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BOOK I.



## CHAPTER I.

—♦—  
THE TWENTY-THIRD OF AUGUST, 1829.

“WILL she last out the night, I wonder?”

“Look at the clock, Joseph.”

“Ten minutes past twelve! She *has* lasted the night out. She has lived, Robert, to see ten minutes of the new day.”

These words were spoken in the kitchen of a large country-house situated on the west coast of Cornwall. The speakers were two of the men-servants composing the establishment of Captain Treverton, an officer in the navy, and the eldest male representative of an old Cornish family. Both the servants communicated with each other restrainedly, in whispers—sitting close together, and looking round expectantly towards the door whenever the talk flagged between them.

“It’s an awful thing,” said the elder of the men, “for us two to be alone here, at this dead,

dark time, counting out the minutes that our mistress has left to live ! ”

“ Robert,” said the other, lowering his voice to a whisper that was barely audible, “ you have been in service here since you were a boy—did you ever hear that our mistress was a play-actress when our master married her ? ”

“ How came you to know that ? ” inquired the elder servant, sharply.

“ Hush ! ” cried the other, rising quickly from his chair.

A bell rang in the passage outside.

“ Is that for one of us ? ” asked Joseph.

“ Can’t you tell, by the sound, which is which of those bells yet ? ” exclaimed Robert, contemptuously. “ That bell is for Sarah Leeson. Go out into the passage and look. ”

The younger servant took a candle and obeyed. When he opened the kitchen-door, a long row of bells met his eye on the wall opposite. Above each of them was painted in neat black letters the distinguishing title of the servant whom it was specially intended to summon. The row of letters began with Housekeeper and Butler, and ended with Kitchenmaid and Footman’s Boy.

Looking along the bells, Joseph easily discovered that one of them was still in motion. Above it were the words, Lady’s Maid. Observing this, he passed quickly along the passage, and knocked at a large, old-fashioned oak door at



the end of it. No answer being given, he opened the door and looked into the room. It was dark and empty.

“Sarah is not in the housekeeper’s room,” said Joseph, returning to his fellow-servant in the kitchen.

“She is gone to her own room, then,” rejoined the other. “Go up and tell her that she is wanted by her mistress.”

The bell rang again as Joseph went out.

“Quick!—quick!” cried Robert. “Tell her she is wanted directly. Wanted,” he continued to himself in lower tones, “perhaps for the last time!”

Joseph ascended three flights of stairs—passed half-way down a long arched gallery—and knocked at another old-fashioned oak door. This time the signal was answered. A low, clear, sweet voice, inside the room, inquired who was waiting without? In a few hasty words Joseph told his errand. Before he had done speaking, the door was quietly and quickly opened, and Sarah Leeson confronted him on the threshold, with her candle in her hand.

Not tall, not handsome, not in her first youth—shy and irresolute in manner—simple in dress to the utmost limits of plainness, the lady’s-maid, in spite of all these disadvantages, was a woman whom it was impossible to look at without a feeling of curiosity, if not of interest. Few men,

at first sight of her, could have resisted the desire to find out who she was; few would have been satisfied with receiving for answer, She is Mrs. Treverton's maid; few would have refrained from the attempt to extract some secret information for themselves from her face and manner: and none, not even the most patient and practised of observers, could have succeeded in discovering more than that she must have passed through the ordeal of some great suffering, at some former period of her life. Much in her manner, and more in her face, said plainly and sadly: I am the wreck of something that you might once have liked to see; a wreck that can never be repaired—that must drift on through life unnoticed, unguided, unpitied—drift till the fatal shore is touched, and the waves of Time have swallowed up these broken relics of me for ever. This was the story that was told in Sarah Leeson's face—this, and no more.

No two men interpreting that story for themselves, would probably have agreed on the nature of the suffering which this woman had undergone. It was hard to say, at the outset, whether the past pain that had set its ineffaceable mark on her, had been pain of the body or pain of the mind. But whatever the nature of the affliction she had undergone, the traces it had left were deeply and strikingly visible in every part of her face. Her cheeks had lost their roundness and

their natural colour ; her lips, singularly flexible in movement and delicate in form, had faded to an unhealthy paleness ; her eyes, large and black and overshadowed by unusually thick lashes, had contracted a strangely anxious startled look, which never left them, and which piteously expressed the painful acuteness of her sensibility, the inherent timidity of her disposition. So far, the marks which sorrow or sickness had set on her, were the marks common to most victims of mental or physical suffering. The one extraordinary personal deterioration which she had undergone, consisted in the unnatural change that had passed over the colour of her hair. It was as thick and soft, it grew as gracefully, as the hair of a young girl ; but it was as grey as the hair of an old woman. It seemed to contradict, in the most startling manner, every personal assertion of youth that still existed in her face. With all its haggardness and paleness, no one could have looked at it and supposed for a moment that it was the face of an elderly woman. Wan as they might be, there was not a wrinkle in her cheeks. Her eyes, viewed apart from their sad prevailing expression of uneasiness and timidity, still preserved that bright, clear moisture which is never seen in the eyes of the old. The skin about her temples was as delicately smooth as the skin of a child. These and other physical signs which never mislead, showed that

she was still, as to years, in the very prime of her life. Sickly and sorrow-stricken as she was, she looked, from the eyes downwards, a woman who had barely reached thirty years of age. From the eyes upwards, the effect of her abundant grey hair, seen in connection with her face, was not simply incongruous—it was absolutely startling; so startling as to make it no paradox to say that she would have looked most natural, most like herself, if her hair had been dyed. In her case, Art would have seemed to be the truth, because Nature looked like falsehood. What shock had stricken her hair, in the very maturity of its luxuriance, with the hue of an unnatural old age? Was it a serious illness, or a dreadful grief, that had turned her grey in the prime of her womanhood? That question had often been agitated among her fellow-servants, who were all struck by the peculiarities of her personal appearance, and rendered a little suspicious of her, as well, by an inveterate habit that she had of talking to herself. Inquire as they might, however, their curiosity was always baffled. Nothing more could be discovered than that Sarah Leeson was, in the common phrase, touchy on the subject of her grey hair and her habit of talking to herself, and that Sarah Leeson's mistress had long since forbidden every one, from her husband downwards, to ruffle her maid's tranquillity by inquisitive questions.

She stood for an instant speechless, on that momentous morning of the twenty-third of August, before the servant who summoned her to her mistress's death-bed; the light of the candle flaring brightly over her large, startled, black eyes, and the luxuriant, unnatural, grey hair above them. She stood a moment silent—her hand trembling while she held the candlestick, so that the extinguisher lying loose in it rattled incessantly—then thanked the servant for calling her. The trouble and fear in her voice, as she spoke, seemed to add to its accustomed sweetness; the agitation of her manner took nothing away from its habitual gentleness, its delicate, winning, feminine restraint. Joseph, who, like the other servants, secretly distrusted and disliked her for differing from the ordinary pattern (within his experience) of professed ladies' maids, was, on this particular occasion, so subdued by her manner and her tone as she thanked him, that he offered to carry her candle for her to the door of her mistress's bed-chamber. She shook her head and thanked him again, then passed before him quickly on her way out of the gallery.

The room in which Mrs. Treverton lay dying, was on the floor beneath. Sarah hesitated twice, before she knocked at the door. It was opened by Captain Treverton.

The instant she saw her master, she started back from him. If she had dreaded a blow, she

could hardly have drawn away more suddenly, or with an expression of greater alarm. There was nothing in Captain Treverton's face to warrant the suspicion of ill-treatment, or even of harsh words. His countenance was kind, hearty, and open; and the tears were still trickling down it, which he had shed by his wife's bed-side.

"Go in," he said, turning away his face. "She does not wish the nurse to attend; she only wishes for you. Call me, if the doctor"—His voice faltered, and he hurried away without attempting to finish the sentence.

Sarah Leeson, instead of entering her mistress's room, stood looking after her master attentively, as long as he was in sight, with her pale cheeks turned to a deathly whiteness,—with an eager, doubting, questioning terror in her eyes. When he had disappeared round the corner of the gallery, she listened for a moment outside the door of the sick-room—whispered affrightedly to herself, "Can she have told him?"—then opened the door, with a visible effort to recover her self-control; and, after lingering suspiciously on the threshold for a moment, went in.

Mrs. Treverton's bed-chamber was a large, lofty room, situated in the western front of the house, and consequently overlooking the sea-view. The night-light burning by the bed-side, displayed rather than dispelled the darkness in the corners of the room. The bed was of the old-fashioned

pattern, with heavy hangings and thick curtains drawn all round it. Of the other objects in the chamber, only those of the largest and most solid kind were prominent enough to be tolerably visible in the dim light. The cabinets, the wardrobe, the full-length looking-glass, the high-backed arm-chair, these, with the great shapeless bulk of the bed itself, towered up heavily and gloomily into view. Other objects were all merged together in the general obscurity. Through the open window—opened to admit the fresh air of the new morning after the sultriness of the August night—there poured monotonously into the room, the dull, still, distant roaring of the surf on the sandy coast. All outer noises were hushed at that first dark hour of the new day. Inside the room, the one audible sound was the slow, toilsome breathing of the dying woman, raising itself in its mortal frailness, awfully and distinctly, even through the far thunder-breathing from the bosom of the everlasting sea.

“Mistress,” said Sarah Leeson, standing close to the curtains, but not withdrawing them. “My master has left the room, and has sent me here in his place.”

“Light!—give me more light.” The feebleness of mortal sickness was in the voice; but the accent of the speaker sounded resolute even yet—doubly resolute by contrast with the hesitation

of the tones in which Sarah had spoken. The strong nature of the mistress and the weak nature of the maid came out, even in that short interchange of words, spoken through the curtain of a death-bed.

Sarah lit two candles with a wavering hand—placed them hesitatingly on a table by the bedside—waited for a moment, looking all round her with suspicious timidity—then undrew the curtains.

The disease of which Mrs. Treverton was dying, was one of the most terrible of all the maladies that afflict humanity—one to which women are especially subject—and one which undermines life, without, in most cases, showing any remarkable traces of its corroding progress in the face. No uninstructed person, looking at Mrs. Treverton when her attendant undrew the bed-curtain, could possibly have imagined that she was past all rescue that mortal skill could offer to her. The slight marks of illness in her face, the inevitable changes in the grace and roundness of its outline, were rendered hardly noticeable by the marvellous preservation of her complexion in all the light, the delicacy, the brilliancy of its first girlish beauty. There lay her face on the pillow—tenderly framed in by the rich lace of her cap; softly crowned by her shining brown hair—to all outward appearance, the face of a beautiful woman recovering from a slight illness, or reposing after unusual fatigue. Even Sarah Leeson, who had



watched her all through her malady, could hardly believe, as she looked at her mistress now, that the Gates of Life had closed behind her, and that the beckoning hand of Death was signing to her already from the Gates of the Grave.

Some dogs'-eared books in paper covers lay on the counterpane of the bed. As soon as the curtain was drawn aside, Mrs. Treverton ordered her attendant by a gesture to remove them. They were plays, underscored in certain places by ink lines and marked with marginal annotations referring to entrances, exits, and places on the stage. The servants, talking down-stairs of their mistress's occupation before her marriage, had not been misled by false reports. Their master, after he had passed the prime of life, had, in very truth, taken his wife from the obscure stage of a country theatre, when little more than two years had elapsed since her first appearance in public. The dogs'-eared old plays had been once her treasured dramatic library; she had always retained a fondness for them from old associations; and during the latter part of her illness, they had remained on her bed for days and days together.

Having put away the plays, Sarah went back to her mistress; and with more of dread and bewilderment in her face than grief, opened her lips to speak. Mrs. Treverton held up her hand, as a sign that she had another order to give.

“Bolt the door,” she said, in the same enfeebled voice, but with the same accent of resolution which had so strikingly marked her first request to have more light in the room. “Bolt the door. Let no one in, till I give you leave.”

“No one?” repeated Sarah faintly. “Not the doctor? not even my master?”

“Not the doctor. Not even your master,” said Mrs. Treverton, and pointed to the door. The hand was weak; but even in that momentary action of it, there was no mistaking the gesture of command.

Sarah bolted the door, returned irresolutely to the bedside, fixed her large, eager, startled eyes inquiringly on her mistress’s face, and, suddenly bending over her, said in a whisper:

“Have you told my master?”

“No,” was the answer. “I sent for him, to tell him—I tried hard to speak the words—it shook me to my very soul, Sarah, only to think how I should best break it to him—I am so fond of him! I love him so dearly! But I should have spoken in spite of that, if he had not talked of the child. Sarah! he did nothing but talk of the child—and that silenced me.”

Sarah, with a forgetfulness of her station which might have appeared extraordinary even in the eyes of the most lenient of mistresses, flung herself back in a chair when the first word of Mrs. Treverton’s reply was uttered, clasped

her trembling hands over her face, and groaned to herself. "O, what will happen! what will happen now!"

Mrs. Treverton's eyes had softened and moistened when she spoke of her love for her husband. She lay silent for a few minutes; the working of some strong emotion in her being expressed by her quick, hard, laboured breathing, and by the painful contraction of her eyebrows. Ere long, she turned her head uneasily towards the chair in which her attendant was sitting, and spoke again—this time, in a voice which had sunk to a whisper.

"Look for my medicine," said she, "I want it."

Sarah started up, and with the quick instinct of obedience brushed away the tears that were rolling fast over her cheeks.

"The doctor," she said. "Let me call the doctor."

"No! The medicine—look for the medicine."

"Which bottle? The opiate, or"——

"No. Not the opiate. The other."

Sarah took a bottle from the table, and looking attentively at the written direction on the label, said that it was not yet time to take that medicine again.

"Give me the bottle."

"O, pray don't ask me. Pray wait. The doctor said it was as bad as dram-drinking, if you took too much."

Mrs. Treverton's clear, deep grey eyes began to flash; the rosy flush deepened on her cheeks; the commanding hand was raised again, by an effort, from the counterpane on which it lay.

"Take the cork out of the bottle," she said, "and give it to me. I want strength. No matter whether I die in an hour's time, or a week's. Give me the bottle."

"Not the bottle," said Sarah, giving it up, nevertheless, under the influence of her mistress's look. "There are two doses left. Wait, pray wait till I get a glass."

She turned again towards the table. At the same instant Mrs. Treverton raised the bottle to her lips, drained it of its contents, and flung it from her on the bed.

"She has killed herself!" cried Sarah, running in terror to the door.

"Stop!" said the voice from the bed, more resolute than ever, already. "Stop! Come back, and prop me up higher on the pillows." Sarah put her hand on the bolt. "Come back," reiterated Mrs. Treverton. "While there is life in me, I will be obeyed. Come back." The colour began to deepen perceptibly all over her face, and the light to grow brighter in her widely-opened eyes.

Sarah came back; and with shaking hands, added one more to the many pillows which supported the dying woman's head and shoulders.

While this was being done, the bedclothes became a little discomposed. Mrs. Treverton shudderingly drew them up to their former position, close round her neck.

“Did you unbolt the door?” she asked.

“No.”

“I forbid you to go near it again. Get my writing-case, and the pen and ink, from the cabinet near the window.”

Sarah went to the cabinet and opened it; then stopped, as if some sudden suspicion had crossed her mind, and asked what the writing materials were wanted for.

“Bring them, and you will see.”

The writing-case, with a sheet of note-paper on it, was placed upon Mrs. Treverton's knees; the pen was dipped into the ink, and given to her; she paused, closed her eyes for a minute, and sighed heavily; then began to write, saying to her waiting-maid, as the pen touched the paper: “Look.”

Sarah peered anxiously over her shoulder, and saw the pen slowly and feebly form these three words:—*To my Husband.*

“O, no! no! For God's sake, don't write it!” she cried, catching at her mistress's hand—but suddenly letting it go again the moment Mrs. Treverton looked at her.

The pen went on; and more slowly, more feebly, formed words enough to fill a line—then

stopped. The letters of the last syllable were all blotted together.

“Don’t!” reiterated Sarah, dropping on her knees at the bedside. “Don’t write it to him if you can’t tell it to him. Let me go on bearing what I have borne so long already. Let the secret die with you and die with me, and be never known in this world—never, never, never!”

“The secret must be told,” answered Mrs. Treverton. “My husband ought to know it, and must know it. I tried to tell him, and my courage failed me. I cannot trust you to tell him, after I am gone. It must be written. Take you the pen; my sight is failing, my touch is dull. Take the pen, and write what I tell you.”

Sarah, instead of obeying, hid her face in the bed-cover, and wept bitterly.

“You have been with me ever since my marriage,” Mrs. Treverton went on. “You have been my friend more than my servant. Do you refuse my last request? You do! Fool! look up and listen to me. On your peril, refuse to take the pen. Write, or I shall not rest in my grave. Write, or as true as there is a Heaven above us, I will come to you from the other world!”

Sarah started to her feet with a faint scream.

“You make my flesh creep!” she whispered, fixing her eyes on her mistress’s face with a stare of superstitious horror. At the same instant, the

overdose of the stimulating medicine began to affect Mrs. Treverton's brain. She rolled her head restlessly from side to side of the pillow—repeated vacantly a few lines from one of the old play-books which had been removed from her bed—and suddenly held out the pen to the servant, with a theatrical wave of the hand, and a glance upward at an imaginary gallery of spectators.

“Write!” she cried, with a hollow, awful mimicry of her old stage voice. “Write!” And the weak hand was waved again with a forlorn, feeble imitation of the old stage gesture.

Closing her fingers mechanically on the pen that was thrust between them, Sarah, with her eyes still expressing the superstitious terror which her mistress's words had aroused, waited for the next command. Some minutes elapsed before Mrs. Treverton spoke again. She still retained her senses sufficiently to be vaguely conscious of the effect which the medicine was producing on her, and to be desirous of combating its further progress before it succeeded in utterly confusing her ideas. She asked first for the smelling-bottle, next for some Eau de Cologne. This last, poured on to her handkerchief, and applied to her forehead, seemed to prove successful in partially clearing her faculties again. Her eyes recovered their steady look of intelligence; and, when she again addressed her

maid, reiterating the word "Write," she was able to enforce the direction by beginning immediately to dictate in quiet, deliberate, determined tones. Sarah's tears fell fast; her lips murmured fragments of sentences in which entreaties, expressions of penitence, and exclamations of fear were all strangely mingled together: but she wrote on submissively, in wavering lines, until she had nearly filled the two first sides of the note paper. Then Mrs. Treverton paused, looked the writing over, and, taking the pen, signed her name at the end of it. With this effort, her powers of resistance to the exciting effect of the medicine, seemed to fail her again. The deep flush began to tinge her cheeks once more, and she spoke hurriedly and unsteadily when she handed the pen back to her maid.

"Sign!" she cried, beating her hand feebly on the bed-clothes. "Sign Sarah Leeson, witness. No!—write accomplice. Take your share of it; I won't have it shifted on me. Sign, I insist on it! Sign as I tell you."

Sarah obeyed; and Mrs. Treverton taking the paper from her, pointed to it solemnly, with a return of the same sad stage gesture which had escaped her a little while back.

"You will give this to your master," she said, "when I am dead; and you will answer any questions he puts to you as truly as if you were before the judgment-seat."



Clasping her hands fast together, Sarah regarded her mistress, for the first time, with steady eyes, and spoke to her for the first time in steady tones.

“If I only knew that I was fit to die,” she said, “O, how gladly I would change places with you!”

“Promise me that you will give the paper to your master,” repeated Mrs. Treverton. “Promise—no! I won’t trust your promise: I’ll have your oath. Get the Bible—the Bible the clergyman used when he was here this morning. Get it, or I shall not rest in my grave. Get it, or I will come to you from the other world.”

The mistress laughed, as she reiterated that threat. The maid shuddered, as she obeyed the command which it was designed to impress on her.

“Yes, yes—the Bible the clergyman used,” continued Mrs. Treverton, vacantly, after the book had been produced. “The clergyman—a good, weak man—I frightened him, Sarah. He said, ‘Are you at peace with all the world?’ and I said, ‘All but one.’ You know who.”

“The Captain’s brother. O, don’t die at enmity with anybody. Don’t die at enmity even with him,” pleaded Sarah.

“The clergyman told me that,” said Mrs. Treverton, her eyes beginning now to wander childishly round the room, her tones growing

suddenly lower and more confused. “ ‘ You must forgive him,’ the clergyman said. And I said, ‘ No. I forgive all the world, but not my husband’s brother.’ The clergyman got up from the bedside, frightened, Sarah. He talked about praying for me, and coming back. Will he come back ? ”

“ Yes, yes,” answered Sarah. “ He is a good man—he will come back—and O ! tell him that you forgive the Captain’s brother ! Those vile words he spoke of you, when you were married, will come home to him some day. Forgive him—forgive him before you die ! ”

Saying those words, she attempted to remove the Bible softly out of her mistress’s sight. The action attracted Mrs. Treverton’s attention, and roused her sinking faculties into observation of present things.

“ Stop ! ” she cried, with a gleam of the old resolution flashing once more over the dying dimness of her eyes. She caught at Sarah’s hand with a great effort, placed it on the Bible, and held it there. Her other hand wandered a little over the bed-clothes, until it encountered the written paper addressed to her husband. Her fingers closed on it ; and a sigh of relief escaped her lips. “ Ah ! ” she said. “ I know what I wanted the Bible for, now. I’m dying with all my senses about me, Sarah ; you can’t deceive me even yet.” She stopped again,

smiled a little, whispered to herself rapidly, "Wait, wait, wait!" then added aloud, with the old stage voice and the old stage gesture again: "No! I won't trust you on your promise. I'll have your oath. Kneel down. These are my last words in this world—disobey them if you dare!"

Sarah dropped on her knees by the bed. The breeze outside, strengthening just then with the slow advance of the morning, parted the window-curtains a little, and wafted a breath of its sweet fragrance joyously into the sick room. The heavy-beating hum of the distant surf came in at the same time, and poured out its unresting music in louder strains. Then the window-curtains fell to again heavily, the wavering flame of the candle grew steady once more, and the awful silence in the room sank deeper than ever.

"Swear," said Mrs. Treverton. Her voice failed her when she had pronounced that one word. She struggled a little, recovered the power of utterance, and went on: "Swear that you will not destroy this paper, after I am dead."

Even while she pronounced those solemn words, even at that last struggle for life and strength, the ineradicable theatrical instinct showed, with a fearful inappropriateness, how firmly it kept its place in her mind. Sarah felt

the cold hand that was still laid on hers lifted for a moment—saw it waving gracefully towards her—felt it descend again, and clasp her own hand with a trembling, impatient pressure. At that final appeal, she answered faintly :—

“ I swear it.”

“ Swear that you will not take this paper away with you, if you leave the house, after I am dead.”

Again Sarah paused before she answered—again the trembling pressure made itself felt on her hand, but more weakly this time,—and again the words dropped affrightedly from her lips ;—

“ I swear it.”

“ Swear,” Mrs. Treverton began for the third time. Her voice failed her once more ; and, now, she struggled vainly to regain the command over it. Sarah looked up, and saw signs of convulsion beginning to disfigure the beautiful face—saw the fingers of the white, delicate hand getting crooked as they reached over towards the table on which the medicine-bottles were placed.

“ You drank it all,” she cried, starting to her feet, as she comprehended the meaning of that gesture. “ Mistress, dear mistress, you drank it all—there is nothing but the opiate left. Let me go—let me go and call——”

A look from Mrs. Treverton stopped her before she could utter another word. The lips of the dying woman were moving rapidly. Sarah

put her ear close to them. At first she heard nothing but panting, quick-drawn breaths—then a few broken words mingled confusedly with them :

“ I hav’n’t done—you must swear—close, close, close, come close—a third thing—your master—swear to give it——”

The last words died away very softly. The lips that had been forming them so laboriously, parted on a sudden and closed again no more. Sarah sprang to the door, and opened it, and called into the passage for help—then ran back to the bed-side, caught up the sheet of note-paper on which she had written from her mistress’s dictation, and hid it in her bosom. The last look of Mrs. Treverton’s eyes fastened sternly and reproachfully on her as she did this, and kept their expression unchanged, through the momentary distortion of the rest of the features, for one breathless moment. That moment passed, and, with the next, the shadow that goes before the presence of death, stole up, and shut out the light of life, in one quiet instant, from all the face.

The doctor, followed by the nurse and one of the servants, entered the room ; and, hurrying to the bed-side, saw at a glance that the time for his attendance there had passed away for ever. He spoke first to the servant who had followed him.

“ Go to your master,” he said, “ and beg him to wait in his own room until I can come and speak to him.”

Sarah still stood—without moving, or speaking, or noticing any one—by the bed-side.

The nurse, approaching to draw the curtains together, started at the sight of her face, and turned to the doctor.

“I think this person had better leave the room, sir?” said the nurse, with some appearance of contempt in her tones and looks. “She seems unreasonably shocked and terrified by what has happened.”

“Quite right,” said the doctor. “It is best that she should withdraw. Let me recommend you to leave us for a little while,” he added, touching Sarah on the arm.

She shrank back suspiciously, raised one of her hands to the place where the letter lay hidden in her bosom, and pressed it there firmly, while she held out the other hand for a candle.

“You had better rest for a little in your own room,” said the doctor, giving her a candle. “Stop, though,” he continued, after a moment’s reflection. “I am going to break the sad news to your master, and I may find that he is anxious to hear any last words that Mrs. Treverton may have spoken in your presence. Perhaps you had better come with me, and wait while I go into Captain Treverton’s room.”

“No! no!—oh, not now—not now, for Heaven’s sake!” Speaking those words in low, quick, pleading tones, and drawing back affright-

edly, during their utterance, to the door, Sarah disappeared, without waiting a moment to be spoken to again.

“A strange woman!” said the doctor, addressing the nurse. “Follow her, and see where she goes to, in case she is wanted and we are obliged to send for her. I will wait here until you come back.”

When the nurse returned she had nothing to report, but that she had followed Sarah Leeson to her own bed-room—had seen her enter it—had listened outside, and had heard her lock the door.

“A strange woman!” repeated the doctor. “One of the silent, secret sort.”

“One of the wrong sort,” said the nurse. “She is always talking to herself, and that is a bad sign, in my opinion. I don’t like the look of her. I distrusted her, sir, the very first day I entered the house.”

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CHILD.

THE instant Sarah Leeson had turned the key of her bedroom door, she took the sheet of note-paper from its place of concealment in her bosom—shuddering, when she drew it out, as if the mere contact of it hurt her—placed it open on her little dressing-table, and fixed her eyes eagerly on the lines which the note contained. At first they swam and mingled together before her. She pressed her hands over her eyes for a few minutes, and then looked at the writing again.

The characters were clear now—vividly clear, and, as she fancied, unnaturally large and near to view. There was the address: “To my Husband;” there the first blotted line beneath, in her dead mistress’s handwriting; there the lines that followed, traced by her own pen, with the signatures at the end—Mrs. Treverton’s first, and then her own. The whole amounted to but very few sentences, written on one perishable



fragment of paper, which the flame of a candle would have consumed in a moment. Yet there she sat, reading, reading, reading, over and over again; never touching the note, except when it was absolutely necessary to turn over the first page; never moving, never speaking, never raising her eyes from the paper. As a condemned prisoner might read his death-warrant, so did Sarah Leeson now read the few lines which she and her mistress had written together not half-an-hour since.

The secret of the paralysing effect of that writing on her mind lay, not only in itself, but in the circumstances which had attended the act of its production. The oath which had been proposed by Mrs. Treverton under no more serious influence than the last caprice of disordered faculties, stimulated by confused remembrances of stage words and stage situations, had been accepted by Sarah Leeson as the most sacred and inviolable engagement to which she could bind herself. The threat of enforcing obedience to her last commands from beyond the grave, which the mistress had uttered in mocking experiment on the superstitious fears of the credulous maid, now hung darkly over the weak mind of Sarah, as a judgment which might descend on her, visibly and inexorably, at any moment of her future life. When she roused herself at last, and pushed away the paper, and

rose to her feet, she stood quite still for an instant, before she ventured to look behind her. When she did look, it was with an effort and a start, with a searching distrust of the empty dimness in the remoter corners of the room.

Her old habit of talking to herself began to resume its influence, as she now walked rapidly backwards and forwards, sometimes along the room and sometimes across it. She repeated incessantly such broken phrases as these: "How can I give him the letter?—Such a good master; so kind to us all.—Why did she die, and leave it all to me?—I can't bear it alone; it's too much for me." While reiterating these sentences, she vacantly occupied herself in putting things about the room in order, which were set in perfect order already. All her looks, all her actions, betrayed the vain struggle of a weak mind to sustain itself under the weight of a heavy responsibility. She arranged and rearranged the cheap china ornaments on her chimney-piece a dozen times over—put her pin-cushion first on the looking-glass, then on the table in front of it—changed the position of the little porcelain dish and tray on her wash-hand-stand, now to one side of the basin, and now to the other. Throughout all these trifling actions, the natural grace, delicacy, and prim neat-handedness of the woman still waited mechanically on the most useless and aimless of her occupations of the

moment. She knocked nothing down, she put nothing awry, her footsteps at their fastest made no sound—the very skirts of her dress were kept as properly and prudishly composed as if it was broad daylight and the eyes of all her neighbours were looking at her.

From time to time the sense of the words she was murmuring confusedly to herself changed. Sometimes they disjointedly expressed bolder and more self-reliant thoughts. Once they seemed to urge her again to the dressing-table and the open letter on it, against her own will. She read aloud the address: "To my Husband," and caught the letter up sharply, and spoke in firmer tones. "Why give it to him at all? Why not let the secret die with her and die with me, as it ought? Why should he know it? He shall *not* know it!" Saying those last words, she desperately held the letter within an inch of the flame of the candle. At the same moment the white curtain over the window before her stirred a little, as the freshening air found its way through the old-fashioned, ill-fitting sashes. Her eye caught sight of it, as it waved gently backwards and forwards. She clasped the letter suddenly to her breast with both hands, and shrank back against the wall of the room, her eyes still fastened on the curtain, with the same blank look of horror which they had exhibited when Mrs. Treverton had threatened

to claim her servant's obedience from the other world.

"Something moves," she gasped to herself, in a breathless whisper. "Something moves in the room besides me!"

The curtain waved slowly to and fro for the second time. Still fixedly looking at it over her shoulder, she crept along the wall to the door.

"Do you come to me already?" she said, her eyes riveted on the curtain while her hand groped over the lock for the key. "Before the grave is dug? Before the coffin is made? Before the body is cold?"

She opened the door and glided into the passage; stopped there for a moment, and looked back into the room.

"Rest!" she said. "Rest—he shall have the letter."

The staircase-lamp guided her out of the passage. Descending hurriedly, as if she feared to give herself time to think, she reached Captain Treverton's study, on the ground-floor, in a minute or two. The door was wide open, and the room was empty.

After reflecting a little, she lighted one of the chamber-candles standing on the hall-table, at the lamp in the study, and ascended the stairs again to her master's bed-room. After repeatedly knocking at the door and obtaining no answer, she ventured to go in. The bed had not been

disturbed, the candles had not been lit—to all appearance, the room had not even been entered during the night.

There was but one other place to seek him in—the chamber in which his wife lay dead. Could she summon the courage to give him the letter there? She hesitated a little—then whispered, “I must! I must!” The direction she now compelled herself to take, led her a little way down the stairs again. She descended very slowly this time, holding cautiously by the banisters, and pausing to take breath almost at every step. The door of what had been Mrs. Treverton’s bed-room was opened, when she ventured to knock at it, by the nurse, who inquired roughly and suspiciously, what she wanted there.

“I want to speak to my master.”

“Look for him somewhere else. He was here half an hour ago. He is gone now.”

“Do you know where he has gone?”

“No. I don’t pry into other people’s goings and comings. I mind my own business.”

With that discourteous answer, the nurse closed the door again. Just as Sarah turned away from it, she looked towards the inner end of the passage. The door of the nursery was situated there. It was ajar, and a dim gleam of candle-light was flickering through it.

She went in immediately, and saw that the

candle-light came from an inner room, usually occupied, as she well knew, by the nursery-maid and by the only child of the house of Treverton; a little girl, named Rosamond, aged, at that time, nearly five years.

“Can he be there?—in that room, of all the rooms in the house!”

Quickly as the thought arose in her mind, Sarah raised the letter (which she had hitherto carried in her hand) to the bosom of her dress, and hid it for the second time, exactly as she had hidden it on leaving her mistress's bed-side.

She then stole across the nursery on tiptoe towards the inner room. The entrance to it, to please some caprice of the child's, had been arched, and framed with trellis-work, gaily-coloured, so as to resemble the entrance to a summer-house. Two pretty chintz curtains, hanging inside the trellis-work, formed the only barrier between the day-room and the bed-room. One of these was looped up, and towards the opening thus made, Sarah now advanced, after cautiously leaving her candle in the passage outside.

The first object that attracted her attention in the child's bed-room, was the figure of the nurse-maid, leaning back fast asleep in an easy chair by the window. Venturing, after this discovery, to look more boldly into the room, she next saw her master sitting with his back towards her, by the side of the child's crib. Little Rosamond was

awake, and was standing up in bed with her arms round her father's neck. One of her hands held over his shoulder the doll that she had taken to bed with her, the other was twined gently in his hair. The child had been crying bitterly, and had now exhausted herself, so that she was only moaning a little from time to time, with her head laid wearily on her father's bosom.

The tears stood thick in Sarah's eyes as they looked on her master and on the little hands that lay round his neck. She lingered by the raised curtain, heedless of the risk she ran, from moment to moment, of being discovered and questioned—lingered until she heard Captain Treverton say soothingly to the child:

“Hush, Rosie, dear! hush, my own love! Don't cry any more for poor mamma. Think of poor papa, and try to comfort him.”

Simple as the words were, quietly and tenderly as they were spoken, they seemed instantly to deprive Sarah Leeson of all power of self-control. Reckless whether she was heard or not, she turned and ran into the passage as if she had been flying for her life. Passing the candle she had left there, without so much as a look at it, she made for the stairs, and descended them with headlong rapidity to the kitchen-floor. There, one of the servants who had been sitting up met her, and, with a face of astonishment and alarm, asked what was the matter.

“I’m ill—I’m faint—I want air,” she answered, speaking thickly and confusedly. “Open the garden-door and let me out.”

The man obeyed, but doubtfully, as if he thought her unfit to be trusted by herself.

“She gets stranger than ever in her ways,” he said, when he rejoined his fellow-servant, after Sarah had hurried past him into the open air. “Now my mistress is dead, she will have to find another place, I suppose. I, for one, shan’t break my heart when she’s gone. Shall you?”



## CHAPTER III.



### THE HIDING OF THE SECRET.

THE cool, sweet air in the garden blowing freshly over Sarah's face, seemed to calm the violence of her agitation. She turned down a side walk which led to a terrace and overlooked the church of the neighbouring village. The daylight out of doors was clear already. The misty auburn light that goes before sunrise, was flowing up, peaceful and lovely, behind a line of black-brown moorland, over all the eastern sky. The old church, with the hedge of myrtle and fuchsia growing round the little cemetery at the side of it in all the luxuriance which is only seen in Cornwall, was clearing and brightening to view, almost as fast as the morning firmament itself. Sarah leaned her arms heavily on the back of a garden-seat, and turned her face towards the church. Her eyes wandered from the building itself to the cemetery by its side—rested there—and watched the light growing warmer

and warmer over the lonesome refuge where the dead lay at rest.

“O, my heart! my heart!” she said. “What must it be made of not to break?”

She remained for some time leaning on the seat, looking sadly towards the churchyard, and pondering over the words which she had heard Captain Treverton say to the child. They seemed to connect themselves, as everything else now appeared to connect itself in her mind, with the letter that had been written on Mrs. Treverton's death-bed. She drew it from her bosom once more, and crushed it up angrily in her fingers.

“Still in my hands! still not seen by any eyes but mine!” she said, looking down at the crumpled pages. “Is it all my fault? If she was alive now—if she had seen what I saw, if she had heard what I heard—could she expect me to give him the letter?”

Her mind was apparently steadied by the reflection which her last words expressed. She moved away thoughtfully from the garden-seat, crossed the terrace, descended some wooden steps, and followed a shrubby path, which led round by a winding track from the east to the north side of the house.

This part of the building had been uninhabited and neglected for more than half a century past. In the time of Captain Treverton's

father the whole range of the north rooms had been stripped of their finest pictures and their most valuable furniture, to assist in re-decorating the west rooms, which now formed the only inhabited part of the house, and which were amply sufficient for the accommodation of the family and of any visitors who came to stay with them. The mansion had been originally built in the form of a square, and had been strongly fortified. Of the many defences of the place, but one now remained—a heavy, low tower (from which and from the village near, the house derived its name of Porthgenna Tower), standing at the southern extremity of the west front. The south side itself consisted of stables and out-houses, with a ruinous wall in front of them, which, running back, eastward, at right angles, joined the north side, and so completed the square which the whole outline of the building represented. The outside view of the range of north rooms from the weedy, deserted garden, below, showed plainly enough that many years had passed since any human creature had inhabited them. The window-panes were broken in some places, and covered thickly with dirt and dust in others. Here, the shutters were closed—there, they were only half-opened. The untrained ivy, the rank vegetation growing in fissures of the stone-work, the festoons of spiders' webs, the rubbish of wood, bricks, plaster, broken glass, rags, and

strips of soiled cloth, which lay beneath the windows, all told the same tale of neglect. Shadowed by its position, this ruinous side of the house had a dark, cold, wintry aspect, even on the sunny August morning, when Sarah Leeson strayed into the deserted northern garden. Lost in the labyrinth of her own thoughts, she moved slowly past flower-beds, long since rooted up, and along gravel-walks overgrown by weeds; her eyes wandering mechanically over the prospect, her feet mechanically carrying her on wherever there was a trace of a footpath, lead where it might.

The shock which the words spoken by her master in the nursery had communicated to her mind, had set her whole nature, so to speak, at bay, and had roused in her, at last, the moral courage to arm herself with a final and a desperate resolution. Wandering more and more slowly along the pathways of the forsaken garden, as the course of her ideas withdrew her more and more completely from all outward things, she stopped insensibly on an open patch of ground, which had once been a well-kept lawn, and which still commanded a full view of the long range of uninhabited north rooms.

“What binds me to give the letter to my master, at all?” she thought to herself, smoothing out the crumpled paper dreamily in the palm of her hand. “My mistress died without making

me swear to do that. Can she visit it on me from the other world, if I keep the promises I swore to observe, and do no more? May I not risk the worst that can happen, so long as I hold religiously to all that I undertook to do on my oath?"

She paused here in reasoning with herself; her superstitious fears still influencing her out of doors, in the daylight, as they had influenced her in her own room, in the time of darkness. She paused—then fell to smoothing the letter again, and began to recal the terms of the solemn engagement which Mrs. Treverton had forced her to contract.

What had she actually bound herself to do? Not to destroy the letter, and not to take it away with her if she left the house. Beyond that, Mrs. Treverton's desire had been that the letter should be given to her husband. Was that last wish binding on the person to whom it had been confided? Yes. As binding as an oath? No.

As she arrived at that conclusion, she looked up. At first, her eyes rested vacantly on the lonely, deserted north front of the house; gradually, they became attracted by one particular window exactly in the middle, on the floor above the ground—the largest and the gloomiest of all the row; suddenly, they brightened with an expression of intelligence. She started; a faint flush of colour flew into her cheeks, and she hastily advanced closer to the wall of the house.

The panes of the large window were yellow with dust and dirt, and festooned about fantastically with cobwebs. Below it was a heap of rubbish, scattered over the dry mould of what might once have been a bed of flowers or shrubs. The form of the bed was still marked out by an oblong boundary of weeds and rank grass. She followed it irresolutely all round, looking up at the window at every step, then stopped close under it, glanced at the letter in her hand, and said to herself abruptly :—

“ I’ll risk it ! ”

As the words fell from her lips, she hastened back to the inhabited part of the house, followed the passage on the kitchen-floor which led to the housekeeper’s room, entered it, and took down from a nail in the wall a bunch of keys, having a large ivory label attached to the ring that connected them, on which was inscribed, “ Keys of the North Rooms.”

She placed the keys on a writing-table near her, took up a pen, and rapidly added these lines on the blank side of the letter which she had written under her mistress’s dictation :—

“ If this paper should ever be found (which I pray with my whole heart it never may be), I wish to state that I have come to the resolution of hiding it, because I dare not show the writing that it contains to my master, to whom it is

addressed. In doing what I now propose to do, though I am acting against my mistress's last wishes, I am not breaking the solemn engagement which she obliged me to make before her on her death-bed. That engagement forbids me to destroy this letter, or to take it away with me if I leave the house. I shall do neither,—my purpose is to conceal it in the place, of all others, where I think there is least chance of its ever being found again. Any hardship or misfortune which may follow as a consequence of this deceitful proceeding on my part, will fall on myself. Others, I believe on my conscience, will be the happier for the hiding of the dreadful secret which this letter contains."

She signed those lines with her name,—pressed them hurriedly over the blotting-pad that lay with the rest of the writing materials on the table,—took the note in her hand, after first folding it up, and then, snatching at the bunch of keys, with a look all round her, as if she dreaded being secretly observed, left the room. All her actions since she had entered it had been hasty and sudden; she was evidently afraid of allowing herself one leisure moment to reflect.

On quitting the housekeeper's room, she turned to the left, ascended a back staircase, and unlocked a door at the top of it. A cloud of dust flew all about her, as she softly opened the door; a mouldy coolness made her shiver as she crossed

a large stone hall, with some black old family portraits, the canvases of which were bulging out of the frames, hanging on the walls. Ascending more stairs, she came upon a row of doors, all leading into rooms on the first floor of the north side of the house.

She knelt down, putting the letter on the boards beside her, opposite the keyhole of the fourth door she came to after reaching the top of the stairs, peered in distrustfully for an instant, then began to try the different keys till she found one that fitted the lock. She had great difficulty in accomplishing this, from the violence of her agitation, which made her hands tremble to such a degree that she was hardly able to keep the keys separate one from the other. At length she succeeded in opening the door. Thicker clouds of dust than she had yet met with flew out the moment the interior of the room was visible; a dry, airless, suffocating atmosphere almost choked her as she stooped to pick up the letter from the floor. She recoiled from it at first, and took a few steps back towards the staircase. But she recovered her resolution immediately. "I can't go back now!" she said, desperately, and entered the room.

She did not remain in it more than two or three minutes. When she came out again, her face was white with fear, and the hand which had held the letter when she went



into the room, held nothing now but a small rusty key.

After locking the door again, she examined the large bunch of keys which she had taken from the housekeeper's room, with closer attention than she had yet bestowed on them. Besides the ivory label attached to the ring that connected them there were smaller labels, of parchment, tied to the handles of some of the keys, to indicate the rooms to which they gave admission. The particular key which she had used had one of these labels hanging to it. She held the little strip of parchment close to the light, and read on it, in written characters faded by time,

*"The Myrtle Room."*

The room in which the letter was hidden had a name, then! A prettily sounding name that would attract most people, and keep pleasantly in their memories. A name to be distrusted by her, after what she had done, on that very account.

She took her housewife from its usual place in the pocket of her apron, and, with the scissors which it contained, cut the label from the key. Was it enough to destroy that one only? She lost herself in a maze of useless conjecture; and ended by cutting off the other labels, from no other motive than instinctive suspicion of them.

Carefully gathering up the strips of parchment from the floor, she put them, along with the little

rusty key which she had brought out of the Myrtle Room, in the empty pocket of her apron. Then, carrying the large bunch of keys in her hand, and carefully locking the doors that she had opened on her way to the north side of Porthgenna Tower, she retraced her steps to the house-keeper's room, entered it without seeing anybody, and hung up the bunch of keys again on the nail in the wall.

Fearful, as the morning hours wore on, of meeting with some of the female servants, she next hastened back to her bed-room. The candle she had left there was still burning feebly in the fresh daylight. When she drew aside the window-curtain, after extinguishing the candle, a shadow of her former fear passed over her face, even in the broad daylight that now flowed in upon it. She opened the window, and leaned out eagerly into the cool air.

Whether for good or for evil, the fatal secret was hidden now—the act was done. There was something calming in the first consciousness of that one fact. She could think more composedly, after that, of herself, and of the uncertain future that lay before her.

Under no circumstances could she have expected to remain in her situation, now that the connection between herself and her mistress had been severed by death. She knew that Mrs. Treverton, in the last days of her illness, had

earnestly recommended her maid to Captain Treverton's kindness and protection, and she felt assured that the wife's last entreaties, in this as in all other instances, would be viewed as the most sacred of obligations by the husband. But could she accept protection and kindness at the hand of the master whom she had been accessory to deceiving, and whom she had now committed herself to deceiving still? The bare idea of such baseness was so revolting, that she accepted, almost with a sense of relief, the one sad alternative that remained—the alternative of leaving the house immediately.

And how was she to leave it? By giving formal warning, and so exposing herself to questions which would be sure to confuse and terrify her? Could she venture to face her master again, after what she had done—to face him, when his first inquiries would refer to her mistress, when he would be certain to ask her for the last mournful details, for the slightest word that had been spoken during the death-scene which she alone had witnessed? She started to her feet, as the certain consequences of submitting herself to that unendurable trial all crowded together warningly on her mind, took her cloak from its place on the wall, and listened at her door in sudden suspicion and fear. Had she heard footsteps? Was her master sending for her already?

No : all was silent outside. A few tears rolled over her cheeks, as she put on her bonnet, and felt that she was facing, by the performance of that simple everyday action, the last, and perhaps the hardest to meet, of the cruel necessities in which the hiding of the secret had involved her. There was no help for it. She must run the risk of betraying everything, or brave the double trial of leaving Porthgenna Tower, and leaving it secretly.

Secretly—as a thief might go? Secretly—without a word to her master; without so much as one line of writing to thank him for his kindness, and to ask his pardon? She had unlocked her desk, and had taken from it her purse, one or two letters, and a little book of Wesley's Hymns, before these considerations occurred to her. They made her pause in the act of shutting up the desk. "Shall I write?" she asked herself, "and leave the letter here, to be found when I am gone?" A little more reflection decided her in the affirmative. As rapidly as her pen could form the letters, she wrote a few lines addressed to Captain Treverton, in which she confessed to having kept a secret from his knowledge which had been left in her charge to divulge; adding, that she honestly believed no harm could come to him, or to any one in whom he was interested, by her failing to perform the duty entrusted to her; and ending

by asking his pardon for leaving the house secretly, and by begging, as a last favour, that no search might ever be made for her. Having sealed this short note, and left it on her table, with her master's name written outside, she listened again at the door; and, after satisfying herself that no one was yet stirring, began to descend the stairs at Porthgenna Tower for the last time.

At the entrance of the passage leading to the nursery, she stopped. The tears which she had restrained since leaving her room, began to flow again. Urgent as her reasons now were for effecting her departure without a moment's loss of time, she advanced, with the strangest inconsistency, a few steps towards the nursery-door. Before she had gone far, a slight noise in the lower part of the house caught her ear, and instantly checked her further progress. While she stood doubtful, the grief at her heart—a greater grief than any she had yet betrayed—rose irresistibly to her lips, and burst from them in one deep gasping sob. The sound of it seemed to terrify her into a sense of the danger of her position, if she delayed a moment longer. She ran out again to the stairs, reached the kitchen-floor in safety, and made her escape by the garden-door which the servant had opened for her at the dawn of the morning.

On getting clear of the premises at Porthgenna Tower, instead of taking the nearest path over the moor that led to the high road, she diverged to the church; but stopped before she came to it, at the public well of the neighbourhood, which had been sunk near the cottages of the Porthgenna fishermen. Cautiously looking round her, she dropped into the well the little rusty key which she had brought out of the Myrtle Room; then hurried on, and entered the churchyard. She directed her course straight to one of the graves, situated a little apart from the rest. On the headstone were inscribed these words:—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
HUGH POLWHEAL,  
AGED 26 YEARS.  
HE MET WITH HIS DEATH  
THROUGH THE FALL OF A ROCK  
IN  
PORTHGENNA MINE,  
DECEMBER 17TH, 1823.

Gathering a few leaves of grass from the grave, Sarah opened the little book of Wesley's Hymns which she had brought with her from the bedroom at Porthgenna Tower, and placed the leaves delicately and carefully between the pages. As she did this, the wind blew open the title-

page of the Hymns, and displayed this inscription on it, written in large clumsy characters:—  
“Sarah Leeson, her book. The gift of Hugh Polwheal.”

Having secured the blades of grass between the pages of the book, she retraced her way towards the path leading to the high road. Arrived on the moor, she took out of her apron-pocket the parchment labels that had been cut from the keys, and scattered them under the furze-bushes.

“Gone,” she said, “as I am gone! God help and forgive me, it is all done and over now!”

With those words, she turned her back on the old house and the sea-view below it, and followed the moorland path on her way to the high road.

Four hours afterwards, Captain Treverton desired one of the servants at Porthgenna Tower to inform Sarah Leeson that he wished to hear all she had to tell him of the dying moments of her mistress. The messenger returned with looks and words of amazement, and with the letter that Sarah had addressed to her master in his hand.

The moment Captain Treverton had read the letter, he ordered an immediate search to be made after the missing woman. She was so easy to describe and to recognise by the premature greyness of her hair, by the odd, scared

look in her eyes, and by her habit of constantly talking to herself, that she was traced with certainty as far as Truro. In that large town, the track of her was lost, and never recovered again. Rewards were offered; the magistrates of the district were interested in the case; all that wealth and power could do to discover her, was done—and done in vain. No clue was found to suggest a suspicion of her whereabouts, or to help in the slightest degree towards explaining the nature of the secret at which she had hinted in her letter. Her master never saw her again, never heard of her again, after the morning of the twenty-third of August, eighteen hundred and twenty-nine.



BOOK II.



## CHAPTER I.



FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER.

THE church of Long Beckley (a large agricultural village in one of the midland counties of England), although a building in no way remarkable either for its size, its architecture, or its antiquity, possesses, nevertheless, one advantage which the merchant despots of London have barbarously denied to their noble cathedral church of St. Paul. It has plenty of room to stand in, and it can consequently be seen with perfect convenience from every point of view, all round the compass.

The large open space around the church can be approached in three different directions. There is a road from the village, leading straight to the principal door. There is a broad gravel-walk, which begins at the vicarage gates, crosses the churchyard, and stops, as in duty bound, at the vestry entrance. There is a footpath over the fields, by which the lord of the manor, and the gentry in general who live in his august neigh-

bourhood, can reach the side door of the building, whenever their natural humility (aided by a favourable state of the weather) may incline them to encourage Sabbath observance in the stables, by going to church, like the lower sort of worshippers, on their own legs.

At half-past seven o'clock, on a certain fine summer morning, in the year eighteen hundred and forty-four, if any observant stranger had happened to be standing in some unnoticed corner of the churchyard, and to be looking about him with sharp eyes, he would probably have been the witness of proceedings which might have led him to believe that there was a conspiracy going on in Long Beckley, of which the church was the rallying point, and some of the most respectable inhabitants the principal leaders. Supposing him to have been looking towards the vicarage as the clock chimed the half-hour, he would have seen the Vicar of Long Beckley, the Reverend Doctor Chennery, leaving his house suspiciously, by the back way, glancing behind him guiltily as he approached the gravel-walk that led to the vestry, stopping mysteriously just outside the door, and gazing anxiously down the road that led from the village.

Assuming that our observant stranger would, upon this, keep out of sight, and look down the road, like the vicar, he would next have seen the clerk of the church—an austere,

yellow-faced, dignified man—a Protestant Loyola in appearance, and a working shoemaker by trade—approaching with a look of unutterable mystery in his face, and a bunch of big keys in his hand. He would have seen the clerk bow to the vicar with a grim smile of intelligence—as Guy Fawkes might have bowed to Catesby when those two large gunpowder proprietors met to take stock in their extensive range of premises under the Parliament Houses. He would have seen the vicar nod in an abstracted way to the clerk, and say—undoubtedly giving a secret pass-word under the double disguise of a common remark and a friendly question—“Fine morning, Thomas. Have you had your breakfast yet?” He would have heard Thomas reply, with a suspicious regard for minute particulars: “I have had a cup of tea and a crust, sir.” And he would then have seen these two local conspirators, after looking up with one accord at the church clock, draw off together to the side door which commanded a view of the footpath across the fields.

Following them—as our observant stranger could not surely fail to do—he would have detected three more conspirators advancing along the footpath. The leader of this treasonable party was an elderly gentleman, with a weather-beaten face, and a bluff hearty manner, admirably calculated to disarm suspicion. His

two followers were a young gentleman and a young lady, walking arm-in-arm, and talking together in whispers. They were dressed in the plainest morning costume. The faces of both were rather pale, and the manner of the lady was a little flurried. Otherwise, there was nothing remarkable to observe in them, until they came to the wicket-gate leading into the churchyard; and there the conduct of the young gentleman seemed, at first sight, rather inexplicable. Instead of holding the gate open for the lady to pass through, he hung back, allowed her to open it for herself, waited till she had got to the churchyard side, and then, stretching out his hand over the gate, allowed her to lead him through the entrance, as if he had suddenly changed from a grown man to a helpless little child.

Noting this, and remarking also that, when the party from the fields had arrived within greeting distance of the vicar, and when the clerk had used his bunch of keys to open the church-door, the young lady's companion was led into the building (this time by Doctor Chennery's hand), as he had been previously led through the wicket-gate, our observant stranger must have arrived at one inevitable conclusion—that the person requiring such assistance as this, was suffering under the affliction of blindness. Startled a little by that

discovery, he would have been still further amazed, if he had looked into the church, by seeing the blind man and the young lady standing together before the altar rails, with the elderly gentleman in parental attendance. Any suspicions he might now entertain that the bond which united the conspirators at that early hour of the morning was of the hymeneal sort, and that the object of their plot was to celebrate a wedding with the strictest secrecy, would have been confirmed in five minutes by the appearance of Doctor Chennery from the vestry in full canonicals, and by the reading of the marriage service in the reverend gentleman's most harmonious officiating tones. The ceremony concluded, the attendant stranger must have been more perplexed than ever, by observing that the persons concerned in it all separated, the moment the signing, kissing, and congratulating duties proper to the occasion had been performed, and quickly retired in the various directions by which they had approached the church.

Leaving the clerk to return by the village road, the bride, bridegroom, and elderly gentleman to turn back by the footpath over the fields, and the visionary stranger of these pages to vanish out of them, a prey to baffled curiosity, in any direction that he pleases;—let us follow Doctor Chennery to the vicarage breakfast-table,

and hear what he has to say about his professional exertions of the morning, in the familiar atmosphere of his own family circle.

The persons assembled at the breakfast were, first, Mr. Phippen, a guest; secondly, Miss Sturch, a governess; thirdly, fourthly, and fifthly, Miss Louisa Chenery (aged ten years), Miss Amelia Chenery (aged nine years), and Master Robert Chenery (aged eight years). There was no mother's face present, to make the household picture complete. Doctor Chenery had been a widower since the birth of his youngest child.

The guest was an old college acquaintance of the vicar's, and he was supposed to be now staying at Long Beckley for the benefit of his health. Most men of any character at all contrive to get a reputation of some sort which individualises them in the social circle amid which they move. Mr. Phippen was a man of some little character, and he lived with great distinction in the estimation of his friends, on the reputation of being A Martyr to Dyspepsia. Wherever Mr. Phippen went, the woes of Mr. Phippen's stomach went with him. He dieted himself publicly, and physicked himself publicly. He was so intensely occupied with himself and his maladies, that he would let a chance acquaintance into the secret of the condition of his tongue, at five minutes' notice; being just as



perpetually ready to discuss the state of his digestion as people in general are to discuss the state of the weather. On this favourite subject, as on all others, he spoke with a wheedling gentleness of manner, sometimes in softly mournful, sometimes in languidly sentimental tones. His politeness was of the oppressively affectionate sort, and he used the word "dear" continually, in addressing himself to others. Personally, he could not be called a handsome man. His eyes were watery, large, and light grey; they were always rolling from side to side in a state of moist admiration of something or somebody. His nose was long, drooping, profoundly melancholy,—if such an expression may be permitted in reference to that particular feature. For the rest, his lips had a lachrymose twist; his stature was small; his head large, bald, and loosely set on his shoulders; his manner of dressing himself eccentric, on the side of smartness; his age about five-and-forty; his condition that of a single man. Such was Mr. Phippen, the Martyr to Dyspepsia, and the guest of the vicar of Long Beckley.

Miss Sturch, the governess, may be briefly and accurately described as a young lady who had never been troubled with an idea or a sensation since the day when she was born. She was a little, plump, quiet, white-skinned, smiling, neatly-dressed girl, wound up accurately to the

performance of certain duties at certain times ; and possessed of an inexhaustible vocabulary of common-place talk, which dribbled placidly out of her lips whenever it was called for, always in the same quantity, and always of the same quality, at every hour in the day, and through every change in the seasons. Miss Sturch never laughed, and never cried, but took the safe middle course of smiling perpetually. She smiled when she came down on a morning in January, and said it was very cold. She smiled when she came down on a morning in July, and said it was very hot. She smiled when the bishop came once a-year to see the vicar ; she smiled when the butcher's boy came every morning for orders. She smiled when Miss Louisa wept on her bosom, and implored indulgence towards errors in geography ; she smiled when Master Robert jumped into her lap and ordered her to brush his hair. Let what might happen at the vicarage, nothing ever jerked Miss Sturch out of the one smooth groove in which she ran perpetually, always at the same pace. If she had lived in a royalist family, during the civil wars in England, she would have rung for the cook, to order dinner, on the morning of the execution of Charles the First. If Shakespeare had come back to life again, and had called at the vicarage at six o'clock on Saturday evening, to explain to Miss Sturch exactly what his views

were in composing the tragedy of Hamlet, she would have smiled and said it was extremely interesting, until the striking of seven o'clock; at which time she would have begged the Bard of Avon to excuse her, and would have left him in the middle of a sentence, to superintend the housemaid in the verification of the washing book. A very estimable young person, Miss Sturch (as the ladies of Long Beckley were accustomed to say); so judicious with the children and so attached to her household duties; such a well-regulated mind, and such a crisp touch on the piano; just nice-looking enough, just well-dressed enough, just talkative enough; not quite old enough, perhaps, and a little too much inclined to be embraceably plump about the region of the waist—but, on the whole, a very estimable young person,—very much so, indeed.

On the characteristic peculiarities of Miss Sturch's pupils, it is not necessary to dwell at very great length. Miss Louisa's habitual weakness was an inveterate tendency to catch cold. Miss Amelia's principal defect was a disposition to gratify her palate by eating supplementary dinners and breakfasts at unauthorised times and seasons. Master Robert's most noticeable failings were caused by alacrity in tearing his clothes, and obtuseness in learning the Multiplication Table. The virtues of all three were of much the same nature—they were well grown

they were genuine children, and they were boisterously fond of Miss Sturch.

To complete the gallery of family portraits, an outline, at the least, must be attempted of the vicar himself. Dr. Chennery was, in a physical point of view, a credit to the Establishment to which he was attached. He stood six feet two in his shooting-shoes; he weighed seventeen stone; he was the best bowler in the Long Beckley cricket-club; he was a strictly orthodox man in the matter of wine and mutton; he never started disagreeable theories about people's future destinies in the pulpit, never quarrelled with anybody out of the pulpit, never buttoned up his pockets when the necessities of his poor brethren (dissenters included) pleaded with him to open them. His course through the world was a steady march along the high and dry middle of a safe turnpike-road. The serpentine side-paths of controversy might open as alluringly as they pleased on his right hand and on his left, but he kept on his way sturdily, and never regarded them. Innovating young recruits in the Church army might entrappingly open the Thirty-nine Articles under his very nose, but the veteran's wary eye never looked a hair's-breadth further than his own signature at the bottom of them. He knew as little as possible of theology, he had never given the Privy Council a minute's trouble in the whole course of his

life, he was innocent of all meddling with the reading or writing of pamphlets, and he was quite incapable of finding his way to the platform of Exeter Hall. In short, he was the most unclerical of clergymen—but, for all that, he had such a figure for a surplice as is seldom seen. Seventeen stone weight of upright muscular flesh, without an angry spot or a sore place in any part of it, has the merit of suggesting stability, at any rate,—an excellent virtue in pillars of all kinds, but an especially precious quality, at the present time, in a pillar of the Church.

As soon as the vicar entered the breakfast-parlour, the children assailed him with a chorus of shouts. He was a severe disciplinarian in the observance of punctuality at meal times; and he now stood convicted by the clock of being too late for breakfast by a quarter of an hour.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Sturch,” said the vicar; “but I have a good excuse for being late this morning.”

“Pray don’t mention it, sir,” said Miss Sturch, blandly rubbing her plump little hands one over the other. “A beautiful morning. I fear we shall have another warm day. Robert, my love, your elbow is on the table. A beautiful morning—a beautiful morning, indeed!”

“Stomach still out of order—eh, Phippen?” asked the vicar, beginning to carve the ham.

Mr. Phippen shook his large head dolefully, placed his yellow forefinger, ornamented with a large turquoise ring, on the centre check of his light green summer waistcoat—looked piteously at Doctor Chennerly, and sighed—removed the finger, and produced from the breast-pocket of his wrapper a little mahogany case—took out of it a neat pair of apothecary's scales, with the accompanying weights, a morsel of ginger, and a highly-polished silver nutmeg-grater. "Dear Miss Sturch will pardon an invalid?" said Mr. Phippen, beginning to grate the ginger feebly into the nearest tea-cup.

"Guess what has made me a quarter of an hour late this morning," said the vicar, looking mysteriously all round the table.

"Lying in bed, papa," cried the three children, clapping their hands in triumph.

"What do *you* say, Miss Sturch?" asked Doctor Chennerly.

Miss Sturch smiled as usual, rubbed her hands as usual, cleared her throat softly as usual, looked fixedly at the tea-urn, and begged, with the most graceful politeness, to be excused if she said nothing.

"Your turn now, Phippen," said the vicar. "Come, guess what has kept me late this morning."

"My dear friend," said Mr. Phippen, giving the Doctor a brotherly squeeze of the hand,

“don't ask me to guess—I know! I saw what you eat at dinner yesterday—I saw what you drank after dinner. No digestion could stand it—not even yours. Guess what has made you late this morning? Pooh! pooh! I know. You dear, good soul, you have been taking physic!”

“Hav'n't touched a drop, thank God, for the last ten years!” said Doctor Chennery, with a look of devout gratitude. “No, no; you're all wrong. The fact is, I have been to church; and what do you think I have been doing there? Listen, Miss Sturch—listen, girls, with all your ears. Poor blind young Frankland is a happy man at last—I have married him to our dear Rosamond Treverton this very morning!”

“Without telling us, papa!” cried the two girls together in their shrillest tones of vexation and surprise. “Without telling us, when you know how we should have liked to see it!”

“That was the very reason why I did not tell you, my dears,” answered the vicar. “Young Frankland has not got so used to his affliction yet, poor fellow, as to bear being publicly pitied and stared at in the character of a blind bridegroom. He had such a nervous horror of being an object of curiosity on his wedding-day, and Rosamond, like a true, kind-hearted girl as she is, was so anxious that his slightest caprices should be humoured, that we settled to have

the wedding at an hour in the morning when no idlers were likely to be lounging about the neighbourhood of the church. I was bound over to the strictest secrecy about the day, and so was my clerk, Thomas. Excepting us two, and the bride and bridegroom, and the bride's father, Captain Treverton, nobody knew——”

“Treverton!” exclaimed Mr. Phippen, holding his tea-cup, with the grated ginger in the bottom of it, to be filled by Miss Sturch. “Treverton! (No more tea, dear Miss Sturch.) How very remarkable! I know the name. (Fill up with water, if you please.) Tell me, my dear doctor (many, many thanks; no sugar, it turns acid on the stomach), is this Miss Treverton whom you have been marrying (many thanks again; no milk, either) one of the Cornish Trevertons?”

“To be sure she is!” rejoined the vicar. “Her father, Captain Treverton, is the head of the family. Not that there's much family to speak of now. The Captain, and Rosamond, and that whimsical old brute of an uncle of her's, Andrew Treverton, are the last left now, of the old stock—a rich family, and a fine family, in former times—good friends to Church and State, you know, and all that——”

“Do you approve, sir, of Amelia having a second helping of bread and marmalade?” asked Miss Sturch, appealing to Dr. Chennery with the most perfect unconsciousness of interrupting



him. Having no spare room in her mind for putting things away in until the appropriate time came for bringing them out, Miss Sturch always asked questions and made remarks the moment they occurred to her, without waiting for the beginning, middle, or end of any conversations that might be proceeding in her presence. She invariably looked the part of a listener to perfection, but she never acted it except in the case of talk that was aimed point-blank at her own ears.

“O, give her a second helping, by all means!” said the vicar, carelessly; “she must over-eat herself, and she may as well do it on bread and marmalade as on anything else.”

“My dear good soul,” exclaimed Mr. Phippen, “look what a wreck I am, and don’t talk in that shockingly thoughtless way of letting our sweet Amelia over-eat herself. Load the stomach in youth, and what becomes of the digestion in age? The thing which vulgar people call the inside—I appeal to Miss Sturch’s interest in her charming pupil as an excuse for going into physiological particulars—is, in point of fact, an Apparatus. Digestively considered, Miss Sturch, even the fairest and youngest of us is an Apparatus. Oil our wheels if you like; but clog them at your peril. Farinaceous puddings and mutton-chops: mutton-chops and farinaceous puddings—those should be the parents’ watch-

words, if I had my way, from one end of England to the other. Look here, my sweet child, look at me. There is no fun, dear, about these little scales, but dreadful earnest. See! I put in the balance, on one side, dry bread (stale, dry bread, Amelia!) and on the other, some ounce weights. ‘Mr. Phippen! eat by weight, Mr. Phippen! eat the same quantity, day by day, to a hair’s-breadth. Mr. Phippen! exceed your allowance (though it is only stale, dry bread) if you dare!’ Amelia, love, this is not fun—this is what the doctors tell me—the doctors, my child, who have been searching my Apparatus through and through, for thirty years past, with little pills, and have not found out where my wheels are clogged yet. Think of that, Amelia—think of Mr. Phippen’s clogged Apparatus—and say ‘No, thank you,’ next time. Miss Sturch, I beg a thousand pardons for intruding on your province; but my interest in that sweet child, my own sad experience of the hydra-headed tortures—Chennery, you dear good soul, what were we talking about? Ah! the bride—the interesting bride! And so, she is one of the Cornish Trevertons? I knew something of Andrew, years ago. Eccentric and misanthropical. Bachelor, like myself, Miss Sturch. Dyspeptic, like myself, dear Amelia. Not at all like his brother, the captain, I should suppose? And so, she is married? A charming girl, I have no doubt. A charming girl!”

“No better, truer, prettier girl in the world,” said the vicar.

“A very lively, energetic person,” said Miss Sturch.

“How I shall miss her!” said Miss Louisa. “Nobody else amused me as Rosamond did, when I was laid up with that last bad cold of mine.”

“She used to give us such nice little early supper-parties,” said Miss Amelia.

“She was the only girl I ever saw who was fit to play with boys,” said Master Robert. “She could catch a ball, Mr. Phippen, sir, with one hand, and go down a slide with both her legs together.”

“Bless me!” said Mr. Phippen. “What an extraordinary wife for a blind man! You said he was blind, my dear doctor, did you not? Let me see, what was his name? You will not bear too hardly on my loss of memory, Miss Sturch? When indigestion has ravaged the body, it begins to prey on the mind. Mr. Frank Something, was it not? Blind, too, from his birth? Sad! sad!”

“No, no—Frankland,” answered the vicar. “Leonard Frankland. And not blind from his birth by any means. It is not much more than a year ago since he could see almost as well as any of us.”

“An accident, I suppose!” said Mr. Phippen.

“You will excuse me if I take the armchair?—a partially reclining posture is of great assistance to me, after meals. So an accident happened to his eyes? Ah, what a delightfully easy chair to sit in!”

“Scarcely an accident,” said Dr. Chennergy. “Leonard Frankland was a difficult-child to bring up: great constitutional weakness, you know, at first. He seemed to get over that with time, and grew into a quiet, sedate, orderly sort of boy—as unlike my son there as possible—very amiable, and what you call easy to deal with. Well, he had a turn for mechanics (I am telling you all this to make you understand about his blindness), and after veering about from one occupation of that sort to another, he took at last to watchmaking. Curious amusement for a boy, but anything that required delicacy of touch and plenty of patience and perseverance, was just the thing to amuse and occupy Leonard. I always said to his father and mother, ‘Get him off that stool, break his magnifying-glasses, send him to me, and I’ll give him a back at Leap Frog, and teach him the use of a bat.’ But it was no use. His parents knew best, I suppose, and they said he must be humoured. Well, things went on smoothly enough for some time, till he got another long illness—as I believe, from not taking exercise enough. As soon as he began to get round, back he went

to his old watchmaking occupations again. But the bad end of it all was coming. About the last work he did, poor fellow, was the repairing of my watch—here it is; goes as regular as a steam-engine. I hadn't got it back into my fob very long before I heard that he was getting a bad pain at the back of his head, and that he saw all sorts of moving spots before his eyes. String him up with lots of port wine, and give him three hours a day on the back of a quiet pony—that was my advice. Instead of taking it, they sent for doctors from London, and blistered him behind the ears, and between the shoulders, and drenched the lad with mercury, and moped him up in a dark room. No use. The sight got worse and worse, flickered and flickered, and went out at last like the flame of a candle. His mother died—luckily for her, poor soul—before that happened. His father was half out of his mind: took him to oculists in London, and oculists in Paris. All they did was to call the blindness by a long Latin name, and to say that it was hopeless and useless to try an operation. Some of them said it was the result of the long weaknesses from which he had twice suffered after illness. Some said it was an apoplectic effusion in his brain. All of them shook their heads when they heard of the watch-making. So they brought him back home, blind; blind he is now; and blind he will

remain, poor dear fellow, for the rest of his life."

"You shock me; my dear Chennery, you shock me dreadfully," said Mr. Phippen. "Especially when you state that theory about long weakness after illness. Good Heavens! Why, I have had long weaknesses—I have got them now. Spots did he see before his eyes? I see spots, black spots, dancing black spots, dancing black bilious spots. Upon my word of honour, Chennery, this comes home to me—my sympathies are painfully acute—I feel this blind story in every nerve of my body; I do indeed!"

"You would hardly know that Leonard was blind, to look at him," said Miss Louisa, striking into the conversation with a view of restoring Mr. Phippen's equanimity. "Except that his eyes look quieter than other people's, there seems no difference in them now. Who was that famous character you told us about, Miss Sturch, who was blind, and didn't show it any more than Leonard Frankland?"

"Milton, my love. I begged you to remember that he was the most famous of British epic poets," answered Miss Sturch with suavity. "He poetically describes his blindness as being caused by 'so thick a drop serene.' You shall read about it, Louisa. After we have had a little French, we will have a little

Milton, this morning. Hush, love, your papa is speaking."

"Poor young Frankland!" said the vicar, warmly. "That good, tender, noble creature I married him to this morning, seems sent as a consolation to him in his affliction. If any human being can make him happy for the rest of his life, Rosamond Treverton is the girl to do it."

"She has made a sacrifice," said Mr. Phippen; "but I like her for that, having made a sacrifice myself in remaining single. It seems indispensable, indeed, on the score of humanity that I should do so. How could I conscientiously inflict such a digestion as mine on a member of the fairer portion of creation? No: I am a Sacrifice in my own proper person, and I have a fellow-feeling for others who are like me. Did she cry much, Chennery, when you were marrying her?"

"Cry!" exclaimed the vicar, contemptuously. "Rosamond Treverton is not one of the puling, sentimental sort, I can tell you. A fine, buxom, warm-hearted, quick-tempered girl, who looks what she means when she tells a man she is going to marry him. And, mind you, she has been tried. If she hadn't loved him with all her heart and soul, she might have been free months ago to marry anybody she pleased. They were engaged long before this cruel affliction

befel young Frankland—the fathers, on both sides, having lived as near neighbours in these parts for years. Well, when the blindness came, Leonard, like the fine conscientious fellow he is, at once offered to release Rosamond from her engagement. You should have read the letter she wrote to him, Phippen, upon that. I don't mind confessing that I blubbered like a baby over it, when they showed it to me. I should have married them at once the instant I read it, but old Frankland was a fidgety, punctilious kind of man, and he insisted on a six months' probation, so that she might be certain of knowing her own mind. He died before the term was out, and that caused the marriage to be put off again. But no delays could alter Rosamond—six years, instead of six months, would not have changed her. There she was this morning as fond of that poor patient blind fellow as she was the first day they were engaged. 'You shall never know a sad moment, Lenny, if I can help it, as long as you live,' those were the first words she said to him when we all came out of church. 'I hear you, Rosamond,' says I. 'And you shall judge me, too, doctor,' says she, quick as lightning. 'We will come back to Long Beckley, and you shall ask Lenny if I have not kept my word.' With that, she gave me a kiss that you might have heard down here at the vicarage, bless her heart! We'll drink her health after dinner, Miss



Sturch—we'll drink both their healths, Phippen, in a bottle of the best wine I have in my cellar."

"In a glass of toast-and-water, so far as I am concerned, if you will allow me," said Mr. Phippen, mournfully. "But, my dear Chennery, when you were talking of the fathers of these two interesting young people, you spoke of their living as near neighbours here, at Long Beckley. My memory is impaired, as I am painfully aware; but I thought Captain Treverton was the eldest of the two brothers, and that he always lived, when he was on shore, at the family place in Cornwall?"

"So he did," returned the vicar, "in his wife's lifetime. But since her death, which happened as long ago as the year 'twenty-nine—let me see, we are now in the year forty-four—and that makes ——"

The vicar stopped for an instant to calculate, and looked at Miss Sturch.

"Fifteen years ago, sir," said Miss Sturch, offering the accommodation of a little simple subtraction to the vicar, with her blandest smile.

"Of course," continued Doctor Chennery. "Well, since Mrs. Treverton died, fifteen years ago, Captain Treverton has never been near Porthgenna Tower. And, what is more, Phippen, at the first opportunity he could get, he sold the place—sold it, out and out, mine, fisheries, and all—for forty thousand pounds."

“You don’t say so!” exclaimed Mr. Phippen. “Did he find the air unhealthy? I should think the local produce, in the way of food, must be coarse, now, in those barbarous regions? Who bought the place?”

“Leonard Frankland’s father,” said the vicar. “It is rather a long story, that sale of Porthgenna Tower, with some curious circumstances involved in it. Suppose we take a turn in the garden, Phippen? I’ll tell you all about it over my morning cigar. Miss Sturch, if you want me, I shall be on the lawn somewhere. Girls! mind you know your lessons. Bob! remember that I’ve got a cane in the hall, and a birch-rod in my dressing-room. Come, Phippen, rouse up out of that arm-chair. You won’t say, no, to a turn in the garden?”

“My dear fellow, I will say yes—if you will kindly lend me an umbrella, and allow me to carry my camp-stool in my hand,” said Mr. Phippen. “I am too weak to encounter the sun, and I can’t go far without sitting down. The moment I feel fatigued, Miss Sturch, I open my camp-stool, and sit down anywhere, without the slightest regard for appearances. I am ready, Chennery, whenever you are—equally ready, my good friend, for the garden and the story about the sale of Porthgenna Tower. You said it was a curious story, did you not?”

“I said there were some curious circumstances

connected with it," replied the vicar. "And when you hear about them, I think you will say so, too. Come along! you will find your camp-stool, and a choice of all the umbrellas in the house, in the hall."

With those words, Doctor Chennery opened his cigar-case, and led the way out of the breakfast parlour.

## CHAPTER II.



### THE SALE OF PORTHGENNA TOWER.

“How charming! how pastoral! how exquisitely soothing to the nerves!” said Mr. Phippen, sentimentally surveying the lawn at the back of the vicarage-house, under the shadow of the lightest umbrella he could pick out of the hall. “Three years have passed, Chennerly—three suffering years for me, but we need not dwell on that—since I last stood on this lawn. There is the window of your old study, where I had that attack of heartburn last time,—in the strawberry season; don’t you remember? Ah! and there is the school-room! Shall I ever forget dear Miss Sturch coming to me out of that room—a ministering angel—with soda and ginger—so comforting, so sweetly anxious about stirring it up, so unaffectedly grieved that there was no sal-volatile in the house! I do so enjoy these pleasant recollections, Chennerly; they are as great a luxury to me as your cigar is to you. Could you walk on the other side, my dear

fellow? I like the smell, but the smoke is a little too much for me. Thank you. And now about the story—the curious story? What was the name of the old place—I am so interested in it—it began with a P, surely?”

“Porthgenna Tower,” said the vicar.

“Exactly,” rejoined Mr. Phippen, shifting the umbrella tenderly from one shoulder to the other. “And what in the world made Captain Treverton sell Porthgenna Tower?”

“I believe the reason was that he could not endure the place after the death of his wife,” answered Doctor Chennery. “The estate, you know, has never been entailed; so the Captain had no difficulty in parting with it, except, of course, the difficulty of finding a purchaser.”

“Why not his brother?” asked Mr. Phippen. “Why not our eccentric friend, Andrew Treverton?”

“Don’t call him my friend,” said the vicar. “A mean, grovelling, cynical, selfish old wretch! It’s no use shaking your head, Phippen, and trying to look shocked. I know Andrew Treverton’s early history as well as you do. I know that he was treated with the basest ingratitude and villany, by a college friend, who took all he had to give, and swindled him at last in the grossest manner. I know all about that. But one instance of ingratitude does not justify a man in shutting himself up from society, and

railing against all mankind as a disgrace to the earth they walk on. I myself have heard the old brute say that the greatest benefactor to our generation would be a second Herod, who could prevent another generation from succeeding it. Ought a man who can talk in that way, to be the friend of any human being with the slightest respect for his species or himself?"

"My friend!" said Mr. Phippen, catching the vicar by the arm, and mysteriously lowering his voice, "my dear and reverend friend! I admire your honest indignation against the utterer of that exceedingly misanthropical sentiment; but—I confide this to you, Chennery, in the strictest secrecy—there are moments,—morning moments generally,—when my digestion is in such a state, that I have actually agreed with that annihilating person, Andrew Treverton! I have woke up with my tongue like a cinder—I have crawled to the glass and looked at it—and I have said to myself, Let there be an end of the human race rather than a continuance of this!"

"Pooh! pooh!" cried the vicar, receiving Mr. Phippen's confession with a burst of irreverent laughter. "Take a glass of cool small beer next time your tongue is in that state, and you will pray for a continuance of the brewing part of the human race, at any rate. But let us go back to Portgenna Tower, or I shall never get on with my story. When Captain Treverton had once

made up his mind to sell the place, I have no doubt that, under ordinary circumstances, he would have thought of offering it to his brother, with a view, of course, to keeping the estate in the family. Andrew was rich enough to have bought it, for, though he got nothing at his father's death, but the old gentleman's rare collection of books, he inherited his mother's fortune, as the second son. However, as things were at that time (and are still, I am sorry to say), the Captain could make no personal offers of any kind to Andrew—for the two were not then, and are not now, on speaking, or even on writing terms. It is a shocking thing to say, but the worst quarrel of the kind I ever heard of, is the quarrel between those two brothers."

"Pardon me, my dear friend," said Mr. Phippen, opening his camp-stool, which had hitherto hung, dangling by its silken tassel on the hooked handle of the umbrella. "May I sit down before you go any further? I am getting a little excited about this part of the story, and I dare not fatigue myself. Pray go on. I don't think the legs of my camp-stool will make holes in the lawn. I am so light—a mere skeleton, in fact. Do go on!"

"You must have heard," pursued the vicar, "that Captain Treverton, when he was advanced in life, married an actress—rather a violent temper, I believe; but a person of spotless character,

and as fond of her husband as a woman could be; therefore, according to my view of it, a very good wife for him to marry. However, the Captain's friends, of course, made the usual senseless outcry, and the Captain's brother, as the only near relation, took it on himself to attempt breaking off the marriage in the most offensively indelicate way. Failing in that, and hating the poor woman like poison, he left his brother's house, saying, among many other savage speeches, one infamous thing about the bride, which—which upon my honour, Phippen, I am ashamed to repeat. Whatever the words were, they were unluckily carried to Mrs. Treverton's ears, and they were of the kind that no woman—let alone a quick-tempered woman like the Captain's wife—ever forgives. An interview followed between the two brothers—and it led, as you may easily imagine, to very unhappy results. They parted in the most deplorable manner. The Captain declared, in the heat of his passion, that Andrew never had one generous impulse in his heart since he was born, and that he would die without one kind feeling towards any living soul in the world. Andrew replied, that if he had no heart, he had a memory, and that he should remember those farewell words as long as he lived. So they separated. Twice afterwards, the Captain made overtures of reconciliation. The first time, when his daughter



Rosamond was born; the second time, when Mrs. Treverton died. On each occasion the elder brother wrote to say that if the younger would retract the atrocious words he had spoken against his sister-in-law, every atonement should be offered to him for the harsh language which the Captain had used, in the hastiness of anger, when they last met. No answer was received from Andrew to either letter; and the estrangement between the two brothers has continued to the present time. You understand now why Captain Treverton could not privately consult Andrew's inclinations, before he publicly announced his intention of parting with Porthgenna Tower?"

Although Mr. Phippen declared, in answer to this appeal, that he understood perfectly, and although he begged with the utmost politeness that the vicar would go on, his attention seemed, for the moment, to be entirely absorbed in inspecting the legs of his camp-stool, and in ascertaining what impression they made on the vicarage lawn. Doctor Chennery's own interest, however, in the circumstances that he was relating, seemed sufficiently strong to make up for any transient lapse of attention on the part of his guest. After a few vigorous puffs at his cigar (which had been several times in imminent danger of going out while he was speaking), he went on with his narrative in these words:—

“ Well, the house, the estate, the mine, and the fisheries of Porthgenna were all publicly put up for sale, a few months after Mrs. Treverton’s death ; but no offers were made for the property which it was possible to accept. The ruinous state of the house, the bad cultivation of the land, legal difficulties in connection with the mine, and quarter-day difficulties in the collection of the rents, all contributed to make Porthgenna what the auctioneers would call a bad lot to dispose of. Failing to sell the place, Captain Treverton could not be prevailed on to change his mind, and live there again. The death of his wife almost broke his heart—for he was, by all accounts, just as fond of her as she had been of him—and the very sight of the place that was associated with the greatest affliction of his life became hateful to him. He removed, with his little girl and a relative of Mrs. Treverton, who was her governess, to our neighbourhood, and rented a pretty little cottage across the church fields, near that large house which you must have observed with the high-walled garden, close to the London road. The house was inhabited at that time by Leonard Frankland’s father and mother. The new neighbours soon became intimate ; and thus it happened that the couple whom I have been marrying this morning were brought up together as children, and fell in love with each

other, almost before they were out of their pinafores."

"Chennery, my dear fellow, I don't look as if I was sitting all on one side, do I?" cried Mr. Phippen, suddenly breaking into the vicar's narrative, with a look of alarm. "I am shocked to interrupt you; but, surely, your grass is amazingly soft in this part of the country. One of my camp-stool legs is getting shorter and shorter every moment. I'm drilling a hole! I'm toppling over! Gracious Heavens! I feel myself going—I shall be down, Chennery; upon my life, I shall be down!"

"Stuff!" cried the vicar, pulling up, first Mr. Phippen and then Mr. Phippen's camp-stool, which had rooted itself in the grass, all on one side. "Here! come on to the gravel-walk; you can't drill holes in that. What's the matter now?"

"Palpitations," said Mr. Phippen, dropping his umbrella, and placing his hand over his heart; "and bile. I see those black spots again—those infernal, lively, black spots, dancing before my eyes. Chennery, suppose you consult some agricultural friend about the quality of your grass. Take my word for it, your lawn is softer than it ought to be.—Lawn!" repeated Mr. Phippen to himself, contemptuously, as he turned round to pick up his umbrella. "It isn't a lawn—it's a bog!"

“There, sit down,” said the vicar, “and don’t pay the palpitations and the black spots the compliment of bestowing the smallest attention on them. Do you want anything to drink? Shall it be physic, or beer, or what?”

“No, no! I am so unwilling to give trouble,” answered Mr. Phippen. “I would rather suffer—rather, a great deal. I think if you would go on with your story, Chennergy, it would compose me. I have not the faintest idea of what led to it, but I think you were saying something interesting on the subject of pinafores!”

“Nonsense!” said Doctor Chennergy. “I was only telling you of the fondness between the two children who have now grown up to be man and wife. And I was going on to tell you that Captain Treverton, shortly after he settled in our neighbourhood, took to the active practice of his profession again. Nothing else seemed to fill up the gap that the loss of Mrs. Treverton had made in his life. Having good interest with the Admiralty, he can always get a ship when he applies for one; and up to the present time, with intervals on shore, he has resolutely stuck to the sea—though he is getting, as his daughter and his friends think, rather too old for it now. Don’t look puzzled, Phippen; I am not going so wide of the mark as you think. These are some of the necessary particulars that must be stated first. And now they are comfortably

disposed of, I can get round at last to the main part of my story—the sale of Porthgenna Tower.—What is it now? Do you want to get up again?”

Yes, Mr. Phippen did want to get up again; being of opinion that the best chance of composing the palpitations and dispersing the black spots, lay in trying the experiment of a little gentle walking exercise. He was most unwilling to occasion any trouble, but would his worthy friend Chenery, before proceeding with this intensely interesting story, give him an arm, and carry the camp-stool, and walk slowly in the direction of the schoolroom window, so as to keep Miss Sturch within easy hailing distance, in case it became necessary to try the last resource of taking a composing draught? The vicar, whose inexhaustible good nature was proof against every trial that Mr. Phippen's dyspeptic infirmities could inflict on it, complied with all these requests, and went on with his story, unconsciously adopting the tone and manner of a good-humoured parent who was doing his best to soothe the temper of a fretful child.

“I told you,” he said, “that the elder Mr. Frankland and Captain Treverton were near neighbours here. They had not been long acquainted before the one found out from the other that Porthgenna Tower was for sale. On first hearing this, old Frankland asked a few

questions about the place, but said not a word on the subject of purchasing it. Soon after that, the Captain got a ship and went to sea. During his absence, old Frankland privately set off for Cornwall, to look at the estate, and to find out all he could about its advantages and defects from the persons left in charge of the house and lands. He said nothing when he came back, until Captain Treverton returned from his first cruise; and then the old gentleman spoke out one morning, in his quiet, decided way.

“ ‘Treverton,’ said he, ‘if you will sell Porthgenna Tower at the price at which you bought it in, when you tried to dispose of it by auction, write to your lawyer, and tell him to take the title-deeds to mine, and ask for the purchase-money.’

“ Captain Treverton was naturally a little astonished at the readiness of this offer; but people, like myself, who knew old Frankland’s history, were not so surprised. His fortune had been made by trade, and he was foolish enough to be always a little ashamed of acknowledging that one simple and creditable fact. The truth was, that his ancestors had been landed gentry of importance, before the time of the Civil War, and the old gentleman’s great ambition was to sink the merchant in the landed grandee, and to leave his son to succeed him in the character of

a Squire of large estate and great county influence. He was willing to devote half his fortune to accomplish this great scheme; but half his fortune would not buy him such an estate as he wanted, in an important agricultural county like ours. Rents are high, and land is made the most of with us. An estate as extensive as the estate at Porthgenna, would fetch more than double the money which Captain Treverton could venture to ask for it, if it was situated in these parts. Old Frankland was well aware of that fact, and attached all possible importance to it. Besides, there was something in the feudal look of Porthgenna Tower, and in the right over the mine and fisheries, which the purchase of the estate included, that flattered his notions of restoring the family greatness. Here, he and his son after him, could lord it, as he thought, on a large scale, and direct at their sovereign will and pleasure, the industry of hundreds of poor people, scattered along the coast, or huddled together in the little villages inland. This was a tempting prospect, and it could be secured for forty thousand pounds—which was just ten thousand pounds less than he had made up his mind to give, when he first determined to metamorphose himself from a plain merchant into a magnificent landed gentleman. People who knew these facts were, as I have said, not much surprised at Mr. Frankland's

readiness to purchase Porthgenna Tower; and Captain Treverton, it is hardly necessary to say, was not long in clenching the bargain on his side. The estate changed hands; and away went old Frankland with a tail of wiseacres from London at his heels, to work the mine and the fisheries on new scientific principles, and to beautify the old house from top to bottom with bran-new mediæval decorations, under the direction of a gentleman who was said to be an architect, but who looked, to my mind, the very image of a Popish priest in disguise. Wonderful plans and projects, were they not? And how do you think they succeeded?"

"Do tell me, my dear fellow!" was the answer that fell from Mr. Phippen's lips. "I wonder whether Miss Sturch keeps a bottle of camphor julep in the family medicine chest?" was the thought that passed through Mr. Phippen's mind.

"Tell you!" exclaimed the vicar. "Why, of course, every one of his plans turned out a dead failure. His Cornish tenantry received him as an interloper. The antiquity of his family made no impression upon them. It might be an old family, but it was not a Cornish family, and, therefore, it was of no importance in their eyes. They would have gone to the world's end for the Trevertons; but not a man would move a step out of his way for the Franklands. As for the



mine, it seemed to be inspired with the same mutinous spirit that possessed the tenantry. The wiseacres from London, blasted in all directions on the profoundest scientific principles, and brought about sixpennyworth of ore to the surface for every five pounds spent in getting it up. The fisheries turned out little better. A new plan for curing pilchards, which was a marvel of economy in theory, proved to be a perfect phenomenon of extravagance in practice. The only item of luck in old Frankland's large sum of misfortunes was produced by his quarrelling in good time with the mediæval architect, who was like a Popish priest in disguise. This fortunate event saved the new owner of Porthgenna all the money he might otherwise have spent in restoring and re-decorating the whole suite of rooms on the north side of the house, which had been left to go to rack and ruin for more than fifty years past, and which remain in their old neglected condition to this day. To make a long story short, after uselessly spending more thousands of pounds at Porthgenna than I should like to reckon up, old Frankland gave in at last, left the place in disgust to the care of his steward, who was charged never to lay out another farthing on it, and returned to this neighbourhood. Being in high dudgeon, and happening to catch Captain Treverton on shore when he got back, the first thing he did was to abuse Porthgenna and all

the people about it, a little too vehemently in the Captain's presence. This led to a coolness between the two neighbours, which might have ended in the breaking off of all intercourse, but for the children on either side, who would see each other just as often as ever, and who ended, by dint of wilful persistency, in putting an end to the estrangement between the fathers, by making it look simply ridiculous. Here, in my opinion, lies the most curious part of the story. Important family interests depended on those two young people falling in love with each other; and, wonderful to relate, that (as you know, after my confession at breakfast-time) was exactly what they did. Here is a case of the most romantic love-match, which is also the marriage, of all others, that the parents on both sides had the strongest worldly interest in promoting. Shakspeare may say what he pleases, the course of true love does run smooth sometimes. Never was the marriage service performed to better purpose than when I read it this morning. The estate being entailed on Leonard, Captain Treverton's daughter now goes back, in the capacity of mistress, to the house and lands which her father sold. Rosamond being an only child, the purchase-money of Porthgenna, which old Frankland once lamented as money thrown away, will now, when the Captain dies, be the marriage-portion of young Frankland's wife. I don't know

what you think of the beginning and middle of my story, Phippen, but the end ought to satisfy you, at any rate. Did you ever hear of a bride and bridegroom who started with fairer prospects in life than our bride and bridegroom of to-day?"

Before Mr. Phippen could make any reply, Miss Sturch put her head out of the school-room window: and seeing the two gentlemen approaching, beamed on them with her invariable smile. Then addressing the vicar, said in her softest tones:

"I regret extremely to trouble you, sir, but I find Robert very intractable, this morning, with his multiplication table."

"Where does he stick now?" asked Doctor Chenery.

"At seven times eight, sir," replied Miss Sturch.

"Bob!" shouted the vicar through the window. "Seven times eight?"

"Forty-three," answered the whimpering voice of the invisible Bob.

"You shall have one more chance before I get my cane," said Doctor Chenery. "Now, then, look out! Seven times——"

"My dear, good friend," interposed Mr. Phippen, "if you cane that very unhappy boy, he will scream. My nerves have been tried once this morning by the camp-stool: I shall be

totally shattered if I hear screams. Give me time to get out of the way, and allow me also to spare dear Miss Sturch the sad spectacle of correction (so shocking to sensibilities like hers) by asking her for a little camphor julep, and so giving her an excuse for getting out of the way like me. I think I could have done without the camphor julep under any other circumstances; but I ask for it unhesitatingly now, as much for Miss Sturch's sake, as for the sake of my own poor nerves. Have you got camphor julep, Miss Sturch? Say yes, I beg and entreat, and give me an opportunity of escorting you out of the way of the screams."

While Miss Sturch—whose well-trained sensibilities were proof against the longest paternal caning and the loudest filial acknowledgment of it in the way of screams—tripped up-stairs to fetch the camphor julep, as smiling and self-possessed as ever, Master Bob, finding himself left alone with his sisters in the school-room, sidled up to the youngest of the two, produced from the pocket of his trousers three frowsy acidulated drops looking very much the worse for wear, and, attacking Miss Amelia on the weak, or greedy side of her character, artfully offered the drops, in exchange for confidential information on the subject of seven times eight. "You like 'em?" whispered Bob. "Oh, don't I!" answered Amelia. "Seven times eight?"

asked Bob. "Fifty-six," answered Amelia. "Sure?" said Bob. "Certain," said Amelia.—The drops changed hands, and the catastrophe of the domestic drama changed with them. Just as Miss Sturch appeared with the camphor julep at the garden-door, in the character of medical Hebe to Mr. Phippen, her intractable pupil showed himself to his father at the school-room window, in the character, arithmetically speaking, of a reformed son. The cane reposed for the day; and Mr. Phippen drank his glass of camphor julep with a mind at ease on the twin-subjects of Miss Sturch's sensibilities and Master Bob's screams.

"Most gratifying in every way," said the Martyr to Dyspepsia, smacking his lips with great relish, as he drained the last drops out of the glass. "My nerves are spared, Miss Sturch's feelings are spared, and the dear boy's back is spared. You have no idea how relieved I feel, Chennery. Whereabouts were we in that delightful story of yours when this little domestic interruption occurred?"

"At the end of it, to be sure," said the vicar. "The bride and bridegroom are some miles on their way, by this time, to spend the honeymoon at St. Swithin's-on-Sea. Captain Treverton is only left behind for a day. He received his sailing orders on Monday, and he will be off to Portsmouth to-morrow morning to take command

of his ship. Though he won't admit it in plain words, I happen to know that Rosamond has persuaded him to make this his last cruise. She has a plan for getting him back to Porthgenna, to live there with her husband, which I hope and believe will succeed. The west rooms at the old house, in one of which Mrs. Treverton died, are not to be used at all by the young married couple. They have engaged a builder—a sensible, practical man, this time—to survey the neglected north rooms, with a view to their redecoration and thorough repair in every way. This part of the house cannot possibly be associated with any melancholy recollections in Captain Treverton's mind; for neither he nor any one else ever entered it during the period of his residence at Porthgenna. Considering the change in the look of the place which this project of repairing the north rooms is sure to produce, and taking into account also the softening effect of time on all painful recollections, I should say there was a fair prospect now of Captain Treverton's returning to pass the end of his days among his old tenantry. It will be a great chance for Leonard Frankland if he does, for he would be sure to dispose the people at Porthgenna kindly towards their new master. Introduced amongst his Cornish tenants under Captain Treverton's wing, Leonard is sure to get on well with them, provided he abstains

from showing too much of the family pride which he has inherited from his father. He is a little given to over-rate the advantages of birth and the importance of rank—but that is really the only noticeable defect in his character. In all other respects, I can honestly say of him that he deserves what he has got—the best wife in the world. What a life of happiness, Phippen, seems to be awaiting these lucky young people! It is a bold thing to say of any mortal creatures, but, look as far as I may, not a cloud can I see anywhere on their future prospects.”

“You excellent creature!” exclaimed Mr. Phippen, affectionately squeezing the vicar’s hand. “How I enjoy hearing you! how I luxuriate in your bright view of life!”

“And is it not the true view—especially in the case of young Frankland and his wife?” inquired the vicar.

“If you ask me,” said Mr. Phippen, with a mournful smile, and a philosophic calmness of manner, “I can only answer that the direction of a man’s speculative views depends, not to mince the matter, on the state of his secretions. Your biliary secretions, dear friend, are all right, and you take bright views. My biliary secretions are all wrong, and I take dark views. You look at the future prospects of this young married couple, and say there is no cloud over them. I don’t dispute the assertion, not having the

pleasure of knowing either bride or bridegroom. But I look up at the sky over our heads—I remember that there was not a cloud on it when we first entered the garden—I now see, just over those two trees growing so close together, a cloud that has appeared unexpectedly from nobody knows where—and I draw my own conclusions. Such,” said Mr. Phippen, ascending the garden-steps on his way into the house, “is my philosophy. It may be tinged with bile, but it is philosophy for all that.”

“All the philosophy in the world,” said the vicar, following his guest up the steps, “will not shake my conviction that Leonard Frankland and his wife have a happy future before them.”

Mr. Phippen laughed, and, waiting on the steps till his host joined him, took Doctor Chennery’s arm in the friendliest manner.

“You have told a charming story, Chennery,” he said, “and you have ended it with a charming sentiment. But, my dear friend, though your healthy mind (influenced by an enviably easy digestion) despises my bilious philosophy, don’t quite forget the cloud over the two trees. Look up at it now—it is getting darker and bigger already.”



## CHAPTER III.



### THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM.

UNDER the roof of a widowed mother, Miss Mowlem lived humbly at St. Swithin's-on-Sea. In the spring of the year eighteen hundred and forty-four, the heart of Miss Mowlem's widowed mother was gladdened in the closing years of life by a small legacy. Turning over in her mind the various uses to which the money might be put, the discreet old lady finally decided on investing it in furniture, on fitting up the first floor and the second floor of her house in the best taste, and on hanging a card in the parlour window to inform the public that she had furnished apartments to let. By the summer the apartments were ready, and the card was put up. It had hardly been exhibited a week before a dignified personage in black applied to look at the rooms, expressed himself as satisfied with their appearance, and engaged them for a month certain, for a newly-married lady and gentleman, who might be expected to take possession in a

few days. The dignified personage in black was Captain Treverton's servant, and the lady and gentleman, who arrived in due time to take possession, were Mr. and Mrs. Frankland.

The natural interest which Mrs. Mowlem felt in her youthful first lodgers was necessarily vivid in its nature; but it was apathy itself compared to the sentimental interest which her daughter took in observing the manners and customs of the lady and gentleman in their capacity of bride and bridegroom. From the moment when Mr. and Mrs. Frankland entered the house, Miss Mowlem began to study them with all the ardour of an industrious scholar who attacks a new branch of knowledge. At every spare moment of the day, this industrious and inquisitive young lady occupied herself in stealing up-stairs to collect observations, and in running down-stairs to communicate them to her mother. By the time the married couple had been in the house a week, Miss Mowlem had made such good use of her eyes, ears, and opportunities that she could have written a seven days' diary of the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Frankland, with the truth and minuteness of Mr. Samuel Pepys himself.

But, learn as much as we may, the longer we live the more information there is to acquire. Seven days' patient accumulation of facts in connection with the honeymoon had not placed Miss Mowlem beyond the reach of further discoveries.

On the morning of the eighth day, after bringing down the breakfast tray, this observant spinster stole up-stairs again, according to custom, to drink at the spring of knowledge through the key-hole channel of the drawing-room door. After an absence of five minutes she descended to the kitchen, breathless with excitement, to announce a fresh discovery in connection with Mr. and Mrs. Frankland to her venerable mother.

“Whatever do you think she’s doing now?” cried Miss Mowlem, with widely opened eyes and highly-elevated hands.

“Nothing that’s useful,” answered Mrs. Mowlem, with sarcastic readiness.

“She’s actually sitting on his knee! Mother, did you ever sit on father’s knee when you were married?”

“Certainly not, my dear. When me and your poor father married we were neither of us flighty young people, and we knew better.”

“She’s got her head on his shoulder,” proceeded Miss Mowlem more and more agitatedly, and her arms round his neck—both her arms, mother, as tight as can be.”

“I won’t believe it!” exclaimed Mrs. Mowlem, indignantly. “A lady like her, with riches, and accomplishments, and all that, demean herself like a housemaid with a sweetheart. Don’t tell me, I won’t believe it!”

It was true though, for all that. There were

plenty of chairs in Mrs. Mowlem's drawing-room; there were three beautifully bound books on Mrs. Mowlem's Pembroke table (the Antiquities of St. Swithin's, Smallridge's Sermons, and Klopstock's Messiah in English prose)—Mrs. Frankland might have sat on purple morocco leather, stuffed with the best horsehair, might have informed and soothed her mind with archæological diversions, with orthodox native theology, and with devotional poetry of foreign origin—and yet, so frivolous is the nature of women, she was perverse enough to prefer doing nothing, and perching herself uncomfortably on her husband's knee!

She sat for some time in the undignified position which Miss Mowlem had described with such graphic correctness to her mother, then drew back a little, raised her head, and looked earnestly into the quiet, meditative face of the blind man.

“Lenny, you are very silent this morning,” she said. “What are you thinking about? If you will tell me all your thoughts, I will tell you all mine.”

“Would you really care to hear all my thoughts?” asked Leonard.

“Yes; all. I shall be jealous of any thoughts that you keep to yourself. Tell me what you were thinking of just now! Me?”

“Not exactly of you.”

“More shame for you. Are you tired of me in eight days? I have not thought of anybody but you ever since we have been here. Ah! you laugh. O, Lenny, I do love you so; how can I think of anybody but you? No! I shan’t kiss you. I want to know what you were thinking about first.”

“Of a dream, Rosamond, that I had last night. Ever since the first days of my blindness—Why, I thought you were not going to kiss me again till I had told you what I was thinking about!”

“I can’t help kissing you, Lenny, when you talk of the loss of your sight. Tell me, my poor love, do I help to make up for that loss? Are you happier than you used to be? and have I some share in making that happiness, though it is ever so little?”

She turned her head away as she spoke, but Leonard was too quick for her. His inquiring fingers touched her cheek. “Rosamond, you are crying,” he said.

“I crying!” she answered with a sudden assumption of gaiety. “No,” she continued, after a moment’s pause. “I will never deceive you, love, even in the veriest trifle. My eyes serve for both of us now, don’t they? you depend on me for all that your touch fails to tell you, and I must never be unworthy of my trust—must I? I did cry, Lenny—but only a very

little. I don't know how it was, but I never, in all my life, seemed to pity you and feel for you as I did just at that moment. Never mind, I've done now. Go on—do go on with what you were going to say."

"I was going to say, Rosamond, that I have observed one curious thing about myself since I lost my sight. I dream a great deal, but I never dream of myself as a blind man. I often visit in my dreams places that I saw, and people whom I knew when I had my sight, and though I feel as much myself, at those visionary times, as I am now when I am wide-awake, I never by any chance feel blind. I wander about all sorts of old walks in my sleep, and never grope my way. I talk to all sorts of old friends in my sleep, and see the expression in their faces which, waking, I shall never see again. I have lost my sight more than a year now, and yet it was like the shock of a new discovery to me to wake up last night from my dream, and remember suddenly that I was blind."

"What dream was it, Lenny?"

"Only a dream of the place where I first met you when we were both children. I saw the glen, as it was years ago, with the great twisted roots of the trees, and the blackberry bushes twining about them in a still shadowed light that came through thick leaves from the rainy sky. I saw the mud on the walk in the middle of the

glen, with the marks of the cows' hoofs in some places, and the sharp circles in others where some countrywomen had been lately trudging by on pattens. I saw the muddy water running down on either side of the path after the shower; and I saw you, Rosamond, a naughty girl, all covered with clay and wet—just as you were in the reality—soiling your bright blue pelisse and your pretty little chubby hands by making a dam to stop the running water, and laughing at the indignation of your nursemaid when she tried to pull you away and take you home. I saw all that exactly as it really was in the bygone time, but strangely enough I did not see myself as the boy I then was. You were a little girl, and the glen was in its old neglected state, and yet, though I was all in the past so far, I was in the present as regarded myself. Throughout the whole dream I was uneasily conscious of being a grown man—of being, in short, exactly what I am now, excepting always that I was not blind.”

“What a memory you must have, love, to be able to recal all those little circumstances, after the years that have passed since that wet day in the glen! How well you recollect what I was as a child! Do you remember in the same vivid way, what I looked like a year ago, when you saw me—O, Lenny, it almost breaks my heart to think of it!—when you saw me for the last time?”

“Do I remember, Rosamond! My last look at

your face has painted your portrait on my memory in colours that can never change. I have many pictures in my mind, but your picture is the clearest and brightest of all."

"And it is the picture of me at my best—painted in my youth, dear, when my face was always confessing how I loved you, though my lips said nothing. There is some consolation in that thought. When years have passed over us both, Lenny, and when time begins to set his mark on me, you will not say to yourself, 'My Rosamond is beginning to fade; she grows less and less like what she was when I married her.' I shall never grow old, love, for you! The bright young picture in your mind will still be my picture when my cheeks are wrinkled and my hair is grey."

"Still your picture—always the same, grow as old as I may."

"But are you sure it is clear in every part? Are there no doubtful lines, no unfinished corners anywhere? I have not altered yet, since you saw me—I am just what I was a year ago. Suppose I asked you what I am like now, could you tell me without making a mistake?"

"Try me."

"May I? You shall be put through a complete catechism! I don't tire you sitting on your knee, do I? Well, in the first place, how tall am I when we both stand up side by side?"



“ You are just up to my ear.”

“ Quite right, to begin with. Now for the next question. What does my hair look like in your portrait ? ”

“ It is dark brown—there is a great deal of it—and it grows rather too low on your forehead for the taste of some people—”

“ Never mind about ‘ some people ; ’ does it grow too low for your taste ? ”

“ Certainly not. I like it to grow low ; I like all those little natural waves that it makes against your forehead ; I like it taken back, as you wear it, in plain bands which leave your ears and your cheeks visible ; and above all things, I like that big glossy knot that it makes where it is all gathered up together at the back of your head.”

“ O Lenny, how well you remember me, so far ! Now go a little lower.”

“ A little lower is down to your eyebrows. They are very nicely shaped eyebrows in my picture—”

“ Yes, but they have a fault. Come ! tell me what the fault is ? ”

“ They are not quite so strongly marked as they might be.”

“ Right again ! And my eyes ? ”

“ Brown eyes, large eyes, wakeful eyes, that are always looking about them. Eyes that can be very soft at one time, and very bright at

another. Eyes tender and clear, just at the present moment, but capable, on very slight provocation, of opening rather too widely, and looking rather too brilliantly resolute."

"Mind you don't make them look so now! What is there below the eyes?"

"A nose that is not quite big enough to be in proper proportion with them. A nose that has a slight tendency to be—"

"Don't say the horrid English word! Spare my feelings by putting it in French. Say *retroussé*, and skip over my nose as fast as possible."

"I must stop at the mouth, then, and own that it is as near perfection as possible. The lips are lovely in shape, fresh in colour, and irresistible in expression. They smile in my portrait, and I am sure they are smiling at me now."

"How could they do otherwise when they are getting so much praise? My vanity whispers to me that I had better stop the catechism here. If I talk about my complexion, I shall only hear that it is of the dusky sort; and that there is never red enough in it, except when I am walking, or confused, or angry. If I ask a question about my figure, I shall receive the dreadful answer, 'You are dangerously inclined to be fat.' If I say, how do I dress? I shall be told, not soberly enough; you are as fond as a child of

gay colours—No! I will venture no more questions. But, vanity apart, Lenny, I am so glad, so proud, so happy to find that you can keep the image of me clearly in your mind. I shall do my best now to look and dress like your last remembrance of me. My love of loves! I will do you credit—I will try if I can't make you envied for your wife. You deserve a hundred thousand kisses for saying your catechism so well—and there they are!”

While Mrs. Frankland was conferring the reward of merit on her husband, the sound of a faint, small, courteously-significant cough, made itself timidly audible in a corner of the room. Turning round instantly with the quickness that characterised all her actions, Mrs. Frankland, to her horror and indignation, confronted Miss Mowlem standing just inside the door with a letter in her hand, and a blush of sentimental agitation on her simpering face.\*

“You wretch! how dare you come in without knocking at the door?” cried Rosamond, starting to her feet with a stamp, and passing in an instant from the height of fondness to the height of passion.

Miss Mowlem shook guiltily before the bright, angry eyes that looked through and through her, turned very pale, held out the letter apologetically, and said in her meekest tones that she was very sorry.

“Sorry!” exclaimed Rosamond, getting even more irritated by the apology than she had been by the intrusion, and showing it by another stamp; “who cares whether you are sorry or no? I don’t want your sorrow—I won’t have it. I never was so insulted in my life—never, you mean, prying, inquisitive creature!”

“Rosamond! Rosamond! pray don’t forget yourself!” interposed the quiet voice of Mr. Frankland.

“Lenny, dear, I can’t help it! That creature would drive a saint mad. She has been prying after us ever since we have been here—you have, you ill-bred, indelicate woman!—I suspected it before—I am certain of it now! Must we lock our doors to keep you out?—we won’t lock our doors! Fetch the bill! We give you warning. Mr. Frankland gives you warning—don’t you, Lenny? I’ll pack up all your things, dear; she shan’t touch one of them. Go down-stairs and make out your bill, and give your mother warning. Mr. Frankland says he won’t have his rooms burst into and his doors listened at by inquisitive women—and I say so too. Put that letter down on the table—unless you want to open it and read it—put it down, you audacious woman, and fetch the bill, and tell your mother we are going to leave the house directly!”

At this dreadful threat, Miss Mowlem, who was soft and timid, as well as curious, by nature,

wrung her hands in despair, and overflowed meekly in a shower of tears.

“O! good gracious Heavens above!” cried Miss Mowlem, addressing herself distractedly to the ceiling, “what will mother say! whatever will become of me now! O, Mam, I thought I knocked—I did, indeed! O, Mam! I humbly beg pardon, and I’ll never intrude again. O, Mam! mother’s a widow, and this is the first time we have let the lodgings, and the furniture’s swallowed up all our money, and, O, Mam! Mam! how I shall catch it if you go!” Here words failed Miss Mowlem, and hysterical sobs pathetically supplied their place.

“Rosamond!” said Mr. Frankland. There was an accent of sorrow in his voice this time, as well as an accent of remonstrance. Rosamond’s quick ear caught the alteration in his tone. As she looked round at him, her colour changed, her head drooped a little, and her whole expression altered on the instant. She stole gently to her husband’s side with softened, saddened eyes, and put her lips caressingly close to his ear.

“Lenny,” she whispered, “have I made you angry with me?”

“I can’t be angry with you, Rosamond,” was the quiet answer. “I only wish, love, that you could have controlled yourself a little sooner.”

“I am so sorry—so very, very sorry!” The

fresh, soft lips came closer still to his ear as they whispered these penitent words; and the cunning little hand crept up tremblingly round his neck and began to play with his hair. "So sorry, and so ashamed of myself! But it was enough to make almost anybody angry, just at first—wasn't it, dear? And you will forgive me—won't you, Lenny?—if I promise never to behave so badly again? Never mind that wretched whimpering fool at the door," said Rosamond, undergoing a slight relapse as she looked round at Miss Mowlem, standing immovably repentant against the wall, with her face buried in a dingy-white pocket-handkerchief. "I'll make it up with her; I'll stop her crying; I'll take her out of the room; I'll do anything in the world that's kind to her, if you will only forgive me."

"A polite word or two is all that is wanted—nothing more than a polite word or two," said Mr. Frankland, rather coldly and constrainedly.

"Don't cry any more, for goodness sake!" said Rosamond, walking straight up to Miss Mowlem, and pulling the dingy-white pocket-handkerchief away from her face without the least ceremony. "There! leave off, will you? I am very sorry I was in a passion—though you had no business to come in without knocking—I never meant to distress you, and I'll never say a hard word to you again, if you will only knock

at the door for the future, and leave off crying now. *Do* leave off crying, you tiresome creature! We are not going away. We don't want your mother, or the bill, or anything. Here! here's a present for you, if you'll leave off crying. Here's my neck-ribbon—I saw you trying it on yesterday afternoon, when I was lying down on the bed-room sofa, and you thought I was asleep. Never mind; I'm not angry about that. Take the ribbon—take it as a peace-offering, if you won't as a present. You *shall* take it!—No, I don't mean that—I mean, please take it! There I've pinned it on. And now, shake hands and be friends, and go up-stairs and see how it looks in the glass." With these words, Mrs. Frankland opened the door, administered, under the pretence of a pat on the shoulder, a good-humoured shove to the amazed and embarrassed Miss Mowlem, closed the door again, and resumed her place in a moment on her husband's knee.

"I've made it up with her, dear. I've sent her away with my bright green ribbon, and it makes her look as yellow as a guinea, and as ugly as——" Rosamond stopped, and looked anxiously into Mr. Frankland's face. "Lenny!" she said, sadly, putting her cheek against his, "are you angry with me still?"

"My love, I was never angry with you. I never can be."

“I will always keep my temper down for the future, Lenny!”

“I am sure you will, Rosamond. But never mind that. I am not thinking of your temper now.”

“Of what, then?”

“Of the apology you made to Miss Mowlem.”

“Did I not say enough? I’ll call her back if you like—I’ll make another penitent speech—I’ll do anything but kiss her. I really can’t do that—I can’t kiss anybody now, but you.”

“My dear, dear love, how very much like a child you are still, in some of your ways! You said more than enough to Miss Mowlem—far more. And if you will pardon me for making the remark, I think in your generosity and good-nature, you a little forgot yourself with the young woman. I don’t so much allude to your giving her the ribbon—though, perhaps, that might have been done a little less familiarly—but, from what I heard you say, I infer that you actually went the length of shaking hands with her.”

“Was that wrong? I thought it was the kindest way of making it up.”

“My dear it is an excellent way of making it up between equals. But consider the difference between your station in society, and Miss Mowlem’s.”

“I will try and consider it, if you wish me,



love. But I think I take after my father, who never troubles his head (dear old man!) about differences of station. I can't help liking people who are kind to me, without thinking whether they are above my rank or below it; and when I got cool, I must confess I felt just as vexed with myself for frightening and distressing that unlucky Miss Mowlem, as if her station had been equal to mine. I will try to think as you do, Lenny; but I am very much afraid that I have got, without knowing exactly how, to be what the newspapers call, a Radical."

"My dear Rosamond! don't talk of yourself in that way, even in joke. You ought to be the last person in the world to confuse those distinctions in rank on which the whole well-being of society depends."

"Does it really? And yet, dear, we don't seem to have been created with such very wide distinctions between us. We have all got the same number of arms and legs; we are all hungry and thirsty, and hot in the summer and cold in the winter; we all laugh when we are pleased, and cry when we are distressed; and, surely, we have all got very much the same feelings, whether we are high or whether we are low. I could not have loved you better, Lenny, than I do now, if I had been a duchess, or less than I do now, if I had been a servant-girl."

"My love, you are not a servant-girl. And,

as to what you say about a duchess, let me remind you that you are not so much below a duchess as you seem to think. Many a lady of high title, cannot look back on such a line of ancestors as yours. Your father's family, Rosamond, is one of the oldest in England: even *my* father's family hardly dates back so far; and we were landed gentry when many a name in the Peerage was not heard of. It is really almost laughably absurd to hear you talking of yourself as a Radical."

"I won't talk of myself so again, Lenny—only don't look so serious. I'll be a Tory, dear, if you will give me a kiss, and let me sit on your knee a little longer."

Mr. Frankland's gravity was not proof against his wife's change of political principles, and the conditions which she annexed to it. His face cleared up, and he laughed almost as gaily as Rosamond herself.

"By the bye," said he, after an interval of silence had given him time to collect his thoughts, "did I not hear you tell Miss Mowlem to put a letter down on the table? Is it a letter for you, or for me?"

"Ah! I forgot all about the letter," said Rosamond, running to the table. "It is for you, Lenny—and, goodness me! here's the Porth-genna postmark on it."

"It must be from the builder whom I sent

down to the old house about the repairs. Lend me your eyes, love, and let us hear what he says."

Rosamond opened the letter, drew a stool to her husband's feet, and, sitting down with her arms on his knees, read as follows:—

TO LEONARD FRANKLAND, ESQ.

SIR,—Agreeably to the instructions with which you favoured me, I have proceeded to survey Porthgenna Tower, with a view to ascertaining what repairs the house in general, and the north side of it in particular, may stand in need of.

As regards the outside, a little cleaning and new-pointing is all that the building wants. The walls and foundations seem made to last for ever. Such strong solid work I never set eyes on before.

Inside the house, I cannot report so favourably. The rooms in the west front, having been inhabited during the period of Captain Treverton's occupation, and having been well looked after since, by the persons left in charge of the house, are in tolerably sound condition. I should say two hundred pounds would cover the expense of all repairs in my line, which these rooms need. This sum would not include the restoration of the west staircase, which has given a little in some places, and the banisters of which are decidedly insecure, from the first to the second landing. From twenty-five to thirty pounds would suffice to set this all right.

In the rooms on the north front, the state of dilapidation, from top to bottom, is as bad as can be. From all that I could ascertain, nobody ever went near these rooms in Captain Treverton's time, or has ever entered them since. The people who now keep the house have a superstitious dread of opening any of the north doors, in consequence of the time that has elapsed since any living being has passed through them. Nobody would volunteer to accompany me in my survey, and nobody could tell me which keys fitted which room doors in any part of the north side. I could find no plan containing the names or numbers of the rooms; nor, to my surprise, were there any labels attached separately to the keys. They were given to me, all hanging together on a large ring, with an

ivory label to it, which was only marked :—Keys of the North Rooms. I take the liberty of mentioning these particulars in order to account for my having, as you might think, delayed my stay at Porthgenna Tower longer than is needful. I lost nearly a whole day in taking the keys off the ring and fitting them at hazard to the right doors. And I occupied some hours of another day in marking each door with a number on the outside, and putting a corresponding label to each key, before I replaced it on the ring, in order to prevent the possibility of future errors and delays.

As I hope to furnish you, in a few days, with a detailed estimate of the repairs needed in the north part of the house, from basement to roof, I need only say here that they will occupy some time, and will be of the most extensive nature. The beams of the staircase and the flooring of the first story have got the dry rot. The damp in some rooms, and the rats in others, have almost destroyed the wainscottings. Four of the mantel-pieces have given out from the walls, and all the ceilings are either stained, cracked, or peeled away in large patches. The flooring is, in general, in a better condition than I had anticipated; but the shutters and window-sashes are so warped, as to be useless. It is only fair to acknowledge that the expense of setting all these things to rights—that is to say, of making the rooms safe and habitable, and of putting them in proper condition for the upholsterer—will be considerable. I would respectfully suggest, in the event of your feeling any surprise or dissatisfaction at the amount of my estimate, that you should name a friend in whom you place confidence, to go over the north rooms with me, keeping my estimate in his hand. I will undertake to prove, if needful, the necessity of each separate repair, and the justice of each separate charge for the same, to the satisfaction of any competent and impartial person whom you may please to select.

Trusting to send you the estimate in a few days,

I remain, sir,

Your humble servant,

THOMAS HORLOCK.

“A very honest, straightforward letter,” said Mr. Frankland.

“I wish he had sent the estimate with it,” said Rosamond. “Why could not the provoking man tell us at once in round numbers what the repairs will really cost?”

“I suspect, my dear, he was afraid of shocking us, if he mentioned the amount in round numbers.”

“That horrid money! It is always getting in one’s way and upsetting one’s plans. If we haven’t got enough, let us go and borrow of somebody who has. Do you mean to despatch a friend to Porthgenna to go over the house with Mr. Horlock? If you do, I know who I wish you would send.”

“Who?”

“Me, if you please—under your escort, of course. Don’t laugh, Lenny. I would be very sharp with Mr. Horlock: I would object to every one of his charges, and beat him down without mercy. I once saw a surveyor go over a house, and I know exactly what to do. You stamp on the floor, and knock at the walls, and scrape at the brickwork, and look up all the chimneys and out of all the windows—sometimes you make notes in a little book, sometimes you measure with a foot-rule, sometimes you sit down all of a sudden and think profoundly—and the end of it is that you say the house will do very well indeed, if the tenant will pull out his purse and put it in proper repair.”

“Well done, Rosamond! You have one more accomplishment than I knew of; and I suppose I have no choice now but to give you an opportunity of displaying it. If you don’t object, my dear, to being associated with a professional assistant in the important business of checking Mr. Horlock’s estimate, I don’t object to paying a short visit to Porthgenna whenever you please—especially now I know that the west rooms are still habitable.”

“O, how kind of you! how pleased I shall be! how I shall enjoy seeing the old place again before it is altered! I was only five years old, Lenny, when we left Porthgenna, and I am so anxious to see what I can remember of it, after such a long, long absence as mine. Do you know, I never saw anything of that ruinous north side of the house—and I do so dote on old rooms? We will go all through them, Lenny. You shall have hold of my hand, and look with my eyes, and make as many discoveries as I do. I prophesy that we shall see ghosts and find treasures, and hear mysterious noises—and, oh heavens! what clouds of dust we shall have to go through.—Pouf! the very anticipation of them chokes me already!”

“Now we are on the subject of Porthgenna, Rosamond, let us be serious for one moment. It is clear to me that these repairs of the north

rooms will cost a large sum of money. Now, my love, I consider no sum of money misspent, however large it may be, if it procures you pleasure. I am with you heart and soul——”

He paused. His wife's caressing arms were twining round his neck again, and her cheek was laid gently against his. “Go on, Lenny,” she said, with such an accent of tenderness in the utterance of those three simple words, that his speech failed him for the moment, and all his sensations seemed absorbed in the one luxury of listening. “Rosamond,” he whispered, “there is no music in the world that touches me as your voice touches me now! I feel it all through me, as I used sometimes to feel the sky at night, in the time when I could see.” As he spoke, the caressing arms tightened round his neck, and the fervent lips softly took the place which the cheek had occupied. “Go on, Lenny,” they repeated happily as well as tenderly now, “you said you were with me, heart and soul. With me in what?”

“In your project, love, for inducing your father to retire from his profession after this last cruise, and in your hope of prevailing on him to pass the evening of his days happily with us at Porthgenna. If the money spent in restoring the north rooms, so that we may all live in them for the future, does indeed so alter the look of the place to his eyes as to dissipate

his old sorrowful associations with it, and to make his living there again a pleasure instead of a pain to him, I shall regard it as money well laid out. But, Rosamond, are you sure of the success of your plan before we undertake it? Have you dropped any hint of the Porthgenna project to your father?"

"I told him, Lenny, that I should never be quite comfortable unless he left the sea, and came to live with us—and he said that he would. I did not mention a word about Porthgenna—nor did he—but he knows that we shall live there when we are settled, and he made no conditions when he promised that our home should be his home."

"Is the loss of your mother the only sad association he has with the place?"

"Not quite. There is another association, which has never been mentioned, but which I may tell you, because there are no secrets between us. My mother had a favourite maid who lived with her from the time of her marriage, and who was, accidentally, the only person present in her room when she died. I remember hearing of this woman, as being odd in her look and manner, and no great favourite with anybody but her mistress. Well, on the morning of my mother's death, she disappeared from the house in the strangest way, leaving behind her a most singular and mysterious letter to my father,



asserting that in my mother's dying moments, a secret had been confided to her which she was charged to divulge to her master when her mistress was no more; and adding that she was afraid to mention this secret, and that, to avoid being questioned about it, she had resolved on leaving the house for ever. She had been gone some hours when the letter was opened—and she has never been seen or heard of since that time. This circumstance seemed to make almost as strong an impression on my father's mind as the shock of my mother's death. Our neighbours and servants all thought (as I think) that the woman was mad; but he never agreed with them, and I know that he has neither destroyed nor forgotten the letter from that time to this."

"A strange event, Rosamond,—a very strange event. I don't wonder that it has made a lasting impression on him."

"Depend upon it, Lenny, the servants and the neighbours were right—the woman was mad. Any way, however, it was certainly a singular event in our family. All old houses have their romance—and that is the romance of our house. But years and years have passed since then; and, what with time, and what with the changes we are going to make, I have no fear that my dear, good father will spoil our plans. Give him a new north garden at Porthgenna, where he can walk the decks, as I call it,—give him new

north rooms to live in—and I will answer for the result. But all this is in the future; let us get back to the present time. When shall we pay our flying visit to Porthgenna, Lenny, and plunge into the important business of checking Mr. Horlock's estimate for the repairs?"

"We have three weeks more to stay here, Rosamond."

"Yes; and then we must go back to Long Beckley. I promised that best and biggest of men, the vicar, that we would pay our first visit to him. He is sure not to let us off under three weeks or a month."

"In that case, then, we had better say two months hence for the visit to Porthgenna. Is your writing-case in the room, Rosamond?"

"Yes; close by us, on the table."

"Write to Mr. Horlock then, love—and appoint a meeting in two months' time at the old house. Tell him also, as we must not trust ourselves on unsafe stairs—especially considering how dependent I am on banisters—to have the west staircase repaired immediately. And, while you have the pen in your hand, perhaps it may save trouble if you write a second note to the housekeeper at Porthgenna, to tell her when she may expect us."

Rosamond sat down gaily at the table and dipped her pen in the ink with a little flourish of triumph.

“In two months,” she exclaimed joyfully, “I shall see the dear old place again! In two months, Lenny, our profane feet will be raising the dust in the solitudes of the North Rooms.”



BOOK III.



## CHAPTER I.



### TIMON OF LONDON.

TIMON of Athens retreated from an ungrateful world to a cavern by the sea-shore—Timon of London took refuge from his species in a detached house at Bayswater. Timon of Athens vented his misanthropy in magnificent poetry—Timon of London expressed his sentiments in shabby prose. Timon of Athens had the honour of being called “My Lord”—Timon of London was only addressed as “Mr. Treverton.” The one point of resemblance which it is possible to set against these points of contrast between the two Timons consisted in this: that their misanthropy was, at least, genuine. Both were incorrigible haters of mankind.

From his childhood, Andrew Treverton’s character had presented those strong distinguishing marks of good and bad, jostling and contradicting each other, which the language of the world carelessly expresses and contemptuously sums up in the one word—eccen-

tric. There is probably no better proof of the accuracy of that definition of man which describes him as an imitative animal, than is to be found in the fact, that the verdict of humanity is always against any individual member of the species who presumes to differ from the rest. A man is one of a flock, and his wool must be of the general colour. He must drink when the rest drink, and graze where the rest graze. When the others are frightened by a dog, and scamper, starting with the right leg, he must be frightened by a dog, and scamper, starting with the right leg also. If he is not frightened, or even if, being frightened, he scampers and starts out of step with the rest, it is a proof at once that there is something not right about him. Let a man walk at noonday with perfect composure of countenance and decency of gait, with not the slightest appearance of vacancy in his eyes or wildness in his manner, from one end of Oxford Street to the other, without his hat, and let every one of the thousands of hat-wearing people whom he passes be asked separately what they think of him, how many will abstain from deciding instantly that he is mad, on no other evidence than the evidence of his bare head? Nay, more: let him politely stop each one of those passengers, and let him explain in the plainest form of words, and in the most intelligible manner, that his head feels more easy and comfortable without a hat than



with one, how many of his fellow mortals who decided that he was mad on first meeting him, will change their opinion when they part from him after hearing his explanation? In the vast majority of cases, the very explanation itself would be accepted as an excellent additional proof that the intellect of the hatless man was indisputably deranged.

Starting at the beginning of the march of life out of step with the rest of the mortal regiment, Andrew Treverton paid the penalty of his irregularity from his earliest days. He was a phenomenon in the nursery, a butt at school, and a victim at college. The ignorant nursemaid reported him as a queer child; the learned schoolmaster genteelly varied the phrase, and described him as an eccentric boy; the college tutor, harping on the same string, facetiously likened his head to a roof, and said there was a slate loose in it. When a slate is loose, if nobody fixes it in time, it ends by falling off. In the roof of a house we view that consequence as a necessary result of neglect; in the roof of a man's head we are generally very much shocked and surprised by it.

Overlooked in some directions and misdirected in others, Andrew's uncouth capacities for good tried helplessly to shape themselves. The better side of his eccentricity took the form of friendship. He became violently and unintelligibly fond of

one among his schoolfellows—a boy, who treated him with no especial consideration in the playground, and who gave him no particular help in the class. Nobody could discover the smallest reason for it, but it was nevertheless a notorious fact, that Andrew's pocket-money was always at this boy's service, that Andrew ran about after him like a dog, and that Andrew over and over again took the blame and punishment on his own shoulders which ought to have fallen on the shoulders of his friend. When, a few years afterwards, that friend went to college, the lad petitioned to be sent to college too, and attached himself there more closely than ever to the strangely-chosen comrade of his schoolboy days. Such devotion as this must have touched any man possessed of ordinary generosity of disposition. It made no impression whatever on the inherently base nature of Andrew's friend. After three years of intercourse at college—intercourse which was all selfishness on one side and all self-sacrifice on the other—the end came, and the light was let in cruelly on Andrew's eyes. When his purse grew light in his friend's hand, and when his acceptances were most numerous on his friend's bills, the brother of his honest affection, the hero of his simple admiration, abandoned him to embarrassment, to ridicule, and to solitude, without the faintest affectation of penitence—without so much even as a word of farewell.

He returned to his father's house, a soured man at the outset of life—returned to be upbraided for the debts that he had contracted to serve the man who had heartlessly outraged and shamelessly cheated him. He left home in disgrace, to travel, on a small allowance. The travels were protracted, and they ended, as such travels often do, in settled expatriation. The life he led, the company he kept, during his long residence abroad, did him permanent and fatal harm. When he at last returned to England, he presented himself in the most hopeless of all characters—the character of a man who believes in nothing. At this period of his life, his one chance for the future lay in the good results which his brother's influence over him might have produced. The two had hardly resumed their intercourse of early days, when the quarrel occasioned by Captain Treverton's marriage broke it off for ever. From that time, for all social interests and purposes, Andrew was a lost man. From that time, he met the last remonstrances that were made to him by the last friends who took any interest in his fortunes, always with the same bitter and hopeless form of reply: "My dearest friend forsook and cheated me," he would say. "My only brother has quarrelled with me for the sake of a play-actress. What am I to expect of the rest of mankind after that? I have suffered twice for my

belief in others—I will never suffer a third time. The wise man is the man who does not disturb his heart at its natural occupation of pumping blood through his body. I have gathered my experience abroad and at home; and have learnt enough to see through the delusions of life which look like realities to other men's eyes, but which have betrayed themselves years ago to mine. My business in this world is to eat, drink, sleep, and die. Everything else is superfluity—and I have done with it."

The few people who ever cared to inquire about him again, after being repulsed by such an avowal as this, heard of him, three or four years after his brother's marriage, in the neighbourhood of Bayswater. Local reports described him as having bought the first cottage he could find which was cut off from other houses by a wall all round it. It was further rumoured that he was living like a miser; that he had got an old manservant, named Shrowl, who was even a greater enemy to mankind than himself; that he allowed no living soul, not even an occasional charwoman, to enter the house; that he was letting his beard grow, and that he had ordered his servant Shrowl to follow his example. In the year eighteen hundred and forty-four, the fact of a man's not shaving was regarded by the enlightened majority of the English nation as a proof of unsoundness of intellect. At the present time, Mr. Tre-

verton's beard would only have interfered with his reputation for respectability. Thirteen years ago, it was accepted as so much additional evidence in support of the old theory that his intellects were deranged. He was at that very time, as his stockbroker could have testified, one of the sharpest men of business in London; he could argue on the wrong side of any question with an acuteness of sophistry and sarcasm that Doctor Johnson himself might have envied; he kept his household accounts right to a farthing, his manner was never disturbed in the slightest degree from morning to night, his eyes were all quickness and intelligence—but what did these advantages avail him, in the estimation of his neighbours, when he presumed to live on another plan than theirs, and when he wore a hairy certificate of lunacy on the lower part of his face? We have advanced a little in the matter of partial toleration of beards since that time; but we have still a great deal of ground to get over. In the present year of progress, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, would the most trustworthy banker's clerk in the whole metropolis have the slightest chance of keeping his situation if he left off shaving his chin?

Common report, which calumniated Mr. Treverton as mad, had another error to answer for in describing him as a miser. He saved more than two-thirds of the income derived from his com-

fortable fortune, not because he liked hoarding up money; but because he had no enjoyment of the comforts and luxuries which money is spent in procuring. To do him justice, his contempt for his own wealth was quite as hearty as his contempt for the wealth of his neighbours. Thus characteristically wrong on both points, in endeavouring to delineate his character, report was, nevertheless, for once in a way, inconsistently right in describing his manner of life. It was true that he had bought the first cottage he could find that was secluded within its own walls—true that nobody was allowed, on any pretence whatever, to enter his doors—and true that he had met with a servant, who was even bitterer against all mankind than himself, in the person of Mr. Shrowl.

The life these two led approached as nearly to the existence of the primitive man (or savage) as the surrounding conditions of civilisation would allow. Admitting the necessity of eating and drinking, the first object of Mr. Treverton's ambition was to sustain life with the least possible dependence on the race of men who professed to supply their neighbours' bodily wants, and who, as he conceived, cheated them infamously on the strength of their profession. Having a garden at the back of the house, Timon of London dispensed with the greengrocer altogether by cultivating his own vegetables. There

was no room for growing wheat, or he would have turned farmer also on his own account; but he could outwit the miller and the baker, at any rate, by buying a sack of corn, grinding it in his own hand-mill, and giving the flour to Shrowl to make into bread. On the same principle, the meat for the house was bought wholesale of the City salesmen—the master and servant eating as much of it in the fresh state as they could, salting the rest, and setting butchers at defiance. As for drink, neither brewer nor publican ever had the chance of extorting a farthing from Mr. Treverton's pocket. He and Shrowl were satisfied with beer—and they brewed for themselves. With bread, vegetables, meat, and malt liquor, these two hermits of modern days achieved the great double purpose of keeping life in, and keeping the tradesmen out.

Eating like primitive men, they lived in all other respects like primitive men also. They had pots, pans, and pipkins, two deal tables, two chairs, two old sofas, two short pipes, and two long cloaks. They had no stated meal-times, no carpets and bedsteads, no cabinets, bookcases, or ornamental knick-knacks of any kind, no laundress, and no charwoman. When either of the two wanted to eat and drink, he cut off his crust of bread, cooked his bit of meat, drew his drop of beer, without the slightest reference to the other. When either of the two thought he

wanted a clean shirt, which was very seldom, he went and washed one for himself. When either of the two discovered that any part of the house was getting very dirty indeed, he took a bucket of water and a birch-broom, and washed the place out like a dog-kennel. And, lastly, when either of the two wanted to go to sleep, he wrapped himself up in his cloak, and lay down on one of the sofas and took what repose he required, early in the evening or late in the morning, just as he pleased.

When there was no baking, brewing, gardening, or cleaning to be done, the two sat down opposite each other and smoked for hours, generally without uttering a word. Whenever they did speak, they quarrelled. Their ordinary dialogue was a species of conversational prize-fight, beginning with a sarcastic affectation of good-will on either side, and ending in hearty exchanges of violent abuse—just as the boxers go through the feeble formality of shaking hands before they enter on the serious practical business of beating each other's faces out of all likeness to the image of man. Not having so many disadvantages of early refinement and education to contend against as his master, Shrowl generally won the victory in these engagements of the tongue. Indeed, though nominally the servant, he was really the ruling spirit in the house—acquiring unbounded influence over his master by dint of



outmarching Mr. Treverton in every direction on his own ground. Shrowl's was the harshest voice; Shrowl's were the bitterest sayings; and Shrowl's was the longest beard. If anyone had accused Mr. Treverton of secretly deferring to his servant's opinions, and secretly fearing his servant's displeasure, he would have repudiated the imputation with the utmost bitterness and wrath. But it was not the less true that Shrowl's was the upper hand in the house, and that his decision on any important matter was, sooner or later, certain to be the decision at which his master arrived. The surest of all retributions is the retribution that lies in wait for a man who boasts. Mr. Treverton was rashly given to boasting of his independence, and when retribution overtook him, it assumed a personal form, and bore the name of Shrowl.

On a certain morning, about three weeks after Mrs. Frankland had written to the housekeeper at Porthgenna Tower to mention the period at which her husband and herself might be expected there, Mr. Treverton descended, with his sourest face and his surliest manner, from the upper regions of the cottage to one of the rooms on the ground-floor, which civilised tenants would probably have called the parlour. Like his elder brother, he was a tall, well-built man; but his bony, haggard, sallow face bore not the slightest resemblance to the handsome,

open, sunburnt face of the Captain. No one, seeing them together, could possibly have guessed that they were brothers—so completely did they differ in expression as well as in feature. The heart-aches that he had suffered in youth; the reckless, wandering, dissipated life that he had led in manhood; the petulance, the disappointment, and the physical exhaustion of his later days, had so wasted and worn him away that he looked his brother's elder by almost twenty years. With unbrushed hair and unwashed face, with a tangled grey beard, and an old patched, dirty flannel dressing-gown that hung about him like a sack, this descendant of a wealthy and ancient family looked as if his birth-place had been the workhouse and his vocation in life the selling of cast-off clothes.

It was breakfast-time with Mr. Treverton—that is to say, it was the time at which he felt hungry enough to think about eating something. In the same position, over the mantel-piece, in which a looking-glass would have been placed in a household of ordinary refinement, there hung in the cottage of Timon of London a side of bacon. On the deal table by the fire, stood half a loaf of heavy-looking brown bread; in a corner of the room was a barrel of beer, with two battered pewter pots hitched on to nails in the wall above it; and under the grate lay a smoky old gridiron, left just as it had been thrown down

when last used and done with. Mr. Treverton took a greasy clasp-knife out of the pocket of his dressing-gown, cut off a rasher of bacon, jerked the gridiron on to the fire, and began to cook his breakfast. He had just turned the rasher, when the door opened, and Shrowl entered the room, with his pipe in his mouth, bent on the same eating errand as his master.

In personal appearance, Shrowl was short, fat, flabby, and perfectly bald, except at the back of his head, where a ring of bristly iron-grey hair projected like a collar that had got hitched out of its place. To make amends for the scantiness of his hair, the beard which he had cultivated by his master's desire, grew far over his cheeks, and drooped down on his chest in two thick jagged peaks. He wore a very old long-tailed dress-coat, which he had picked up a bargain in Petticoat Lane—a faded yellow shirt, with a large torn frill—velveteen trousers, turned up at the ankles—and Blucher boots that had never been blacked since the day when they last left the cobbler's stall. His colour was unhealthily florid, his thick lips curled upward with a malicious grin, and his eyes were the nearest approach, in form and expression, to the eyes of a bull-terrier which those features are capable of achieving when they are placed in the countenance of a man. Any painter wanting to express strength, insolence, ugliness, coarseness,

and cunning, in the face and figure of one and the same individual, could have discovered no better model for the purpose, all the world over, than he might have found in the person of Mr. Shrowl.

Neither master nor servant exchanged a word, or took the smallest notice of each other, on first meeting. Shrowl stood stolidly contemplative, with his hands in his pockets, waiting for his turn at the gridiron. Mr. Treverton finished his cooking, took his bacon to the table, and cutting himself a crust of bread, began to eat his breakfast. When he had disposed of the first mouthful, he condescended to look up at Shrowl, who was at that moment opening his clasp-knife and approaching the side of bacon with slouching steps and sleepily greedy eyes.

“What do you mean by that?” asked Mr. Treverton, pointing with indignant surprise at Shrowl’s breast. “You ugly brute, you’ve got a clean shirt on!”

“Thankee, sir, for noticing it,” said Shrowl, with a sarcastic affectation of extreme humility. “This is a joyful occasion, this is. I couldn’t do no less than put a clean shirt on, when it’s my master’s birthday. Many happy returns, sir. Perhaps you thought I should not remember that to-day was your birthday? Lord bless your sweet face, I wouldn’t have forgot it on any account. How old are you to-day, sir? Long

time ago, sir, since you was a plump smiling little boy, with a frill round your neck, and marbles in your pocket, and trousers and waistcoat all in one, and kisses and presents from Pa and Ma and uncle and aunt, on your birthday. Don't you be afraid of me wearing out this shirt by too much washing. I mean to put it away in lavender against your next birthday; or against your funeral, which is just as likely at your time of life—isn't it, sir?"

"Don't waste a clean shirt on my funeral," retorted Mr. Treverton. "I hav'n't left you any money in my will, Shrowl. You'll be on your way to the workhouse, when I'm on my way to the grave."

"Have you really made your will, at last, sir?" inquired Shrowl, pausing, with an appearance of the greatest interest, in the act of cutting off his slice of bacon. "I humbly beg pardon, but I always thought you was afraid to do it."

The servant had evidently touched intentionally on one of the master's sore points. Mr. Treverton thumped his crust of bread on the table, and looked up angrily at Shrowl.

"Afraid of making my will, you fool!" said he. "I don't make it, and I won't make it, on principle."

Shrowl slowly sawed off his slice of bacon, and began to whistle a tune.

"On principle," repeated Mr. Treverton. Rich

men who leave money behind them are the farmers who raise the crop of human wickedness. When a man has any spark of generosity in his nature, if you want to put it out, leave him a legacy. When a man is bad, if you want to make him worse, leave him a legacy. If you want to collect a number of men together for the purpose of perpetuating corruption and oppression on a large scale, leave them a legacy under the form of endowing a public charity. If you want to give a woman the best chance in the world of getting a bad husband, leave her a legacy. If you want to send young men to perdition; if you want to make old men loadstones for attracting all the basest qualities of mankind; if you want to set parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, all together by the ears, leave them money. Make my will! I have a pretty strong dislike of my species, Shrowl, but I don't quite hate mankind enough yet, to do such mischief among them as that!" Ending his diatribe in these words, Mr. Treverton took down one of the battered pewter pots, and refreshed himself with a pint of beer.

Shrowl shifted the gridiron to a clear place in the fire, and chuckled sarcastically.

"Who the devil would you have me leave my money to?" cried Mr. Treverton, overhearing him. "To my brother, who thinks me a brute now; who would think me a fool then; and who

would encourage swindling, anyhow, by spending all my money among doxies and strolling players? To the child of that player-woman, whom I have never set eyes on, who has been brought up to hate me, and who would turn hypocrite directly by pretending, for decency's sake, to be sorry for my death? To *you*, you human baboon!—you, who would set up an usury-office directly, and prey upon the widow, the fatherless, and the unfortunate, generally, all over the world? Your good health, Mr. Shrowl! I can laugh as well as you—especially when I know I'm not going to leave you sixpence."

Shrowl, in his turn, began to get a little irritated now. The jeering civility which he had chosen to assume on first entering the room, gave place to his habitual surliness of manner and his natural growling intonation of voice.

"You just let me alone—will you?" he said, sitting down sulkily to his breakfast. "I've done joking for to-day; suppose you finish, too. What's the use of talking nonsense about your money? You must leave it to somebody."

"Yes, I will," said Mr. Treverton. "I will leave it, as I have told you over and over again, to the first Somebody I can find who honestly despises money, and who can't be made the worse, therefore, by having it."

"That means nobody," grunted Shrowl.

"I know it does!" retorted his master.

“But you can't leave it to nobody,” persisted Shrowl. “You must leave it to somebody. You can't help yourself.”

“Can't I?” said Mr. Treverton. “I rather think I can do what I please with it. I can turn it all into bank-notes, if I like, and make a bon-fire with them in the brew-house before I die. I should go out of the world then, knowing that I hadn't left materials behind me for making it worse than it is—and that would be a precious comfort to me, I can tell you!”

Before Shrowl could utter a word of rejoinder, there was a ring at the gate-bell of the cottage.

“Go out,” said Mr. Treverton, “and see what that is. If it's a woman-visitor, show her what a scarecrow you are, and frighten her away. If it's a man-visitor——”

“If it's a man-visitor,” interposed Shrowl, “I'll punch his head for interrupting me at my breakfast.”

Mr. Treverton filled and lit his pipe during his servant's absence. Before the tobacco was well a-light, Shrowl returned, and reported a man-visitor.

“Did you punch his head?” asked Mr. Treverton.

“No,” said Shrowl, “I picked up his letter. He poked it under the gate, and went away. Here it is.”



The letter was written on foolscap paper, superscribed in a round legal hand. As Mr. Treverton opened it, two slips cut from newspapers dropped out. One fell on the table before which he was sitting; the other fluttered to the floor. This last slip Shrowl picked up, and looked over its contents, without troubling himself to go through the ceremony of first asking leave.

After slowly drawing in and slowly puffing out again one mouthful of tobacco-smoke, Mr. Treverton began to read the letter. As his eye fell on the first lines, his lips began to work round the mouth-piece of the pipe in a manner that was very unusual with him. The letter was not long enough to require him to turn over the first leaf of it—it ended at the bottom of the opening sheet. He read it down to the signature—then looked up to the address, and went through it again from the beginning. His lips still continued to work round the mouth-piece of the pipe, but he smoked no more. When he had finished the second reading, he set the letter down very gently on the table, looked at his servant with an unaccustomed vacancy in the expression of his eyes, and took the pipe out of his mouth with a hand that trembled a little.

“Shrowl,” he said, very quietly, “my brother is drowned.”

“I know he is,” answered Shrowl, without

looking up from the newspaper-slip. "I'm reading about it here."

"The last words he said to me when we quarrelled about the player-woman," continued Mr. Treverton, speaking as much to himself as to his servant, "were, that I should die without one kind feeling in my heart towards any living soul."

"So you will," muttered Shrowl, turning the slip over to see if there was anything worth reading at the back of it.

"I wonder what he thought about me when he was dying?" said Mr. Treverton, abstractedly taking up the letter again from the table.

"He didn't waste a thought on you or anybody else," remarked Shrowl. "If he thought at all, he thought about how he could save his life. When he had done thinking about that, he had done living, too." With that expression of opinion Mr. Shrowl went to the beer-barrel, and drew his morning draught.

"Damn that player-woman!" muttered Mr. Treverton. As he said these words his face darkened and his lips closed firmly. He smoothed the letter out on the table. There seemed to be some doubt in his mind whether he had mastered all its contents yet—some idea that there was more in it—or that there ought to be more in it—than he had yet discovered. In going over it for the third time, he read it to

himself aloud and very slowly, as if he was determined to fix every separate word firmly in his memory.

“SIR (he read),—As the old legal adviser and faithful friend of your family, I am desired by Mrs. Frankland, formerly Miss Treverton, to acquaint you with the sad news of your brother’s death. This deplorable event occurred on board the ship of which he was captain, during a gale of wind in which the vessel was lost on a reef of rocks off the island of Antigua. I enclose a detailed account of the shipwreck extracted from the Times, by which you will see that your brother died nobly in the performance of his duty towards the officers and men whom he commanded. I also send a slip from the local Cornish paper, containing a memoir of the deceased gentleman.

“Before closing this communication, I must add that no will has been found, after the most rigorous search, among the papers of the late Captain Treverton. Having disposed, as you know, of Porthgenna, the only property of which he was possessed at the time of his death was personal property, derived from the sale of his estate; and this, in consequence of his dying intestate, will go in due course of law to his daughter, as his nearest of kin.

“I am, Sir,

“Your obedient servant,

“ALEXANDER NIXON.”

The newspaper-slip, which had fallen on the table, contained the paragraph from the Times. The slip from the Cornish paper, which had dropped to the floor, Shrowl poked under his master’s eyes, in a fit of temporary civility, as soon as he had done reading it. Mr. Treverton took not the slightest notice either of the one paragraph or the other. He still sat looking

at the letter, even after he had read it for the third time.

“ Why don't you give the strip of print a turn, as well as the sheet of writing ? ” asked Shrowl. “ Why don't you read about what a great man your brother was, and what a good life he led, and what a wonderful handsome daughter he's left behind him, and what a capital marriage she's made along with the man that's owner of your old family estate ? *She* don't want your money now, at any rate ! The ill wind that blowed her father's ship on the rocks has blowed forty thousand pound of good into her lap. Why don't you read about it ? She and her husband have got a better house in Cornwall than you have got here. Ain't you glad of that ? They were going to have repaired the place from top to bottom for your brother to go and live along with 'em in clover when he came back from sea. Who will ever repair a place for you ? I wonder whether your niece would knock the old house about for your sake, now, if you was to clean yourself up and go and ask her ? ”

At the last question, Shrowl paused in the work of aggravation—not for want of more words, but for want of encouragement to utter them. For the first time since they had kept house together, he had tried to provoke his master and had failed. Mr. Treverton listened, or appeared to listen, without moving a muscle—without the faintest

change to anger in his face. The only words he said when Shrowl had done, were these two—

“Go out!”

Shrowl was not an easy man to move, but he absolutely changed colour when he heard that unprecedented and uncompromising command. After leading his master, from the first days of their sojourn together in the house just as he pleased, could he believe his ears when he heard himself suddenly ordered to leave the room?

“Go out!” reiterated Mr. Treverton. “And hold your tongue henceforth and for ever, about my brother and my brother’s daughter. I never have set eyes upon the player-woman’s child, and I never will. Hold your tongue—leave me alone—go out!”

“I’ll be even with him for this,” thought Shrowl as he slowly withdrew from the room.

When he had closed the door, he listened outside it, and heard Mr. Treverton push aside his chair, and walk up and down, talking to himself. Judging by the confused words that escaped him, Shrowl concluded that his thoughts were still running on the “player-woman” who had set his brother and himself at variance. He seemed to feel a barbarous sense of relief in venting his dissatisfaction with himself, after the news of Captain Treverton’s death, on the memory of the woman whom he hated so bitterly, and on the child whom she had left behind her.

After a while, the low rumbling tones of his voice ceased altogether. Shrowl peeped through the keyhole, and saw that he was reading the newspaper-slips which contained the account of the shipwreck, and the Memoir of his brother. The latter adverted to some of those family particulars which the vicar of Long Beckley had mentioned to his guest; and the writer of the Memoir concluded by expressing a hope that the bereavement which Mr. and Mrs. Frankland had suffered would not ultimately interfere with their project for repairing Porthgenna Tower, after they had gone the length already of sending a builder to survey the place. Something in the wording of that paragraph seemed to take Mr. Treverton's memory back to his youth-time when the old family house had been his home. He whispered a few words to himself which gloomily referred to the days that were gone, rose from his chair impatiently, threw both the newspaper-slips into the fire, watched them while they were burning, and sighed when the black gossamer ashes floated upward on the draught, and were lost in the chimney.

The sound of that sigh startled Shrowl as the sound of a pistol-shot might have startled another man. His bull-terrier's eyes opened wide in astonishment, and he shook his head ominously as he walked away from the door.

## CHAPTER II.



### WILL THEY COME ?

THE housekeeper at Porthgenna Tower had just completed the necessary preparations for the reception of her master and mistress, at the time mentioned in Mrs. Frankland's letter from St. Swithin's-on-Sea, when she was startled by receiving a note sealed with black wax, and surrounded by a thick mourning border. The note briefly communicated the news of Captain Treverton's death, and informed her that the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Frankland to Porthgenna was deferred for an indefinite period.

By the same post, the builder who was superintending the renovation of the west staircase also received a letter, requesting him to send in his account as soon as the repairs on which he was then engaged were completed; and telling him that Mr. Frankland was unable, for the present, to give any further attention to the project for making the north rooms habitable, in consequence of a domestic affliction which

might possibly change his intentions in regard to the alteration proposed in that part of the house. On the receipt of this communication, the builder withdrew himself and his men as soon as the west stairs and banisters had been made secure; and Porthgenna Tower was again left to the care of the housekeeper and her servant, without master or mistress, friends or strangers, to thread its solitary passages or enliven its empty rooms.

From this time, eight months passed away, and the housekeeper heard nothing of her master and mistress, except through the medium of paragraphs in the local newspaper, which dubiously referred to the probability of their occupying the old house, and interesting themselves in the affairs of their tenantry, at no very distant period. Occasionally, too, when business took him to the post-town, the steward collected reports about his employers among the old friends and dependants of the Treverton family. From these sources of information, the housekeeper was led to conclude that Mr. and Mrs. Frankland had returned to Long Beckley, after receiving the news of Captain Treverton's death, and had lived there for some months in strict retirement. When they left that place, they moved (if the newspaper report was to be credited) to the neighbourhood of London, and occupied the house of some friends who were travelling on the continent. Here they must



have remained for some time, for the new year came and brought no rumours of any change in their place of abode. January and February passed without any news of them. Early in March the steward had occasion to go to the post-town. When he returned to Porthgenna, he came back with a new report relating to Mr. and Mrs. Frankland, which excited the housekeeper's interest in an extraordinary degree. In two different quarters, each highly respectable, the steward had heard it facetiously announced that the domestic responsibilities of his master and mistress were likely to be increased by their having a nurse to engage and a crib to buy at the end of the spring or the beginning of the summer. In plain English, among the many babies who might be expected to make their appearance in the world in the course of the next three months, there was one who would inherit the name of Frankland, and who (if the infant luckily turned out to be a boy) would cause a sensation throughout West Cornwall as heir to the Porthgenna estate.

In the next month, the month of April, before the housekeeper and the steward had done discussing their last and most important fragment of news, the postman made his welcome appearance at Porthgenna Tower, and brought another note from Mrs. Frankland. The housekeeper's face brightened with unaccustomed pleasure and

surprise as she read the first line. The letter announced that the long-deferred visit of her master and mistress to the old house would take place early in May, and that they might be expected to arrive any day from the first to the tenth of the month.

The reasons which had led the owners of Porthgenna to fix a period, at last, for visiting their country seat, were connected with certain particulars into which Mrs. Frankland had not thought it advisable to enter in her letter. The plain facts of the case were, that a little discussion had arisen between the husband and wife in relation to the next place of residence which they should select, after the return from the continent of the friends whose house they were occupying. Mr. Frankland had very reasonably suggested returning again to Long Beckley—not only because all their oldest friends lived in the neighbourhood, but also (and circumstances made this an important consideration) because the place had the advantage of possessing an excellent resident medical man. Unfortunately this latter advantage, so far from carrying any weight with it in Mrs. Frankland's estimation, actually prejudiced her mind against the project of going to Long Beckley. She had always, she acknowledged, felt an unreasonable antipathy to the doctor there. He might be a very skilful, an extremely polite, and an undeniably respect-

able man; but she never had liked him, and never should, and she was resolved to oppose the plan for living at Long Beckley, because the execution of it would oblige her to commit herself to his care. Two other places of residence were next suggested: but Mrs. Frankland had the same objection to oppose to both—in each case, the resident doctor would be a stranger to her, and she did not like the notion of being attended by a stranger. Finally, as she had all along anticipated, the choice of the future abode was left entirely to her own inclinations; and then, to the amazement of her husband and her friends, she immediately decided on going to Porthgenna. She had formed this strange project, and was now resolved on executing it, partly because she was more curious than ever to see the place again; partly, because the doctor who had been with her mother in Mrs. Treverton's last illness, and who had attended her through all her own little maladies, when she was a child, was still living and practising in the Porthgenna neighbourhood. Her father and the doctor had been old cronies, and had met for years at the same chess-board every Saturday night. They had kept up their friendship, when circumstances separated them, by exchanges of Christmas presents every year; and when the sad news of the Captain's death had reached Cornwall, the doctor had written a letter of

sympathy and condolence to Rosamond, speaking in such terms of his former friend and patron as she could never forget. He must be a nice, fatherly old man, now—the man of all others who was fittest, on every account, to attend her. In short, Mrs. Frankland was just as strongly prejudiced in favour of employing the Porthgenna doctor, as she was prejudiced against employing the Long Beckley doctor; and she ended—as all young married women, with affectionate husbands, may, and do, end, whenever they please—by carrying her own point, and having her own way.

On the first of May, the west rooms were all ready for the reception of the master and mistress of the house. The beds were aired, the carpets cleaned, the sofas and chairs uncovered. The housekeeper put on her satin gown and her garnet brooch; the maid followed suit, at a respectful distance, in brown merino and a pink ribbon; and the steward, determining not to be outdone by the women, arrayed himself in a black brocaded waistcoat, which almost rivalled the gloom and grandeur of the housekeeper's satin gown. The day wore on, evening closed in, bed-time came—and there were no signs yet of Mr. and Mrs. Frankland.

But the first was an early day on which to expect them. The steward thought so, and the housekeeper added that it would be foolish to

feel disappointed, even if they did not arrive until the fifth. The fifth came, and still nothing happened. The sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth followed; and no sound of the expected carriage-wheels came near the lonely house.

On the tenth, and last day, the housekeeper, the steward, and the maid, all three rose earlier than usual; all three opened and shut doors, and went up and down stairs oftener than was needful; all three looked out perpetually towards the moor and the high road, and thought the view flatter, and duller, and emptier than ever it had appeared to them before. The day waned, the sunset came; darkness changed the perpetual looking out of the housekeeper, the steward, and the maid, into perpetual listening; ten o'clock struck, and still there was nothing to be heard when they went to the open window, but the dull, wearisome, ceaseless beating of the surf on the sandy shore.

The housekeeper began to calculate the time that would be consumed on the railway journey from London to Exeter, and on the posting journey afterwards through Cornwall to Porthgenna. When had Mr. and Mrs. Frankland left Exeter?—that was the first question. And what delays might they have encountered afterwards in getting horses?—that was the second. The housekeeper and the steward differed in debating these points; but both agreed that it was necessary

to sit up until midnight, on the chance of the master and mistress arriving late. The maid, hearing her sentence of banishment from bed for the next two hours, pronounced by the superior authorities, yawned and sighed mournfully—was reproved by the steward—and was furnished by the housekeeper with a book of Hymns to read, to keep up her spirits.

Twelve o'clock struck, and still the monotonous beating of the surf, varied occasionally by those loud, mysterious, cracking noises which make themselves heard at night in an old house, were the only audible sounds. The steward was dozing; the maid was fast asleep under the soothing influence of the Hymns; the housekeeper was wide awake, with her eyes fixed on the window, and her head shaking forebodingly from time to time. At the last stroke of the clock she left her chair, listened attentively, and still hearing nothing, shook the maid irritably by the shoulder, and stamped on the floor to arouse the steward.

“We may go to bed,” she said. “They are not coming.”

“Did you say they were not coming at all?” asked the steward.

“No; I only said they were not coming,” answered the housekeeper. “But it wouldn't surprise me, for one, if we never set eyes on them after all our trouble in getting the place

ready. This is the second time they have disappointed us. The first time, the Captain's death stood in the way. What stops them now? Another death? I shouldn't wonder if it was."

"Now I think of it, no more should I," said the steward, ominously knitting his brows.

"Another death!" repeated the housekeeper, superstitiously. "If it *is* another death, I should take it, in their place, as a warning to keep away from the house."

## CHAPTER III.

—♦—  
MRS. JAZEPH.

IF, instead of hazarding the guess that a second death stood in the way of Mr. and Mrs. Frankland's arrival at Porthgenna, the housekeeper had, by way of variety, surmised, this time, that a birth was the obstacle which delayed them, she might have established her character as a wise woman, by hitting at random on the actual truth. Her master and mistress had started from London on the ninth of May, and had got through the greater part of their railway journey when they were suddenly obliged to stop, on Mrs. Frankland's account, at the station of a small town in Somersetshire. The little visitor who was destined to increase the domestic responsibilities of the young married couple, had chosen to enter on the scene in the character of a robust boy-baby, a month earlier than he had been expected, and had modestly preferred to make his first appearance in a small Somersetshire inn, rather than wait to be ceremoniously



welcomed to life in the great house of Porthgenna, which he was one day to inherit.

Very few events had ever produced a greater sensation in the town of West Winston, than the one small event of the unexpected stoppage of Mr. and Mrs. Frankland's journey at that place. Never, since the last election, had the landlord and landlady of the Tiger's Head Hotel bustled about their house in such a fever of excitement, as possessed them, when Mr. Frankland's servant and Mrs. Frankland's maid drew up at the door in a fly from the station, to announce that their master and mistress were behind, and that the largest and quietest rooms in the hotel were wanted immediately, under the most unexpected and most interesting circumstances. Never, since he had triumphantly passed his examination, had young Mr. Orridge, the new doctor, who had started in life by purchasing the West Winston practice, felt such a thrill of pleasurable agitation pervade him from top to toe, as when he heard that the wife of a blind gentleman of great fortune had been taken ill on the railway journey from London to Devonshire at the West Winston station, and required all that his skill and attention could do for her, without a moment's delay. Never, since the last archery meeting and fancy fair, had the ladies of the town been favoured with such an all-absorbing subject for conversation as was now afforded to

them by Mrs. Frankland's mishap. Fabulous accounts of the wife's beauty and the husband's fortune poured from the original source of the Tiger's Head, and trickled through the highways and byways of the little town. There were a dozen different reports, one more elaborately false than the other, about Mr. Frankland's blindness, and the cause of it; about the lamentable condition in which his wife had arrived at the hotel; and about the painful sense of responsibility which had unnerved the inexperienced Mr. Orridge from the first moment when he set eyes on "his fashionable and lovely patient." It was not till eight o'clock in the evening that the public mind was relieved at last from all suspense by an announcement that the child was born, and screaming lustily; that the mother was wonderfully well, considering all things; and that Mr. Orridge had not only kept possession of his nerves, but had covered himself with distinction by the skill, tenderness, and attention with which he had performed his duties.

On the next day, and the next, and for a week after that, the accounts were still favourable. But on the tenth day, a catastrophe was reported. The nurse who was in attendance on Mrs. Frankland had been suddenly taken ill, and was rendered quite incapable of performing any further service for at least a week to come, and perhaps for a much longer period. In a

large town this misfortune might have been readily remedied, but in a place like West Winston it was not so easy to supply the loss of an experienced nurse at a few hours' notice. When Mr. Orridge was consulted in the new emergency, he candidly acknowledged that he required a little time for consideration before he could undertake to find another professed nurse of sufficient character and experience, to wait on a lady like Mrs. Frankland. Mr. Frankland suggested telegraphing to a medical friend in London for a nurse, but the doctor was unwilling for many reasons to adopt that plan, except as a last resource. It would take some time to find the right person, and to send her to West Winston; and, moreover, he would infinitely prefer employing a woman with whose character and capacity he was himself acquainted. He therefore proposed that Mrs. Frankland should be trusted for a few hours to the care of her maid, under supervision of the landlady of the Tiger's Head, while he made enquiries in the neighbourhood. If the enquiries produced no satisfactory result, he should be ready, when he called in the evening, to adopt Mr. Frankland's idea of telegraphing to London for a nurse.

On proceeding to make the investigation that he had proposed, Mr. Orridge, although he spared no trouble, met with no success. He found plenty of volunteers for the office of nurse,

but they were all loud-voiced, clumsy-handed, heavy-footed countrywomen, kind and willing enough, but sadly awkward, blundering attendants to place at the bedside of such a lady as Mrs. Frankland. The morning hours passed away, and the afternoon came, and still Mr. Orridge had found no substitute for the invalided nurse whom he could venture to engage.

At two o'clock he had half an hour's drive before him to a country house, where he had a child-patient to see. "Perhaps I may remember somebody who may do, on the way out, or on the way back again," thought Mr. Orridge as he got into his gig. "I have some hours at my disposal still, before the time comes for my evening visit at the inn."

Puzzling his brains, with the best intention in the world, all along the road to the country house, Mr. Orridge reached his destination without having arrived at any other conclusion than that he might just as well state his difficulty to Mrs. Norbury, the lady whose child he was about to prescribe for. He had called on her when he bought the West Winston practice, and had found her one of those frank, good-humoured, middle-aged women, who are generally designated by the epithet "motherly." Her husband was a country squire, famous for his old politics, his old jokes, and his old wine. He had seconded his wife's hearty reception of the new

doctor, with all the usual jokes about never giving him any employment, and never letting any bottles into the house, except the bottles that went down into the cellar. Mr. Orridge had been amused by the husband and pleased with the wife; and he thought it might be at least worth while, before he gave up all hope of finding a fit nurse, to ask Mrs. Norbury, as an old resident in the West Winston neighbourhood, for a word of advice.

Accordingly, after seeing the child, and pronouncing that there were no symptoms about the little patient which need cause the slightest alarm to anybody, Mr. Orridge paved the way for a statement of the difficulty that beset him, by asking Mrs. Norbury if she had heard of the "interesting event" that had happened at the Tiger's Head.

"You mean," answered Mrs. Norbury, who was a downright woman, and a resolute speaker of the plainest possible English, "you mean, have I heard about that poor unfortunate lady who was taken ill on her journey, and who had a child born at the inn? We have heard so much, and no more—living as we do (thank Heaven!) out of reach of the West Winston gossip. How is the lady? Who is she? Is the child well? Is she tolerably comfortable, poor thing? Can I send her anything, or do anything for her?"

“ You would do a great thing for her, and render a great assistance to me,” said Mr. Orridge, “ if you could tell me of any respectable woman in this neighbourhood who would be a proper nurse for her.”

“ You don't mean to say that the poor creature has not got a nurse !” exclaimed Mrs. Norbury.

“ She has had the best nurse in West Winston,” replied Mr. Orridge. “ But, most unfortunately, the woman was taken ill this morning, and was obliged to go home. I am now at my wit's end for somebody to supply her place. Mrs. Frankland has been used to the luxury of being well waited on ; and where I am to find an attendant, who is likely to satisfy her, is more than I can tell.”

“ Frankland, did you say, her name was ?” enquired Mrs. Norbury.

“ Yes. She is, I understand, a daughter of that Captain Treverton, who was lost with his ship, a year ago, in the West Indies. Perhaps you may remember the account of the disaster in the newspapers ?”

“ Of course I do ! and I remember the Captain, too. I was acquainted with him when he was a young man, at Portsmouth. His daughter and I ought not to be strangers, especially under such circumstances as the poor thing is placed in now. I will call at the inn, Mr. Orridge, as

soon as you will allow me to introduce myself to her. But in the mean time, what is to be done in this difficulty about the nurse? Who is with Mrs. Frankland now?"

"Her maid; but she is a very young woman, and doesn't understand nursing-duties. The landlady of the inn is ready to help when she can; but then she has constant demands on her time and attention. I suppose we shall have to telegraph to London, and get somebody sent here by railway."

"And that will take time, of course? And the new nurse may turn out to be a drunkard, or a thief, or both,—when you have got her here," said the outspoken Mrs. Norbury. "Dear, dear me! can't we do something better than that? I am ready, I am sure, to take any trouble, or make any sacrifice, if I can be of use to Mrs. Frankland. Do you know, Mr. Orridge, I think it would be a good plan if we consulted my housekeeper—Mrs. Jazeph. She is an odd woman, with an odd name, you will say. But she has lived with me in this house more than five years, and she may know of somebody in our neighbourhood who might suit you, though I don't." With those words, Mrs. Norbury rang the bell, and ordered the servant who answered it, to tell Mrs. Jazeph that she was wanted upstairs immediately.

After the lapse of a minute or so, a soft knock

was heard at the door, and the housekeeper entered the room.

Mr. Orridge looked at her, the moment she appeared, with an interest and curiosity for which he was hardly able to account. He judged her, at a rough guess, to be a woman of about fifty years of age. At the first glance, his medical eye detected that some of the intricate machinery of the nervous system had gone wrong with Mrs. Jazeph. He noted the painful working of the muscles of her face, and the hectic flush that flew into her cheeks when she entered the room and found a visitor there. He observed a strangely scared look in her eyes, and remarked that it did not leave them when the rest of her face became gradually composed. "That woman has had some dreadful fright, some great grief, or some wasting complaint," he thought to himself. "I wonder which it is?"

"This is Mr. Orridge, the medical gentleman who has lately settled at West Winston," said Mrs. Norbury, addressing the housekeeper. "He is in attendance on a lady, who was obliged to stop, on her journey westward, at our station, and who is now staying at the Tiger's Head. You have heard something about it, have you not, Mrs. Jazeph?"

Mrs. Jazeph, standing just inside the door, looked respectfully towards the doctor, and answered in the affirmative. Although she only



said the two common words, "Yes, ma'am," in a quiet uninterested way, Mr. Orridge was struck by the sweetness and tenderness of her voice. If he had not been looking at her, he would have supposed it to be the voice of a young woman. His eyes remained fixed on her after she had spoken, though he felt that they ought to have been looking towards her mistress. He, the most unobservant of men in such things, found himself noticing her dress, so that he remembered, long afterwards, the form of the spotless muslin cap that primly covered her smooth grey hair, and the quiet brown colour of the silk dress that fitted so neatly and hung around her in such spare and disciplined folds. The little confusion which she evidently felt at finding herself the object of the doctor's attention, did not betray her into the slightest awkwardness of gesture or manner. If there can be such a thing, physically-speaking, as the grace of restraint, that was the grace which seemed to govern Mrs. Jazeph's slightest movements; which led her feet smoothly over the carpet, as she advanced when her mistress next spoke to her; which governed the action of her wan right-hand as it rested lightly on a table by her side, while she stopped to hear the next question that was addressed to her.

"Well," continued Mrs. Norbury, "this poor lady was just getting on comfortably, when the

nurse, who was looking after her, fell ill this morning; and there she is now, in a strange place, with a first child, and no proper attendance — no woman of age and experience to help her as she ought to be helped. We want somebody fit to wait on a delicate woman who has seen nothing of the rough side of humanity. Mr. Orridge can find nobody at a day's notice, and I can tell him of nobody. Can you help us, Mrs. Jazeph? Are there any women down in the village, or among Mr. Norbury's tenants, who understand nursing, and have some tact and tenderness to recommend them into the bargain?"

Mrs. Jazeph reflected for a little while, and then said, very respectfully, but very briefly also, and still without any appearance of interest in her manner, that she knew of no one whom she could recommend.

"Don't make too sure of that till you have thought a little longer," said Mrs. Norbury. "I have a particular interest in serving this lady, for Mr. Orridge told me just before you came in, that she is the daughter of Captain Treverton, whose shipwreck ——"

The instant those words were spoken, Mrs. Jazeph turned round with a start, and looked at the doctor. Apparently forgetting that her right hand was on the table, she moved it so suddenly that it struck against a bronze statuette of a dog placed on some writing materials. The

statuette fell to the ground, and Mrs. Jazeph stooped to pick it up with a cry of alarm which seemed strangely exaggerated by comparison with the trifling nature of the accident.

“Bless the woman! what is she frightened about?” exclaimed Mrs. Norbury. “The dog is not hurt—put it back again! This is the first time, Mrs. Jazeph, that I ever knew you do an awkward thing. You may take that as a compliment, I think. Well, as I was saying, this lady is the daughter of Captain Treverton, whose dreadful shipwreck we all read about in the papers. I knew her father in my early days, and on that account I am doubly anxious to be of service to her now. Do think again. Is there nobody within reach who can be trusted to nurse her?”

The doctor, still watching Mrs. Jazeph with that secret medical interest of his in her case, had seen her turn so deadly pale when she started and looked towards him, that he would not have been surprised if she had fainted on the spot. He now observed that she changed colour again when her mistress left off speaking. The hectic red tinged her cheeks once more with two bright spots. Her timid eyes wandered uneasily about the room; and her fingers as she clasped her hands together, interlaced themselves mechanically. “That would be an interesting case to treat,” thought the doctor, fol-

lowing every nervous movement of the house-keeper's hands with watchful eyes.

"Do think again," repeated Mrs. Norbury, "I am so anxious to help this poor lady through her difficulty, if I can."

"I am very sorry," said Mrs. Jazeph, in faint, trembling tones, but still always with the same sweetness in her voice, "very sorry that I can think of no one who is fit; but ——"

She stopped. No shy child on its first introduction to the society of strangers could have looked more disconcerted than she looked now. Her eyes were on the ground; her colour was deepening; the fingers of her clasped hands were working together faster and faster every moment.

"But what?" asked Mrs. Norbury.

"I was about to say, ma'am," answered Mrs. Jazeph, speaking with the greatest difficulty and uneasiness, and never raising her eyes to her mistress's face, "that, rather than this lady should want for a nurse, I would—considering the interest, ma'am, which you take in her—I would, if you thought you could spare me ——"

"What, nurse her yourself!" exclaimed Mrs. Norbury. "Upon my word, although you have got to it in rather a roundabout way, you have come to the point at last, in a manner which does infinite credit to your kindness of heart and your readiness to make yourself useful. As to sparing you, of course I am not so selfish, under the

circumstances, as to think twice of the inconvenience of losing my housekeeper. But the question is, are you competent as well as willing? Have you ever had any practice in nursing?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Mrs. Jazeph, still without raising her eyes from the ground. "Shortly after my marriage" (the flush disappeared, and her face turned pale again as she said those words), "I had some practice in nursing, and continued it at intervals until the time of my husband's death. I only presume to offer myself, sir," she went on, turning towards the doctor, and becoming more earnest and self-possessed in her manner as she did so; "I only presume to offer myself, with my mistress's permission, as a substitute for a nurse until some better qualified person can be found."

"What do you say, Mr. Orridge?" asked Mrs. Norbury.

It had been the doctor's turn to start when he first heard Mrs. Jazeph propose herself for the office of nurse. He hesitated before he answered Mrs. Norbury's question, then said:

"I can have but one doubt about the propriety of thankfully accepting Mrs. Jazeph's offer."

Mrs. Jazeph's timid eyes looked anxiously and perplexedly at him as he spoke. Mrs. Norbury, in her downright, abrupt way, asked immediately what the doubt was.

"I feel some uncertainty," replied Mr. Orridge,

“as to whether Mrs. Jazeph—she will pardon me, as a medical man, for mentioning it—as to whether Mrs. Jazeph is strong enough, and has her nerves sufficiently under control to perform the duties which she is so kindly ready to undertake.”

In spite of the politeness of the explanation, Mrs. Jazeph was evidently disconcerted and distressed by it. A certain quiet, uncomplaining sadness, which it was very touching to see, overspread her face as she turned away, without another word, and walked slowly to the door.

“Don’t go yet!” cried Mrs. Norbury, kindly, “or, at least, if you do go, come back again in five minutes. I am quite certain we shall have something more to say to you then.”

Mrs. Jazeph’s eyes expressed her thanks in one grateful glance. They looked so much brighter than usual while they rested on her mistress’s face, that Mrs. Norbury half doubted whether the tears were not just rising in them at that moment. Before she could look again, Mrs. Jazeph had curtseyed to the doctor, and had noiselessly left the room.

“Now we are alone, Mr. Orridge,” said Mrs. Norbury, “I may tell you, with all submission to your medical judgment, that you are a little exaggerating Mrs. Jazeph’s nervous infirmities. She looks poorly enough I own—but, after five years’ experience of her, I can tell you that she is stronger than she looks, and I honestly think

you will be doing good service to Mrs. Frankland if you try our volunteer nurse, at least, for a day or two. She is the gentlest, tenderest creature I ever met with, and conscientious to a fault in the performance of any duty that she undertakes. Don't be under any delicacy about taking her away. I gave a dinner-party last week, and shall not give another for some time to come. I never could have spared my housekeeper more easily than I can spare her now."

"I am sure I may offer Mrs. Frankland's thanks to you as well as my own," said Mr. Orridge. "After what you have said, it would be ungracious and ungrateful in me not to follow your advice. But will you excuse me if I ask one question? Did you ever hear that Mrs. Jazeph was subject to fits of any kind?"

"Never."

"Not even to hysterical affections, now and then?"

"Never, since she has been in this house."

"You surprise me, there is something in her look and manner——"

"Yes, yes; everybody remarks that at first; but it simply means that she is in delicate health, and that she has not led a very happy life (as I suspect) in her younger days. The lady from whom I had her (with an excellent character) told me that she had married un-

happily when she was in a sadly poor unprotected state. She never says anything about her married troubles herself; but I believe her husband ill-used her. However, it does not seem to me that this is our business. I can only tell you again that she has been an excellent servant here for the last five years, and that, in your place, poorly as she may look, I should consider her as the best nurse that Mrs. Frankland could possibly wish for under the circumstances. There is no need for me to say any more. Take Mrs. Jazeph, or telegraph to London for a stranger—the decision of course rests with you.”

Mr. Orridge thought he detected a slight tone of irritability in Mrs. Norbury's last sentence. He was a prudent man; and he suppressed any doubts he might still feel in reference to Mrs. Jazeph's physical capacities for nursing, rather than risk offending the most important lady in the neighbourhood at the outset of his practice in West Winston as a medical man.

“I cannot hesitate a moment after what you have been good enough to tell me,” he said. “Pray believe that I gratefully accept your kindness and your housekeeper's offer.”

Mrs. Norbury rang the bell. It was answered on the instant by the housekeeper herself.

The doctor wondered whether she had been listening outside the door, and thought it rather



strange, if she had, that she should be so anxious to learn his decision.

“Mr. Orridge accepts your offer with thanks,” said Mrs. Norbury, beckoning to Mrs. Jazeph to advance into the room. “I have persuaded him that you are not quite so weak and ill as you look.”

A gleam of joyful surprise broke over the housekeeper's face. It looked suddenly younger by years and years, as she smiled and expressed her grateful sense of the trust that was about to be reposed in her. For the first time also since the doctor had seen her, she ventured on speaking before she was spoken to.

“When will my attendance be required, sir?” she asked.

“As soon as possible,” replied Mr. Orridge. How quickly and brightly her dim eyes seemed to clear as she heard that answer! How much more hasty than her usual movements was the movement with which she now turned round and looked appealingly at her mistress!

“Go whenever Mr. Orridge wants you,” said Mrs. Norbury. “I know your accounts are always in order, and your keys always in their proper places. You never make confusion and you never leave confusion. Go, by all means, as soon as the doctor wants you.”

“I suppose you have some preparations to make?” said Mr. Orridge.

“None, sir, that need delay me more than half-an-hour,” answered Mrs. Jazeph.

“This evening will be early enough,” said the doctor, taking his hat, and bowing to Mrs. Norbury. “Come to the Tiger’s Head, and ask for me. I shall be there between seven and eight. Many thanks again, Mrs. Norbury.”

“My best wishes and compliments to your patient, doctor.”

“At the Tiger’s Head, between seven and eight this evening,” reiterated Mr. Orridge, as the housekeeper opened the door for him.

“Between seven and eight, sir,” repeated the soft sweet voice, sounding younger than ever now that there was an under-note of pleasure running through its tones.

## CHAPTER IV.



### THE NEW NURSE.

As the clock struck seven, Mr. Orridge put on his hat to go to the Tiger's Head. He had just opened his own door, when he was met on the step by a messenger, who summoned him immediately to a case of sudden illness in the poor quarter of the town. The inquiries he made satisfied him that the appeal was really of an urgent nature, and that there was no help for it but to delay his attendance for a little while at the inn. On reaching the bedside of the patient, he discovered symptoms in the case which rendered an immediate operation necessary. The performance of this professional duty occupied some time. It was a quarter to eight before he left his house, for the second time, on his way to the Tiger's Head.

On entering the inn door, he was informed that the new nurse had arrived as early as seven o'clock, and had been waiting for him in a room by herself, ever since. Having

received no orders from Mr. Orridge, the landlady had thought it safest not to introduce the stranger to Mrs. Frankland before the doctor came.

“Did she ask to go up into Mrs. Frankland’s room?” inquired Mr. Orridge.

“Yes, sir,” replied the landlady. “And I thought she seemed rather put out when I said that I must beg her to wait till you got here. Will you step this way, and see her at once, sir? She is in my parlour.”

Mr. Orridge followed the landlady into a little room at the back of the house, and found Mrs. Jazeph sitting alone in the corner farthest from the window. He was rather surprised to see that she drew her veil down the moment the door was opened.

“I am sorry you should have been kept waiting,” he said; “but I was called away to a patient. Besides, I told you between seven and eight, if you remember; and it is not eight o’clock yet.”

“I was very anxious to be in good time, sir,” said Mrs. Jazeph. There was an accent of restraint in the quiet tones in which she spoke which struck Mr. Orridge’s ear, and a little perplexed him. She was apparently, not only afraid that her face might betray something, but apprehensive also that her voice might tell him more than her words expressed. What feeling was she

anxious to conceal? Was it irritation at having been kept waiting so long by herself in the landlady's room?

"If you will follow me," said Mr. Orridge, "I will take you to Mrs. Frankland immediately."

Mrs. Jazeph rose slowly, and, when she was on her feet, rested her hand for an instant on a table near her. That action, momentary as it was, helped to confirm the doctor in his conviction of her physical unfitness for the position which she had volunteered to occupy.

"You seem tired," he said, as he led the way out of the door. "Surely, you did not walk all the way here?"

"No, sir. My mistress was so kind as to let one of the servants drive me in the pony-chaise." There was the same restraint in her voice, as she made that answer; and still she never attempted to lift her veil. While ascending the inn stairs Mr. Orridge mentally resolved to watch her first proceedings in Mrs. Frankland's room closely, and to send, after all, for the London nurse, unless Mrs. Jazeph showed remarkable enthusiasm and aptitude in the performance of her new duties.

The room which Mrs. Frankland occupied was situated at the back of the house, having been chosen in that position, with the object of removing her as much as possible from the bustle and noise about the inn door. It was lighted by

one window overlooking a few cottages, beyond which spread the rich grazing grounds of West Somersetshire, bounded by a long monotonous line of thickly-wooded hills. The bed was of the old-fashioned kind, with the customary four posts and the inevitable damask curtains. It projected from the wall into the middle of the room, in such a situation, as to keep the door on the right hand of the person occupying it, the window on the left, and the fire-place opposite the foot of the bed. On the side of the bed nearest the window, the curtains were open, while at the foot, and on the side near the door, they were closely drawn. By this arrangement the interior of the bed was necessarily concealed from the view of any person on first entering the room.

“How do you find yourself to-night, Mrs. Frankland?” asked Mr. Orridge, reaching out his hand to undraw the curtains. “Do you think you will be any the worse for a little freer circulation of air?”

“On the contrary, doctor, I shall be all the better,” was the answer. “But I am afraid—in case you have ever been disposed to consider me a sensible woman—that my character will suffer a little in your estimation, when you see how I have been occupying myself for the last hour.”

Mr. Orridge smiled as he undrew the curtains, and laughed outright when he looked at the

mother and child. Mrs. Frankland had been amusing herself, and gratifying her taste for bright colours, by dressing out her baby with blue ribbons as he lay asleep. He had a necklace, shoulder-knots, and bracelets, all of blue ribbon; and to complete the quaint finery of his costume, his mother's smart little lace cap had been hitched comically on one side of his head. Rosamond herself, as if determined to vie with the baby in gaiety of dress, wore a light pink jacket, ornamented down the bosom and over the sleeves with bows of white satin ribbon. Laburnum blossoms, gathered that morning, lay scattered about over the white counterpane, intermixed with some flowers of the Lily of the Valley, tied up into two nosegays with strips of cherry-coloured ribbon. Over this varied assemblage of colours, over the baby's smoothly-rounded cheeks and arms, over his mother's happy, youthful face, the tender light of the May evening poured tranquil and warm. Thoroughly appreciating the charm of the picture which he had disclosed on undrawing the curtains, the doctor stood looking at it for a few moments, quite forgetful of the errand that had brought him into the room. He was only recalled to a remembrance of the new nurse by a chance question which Mrs. Frankland addressed to him.

"I can't help it, doctor," said Rosamond, with

a look of apology. "I really can't help treating my baby, now I am a grown woman, just as I used to treat my doll when I was a little girl. Did anybody come into the room with you? Lenny, are you there? Have you done dinner, darling, and did you drink my health when you were left at dessert all by yourself?"

"Mr. Frankland is still at dinner," said the doctor. "But I certainly brought some one into the room with me. Where in the name of wonder has she gone to?—Mrs. Jazeph!"

The housekeeper had slipped round to the part of the room between the foot of the bed and the fire-place, where she was hidden by the curtains that still remained drawn. When Mr. Orridge called to her, instead of joining him where he stood, opposite the window, she appeared at the other side of the bed, where the window was behind her. Her shadow stole darkly over the bright picture which the doctor had been admiring. It stretched obliquely across the counterpane, and its dusky edges touched the figures of the mother and child.

"Gracious goodness! who are you?" exclaimed Rosamond, "A woman, or a ghost?"

Mrs. Jazeph's veil was up at last. Although her face was necessarily in shadow in the position which she had chosen to occupy, the doctor saw a change pass over it when Mrs. Frankland spoke. The lips dropped and quivered a little;



the marks of care and age, about the mouth, deepened; and the eyebrows contracted suddenly. The eyes Mr. Orridge could not see; they were cast down on the counterpane at the first word that Rosamond uttered. Judging by the light of his medical experience, the doctor concluded that she was suffering pain, and trying to suppress any outward manifestation of it. "An affection of the heart, most likely," he thought to himself. "She has concealed it from her mistress, but she can't hide it from me."

"Who are you?" repeated Rosamond. "And what in the world do you stand there for,—between us and the sunlight?"

Mrs. Jazeph neither answered nor raised her eyes. She only moved back timidly to the farthest corner of the window.

"Did you not get a message from me this afternoon?" asked the doctor, appealing to Mrs. Frankland.

"To be sure I did," replied Rosamond. "A very kind, flattering message about a new nurse."

"There she is," said Mr. Orridge, pointing across the bed to Mrs. Jazeph.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Rosamond. "But of course it must be. Who else could have come in with you? I ought to have known that. Pray come here—(what is her name, doctor? Joseph, did you say?—No?—Jazeph?)

—pray come nearer, Mrs. Jazeph, and let me apologise for speaking so abruptly to you. I am more obliged than I can say, for your kindness in coming here, and for your mistress's good-nature in resigning you to me. I hope I shall not give you much trouble, and I am sure you will find the baby easy to manage. He is a perfect angel, and sleeps like a dormouse. Dear me! now I look at you a little closer, I am afraid you are in very delicate health, yourself. Doctor! if Mrs. Jazeph would not be offended with me, I should almost feel inclined to say that she looks in want of nursing, herself."

Mrs. Jazeph bent down over the laburnum blossoms on the bed, and began hurriedly and confusedly to gather them together.

"I thought as you do, Mrs. Frankland," said Mr. Orridge. "But I have been assured that Mrs. Jazeph's looks belie her, and that her capabilities, as a nurse, quite equal her zeal."

"Are you going to make all that laburnum into a nosegay?" asked Mrs. Frankland, noticing how the new nurse was occupying herself. "How thoughtful of you! and how magnificent it will be! I am afraid you will find the room very untidy. I will ring for my maid to set it to rights."

"If you will allow me to put it in order, ma'am, I shall be very glad to begin being of

use to you in that way," said Mrs. Jazeph. When she made the offer she looked up; and her eyes and Mrs. Frankland's met. Rosamond instantly drew back on the pillow, and her colour altered a little.

"How strangely you look at me!" she said.

Mrs. Jazeph started at the words, as if something had struck her, and moved away suddenly to the window.

"You are not offended with me, I hope?" said Rosamond, noticing the action. "I have a sad habit of saying anything that comes uppermost. And I really thought you looked just now as if you saw something about me that frightened or grieved you. Pray put the room in order, if you are kindly willing to undertake the trouble. And never mind what I say—you will soon get used to my ways—and we shall be as comfortable and friendly——"

Just as Mrs. Frankland said the words, "comfortable" and "friendly," the new nurse left the window, and went back to the part of the room where she was hidden from view, between the fire-place and the closed curtains at the foot of the bed. Rosamond looked round to express her surprise to the doctor, but he turned away at the same moment so as to occupy a position which might enable him to observe what Mrs. Jazeph was doing on the other side of the bed-curtains.

When he first caught sight of her, her hands

were both raised to her face. Before he could decide whether he had surprised her in the act of clasping them over her eyes or not, they changed their position, and were occupied in removing her bonnet. After she had placed this part of her wearing apparel, and her shawl and gloves, on a chair in a corner of the room, she went to the dressing-table, and began to arrange the various useful and ornamental objects scattered about it. She set them in order with remarkable dexterity and neatness, showing a taste for arrangement, and a capacity for discriminating between things that were likely to be wanted and things that were not, which impressed Mr. Orridge very favourably. He particularly noticed the carefulness with which she handled some bottles of physic, reading the labels on each, and arranging the medicine that might be required at night on one side of the table, and the medicine that might be required in the daytime on the other. When she left the dressing-table, and occupied herself in setting the furniture straight, and in folding up articles of clothing that had been thrown on one side, not the slightest movement of her thin wasted hands seemed ever to be made at hazard or in vain. Noiselessly, modestly, observantly, she moved from side to side of the room, and neatness and order followed her steps wherever she went. When Mr. Orridge resumed his place at Mrs.

Frankland's bedside, his mind was at ease on one point at least—it was perfectly evident that the new nurse could be depended on to make no mistakes.

“What an odd woman she is!” whispered Rosamond.

“Odd, indeed,” returned Mr. Orridge, “and desperately broken in health, though she may not confess to it. However, she is wonderfully neat-handed and careful, and there can be no harm in trying her for one night—that is to say, unless you feel any objection.”

“On the contrary,” said Rosamond, “she rather interests me. There is something in her face and manner—I can't say what—that makes me feel curious to know more of her. I must get her to talk, and try if I can't bring out all her peculiarities. Don't be afraid of my exciting myself, and don't stop here in this dull room on my account. I would much rather you went down-stairs, and kept my husband company over his wine. Do go and talk to him, and amuse him a little—he must be so dull, poor fellow, while I am up here; and he likes you, Mr. Orridge—he does, very much. Stop one moment, and just look at the baby again. He doesn't take a dangerous quantity of sleep, does he? And, Mr. Orridge, one word more: when you have done your wine, you will promise to lend my husband the use of your eyes, and

bring him up-stairs to wish me good-night, won't you?"

Willingly engaging to pay attention to Mrs. Frankland's request, Mr. Orridge left the bedside. As he opened the room door, he stopped to tell Mrs. Jazeph that he should be down-stairs if she wanted him, and that he would give her any instructions of which she might stand in need later in the evening, before he left the inn for the night. The new nurse, when he passed by her, was kneeling over one of Mrs. Frankland's open trunks, arranging some articles of clothing which had been rather carelessly folded up. Just before he spoke to her, he observed that she had a chemisette in her hand, the frill of which was laced through with ribbon. One end of this ribbon she appeared to him to be on the point of drawing out, when the sound of his footsteps disturbed her. The moment she became aware of his approach, she dropped the chemisette suddenly in the trunk, and covered it over with some handkerchiefs. Although this proceeding on Mrs. Jazeph's part rather surprised the doctor, he abstained from showing that he had noticed it. Her mistress had vouched for her character, after five years' experience of it, and the bit of ribbon was intrinsically worthless. On both accounts, it was impossible to suspect her of attempting to steal it; and yet, as Mr. Orridge

could not help feeling when he had left the room, her conduct, when he surprised her over the trunk, was exactly the conduct of a person who is about to commit a theft.

“Pray don’t trouble yourself about my luggage,” said Rosamond, remarking Mrs. Jazeph’s occupation as soon as the doctor had gone. “That is my idle maid’s business, and you will only make her more careless than ever if you do it for her. I am sure the room is beautifully set in order. Come here, and sit down and rest yourself. You must be a very unselfish, kind-hearted woman to give yourself all this trouble to serve a stranger. The doctor’s message this afternoon told me that your mistress was a friend of my poor, dear father’s. I suppose she must have known him before my time. Any way, I feel doubly grateful to her for taking an interest in me for my father’s sake. But you can have no such feeling; you must have come here from pure good-nature and anxiety to help others. Don’t go away, there, to the window. Come and sit down by me.”

Mrs. Jazeph had risen from the trunk, and was approaching the bedside—when she suddenly turned away in the direction of the fire-place, just as Mrs. Frankland began to speak of her father.

“Come, and sit here,” reiterated Rosamond, getting impatient at receiving no answer.

“What in the world are you doing there at the foot of the bed?”

The figure of the new nurse again interposed between the bed and the fading evening light that glimmered through the window, before there was any reply.

“The evening is closing in,” said Mrs. Jazeph, “and the window is not quite shut. I was thinking of making it fast, and of drawing down the blind—if you had no objection, ma’am?”

“O, not yet! not yet! Shut the window, if you please, in case the baby should catch cold, but don’t draw down the blind. Let me get my peep at the view as long as there is any light left to see it by. That long flat stretch of grazing-ground out there is just beginning, at this dim time, to look a little like my childish recollections of a Cornish moor. Do you know anything about Cornwall, Mrs. Jazeph?”

“I have heard”——At those first three words of reply the nurse stopped. She was just then engaged in shutting the window, and she seemed to find some difficulty in closing the lock.

“What have you heard?” asked Rosamond.

“I have heard that Cornwall is a wild, dreary country,” said Mrs. Jázeph, still busying herself with the lock of the window, and, by



consequence, still keeping her back turned on Mrs. Frankland.

“Can’t you shut the window, yet?” said Rosamond. “My maid always does it quite easily. Leave it till she comes up, I am going to ring for her directly. I want her to brush my hair and cool my face with a little Eau de Cologne and water.”

“I have shut it, ma’am,” said Mrs. Jazeph, suddenly succeeding in closing the lock. “And, if you will allow me, I should be very glad to make you comfortable for the night, and save you the trouble of ringing for the maid.”

Thinking the new nurse the oddest woman she had ever met with, Mrs. Frankland accepted the offer. By the time Mrs. Jazeph had prepared the Eau de Cologne and water, the twilight was falling softly over the landscape outside, and the room was beginning to grow dark.

“Had you not better light a candle?” suggested Rosamond.

“I think not, ma’am,” said Mrs. Jazeph, rather hastily. “I can see quite well without.”

She began to brush Mrs. Frankland’s hair as she spoke; and, at the same time, asked a question which referred to the few words that had passed between them on the subject of Cornwall. Pleased to find that the new nurse had grown familiar enough at last to speak

before she was spoken to, Rosamond desired nothing better than to talk about her recollections of her native country. But, from some inexplicable reason, Mrs. Jazeph's touch, light and tender as it was, had such a strangely disconcerting effect on her, that she could not succeed, for the moment, in collecting her thoughts so as to reply, except in the briefest manner. The careful hands of the nurse lingered with a stealthy gentleness among the locks of her hair; the pale, wasted face of the new nurse approached, every now and then, more closely to her own than appeared at all needful. A vague sensation of uneasiness which she could not trace to any particular part of her—which she could hardly say that she really felt, in a bodily sense, at all—seemed to be floating about her, to be hanging around and over her, like the air she breathed. She could not move, though she wanted to move in the bed; she could not turn her head so as to humour the action of the brush; she could not look round; she could not break the embarrassing silence which had been caused by her own short, discouraging answer. At last the sense of oppression—whether fancied, or real—irritated her into snatching the brush out of Mrs. Jazeph's hand. The instant she had done so, she felt ashamed of the discourteous abruptness of the action, and confused at the alarm

and surprise which the manner of the nurse exhibited. With the strongest sense of the absurdity of her own conduct, and yet without the least power of controlling herself, she burst out laughing, and tossed the brush away to the foot of the bed.

“Pray don’t look surprised, Mrs. Jazeph,” she said, still laughing without knowing why, and without feeling in the slightest degree amused. “I’m very rude and odd, I know. You have brushed my hair delightfully; but—I can’t tell how—it seemed, all the time, as if you were brushing the strangest fancies into my head. I can’t help laughing at them—I can’t indeed! Do you know, once or twice, I absolutely fancied, when your face was closest to mine, that you wanted to kiss me! Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous? I declare I am more of a baby, in some things, than the little darling here by my side!”

Mrs. Jazeph made no answer. She left the bed while Rosamond was speaking, and came back, after an unaccountably long delay, with the Eau de Cologne and water. As she held the basin while Mrs. Frankland bathed her face, she kept away at arm’s length, and came no nearer when it was time to offer the towel. Rosamond began to be afraid that she had seriously offended Mrs. Jazeph, and tried to soothe and propitiate her by asking questions

about the management of the baby. There was a slight trembling in the sweet voice of the new nurse, but not the faintest tone of sullenness or anger, as she simply and quietly answered the inquiries addressed to her. By dint of keeping the conversation still on the subject of the child, Mrs. Frankland succeeded, little by little, in luring her back to the bedside—in tempting her to bend down admiringly over the infant—in emboldening her, at last, to kiss him tenderly on the cheek. One kiss was all that she gave; and she turned away from the bed, after it, and sighed heavily.

The sound of that sigh fell very sadly on Rosamond's heart. Up to this time, the baby's little span of life had always been associated with smiling faces and pleasant words. It made her uneasy to think that any one could caress him and sigh after it.

“I am sure you must be fond of children,” she said, hesitating a little from natural delicacy of feeling. “But, will you excuse me for noticing that it seems rather a mournful fondness? Pray—pray don't answer my question if it gives you any pain—if you have any loss to deplore; but—but I do so want to ask if you have ever had a child of your own?”

Mrs. Jazeph was standing near a chair when that question was put. She caught fast hold of the back of it, grasping it so firmly, or perhaps

leaning on it so heavily, that the woodwork cracked. Her head drooped low on her bosom. She did not utter, or even attempt to utter, a single word.

Fearing that she must have lost a child of her own, and dreading to distress her unnecessarily by venturing to ask any more questions, Rosamond said nothing, as she stooped over the baby to kiss him in her turn. Her lips rested on his cheek a little above where Mrs. Jazeph's lips had rested the moment before, and they touched a spot of wet on his smooth warm skin. Fearing that some of the water in which she had been bathing her face might have dropped on him, she passed her fingers lightly over his head, neck, and bosom, and felt no other spots of wet anywhere. The one drop that had fallen on him was the drop that wetted the cheek which the new nurse had kissed.

The twilight faded over the landscape, the room grew darker and darker; and still, though she was now sitting close to the table on which the candles and matches were placed, Mrs. Jazeph made no attempt to strike a light. Rosamond did not feel quite comfortable at the idea of lying awake in the darkness, with nobody in the room but a person who was as yet almost a total stranger; and she resolved to have the candles lighted immediately.

“Mrs. Jazeph,” she said, looking towards the gathering obscurity outside the window, “I shall be much obliged to you, if you will light the candles, and pull down the blind. I can trace no more resemblances out there, now, to a Cornish prospect; the view has gone altogether.”

“Are you very fond of Cornwall, ma’am?” asked Mrs. Jazeph, rising, in rather a dilatory manner, to light the candles.

“Indeed I am,” said Rosamond. “I was born there; and my husband and I were on our way to Cornwall, when we were obliged to stop, on my account, at this place. You are a long time getting the candles lit. Can’t you find the match-box?”

Mrs. Jazeph, with an awkwardness which was rather surprising in a person who had shown so much neat-handedness in setting the room to rights, broke the first match in attempting to light it, and let the second out the instant after the flame was kindled. At the third attempt she was more successful; but she only lit one candle, and that one she carried away from the table which Mrs. Frankland could see, to the dressing-table, which was hidden from her by the curtains at the foot of the bed.

“Why do you move the candle?” asked Rosamond.

“I thought it was best for your eyes, ma’am, not to have the light too near them,” replied Mrs.

Jazeph; and then added hastily, as if she was unwilling to give Mrs. Frankland time to make any objections, "And so you were going to Cornwall, ma'am, when you stopped at this place? To travel about there a little, I suppose?" After saying these words, she took up the second candle, and passed out of sight as she carried it to the dressing-table.

Rosamond thought that the nurse, in spite of her gentle looks and manners, was a remarkably obstinate woman. But she was too good-natured to care about asserting her right to have the candles placed where she pleased; and when she answered Mrs. Jazeph's question, she still spoke to her as cheerfully and familiarly as ever.

"O, dear no! Not to travel about," she said: "but to go straight to the old country house where I was born. It belongs to my husband, now, Mrs. Jazeph. I have not been near it since I was a little girl of five years of age. Such a ruinous, rambling old place! You, who talk of the dreariness and wildness of Cornwall, would be quite horrified at the very idea of living in Porthgenna Tower."

The faintly rustling sound of Mrs. Jazeph's silk dress, as she moved about the dressing-table, had been audible all the while Rosamond was speaking. It ceased instantaneously when she said the words, "Porthgenna Tower;" and,

for one moment, there was a dead silence in the room.

“You, who have been living all your life, I suppose, in nicely-repaired houses, cannot imagine what a place it is that we are going to, when I am well enough to travel again,” pursued Rosamond. “What do you think, Mrs. Jazeph, of a house with one whole side of it that has never been inhabited for sixty or seventy years past? You may get some notion of the size of Porthgenna Tower from that. There is a west side that we are to live in when we get there, and a north side, where the empty old rooms are, which I hope we shall be able to repair. Only think of the hosts of odd, old-fashioned things that we may find in those uninhabited rooms! I mean to put on the cook’s apron and the gardener’s gloves, and rummage all over them from top to bottom. How I shall astonish the housekeeper, when I get to Porthgenna, and ask her for the keys of the ghostly north rooms!”

A low cry, and a sound as if something had struck against the dressing-table, followed Mrs. Frankland’s last words. She started in the bed, and asked eagerly what was the matter.

“Nothing,” answered Mrs. Jazeph, speaking so constrainedly that her voice dropped to a whisper. “Nothing, ma’am — nothing, I assure you. I struck my side, by accident, against the table — pray don’t be alarmed! — it’s not worth noticing.”



“But you speak as if you were in pain,” said Rosamond.

“No, no, not in pain. Not hurt, not hurt, indeed.”

While Mrs. Jazeph was declaring that she was not hurt, the door of the room was opened, and the doctor entered, leading in Mr. Frankland.

“We come early, Mrs. Frankland, but we are going to give you plenty of time to compose yourself for the night,” said Mr. Orridge. He paused, and noticed that Rosamond’s colour was heightened. “I am afraid you have been talking and exciting yourself a little too much,” he went on. “If you will excuse me for venturing on the suggestion, Mr. Frankland, I think the sooner good-night is said the better. Where is the nurse?”

Mrs. Jazeph sat down with her back to the lighted candle when she heard herself asked for. Just before that, she had been looking at Mr. Frankland with an eager, undisguised curiosity, which, if anyone had noticed it, must have appeared surprisingly out of character with her usual modesty and refinement of manner.

“I am afraid the nurse has accidentally hurt her side more than she is willing to confess,” said Rosamond to the doctor, pointing, with one hand, to the place in which Mrs. Jazeph was sitting, and raising the other to her husband’s neck as he stooped over her pillow.

Mr. Orridge, on inquiring what had happened, could not prevail on the new nurse to acknowledge that the accident was of the slightest consequence. He suspected, nevertheless, that she was suffering, or, at least, that something had happened to discompose her; for he found the greatest difficulty in fixing her attention, while he gave her a few needful directions in case her services were required during the night. All the time he was speaking, her eyes wandered away from him to the part of the room where Mr. and Mrs. Frankland were talking together. Mrs. Jazeph looked like the last person in the world who would be guilty of an act of impertinent curiosity; and yet she openly betrayed all the characteristics of an inquisitive woman, while Mr. Frankland was standing by his wife's pillow. The doctor was obliged to assume his most peremptory manner, before he could get her to attend to him at all.

“And now, Mrs. Frankland,” said Mr. Orridge, turning away from the nurse, “as I have given Mrs. Jazeph all the directions she wants, I shall set the example of leaving you in quiet, by saying good-night.”

Understanding the hint conveyed in these words, Mr. Frankland attempted to say good-night, too, but his wife kept tight hold of both his hands, and declared that it was unreasonable to expect her to let him go for another half-hour

at least. Mr. Orridge shook his head, and began to expatiate on the evils of over-excitement, and the blessings of composure and sleep. His remonstrances, however, would have produced very little effect, even if Rosamond had allowed him to continue them, but for the interposition of the baby, who happened to wake up at that moment, and who proved himself a powerful auxiliary on the doctor's side, by absorbing all his mother's attention immediately. Seizing his opportunity at the right moment, Mr. Orridge quietly led Mr. Frankland out of the room, just as Rosamond was taking the child up in her arms. He stopped before closing the door to whisper one last word to Mrs. Jazeph.

"If Mrs. Frankland wants to talk, you must not encourage her," he said. "As soon as she has quieted the baby, she ought to go to sleep. There is a chair-bedstead in that corner which you can open for yourself when you want to lie down. Keep the candle where it is now, behind the curtain. The less light Mrs. Frankland sees, the sooner she will compose herself to sleep."

Mrs. Jazeph made no answer: she only looked at the doctor and curtsyed. That strangely scared expression in her eyes, which he had noticed on first seeing her, was more painfully apparent than ever, when he left her alone for the night with the mother and child. "She will never do," thought Mr. Orridge, as he led Mr. Frank-

land down the inn stairs. "We shall have to send to London for a nurse, after all."

Feeling a little irritated by the summary manner in which her husband had been taken away from her, Rosamond fretfully rejected the offers of assistance which were made to her by Mrs. Jazeph as soon as the doctor had left the room. The nurse said nothing when her services were declined; and yet, judging by her conduct, she seemed anxious to speak. Twice, she advanced towards the bedside,—opened her lips—stopped—and retired confusedly, before she settled herself finally in her former place by the dressing-table. Here she remained, silent and out of sight, until the child had been quieted, and had fallen asleep in his mother's arms with one little pink, half-closed hand resting on her bosom. Rosamond could not resist raising the hand to her lips, though she risked waking him again by doing so. As she kissed it, the sound of the kiss was followed by a faint, suppressed sob, proceeding from the other side of the curtains at the lower end of the bed.

"What is that?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing, ma'am," said Mrs. Jazeph, in the same constrained, whispering tones in which she had answered Mrs. Frankland's former question. "I think I was just falling asleep in the arm-chair, here; and I ought to have told you perhaps that, having had my troubles, and being

afflicted with a heart complaint, I have a habit of sighing in my sleep. It means nothing, ma'am, and I hope you will be good enough to excuse it."

Rosamond's generous instincts were aroused in a moment. "Excuse it!" she said. "I hope I may do better than that, Mrs. Jazeph, and be the means of relieving it. When Mr. Orridge comes to-morrow, you shall consult him, and I will take care that you want for nothing that he may order. No! no! Don't thank me until I have been the means of making you well—and keep where you are, if the arm-chair is comfortable. The baby is asleep again; and I should like to have half-an-hour's quiet, before I change to the night-side of the bed. Stop where you are for the present: I will call as soon as I want you."

So far from exercising a soothing effect on Mrs. Jazeph, these kindly-meant words produced the precisely opposite result of making her restless. She began to walk about the room, and confusedly attempted to account for the change in her conduct, by saying that she wished to satisfy herself that all her arrangements were properly made for the night. In a few minutes more, she began, in defiance of the doctor's prohibition, to tempt Mrs. Frankland into talking again, by asking questions about Porthgenna Tower, and by referring to the chances for and against its being chosen as a permanent residence by the young married couple.

“Perhaps, ma’am,” she said, speaking on a sudden, with an eagerness in her voice, which was curiously at variance with the apparent indifference of her manner. “Perhaps, when you see Porthgenna Tower, you may not like it so well as you think you will now? Who can tell that you may not get tired and leave the place again after a few days—especially if you go into the empty rooms. I should have thought—if you will excuse my saying so, ma’am—I should have thought that a lady like you would have liked to get as far away as possible from dirt and dust, and disagreeable smells?”

“I can face worse inconveniences than those, where my curiosity is concerned,” said Rosamond. “And I am more curious to see the uninhabited rooms at Porthgenna, than to see the Seven Wonders of the World. Even if we don’t settle altogether at the old house, I feel certain that we shall stay there for some time.”

At that answer, Mrs. Jazeph abruptly turned away, and asked no more questions. She retired to a corner of the room near the door, where the chair-bedstead stood which the doctor had pointed out to her—occupied herself for a few minutes in making it ready for the night—then left it as suddenly as she had approached it, and began to walk up and down, once more. This unaccountable restlessness, which had already surprised Rosamond, now made her feel rather uneasy—

especially when she once or twice overheard Mrs. Jazeph talking to herself. Judging by words and fragments of sentences that were audible now and then, her mind was still running, with the most inexplicable persistency, on the subject of Porthgenna Tower. As the minutes wore on, and she continued to walk up and down, and still went on talking, Rosamond's uneasiness began to strengthen into something like alarm. She resolved to awaken Mrs. Jazeph in the least offensive manner, to a sense of the strangeness of her own conduct, by noticing that she was talking, but by not appearing to understand that she was talking to herself.

"What did you say?" asked Rosamond—putting the question at a moment when the nurse's voice was most distinctly betraying her in the act of thinking aloud.

Mrs. Jazeph stopped, and raised her head vacantly, as if she had been awakened out of a heavy sleep.

"I thought you were saying something more about our old house," continued Rosamond. "I thought I heard you say that I ought not to go to Porthgenna, or that you would not go there in my place, or something of that sort."

Mrs. Jazeph blushed like a young girl. "I think you must have been mistaken, ma'am," she said, and stooped over the chair-bedstead again.

Watching her anxiously, Rosamond saw that, while she was affecting to arrange the bedstead, she was doing nothing whatever to prepare it for being slept in. What did that mean? What did her whole conduct mean for the last half-hour? As Mrs. Frankland asked herself those questions, the thrill of a terrible suspicion turned her cold to the very roots of her hair. It had never occurred to her before, but it suddenly struck her now, with the force of positive conviction, that the new nurse was not in her right senses.

All that was unaccountable in her behaviour—her odd disappearances behind the curtains, at the foot of the bed; her lingering, stealthy, over-familiar way of using the hair-brush; her silence at one time, her talkativeness at another; her restlessness, her whispering to herself, her affectation of being deeply engaged in doing something which she was not doing at all—every one of her strange actions (otherwise incomprehensible) became intelligible in a moment on that one dreadful supposition that she was mad.

Terrified as she was, Rosamond kept her presence of mind. One of her arms stole instinctively round the child; and she had half raised the other to catch at the bell-rope hanging above her pillow, when she saw Mrs. Jazeph turn and look at her.

A woman possessed only of ordinary nerve



would, probably, at that instant, have pulled at the bell-rope in the unreasoning desperation of sheer fright. Rosamond had courage enough to calculate consequences, and to remember that Mrs. Jazeph would have time to lock the door, before assistance could arrive, if she betrayed her suspicions by ringing without first assigning some plausible reason for doing so. She slowly closed her eyes as the nurse looked at her, partly to convey the notion that she was composing herself to sleep,—partly to gain time to think of some safe excuse for summoning her maid. The flurry of her spirits, however, interfered with the exercise of her ingenuity. Minute after minute dragged on heavily, and still she could think of no assignable reason for ringing the bell.

She was just doubting whether it would not be safest to send Mrs. Jazeph out of the room, on some message to her husband, to lock the door the moment she was alone, and then to ring—she was just doubting whether she would boldly adopt this course of proceeding, or not, when she heard the rustle of the nurse's silk dress approaching the bedside.

Her first impulse was to snatch at the bell-rope; but fear had paralysed her hand; she could not raise it from the pillow.

The rustling of the silk dress ceased. She half unclosed her eyes, and saw that the nurse was stopping midway between the part of the

room from which she had advanced, and the bedside. There was nothing wild or angry in her look. The agitation which her face expressed, was the agitation of perplexity and alarm. She stood rapidly clasping and unclasping her hands, the image of bewilderment and distress—stood so for nearly a minute—then came forward a few steps more, and said inquiringly, in a whisper:—

“Not asleep? not quite asleep, yet?”

Rosamond tried to speak in answer, but the quick beating of her heart seemed to rise up to her very lips, and to stifle the words on them.

The nurse came on, still with the same perplexity and distress in her face, to within a foot of the bedside—knelt down by the pillow, and looked earnestly at Rosamond—shuddered a little, and glanced all round her, as if to make sure that the room was empty—bent forward—hesitated—bent nearer, and whispered into her ear these words:—

“When you go to Porthgenna, keep out of the Myrtle Room!”

The hot breath of the woman, as she spoke, beat on Rosamond’s cheek, and seemed to fly in one fever-throb through every vein of her body. The nervous shock of that unutterable sensation burst the bonds of the terror that had hitherto held her motionless and speechless. She started up in bed with a scream, caught hold of the bell-rope, and pulled it violently.

“O, hush! hush!” cried Mrs. Jazeph, sinking back on her knees, and beating her hands together despairingly with the helpless gesticulation of a child.

Rosamond rang again and again. Hurrying footsteps and eager voices were heard outside on the stairs. It was not ten o'clock yet—nobody had retired for the night—and the violent ringing had already alarmed the house.

The nurse rose to her feet, staggered back from the bedside, and supported herself against the wall of the room, as the footsteps and the voices reached the door. She said not another word. The hands that she had been beating together so violently, but an instant before, hung down nerveless at her side. The blank of a great agony spread over all her face, and stilled it awfully.

The first person who entered the room was Mrs. Frankland's maid, and the landlady followed her.

“Fetch Mr. Frankland,” said Rosamond, faintly, addressing the landlady. “I want to speak to him directly. You,” she continued, beckoning to the maid, “sit by me here, till your master comes. I have been dreadfully frightened. Don't ask me questions; but stop here.”

The maid stared at her mistress in amazement; then looked round with a disparaging frown at

the nurse. When the landlady left the room to fetch Mr. Frankland, she had moved a little away from the wall, so as to command a full view of the bed. Her eyes fixed with a look of breathless suspense, of devouring anxiety, on Rosamond's face. From all her other features, the expression seemed to be gone. She said nothing, she noticed nothing. She did not start, she did not move aside an inch, when the landlady returned, and led Mr. Frankland to his wife.

“Lenny! don't let the new nurse stop here to-night—pray, pray don't!” whispered Rosamond, eagerly catching her husband by the arm.

Warned by the trembling of her hand, Mr. Frankland laid his fingers lightly on her temples and on her heart.

“Good Heavens, Rosamond! what has happened? I left you quiet and comfortable, and now——”

“I've been frightened, dear—dreadfully frightened, by the new nurse. Don't be hard on her, poor creature; she is not in her right senses—I am certain she is not. Only get her away quietly—only send her back at once to where she came from. I shall die of the fright, if she stops here. She has been behaving so strangely, she has spoken such words to me—Lenny! Lenny! don't let go of my hand. She came stealing up to me so horribly, just where you are now; she

knelt down at my ear, and whispered—Oh, such words!”

“Hush, hush, love!” said Mr. Frankland, getting seriously alarmed by the violence of Rosamond’s agitation. “Never mind repeating the words now; wait till you are calmer—I beg and entreat of you, wait till you are calmer. I will do everything you wish, if you will only lie down and be quiet, and try to compose yourself before you say another word. It is quite enough for me to know that this woman has frightened you, and that you wish her to be sent away with as little harshness as possible. We will put off all further explanations till to-morrow morning. I deeply regret now that I did not persist in carrying out my own idea of sending for a proper nurse from London. Where is the landlady?”

The landlady placed herself by Mr. Frankland’s side.

“Is it late?” asked Leonard.

“Oh no, sir; not ten o’clock yet.”

“Order a fly to be brought to the door, then, as soon as possible, if you please. Where is the nurse?”

“Standing behind you, sir, near the wall,” said the maid.

As Mr. Frankland turned in that direction, Rosamond whispered to him: “Don’t be hard on her, Lenny.”

The maid, looking with contemptuous curiosity

at Mrs. Jazeph, saw the whole expression of her countenance alter, as those words were spoken. The tears rose thick in her eyes, and flowed down her cheeks. The deathly spell of stillness that had lain on her face was broken in an instant. She drew back again, close to the wall, and leaned against it as before. "Don't be hard on her!" the maid heard her repeat to herself, in a low sobbing voice. "Don't be hard on her! Oh, my God! she said that kindly—she said that kindly, at least!"

"I have no desire to speak to you, or to use you unkindly," said Mr. Frankland, imperfectly hearing what she said. "I know nothing of what has happened, and I make no accusations. I find Mrs. Frankland violently agitated and frightened; I hear her connect that agitation with you—not angrily, but compassionately—and, instead of speaking harshly, I prefer leaving it to your own sense of what is right, to decide whether your attendance here ought not to cease at once. I have provided the proper means for your conveyance from this place; and I would suggest that you should make our apologies to your mistress, and say nothing more than that circumstances have happened which oblige us to dispense with your services."

"You have been considerate towards me, sir," said Mrs. Jazeph, speaking quietly, and with a certain gentle dignity in her manner, "and I will

not prove myself unworthy of your forbearance by saying what I might say in my own defence." She advanced into the middle of the room, and stopped where she could see Rosamond plainly. Twice she attempted to speak, and twice her voice failed her. At the third effort she succeeded in controlling herself.

"Before I go, ma'am," she said, "I hope you will believe that I have no bitter feeling against you, for sending me away. I am not angry—pray remember always that I was not angry, and that I never complained."

There was such a forlornness in her face, such a sweet, sorrowful resignation in every tone of her voice during the utterance of these few words, that Rosamond's heart smote her.

"Why did you frighten me?" she asked, half relenting.

"Frighten you? How could I frighten you? Oh me! of all the people in the world, how could I frighten you?" Mournfully saying those words, the nurse went to the chair on which she had placed her bonnet and shawl, and put them on. The landlady and the maid, watching her with curious eyes, detected that she was again weeping bitterly, and noticed with astonishment, at the same time, how neatly she put on her bonnet and shawl. The wasted hands were moving mechanically, and were trembling while they moved,—and yet, slight thing though it was, the in-

exorable instinct of propriety guided their most trifling actions still!

On her way to the door, she stopped again at passing the bedside, looked through her tears at Rosamond and the child, struggled a little with herself, and then spoke her farewell words——

“God bless you, and keep you and your child happy and prosperous,” she said. “I am not angry at being sent away. If you ever think of me again, after to-night, please to remember that I was not angry, and that I never complained.”

She stood for a moment longer, still weeping, and still looking through her tears at the mother and child—then turned away; and walked to the door. Something in the last tones of her voice caused a silence in the room. Of the four persons in it not one could utter a word, as the nurse closed the door gently, and went out from them alone.



## CHAPTER V.



### A COUNCIL OF THREE.

ON the morning after the departure of Mrs Jazeph, the news that she had been sent away from the Tiger's Head by Mr. Frankland's directions, reached the doctor's residence from the inn, just as he was sitting down to breakfast. Finding that the report of the nurse's dismissal was not accompanied by any satisfactory explanation of the cause of it, Mr. Orridge refused to believe that her attendance on Mrs. Frankland had really ceased. However, although he declined to credit the news, he was so far disturbed by it that he finished his breakfast in a hurry, and went to pay his morning visit at the Tiger's Head, nearly two hours before the time at which he usually attended on his patient.

On his way to the inn, he was met and stopped by the one waiter attached to the establishment. "I was just bringing you a message from Mr. Frankland, sir," said the man. "He wants to see you as soon as possible."

“Is it true that Mrs. Frankland’s nurse was sent away last night, by Mr. Frankland’s order?” asked Mr. Orridge.

“Quite true, sir,” answered the waiter.

The doctor coloured and looked seriously discomposed. One of the most precious things we have about us—especially if we happen to belong to the medical profession—is our dignity. It struck Mr. Orridge that he ought to have been consulted before a nurse of his recommending was dismissed from her situation at a moment’s notice. Was Mr. Frankland presuming upon his position as a gentleman of fortune? It was impossible to decide that question as yet; but the mere act of considering it, exercised an undermining influence on the conservative foundations of Mr. Orridge’s principles. The power of wealth may do much with impunity, but it is not privileged to offer any practical contradictions to a man’s good opinion of himself. Never had the doctor thought more disrespectfully of rank and riches; never had he been conscious of reflecting on republican principles with such absolute impartiality, as when he now followed the waiter in sullen silence to Mr. Frankland’s room.

“Who is that?” asked Leonard, when he heard the door open.

“Mr. Orridge, sir,” said the waiter.

“Good morning,” said Mr. Orridge, with self-asserting abruptness and familiarity.

Mr. Frankland was sitting in an arm-chair, with his legs crossed. Mr. Orridge carefully selected another arm-chair, and crossed his legs on the model of Mr. Frankland's the moment he sat down. Mr. Frankland's hands were in the pockets of his dressing-gown. Mr. Orridge had no pockets, except in his coat-tails, which he could not conveniently get at; but he put his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and asserted himself against the easy insolence of wealth, in that way. It made no difference to him—so curiously narrow is the range of a man's perceptions when he is insisting on his own importance—that Mr. Frankland was blind, and consequently incapable of being impressed by the independence of his bearing. Mr. Orridge's own dignity was vindicated in Mr. Orridge's own presence; and that was enough.

“I am glad you have come so early, doctor,” said Mr. Frankland. “A very unpleasant thing happened here last night. I was obliged to send the new nurse away at a moment's notice.”

“Were you, indeed!” said Mr. Orridge, defensively matching Mr. Frankland's composure, by an assumption of the completest indifference. “Aha! were you, indeed?”

“If there had been time to send and consult you, of course I should have been only too glad to have done so,” continued Leonard. “But it

was impossible to hesitate. We were all alarmed by a loud ringing of my wife's bell; I was taken up to her room, and found her in a condition of the most violent agitation and alarm. She told me she had been dreadfully frightened by the new nurse; declared her conviction that the woman was not in her right senses; and entreated that I would get her out of the house with as little delay and as little harshness as possible. Under these circumstances, what could I do? I may seem to have been wanting in consideration towards you, in proceeding on my own sole responsibility; but Mrs. Frankland was in such a state of excitement that I could not tell what might be the consequence of opposing her, or of venturing on any delays; and after the difficulty had been got over, she would not hear of your being disturbed by a summons to the inn. I am sure you will understand this explanation, doctor, in the spirit in which I offer it?"

Mr. Orridge began to look a little confused. His solid substructure of independence was softening and sinking from under him. He found himself thinking—no, not exactly thinking, but the next thing to it—of the cultivated manners of the wealthy classes; his thumbs slipped mechanically out of the arm-holes of his waistcoat; and, before he well knew what he was about, he was stammering his way through all

the choicest intricacies of a complimentary and respectful reply.

“You will naturally be anxious to know what the new nurse said, or did, to frighten my wife so,” pursued Mr. Frankland. “I can tell you nothing in detail; for Mrs. Frankland was in such a state of nervous dread last night that I was really afraid of asking for any explanations; and I have purposely waited to make inquiries this morning, until you could come here and accompany me up-stairs. You kindly took so much trouble to secure this unlucky woman’s attendance, that you have a right to hear all that can be alleged against her, now she has been sent away. Considering all things, Mrs. Frankland is not so ill this morning as I was afraid she would be. She expects to see you with me; and if you will kindly give me your arm, we will go up to her immediately.”

Mr. Orridge uncrossed his legs, rose in a great hurry, and even went the length, instinctively, of making a bow. Let it not be imagined that he compromised his independence, while he acted in this way, by reflecting on rich men in a too hasty spirit of approval. When he mechanically committed himself to a bow, forgetting at the moment that Mr. Frankland was incapable of appreciating that act of homage, he was only thinking in the most unmercenary and abstract way, of Blood,—of the breeding it brought with

it—of the inscrutable value that it gave to words which would sound quite simple and commonplace in the mouths of ordinary people. Mr. Orridge was possessed—and it is due to him, to record the fact—of most of the virtues of his species, especially of that widely-spread virtue which preserves people from allowing their opinions to be seriously influenced by personal considerations. We all have our faults; but it is, at least, consolatory to think how very few of our dearest friends—to say nothing of ourselves—are ever guilty of such weakness as that!

On entering Mrs. Frankland's room, the doctor saw at a glance, that she had been altered for the worse by the events of the past evening. He remarked that the smile with which she greeted her husband was the faintest and saddest he had seen on her face. Her eyes looked dim and weary, her skin was dry, her pulse was irregular. It was plain that she had passed a wakeful night, and that her mind was not at ease. She dismissed the inquiries of her medical attendant as briefly as possible, and led the conversation immediately, of her own accord, to the subject of Mrs. Jazeph.

“I suppose you have heard what has happened,” she said, addressing Mr. Orridge. “I can't tell you how grieved I am about it. My conduct must look in your eyes, as well as in

the eyes of the poor unfortunate nurse, the conduct of a capricious, unfeeling woman. I am ready to cry with sorrow and vexation, when I remember how thoughtless I was, and how little courage I showed. O, Lenny, it is dreadful to hurt the feelings of anybody, but to have pained that unhappy, helpless woman, as we pained her, to have made her cry so bitterly, to have caused her such humiliation and wretchedness——”

“My dear Rosamond,” interposed Mr. Frankland, “you are lamenting effects, and forgetting causes altogether. Remember what a state of terror I found you in—there must have been some reason for that. Remember, too, how strong your conviction was, that the nurse was out of her senses. Surely, you have not altered your opinion on that point, already?”

“It is that very opinion, love, that has been perplexing and worrying me all night. I can’t alter it; I feel more certain than ever that there must be something wrong with the poor creature’s intellect—and, yet, when I remember how good-naturedly she came here to help me; and how anxious she seemed to make herself useful, I can’t help feeling ashamed of my suspicions; I can’t help reproaching myself for having been the cause of her dismissal last night. Mr. Orridge, did you notice anything in Mrs. Jazeph’s face, or manner, which might lead you to doubt whether

her intellects were quite as sound as they ought to be?"

"Certainly not, Mrs. Frankland—or I should never have brought her here. I should not have been astonished to hear that she was suddenly taken ill, or that she had been seized with a fit, or that some slight accident, which would have frightened nobody else, had seriously frightened her. But to be told that there is anything approaching to derangement in her faculties, does, I own, fairly surprise me."

"Can I have been mistaken!" exclaimed Rosamond, looking confusedly and self-distrustfully from Mr. Orridge to her husband. "Lenny! Lenny! if I have been mistaken, I shall never forgive myself."

"Suppose you tell us, my dear, what led you to suspect that she was mad?" suggested Mr. Frankland.

Rosamond hesitated. "Things that are great in one's own mind," she said, "seem to get so little when they are put into words. I almost despair of making you understand what good reason I had to be frightened—and then, I am afraid, in trying to do justice to myself, that I may not do justice to the nurse."

"Tell your own story, my love, in your own way, and you will be sure to tell it properly," said Mr. Frankland.

"And pray remember," added Mr. Orridge,



“that I attach no real importance to my opinion of Mrs. Jazeph. I have not had time enough to form it. Your opportunities of observing her, have been far more numerous than mine.”

Thus encouraged, Rosamond plainly and simply related all that had happened in her room on the previous evening, up to the time when she had closed her eyes, and had heard the nurse approaching her bedside. Before repeating the extraordinary words that Mrs. Jazeph had whispered into her ear, she made a pause, and looked earnestly in her husband's face.

“Why do you stop?” asked Mr. Frankland.

“I feel nervous and flurried still, Lenny, when I think of the words the nurse said to me, just before I rang the bell.”

“What did she say? Was it something you would rather not repeat?”

“No! no! I am most anxious to repeat it, and to hear what you think it means. As I have just told you, Lenny, we had been talking of Porthgenna, and of my project of exploring the north rooms, as soon as I got there; and she had been asking many questions about the old house; appearing, I must say, to be unaccountably interested in it, considering she was a stranger.”

“Yes?”

“Well, when she came to the bedside, she knelt down close at my ear, and whispered all on

a sudden:—‘When you go to Porthgenna, keep out of the Myrtle Room!’”

Mr. Frankland started. “Is there such a room at Porthgenna?” he asked, eagerly.

“I never heard of it,” said Rosamond.

“Are you sure of that?” inquired Mr. Orridge. Up to this moment the doctor had privately suspected that Mrs. Frankland must have fallen asleep soon after he left her the evening before; and that the narrative which she was now relating, with the sincerest conviction of its reality, was actually derived from nothing but a series of vivid impressions produced by a dream.

“I am certain I never heard of such a room,” said Rosamond. “I left Porthgenna at five years old; and I had never heard of it then. My father often talked of the house in after years; but I am certain that he never spoke of any of the rooms by any particular names; and I can say the same of your father, Lenny, whenever I was in his company after he had bought the place. Besides, don’t you remember, when the builder we sent down to survey the house wrote you that letter, he complained that there were no names of the rooms on the different keys, to guide him in opening the doors, and that he could get no information from anybody at Porthgenna on the subject? How could I ever have heard of the Myrtle Room? Who was there to tell me?”

Mr. Orridge began to look perplexed: it seemed by no means so certain that Mrs. Frankland had been dreaming, after all.

“I have thought of nothing else,” said Rosamond to her husband, in low, whispering tones. “I can’t get those mysterious words off my mind. Feel my heart, Lenny—it is beating quicker than usual, only with saying them over to you. They are such very strange, startling words. What do you think they mean?”

“Who is the woman who spoke them?—that is the most important question,” said Mr. Frankland.

“But why did she say the words to *me*? That is what I want to know—that is what I must know, if I am ever to feel easy in my mind again!”

“Gently, Mrs. Frankland, gently!” said Mr. Orridge. “For your child’s sake, as well as for your own, pray try to be calm, and to look at this very mysterious event as composedly as you can. If any exertions of mine can throw light upon this strange woman and her still stranger conduct, I will not spare them. I am going to-day to her mistress’s house, to see one of the children; and, depend upon it, I will manage in some way to make Mrs. Jazeph explain herself. Her mistress shall hear every word that you have told me; and, I can assure you, she is just the sort of downright, resolute woman who will

insist on having the whole mystery instantly cleared up."

Rosamond's weary eyes brightened at the doctor's proposal. "O, go at once, Mr. Orridge!" she exclaimed, "Go at once!"

"I have a great deal of medical work to do in the town first," said the doctor, smiling at Mrs. Frankland's impatience.

"Begin it then, without losing another instant," said Rosamond. "The baby is quite well, and I am quite well—we need not detain you a moment. And, Mr. Orridge, pray be as gentle and considerate as possible with the poor woman; and tell her that I never should have thought of sending her away, if I had not been too frightened to know what I was about. And say how sorry I am, this morning, and say——"

"My dear, if Mrs. Jazeph is really not in her right senses, what would be the use of overwhelming her with all these excuses?" interposed Mr. Frankland. "It will be more to the purpose if Mr. Orridge will kindly explain and apologise for us to her mistress."

"Go! Don't stop to talk—pray go at once!" cried Rosamond, as the doctor attempted to reply to Mr. Frankland.

"Don't be afraid; no time shall be lost," said Mr. Orridge, opening the door. "But remember, Mrs. Frankland, I shall expect you to reward your ambassador, when he returns from

his mission, by showing him that you are a little more quiet and composed than I find you this morning." With that parting hint, the doctor took his leave.

" "When you go to Porthgenna, keep out of the Myrtle Room," repeated Mr. Frankland, thoughtfully. "Those are very strange words, Rosamond. Who can this woman really be? She is a perfect stranger to both of us; we are brought into contact with her by the merest accident; and we find that she knows something about our own house, of which we were both perfectly ignorant until she chose to speak!"

"But the warning, Lenny—the warning, so pointedly and mysteriously addressed to me? O, if I could only go to sleep at once, and not wake again till the doctor comes back!"

"My love, try not to count too certainly on our being enlightened, even then. The woman may refuse to explain herself to anybody."

"Don't even hint at such a disappointment as that, Lenny—or I shall be wanting to get up and go and question her myself!"

"Even if you could get up and question her, Rosamond, you might find it impossible to make her answer. She may be afraid of certain consequences which we cannot foresee; and, in that case, I can only repeat, that it is more than probable she will explain nothing—or, perhaps, still

more likely that she will coolly deny her own words altogether."

"Then, Lenny, we will put them to the proof for ourselves."

"And how can we do that?"

"By continuing our journey to Porthgenna, the moment I am allowed to travel, and by leaving no stone unturned, when we get there, until we have discovered whether there is, or is not, any room in the old house that ever was known, at any time of its existence, by the name of the Myrtle Room."

"And suppose it should turn out that there is such a room?" asked Mr. Frankland, beginning to feel the influence of his wife's enthusiasm.

"If it does turn out so," said Rosamond, her voice rising, and her face lighting up with its accustomed vivacity, "how can you doubt what will happen next? Am I not a woman? And have I not been forbidden to enter the Myrtle Room? Lenny! Lenny! Do you know so little of my half of humanity, as to doubt what I should do, the moment the room was discovered? My darling, as a matter of course, I should walk into it immediately!"

## CHAPTER VI.

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### ANOTHER SURPRISE.

WITH all the haste he could make, it was one o'clock in the afternoon before Mr. Orridge's professional avocations allowed him to set forth in his gig for Mrs. Norbury's house. He drove there with such good-will that he accomplished the half-hour's journey in twenty minutes. The footman having heard the rapid approach of the gig, opened the hall door, the instant the horse was pulled up before it; and confronted the doctor with a smile of malicious satisfaction.

"Well," said Mr. Orridge, bustling into the hall, "you were all rather surprised, last night, when the housekeeper came back, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, we certainly were surprised when she came back last night," answered the footman; "but we were still more surprised when she went away again, this morning."

"Went away! You don't mean to say she is gone?"

"Yes, I do, sir—she has lost her place and

gone for good." The footman smiled again, as he made that reply; and the housemaid, who happened to be on her way down stairs while he was speaking, and to hear what he said, smiled too. Mrs. Jazeph had evidently been no favourite in the servants' hall.

Amazement prevented Mr. Orridge from uttering another word. Hearing no more questions asked, the footman threw open the door of the breakfast-parlour; and the doctor followed him into the room. Mrs. Norbury was sitting near the window in a rigidly upright attitude, inflexibly watching the proceedings of her invalid child over a basin of beef-tea.

"I know what you are going to talk about before you open your lips," said the outspoken lady. "But just look to the child first, and say what you have to say on that subject, if you please, before you enter on any other."

The child was examined, was pronounced to be improving rapidly, and was carried away by the nurse to lie down and rest a little. As soon as the door of the room had closed, Mrs. Norbury abruptly addressed the doctor, interrupting him, for the second time, just as he was about to speak.

"Now, Mr. Orridge," she said, "I want to tell you something at the outset. I am a remarkably just woman, and I have no quarrel with you. You are the cause of my having been treated with the most audacious insolence by three



people—but you are the innocent cause, and, therefore, I don't blame you."

"I am really at a loss," Mr. Orridge began, "quite at a loss, I assure you—"

"To know what I mean?" said Mrs. Norbury. "I will soon tell you. Were you not the original cause of my sending my housekeeper to nurse Mrs. Frankland?"

"Yes:" Mr. Orridge could not hesitate to acknowledge that.

"Well," pursued Mrs. Norbury, "and the consequence of my sending her is, as I said before, that I am treated with unparalleled insolence by no less than three people. Mrs. Frankland takes an insolent whim into her head, and affects to be frightened by my housekeeper. Mr. Frankland shows an insolent readiness to humour that whim, and hands me back my housekeeper as if she was a bad shilling; and last, and worst of all, my housekeeper herself insults me to my face, as soon as she comes back—insults me, Mr. Orridge, to that degree, that I give her twelve hours' notice to leave the place. Don't begin to defend yourself! I know all about it; I know you had nothing to do with sending her back; I never said you had. All the mischief you have done is innocent mischief. I don't blame you, remember that—whatever you do, Mr. Orridge, remember that!"

"I had no idea of defending myself," said the

doctor, "for I have no reason to do so. But you surprise me beyond all power of expression, when you tell me that Mrs. Jazeph treated you with incivility."

"Incivility!" exclaimed Mrs. Norbury. "Don't talk about incivility—it's not the word. Impudence is the word; daring, brazen impudence. The only charitable thing to say of Mrs. Jazeph is that she is not right in her head. I never noticed anything odd about her myself; but the servants used to laugh at her for being as timid in the dark as a child, and for often running away to her candle in her own room, when they declined to light the lamps before the night had fairly set in. I never troubled my head about this before; but I thought of it last night, I can tell you, when I found her looking me fiercely in the face, and contradicting me flatly the moment I spoke to her."

"I should have thought she was the very last woman in the world to misbehave herself in that way," answered the doctor.

"Very well. Now hear what happened when she came back, last night," said Mrs. Norbury. "She got here just as we were going up-stairs to bed. Of course, I was astonished; and of course, I called her into the drawing-room for an explanation. There was nothing very unnatural in that course of proceeding, I suppose? Well, I noticed that her eyes were swollen and red, and

that her looks were remarkably wild and queer; but I said nothing, and waited for the explanation. All she had to tell me was, that something she had unintentionally said, or done, had frightened Mrs. Frankland, and that Mrs. Frankland's husband had sent her away on the spot. I disbelieved this at first—and very naturally, I think—but she persisted in the story, and answered all my questions by declaring that she could tell me nothing more. 'So then,' I said, 'I am to believe that, after I have inconvenienced myself by sparing you, and after you have inconvenienced yourself by undertaking the business of nurse, I am to be insulted, and you are to be insulted, by your being sent away from Mrs. Frankland on the very day when you get to her, because she chooses to take a whim into her head?' 'I never accused Mrs. Frankland of taking a whim into her head,' says Mrs. Jazeph, and stares me straight in the face, with such a look as I never saw in her eyes before, after all my five years' experience of her. 'What do you mean?' I asked, giving her back her look, I can promise you. 'Are you base enough to take the treatment you have received in the light of a favour?' 'I am just enough,' said Mrs. Jazeph, as sharp as lightning, and still with that same stare straight at me, 'I am just enough not to blame Mrs. Frankland.' 'O, you are, are you?' I said. 'Then all I can tell you is, that I feel

this insult, if you don't; and that I consider Mrs. Frankland's conduct to be the conduct of an ill-bred, impudent, capricious, unfeeling woman.' Mrs. Jazeph takes a step up to me—takes a step, I give you my word of honour—and says distinctly, in so many words, 'Mrs. Frankland is neither ill-bred, impudent, capricious, nor unfeeling.' 'Do you mean to contradict me, Mrs. Jazeph?' I asked. 'I mean to defend Mrs. Frankland from unjust imputations,' says she. 'Those were her words, Mr. Orridge—on my honour, as a gentlewoman, those were exactly her words.'

The doctor's face expressed the blankest astonishment. Mrs. Norbury surveyed him with a look of calm triumph, and went on—

"I was in a towering passion—I don't mind confessing that, Mr. Orridge—but I kept it down. 'Mrs. Jazeph,' I said, 'this is language that I am not accustomed to, and that I certainly never expected to hear from your lips. Why you should take it on yourself to defend Mrs. Frankland for treating us both with contempt, and to contradict me for resenting it, I neither know nor care to know. But I must tell you, in plain words, that I will be spoken to by every person in my employment, from my housekeeper to my scullery-maid, with respect. I would have given warning on the spot to any other servant in this house who had behaved to me as you have

behaved'—She tried to interrupt me there, but I would not allow her. 'No,' I said, 'you are not to speak to me just yet; you are to hear me out. Any other servant, I tell you again, should have left this place to-morrow morning; but I will be more than just to *you*. I will give you the benefit of your five years' good conduct in my service. I will leave you the rest of the night to get cool, and to reflect on what has passed between us; and I will not expect you to make the proper apologies to me until the morning.' You see, Mr. Orridge, I was determined to act justly and kindly—I was ready to make allowances; and what do you think she said in return? 'I am willing to make any apologies, ma'am, for offending you,' she said, 'without the delay of a single minute; but, whether it is to-night, or whether it is to-morrow morning, I cannot stand by silent when I hear Mrs. Frankland charged with acting unkindly, uncivilly, or improperly, towards me or towards any one.' 'Do you tell me that deliberately, Mrs. Jazeph?' I asked. 'I tell it you sincerely, ma'am,' she answered; 'and I am very sorry to be obliged to do so.' 'Pray don't trouble yourself to be sorry,' I said, 'for you may consider yourself no longer in my service. I will order the steward to pay you the usual month's wages instead of the month's warning, the first thing to-morrow; and I beg that you will leave the house as soon as you

conveniently can, afterwards.' 'I will leave to-morrow, ma'am,' says she, 'but without troubling the steward. I beg respectfully, and with many thanks for your past kindness, to decline taking a month's money which I have not earned by a month's service.' And, thereupon, she curtsseys and goes out. That is, word for word, what passed between us, Mr. Orridge. Explain the woman's conduct in your own way, if you can. I say that it is utterly incomprehensible, unless you agree with me, that she was not in her right senses, when she came back to this house last night."

The doctor began to think, after what he had just heard, that Mrs. Frankland's suspicions in relation to the new nurse, were not quite so unfounded as he had been at first disposed to consider them. He wisely refrained, however, from complicating matters, by giving utterance to what he thought; and, after answering Mrs. Norbury in a few vaguely polite words, endeavoured to soothe her irritation against Mr. and Mrs. Frankland, by assuring her that he came as the bearer of apologies from both husband and wife, for the apparent want of courtesy and consideration in their conduct, which circumstances had made inevitable. The offended lady, however, absolutely refused to be propitiated. She rose up, and waved her hand with an air of great dignity.

“I cannot hear a word more from you, Mr. Orridge,” she said, “I cannot receive any apologies which are made indirectly. If Mr. Frankland chooses to call, and if Mrs. Frankland condescends to write to me, I am willing to think no more of the matter. Under any other circumstances, I must be allowed to keep my present opinions both of the lady and the gentleman. Don’t say another word, and be so kind as to excuse me if I leave you, and go up to the nursery to see how the child is getting on. I am delighted to hear that you think her so much better. Pray call again to-morrow, or next day, if you conveniently can. Good morning !”

Half-amused at Mrs. Norbury, half-displeased at the curt tone she adopted towards him, Mr. Orridge remained for a minute or two alone in the breakfast-parlour, feeling rather undecided about what he should do next. He was, by this time, almost as much interested in solving the mystery of Mrs. Jazeph’s extraordinary conduct, as Mrs. Frankland herself; and he felt unwilling, on all accounts, to go back to the Tiger’s Head, and merely repeat what Mrs. Norbury had told him, without being able to complete the narrative by informing Mr. and Mrs. Frankland of the direction that the housekeeper had taken on leaving her situation. After some pondering, he determined to question the footman, under the pretence of desiring to know if his gig was

at the door. The man having answered the bell, and having reported the gig to be ready, Mr. Orridge, while crossing the hall, asked him carelessly, if he knew at what time in the morning Mrs. Jazeph had left her place.

“About ten o’clock, sir,” answered the footman. “When the carrier came by from the village, on his way to the station for the eleven o’clock train.”

“O! I suppose he took her boxes?” said Mr. Orridge.

“And he took her, too, sir,” said the man with a grin. “She had to ride, for once in her life, at any rate, in a carrier’s cart.”

On getting back to West Winston, the doctor stopped at the station, to collect further particulars, before he returned to the Tiger’s Head. No trains, either up or down, happened to be due just at that time. The station-master was reading the newspaper, and the porter was gardening on the slope of the embankment.

“Is the train at eleven in the morning an up-train, or a down-train?” asked Mr. Orridge, addressing the porter.

“A down-train.”

“Did many people go by it?”

The porter repeated the names of some of the inhabitants of West Winston.

“Were there no passengers but passengers from the town?” inquired the doctor.



“Yes, sir. I think there was one stranger—a lady.”

“Did the station-master issue the tickets for that train?”

“Yes, sir.”

Mr. Orridge went on to the station-master.

“Do you remember giving a ticket, this morning, by the eleven o'clock down-train, to a lady travelling alone?”

The station-master pondered. “I have issued tickets, up and down, to half-a-dozen ladies to-day,” he answered, doubtfully.

“Yes, but I am speaking only of the eleven o'clock train,” said Mr. Orridge. “Try if you can't remember?”

“Remember? Stop! I do remember; I know who you mean. A lady who seemed rather flurried, and who put a question to me that I am not often asked at this station. She had her veil down, I recollect, and she got here for the eleven o'clock train. Crouch, the carrier, brought her trunk into the office.”

“That is the woman. Where did she take her ticket for?”

“For Exeter.”

“You said she asked you a question?”

“Yes: a question about what coaches met the rail at Exeter to take travellers into Cornwall. I told her we were rather too far off here to have the correct time-table, and recommended her to

apply for information to the Devonshire people, when she got to the end of her journey. She seemed a timid, helpless kind of woman to travel alone. Anything wrong in connection with her, sir? ”

“ O, no ! nothing,” said Mr. Orridge, leaving the station-master and hastening back to his gig again.

When he drew up, a few minutes afterwards, at the door of the Tiger’s Head, he jumped out of his vehicle with the confident air of a man who has done all that could be expected of him. It was easy to face Mrs. Frankland with the unsatisfactory news of Mrs. Jazeph’s departure, now that he could add, on the best authority, the important supplementary information that she had gone to Cornwall.

BOOK IV.



## CHAPTER I.



### A PLOT AGAINST THE SECRET.

TOWARDS the close of the evening, on the day after Mr. Orridge's interview with Mrs. Norbury, the Druid fast coach, running through Cornwall as far as Truro, set down three inside passengers at the door of the booking-office, on arriving at its destination. Two of these passengers were an old gentleman and his daughter; the third was Mrs. Jazeph.

The father and daughter collected their luggage, and entered the hotel; the outside passengers branched off in different directions with as little delay as possible; Mrs. Jazeph alone stood irresolute on the pavement, and seemed uncertain what she should do next. When the coachman good-naturedly endeavoured to assist her in arriving at a decision of some kind, by asking whether he could do anything to help her, she started, and looked at him suspiciously; then, appearing to recollect herself, thanked him for his kindness, and inquired, with a confusion of

words and a hesitation of manner which appeared very extraordinary in the coachman's eyes, whether she might be allowed to leave her trunk at the booking-office for a little while, until she could return and call for it again.

Receiving permission to leave her trunk as long as she pleased, she crossed over the principal street of the town, ascended the pavement on the opposite side, and walked down the first turning she came to. On entering the bye-street to which the turning led, she glanced back, satisfied herself that nobody was following or watching her, hastened on a few yards, and stopped again at a small shop devoted to the sale of book-cases, cabinets, work-boxes, and writing-desks. After first looking up at the letters painted over the door—BUSCHMANN, CABINET-MAKER, &C.—she peered in at the shop window. A middle-aged man, with a cheerful face, sat behind the counter, polishing a rose-wood bracket, and nodding briskly at regular intervals, as if he were humming a tune and keeping time to it with his head. Seeing no customers in the shop, Mrs. Jazeph opened the door and walked in.

As soon as she was inside, she became aware that the cheerful man behind the counter was keeping time, not to a tune of his own humming, but to a tune played by a musical box. The clear ringing notes came from a parlour behind

the shop, and the air the box was playing was the lovely "Batti, Batti," of Mozart.

"Is Mr. Buschmann at home?" asked Mrs. Jazeph.

"Yes, ma'am," said the cheerful man, pointing with a smile towards the door that led into the parlour. "The music answers for him. Whenever Mr. Buschmann's box is playing, Mr. Buschmann himself is not far off from it. Did you wish to see him, ma'am?"

"If there is nobody with him."

"Oh, no, he is quite alone. Shall I give any name?"

Mrs. Jazeph opened her lips to answer, hesitated, and said nothing. The shopman, with a quicker delicacy of perception than might have been expected from him, judging by outward appearances, did not repeat the question, but opened the door at once, and admitted the visitor to the presence of Mr. Buschmann.

The shop parlour was a very small room, with an odd three-cornered look about it, with a bright green paper on the walls, with a large dried fish in a glass case over the fireplace, with two meerschaum pipes hanging together on the wall opposite, and with a neat round table placed as accurately as possible in the middle of the floor. On the table were tea-things, bread, butter, a pot of jam, and a musical box in a quaint, old-fashioned case; and by the side of the table sat

a little, rosy-faced, white-haired, simple-looking old man, who started up, when the door was opened, with an appearance of extreme confusion, and touched the stop of the musical box so that it might cease playing when it came to the end of the air.

“A lady to speak with you, sir,” said the cheerful shopman. “That is Mr. Buschmann, ma’am,” he added in a lower tone, seeing Mrs. Jazeph stop in apparent uncertainty on entering the parlour.

“Will you please to take a seat, ma’am?” said Mr. Buschmann, when the shopman had closed the door and gone back to his counter. “Excuse the music; it will stop directly.” He spoke these words in a foreign accent but with perfect fluency.

Mrs. Jazeph looked at him earnestly while he was addressing her, and advanced a step or two before she said anything. “Am I so changed?” she asked softly. “So sadly, sadly changed, uncle Joseph?”

“Gott im Himmel! it’s her voice—it’s Sarah Leeson!” cried the old man, running up to his visitor as nimbly as if he was a boy again, taking both her hands, and kissing her with an odd brisk tenderness on the cheek. Although his niece was not at all above the average height of women, uncle Joseph was so short that he had to raise himself on tiptoe to perform the ceremony of embracing her.



“To think of Sarah coming at last!” he said, pressing her into a chair. “After all these years and years, to think of Sarah Leeson coming to see Uncle Joseph again!”

“Sarah still, but not Sarah Leeson,” said Mrs. Jazeph, pressing her thin, trembling hands firmly together, and looking down on the floor while she spoke.

“Ah! married?” said Mr. Buschmann, gaily. “Married of course. Tell me all about your husband, Sarah.”

“He is dead. Dead, and forgiven.” She murmured the last three words in a whisper to herself.

“Ah! I am so sorry for you! I spoke too suddenly, did I not, my child?” said the old man. “Never mind! No, no; I don’t mean that—I mean let us talk of something else. You will have a bit of bread and jam, won’t you, Sarah?—ravishing raspberry jam that melts in your mouth. Some tea, then? So, so, she will have some tea, to be sure. And we won’t talk of our troubles—at least, not just yet. You look very pale, Sarah, very much older than you ought to look—no, I don’t mean that either; I don’t mean to be rude. It was your voice I knew you by, my child—your voice that your poor uncle Max always said would have made your fortune if you would only have learnt to sing. Here’s his pretty music box going still. Don’t look so

down-hearted—don't, pray! Do listen a little to the music: you remember the box—my brother Max's box? Why, how you look! Have you forgotten the box that the divine Mozart gave to my brother with his own hand, when Max was a boy in the music school at Vienna? Listen! I have set it going again. It's a song they call 'Batti, Batti;' it's a song in an opera of Mozart's. Ah, beautiful! beautiful! your uncle Max said that all music was comprehended in that one song. I know nothing about music, but I have my heart and my ears, and they tell me that Max was right."

Speaking these words with abundant gesticulation and amazing volubility, Mr. Buschmann poured out a cup of tea for his niece, stirred it carefully, and, patting her on the shoulder, begged that she would make him happy by drinking it all up directly. As he came close to her to press this request, he discovered that the tears were in her eyes, and that she was trying to take her handkerchief from her pocket without being observed.

"Don't mind me," she said, seeing the old man's face sadden as he looked at her; "and don't think me forgetful or ungrateful, Uncle Joseph. I remember the box—I remember everything that you used to take an interest in, when I was younger and happier than I am now. When I last saw you, I came to you

in trouble; and I come to you in trouble once more. It seems neglectful in me never to have written to you for so many years past; but my life has been a very sad one, and I thought I had no right to lay the burden of my sorrow on other shoulders than my own."

Uncle Joseph shook his head at these last words, and touched the stop of the musical box. "Mozart shall wait a little," he said, gravely, "till I have told you something. Sarah, hear what I say, and drink your tea, and own to me whether I speak the truth or not. What did I, Joseph Buschmann, tell you, when you first came to me in trouble, fourteen, fifteen, ah more! sixteen years ago, in this town, and in this same house? I said then, what I say again, now: Sarah's sorrow is my sorrow, and Sarah's joy is my joy; and if any man asks me reasons for that, I have three to give him."

He stopped to stir up his niece's tea for the second time, and to draw her attention to it, by tapping with the spoon on the edge of the cup.

"Three reasons," he resumed. "First you are my sister's child—some of her flesh and blood, and some of mine, therefore, also. Second, my sister, my brother, and, lastly me myself, we owe to your good English father—all. A little word that means much, and may be said again and again—all. Your father's friends cry, Fie! Agatha Buschmann is poor, Agatha Buschmann

is foreign! But your father loves the poor German girl, and he marries her in spite of their Fie, Fie. Your father's friends cry Fie! again; Agatha Buschmann has a musician brother, who gabbles to us about Mozart, and who cannot make to his porridge, salt. Your father says Good! I like his gabble; I like his playing; I shall get him people to teach; and while I have pinches of salt in my kitchen, he to his porridge shall have pinches of salt, too. Your father's friends cry, Fie! for the third time. Agatha Buschmann has another brother, a little Stupid-Head, who to the other's gabble can only listen and say Amen. Send him trotting; for the love of Heaven, shut up all the doors and send Stupid-Head trotting, at least! Your father says, No! Stupid-Head has his wits in his hands; he can cut, and carve, and polish; help him a little at the starting; and, after, he shall help himself. They are all gone now but me! Your father, your mother, and uncle Max—they are all gone! Stupid-Head alone remains to remember and to be grateful—to take Sarah's sorrow for his sorrow, and Sarah's joy for his joy."

He stopped again, to blow a speck of dust off the musical box. His niece endeavoured to speak, but he held up his hand, and shook his forefinger at her warningly.

"No," he said. "It is yet my business to talk,

and your business to drink tea. Have I not my third reason still? Ah! you look away from me; you know my third reason, before I say a word. When I, in my turn, marry, and my wife dies, and leaves me alone with little Joseph, and when the boy falls sick, who comes then, so quiet, so pretty, so neat, with the bright young eyes, and the hands so tender and light? Who helps me with little Joseph by night and by day? Who makes a pillow for him on her arm when his head is weary? Who holds this box patiently at his ear?—yes! this box, that the hand of Mozart has touched—Who holds it closer, closer always, when little Joseph's sense grows dull, and he moans for the friendly music that he has known from a baby, the friendly music that he can now so hardly, hardly hear? Who kneels down by Uncle Joseph when his heart is breaking, and says, 'Oh, hush! hush! The boy is gone where the better music plays, where the sickness shall never waste or the sorrow touch him more!' Who? Ah, Sarah! you cannot forget those days; you cannot forget the Long Ago! When the trouble is bitter, and the burden is heavy, it is cruelty to Uncle Joseph to keep away; it is kindness to him to come here."

The recollections that the old man had called up, found their way tenderly to Sarah's heart. She could not answer him; she could only hold out her hand. Uncle Joseph bent down, with a

quaint, affectionate gallantry, and kissed it; then stepped back again to his place by the musical box. "Come!" he said, patting it cheerfully, "we will say no more for a while. Mozart's box, Max's box, little Joseph's box, you shall talk to us again!"

Having put the tiny machinery in motion, he sat down by the table, and remained silent until the air had been played over twice. Then observing that his niece seemed calmer, he spoke to her once more.

"You are in trouble, Sarah," he said, quietly. "You tell me that, and I see it is true in your face. Are you grieving for your husband?"

"I grieve that I ever met him," she answered. "I grieve that I ever married him. Now that he is dead, I cannot grieve—I can only forgive him."

"Forgive him? How you look, Sarah, when you say that! Tell me——"

"Uncle Joseph! I have told you that my husband is dead, and that I have forgiven him."

"You have forgiven him? He was hard and cruel with you, then? I see; I see. That is the end, Sarah—but the beginning? Is the beginning that you loved him?"

Her pale cheeks flushed; and she turned her head aside. "It is hard and humbling to confess it," she murmured, without raising her eyes; "but you force the truth from me, uncle. I had

no love to give to my husband—no love to give to any man.”

“And yet, you married him! Wait! it is not for me to blame. It is for me to find out, not the bad, but the good. Yes, yes; I shall say to myself, she married him when she was poor and helpless; she married him when she should have come to Uncle Joseph, instead. I shall say that to myself, and I shall pity, but I shall ask no more.”

Sarah half reached her hand out to the old man again—then suddenly pushed her chair back, and changed the position in which she was sitting. “It is true that I was poor,” she said, looking about her in confusion, and speaking with difficulty. “But you are so kind and so good, I cannot accept the excuse that your forbearance makes for me. I did not marry him because I was poor, but——” She stopped, clasped her hands together, and pushed her chair back still farther from the table.

“So! so!” said the old man, noticing her confusion. “We will talk about it no more.”

“I had no excuse of love; I had no excuse of poverty,” she said, with a sudden burst of bitterness and despair. “Uncle Joseph, I married him because I was too weak to persist in saying No! The curse of weakness and fear has followed me all the days of my life! I said No to him once I said No to him twice. Oh, uncle, if I

could only have said it for the third time ! But he followed me, he frightened me, he took away from me all the little will of my own that I had. He made me speak as he wished me to speak, and go where he wished me to go. No, no, no—don't come to me, uncle ; don't say anything. He is gone ; he is dead—I have got my release ; I have given my pardon ! Oh, if I could only go away and hide somewhere ! All people's eyes seem to look through me ; all people's words seem to threaten me. My heart has been weary ever since I was a young woman ; and all these long, long years, it has never got any rest. Hush ! the man in the shop—I forgot the man in the shop. He will hear us ; let us talk in a whisper. What made me break out so ? I'm always wrong. Oh me ! I'm wrong when I speak ; I'm wrong when I say nothing ; wherever I go and whatever I do, I'm not like other people. I seem never to have grown up in my mind, since I was a little child. Hark ! the man in the shop is moving—has he heard me ? Oh, Uncle Joseph ! do you think he has heard me ?”

Looking hardly less startled than his niece, Uncle Joseph assured her that the door was solid, that the man's place in the shop was at some distance from it, and that it was impossible, even if he heard voices in the parlour, that he could also distinguish any words that were spoken in it.

“ You are sure of that ? ” she whispered,



hurriedly. "Yes, yes, you are sure of that, or you would not have told me so, would you? We may go on talking now. Not about my married life: that is buried and past. Say that I had some years of sorrow and suffering, which I deserved,—say that I had other years of quiet, when I was living in service with masters and mistresses who were often kind to me when my fellow-servants were not,—say just that much about my life, and it is saying enough. The trouble that I am in now, the trouble that brings me to you, goes back further than the years we have been talking about—goes back, back, back, Uncle Joseph, to the distant day when we last met."

"Goes back all through the sixteen years!" exclaimed the old man, incredulously. "Goes back, Sarah, even to the Long Ago!"

"Even to that time. Uncle, you remember where I was living, and what had happened to me, when——"

"When you came here in secret? When you asked me to hide you? That was the same week, Sarah, when your mistress died; your mistress who lived away, west, in the old house. You were frightened, then—pale and frightened as I see you now."

"As every one sees me! People are always staring at me; always thinking that I am nervous, always pitying me for being ill."

Saying these words with a sudden fretfulness, she lifted the tea-cup by her side to her lips, drained it of its contents at a draught, and pushed it across the table to be filled again. "I have come all over thirsty and hot," she whispered. "More tea, Uncle Joseph—more tea."

"It is cold," said the old man. "Wait till I ask for hot water."

"No!" she exclaimed, stopping him as he was about to rise. "Give it me cold; I like it cold. Let nobody else come in—I can't speak if anybody else comes in." She drew her chair close to her uncle's, and went on:—"You have not forgotten how frightened I was, in that byegone time—do you remember why I was frightened?"

"You were afraid of being followed—that was it, Sarah. I grow old, but my memory keeps young. You were afraid of your master, afraid of his sending servants after you. You had run away; you had spoken no word to anybody; and you spoke little—ah, very, very little—even to Uncle Joseph, even to me."

"I told you," said Sarah, dropping her voice to so faint a whisper that the old man could barely hear her. "I told you that my mistress had left me a secret on her death-bed—a secret in a letter, which I was to give to my master. I told you I had hidden the letter, because I could not bring myself to deliver it, because I would

rather die a thousand times over than be questioned about what I knew of it. I told you so much, I know. Did I tell you no more? Did I not say that my mistress made me take an oath on the Bible?—Uncle! are there candles in the room? Are there candles we can light without disturbing anybody, without calling anybody in here?”

“There are candles and a match-box in my cupboard,” answered Uncle Joseph. “But look out of window, Sarah. It is only twilight—it is not dark yet.”

“Not outside; but it is dark here.”

“Where?”

“In that corner. Let us have candles. I don't like the darkness when it gathers in corners, and creeps along walls.”

Uncle Joseph looked all round the room, inquiringly; and smiled to himself as he took two candles from the cupboard and lighted them. “You are like the children,” he said, playfully, while he pulled down the window-blind. “You are afraid of the dark.”

Sarah did not appear to hear him. Her eyes were fixed on the corner of the room which she had pointed out the moment before. When he resumed his place by her side, she never looked round, but laid her hand on his arm, and said to him suddenly:—

“Uncle! Do you believe that the dead can

come back to this world, and follow the living everywhere, and see what they do in it?"

The old man started. "Sarah!" he said, "why do you talk so? Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Are there lonely hours," she went on, still never looking away from the corner, still not seeming to hear him, "when you are sometimes frightened without knowing why,—frightened all over in an instant, from head to foot? Tell me, uncle, have you ever felt the cold steal round and round the roots of your hair, and crawl bit by bit down your back? I have felt that, even in the summer. I have been out of doors, alone on a wide heath, in the heat and brightness of noon, and have felt as if chilly fingers were touching me—chilly, damp, softly-creeping fingers. It says in the New Testament that the dead came once out of their graves, and went into the holy city. The dead! Have they rested, rested always, rested for ever, since that time?"

Uncle Joseph's simple nature recoiled in bewilderment from the dark and daring speculations to which his niece's questions led. Without saying a word, he tried to draw away the arm which she still held; but the only result of the effort was to make her tighten her grasp, and bend forward in her chair so as to look closer still into the corner of the room.

"My mistress was dying," she said, "my

mistress was very near her grave, when she made me take my oath on the Bible. She made me swear never to destroy the letter; and I did not destroy it. She made me swear not to take it away with me, if I left the house; and I did not take it away. She would have made me swear for the third time, to give it to my master, but death was too quick for her—death stopped her from fastening that third oath on my conscience. But she threatened me, uncle, with the dead dampness on her forehead, and the dead whiteness on her cheeks—she threatened to come to me from the other world, if I thwarted her—and I *have* thwarted her!”

She stopped, suddenly removed her hand from the old man's arm, and made a strange gesture with it towards the part of the room on which her eyes remained fixed. “Rest, rest, rest,” she whispered under her breath. “Is my master alive now? Rest, till the drowned rise. Tell him the Secret when the sea gives up her dead.”

“Sarah! Sarah! you are changed, you are ill, you frighten me!” cried Uncle Joseph, starting to his feet.

She turned round slowly, and looked at him with eyes void of all expression, with eyes that seemed to be staring through him vacantly at something beyond.

“Gott im Himmel! what does she see?” He looked round as the exclamation escaped him.

“Sarah! what is it! Are you faint? Are you ill? Are you dreaming with your eyes open?”

He took her by both arms and shook her. At the instant when she felt the touch of his hands, she started violently and trembled all over. Their natural expression flew back into her eyes with the rapidity of a flash of light. Without saying a word, she hastily resumed her seat and began stirring the cold tea round and round in her cup, round and round so fast that the liquid overflowed into the saucer.

“Come! she gets more like herself,” said Uncle Joseph, watching her.

“More like myself?” she repeated, vacantly.

“So! so!” said the old man trying to soothe her. “You are ill—what the English call, out of sort. They are good doctors here. Wait till to-morrow, you shall have the best.”

“I want no doctors. Don’t speak of doctors. I can’t bear them; they look at me with such curious eyes; they are always prying into me, as if they wanted to find out something. What have we been stopping for? I had so much to say; and we seem to have been stopping just when we ought to have been going on. I am in grief and terror, Uncle Joseph; in grief and terror again about the Secret——”

“No more of that!” pleaded the old man.  
“No more to-night at least!”

“Why not?”

“Because you will be ill again with talking about it. You will be looking into that corner, and dreaming with your eyes open. You are too ill—yes, yes, Sarah; you are too ill.”

“I’m not ill! Oh, why does everybody keep telling me that I am ill? Let me talk about it, uncle. I have come to talk about it; I can’t rest till I have told you.”

She spoke with a changing colour and an embarrassed manner, now apparently conscious for the first time that she had allowed words and actions to escape her which it would have been more prudent to have restrained.

“Don’t notice me again,” she said with her soft voice, and her gentle, pleading manner. “Don’t notice me if I talk or look as I ought not. I lose myself sometimes, without knowing it; and I suppose I lost myself just now. It means nothing, Uncle Joseph—nothing indeed.”

Endeavouring thus to reassure the old man, she again altered the position of her chair, so as to place her back towards the part of the room to which her face had been hitherto turned.

“Well, well, it is good to hear that,” said Uncle Joseph; “but speak no more about the past time, for fear you should lose yourself again. Let us hear about what is now. Yes, yes, give me my way. Leave the Long Ago to me, and take you the present time. I can go back

through the sixteen years as well as you. Ah! you doubt it? Hear me tell you what happened when we last met—hear me prove myself in three words: You leave your place at the old house—you run away here—you stop in hiding with me, while your master and his servants are hunting after you—you start off, when your road is clear, to work for your living, as far away from Cornwall as you can get—I beg and pray you to stop with me, but you are afraid of your master, and away you go. There! that is the whole story of your trouble the last time you came to this house. Leave it so; and tell me what is the cause of your trouble now.”

“The past cause of my trouble, Uncle Joseph, and the present cause of my trouble are the same. The Secret——”

“What! you will go back to that?”

“I must go back to it.”

“And why?”

“Because the Secret is written in a letter——”

“Yes; and what of that?”

“And the letter is in danger of being discovered. It is, uncle,—it is! Sixteen years it has lain hidden—and now, after all that long time, the dreadful chance of its being dragged to light has come like a judgment. The one person in all the world who ought never to set eyes on that letter is the very person who is most likely to find it!”



“So! so! Are you very certain, Sarah? How do you know it?”

“I know it from her own lips. Chance brought us together——”

“Us? us? What do you mean by us?”

“I mean——uncle, you remember that Captain Treverton was my master when I lived at Porthgenna Tower?”

“I had forgotten his name. But, no matter——go on.”

“When I left my place, Miss Treverton was a little girl of five years old. She is a married woman now—so beautiful, so clever, such a sweet, youthful, happy face! And she has a child as lovely as herself. Oh, uncle, if you could see her! I would give so much if you could only see her!”

Uncle Joseph kissed his hand and shrugged his shoulders; expressing by the first action, homage to the lady's beauty, and by the second, resignation under the misfortune of not being able to see her. “Well, well,” he said, philosophically, “put this shining woman by, and let us go on.”

“Her name is Frankland now,” said Sarah. “A prettier name than Treverton, a much prettier name, I think. Her husband is fond of her—I am sure he is. How can he have any heart at all, and not be fond of her?”

“So! so!” exclaimed Uncle Joseph, looking very much perplexed. “Good, if he is fond of

her—very good. But what labyrinth are we getting into now? Wherefore all this about a husband and a wife? My word of honour, Sarah, but your explanation explains nothing—it only softens my brains!”

“I must speak of her and of Mr. Frankland, uncle. Porthgenna Tower belongs to her husband now; and they are both going to live there.”

“Ah! we are getting back into the straight road at last.”

“They are going to live in the very house that holds the Secret; they are going to repair that very part of it where the letter is hidden. She will go into the old rooms—I heard her say so; she will search about in them to amuse her curiosity; workmen will clear them out, and she will stand by in her idle hours, looking on.”

“But she suspects nothing of the Secret?”

“God forbid she ever should!”

“And there are many rooms in the house? And the letter in which the Secret is written is hidden in one of the many? Why should she hit on that one?”

“Because I always say the wrong thing! because I always get frightened and lose myself at the wrong time! The letter is hidden in a room called the Myrtle Room, and I was foolish enough, weak enough, crazed enough, to warn her against going into it.”

“ Ah, Sarah ! Sarah ! that was a mistake indeed.”

“ I can't tell what possessed me—I seemed to lose my senses when I heard her talking so innocently of amusing herself by searching through the old rooms, and when I thought of what she might find there. It was getting on towards night, too; the horrible twilight was gathering in the corners and creeping along the walls. I longed to light the candles, and yet I did not dare, for fear she should see the truth in my face. And when I did light them it was worse. Oh, I don't know how I did it! I don't know why I did it! I could have torn my tongue out for saying the words, and still I said them. Other people can think for the best; other people can act for the best; other people have had a heavy weight laid on their minds, and have not dropped under it as I have. Help me, uncle, for the sake of old times when we were happy—help me with a word of advice ! ”

“ I will help you ; I live to help you, Sarah ! No, no, no—you must not look so forlorn ; you must not look at me with those crying eyes. Come ! I will advise this minute—but say in what ; only say in what.”

“ Have I not told you ? ”

“ No ; you have not told me a word yet.”

“ I will tell you now——”

She paused, looked away distrustfully towards

the door leading into the shop, listened a little, and resumed:—"I am not at the end of my journey yet, Uncle Joseph—I am here on my way to Porthgenna Tower—on my way to the Myrtle Room—on my way, step by step, to the place where the letter lies hid. I dare not destroy it; I dare not remove it; but, run what risk I may, I must take it out of the Myrtle Room."

Uncle Joseph said nothing, but he shook his head despondingly.

"I must," she repeated; "before Mrs. Frankland gets to Porthgenna, I must take that letter out of the Myrtle Room. There are places in the old house where I may hide it again—places that she would never think of—places that she would never notice. Only let me get it out of the one room that she is sure to search in, and I know where to hide it from her and from every one for ever."

Uncle Joseph reflected, and shook his head again—then said:—"One word, Sarah; does Mrs. Frankland know which is the Myrtle Room?"

"I did my best to destroy all trace of that name when I hid the letter; I hope and believe she does not. But she may find out—remember the words I was crazed enough to speak; they will set her seeking for the Myrtle Room; they are sure to do that."

"And if she finds it? And if she sees the letter?"

“It will cause misery to innocent people; it will bring death to *me*. Don’t push your chair from me, uncle! It is not shameful death I speak of. The worst injury I have done is injury to myself; the worst death I have to fear is the death that releases a worn-out spirit and cures a broken heart.”

“Enough—enough so,” said the old man. “I ask for no secret, Sarah, that is not yours to give. It is all dark to me—very dark, very confused. I look away from it; I look only towards you. Not with doubt, my child, but with pity, and with sorrow, too—sorrow that ever you went near that house of Porthgenna—sorrow that you are now going to it again.”

“I have no choice, uncle, but to go. If every step on the road to Porthgenna took me nearer and nearer to my death, I must still tread it. Knowing what I know, I can’t rest, I can’t sleep—my very breath won’t come freely—till I have got that letter out of the Myrtle Room. How to do it—oh, Uncle Joseph, how to do it, without being suspected, without being discovered by anybody—that is what I would almost give my life to know! You are a man; you are older and wiser than I am; no living creature ever asked you for help in vain—help *me* now! my only friend in all the world, help me a little with a word of advice!”

Uncle Joseph rose from his chair, and folded

his arms resolutely, and looked his niece full in the face.

“You will go?” he said. “Cost what it may, you will go? Say, for the last time, Sarah—is it yes, or no?”

“Yes! For the last time, I say, Yes.”

“Good. And you will go soon?”

“I must go to-morrow. I dare not waste a single day; hours even may be precious for anything I can tell.”

“You promise me, my child, that the hiding of this secret does good, and that the finding of it will do harm?”

“If it was the last word I had to speak in this world, I would say, Yes!”

“You promise me also that you want nothing but to take the letter out of the Myrtle Room, and put it away somewhere else?”

“Nothing but that.”

“And it is yours to take and yours to put? No person has a better right to touch it than you?”

“Now that my master is dead, no person.”

“Good. You have given me my resolution. I have done. Sit you there, Sarah; and wonder, if you like, but say nothing.” With these words, Uncle Joseph stepped lightly to the door leading into the shop, opened it, and called to the man behind the counter.

“Samuel, my friend,” he said. “To-morrow

I go a little ways into the country with my niece, who is this lady, here. You keep shop and take orders, and be just as careful as you always are, till I get back. If anybody comes and asks for Mr. Buschmann, say he is gone a little ways into the country, and will be back in a few days. That is all. Shut up the shop, Samuel, my friend, for the night; and go to your supper. I wish you good appetite, nice victuals, and sound sleep."

Before Samuel could thank his master the door was shut again. Before Sarah could say a word, Uncle Joseph's hand was on her lips, and Uncle Joseph's handkerchief was wiping away the tears that were now falling fast from her eyes.

"I will have no more talking, and no more crying," said the old man. "I am German, and I glory in the obstinacy of six Englishmen, all rolled into one. To-night you sleep here, to-morrow we talk again of all this. You want me to help you with a word of advice. I will help you with myself, which is better than advice, and I say no more till I fetch my pipe down from the wall there, and ask him to make me think. I smoke and think to-night—I talk and do to-morrow. And you, you go up to bed; you take Uncle Max's music-box in your hand, and you let Mozart sing the cradle-song before you go to sleep. Yes, yes, my child, there is always comfort in Mozart—better comfort than in crying.

Why cry so much? What is there to cry about, or to thank about? Is it so great a wonder that I will not let my sister's child go alone to make a venture in the dark? I said Sarah's sorrow was my sorrow, and Sarah's joy my joy; and now, if there is no way of escape—if it must indeed be done—I also say: Sarah's risk to-morrow is Uncle Joseph's risk to-morrow, too!"



## CHAPTER II.



### OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

THE next morning wrought no change in the resolution at which Uncle Joseph had arrived overnight. Out of the amazement and confusion produced in his mind by his niece's avowal of the object that had brought her to Cornwall, he had contrived to extract one clear and definite conclusion—that she was obstinately bent on placing herself in a situation of uncertainty, if not of absolute peril. Once persuaded of this, his kindly instincts all sprang into action, his natural firmness on the side of self-sacrifice asserted itself, and his determination not to let Sarah proceed on her journey alone, followed as a matter of course. In that determination he took refuge from the doubt, the perplexity, the vague uneasiness and alarm which her looks, her language, and her conduct had caused in him. Strong in the self-denying generosity of his purpose—though strong in nothing else—when he and his niece met in the morning, and when

Sarah spoke self-reproachfully of the sacrifice that he was making, of the serious hazards to which he was exposing himself for her sake, he refused to listen to her just as obstinately as he had refused the previous night. There was no need, he said, to speak another word on that subject. If she had abandoned her intention of going to Porthgenna, she had only to say so. If she had not, it was mere waste of breath to talk any more, for he was deaf in both ears to everything in the shape of a remonstrance that she could possibly address to him. Having expressed himself in these uncompromising terms, Uncle Joseph abruptly dismissed the subject, and tried to turn the conversation to a cheerful everyday topic, by asking his niece how she had passed the night.

“I was too anxious to sleep,” she answered. “I can’t fight with my fears and misgivings as some people can. All night long they keep me waking and thinking as if it was day.”

“Thinking about what?” asked Uncle Joseph. “About the letter that is hidden? about the house of Porthgenna? about the Myrtle Room?”

“About how to get into the Myrtle Room,” she said. “The more I try to plan and ponder, and settle beforehand what I shall do, the more confused and helpless I seem to be. All last night, uncle, I was trying to think of some excuse for getting inside the doors at Porthgenna Tower

—and yet, if I was standing on the house-step at this moment, I should not know what to say when the servant and I first came face to face. How are we to persuade them to let us in? How am I to slip out of sight, even if we do get in? Can't you tell me? you will try, Uncle Joseph—I am sure you will try? Only help me so far, and I think I can answer for the rest. If they keep the keys where they used to keep them in my time, ten minutes to myself is all I should want—ten minutes, only ten short minutes, to make the end of my life easier to me than the beginning has been; to help me to grow old quietly and resignedly, if it is God's will that I should live out my years. O, how happy people must be who have all the courage they want; who are quick and clever, and have their wits about them! You are readier than I am, uncle; you said last night that you would think about how to advise me for the best—what did your thoughts end in? You will make me so much easier if you will only tell me that.”

Uncle Joseph nodded assentingly, assumed a look of the profoundest gravity, and slowly laid his fore-finger along the side of his nose.

“What did I promise you last night?” he said. “Was it not to take my pipe and ask him to make me think? Good. I smoke three pipes, and think three thoughts. My first thought is—Wait! My second thought is

again—Wait! My third thought is yet once more—Wait! You say you will be easy, Sarah, if I tell you the end of all my thoughts. Good. I have told you. There is the end—you are easy—it is all right.”

“Wait?” repeated Sarah, with a look of bewilderment which suggested anything rather than a mind at ease. “I am afraid, uncle, I don’t quite understand. Wait for what? Wait till when?”

“Wait till we arrive at the house, to be sure! Wait till we are got outside the door; then is time enough to think how we are to get in,” said Uncle Joseph, with an air of conviction. “You understand now?”

“Yes—at least I understand better than I did. But, there is still another difficulty left. Uncle! I must tell you more than I intended ever to tell anybody—I must tell you that the letter is locked up.”

“Locked up in a room?”

“Worse than that—locked up in something inside the room. The key that opens the door—even if I get it—the key that opens the door of the room is not all I want. There is another key besides that, a little key——” She stopped, with a confused startled look.

“A little key that you have lost?” asked Uncle Joseph.

“I threw it down the well in the village, on the

morning when I made my escape from Porth-genna. Oh, if I had only kept it about me! If it had only crossed my mind that I might want it again!"

"Well, well; there is no help for that now. Tell me, Sarah, what the something is which the letter is hidden in."

"I am afraid of the very walls hearing me."

"What nonsense! Come! whisper it to me."

She looked all round her distrustfully, and then whispered into the old man's ear. He listened eagerly, and laughed when she was silent again. "Bah!" he cried. "If that is all, make yourself happy. As you wicked English people say, it is as easy as lying. Why, my child, you can burst him open for yourself!"

"Burst it open? How?"

Uncle Joseph went to the window-seat, which was made on the old-fashioned plan, to serve the purpose of a chest as well as a seat. He opened the lid, searched among some tools which lay in the receptacle beneath, and took out a chisel. "See," he said, demonstrating on the top of the window-seat the use to which the tool was to be put. "You push him in so—crick! Then you pull him up so—crack! It is the business of one little moment—crick! crack!—and the lock is done for. Take the chisel yourself, wrap him up in a bit of that stout paper there, and put him in your pocket. What are you waiting for? Do

you want me to show you again, or do you think you can do it now for yourself?"

"I should like you to show me again, Uncle Joseph, but not now—not till we have got to the end of our journey."

"Good. Then I may finish my packing up, and go ask about the coach. First and foremost, Mozart must put on his great coat, and travel with us." He took up the musical box, and placed it carefully in a leather case, which he slung by a strap over one shoulder. "Next, there is my pipe, the tobacco to feed him with, and the matches to set him alight. Last, here is my old German knapsack, which I pack last night. See! here is shirt, nightcap, comb, pocket-handkerchief, sock. Say I am an emperor, and what do I want more than that? Good. I have Mozart, I have the pipe, I have the knapsack, I have—stop! stop! there is the old leather purse; he must not be forgotten. Look! here he is. Listen! Ting, ting, ting! He jingles; he has in his inside, money. Aha, my friend, my good Leather, you shall be lighter and leaner before you come home again. So, so—it is all complete; we are ready for the march now, from our tops to our toes. Good-bye, Sarah, my child, for a little half-hour; you shall wait here and amuse yourself while I go ask for the coach."

When Uncle Joseph came back, he brought his niece information that a coach would pass

through Truro in an hour's time, which would set them down at a stage not more than five or six miles distant from the regular post-town of Porthgenna. The only direct conveyance to the post-town was a night coach which carried the letter-bags, and which stopped to change horses at Truro at the very inconvenient hour of two o'clock in the morning. Being of opinion that to travel at bed-time was to make a toil of a pleasure, Uncle Joseph recommended taking places in the day-coach, and hiring any conveyance that could be afterwards obtained to carry his niece and himself on to the post-town. By this arrangement they would not only secure their own comfort, but gain the additional advantage of losing as little time as possible at Truro before proceeding on their journey to Porthgenna.

The plan thus proposed, was the plan followed. When the coach stopped to change horses, Uncle Joseph and his niece were waiting to take their places by it. They found all the inside seats but one disengaged, were set down two hours afterwards at the stage that was nearest to the destination for which they were bound, hired a pony-chaise there, and reached the post-town between one and two o'clock in the afternoon.

Dismissing their conveyance at the inn, from motives of caution which were urged by Sarah, they set forth to walk across the moor to Porth-

genna. On their way out of the town, they met the postman returning from his morning's delivery of letters in the surrounding district. His bag had been much heavier, and his walk much longer, that morning than usual. Among the extra letters that had taken him out of his ordinary course, was one addressed to the house-keeper at Porthgenna Tower, which he had delivered early in the morning, when he first started on his rounds.

Throughout the whole journey, Uncle Joseph had not made a single reference to the object for which it had been undertaken. Possessing a child's simplicity of nature, he was also endowed with a child's elasticity of disposition. The doubts and forebodings which troubled his niece's spirit, and kept her silent and thoughtful and sad, cast no darkening shadow over the natural sunshine of his mind. If he had really been travelling for pleasure alone, he could not have enjoyed more thoroughly than he did the different sights and events of the journey. All the happiness which the passing minute had to give him, he took as readily and gratefully as if there was no uncertainty in the future, no doubt, difficulty, or danger lying in wait for him at the journey's end. Before he had been half an hour in the coach, he had begun to tell the third inside passenger—a rigid old lady, who stared at him in speechless amazement—the whole history of the musical



box, ending the narrative by setting it playing, in defiance of all the noise that the rolling wheels could make. When they left the coach, he was just as sociable afterwards with the driver of the chaise, vaunting the superiority of German beer over Cornish cider, and making his remarks upon the objects which they passed on the road with the pleasantest familiarity, and the heartiest enjoyment of his own jokes. It was not till he and Sarah were well out of the little town, and away by themselves on the great moor which stretched beyond it, that his manner altered and his talk ceased altogether. After walking on in silence for some little time, with his niece's arm in his, he suddenly stopped, looked her earnestly and kindly in the face, and laid his hand on hers.

“There is yet one thing more I want to ask you, my child,” he said. “The journey has put it out of my head, but it has been in my heart all the time. When we leave this place of Porthgenna, and get back to my house, you will not go away? you will not leave Uncle Joseph again? Are you in service still, Sarah? Are you not your own master yet?”

“I was in service a few days since,” she answered. “But I am free now. I have lost my place.”

“Aha! You have lost your place; and why?”

“Because I would not hear an innocent person unjustly blamed. Because—”

She checked herself. But the few words she had said were spoken with such a suddenly heightened colour, and with such an extraordinary emphasis and resolution of tone, that the old man opened his eyes as widely as possible, and looked at his niece in undisguised astonishment.

“So! so! so!” he exclaimed. “What! You have had a quarrel, Sarah?”

“Hush! Don’t ask me any more questions now!” she pleaded earnestly. “I am too anxious and too frightened to answer. Uncle! this is Porthgenna Moor—this is the road I passed over, sixteen years ago, when I ran away to you. O! let us get on, pray let us get on! I can’t think of anything now but the house we are so near, and the risk we are going to run.”

They went on quickly, in silence. Half-an-hour’s rapid walking brought them to the highest elevation on the moor, and gave the whole western prospect grandly to their view.

There below them was the dark, lonesome, spacious structure of Porthgenna Tower with the sunlight already stealing round towards the windows of the west front! There was the path winding away to it gracefully over the brown moor, in curves of dazzling white! There, lower down, was the solitary old church, with the

peaceful burial-ground nestling by its side! There, lower still, were the little scattered roofs of the fishermen's cottages! And there, beyond all, was the changeless glory of the sea, with its old seething lines of white foam, with the old winding margin of its yellow shores! Sixteen long years—such years of sorrow, such years of suffering, such years of change, counted by the pulses of the living heart!—had passed over the dead tranquillity of Porthgenna, and had altered it as little as if they had all been contained within the lapse of a single day!

The moments when the spirit within us is most deeply stirred, are almost invariably the moments also when its outward manifestations are hardest to detect. Our own thoughts rise above us; our own feelings lie deeper than we can reach. How seldom words can help us, when their help is most wanted! How often our tears are dried up when we most long for them to relieve us! Was there ever a strong emotion in this world that could adequately express its own strength? What third person brought face to face with the old man and his niece, as they now stood together on the moor, would have suspected, to look at them, that the one was contemplating the landscape with nothing more than a stranger's curiosity, and that the other was viewing it through the recollections of half a life-time? The eyes of both

were dry, the tongues of both were silent, the faces of both were set with equal attention towards the prospect. Even between themselves there was no real sympathy, no intelligible appeal from one spirit to the other. The old man's quiet admiration of the view was not more briefly and readily expressed, when they moved forward and spoke to each other, than the customary phrases of assent by which his niece replied to the little that he said. How many moments there are in this mortal life, when, with all our boasted powers of speech, the words of our vocabulary treacherously fade out, and the page presents nothing to us but the sight of a perfect blank!

Slowly descending the slope of the moor, the uncle and niece drew nearer and nearer to Porthgenna Tower. They were within a quarter of an hour's walk of the house, when Sarah stopped at a place where a second path intersected the main foot-track which they had hitherto been following. On the left hand, as they now stood, the cross-path ran on until it was lost to the eye in the expanse of the moor. On the right hand, it led straight to the church.

"What do we stop for now?" asked Uncle Joseph, looking first in one direction and then in the other.

"Would you mind waiting for me here a little while, uncle? I can't pass the church path——"

she paused, in some trouble how to express herself—"without wishing (as I don't know what may happen after we get to the house), without wishing to see—to look at something——" she stopped again, and turned her face wistfully towards the church. The tears which had never wetted her eyes at the first view of Porthgenna, were beginning to rise in them now.

Uncle Joseph's natural delicacy warned him that it would be best to abstain from asking her for any explanations. "Go you where you like, to see what you like," he said, patting her on the shoulder. "I shall stop here to make myself happy with my pipe; and Mozart shall come out of his cage, and sing a little in this fine fresh air." He unslung the leather case from his shoulder while he spoke, took out the musical-box, and set it ringing its tiny peal to the second of the two airs which it was constructed to play—the minuet in Don Giovanni. Sarah left him looking about carefully, not for a seat for himself, but for a smooth bit of rock to place the box upon. When he had found this, he lit his pipe, and sat down to his music and his smoking, like an epicure to a good dinner. "Aha!" he exclaimed to himself, looking round as composedly at the wild prospect on all sides of him, as if he was still in his own little parlour at Truro. "Aha! Here is a fine big music-room, my friend Mozart, for you to sing

in! Ouf! there is wind enough in this place to blow your pretty dance-tune out to sea, and give the sailor-people a taste of it as they roll about in their ships."

Meanwhile, Sarah walked on rapidly towards the church, and entered the inclosure of the little burial-ground. Towards that same part of it, to which she had directed her steps on the morning of her mistress's death, she now turned her face again, after a lapse of sixteen years. Here, at least, the march of time had left its palpable track—its footprints whose marks were graves. How many a little spot of ground, empty when she last saw it, had its mound and its headstone now! The one grave that she had come to see—the grave which had stood apart in the bygone days, had companion-graves on the right hand and on the left. She could not have singled it out, but for the weather-stains on the headstone, which told of storm and rain passing over it, that had not passed over the rest. The mound was still kept in shape; but the grass grew long, and waved a dreary welcome to her, as the wind swept through it. She knelt down by the stone, and tried to read the inscription. The black paint which had once made the carved words distinct, was all flayed off from them now. To any other eyes but hers, the very name of the dead man would have been hard to trace. She sighed heavily, as she followed the letters of the

inscription mechanically one by one, with her finger:—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY  
 OF  
 HUGH POLWHEAL,  
 AGED 26 YEARS.  
 HE MET WITH HIS DEATH  
 THROUGH THE FALL OF A ROCK  
 IN  
 PORTHGENNA MINE,  
 DECEMBER 17TH, 1823.

Her hand lingered over the letters after it had followed them to the last line; and she bent forward and pressed her lips on the stone.

“Better so!” she said to herself, as she rose from her knees, and looked down at the inscription for the last time. “Better it should fade out so! Fewer strangers’ eyes will see it; fewer strangers’ feet will follow where mine have been—he will lie all the quieter in the place of his rest!”

She brushed the tears from her eyes, and gathered a few blades of grass from the grave—then left the churchyard. Outside the hedge that surrounded the enclosure, she stopped for a moment, and drew from the bosom of her dress the little book of Wesley’s Hymns, which she had taken with her from the desk in her bedroom on the morning of her flight from Porth-

genna. The withered remains of the grass that she had plucked from the grave sixteen years ago, lay between the pages still. She added to them the fresh fragments that she had just gathered, replaced the book in the bosom of her dress, and hastened back over the moor to the spot where the old man was waiting for her.

She found him packing up the musical-box again in its leather case. "A good wind," he said, holding up the palm of his hand to the fresh breeze that was sweeping over the moor. "A very good wind indeed, if you take him by himself—but a bitter bad wind if you take him with Mozart. He blows off the tune as if it was the hat on my head. You come back, my child, just at the nick of time—just when my pipe is done, and Mozart is ready to travel along the road once more. Ah, have you got the crying look in your eyes again, Sarah! What have you met with to make you cry? So! so! I see—the fewer questions I ask just now, the better you will like me. Good. I have done. No! I have a last question yet. What are we standing here for? why do we not go on?"

"Yes, yes—you are right, Uncle Joseph—let us go on at once. I shall lose all the little courage I have, if we stay here much longer looking at the house."

They proceeded down the path without another moment of delay. When they had



reached the end of it, they stood opposite the eastern boundary wall of Porthgenna Tower. The principal entrance to the house, which had been very rarely used of late years, was in the west front, and was approached by a terrace road that overlooked the sea. The smaller entrance, which was generally used, was situated on the south side of the building, and led through the servants' offices to the great hall and the west staircase. Sarah's old experience of Porthgenna guided her instinctively towards this part of the house. She led her companion on, until they gained the southern angle of the east wall—then stopped and looked about her. Since they had passed the postman and had entered on the moor, they had not set eyes on a living creature; and still, though they were now under the very walls of Porthgenna, neither man, woman, nor child—not even a domestic animal—appeared in view.

“It is very lonely here,” said Sarah, looking round her distrustfully. “Much lonelier than it used to be.”

“Is it only to tell me what I can see for myself that you are stopping now?” asked Uncle Joseph, whose inveterate cheerfulness would have been proof against the solitude of Sahara itself.

“No, no!” she answered, in a quick anxious whisper. “But the bell we must ring at is so

close—only round there—I should like to know what we are to say when we come face to face with the servant. You told me it was time enough to think about that when we were at the door. Uncle! we are all but at the door now. What shall we do?”

“The first thing to do,” said Uncle Joseph, shrugging his shoulders, “is surely to ring.”

“Yes—but when the servant comes, what are we to say?”

“Say?” repeated Uncle Joseph, knitting his eyebrows quite fiercely with the effort of thinking, and rapping his forehead with his forefinger, just under his hat. “Say? Stop, stop, stop. Ah! I have got it! I know! Make yourself quite easy, Sarah. The moment the door is opened, all the speaking to the servant shall be done by me.”

“O, how you relieve me! What shall you say?”

“Say? This;—‘How do you do? We have come to see the house.’”

When he had disclosed that remarkable expedient for effecting an entrance into Porthgenna Tower, he spread out both his hands interrogatively, drew back several paces from his niece, and looked at her with the serenely self-satisfied air of a man who has leapt, at one mental bound, from a doubt to a discovery.

Sarah gazed at him in astonishment. The

expression of absolute conviction on his face staggered her. The poorest of all the poor excuses for gaining admission into the house, which she herself had thought of, and had rejected, during the previous night, seemed like the very perfection of artifice by comparison with such a childishly simple expedient as that suggested by Uncle Joseph. And yet there he stood, apparently quite convinced that he had hit on the means of smoothing away all obstacles at once. Not knowing what to say, not believing sufficiently in the validity of her own doubts to venture on openly expressing an opinion either one way or the other, she took the last refuge that was now left open to her—she endeavoured to gain time.

“It is very, very good of you, uncle, to take all the difficulty of speaking to the servant on your own shoulders,” she said; the hidden despondency at her heart, expressing itself, in spite of her, in the faintness of her voice, and the forlorn perplexity of her eyes. “But would you mind waiting a little before we ring at the door, and walking up and down for a few minutes by the side of this wall, where nobody is likely to see us? I want to get a little more time to prepare myself for the trial that I have to go through; and—and in case the servant makes any difficulties about letting us in—I mean difficulties that we cannot just now anticipate—would it not be

as well to think of something else to say at the door? Perhaps, if you were to consider again——”

“There is not the least need,” interposed Uncle Joseph. “I have only to speak to the servant, and—crick! crack!—you will see that we shall get in. But, I will walk up and down as long as you please. There is no reason, because I have done all my thinking in one moment, that you should have done all your thinking in one moment too. No, no, no—no reason at all.” Saying those words with a patronising air, and a self-satisfied smile, which would have been irresistibly comical under any less critical circumstances, the old man again offered his arm to his niece, and led her back over the broken ground that lay under the eastern wall of Porthgenna Tower.

While Sarah was waiting in doubt outside the walls, it happened, by a curious coincidence, that another person, vested with the highest domestic authority, was also waiting in doubt inside the walls. This person was no other than the housekeeper of Porthgenna Tower; and the cause of her perplexity was nothing less than the letter which had been delivered by the postman that very morning.

It was a letter from Mrs. Frankland, which had been written after she had held a long

conversation with her husband and Mr. Orridge, on receiving the last fragments of information which the doctor was able to communicate in reference to Mrs. Jazeph.

The housekeeper had read the letter through over and over again, and was more puzzled and astonished by it at every fresh reading. She was now waiting for the return of the steward, Mr. Munder, from his occupations out of doors, with the intention of taking his opinion on the singular communication which she had received from her mistress.

While Sarah and her uncle were still walking up and down outside the eastern wall, Mr. Munder entered the housekeeper's room. He was one of those tall, grave, benevolent-looking men, with a conical head, a deep voice, a slow step, and a heavy manner, who passively contrive, by some inscrutable process, to get a great reputation for wisdom without the trouble of saying or doing anything to deserve it. All round the Porthgenna neighbourhood, the steward was popularly spoken of as a remarkably sound, sensible man; and the housekeeper, although a sharp woman in other matters, in this one respect shared to a large extent in the general delusion.

“Good morning, Mrs. Pentreath,” said Mr. Munder. “Any news to-day?” What a weight and importance his deep voice and his im-

pressively slow method of using it, gave to those two insignificant sentences!

“News, Mr. Munder, that will astonish you,” replied the housekeeper. “I have received a letter this morning from Mrs. Frankland, which is, without any exception, the most mystifying thing of the sort I ever met with. I am told to communicate the letter to you; and I have been waiting the whole morning to hear your opinion of it. Pray sit down, and give me all your attention—for I do positively assure you that the letter requires it.”

Mr. Munder sat down, and became the picture of attention immediately—not of ordinary attention, which can be wearied, but of judicial attention, which knows no fatigue, and is superior alike to the power of dulness and the power of time. The housekeeper, without wasting the precious minutes—Mr. Munder’s minutes, which ranked next on the scale of importance to a prime minister’s!—opened her mistress’s letter, and, resisting the natural temptation to make a few more prefatory remarks on it, immediately favoured the steward with the first paragraph, in the following terms:—

“Mrs. Pentreath,

“You must be tired of receiving letters from me, fixing a day for the arrival of my husband and myself. On this, the third occasion of my writing to you about our plans, it will be best, I think, to make no third appointment, but merely to say

that we shall leave West Winston for Porthgenna the moment I can get the doctor's permission to travel."

"So far," remarked Mrs. Pentreath, placing the letter on her lap, and smoothing it out rather irritably while she spoke—"so far, there is nothing of much consequence. The letter certainly seems to me (between ourselves) to be written in rather poor language—too much like common talking to come up to my idea of what a lady's style of composition ought to be—but that is a matter of opinion. I can't say, and I should be the last person to wish to say, that the beginning of Mrs. Frankland's letter is not, upon the whole, perfectly clear. It is the middle and the end that I wish to consult you about, Mr. Munder."

"Just so," said Mr. Munder. Only two words, but what volumes of meaning in them! The housekeeper cleared her throat with extraordinary loudness and elaboration, and read on thus:—

"My principal object in writing these lines is to request, by Mr. Frankland's desire, that you and Mr. Munder will endeavour to ascertain, as privately as possible, whether a person now travelling in Cornwall—in whom we happen to be much interested—has been yet seen in the neighbourhood of Porthgenna. The person in question is known to us by the name of Mrs. Jazeph. She is an elderly woman, of quiet lady-like manners, looking nervous and in delicate health. She dresses, according to our experience of her, with extreme propriety and neatness, and in dark colours. Her eyes have a singular expression of timidity, her voice is particularly soft and low, and her manner

is frequently marked by extreme hesitation. I am thus particular in describing her, in case she should not be travelling under the name by which we know her.

“For reasons, which it is not necessary to state, both my husband and myself think it probable that, at some former period of her life, Mrs. Jazeph may have been connected with the Porthgenna neighbourhood. Whether this be the fact or no, it is indisputably certain that she is familiar with the interior of Porthgenna Tower, and that she has an interest of some kind, quite incomprehensible to us, in the house. Coupling these facts with the knowledge we have of her being now in Cornwall, we think it just within the range of possibility, that you, or Mr. Munder, or some other person in our employment, may meet with her; and we are particularly anxious, if she should by any chance ask to see the house, not only that you should show her over it with perfect readiness and civility, but also that you should take private and particular notice of her conduct from the time when she enters the building to the time when she leaves it. Do not let her out of your sight for a moment; and, if possible, pray get some trustworthy person to follow her unperceived, and ascertain where she goes to, after she has quitted the house. It is of the most vital importance that these instructions (strange as they may seem to you) should be implicitly obeyed to the very letter.

“I have only room and time to add, that we know nothing to the discredit of this person, and that we particularly desire you will manage matters with sufficient discretion (in case you meet with her) to prevent her from having any suspicion that you are acting under orders, or that you have any especial interest in watching her movements. You will be good enough to communicate this letter to the steward, and you are at liberty to repeat the instructions in it to any other trustworthy person, if necessary.

“Yours truly,

“ROSAMOND FRANKLAND.

“P.S.—I have left my room, and the baby is getting on charmingly.”

“There!” said the housekeeper. “Who is to make head or tail of that, I should like to know!



Did you ever, in all your experience, Mr. Munder, meet with such a letter before? Here is a very heavy responsibility laid on our shoulders, without one word of explanation. I have been puzzling my brains about what their interest in this mysterious woman can be, the whole morning; and the more I think the less comes of it. What is your opinion, Mr. Munder? We ought to do something immediately. Is there any course in particular which you feel disposed to point out?"

Mr. Munder coughed softly, crossed his right leg over his left, put his head critically on one side, coughed softly for the second time, and looked at the housekeeper. If it had belonged to any other man in the world, Mrs. Pentreath would have considered that the face which now confronted hers expressed nothing but the most profound and vacant bewilderment. But it was Mr. Munder's face, and it was only to be looked at confidingly, with sentiments of respectful expectation.

"I rather think—" began Mr. Munder.

"Yes?" said the housekeeper, eagerly.

Before another word could be spoken, the maid-servant entered the room to lay the cloth for Mrs. Pentreath's dinner.

"There, there! never mind now, Betsey," said the housekeeper, impatiently. "Don't lay the cloth till I ring for you. Mr. Munder and I have

something very important to talk about, and we can't be interrupted just yet."

She had hardly said the word, before an interruption of the most unexpected kind happened. The door-bell rang. This was a very unusual occurrence at Porthgenna Tower. The few persons who had any occasion to come to the house on domestic business, always entered by a small side gate, which was left on the latch in the day-time.

"Who in the world can that be!" exclaimed Mrs. Pentreath, hastening to the window, which commanded a side view of the lower door steps.

The first object that met her eye when she looked out, was a lady standing on the lowest step—a lady dressed very neatly in quiet, dark colours.

"Good Heavens, Mr. Munder!" cried the housekeeper, hurrying back to the table, and snatching up Mrs. Frankland's letter, which she had left on it. "There is a stranger waiting at the door at this very moment! a lady! or, at least, a woman—and dressed neatly, dressed in dark colours! You might knock me down, Mr. Munder, with a feather! Stop, Betsey;—stop where you are!"

"I was only going, ma'am, to answer the door," said Betsey, in amazement.

"Stop where you are," reiterated Mrs. Pentreath, composing herself by a great effort. "I

happen to have certain reasons, on this particular occasion, for descending out of my own place and putting myself into yours. Stand out of the way, you staring fool! I am going up-stairs myself to answer that ring at the door."

END OF VOL. I.















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