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LOVELL'S WESTMINSTER SERIES

HER LAST THROW

BY

“THE DUCHESS”

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BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH THE AUTHORS.

LOVELL'S WESTMINSTER SERIES.

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JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY,

150 WORTH STREET, NEW YORK.

HER LAST THROW.

HER LAST THROW.

A NOVEL.

BY

formerly Maggie Taylor

"THE DUCHESS,"

Author of "Molly Bawn," "Phyllis," "A Born Coquette," "April's Lady," etc., etc.

M. J. Krugerford

"Thou sayest it . . . I am outcast."

—MORRIS.



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JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY,

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(1890)

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HER LAST THROW.

CHAPTER I.

“ Nor do they trust their tongues alone,
But speak a language of their own ;
Convey a libel in a frown,
And wink a reputation down.”

“ BUT who *is* she, dear Lady Severn ? That is what we all want to know. It is so awkward having people drop upon one from the clouds as it were, without a single word as to their antecedents.”

“ Well, if they drop from the clouds there can't be much the matter with them,” says Lady Severn, arching her pretty brows, and smiling in a somewhat amused fashion.

“ Ah, that is just it. For politeness' sake one *suggests* the clouds, but what if a next

door neighbor, such as she is, should have *ascended*! That would be awkward—very.”

The speaker, a huge florid woman, of about sixty, fans herself heavily, and purses up her lips, and looks so many things that her hostess gives way to a sense of fatigue.

“Very, for *her*!” says she, somewhat flippantly it must be confessed. Her pretty, kindly face has taken a distressed expression. This dreadful Mrs. Wilcott! Will nobody come to relieve her of her detested *tête-à-tête*. Fate seems to be conspiring against her. On every other Friday people have flocked in to see her, and play tennis on her charming grounds, and just to-day, because she wants them, her day is left unto her desolate. Even if Fay would only come in and stop this sharp examination that threatens to be a very cross one.

“Oh, and for us, too, dear Lady Severn. Now, you, as Sir George’s wife, should know something about her.”

“I can’t imagine why you should think

there is anything wrong," says Lady Severn with a swift frown. "We have all met her, she is charming—she is lovely; perhaps," a little maliciously, "that is her fault."

"Not so far as *I* am concerned," says Mrs. Wilcott promptly. "I don't think her lovely, I merely speak in the interests of society; in *your* interests, in fact. Sir George being her landlord, and in a sense responsible——"

"Oh no, I disclaim that."

"Well, I am afraid the County won't let you. But—er—as I was saying, Sir George being in a *measure* her sponsor, and considering the tie that soon must connect your family with mine——" here Mrs. Wilcott, whose late lamented had made his money in Manchester by rather nefarious means, largely connected with sugar and old bones, looks one overpowering smirk, and Lady Severn shrinks palpably—"I thought I would give you a little hint as to what is expected of you."

“I am a very dull person,” says Lady Severn, with a slight touch of hauteur.

“What *is* expected of me?”

“Why, I told you. We want to know who and what Mrs. Barrington *is*.”

“And who is ‘*we*’?” asks Lady Severn, the little sneer round her lips increasing.

“*The County!*” replies her guest with all the solemnity due to the occasion. Evidently the County is her fetish—her god—to whom she bows, not only in the morning and at noontide, but every moment of the day.

“I’m sorry I can’t enlighten it,” says Lady Severn, now with a genuine laugh. The touch of humor born with her has overcome her anger, and she is struggling with a wild desire to give way to mirth as she watches Mrs. Wilcott’s growing impressiveness over her deity. “I’m afraid, indeed, I can’t do anything to alleviate your anxiety. Sir George’s lawyer might be able to lift this weight off your mind, but I’m afraid neither Sir George nor I can be of any

use. We have been—you make me *feel* it—disgracefully culpable. But the fact is, ‘The Priory’ was so long on our hands, that we were delighted to get any tenant for it. We *expected* a frowzy old person of eighty or so—it is not our faults, at all events, that Mrs. Barrington should have turned out young and lovely.”

“*Young!*” says Mrs. Wilcott. “Thirty if a day.”

“Well, you know

‘A woman’s as old as she’s looking,
A man is as old as he feels.’

Mrs. Barrington, whatever her age, has the *beauté du diable* about her still.”

“Very much the *diable* in my opinion,” says Mrs. Wilcott with an awful sniff.

“You quite startle me,” says Lady Severn, smiling. “I confess I am not in a position to say anything *for* my tenant. Am I, however, to understand that you know something *against* her?”

“Oh, no, *no*. Dear me, *no!* I should be the last person in the world to find fault.

with *anyone*. I am on your side, of course, and I hope all things for this Mrs. Barrington, but you know there are others. There are a great many troublesome people in the world," says Mrs. Wilcott, with a sigh of deepest resignation.

"There are indeed," says Lady Severn, with a sigh that beats it thoroughly. "Put the tea on the table over there, Thomas," pointing to a three-legged, most dangerous thing at the very farthest limit from Mrs. Wilcott.

"Fay will want her tea," she says absently. She goes to the window and looks with eager concern round the corner to where a portion of the eastern tennis-court can be seen. No sign of Fay—the little step-sister, who has come to live with her, with Sir George's full and eager consent. A penniless child—a pretty, petulant, charming creature of seventeen, to whom all things seem possible, and nothing in the world impossible. A little, lovely fairy, as dear to Lady Severn *almost* as

the first baby—her *very* own—lying in its cradle now upstairs in the big airy nursery. After all, the tiny step-sister had been given to her to watch and ward by a dying mother when it was only a baby too.

A soft, exultant laugh catches her ear as she is turning back to give Mrs. Wilcott her conversation once again, and, a far easier thing, her tea. It comes from Fay surely. Yes, there she is; in full flight; with two of the small Severns beside her. Lady Severn's little step-sons—pretty boys; Severns all through—of about nine and ten years of age.

Mrs. Wilcott, who is watching her, having nothing else to do, seeing the growing brightness in her face goes to the window also.

“Ah! your step-sister!” says she.

“Yes. She will come in now.”

“One can see you are fond of her,” says Mrs. Wilcott. “Every step-sister is not beloved. But I always say, *why not?* For *my* part,” with a fat laugh, “if *I* had a

step-sister younger than myself I should encourage her largely. Half the world, you see, doesn't know about the 'step,' and it adds so much to one's *own* youth, don't you know."

"Oh, yes, one *always* knows," says Lady Severn, with ill-concealed disgust. *How* could the late Sir George have encouraged an engagement between Ernest, his youngest son, and the daughter of this terrible woman. *No* amount of money could make up for the annoyance of it. And Ernest, himself! however he might have felt in his boyish days, when the engagement was hurried on and completed, she is quite sure he cares nothing *now*, judging by the dilatoriness with which he pays his visits to his beloved when in the county. Of late, too, he has seemed to find a terrible difficulty in gaining leave from his colonel for even a *day*. *He* who used to spend weeks at a time with them! And as for Jessica! Does she care either? A pretty creature—a little Jewish in profile.

But so silent, so impassive, so uninteresting—as Lady Severn thought.

However, the engagement was of such an old standing that there was no use in going against it *now*. Jessica had had from infancy a large fortune, scented and sweetened by sugar and old bones, and Sir George's father, who died last year, had thought her *dôt* a capital thing to secure for his third son, who was comparatively penniless—if one excepts the noble income he derived from an Hussar regiment as captain. The girl had seemed attracted by Ernest Severn, and he by her. There had been several months of hot flirtation and then—the *denouement*. In a foolish moment, after a dance, just before the carriages were ordered and the lights began to burn low in gardens and conservatories, Ernest had asked Miss Wilcott to be his wife, and in just as foolish a moment Jessica Wilcott had said yes. I don't think either had been influenced by mundane con-

siderations. *She* had not thought of his birth; he had not thought of her money.

Next morning both had felt a little startled at what had been done, but not enough to make them undo it. At that time neither cared for anyone else, so the mischief accomplished did not seem so bad as it really was.

The late Sir George had been delighted when the news was conveyed to him in somewhat laggard fashion by Ernest. Now his third son, and his dearest, the one who had been left to him as a special charge by his dying wife, was in a fair way to be comfortable for life.

“In clover! By Jingo!” said the old man, slapping his thigh. He squirmed at the idea of a Brummagem wife for his youngest born, but still thought fondly of her wealth.

His second son Pasco would have enough of his own. All his poor mother's property, who had been a big heiress, and owned property both in North and South. There-

fore Ernest was the one to be considered.

And the old man died, not seeing his desire accomplished, and still the engagement holds good ; Jessica and her betrothed being always on excellent terms until quite lately—until in fact a month ago, the beginning of this summer, when Mr. Wyvern, a barrister, had come down from London to recruit a rather over-tried if distinctly clever brain at the Park, where his aunt, Mrs. Wilcott, lived—and Jessica !

“ Your step-sister has come to live with you definitely ? ” asks Mrs. Wilcott, reseating herself, and evidently preparing for a fresh campaign.

“ My *sister* will live with me—yes,” says Lady Severn. “ You have not met her yet I think, though Jessica and she are quite friends already.” She looks out of the window again and succeeds in attracting the girl’s attention. “ Fay, come in, darling ! ” cries she in her clear, sweet tones.

CHAPTER II.

“Surely Nature must have meant you
For a syren when she sent you
That sweet voice and glittering hair.”

THERE is a response in a joyous voice—a little rush of feet across the grass, a patter-patter of high-heeled shoes up the stone steps of the terrace, and presently Miss Ashton stands revealed, framed in by the ivy-clad woodwork of the open window.

“You called me?” asks she, addressing her sister.

“Yes. Come in, Fay, and let me introduce you to Mrs. Wilcott. I have been telling her that you are already acquainted with her daughter—Jessica.”

Fay steps lightly into the room.

She is a slight, small creature, as delicately as she is exquisitely proportioned. A

very gipsy in coloring, so dark she is, with her deep velvet eyes, and the soft nut-brown rings of hair that curl around her dainty head. She had been well named "Fay," a long time ago, though she had not been given that fantastic name at baptism. It suits her, and seems to belong to her of right. She is an extreme contrast to her step-sister, Lady Severn, who is tall and fair, and who, it may not uncharitably be supposed, will be stouter as the years go by.

Fay, on the contrary, is slim as a willow wand, and vivacious almost to a fault. A lovely thing of light and air, and one that might be termed soulless as a butterfly, save for the depth in the dark eyes, and the rather passionate curve of the red lips. A good little friend, no doubt, and a rather dangerous little foe. But one who, if she *did* love, would count the world well lost for her heart's desire.

At present her heart is entirely in Lady Severn's keeping. Between the two there

exists an affection far deeper than is usually known to sisters who are even of the same blood. A great deal younger than Lady Severn, Fay has ever been treated by her as a child, a beloved gift left to her by her dead mother.

“How d’ye do?” says Fay, advancing, and giving her hand to Mrs. Wilcott. “Yes, I have met Miss Wilcott.”

“So she told me,” says Mrs. Wilcott, smiling her elephantine smile. “I hope you and she will suit each other. So *few* people in a small neighborhood like this with whom one cares to associate.”

“So true!” says Fay, with considerable meaning. She moves to a big arm-chair and drops into it with a sort of indolent grace. Her charming dark head shows out agreeably against the amber satin behind it. She makes, indeed, a perfect picture as she so sits—or lounges. Every gesture is expressive, every turn of her lithe body a study in itself.

“But Jessica——”

“Jessica is delightful,” says Miss Ashton quickly, but without emotion, more as if to stop the other than from any enthusiasm about the subject in hand.

“She has been considered so,” says Mrs. Wilcott heavily. As a fact she and the fair Jessica do not pull together very well, but to hear Mrs. Wilcott talk about her daughter is to know what a mother’s love must really mean. “Jessica is very distinguished,” goes on Mrs. Wilcott, not knowing exactly what she means. “I have heard her described as being rather *special*. Her manners leave nothing to be desired, they are——”

“Of that kind that

‘Stamps the cast of Vere de Vere,’”

says Fay, idly furling and unfurling the huge red fan she holds, and endeavoring nobly to suppress the yawn that is dying to divide her lips.

“Eh?” says Mrs. Wilcott, but receives

no answer save a slight glance from the girl from under her slumbrous lids.

There is a pause. Through all Mrs. Wilcott's density there grows a fancy that this pale, slender child can be guilty of flippancy—and to *her*! She draws herself up. What on earth did she mean? *Who* were the de Veres?

“We are not connected with people of that name, so far as I know,” says she austere-ly. “The de Veres are a northern family, I fancy.”

Fay, after one swift glance at Lady Severn, who frowns down imperatively any attempt at collusion, gives way to an irrepressible little laugh.

“No? Yet one notes the resemblance,” says she, naughtily. “I'm sure there *must* be a cousinship somewhere.”

She beams at Mrs. Wilcott, and her low, soft, yet clear voice rings prettily in the ears of the elder lady. De Vere! A good name. Evidently this little queer girl has sufficient common-sense about her to know

that *she*—Mrs. Wilcott—is a person of no ordinary distinction. She will ask Jessica about these de Veres when she gets home. Jessica knows a good deal.

When she *does* ask Jessica there is a remarkably bad quarter of an hour for somebody!

“We were talking about Mrs. Barrington, that pretty woman who has taken ‘The Priory,’” says Lady Severn rather hastily, hardly knowing what Fay may do or say next. “Mrs. Wilcott, I am afraid, is not prepossessed in her favor.”

“What?” cries Fay. “That lovely woman—oh——”

“You are wrong, quite wrong, I assure you, Lady Severn,” exclaims Mrs. Wilcott growing warm. “On the contrary, I admire Mrs. Barrington immensely—quite *immensely*. So agreeable in her manner, and *er*—in such evident good circumstances. I have always rather fancied her, for myself! Quite an acquisition to the neighborhood I have always considered her—only——”

“ Ah, we are coming to it now ! ” says Fay, leaning forward with an appearance of great interest that is perhaps a little overdone.

“ Only—I am afraid you are a mischievous little girl,” cries Mrs. Wilcott, pausing to shake a playful forefinger at Fay, and evidently wishing Fay was the forefinger. “ What I was going to say was, that one likes, you understand, to know *who* one is talking to, no matter *how* charming they may be.”

This exclusive sentiment coming from the daughter of the Manchester tradesman is bound to be admired. Fay, to judge by her face, admires it immensely. She laughs lightly—a soft little laugh, that, coming from the depths of the big arm-chair, sounds rather mocking.

“ I don’t think it matters half so much *who* you are as *what* you are,” she says.

“ Well, that is pretty much the same thing, isn’t it ? ” says Mrs. Wilcott. “ When

one knows what a person is—whether belonging to the county——”

“Or to trade. Precisely so,” says Fay with a lovely little nod of intelligence, that almost gives the lie to the *arrière pensée* below. “But after all I don’t mean that. What I call important is the discovery of whether a fresh acquaintance is charming or detestable, lovable or disagreeable!”

“You must pardon my saying that that is a very youthful remark,” says Mrs. Wilcott in her deepest bass.

“Well! Fay *is* young,” says Lady Severn diplomatically. What is that mad little thing going to say next?

“That will mend!” says Mrs. Wilcott with a forgiving smile that is almost as good as a retort. “As for your new tenant, Mrs. Barrington, what I was going to say about her was that she——”

“Ah! You need say no more. The mystery is solved!” cries Fay, rushing out of her chair and running to the window. “Surely I hear the approaching wheels of

her chariot? and therefore Mrs. Barrington's reputation is assured. She is *an angel!* The moment we began to talk of her, she appeared! An infallible sign. Yes, I was right," nodding and smiling and kissing her hand to somebody down below. "See, Nettie," turning to Lady Severn, "here she comes."

"Proof positive, of course," says Lady Severn, smiling, as she always does at her little sister's bursts of nonsense.

Two pretty ponies have just been pulled up at the Hall door. And the tall slender woman who has been driving them, giving the reins to her groom, descends to the ground. Almost as she does so a horseman rides up, springs to earth, and just fails in being in time to give her his hand. He does not fail, however, in winning a smile from her as a greeting.

"Ah! your brother-in-law, Mr. Pasco Severn!" says Mrs. Wilcott, whose curiosity has compelled her to go to the window also. She is staring through a formid-

able pince-nez at the young man who has just sprung down from his horse. "Very devoted *there*, I hear. Eh?"

"I seldom hear!" says Lady Severn calmly. She might perhaps have said something more, but that by this time Mrs. Barrington has entered the Hall, and is being ushered by the footman into the drawing-room. She rises to welcome her.

CHAPTER III.

“The curious, questioning eye,
That plucks the heart of every mystery.”

“How dy’e do,” says she, rustling towards her. “A delicious day, is it not?”

“Perhaps a little too warm,” says Mrs. Barrington in a gentle, slow sort of way.

She is a tall woman, as has been said, of about thirty—not *more* certainly. She is singularly pale and singularly beautiful. Nature seems to have given all her time to the creation of her. No fault is visible. And her form is as perfect as her face. Every movement is a suggestion of grace—every glance a charm. Her large eyes—a deep grey, almost black—are filled with a strange light, that might be melancholy or fear, or memories of past unhappiness—or only a mere freak of Nature for

the matter of that, but whatever it is, it lends a delight to them that few eyes possess. Her mouth is beautiful, not small, large rather, but without a flaw, for all that. Her bright brown hair has a tinge of gold in it.

She is dressed in half mourning, very fashionable, if very quiet. It is worn for the late Mr. Barrington, says the neighborhood, but nobody can remember that Mrs. Barrington had ever said so. *Afterwards*, they remembered that she hadn't. But just now it seems the reasonable thing to imagine, and as reason is everything, of course nothing else matters. She does not wear a widow's bonnet, but the extremely pretty article that covers her head has a good deal of crape about it.

As she entered the room, a young man had followed her. Pasco Severn, the handsomest of all the handsome Severns. A tall man, with a haughty, rather severely cut face, and an earnest expression. Sir George, the eldest of the three brothers, is

handsome too, in a big, burly, fair fashion, but Pasco, who is ten years his brother's junior, is as shapely as a man can be, and well set up on all points. He lives at a place called "Fensides" (for no earthly reason apparently but because there isn't a fen within a hundred miles of it), a place inherited from his mother, who had left it to her second son with the two thousand a year belonging to it.

"*You, Pasco!*" says his sister-in-law, giving him her hand and a smile. "We didn't hope to see you to-day."

"Well, I didn't hope it myself until half-an-hour ago," says Severn. "I found then I had business in this part of the world that compelled my coming in this direction. It was the first time in my life," laughing, "that I found business a pleasure."

He smiles comprehensively all round, but somehow at the last the smile settles on Mrs. Barrington, to gain an answering smile there.

"How dusty the roads are to-day," says

Mrs. Wilcott, turning to the latter. "A perfect cloud of dust. I suppose, Mrs. Barrington, you came by the lower road that overlooks the sea? So much the prettier drive. By-the-bye, your name reminds me of old friends of mine, now, I regret to say, beyond my knowledge; we have lost sight of each other for so many years. I allude to the Barringtons of Norfolk. Your husband, perhaps, was connected with them?"

"I don't know, really; but I *think* not," says Mrs. Barrington slowly. She has grown a little pale. The day is certainly abominably warm.

"Ah, there are Barringtons in the North too. Very good people?" interrogatively.

"Are there? *No*, thank you, Miss Ash-ton, no sugar."

"*Yes*, have you not heard of them?" goes on Mrs. Wilcott unrelentingly.

"Yes, I have heard of them," says Mrs. Barrington, playing with her spoon.

"Oh, you *have*!" as if scenting prey.

The northern Barringtons she can prove to be nobodies in a moment—if this woman is connected with *them*——

“Yes,” says Mrs. Barrington with a lovely smile directed straight at her tormentor. “From *you*. *Now!*”

Mrs. Wilcott cast a furious glance at her, that is only partly concealed beneath a bland laugh.

“Ah, so clever. But you *are* very clever, I hear,” says she meaningly.

“I think Barrington such a charming name,” says Lady Severn nervously.

“So do I,” acquiesces Mrs. Wilcott. “There are Barringtons in Ireland too; in Dublin. You haven’t heard of them?”

“I have never been in Ireland, I regret to say,” Mrs. Barrington murmurs in her low voice, that has something of determined suppression in it.

“Oh, you are like me,” cries Fay. “I always feel I *want* to go to Ireland to see those poor tenants, and those *poorer* landlords. It would be so interesting.”

“Dear me! Miserable savages—*all!*” says Mrs. Wilcott, uplifting her hands in horror. She has not done with Mrs. Barrington yet, however. The kindly intention of taking her off the trail is unsuccessful so far. “Your husband was in the army, I think?” says she, addressing the new comer with her most insinuating smile.

“No,” says Mrs. Barrington sharply. She looks round her as if for support. For the moment she has lost her self-control. A brilliant flush has risen to her cheeks, a strange light to her eyes.

“I hate army men,” says Fay hastily, who, in truth, has never met an officer in her life to speak to, having only just returned from a school at Brussels. “They are so conceited. I’m so glad, Mrs. Barrington, your husband wasn’t one.” She laughs somewhat nervously, a glance at Pasco having startled her. He is singularly pale, and he is looking a little—a little *dangerous*, thinks Fay to herself. What on earth does that vulgar old woman mean by

her examination of that pretty Mrs. Barrington? a distinctly cross one too.

Lady Severn, at this moment, leans towards Mrs. Barrington.

“I hear your conservatories are lovely this year,” she says kindly. “I daresay my flowers are not to be compared to yours, judging from all I hear,” with a gracious smile; “yet I should like you to see them. They say my late calceolarias are *quite* a success. Pasco!” turning to Mr. Severn, “will you take Mrs. Barrington through the houses? It won’t take you very long, Mrs. Barrington,” turning back to her; “and knowing you to be quite a *connoisseur* about flowers, I should like you to give me your opinion.”

“Yes, come, Mrs. Barrington. I assure you my sister’s calceolarias are not to be despised,” says Pasco, stooping over Mrs. Barrington, and taking away her tea-cup. She rises, still in a strangely nervous, half-conscious fashion, and moves with him across the room and into the first conser-

vatory at the end of it. Presently they are lost to view.

“She has money, one can *see!*” says Mrs. Wilcott. “I daresay, after all, it won’t be so bad a match for dear Pasco as it *looks!*”

Lady Severn makes a movement that her little sister understands. It means that her dearest Nettie is going to be angry. She therefore steps hurriedly into the breach. Because, when Nettie is angry, she is so sorry afterwards that the little sister cannot bear to see it.

“Who has money?” cries she, in her pretty inquisitive way, that means so little. “And *is* Mr. Severn going to make a good marriage?” She has been so short a time at home that she has not yet brought herself to call Pasco or his brother Ernest, who stays with him when on leave, by their Christian names.

“You have so lately come amongst us,” says Mrs. Wilcott, with truly terrible *bon-homie*, “that you cannot be expected to know the ins and outs of our small interests.

But I have *heard* that Pasco is very much *épris* with Mrs. Barrington, and that——
You know whether there is truth in the report, dear Lady Severn, don't you?"

"I don't, indeed," says Lady Severn, icily. She has so far recovered herself that she can now speak with the regulation calm. "I never permit myself to pry into the concerns of my neighbors."

Her look is a direct sneer. Mrs. Wilcott wisely accepts it as a dismissal. She rises and bids Lady Severn adieu with the happiest air in the world; squeezing her hand, and looking all the friendliest things possible at Fay, who refuses to acknowledge them.

CHAPTER IV.

“She’s fancy free, but sweeter far
Than many plighted maidens are.”

“WELL, wasn’t she a *pig*?” says Miss Ashton after Mrs. Wilcott has gone, turning to her sister.

“Oh! darling child! what a word!” reproachfully.

“A very good one,” with a willful grimace. “Just suits her.”

At this moment the door opens, and Captain Severn—Ernest—the third of the brothers, enters the room.

“Who are you anathematizing?” asks he. Fay is as new to him as he is to her, and therefore they regard each other with a good deal of interest. As yet their acquaintance is only a week old, and during that time they have only met twice.

“ Ah, you have come just in time to defend me,” cries Fay saucily. “ I was just calling Mrs. Wilcott bad names, and Nettie was scolding me.”

She has heard nothing about his engagement to Miss Wilcott, and therefore makes this little speech about his *fiancée's* mother with all the insouciance in the world. Lady Severn colors warmly, but Ernest bursts out laughing.

“ You can hardly call her bad names enough to satisfy *me*,” says he, mischievously, rather enjoying Lady Severn's confusion. “ *Pelt* her with them, and I'll give you every assistance in my power.”

“ My dear Ernest,” says Lady Severn, rather shocked at this treatment of his prospective mother-in-law. *After* marriage it is generally allowable, but *before* !

“ You see. He quite agrees with me,” says Fay, nodding her little dark head. “ She is a very horrid old woman. I like her daughter a great deal better than I like her. Don't you, Captain Severn ? ”

Severn gives way to mirth again.

“Well, she’s younger,” says he, as if cautiously; “but on the whole——”

“Certainly yes. *She* isn’t much either,” says the girl with a dainty shrug of her shoulders.

“Oh! well, I can’t go so far as that with you,” says Severn gravely. “*I’d* say she was *very* much. There is a good deal of her, don’t you think?”

“Ernest, it isn’t right of you,” says Lady Severn, frowning. “You should not lead Fay on to say things she will regret after.”

“I shan’t regret a word about the Wilcotts,” says Fay. “I don’t care for them *at all*. Not a little bit.”

“Captain Severn is engaged to Miss Wilcott,” says Lady Severn abruptly.

Fay turns and looks at him. Slowly the hot blood mounts to her brow.

“Oh!” says she in a low tone. There is a world of reproach—of anger—of contempt in the exclamation. Then she throws up her head. “I am sorry I cannot con-

gratulate you upon your choice," says she with distinct defiance.

"Poor Jessica," says he, flushing in turn under that contemptuous glance.

As if indeed he finds it more than he can endure, he now addresses himself to Lady Severn.

"You will be at their tennis party to-morrow, I suppose," says he.

"Yes, if the day is fine."

"Sure to be. Miss Ashton," with a slight look at Fay, who is standing at the window with her back turned to him, "has not seen The Park yet, I suppose?"

"Not yet."

"I hope, Miss Ashton," teasingly, "it will please you more than the unhappy possessor of it. It is quite perfect in its way."

No answer.

"Yes, quite a show place," says Lady Severn hastily, who knows her little sister well enough to understand that she is now in one of her naughty moods.

“If you said ‘*showy*,’ it would suit its mistress thoroughly,” says Fay, without turning round. “I shan’t go with you, Nettie. I hate places where one is expected to admire, and wonder, and praise at every moment.”

“I don’t think they will ask you to fatigue yourself to that extent,” says Severn, plainly amused. “By-the-bye, may I ask you what you are admiring and wondering at so diligently out there? Let me see if I can’t wonder too.”

He crosses the room, and, taking up his position by her side, pretends to study the landscape, until at last Fay, whose tempers are at all times the vaguest clouds, gives way, and with a half shy, half coquettish glance at him from under her long lashes, breaks into a soft little laugh.

Having achieved his purpose, and restored her to good humor, and a seat where he can watch the passing expressions on her charming face, Severn gives his attention once more to his sister-in-law.

“Did Mrs. Wilcott tell you that Wylding is staying with them again?”

“Her nephew? No. I thought there was some disagreement there. That she—well—expressed a wish that he would keep away from The Park.”

“I expect Jessica over-ruled all that. At all events he came down yesterday.”

“Jessica seems very fond of him. She treats him quite like a brother.”

“*Ye—es!*” says Severn, in a peculiar tone, his eyes on the ground. Then: “I suppose you saw he was victorious in that case ‘*Bunter v. Shields.*’ Carried all before him. A very eloquent defence. The winding up I hear was splendid. They say he is one of the most rising barristers in London.”

“He looks clever—and he is certainly interesting. At least I think him so.”

“So does Jessica!”—with the same curious air as before. “I think him a good sort of fellow enough. He make the best part of his income out of theatrical squab-

bles. They call him the stage lawyer in town."

"Ah! Well—I daresay it pays him," vaguely. "Do you know you just missed Mrs. Barrington?"

"Was she here?"

"Yes. And Pasco—came in almost with her."

"Not *quite*, you think?" laughing.

"No," says Fay suddenly. "The moment after. I saw him ride up to the door. Don't you think——" eagerly—"that she is lovely?"

"I do indeed. You see there is *one* point on which we can agree," says he. "I think her even more than that—distinctly fascinating."

"Pasco is——" Lady Severn hesitates. "Do you think, Ernest, that he——"

"It has grown beyond thinking," says Severn. "I never saw a fellow so much in love in my life. And really one can scarcely wonder at it."

"But," nervously, "*who* is she?"

“Oh Nettie!” cries Fay, with amused reproach. “That is just what Mrs. Wilcott was saying all the time. She has contaminated you. What does it matter *who* Mrs. Barrington is, so long as she can look like a beautiful dream?”

“Yes. That is all very well until it comes to a question of *marrying* her,” says Lady Severn. “And I confess Mrs. Wilcott has made me feel nervous about her. You see if—if she wasn’t anybody—if she turned out to be a person of low birth, I mean—it would be very awkward for Pasco.”

“Perhaps she is an adventuress! A criminal! A female poisoner!” says Ernest. “Good heavens! what should we do then? She might make away with the entire family.”

“Still, it isn’t *quite* a jesting matter,” says Lady Severn.

“I expect Pasco will make it his business to find out, before finally committing himself,” says Severn contentedly. “And if

she *does* happen to belong to Manchester or Birmingham, I confess I for one could forgive her on account of her face."

"So could I," cries Fay. "I should *like* to have her for my sister. I think she has such a *sweet* expression."

"Yes, such a *good* face," agrees Lady Severn. "She looks just like a woman who has never had a bad thought in her mind in all her life. It is to me the purest face."

"Barrington isn't half a bad name, either," says Ernest.

"And certainly she has money," says Lady Severn, in a practical tone.

CHAPTER V.

“Love he comes, and love he tarries,
Just as fate or fancy carries ;
Longest stays, when sorest chidden ;
Laughs and flies, when press'd and bidden.”

IT is now close upon evening. A hot, languorous evening. There had been rain last night, and to-day, as if to make up for it, has been more than usually sultry. Up above in the pale blue sky not a cloud is to be seen, and down below, where all the earth lies heavy beneath the sun's hot rays, not so much as one sweet, cool, refreshing breeze comes to stir the drowsy air.

The very river that runs below the tennis grounds, though swollen by the torrents that fell at midnight, now flows but lazily between its banks, as if too overcome by the great heat to make any haste towards

the great ocean—its goal—far, far away behind the misty hills.

The broad, placid bosom of this river lies white, silvery, tremulous, beneath the burning glances of old Sol, its waters flush with the green meadows that guard it on either side. Large white lilies lie tossing sleepily from right to left, their broad green leaves dipping every now and then into the cooling water as though to refresh themselves.

The banks are crowded with the yellow iris that rises tall and stately, and on them rest every now and then gaudy flies of all hues, their iridescent wings showing brilliantly against the sunlight.

Far away in the distance a quivering purple mist speaks of heat intolerable, and here on the tennis courts they have for the most part thrown aside their racquets at last, and are lounging in groups of twos and threes under huge white umbrellas, with a view to saving themselves from sunstrokes.

Still, some adventurous spirits are to be found, strong to brave the maddening heat.

A slight, meagre girl, bloodless to all appearance, and with a skin distinctly yellow, is playing with a young man her direct counterpart, he being short, massive, ponderous. He is plainly suffering as he runs hither and thither after the balls, but courage sustains him, and an undying desire to shine. In one sense he is shining as brilliantly as ever he himself could desire, but as a player his efforts are distinctly weak. He is evidently determined, however, to do or die.

“It will be ‘die,’ I think,” says a lean man of about thirty-five who is talking to Jessica Wilcott—has, indeed, been her shadow all day, if one can imagine so desirable a thing on such a tropical afternoon. Perhaps Miss Wilcott has imagined it. She certainly looks cooler—in better case—than those around her. Her pale, handsome face shows no sign of undue warmth. Her eyes are calm as usual. She looks, indeed, delightfully undisturbed.

“Absurd, a man of his weight exerting himself like that on such a day,” she says contemptuously. She talks with a curious drawl, not unpleasant, but as if life was low within her.

“Why? Very sensible *I* call it. I dare say he wants to reduce it.” Her cousin, Gilbert Wylding, laughs as he says this, and looks at her. One has a vague feeling that he likes to look at her, that her cold, still manner, her clear cut profile, her dark, long, Jewish eyes have a certain fascination for him.

He himself is an intelligent man, with the unmistakable legal stamp “plain writ” upon him. He wears no moustache, no beard. His face, indeed, is devoid of covering of any sort, and one feels it is well that it is so. A remarkable face, not easily read, with a strong square lower jaw and immense breadth of forehead.

A stern face and hard, yet, withal, not without much human kindliness. There is too a trace of humor in it, that, but for his

calling and the severity of the work that claims him, might have been more pronounced.

“ His partner doesn't want reducing at all events,” says Miss Wilcott. “ Did you ever see so thin a girl? They say it is because she begins to play tennis at dawn, and never leaves off until the short night falls. She won everything last year at the tournaments. Do you admire her? ”

“ I don't care for lemons as a rule,” says Mr. Wylding, “ except in claret cup.”

“ That is rather severe, isn't it? ”

“ Not so severe as *she* is, at all events. Mark what balls she serves to that poor old man, her adversary. What on earth is *he* playing for at this time of life? ”

“ He *will* do it, you know,” says Miss Wilcott with a little shrug. “ Nobody can prevent him. He is old Major Adams, and is popularly supposed to have been born before the flood. He still, however, goes on as gaily as ever. He, *indeed*, has

never learned the trick of growing old gracefully."

"Is *that* the old major?"

"Yes, the old man in the white flannel, a foretaste of his shroud I should ——"

"Hope?" suggests her companion.

"Oh no, I'm not so selfish as that. The world is wide enough for us all. But I thought you knew him, you *should*. He's been born a long, long time. I have *heard* that Adam was his younger brother, but one hears so *many* things."

"Who is severe now?" says Wylding.

"Am I?"

"Rather; however, I don't complain so long as you are not severe to me. What a number of people you have here to-day."

"Yes, and some new faces. That little girl over there, for example. You can just see her between the branches of the trees; she is sitting on the swing. She is Miss Ashton, a step-sister of Lady Severn's."

"Yes, I can see her."

"You can admire *her* at all events."

“Can I? I’m not sure,” with a meaning laugh. “Is that Ernest Severn with her now?”

“Yes,” with a slight frown; but whether at the name, or the insinuation in his speech, Wylding is at a loss to be *sure*.

“I have noticed her,” says he carelessly. “She has chosen a capital place to escape the sunshine——”

“Or observation,” says Miss Wilcott indifferently.

In truth, the leafy shelter that Fay has chosen is so far out of the present world that surrounds her, as to make her practically alone with Captain Severn.

She is sitting on a fantastically arranged swing, and is idly tilting herself to and fro with the help of one small foot. She is evidently enjoying herself, and is looking supremely happy. No smallest idea of flirting with Ernest Severn has entered her head. She is, indeed, too young to life, to society, that the very fact that she knows

him to be engaged to Jessica Wilcott would seem to her a thorough bar against amusement of that kind.

That she *likes* Ernest she has admitted frankly; not only to herself but to her sister, many times. That she thinks Jessica quite unsuited to him, she has admitted to herself alone, as yet.

Captain Severn is looking very happy, too. There is no denying that. The certainty that his betrothed is being all things to her cousin at this moment seems to have no power to check the contentment he is feeling. It is eight days now since Fay came to stay with her sister, and already—already he has known bad hours, when regrets that *must* be vain (*there* lies their sting) have harassed him. Just now, however, he is free from every care, and is ready to enjoy life with a glad heart.

“What is your real name?” asks he suddenly of the little creature who has been chattering gaily to him for the last half-hour.

"Fay."

"Oh, nonsense."

"Fairy, then. Fay would be the pet name for that, would it not?"

"Nonsense again! I don't believe you were actually christened by that eccentric though charming title."

"No?" she laughs a little and glances at him provokingly, and swings herself lightly away *from* him and then back again. "Well, you are right for once. That must be a refreshing sensation for *you!*"

"So it is, but—you don't answer me, however."

"Answer?"

"Yes. I want to know your *real* name."

"For what?"

"It will make you yourself seem more real to me."

She laughs.

"Well, it is—Ashton."

"Oh, of course!" huffily. "If you don't *wish* me to know it——"

“ I do, I think, after all,” says she, with a rather insincere air, however. “ It is—— You won’t like it. But it is—— That’s why I couldn’t bear to tell you. But—it is—— Now *what* would you think of a person who could call a poor, unconscious baby—Susannah?”

“ I know what I should think of some one who should tell me stories. I don’t believe in *that* name either.”

“ Well, ‘ Fancy,’ then.”

“ Fancy what?”

“ Fancy Ashton, of course.”

“ Oh, ‘ *Fancy*’ as a *name*!” He gives way to mirth in spite of himself. “ I don’t believe there was ever anyone so provoking as you,” says he, regarding her lovely saucy little face with ill-disguised admiration. “ Well, it *suits* you, but——”

“ But! Unbeliever!” cries she with a pout. “ There is no pleasing you.”

“ Oh, yes, there is,” with a meaning glance at her.

“ You had better make up your mind to the Susannah,” says she.

“ I couldn't. I don't believe any clergyman worthy of the title would *dare* to christen you Susannah.”

She breaks into merry laughter. Is there something mocking in it?

“ Ah! There is no deceiving you,” cries she, still bubbling over with mirth. “ One can see that. Never mind. I forgive you, although my best efforts have been thrown away. In vain have I dissembled. Come,” slipping from her swing to the ground, “ I see an empty court, and the day is cooler now. Let us try for victory again.”

“ So you really *won't* tell me?” say he, looking at her. “ I don't care. I shall find out from your sister.”

This defiance seems to amuse her more than all that has gone before.

“ Do,” says she. “ And be sure you ask her if it isn't Susannah.”

“ I certainly shan't ask her anything so absurd as that,” says he.

However, when he *does* ask her, it is to learn to his discomfiture that Susannah *is* her name. This little Delilah had beguiled him.

On their way to the court they met poor old Major Adams coming away from it, crestfallen, defeated, worn to a terrible degree. Fay, stopping, says a few pretty words to the tired old bore.

“How kind you *can* be,” says Severn, as he and she walk on again.

“I am always kind to every body, am I not?”

“Not to everybody. Only just now you have been very unkind to me.”

“Oh, to *you*,” saucily. “You are——” eloquent pause.

“Thank you.”

“A sort of brother-in-law,” says she promptly, with the most innocent air in the world. “You are Nettie’s brother, and as Nettie is my sister, why, of course,” triumphantly, “there you are!”

“Never heard anything clearer,” says Severn.

“As to being kind to that poor old major,” says Fay presently, “somehow I always feel one *should* be kind to very old people.”

“But with a limit, surely? Once let the major begin to talk, and——”

“Ah! That is just it! Old people as a rule *always* want to talk. It is the only thing they can do. They can't run about as we can. I like to let them say as much as ever they can. I always seem to remember, when with them, the one sad fact, that they have got so little more time left them in which to talk. Soon—*terribly* soon, the grave must open for them!”

Her tone has changed. She has grown strangely earnest. Severn looks at her in great astonishment.

Who would have thought so frivolous, so bright, so flower-like a thing could have thought so deeply. In a moment, however, she has recovered herself, and has

cast—apparently—all sentiment behind her.

“There is Jessica,” says she, pointing to where Miss Wilcott is sitting talking languidly to a gaunt old lady. “Perhaps after all you had better go and ask *her* to play this set. She is alone now. I,” earnestly, “can get some one else to be my partner.”

“I have no doubt of it,” says he with unintentional bitterness. “Do you wish me to go to Jessica?”

“Well—you see, Mr. Wylding has gone away,” says she, quite without meaning. “Now she has got rid of him she will, of course, be wanting you.”

“Of course. And so Wylding has left her?”

“Yes. He is over there at the other end of the court with Pasco.”

“I wonder why you call Pasco by his Christian name, and not me?” says he.

“You?” She ponders for a second. “Yes, it *does* sound funny, doesn’t it? But I’ll call you Ernest if you like.”

“ I should,” says he. “ And may I call you——”

“ Susannah ? ” mischievously.

“ No, Fay.”

“ Yes. There, go to Jessica.”

“ It looks as if you wanted me out of your way,” says he with a slight frown. “ By-the-bye, you told me your opinion of Jessica yesterday.”

“ Oh ! That is unkind. You *know* I meant nothing—and as you would not *let* me know anything, you should be the last to bring up that subject. I admire her immensely. I think her really *lovely* ! ” says she with enthusiasm.

“ You have *no* fault to find then ? ” with a rather sarcastic intonation that ruffles her.

“ One,” says she. “ If I must admit her. Her voice annoys me. It is so slow—so *drawlly*. It is irritating. It is lifeless. She talks as though she were a fly in October.”

Captain Severn laughs rather constrainedly.

“Oh! And is it in October flies talk?” says he. “How interesting! After all, the one subject never *quite* mastered is natural history. It is always *full* of surprises.”

“I am going to sit down here,” says Fay very stiffly, stopping short beside a long garden chair, on which Lady Severn is seated talking to Mrs. Adams.

CHAPTER VI.

“Yet the first bringer of unwelcome news
Hath but a losing office : and his tongue
Sounds ever after as a sullen bell,
Remembered knolling a departed friend.”

MR. WYLDING and Pasco Severn having isolated themselves somewhat from those around, are engaged in an animated conversation. Pasco had seen a good deal of the lawyer in town, and had taken a tremendous fancy to him—a fancy warmly returned. Just now, Wylding seems to have flung aside the man of law, and become as idle as the rest of them. It is a relief to find himself at last at anchor beside Pasco, who has always appeared to him to be a singularly earnest, strong man—a tenacious man in the midst of a frivolous generation. Of the three bro-

thers Pasco seems, to the thinking man of the world, by many miles the best. Sir George is big, burly, good-natured ; Ernest is—well, hardly worth considering, according to Wylding's private belief. A mere society butterfly. It would be invidious to suggest that circumstances rather than honest belief have brought to birth this severe criticism.

Pasco, although pleased to be with Wylding, has always an occupied air. He seems to be perpetually looking round for something, some *one*, hitherto absent. As a fact Mrs. Barrington, late though the hour is, has not put in an appearance. What has kept her ? Suddenly his face brightens, his eyes light up.

“ Oh ! *there* she is ! ” says he involuntarily. Wylding grows amused.

“ No ? Really ! ” says he.

At this Pasco laughs, amused too.

“ Was it a betrayal ? ” says he. “ Well, she is worthy of it. As I have committed myself so far, I may as well take you on to

the end. Don't you think there is—er—something very special about her?"

He points to a group standing a good way off.

"She's a very pretty girl, no doubt," says Wylding, who in his soul thinks the person he is regarding distinctly plain.

"She's not a girl," says Severn, pleased, however, at the tribute to his love. "She's a widow."

"A widow? Why any one——"

He breaks off suddenly, and fumbling impatiently for his eyeglass, presses it into his right eye.

"*By Jove!*" says he, as if his breath has been taken away.

"What?"

"What the deuce brings *her* here?"

"Who?" asks Pasco again.

"Why that—woman. The one standing at the right of the group."

"A card, I suppose. That's Miss Aldworth."

"Nonsense! I know *her*. I mean the

woman with the lilac flowers in her bonnet."

"The lilac. Why, that is Mrs. Barrington," says Pasco.

"Mrs.——" he pauses. "*Mrs. Barrington!* Who told my aunt to ask *her* here?"

"What do you mean?" says Severn, with a sudden glance that has something savage in it.

"Mean? I mean that that woman over there has no right to *be* there. She——"

"*Speak* man!" says Severn, seeing he pauses. Pasco's face is livid now, there is something murderous in his eyes.

"Why, my dear fellow," Wylding hesitates as if overwhelmed by thought, and now bursts forth. "By George! it *will* be a blow to my aunt! *Speak*. It is I who *can* speak! Why that woman over there was the most notorious woman in town three years ago. She——"

"Damn you, sir! How *dare* you say such things of her?" cries Pasco violently. He is as white as death. He has grasped Wylding by his arm, high up, and makes as

though he would spring at him. Wylding by a sharp movement, not a bit too soon accomplished, shakes himself free.

“Great heavens!” says he. “I never suspected this. I thought when you spoke, it was of the girl down there—I——”

“You are a liar—a damned liar!” says Pasco, trembling from head to foot. “If you have a last remnant of manhood left in you, you will——”

“Be silent,” says the other quickly. “Think of all these people. Already they are looking our way. Be careful, Severn, if only for,” the words stick in his throat, “for *her* sake.” They must, however, be said for *his* sake.

“Come here then,” says Pasco, drawing him behind a heavy laurel hedge. “Now then, sir, speak. The truth! Believe me you shall answer to me—in *blood*—for every lie you have uttered against that lady.”

“For every *lie*. I would to Heaven they *were* lies, and that my blood could wash

them out," says Wylding passionately. "You know how I have regarded you, Severn, that never before have I given a man my friendship—until I met you, I lived on acquaintanceship alone. It sufficed me—but to *you*, I have given my *best*. Would I wilfully hurt or insult you? I *entreat* you to be calm."

"To the point, sir," cries Pasco in a miserable attempt at superiority. The other's evident and most unmistakeable sorrow has sunk into his soul, and withered it; truth lies within that grief.

"You would know all?" says Wylding, very pale now, but thinking it best to conceal nothing.

"All."

"I defended her," says Wylding in a low tone. *He* now is trembling. God alone knows how he shrinks from his task. "You *must* have read it in the papers. The case of that dancing girl, 'Cora Strange,' and her claim on the property of the late Lord Ilton?"

“ ‘Cora Strange, oh, no, *no!* ’” says Severn violently. “ I apologize for that word ‘ lie,’ Wylding, but you mistake, yes—mistake! You,” faintly— “ There is a mistake somewhere.”

“ There is no mistake *here,*” says Wylding slowly, yet with decision. “ As I tell you, I defended her and she won her case. He left her all his money. At least, as much as he could.”

“ Well, but she might perhaps have been a cousin, a niece, a daughter. Now-a-days people of great respectability go upon the stage, who is to say that she——”

“ She was *his mistress!* ” says Wylding in a whisper almost, but without an attempt at compromise.

There is a silence that might well be termed fearful. Anguish, unspeakable fills it. Wylding, expecting nothing but an attack, judging by Severn’s wild face, stands waiting, but Pasco does nothing. He stands silent, motionless. He has forgotten all about the other. This horrible thing

that has fallen into his day has destroyed all minor sentiments. He can feel no longer. Neither grief, nor rage, nor fear—all is a blank.

Wylding, frightened by his appearance, at last rouses him.

“Go home,” says he. “It can’t have gone so far *yet*. Be thankful that you know the truth in time; many a man——”

“I am not thankful,” says the other in a queer tone. “And as for knowing—after all it makes no difference. It would have been better otherwise—different . . . but . . . we . . . we love each other.”

“You are not well, Severn. Go to your own house. Rest will bring sense, knowledge, comfort.”

“Comfort!” Oh, the desolation in that good word.

“Certainly,” says the other with a far greater assurance than he feels. If he had not been safe in the belief that Pasco’s admiration was that ugly girl, would he ever have made that disastrous disclosure? Yes,

yes, surely. What sort of a friend would he be to know a thing of that sort and yet conceal it? Yet now at heart he is sore indeed, that *his* should have been the hand!

“Would you rather have learned it later?” asks he, his own grief making his tone stern. “Hear all, Severn. She was a dancer. Nothing but a ballet-girl. Of good family, I believe, but she ran away from home early and gave herself up to ambition—of a *sort*. She happened to meet with Lord Ilton, an elderly man, and of good character, I understand. But men are mortal, and he fancied her. His own wife was in a mad-house, hopelessly insane for fifteen years before he saw Miss——Mrs.——*you* know,” confusedly, “and according to our clever laws he could not therefore marry again so long as the mad wife lived.”

“Tell me this, if he *could* have married her, would you have advised him to take that step?” asks Severn, laying a cold, clutching hand upon his shoulder. Wyld-

ing's eyes sink, but a determination to stop this disastrous affair at all risks is strong enough to aid him to a just answer.

"No," says he reluctantly, but certainly. "Her life before that was——"

"Oh!" cries Severn, releasing him with a gesture that almost compels his silence. "Oh!" and that only. It is the merest sound, but he staggers back and covers his eyes with his hands. His friend has dealt him his death stroke. He moves away, walking like a drunken man. Wylding follows him.

"This will wear off, Severn," says he stupidly, nervously, hardly knowing what he says.

"Never!" vehemently. "And see here." He turns to Wylding with a sort of dogged fury in his look and tone. "You may all hound her down and try to ruin her and drag her in the dust, and though I might believe all you say, still, I shall be true to her so long as she remains true to me."

“If that is your last word,” says Wylding, “I warn you that I shall take means to prevent your achieving your mad purpose.”

Severn hurls at him a savage word and disappears.

A determination arrived at by a man of Wylding's stamp is not lightly laid aside. Making his way to Sir George Severn's side, he stubbornly leads him away from the others, and pours into his horrified ears the true history of Mrs. Barrington.

“But, my dear fellow, you *must* be mistaken,” says Sir George, horror-stricken. “She is a most respectable person—excellent references. My man of business will tell you all about her. I've let her my own house—small place—Priory, you know.”

“The Priory?—a fit residence for her, on my soul,” says Wylding, with a harsh laugh. He is terribly disquieted still, as he thinks of that last glance Pasco had given him. “I tell you, Sir George, there is *no* mistake. I tell you, too, it is your duty as

his brother to go to her, to lay the facts before her, to——”

“Good heavens! The grave must be a good place after all,” says Sir George, groaning heavily, and lifting protesting hands to the sky.

CHAPTER VII.

“Thy leaf has perished in the green.”

.
“Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.”

WHEN he enters her drawing-room next morning, however—though his heart is dying within him, still his demeanor is all that of the ordinary courteous, if somewhat abrupt, Englishman. He has seen very little of his tenant up to this. But Wylding had given him to understand that she would probably be an unscrupulous person, and that if Pasco had proposed marriage to her, would keep him to his bargain, or else make another very advantageous one for herself.

The room is in shade, all the blinds having been pulled down in a vain endeavor to exclude the heat. These are silk blinds of a soft rose color.

“Meretricious!” mutters Sir George to himself, being naturally prejudiced. The room being empty he has time to make reflections, and to look around him.

It must be confessed it is a charming room—a very bower of roses. Exquisite bowls and foreign vases are filled to overflowing with rich drooping Gloire de Dijons, whilst other homelier roses lie in rich profusion on every table and cabinet. The floor is waxed and partially covered by a huge Turkey carpet, here and there lie Persian prayer rugs; in the corners tall palms rest against dainty screens, and the walls are covered here and there, at long distances, by a few carefully-selected water-colors.

Sir George is looking at one of these when the door opens and Mrs. Barrington comes in. She is looking singularly lovely even for her, and advances to meet him with a bright smile. Something in his return gaze, however—something—*what* is it?—kills her smile almost at its birth. Her

heart gives one great leap, and that old, horrible physical pain seems to clutch it again. She feels she has grown white to her very lips, but she so far struggles with the growing faintness that is threatening to overcome her, to stand upright, and even speak to him with at least an assumption of calm.

“You wish to see me—to speak to me?” says she, her voice cold as death, and as hard. That sudden destruction has come upon her she knows perfectly. It is all over, that one mad dream of respectability—of hope—of rest and peace.

“Yes; and on a rather unhappy business,” says Sir George, staring at his hat and wishing himself dead. “You—er—you——”

“Yes?” in an uncompromising tone. If he had hoped that she would have helped him he finds himself mistaken; and yet, after one short nervous glance at her face, he sees that she *knows*.

“Mrs. Barrington,” says he quickly, “believe me when I say that it is with terrible regret I come here to-day. Be frank with me. Perhaps,” doubtfully, “perhaps, after all, you will be able to explain to——”

“Perhaps,” says she, with a strange smile. Some note in her voice and a touch of defiance in her eyes hardens him towards her. Her very lips are white, but there is an open determination to fight it out to the last that angers him and lowers her still further in his estimation. If she had given in at once, had had recourse to tears, to entreaties— but she looks strong, fierce, almost bold.

“You can answer me one question, at least,” says he stiffly. He has not sat down, and now rests his hand upon the back of a chair near her. “Who was Mr. Barrington?”

“An unfortunate question. It is indeed the one I cannot answer——”

“ You cannot ? ” sternly. “ You refuse ! ”

“ Certainly not. I merely said I could not.”

“ You mean by that—— ? ”

“ That I don't know myself.” She looks at him fixedly. “ There was no Mr. Barrington,” says she.

“ Ah ! I am then to understand—— ? ”

“ Anything you wish. I suppose I am to understand that you would like a new tenant here ? ”

“ That, of course,” says Sir George coldly. “ There is, however, something more. I have heard—I have been told—that my brother Pasco has been seen here very frequently of late.”

“ Have you ? ”

“ I have said so,” returns Sir George, frowning heavily. “ I see I may as well speak openly. All your early life has been made known to me, and therefore it is desirable that any—friendship between you and my brother should at once come to an end.”

“That is a matter for *his* consideration,” replies she calmly, almost insolently. Her beautiful face is set like marble. She is quite composed now, with an ease and a grace unspeakable. She leans backwards, takes a huge fan off a table behind her, and opens it. Her consummate self-possession destroys the small grains of it that Sir George can command.

“I am to understand——?” says he again, stammering. He stops short, and she breaks into a low but mirthless laugh.

“You are bent on understanding a great deal, it seems to me,” says she. “I am afraid it will prove too much for you. Why don’t you give it up, or else say plainly what it is you *do* want to understand?”

“I will,” says Sir George, with sudden fire, the blood mounting to his brow. No one likes being held up to ridicule. “Do you mean that under the circumstances you are still determined to keep my brother to any rash proposals he may have made to you?”

“ I don't think he thought them rash.”

“ They *were*, nevertheless, under——”

He pauses. He has been about to repeat himself and again incur further ridicule. He is not to escape, however.

“ Under the circumstances,” supplements she, smiling, “ there is nothing like iteration, after all. It impresses one so. You were saying, Sir George——?” She leans towards him.

“ I was asking you,” says he, “ whether you meant to keep my brother to his word.”

“ What word ? ”

“ To any offer of marriage he may have made you.”

A thought seems to strike her at this instant. It renders her mute. Once again that awful pain grasps her heart. He—*he*—could *he* have sent this man ?

“ Am I to regard you as your brother's envoy ? ” asks she with parched lips. “ Has he sent you here to-day—to ask that question ? ”

“He is entirely ignorant of my coming,” replies Sir George, who is far too much of a gentleman to even *see* the grand opportunity he has created for himself. The old copy-books tell us that “an opportunity once lost is never to be regained.” Sir George has lost *his*.

Mrs. Barrington leans back in her chair, and for the first time since Sir George entered the room a soft flush colors her cheek. *He* has not been false then! All is not lost yet. And this man—his brother—by what authority has he come here to insult her? Alas, she ought to be used to it! Has not insult, open and covert, been her food through life? Save from one only—that man who now lies dead! Yet, had he lived, would she have been true to him? She had not loved him. She had never loved until she came down to this quiet, remote little country spot, so hidden away from the wide, horrible, staring world that she had believed she and her past would be safe here—safe from discovery. She had

only desired peace from it, and lo! it had given her all things. Love. *Such* love. She clenches her hands together. Oh, remorseless Heaven! Does *he* know? Have they told *him*?

“He—your brother—he knows nothing, then?” Her lips can barely frame the question.

“I cannot go so far as that. Yes. He knows. He knows everything—except that I am here to-day.”

To this she says nothing. *He knows!*—and has not come to her. A wild storm of passion seizes upon her and shakes her very soul. Ah! to *see* him!—to have him *near* her!—to compel him to look into her eyes. By the power of her own love, that seems to rend her in this her last hour, she knows she can bring him back to her, be his revolt never so strong. Sir George’s voice breaks in upon her reverie and brings her back to the present.

“You have not answered me,” says he
“If there *was* an engagement between you

and him, I wish to hear from your own lips that *now* it is an end."

"You will never hear that from me," cries she, rising suddenly and confronting him like a thing at bay—some fierce wild thing that will not be tamed. "Who are *you*, that you should come here to-day to interfere between him and me? How *dare* you come? I will give no word—no assurance. He is mine—*mine*, I tell you!" throwing out her arms with an indescribable gesture. "I *defy* you—*all* of you, to take him from me. Take everything else—my hopes—my name—my character!" She breaks into terrible laughter here, and raises her hands and presses them with all her force against each side of her head. "*My* character! But you cannot take *him*."

"I know mine is a difficult mission," says Sir George, now growing once again a little uncertain, "but, of course, compensation would be made you; you would suffer, and we—he——"

She has turned upon him now like a tigress. Her beautiful eyes are glaring.

“*He?*” she gasps.

“No, no! He, of course, has nothing to do with my proposition,” says he, feeling cowed in spite of his honest manhood that has nothing to reproach itself with. “But—if you will permit me to——”

He stops dead short. She has come a little closer to him, and has raised her right hand. It points to the door. Not a word passes her lips; yet mechanically he obeys her. He takes up his hat, makes her a silent salutation, and goes down the room. A bitter feeling is his as he takes his homeward way. He has gained nothing by his visit to her, and he has lost his sense of dignity. She—that woman—had ordered him from her presence as though he were a whipped cur, and he had obeyed her. And—she will marry Pasco in spite of all. Of that he feels assured.

A turn of the road brings him face to face with the latter.

CHAPTER VIII.

“I’ll give thee misery, for here she dwells ;
This is her house, where the sun never dawns.”

A MOMENT’S glance at his brother’s face makes him thankful he had walked. It would have been thoroughly unpleasant to have had a groom as witness of the scene that is so surely coming. Pasco’s eyes are brilliant, his mouth forbidding. There is something dangerous in his whole air. No one knows, save he himself and One other, how he got through the night. The morning, at all events, has shown the marks that terrible vigil has left upon him. He is changed—so haggard that Sir George’s kindly heart bleeds for him. Has it gone so far ?

“You have been with her ?” says Pasco, striding up to his brother with a murderous

hatred in his glance, "what have you said to her?"

"You shouldn't take it like this," says Sir George. "It was for *your* sake I went at all."

"What have you said to her?" repeats the other, in a dull, wild sort of way.

"Very little, and that to no purpose."

"I'm glad of that—if I can be glad of anything. What had *you* to do with it? Look here," savagely, "I'm going to her now, and if I hear you have insulted her in any way, brother or no brother, you shall answer to me for it."

"You don't know what you are saying," says Sir George, contemptuously, losing his own temper in a degree. "As to insulting——"

The sneer is hardly past his lips when the other, maddened by misery, has sprung upon him. There is a silent swaying together of two bodies, and then Sir George, being far the stronger, presses his brother

back against the wall that bounds the right side of the wall.

“Are you mad?” says he breathing heavily. “Pasco!—*think!* There!” panting still, and looking at his brother as the latter stands staring back at him—a little sobered perhaps. “I have done all I can for you. Follow out your own destruction as quickly as you can, I shall not interfere with you again.”

“You have come to a wise conclusion. It would be useless,” says Pasco, doggedly. “I asked her to marry me on Tuesday last. I am going to her now to ask her to renew the promise she gave me then.”

“Go,” says Sir George bitterly. “I suppose you know what you are doing?”

“I know that I shall lose all belonging to me, but I shall gain *her.*”

“A gain indeed!” with increasing bitterness.

“I know all that you would say. I am prepared for everything. I have thought

it all out. If she will come with me, there are other worlds where one's past misfortunes are unknown."

"*Other* worlds! With your own world well lost."

"Well lost indeed," feverishly. If it is for *her*. There. Go. You cannot understand." He turns away.

"Stay. One moment!" says Sir George, striding after him. "Pasco! for heaven's sake pause, take a day—to consider. It is your whole existence, remember, that lies in the balance; forget what *we* shall feel—think of yourself only. Do not *wilfully* fling your entire life into"—with an expressive passionate gesture—"the gutter."

"I shall give my life to *her*!" says Pasco, doggedly; and throwing off his brother's restraining arm, strides away.

He had had no doubt of the truth. This thought strikes Sir George forcibly as he sees him disappear up the road and into the gates of The Priory. No doubt, and *still!* Sir George, with a smothered and vehement

exclamation, gives up hope, and goes homeward with bent head, and a most sorrowful spirit.

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She is sitting quite still. It might almost seem that she had never stirred since Sir George's departure. Her head is a little bent; there is a terrible look in the usually calm, reserved face. She rises as he enters and stands confronting him—not giving her hand or the welcoming smile that has grown so dear to him, nothing, but that long, *long* gaze that seems as though it would rive asunder the veil that conceals his soul from hers.

He too makes no advance. He stands silent, just looking at her with such a world of reproach and despair in his face as almost kills her. She would scarcely have known him. His beautiful face is lined and aged with misery. His eyes are dull. A most sorrowful sternness curves his lips.

At last it grows beyond bearing, and she speaks.

“ You have found me out,” says she, the words dropping frozenly from between her parched lips. She shows no sign of feeling, however, except that the purple pansies at her throat are quivering. He can see that.

“ It is true, then? ” says he.

“ All true! All! You have come as my judge and executioner——” she would have braved it out, but suddenly she chokes and her eyes fall before his, her head droops. “ Oh! ” moans she as if dying. In truth, at this moment, the bitterness of death is hers.

“ Sir George was here? ” He has not attempted to go near her.

“ Yes.”

“ He was——”

“ You must not blame him. Not a *word* must be said against him,” says she in an eager whisper. “ He was kind, forbearing. Oh! too kind--to such as——”

“Be silent!” interrupts he sharply. “Let us talk this out. It has nothing to do with him or another, only with you and me. That man they tell me of—he ——”

“Lord Ilton!” says she very quietly. It is the quietness of despair. “You would know about him. You had hoped perhaps there was some mistake somewhere that I might have cleared up. But there is none. You have heard the real truth at last. My name is *not* Barrington! I was *never* married! And he—Ilton—*he*——” she sinks heavily into a chair as if gasping for breath —“I was his mistress.”

A strange silence has fallen upon the room. The fitful sunbeams straying from place to place rest at last lovingly on the hands that cover the poor, shamed face.

“You loved him?” says Severn at last, his tone is so unreal that it startles her.

“Oh, no, *no, no!*” cries she wildly. “I have wronged you in every way, but not in *that* way. Not there. He was a good man! Was *kind* to me. I think he loved

me. He would have married me but that his wife was alive, in a mad house. Within six months he died."

She pauses and pulls at the laces round her throat as if suffocating.

"He left me all he could leave me. It was a great deal. There was a law-suit, and Mr. Wylding defended me. *He* told you?"

Severn makes a gesture of assent.

"Ah, yes! There is no escape—*none*," says she. "Well—well," absently and slowly, as if hardly equal to the task of keeping her mind on her subject, "he died and left me without fear of poverty. I did not love him, but I was grateful to him. I think," hurriedly, "I was more grateful to him for his kindness to me living than for his kindness when he was dead. But I did not know that until it was too late to tell him. He was," slowly, "the best man I ever knew."

"And yet——"

“And yet all I had to give him, living or dead, was a bald gratitude. I gained my suit. Mr. Wylding gained it for me. He was enthusiastic about it, I remember, and was very sympathetic, and congratulated me afterwards on my victory. I wish he had been able to congratulate me on my *death* rather. See,” with a sudden desperate gesture, “what has come of it.”

She rises and flings open a window as if gasping for air. Pasco is sitting quite still, his eyes on the ground.

“Don’t go on,” says he now, but in a lifeless sort of way.

“Oh, yes. I must make a finish. Such a story as mine,” bitterly, “should not be left incomplete. The last chapter is always the best. There the wicked woman comes to grief—according to her due—and so—*I*——” A heavy sigh that is almost a sob chokes her.

“Well! I thought if I came down to some obscure little village—some place well hidden away from the big, terrible

world—I should find safety in it for me and my secret. England, I told myself, must be full of such places. Sweet country villages, where such lives as mine are never even heard of—where I should have no fear of meeting any one who had ever known me before. I craved above all things, rest and security. I thought I might even do some good amongst the poor of my ideal village—something that might be regarded by God as reparation——”

She pauses, and two heavy tears roll down her cheeks. Yet she does not seem to be crying. She does not even seem conscious of those two miserable betrayers of the supreme grief within her. She recovers herself almost immediately, and goes on in the dull monotone she has adopted—a note well suited to her woeful tale.

“It was a foolish hope,” says she, sighing oh! so sadly! “Where is rest to be found for such as I am? Not in *this* world! I came, and what follows you know. For eight weeks I was divinely happy. Eight

weeks' happiness out of twenty-seven years of misery! A small allowance, surely. But it is all I have ever had. No. In this world there is no hope for—some poor wretches!”

Her head sinks upon her bosom, she covers her eyes with her hand.

He has risen to his feet and has come closer to her—quite close now.

“There are other worlds,” says he hoarsely. “Let us go in search of one *together*, Janet.”

She regards him strangely for a moment. Is he like all the others? No—even if he means *that*. He cannot be like them. He is giving up something—a *great* deal—all his life here—when he speaks of this foreign scheme.

“Oh, no,” says she gently. She shakes her head. “I shall leave this place, of course, and go back to London. After all that is the one place where true isolation may be found.”

“ You will live there *alone*, with no friends to speak to you—to comfort you——”

“ I have one friend,” says she, simply. “ She was a dresser at the—the theatre where I—*danced!* ” It seems to give her positive physical agony to say this. “ She grew attached to me when I was there, and when Lord Ilton died I asked her to come with me and be my housekeeper. She was faithful—I could trust her, and she was someone to whom I could speak—of—the cruel past. She accepted my proposal—she came with me—she has proved a friend indeed.”

“ She can travel with us,” says Severn, slowly. “ When we are married and are going abroad, you can take her with you as your maid.”

“ *Married!* ” says she. She has turned very white.

“ Yes.”

“ You would marry me after all? after——”

“When first I saw you, I knew you were the only woman I should ever marry. I think so still. When can you be ready?”

“Never—*never!*” says she.

“Janet, what are you saying?”

“What I *mean!* Do you think”—passionately—“that you are the *only* person who can be generous. Do you suppose that I—I—who love you, am going to be the one to spoil your life! No! don’t look at me like that! I tell you if you knelt to me for a thousand years I should still refuse to link my wretched life with yours.”

She means it. All at once it has come to her—the terrible truth—that she *cannot* marry this man—that she *dare* not destroy his life—the life most precious to her. She has thought she could do it—she has defied Sir George, and told herself, whilst looking at him, that she could carry through her cruel determination to make his brother her own. But now—the very power of her love constrains her. She must let him

go free, and endure to the end the utter loneliness that Fate has allotted as her portion. There is no hope—no escape.

“What has George been saying to you?” asks he.

“I told you. He was particularly careful. He did not influence me in any way. Do you think I cannot judge for myself where *you* are concerned?”

“I do not ask you to stay here,” says he in a low voice. “Not even in this country. There are other lands where everything will be unknown.”

She breaks suddenly into a low fierce laugh. *Unknown!* What land can they go to where *he* will not know? It is a wild laugh that shakes her slender frame.

“You can laugh,” said he, too wretched himself to mark the wretchedness of her mirth.

“Why not? Why not?” cries she, vehemently. “Shall I not have no crying to do by-and-bye, think you? Do not grudge me my laughter now. *My laughter!*”

There is now such misery in her tone that it rouses him from his own abstraction, and compels him to hear it.

“What do you mean?” says he, quickly.

“Nothing — nothing — nothing!” She puts up her hands to her head. “There, go! leave me!” cries she violently. “It is all over—all at an end!”

“Not if you love me.”

“Who could believe in *my* love?” exclaims she. “If *now* you believe, do you think the time would not come when doubt would creep in—when you would say, ‘she pretended to me, as she pretended to others.’ No,” lapsing into a sullen mood, “I *tell* you—*go!* whilst there is yet time.”

“There is no time when I shall leave you,” says he, “unless, indeed, you drive me from you.”

“That time has come, then,” says she, looking like death.

“If you send me away now I shall return again.”

“I think not—I hope not. When we part to-day, it will be finally; it is our last hour, Pasco. In the future do not dwell remorsefully upon *that* Always remember it was a worthless woman who arranged our parting. After to-day we shall never meet again—*Never!*”

“We shall meet again in a year,” says he, with a settled determination in his tone.

“No, no! I refuse to listen to that. To-day will see my own happy little hour at an end. Remember always that it was *my* doing,” says she, feverishly. “I should *like* you to remember that. Even though I am a most worthless woman, I did that one good deed. It should count for me. Go—go now!”

“To return!” says he, doggedly. “In the meantime, if ever you should want me—I shall leave you an address . . . I shall send it to you by post. It will find me always. It will be sent on to me.”

“I shall not want you!” says she, her

head bent, her hands tightly folded on her knees.

“That is the first time you have ever said what was not true to me,” says he. “Is it not so?”

“Perhaps. But how about others?” She lifts haggard, defiant eyes to his. “Do you think I have not known *how* to lie? There! There! There!’ wearily, “I am not worth so great a coil.” Some phrases belonging to her old life at the theatre still cling to her.

“In a year,” says he, “I shall return. That time I will give you to make up your mind as to whether you will link your fate with mine, or— But there is no alternative. I will not suggest one. You love me and I love you. Our love is strong enough to blot out all the past. In the meantime—” for the first time he approaches her and takes her hand—“you will not forget me.”

“I pray God that in that time you will forget *me*,” returns she.

“ Pray for something else. You will not get the desired answer to *that*. Pray for something possible. I shall go abroad next week; we shall be better apart for a little while until you have time given you in which to arrange your thoughts. This is June. The 21st of June. Some day like this next year you shall hear from me. I shall send you a sign to say I am coming.”

“ A sign ! ”

“ Yes. It sounds rather second class, doesn't it ? ” says he with a most mournful attempt at a smile. “ What Colin would say to his Phyllis. But—I'll leave it so ! And the sign shall be pansies, such as these,” touching the bunch of drooping purple things at her throat. “ *They* shall be a sign from me to you that I am coming.”

“ Ah,” says she sharply. “ They are for *death*.”

“ No ! For thoughts.”

“ For death, I've always heard. These purple blossoms are made to lie on graves.

You have chosen a proper symbol. Death !
It is the one thing left me to hope for !”

“ Don't talk like that,” says he roughly.
“ We will change the sign then.”

“ No,” hastily, “ no, let it be so. I like it. It is your own choice. I *like* it ! And after all, what does it matter ? I shall not get those pansies !”

“ You think I shall forget ? ”

“ I *hope* you will forget.”

“ But you do not think it, I see.” There is a touch of triumph in his tone. “ After all, you understand me,” says he.

She is deadly pale.

“ You said you were going,” says she, looking at him. She is evidently trying to command herself. She is so white that he fears she is going to faint.

“ Yes, I am going.” He takes her in his arms and holds her close against his breast.

“ Good-bye, *my soul*,” says he.

She hardly returns the embrace, and

even struggles a little as if to release herself. He lets her go.

“Janet! *Remember!*” says he in a hoarse whisper. She makes a little vague gesture that he cannot understand, and turns aside. He moves towards the door. Suddenly a faint sound reaches him. He turns.

She is standing where he had left her, holding out her arms to him.

“Oh, Pasco! Oh, darling! Oh! . . .
one moment.”

Could there be a worse moment than that? He asks himself that question when she has at last pushed him from her, and he finds himself walking homewards through the soft, evening air, with happiness lying a dead thing behind him.

CHAPTER IX.

“They who tell me that men grow hard-hearted as they grow older, have a very limited view of this world of ours.”

SHE stands still where he has left her, listening—listening always to the steps that are going from her. After a while, as if unable to command her strength, she sinks into the chair behind her and presses her handkerchief to her lips. Her teeth meet on it, but she is unconscious of everything save those departing footsteps.

Now, now they have gone down the stairs, and now he is crossing the hall. And now—he is at the hall door. The servant is opening it. There is yet time to call him back, to fling herself into his kind arms, and—ruin his life.

“Oh! *no!*” She had half risen with a passionate longing in her eyes—but now—

the passion dies away into the saddest, greyest ashes, and she staggers backwards, a mere wreck upon the cruel ocean of life.

At this moment the hall door closes. The sharp click of the lock is known to her. Even still she can hear his step crunching on the gravel path. But now—now it is gone; she leans forward as if to *compel* her ears to the service required of them, but *no use*. He is gone—*gone* for ever For ever! FOR EVER!

She throws her hands above her head; but not the smallest sound escapes her. Why was she born? Had she *asked* to be brought into a world that would treat her like this? All through her horrible lament, however, there runs a voice that renders it even more intolerable. “My own fault? My own fault!” cries this voice, that is unappeasable—incessant!

She cannot bear it! Rising, she flings herself bodily upon a sofa, and buries her head in the cushions. Oh! that thus easily she could bury herself out of sight. If—if she had

known—if—— She grows confused—a pain even keener than this mental one has now caught her. She presses her hand to her heart. Oh! the agony! And now the two hands clutch at the seat of pain—and now——

It is quite an hour later when the house-keeper enters the room. A gaunt woman almost forbidding in appearance, with a face marked by small-pox and a stern, cold mouth. Her eyes, however, as they light on that stricken form lying so motionless upon the sofa, seem to alter suddenly. They grow eager—frightened—transfigured, for love lies in them. Love that beautifies all things. She rushes forward. “Janet! Janet!” cries she in a low tone, yet one replete with passionate tenderness, It seems a strange address from a woman clothed in the garb of servitude as she is to the slender, exquisitely formed woman lying on the sofa. But the days had been when the two were equal, and in the agony of the moment the woman had forgotten

the gulf that since had spread itself between them. A gulf not created by that poor creature lying there unconscious.

The housekeeper, lifting her in her strong arms, turns her face to the light. She is still breathing. She is alive still. Alive, thank God for that above all things! After a minute or two Mrs. Barrington stirs painfully and opens her eyes. Her lips are blue.

“ You must be *mad* to lie like that,” says the woman, the relief following on seeing the eyes open acting on the fear and grief going before rendering her now even more stern than usual. “ Here! sit up.” She lifts Mrs. Barrington in a sitting position, pressing down the pillows behind her back. “ What was it ? ” asks she. “ The same old pain ? The heart again ? ”

“ Ah—the heart ! ” says Mrs. Barrington in a strange tone that puzzles the other.

“ Well—there is more ! ” says she in her grim way. “ What makes you speak like

that? And there's a queer look about you too. — *He* was here, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Ah! you've been having it out with him—what?"

All through the roughness of her manner an extreme and almost vehement affection betrays itself.

Mrs. Barrington smiles at her—a wan smile that is affirmative.

"He knows then? He has been told?"

Mrs. Barrington smiles again. Oh! *what* a smile.

"Damn the one that told him then!" says the woman with a strange ferocity. Her eyes gleam, she uprears her gaunt figure, and breathes heavily. She turns to her mistress as though to say something further, and then—grows quite calm.

That pale, almost dying face! Is *she* to be the one to make it paler? If she ate her heart out would it do any good? A sense of despair paralyzes the woman. She subdues her anger by an heroic effort, and

whilst giving way to murderous thoughts of Pasco, who, she believes, has proved unfaithful, still manages to regard Janet with the old, quiet, stern glance.

“ You know you have been warned to avoid excitement of all kinds. Is any man worth dying for? Is the grave better than this life? ”

“ Have you a doubt? ” says Mrs. Barrington, speaking in a faint whisper, and with a touch of something in her voice that might almost be termed amusement—a shadow of it.

“ A great many! ” says the woman sharply. “ Life is *life!* There is nothing like it. Don't you want to know what is going on? What *he* is going to do for example! Hah! ” as she sees a change cross Mrs. Barrington's face. “ I told you so! Nobody ever wants to *be* nobody! Come now, rouse yourself; sit up a bit. There are other things in the world besides that man, He is, of course, like all the rest—fair-weather friends! Why should you pin your

faith to any one of them all? They all laugh and love and ride away, and forget——”

“*Ah!* АН! Forget. He *will* forget!” Janet has broken into a terrible cry, and has fallen back on her cushions.

“There, there!” says the housekeeper. “It was only a word, darling. A word well meant. And if you *could* forget. Now. There, *there!* Come,” sternly, “be sensible! If you persist in giving way to emotion of this kind, some day it will carry you off.”

“Carry me off!” she has broken into an hysterical laugh. “Why, you would make him and death one. That is what *he* wanted to do—to carry me off.”

“*He?*”

“Yes, *yes,*” excitedly, sitting up again, but always with her hand pressed to her side, and with her words coming in little gasps. “You thought otherwise, didn’t you? But he is true—true as steel!”

“He asked you to go with him?” says the woman in a dazed sort of way.

“Yes, and you too. Come,” laughing wildly, “*there* was generosity for you! Not only me, the disgraced one, the one his own brother thinks only worthy to be trodden under foot, and—and—*with justice!*—but he was so careful of me, that when I said I could not leave you, he arranged that you should come away with us and sail to lands unknown.”

She falls back exhausted, still laughing miserably.

The woman, taking a bottle from her pocket, looks quickly round her, and seeing a tiny colored glass upon one of the tables, pours a few drops from the bottle into it and gives it to her mistress. Janet swallows it and grows by degrees calmer.

“Now, not another word,” says the woman seeing her again about to speak.

“Acknowledge, then, you wronged him. He asked—he *implored* me to marry him and go abroad with him.”

“Well, why don't you go?” says the woman.

“Oh, no!” she shakes her head. The faint color that her cheeks had regained now quits them again. The housekeeper grows alarmed. “*That* would mean misery for me, not happiness.” Her voice has become almost inarticulate.

“Come upstairs to your bed,” says the housekeeper quickly. “Come, you can think it all out as well there as here, and rest is what you want.”

“*Rest!*” says Mrs. Barrington, slowly.
“*Rest.*”

She says nothing more. The housekeeper, passing her arms under her, lifts her to her feet, and almost carries her on her short journey upstairs.

CHAPTER X.

“And to his eye
There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him.”

“So he has gone abroad,” says Fay, raising tearful eyes to Ernest Severn’s face. “Poor, *poor* fellow. He seemed broken-hearted. Oh, it was *hard*, wasn’t it?”

“Well, I don’t know,” says Ernest, riveting his eyes upon the ground (they are in the garden) and feeling himself a monster.

“You don’t *know!*” with awful emphasis. “I *suppose*,” with severity as awful as the emphasis, “you know this much, at all events—that he loved her and that she loved him.”

“Yes—of course—but——”

“*But* why, what more do you want?” indignantly. “I think I never heard of so

sad a case. And it appears she behaved splendidly! Actually *refused* to marry him! George has been in *such* a way ever since. I believe it was all his fault. But," spitefully, "he is just like you. I daresay *he* doesn't believe in love either, though I'm sure Nettie is a perfect model of a wife."

"*Who* says I don't believe in love?" demands he hotly.

"I do," boldly.

"Simply because I think Pasco is well off a marriage with a woman who—
who——"

"She was lovely," says Miss Ashton, inconsequently.

"I daresay."

"I heard you say so yourself, over and over again."

"Very likely. But, as I suppose you have heard before, this loveliness——"

"I haven't heard anything," says she, pettishly tilting up a charming little shoulder against him. "She was lovely,

and she was *sweet!* That to me is everything, so *there.*"

"You carry out my view exactly," says he, unmoved. "Permit me to finish my sentence. I suppose you have heard before this that *some* sweets are not good for us?"

"*You* must be a sweet," says she impertinently. "Though," with an irrepressible laugh, "one wouldn't think it, because you certainly aren't good for *me.*"

"I'm good *to* you for all that," says he undaunted. "I'm trying to show you the right path, only you won't be led by me. All women are unreasonable."

"According to all *men,*" quickly, casting at him a disdainful glance from under her heavily fringed lids. "That is one of the old foolish beliefs to which people still cling because their grandfathers so clung before them. They have no other reason. Once in the dark ages, some sour old bachelor collected together all the vices of men, and wrote them down, and then attributed them to women. And now his calumnies have

become settled beliefs with all the masculine world. But *we* know better. All women are unreasonable you say. But," with withering scorn, "what are all *men*, I wonder?"

"Fools!" says Captain Severn, with cheerful humility.

She glances at him doubtfully a moment, a little taken aback by this ready submission, perhaps, and then says relentlessly:

"So they are!"

After this, as might rationally be expected, there is silence for a minute or two.

"I must say," says he, in a distinctly offended tone, "you are a very severe critic."

"I only indorse your own sentiments," returns she icily.

"There is one sentiment, however, you refuse to credit me with. You say I don't believe in love."

"I said," prevaricating mildly, "that I supposed Sir *George* didn't."

“ You said *I* didn't,” persistently.

“ Oh! Did I? Well—*Do you?* ”

“ *Fay,*” says he suddenly—sharply. He catches her hand, but she breaks herself resolutely from him, and turns to face him with gleaming eyes.

“ Well? ” says she defiantly.

“ You know what I mean,” says the young man defiantly in turn.

“ Know *what?* ” Her very lips are white, and her low broad forehead lined with an ominous frown. “ You give me credit for more intelligence than I possess. I know nothing, *nothing!* ”

“ Ah! because you *won't* know,” says he.

There is silence for a moment or two, and then—

“ I hope I *don't* know,” says she slowly.

“ If I do, how am I to regard you again—as an honorable man? ”

“ *Fay,* be reasonable,” says he, forgetting the late argument. A little derisive laugh breaks from her.

“*Reasonable!* you forget. I am a woman—by your own showing! I could not be that.”

“Listen to me,” says he. “I want to tell you a story.”

“I *hate* stories,” returns she restlessly.

“Let me put a case before you then?”

“Well—make it short,” says she.

“If—supposing—there should be two people, both young—who, in an absurd moment, thought that they—that is——”

“It is a rather involved case, isn’t it?” asks she, glancing up at him mischievously; that light attack of nervousness that was more than half anger, that troubled her a while ago, has now entirely disappeared. The anger certainly is all gone, and if any of the nervousness still remains, it is carefully hidden away.

“No. No. It is very simple. But I feel you are not listening—*not caring.*”

“Well. I will listen now.”

“Oh, no, you have spoiled it,” says he impatiently. “I *couldn’t* go on now. Only

this remains. I shall never marry Jessica."

She turns to him quickly, passionately, and then controls herself.

"You should tell that to her, not to another," says she coldly. "If you must tell it at all. But—your promise?"

"Given when I was a mere boy! Does that hold a man for all his life? And besides, it would be different if she cared, but she does not. At least not for *me*."

Miss Ashton lifts her dark eyes, and regards him curiously for a moment.

"There is such a thing as jealousy," says she.

"If you imagine I am jealous of Wylding, you don't know me," retorts he. "Oh, if I could *only* believe that she honestly cared for him, what a relief it would be. But—*could* she care?"

"You wrong her," says Fay, in a low tone. "She has a heart in her body somewhere. I am sure of that. I am *not* sure, however, that you do not possess it."

“And yet you have watched her day by day. Fay, let me speak to you openly. Already you know I don't care for her. You *must* know that she is equally indifferent to me. To her cousin, Gilbert Wylding, she has given all the love of which she is capable.”

“Ah! who can be sure of that?” says she, arguing the point even against her better judgment. Even to her, of late—and she is a newcomer to the county—it has seemed that Jessica Wilcott has given kinder words and smiles to Wylding than to any other man of her acquaintance—than even to the man she has promised to marry. But then might not all this be the result of pique? Has Ernest been a devoted lover? She lifts her eyes to Severn's.

“Perhaps it is your fault,” says she.

“I daresay I am always in fault so far as you think,” returns he bitterly. “You refuse to give me a chance. And yet you *must* see for yourself how things are going.”

“If,” says Fay, in a little troubled tone, her pretty face growing sad and distressed, “if she is going to prove false to you, I—you *know* how sorry I shall feel for you.”

“False!” Good heavens! I hope she *will* prove false!” cries he. “Oh! if once I could feel free again; free—to tell—the one I really love, *how* I love her!”

His eyes meet hers. He makes a quick irrepressible movement in her direction. In vain to deny him. He has his arms round her, and, after one faint effort at repulsion, she gives way, and her small, pretty head sinks upon his shoulder.

“It is wrong—*wrong*,” sobs she vehemently.

“Oh, no! *Nothing* is wrong if you love me as I love you. You *do* love me, Fay.”

“Ah, you know it,” says she. “You have known it for ever so long. That is why I *hate* you.”

“Well, you know that I love you too,” says he, pressing his cheek to hers, and too much agitated to take notice of the as-

tonishing nature of her answer to his simple question. "My darling! Don't be so unhappy. It will all come right, and she——"

"Oh, no. No; it is wicked, dishonorable, horrible. Perhaps she loves you in spite of all we know. She may"—anxiously—"in fact," looking at him with loving eyes, "I'm sure she *must!*"

"Nonsense, sweetheart. That is a mere phantasy of your brain. We are heartily sick of each other, she and I. I have known that for a long time. And besides——"

"Well, it is no use speaking to me," says she, sighing heavily. "I can only feel one thing—that you have given your word to her, and that you love me."

"That is two things," says he. "But what if she doesn't want my word?"

"Ah! If *she* would say so!"

"I would to heaven Wylding would *make* her say it," says he miserably. "Not that it makes much difference about *him*."

Now that I know you care for me, my own little, sweet, precious darling, I shall go up to The Park to-morrow, and tell Jessica that I have changed my mind about—many things.”

“Don’t do that,” says she quickly. She releases herself from his loving arms and stands back from him. “I couldn’t *bear* you to do that. It would be dishonorable, and I should always feel that it was I who had driven you to do what—what the world would consider——”

“I don’t think of the world,” says he. “*You* are my world. There is nothing beyond.”

“Then you *do* think of the world,” says she, with a quick flash of wit, “and a censorious one, too, for *I* should condemn a breach of faith in anyone.”

“But how if you found this to be no breach?”

“Ah! But how shall I find that?”

“Fay! Trust me! Believe in me!” cries he, passionately, drawing her to him, and

encircling her little fragile form in his strong arms. "There is no dishonor anywhere, neither with me nor Jessica. She is as free from blame as I am. We were both hurried into an engagement that had no hold upon our hearts. But now—*now!* My beloved—my darling!" pressing her head down against his breast, "you know how it is with me. I love you, Fay; if I talked to you for ever I could say nothing stronger than that."

"And I—I love you too!" says she, breaking into bitter tears, "but it is all useless! *Ail!* If she—*of her own will*—does not release you from your engagement to her, I *cannot* listen to you."

"Oh, Fay!—be merciful! If I speak to her——"

"No. It would not be the same thing. It would not be *right!* If she were to tell you she didn't want to marry you, that would be different. I should"—*naively*—"be happy, then! But otherwise——"

“You raise a barrier between us that will never be razed,” says Severn, desperately. “She is governed so far by her mother that she would hardly dare to break with me.” He speaks sincerely, but in this he wrongs Jessica. “If you decide upon refusing me when *I* have ended this loveless engagement that now ties me—why, I shall not end it. As well be miserable one way as the other.”

She is silent.

“Speak, Fay!”

“You proposed to her of your own free will—she has not spoken to you any word that would betray her desire to break her engagement with you. I think you should keep to it,” says she.

It is strange to see so much strength—so much determination in so small a creature.

“It shall be as you will,” says Severn, in a low voice.

He turns away, and then comes back again.

“Nevertheless, I shall put an end to this hated bond to-morrow,” says he, doggedly, and with sudden angry change of purpose.

She makes no reply. She is standing quite quiet, her little figure in its pretty white frock bowed. Her face—two tears run swiftly down her cheeks.

“Oh darling!” cries he, in a suffocated tone.

He makes a step towards her; but she, throwing out both her hands to check him, runs swiftly up the balcony steps leading into the drawing-room, and, like a small whirlwind, disappears round the corner of the first window.

CHAPTER XI.

“ All nature is but Art, unknown to thee ;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see ;
All discord, harmony not understood ;
All partial evil, universal good.”

WITH a heavy heart he turns, and walks homewards to Pasco's home, that has now no master. He had seemed cold when speaking to Fay about his brother's unhappiness, about the woman who had caused it. But in truth his coldness had been nothing to his anger against her. To him there was but one possible view of the case, and that was that she had deliberately ruined his life—had come down there to prey upon society, and secure for the establishment of her lost respectability the first eligible man that offered. Pasco had been that man. He would have laughed

aloud if anyone had told him now—whatever he might have believed before—that Mrs. Barrington—or whatever her name was—had ever loved his brother . . . To him the whole affair was a preconcerted scheme on her part, in which any honest sentiment had no portion whatsoever.

He regarded his brother well out of it, and attributed the woman's refusal to marry him to the fact that, her story being known here, the respectability she craved would have been impossible. Nobody would have called, his family would decline to receive her. She had thrown up the game at the last moment to the everlasting good of Pasco—if Pasco could only have been brought to see it. But he had *not* seen it, and had left his home yesterday, bound no one knew where, with a heart that seemed broken, and an openly expressed feeling of resentment towards all his family.

He had refused indeed to see Sir George, who up to the last moment had made vigorous efforts to get at him, and explain

what really happened, and so break down this terrible barrier that the younger brother had raised between them.

Pasco was obdurate, and left home with a dull farewell to Ernest, and a decided intention of leaving no address behind him.

No wonder Ernest, who regarded Pasco as his dearest possession—once a little, petulant, charming face was out of the question—felt bitter against Janet Barrington.

She was still at The Priory, but was leaving to-morrow. To go where no one knew, beyond the fact that she was bound for London first. After that, according to Ernest's belief, for Monte Carlo, or some other foreign place where adventuresses live and thrive—or for the—— Eventually it would be the latter.

His mood is a terribly bitter one now, as he walks along through the warm woodlands; his brother's griefs have been as his own, but now a yet more intimate one claims him. Fay's face as last he saw it,

with those two large melancholy tears stealing down the woe-begone little cheeks, has rendered him almost distracted. They had told their own tale. She loved him. He loved her with all his heart and soul—nothing stood between them but a hateful engagement in which neither of the supposed interested parties had sunk any heart-capital whatsoever—and yet——

Well, if she would not have him, he would follow Pasco's example, and cut this life altogether. Tuesday next his leave would be up, and he must rejoin his regiment, but he could not live out a detestable existence in a country that contained the being he loved, but who, of her own accord, had determined to render herself inaccessible. Of Jessica he thought little beyond this, that he would certainly end the farce existing between her and him to-morrow. The very thought of her had grown hateful. And she would probably be glad of her release.

He—Ernest—had nothing to offer beyond an old name, and, now-a-days, an heiress such as Jessica could always be sure of securing that—and it would leave her free to accept the evident admiration of her cousin. Of course, if he—Ernest—had been a man of property, a desirable *parti* of *that* sort, it would be impossible now to draw back, but as it *is*——

Entering the library he finds a letter awaiting him. Opening it with languid interest, he finds it contains a whole world of excitement. His uncle, an old man living in Devonshire, is dead, and has left him all his property. A clear three thousand a year!

Severn falls into a chair, and having re-read the letter, gives himself up to despair. With *this*—with *her*—what life would have meant! And now! Now it is impossible that he should even have the small comfort of breaking off his engagement with the other.

.

It is growing towards evening, and Fay, who had spent a good deal of her afternoon in her own room and in tears, has crept down to the small drawing-room, knowing that there solitude at least will be found. The children are all spending the day at a distant place, and Nettie has gone visiting. Not being the latter's day at Home, her small sister feels sure of thinking out her sad thoughts undisturbed.

Vain hope!

The door is thrown open and Miss Wilcott is ushered in by one of the servants. Fay, with a little wild thought of hiding her tell-tale eyes, rises hurriedly to greet her visitor, keeping her back well to the light.

"Nettie is not in," says she, as cordially as nature will permit. "But perhaps I may be her substitute for this one day."

"I'm rather glad she is from home," says Miss Wilcott coolly. "It is you I want to see. May I take off these laces? They are so warm, and I daresay I shall be here for some time."

"Let me take them off," says Fay, her heart sinking within her. *This* girl, of all others! How long is she going to stay? Nevertheless, she busies herself with the undoing of the laces.

"You are not feeling well, are you?" says Miss Wilcott, looking at her sharply.

"Oh, yes, quite well, thank you. Did you walk?"

A pause, and then:

"Yes, such a lovely day. If you are quite well, at all events you have been crying."

"Do *you* never cry?" says Fay, slowly, deliberately, and with just a suspicion of insolence.

"Never," says Miss Wilcott. "I'm not a foolish person as a rule. This *sounds* a little rude, because you evidently have been crying, but in reality it is not so. Very sensible people have been known to give way to folly occasionally. But crying is not in my line. If you want a thing, *take* it—don't sit crying for it. That is sensible

advice, and economical too. You save your eyes."

"It sounds a little lawless," says Fay, laughing in a rather forced fashion. "May I ask what you have been appropriating lately?"

"My cousin, Gilbert Wylding," returns Miss Wilcott coolly. "I finally made up my mind to marry him this morning."

There is a long pause. Fay has turned very pale. She would have spoken, but is afraid to trust her voice. Presently, however, she gains once more control over herself.

"Surely I heard the truth when I was told you were engaged to Captain Severn?"

"The whole truth and nothing but the truth," with a shrug of her handsome shoulders.

"And now, how are you going to——? I don't understand you," says Fay.

"A great many people have said that to me off and on," says Miss Wilcott care-

lessly. She smiles curiously—a little complacently, and glances at Fay out of her dark almond-shaped eyes. Never had she seemed so Jewish in the other's opinion. Dark, handsome, a little crafty, *detestable*, decides Fay, who, though full of a confused joy, that as yet had hardly grown definite, still feels the indignity shown to her lover. To calmly throw him over like that without a word or thought!

“And Ernest—you have not considered him?” she says warmly.

The other looks at her very straight this time.

“Well, I never thought you a hypocrite,” says she slowly.

The blood rushes into Fay's pale cheeks. She grows visibly unnerved, whereupon Miss Wilcott gives way to that peculiar low laugh of hers.

“Oh, I think I have considered him,” she says, with a touch of amusement that is not wholly free of a sneer. “Was I ever so considerate to him before, I wonder? I

don't think he will die of chagrin or grief over my loss. I really think, on the contrary, that he will feel inclined to kill the fatted calf. He will be now free to——” She pauses, her eyes still fixed on Fay.

“Well?” says the latter, with a rather ominous compression of her lips.

“To seek consolation elsewhere. What did you think I was going to say?” laughing again.

“Your thoughts are beyond me,” says Fay, rather haughtily.

“Yes? Well, yours are not beyond *me*. Am I rude again? You thought I was going to say that he could now seek consolation from *you*.”

Fay rises to her feet, her dark eyes flashing, her small, shapely head well thrown back. She opens her lips as if to speak, but Jessica, by an imperious gesture, stops her.

“There—there. What is it all about?” says she contemptuously. “Why should you be angry because I tell you Ernest

adores you? It is I who should be angry with you, but," with a little smile, "I'm not. Did you think I was *blind* all these weeks? That I could not see for myself how matters were going? Will you be angry again if I say I rejoiced when I saw you had attracted him? Ernest in love *might* be bearable (I don't know), but Ernest *not* in love is distinctly *unbearable*! (That I *do* know.) Come," rising, "I wish you joy—though that is more than you wished me.

"You go very far," says Fay, who is almost too angry to speak.

"One can only go to a certain limit. I expect I have gone to mine," says Miss Wilcott. "Good-bye."

She extended her hand, in which Fay places hers, sorely against her will.

"You regard me as an enemy plainly," says Miss Wilcott, always looking a little amused. "Whereas, in reality, I am the best friend you have ever had. At all events, I have done you the best turn."

This is so true that Fay feels her resentment fall an inch or two.

“As for the exploded compact between me and Ernest, that was not our doing. It was a make-up of mamma’s and the old man, Sir George, who is dead. I always knew it would come to nothing. It has, however, come to this, which is something! But I shall be sorry if it creates me a foe—in *you!*”

She is still holding Fay’s hand and is still looking amused.

“It may interest you to know that Ernest never made me a lover-like speech in his life. There, you surely should be grateful for *that.*”

Perhaps Fay in her heart *is* grateful. At all events, when Miss Wilcott presses her hand again in a final adieu she returns the pressure, and even goes so far as to see her to the door and watch her across the hall. Then she closes the door again, and, sinking into a chair, lets her face fall forward into her hands.

Is it true? Is it true?

For a long time she sits like that; thinking—hoping. It seems too good to be real. Then she may *really* love him, and he may love her? Does he *know*? She starts to her feet as this question occurs to her, and after a second's deliberation, runs out of the room, upstairs, and puts on her hat. It is the work of an instant to run downstairs again, and out of the hall door and across the avenue to the pleasance that will lead to the wood beyond.

A vague longing to get to him—to tell him—is possessing her. From the Elms to where he lives is a rather long cry so late in the evening, but this idea has not occurred to her. Happily, however, when half-way through her self-imposed journey, she sees a tall grey-clad figure advancing towards her.

To give her information as to who that grey-clad figure is would indeed be loss of time. She stops short, and lifting her tiny

hands to her mouth, calls to him across the distance that separates them.

“Ernest! Hurry! *Hurry!* I have something to tell you!”

Perhaps he hears her, perhaps he doesn't. Perhaps he too has seen her and has something to tell her; at all events, he quickens his pace, and soon is beside her.

“Oh!” cries she, “I have *such* news. You wouldn't guess it—*ever!* What do you think? Jessica—*has*—but you *shall* guess!”

“Engaged herself to her cousin, Gilbert Wylding,” replies he, joy looking out from his eyes.

“Ah! you *heard!*” cries she, distinctly disappointed. “But *how?* This morning you——”

“Oh, *then* I knew nothing. But half-an-hour ago I got a polite little letter from her, couched in the civilest terms, saying she hoped I would release her from her engagement to me, and winding up with the salient hint, that whether I did or not would make

no difference, as she had made up her mind to wed her cousin. Who was I," gaily, "that I should interfere with her mind? I succumbed at *once*. Lowered my flag without making a single show of fight, and——" he catches Fay suddenly in his arms and presses her tenderly to his heart, "*here* I am."

They both laugh a little, and perhaps with tears in their eyes.

"You are *glad*?" asks he presently.

"Oh! you *know* it! And you?"

"My darling, need you ask that question?"

"Well, you asked it to me," says she aggrieved. And then—"Ernest! what a blessing it is that she should have fallen in love with her cousin."

"I shall owe a debt of gratitude to Gilbert Wylding all my life," returns he, with fervor.

"Yes, I daresay he now——"

"Is afraid to meet me" supplements Ernest with a laugh. "Thinks he has

done me out of my heart's desire and so on. Oh!" pressing one of her dainty palms to his lips. "If he only *knew!*"

"I think he *will*—soon!" says Fay naively.

"How?"

"Because Jessica seems to know. She was very, *very* rude and—vulgar, I think," with hesitation. "And she said she had known for weeks that you were in love with me, and I'm afraid," hanging her pretty head, "that she knew too that I had been in love with you for just as long."

"And *were* you?" cries he with eager delight. "Oh! Fay, and what a life you led me! Well, you will have to make up for it now."

"So will you," says she. "What right had you to be engaged to anybody until *I* came?" She is laughing, but suddenly she grows very grave. "I am afraid Nettie and Sir George will be angry," she says. "You see we have no money, and Nettie says——"

“ Ah! I had forgotten something else I had to tell you,” says he. “ If want of means to marry on is Nettie’s only objection, I can conquer that. To-day—an hour after I left you this morning—I received this,” he draws the letter from his pocket that contains the news of his uncle’s death, and gives it to her to read. “ You see we shall not be actual paupers,” says he.

“ It seems *too* much luck!” whispers she in an awed tone when she has read the letter. Her face has lost its color.

“ Too much luck for me certainly. Not half enough for *you*!” exclaims he, fondly pressing her pretty little face against his own.

CHAPTER XII.

“In many a stead Doom dwelleth, nor sleepeth day
nor night.”

“It is enough ; the end and the beginning
Are one thing to thee, who art past the end.”

THE sun is streaming into a pleasant room in Harley Street. The blinds are all drawn down, but the windows are raised to let in any little passing breeze that may arise, and through them the sounds of distant street pianos, mingled with the cries of newsvendors, make their way. The world is a year older. It is once again the 21st of June!

Janet Barrington had risen that morning with a full remembrance of that dead, past, sweet day full upon her. All these sad twelve months indeed that now lie behind her she had thought of little else—and always without hope. She had forbidden

him to hope, she knew that, but yet—*yet*. And if he *had* borne her in memory would he not have written her a vagrant line, now and again—a little sentence ever so short, but long enough to keep her starving soul from death.

Where he was all this past year no one knew. Not even his own people. Abroad, was the one address they had to give any friends whose curiosity drove them to ask unwelcome questions.

And now that first anniversary of the day that marked the crowning grief of her life has come round. To bring her what? Nothing! As I have said, she felt herself beyond hope, and though some faint stirring as of expectation moved her when the morning's post was brought her, still when she found that it contained no word from him she told herself she was not disappointed. She had *known*! He had learned through the wisdom that accrues from a full year that he had had a lucky escape from her.

She seldom rises before noon now. There is nothing the matter with her, she says persistently, nothing beyond the fact that she is always tired—*tired*. This tiring must be a rather dangerous illness in itself, because it has certainly reduced her to skin and bone. Just now, as she walks feebly into this pleasant room with its shady blinds, she is only a mere shadow of her former self. A lovely self still, but terribly worn, and with eyes that look too large and dark for their pale setting.

Her housekeeper, who is still with her, accompanies her, and arranges a comfortable lounge for her amongst the pillows of the sofa. *She* has not changed. Always the same gaunt woman, with stern features, but earnest eyes, now grown terribly watchful.

“Sit down here—rest yourself,” says she, patting the cushions and addressing Janet, who is wandering from window to window in a slow, languid, idle fashion, pretending to admire the banks of flowers

that fling their sweet perfumes into the room.

“ In a moment. I like to walk about a little ; it does me good, and I feel strangely energetic to-day,” says Mrs. Barrington with a soft laugh.

“ To-day,” mutters the housekeeper, “ you are thinking of that past folly, I expect. I knew how it would be.”

“ Just for once you are at fault,” says her mistress, shaking her head gently. “ That is too old a dream now, Janet, to concern me. It ended this day twelve months.”

“ Yet you are not looking as well as you were last week,” says the woman gruffly. “ *Then* there seemed a chance of improvement in you ; but *to-day* !”

“ Am I so hideous to-day ?” with another laugh, more real than the last.

“ No.”

“ How do I look then ?”

“ Ill,” says the woman laconically.

“Without blood—without strength—without *life*.”

At this instant the sound of the postman's afternoon knock makes itself heard.

“Get me my letters,” says Mrs. Barrington, a little glad, perhaps, to end the conversation.

The woman presently returns with a small parcel in her hands. A paper box it might be, carefully wrapped round.

“Scarcely worth the journey, was it?” says she, handing it to her mistress.

Mrs. Barrington, taking it, regards it eagerly. Had she hoped to see foreign stamps, foreign postmarks on it? If so, she must be disappointed. It is all hopelessly English, stamp, postage, everything.

No, oh, no, it could not be from *him*.

The handwriting is unknown to her. This would mean nothing, as, strange to say, she has never had a letter from Pasco Severn. Their short, sweet love term had shewn no interlude where a *billet-doux* could have come in. He had been always so close to

her and she to him. Meetings were all too frequent.

Carelessly she drags off the paper covering of the little parcel, disclosing a small cardboard box; carelessly still she lifts the lid of it. The housekeeper has gone over to the window to arrange the drooping petals of a flower, and for a moment silence supreme reigns in the room. It is broken by a sharp and terrible cry.

The woman turns quickly from the injured flower, her face blanched. Mrs. Barrington is standing where she has last seen her, an open box in her hand. She is swaying dangerously to and fro; before the woman can reach her, she has fallen forward on her face and hands, a whole shower of purple pansies lie scattered round her head.

.

It is many hours later, and dawn is just breaking in the pretty room. They had lifted her when she fell and placed her on

the lounge, and there still she lies. She will not be raised from it again until they raise her to place her in her coffin. The doctors had come in all haste and looked at her, and—well—there was no hope, and she must not be moved; it was a mere question of hours, and she must not be moved, whatever happened!

The housekeeper, greyer and sterner of face than ever, sits motionless beside her, the dying woman's hand in hers. What a beautiful hand! Nature had been bountiful to her, but Fate had destroyed Nature's gifts. What use to be perfect in face and form, if misery is flung out with a liberal hand to render all joy worthless.

The woman lifting her from amongst those dying pansies, had known she supported in her arms a flower as beautiful and as near to death as they were. Surely they were an unlucky souvenir. A little note had lain amongst them, and this the housekeeper had read, hoping to give some comfort to the one creature that on earth she

loves, and that creature lying on the borderland of life. It was a tiny note, a mere word or two.

“ You will remember ? Not for one moment have I forgotten. To-morrow early I shall be with you, and then——”

It broke off abruptly, but love, real, earnest, passionate, sounded through each bare word, rendering them all eloquent. To-morrow ! That now, would mean *to-day !*

The woman shivers as she glances at the slender form on the lounge. Will she last ? Will she live until he comes ? And even if so—*who is to tell him ?*

Early ! What does that mean ? Eleven ! One ! Three perhaps ! Who can say ?

The cold sad light of coming day is illuminating the room. As though she feels it, the dying woman stirs, and wakes from her lethargy to a last dull dalliance with life.

“ It is day,” says she in that strange far-off tone that belongs alone to those bound

for their immediate voyage across the implacable Styx.

“Yes,” says the elder woman, pressing the hand she holds. This one word she speaks with difficulty—another would have been beyond her. She feels choked.

“*This* is to-morrow?” says Janet.

“Yes.”

“He will soon be here.”

“Soon, my dear. Soon, my darling.”

“He was true to me.”

“Oh! who would *not* be,” moans the woman. “But keep still, keep quiet. Do not excite yourself.”

“I am happy,” says she with a slow glance upwards at the faithful rugged face above her. “He is coming!”

“Ay,” says the woman. She clasps the damp thin hand more closely. “And so is Death,” she whispers to herself.

There is a long silence.

“You have not put me to bed,” says Mrs. Barrington, faintly.

“ No. They said you would be better here.”

“ Yes.” She seems to think for awhile. “ And after all, it doesn't matter, does it? Only, you will have the trouble of undressing me—*afterwards!*”

The woman suppresses the groan that rises to her lips, but she turns very white.

Once again the silence is prolonged—intense. Slowing the morning develops. Suddenly a clear sound breaks the stillness. The sharp cry of a little bird. The sparrows are beginning to twitter beneath the roof.

“ Do you hear that? ” cries Mrs. Barrington uplifting herself upon her pillows, with a quick, wild energy. Some last uncertain strength seems to be upholding her. “ Oh! That is *life*, LIFE! What a little strange cry. It is a bird, a bird—but what a funny one. Listen.” She falls back upon her pillows again, and to her companion's horror breaks into low laughter. Laughter faint enough to be almost inaudible, yet strong

enough to shake the dying frame.

“Hush! Hush!”

“It is the dawn! Now the birds awake.” She sighs. Her sudden laughter has left her. “Birds waken, and people die. I’ve always heard that one dies at dawn—haven’t you? Oh!” An agony of fright convulses her lovely face. “Oh! *keep* me alive till he comes.”

“There! There now. He is coming soon. Don’t talk, my dear. *That’s* what wears you! There now—stay still.”

Silence again. The morning deepens. The light grows. Presently all the birds begin to call to each other, yet the figure lying so motionless takes no heed of them until suddenly:

“Now—now!” cries she, excitedly, “there it is again—don’t you hear it?”

And, indeed, a most miserable little pipe can be heard through all the other twitterings. It is a heartbroken, weak little chirp, and just at this sad moment distressing.

“It is calling to me,” whispers Mrs.

Barrington. "Calling—calling—what a wretched little voice—like my own now."

She begins to laugh again in the same queer way, until the woman watching her grows almost mad with fear and grief. What a wasting away of the last poor strands of strength! Suddenly the lovely dying face quivers. The forlorn mirth dies from it.

"Oh, I wish it *wouldn't!*" says Mrs. Barrington, turning feebly to her companion. "Oh! don't *let* it!"

She bursts into tears.

The housekeeper, rising with a suppressed vehemence, shuts close the windows that have been left open to give the patient air, and so shuts out the coming sounds of day. Afterwards she sits down again by her charge, and so the day grows.

.

He has entered the room. The housekeeper, rising from her seat beside the dying form, lifts her hand to enjoin calm—

quiet. But love is never deaf, and *she* has heard. She had been seemingly asleep for the last hour; but now she lifts herself with a sudden joyous movement, and holds out her arms to him.

Falling upon his knees beside her, he buries his face in her gown.

“Darling!—Darling!—*Beloved!*” whispers she, happily. With one hand she smoothes his bent head; the other is firmly closed over *something*, as it has been ever since that fatal moment when she opened the packet. No one had dared to unclasp it, so tightly was it clenched. “That you should have come!” says she.

“Oh! surely you *knew* I would come!”

“No. There has always been so much disappointment for me—I did not dare believe it.”

“You doubted me?”

“You will forgive me that now,” says she, with a smile of saddest meaning. “I am paying for my fault. If I *had* believed, I should not be dying!”

“The fault is all mine—I should have written. But you forbid me—and I thought you would know. Janet!” lifting his head, and looking at her wildly—“Is it hopeless?”

“Don’t look like that! I am glad of it!” says she, calmly. “And I am happy—*happy!* When *these* came”—she holds out to him her clenched hand—“when I knew that you had remembered me, in spite of everything, my heart broke, I think, for very joy.”

He opens her hand, and there, crushed, withered—dead, lie some of the purple pansies he had sent her.

“Dear flowers!” whispers she, faintly. “I have killed them! Soon I shall be as they are. I told you,” smiling at him softly, “they were for death. But I did not know then that death would be so sweet.”

“*Don’t!*” says he, hoarsely.

“Why not? . . . Had I ever hoped for so good an ending as this? To have *you* beside me. . . . To——”

She seems to lose herself a little. Passing his arms round her, he draws her to him, till her head leans upon his breast—the beautiful head!

There is a long, long silence. She has grown very quiet. The labored breathing has become so gentle that now he can scarcely hear it. The day has changed, and a soft, light, pattering rain is falling upon the window-panes. The terrible monotony of its sound becomes at last unbearable. All at once it seems to him that he cannot hear her breathing at all. He leans down to look more closely at her, an awful fear clutching at his heart.

“Janet!” he whispers, loudly.

She opens her eyes, and, recognizing him, a divine smile lights her face.

“You—you!” she gasps, faintly. “Stay with me. I go at last to find rest—peace Eternal Rest Everlasting Peace!”

She sighs. Suddenly, with a strange strength, she turns herself and slips a hand

round his neck. Feebly she tries to get even nearer to him. A violent shiver convulses her frame.

“ I am cold ! ” says she.

Cold as Death can make her ! She is, indeed, quite dead ! Pasco, numbed, hardly realizing, lays her back amongst her pillows. Her eyes are quite closed. She looks lovely. A tiny lock of hair is straying over her temple. He puts it gently into its place—softly, as if afraid of waking her. But she is past all that. No storm of life—no grief—no love—can hurt or charm her any more.

Somebody has come into the room. There is a sharp cry. It seems to waken Pasco from his dull dream. That woman, there, on her knees beside her—what is she doing ? And Janet—Janet is silent.

The dream flies for ever !

Janet is dead !

THE END.

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