead!*”

“That does not relieve him of criticism,” he replied, roughly. “But, let me say again, Mrs. Stuart, this conversation can have no good end. As I said in the first place, you are not responsible to me for your ac-

tions, so far as they concern your individual conduct. You have made it impossible that I should again ever be a husband to Mabel Fawcett, and I am only awaiting the passage of a few more days to tell her so. When I am out of the way it is probable she will send for you, so that your old friendship is likely to be renewed. I must now bid you good-afternoon."

He had turned, and was about to walk away, when Mattie spoke again.

"I shall never lead her into such dangers as might come from companionship with me," she said, chokingly. "She has been kind enough to give me money and I can get along now; but I will not let her injure herself farther, much as I would like her society."

Fawcett had not turned his face toward her. He listened with no sign of relenting, and when she finished he said—

"Good-bye, Mrs. Stuart."

She would have liked to say much more to him, but she saw that he was adamant. The death of Mr. Selden had given her a shock from which she had never recovered, and she was in no condition for a controversy with one so set as he appeared to be.

At the end of the month Fawcett came into his house one morning only an hour after he left it, to the great astonishment of his wife, who had never known a similar instance since they had lived in New York.

"Is anything the matter, Allan?" she asked, anxiously, coming toward him with the timid air she always wore in his presence of late.

He took a chair and braced himself up for his unpleasant task.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Something is the matter. Very many things are the matter."

Mrs. Fawcett saw that it was no ordinary affair that was on his mind. She sat down opposite to him and waited for him to continue, with a feeling of deep apprehension.

"Is it about—your business—at the office?" she asked, as he did not speak.

"No. I have no business at the office. I sold out a month ago."

"Ah!" She heaved a sigh. "Things had gone wrong there again?"

He took out a penknife and began to cut his fingernails, which did not need that attention in the least; a fact she was quick to observe.

"On the contrary," he said, "things have gone remarkably well there for some time back. In fact, when things went the worst elsewhere they improved at the office. I have thirty thousand dollars in the bank and I owe no man a cent."

It was something about herself, then. She had feared at the first that this was it, but she hoped otherwise. What new fault had she committed, she wondered. She puzzled her tired brain over this conundrum, but could find no solution to it. It was a long time since she had been beyond her doorstep, and she had had literally no visitors but Dr. Legate and her nurse.

"The fact is, Mabel," said Fawcett, forcing out the words with difficulty, "I am going away."

"Going away! Where?"

"I am going away," he repeated. "Too many things have made New York unpleasant to me."

She waited a few seconds for him to explain.

"Where are we going?" she asked finally.

He twisted a number of times the only ring that he wore.

"It is only *I* who am going," he said, slowly.

"And—shall you—stay long?"

He raised his eyes to hers, and she understood everything before he spoke.

"As long as I live."

For a moment the shock was substantially the same to her as if he had suddenly died in that chair in which he was sitting. She had had no preparation for this. She had known that he was likely at any time to find fault with her, to complain of things she had done, to warn her against their repetition. But that he intended to sever their marital bonds—fully and immediately—for that she had not the least premonition. She could not utter a word, so great was her surprise, so intense her pain. After waiting a moment he proceeded to explain.

"I want to say just as little as I can and have no misunderstanding. That matter of Frank Selden and Mattie Stuart settled everything for me. They were living in open adultery. You were their almost constant companion, visiting them at their residence, accompanying them on their walks, to places of public resort. Mrs. Stuart swears you did not know what was going on, and I do not dispute her. The disgrace was, however, just as great to my name. Had you been possessed of as much sense as you ought to have you would have known by instinct. Had you confided in your husband instead of concealing all your acts from him, he would have been able to tell you that you were in dangerous society. You chose your own path. If you ever have a regret for our separation, it is them you may blame.

"So long as I had your child to think of, I was obliged to forgive and try to forget many things. He

—Is—not—here. So long as there was another life that seemed about to owe its existence to us I held my peace as well as I could. Now nothing stands in my way. There is no reason why you and I cannot separate, cannot give up a married existence that has had more than its share of unhappiness for both. You have a much larger fortune than I. There is no probability that you will ever be in want. If you ever are, I will share all I have with you freely. As to a divorce—a legal affair—I leave that to your pleasure. I shall never wish to marry again. Should you ever have such a desire, I will not oppose you. There is only one thing more that I wish to say, and that is, I accuse you of nothing worse than blind folly; I do not think you have been guilty of personal faults. We are thoroughly incompatible, that is all.”

There was a quality in this little woman difficult to comprehend, a quality that made strength out of her very weakness, in such an emergency as this. She had recently risen from a sick bed. At her best she was no match for a strong man like him. The few things she had to say, however, came straight from her lips, without a tremor or sign of cowardice.

“I have listened to you, Allan,” she answered, “without interruption, and if you will do as much, I will be very brief. I never knew, never conceived that anything was wrong between Frank and Mattie, until she wrote me in response to the donation I sent her, confessing all and begging my pardon. I was inexpressibly shocked, for nothing but her own admission would have made me believe so frightful a thing of a woman who seemed so pure and innocent. You think it strange, but reflect a little. There was no way that I should know. I have not had *your* experience.

I never went to a house of ill-repute, never drank to intoxication in company with a courtesan, as you have done. If I misjudged my two cousins, my ignorance of such matters is my sufficient excuse."

Fawcett winced severely under the thrust, but he let her go on without reply.

"You speak of our children. Do you think they were dearer to you than to the mother who carried them next her heart for long months, bore them in anguish such as no man ever endures, and nursed them at her breast? I have not your facility of expression, Allan, but the loss—not only of Cecil, but of that little girl on whose face you did not even deign to look—has made me suffer intensely. The trouble is that you have never really loved *me*; you have looked on me as something to preserve for the sake of your offspring, something to be treated with special consideration as long as *their* lives were dependent on mine, and to be thrust aside when that necessity no longer exists. Now, Allan, before you say good-bye, I want to own to you that I have not done everything as I should, nor as I would if I had them to do over again. I have learned from dear experience. But I cannot help adding that you have not been perfect, either. You married a child, and it was your duty to guard her closer than you did. You could have passed a little more of your time with her, you might occasionally have taken her to walk, or a place of amusement, instead of leaving her to find other people more willing. Had you done your whole duty, I might have been a little nearer to performing mine."

The husband waited a moment, but she seemed to have finished.

"The things I wish to take are packed in my trunks

and bags," he said, quietly. "I will bring an express man for them. I wish you well, Mabel."

"Thank you," she answered, calmly.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

An hour later Fawcett returned with an expressman for the baggage. Before the man came upstairs, Allan went in search of his wife to give her the key of the flat, as an indication of his final departure. He found her in a dead faint on her own bed, with two photographs clasped tightly in her hands.

His first thought was to call the servant, but on consideration he decided that this would have a heartless look, and he applied himself to restoring animation in the still form. Within a few minutes Mabel was breathing more naturally, but she was not yet in a condition to recognize him. He did not want to go till he had completed his task.

Suddenly he noticed whose pictures his wife had clasped to her breast when she lost consciousness. They were those of Cecil and himself. Both were wet with tears.

A dizziness came over the husband.

"I had best go now, before she fully awakes," he thought.

Then he looked at Mrs. Fawcett again. In her pallor she appeared five years younger. It was the face of his child-wife that stared at him. It was the face he had joyed to find on his pillow in the days of their honeymoon! How the memories thronged upon him!

The eyes of the wife opened slowly and drank in the sight before them. The arms opened to their fullest extent and closed around his neck. What had hap-

pened to the years? Surely he was again in the bridal chamber of the Narragansett House at Providence!

There was a mighty struggle in his mind, and the woman conquered.

"Mabel," he whispered, "can you ever love me again?"

And she murmured—

"When did I cease?"

He took up one of the photographs that lay by her side.

"You had Cecil's picture here," he said, tenderly.

"Yes," she answered, "and yours."

The expressman was surprised when he received word, some minutes later, that there was no baggage to remove, after all.

"You are not going to-day?" he said, interrogatively.

"No," responded Fawcett, dreamily, "not to-day."

THE END.

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