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THE OLD, OLD STORY

A Novel

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'NELLIE'S MEMORIES,' 'NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS,'
'SIR GODFREY'S GRANDDAUGHTERS' ETC.

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THE OLD, OLD STORY

CHAPTER I

MR. LORIMER'S TROUBLE

'The leaves of memory seem to make
A mournful rustle in the dark.'

LONGFELLOW.

WHEN Lady Car died, it was understood that her husband was a broken-hearted man; that for him the joys and ambitions of life had crumbled to pieces in his wife's grave.

'Reggie will never get over it,' observed Mrs. Wyndham, mournfully.

She was his only sister, and until her marriage he had been her one absorbing interest. Few women loved their brothers as Constance Wyndham had loved hers; and, though her affection had not always been discreet, it was at least devoid of selfishness.

'He will never get over it,' she repeated emphatically to her usual confidant, who was Reggie's friend, and knew all the ins and outs of the family history.

Mr. Hamerton was a privileged person, and it was certainly in his favour that no censorious tongue, no inquisitorial glance, ever conveyed an impression that the warm friendship between him and his friend's sister was not utterly commendable.

Felix Hamerton was a part of Constance's earlier life. Reggie's friend had been hers. However much they differed in opinion, they were agreed on this point—that Reggie was the dearest fellow in the world; and that they were ready to do battle on his behalf to the best of their powers. Mr. Hamerton had never fallen in love with the beautiful girl who had been

the life and sunshine of her brother's home; though they had danced and ridden together, and played tennis and laughed and talked through scores of summer afternoons; neither did he tear his hair or cover himself with ashes when Harcourt Wyndham quietly carried her off.

'He will do better than most men, but there is no one worthy of her,' he had observed, with philosophical phlegm. 'He is strong, and she worships strength'—by which Mr. Hamerton by no means meant mere brute force.

Felix Hamerton always spoke of himself as a non-marrying man. 'My ideal is too high,' he would affirm in one of his serious and least cynical moments; "'the noble woman nobly planned'" has not yet reached my plane. Reg calls me a confirmed old bachelor—and, upon my word, he is right. I know you will endorse that opinion, Mrs. Wyndham.'

When Constance put her handkerchief to her eyes and made this little speech about her bereaved brother, Mr. Hamerton shifted uneasily in his seat.

'It is a bad business,' he returned gloomily; and then he stared at the fire. He hated to see any woman in tears, but especially this bright, warm-hearted creature who had filled for him the place of a sister.

'It is worse than bad; it is utterly miserable,' she replied, with a trifle of impatience in her voice, which said very plainly, 'You men never know how to express your feelings properly.' 'He and Car were all in all to each other; and then she managed everything so beautifully, and now what will he and Tottie do without her?'

'I forgot the child'—in a conscience-stricken tone—'I was only thinking of him, poor beggar! I wanted to stay with him to-night; but no, he said he would rather be alone.'

'He said the same to me yesterday,' returned Mrs. Wyndham, with a sigh; 'but of course I should have taken no notice of that, only Ninian was so poorly that Harcourt said I had better come back with him. It is only a little feverish attack, but I could not have stayed away. If all goes well I shall go down again to-morrow. How is one to leave him in that great house alone?'

'You had better bring him back with you. The change will do him good.'

'I am afraid he could not leave,' she replied thoughtfully; 'there is so much to be done. Poor Car died so suddenly; it was so unexpected. Oh, how wretched it all is, Felix! Who

would have thought of such a thing happening? she was so strong, so full of life and energy, so——' And here Constance struggled with her emotion.

'Yes, it is awfully sad.'

Felix had a notion that women liked to talk about their troubles; that speech was a sort of safety-valve with them for pent-up feelings. But, with all his good-will and sympathy, he found it difficult to respond. He and Reginald had sat opposite each other a whole evening, and had spoken no word, though the bereaved widower had indeed uttered one brief sentence—'You may smoke. Don't mind me'—and the words had been pregnant with consolation to Felix. Silence ceased to be oppressive when one could puff at one's pipe in comfort; and somehow, so strange are the ways of men, that even Reginald Lorimer felt insensibly soothed as he watched the filmy smoke rise between him and his friend. When they had parted for the night, he had wrung Felix's hand with unusual feeling—'You have done me good, old fellow. Thanks awfully.' And yet no word of sympathy had passed Felix's lips.

But now silence seemed misplaced. Mrs. Wyndham was evidently yearning to pour out her heart; she seized on his scanty speech, and dilated on it with womanly scorn.

"Awfully sad." That is all you men can find to say; and yet how absurdly inadequate it sounds! Car gone, and poor Reggie left with his broken heart, and that darling child deprived of a mother. Felix,' she continued, after a pause, which he did not stir to break, 'you were always a little satirical with poor Car. In your jargon, you and she did not quite hit it off. She always said you were too clever for her. But even you could not say that Car was not a pattern wife and mother.'

'I am quite sure that she was awfully good to Reg.'

'Good! I should think so'—half starting from her chair in her quick way, and then flinging herself back against the cushions. 'She managed everything for him. He never had to think of anything. People used to say it was wonderful, and she such a young woman. I don't think there was ever a word between them all those five years.'

'Lady Car was remarkably even tempered,' was Mr. Hamerton's reply. 'It was you who always wanted Reg to marry her; I remember he told me so himself.'

'Yes, indeed; Car was my friend, and I was always so fond of her. I knew she and Reggie were cut out for each other. I told him so a hundred times before he believed me; but he

owned it himself afterwards. "She suits me down to the ground, Con." I can hear him say it now.'

'Were they married when he made that speech?'

'No, only engaged; but he had found it out then'—with a little conscious triumph breaking through her sadness.

'Oh, he had found it out then!' repeated Mr. Hamerton, but his tone was a trifle enigmatical.

While this conversation was taking place between his sister and his friend, Reginald Lorimer sat beside his lonely fireside in the warm spacious library that was always called the master's room.

It was here that he wrote his letters, and read papers and magazines, or translated a page or too of Greek verse by way of keeping up his classics, and indulged in the miscellaneous literature which he called cultivating his mind.

He was not a great reader, but he had plenty of intelligence, and, his moral digestion being in fine working order, he was able to assimilate his mental food so that it nourished him sufficiently.

'Lorimer is a clever fellow,' his friends would say; 'he seems well up on most subjects.' But Reginald, who was no hypocrite, always spoke very humbly of his own abilities. 'Hamerton puts me to shame,' was his frequent observation. 'I am like a schoolboy beside him.'

When there were no guests staying at Silcote Hall, Lady Car refused to use either her drawing-room or the music-room in the evening, and had always sat with her husband in the library. 'Reginald is fond of the room, and so am I,' she would say; 'it is the most comfortable room in the house. In the winter it is so free from draughts. The music-room is too large; we little people are lost in it,' which was merely a figure of speech, as Lady Car had been a tall woman, and measured exactly her husband's height.

It was late in the afternoon, and the butler, who was an old servant, and had lived at the Hall ever since Reginald's birth, had taken infinite pains to promote outward cheerfulness by shutting out the faint wintry twilight, with its tiny crescent of a moon, and drawing the heavy plush curtains across the big bay window, and had lighted the tall standard lamps and his master's particular reading lamp.

'When one is very low down, there is nothing like a bright fire and plenty of light to hearten one,' thought Norton, as he

threw on another pine log; and then he stood and hesitated. George would appear in another moment with the tea-tray. The table had always been placed beside the low easy-chair that Lady Car had appropriated for her own use. 'We must shift it to the other side,' he muttered. 'Lord bless us! the changes and chances of this mortal life!' and the moisture gathered to Norton's honest eyes as he made the change.

The tea-tray was in its place, but still Norton lingered. Perhaps he had a dim sort of notion that even his familiar homely figure might detract somewhat from the loneliness of the scene; and the next moment a small fox terrier made its appearance, and walked straight to the centre of the bearskin hearthrug.

'Ah, so he has come in, Lassie! I do believe,' moralised Norton, as he made a pretence of readjusting the reading-lamp, 'that even that dumb creature knows there is a death in the house. Another time she would have rushed in with a bark to tell us her master was coming; but you knew better than that, eh, old girl?'

But Lassie only moved her tail feebly, and peered at him with her bright eyes as she sat up quivering with expectation and excitement, which culminated in a low whine of pleasure as her master's footfall was heard outside.

Mr. Lorimer walked in wearily, with the gait of a man who was physically and mentally fatigued, and threw himself down in his easy-chair, while Lassie jumped up and fawned on him.

'Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?' asked Norton, anxiously.

But Mr. Lorimer shook his head as he mechanically caressed the dog. 'No, thank you, Norton; I have all I want.' And then he poured himself out a cup of tea, but forgot to drink it until it was cold.

Reginald Lorimer was a slight, fair-haired man, singularly young-looking for his age, which was nine-and-twenty. He was by no means tall, but, on the other hand, there was a well-bred air about him that redeemed him from insignificance; and before his trouble he had been distinguished by a certain brightness and alertness of manner, which made him pleasant to contemplate.

But on this afternoon the heaviness of his aspect added years to his age; in these eight days he seemed to have grown eight years older. In his stunned condition, when a sudden earthquake had reduced his little world to chaos, he yearned

painfully for solitude. He must be alone; he must think; he must try to understand this terrible thing that had come to pass, and what he was expected to do under the circumstances. Constance had been very kind, but her tears and caresses troubled him; he did not want to see her sitting in Car's chair, crying over him. Hamerton was better—Hamerton understood him, and left him in peace; but even Hamerton, good old sort as he was, was in his way. When one has to think a difficult matter out, it is necessary to be alone. Even Lassie's sharp paws scratching lovingly at his knee irritated him, and he bade her lie down somewhat sternly. Lassie whimpered a little, but her master did not relent, and she lay down obedient and unhappy, with her black nose on her slender paws, watching him with unreasoning and slavish devotion after the manner of her kind, while he resumed the weary thread of his cogitation.

He had walked far that afternoon, hoping that exercise would quicken his clouded faculties; but the grey sky and leafless hedges and wide tracts of desolate country had only added to his depression, and the dull weight on him had grown heavier.

It was far better by his own fireside, with his mother's face smiling on him from the wall. True, Car's chair was empty; she had sat there opposite to him for five years. Good heavens! had they been married five years? Yes; Tottie was three, and if the boy had lived he would have been four. Well, after all perhaps it was as well that little Fred was gone. He was not much of a hand for managing children, and Car would have him. Though she said very little about it, he knew how she had missed the boy; she had so longed for him to have a son and heir.

Yes, they had been married five years; and on the whole he had been very happy. Car had made him so comfortable; she had taken all the worries off him. He supposed he should have nothing but worries now.

'Go to Lady Car'—that had always been his cry when complaints had been brought to him; 'your mistress will see to all that.'

What a manager she had been; how capable and clever! He had never ceased wondering at her. Constance had been right when she told him that if he married Lady Car Glenyon he would never repent it.

'Mark my words, Reg,' she had said to him, 'Car is the

woman you ought to marry. You are a careless, indolent boy, and hate trouble, and she will smooth everything for you.'

'Smooth everything!' Con had been right, as usual, and yet he had hesitated long before he had brought himself to propose to her.

Lady Car had been handsome, with a certain fair placidity that people thought reposeful; a fine woman, too, with a low, smooth voice; and yet with shame he confessed that he had never been in love with her. Violet Winter had been more to his taste; but he was not very far gone on her either. He wondered even now how the thing had been brought about. It had been owing to Con's persistence and Car's softness and cleverness, he supposed; but of course it had turned out splendidly. She had been very nice to him during their brief engagement; her tact had been exquisite, and somehow she always said the right thing. She was not exacting, either, and had never teased him by expecting too much attention, and she had always looked handsome and well dressed. She had been five years his senior, and perhaps this had made her specially careful of her appearance.

And then, what a good wife she had made him! He had never seen her out of temper all these years. True, he always knew when she was displeased, by a certain solemnity and precision of voice, and a marked access of dignity. Lady Car was always dignified, and her 'Reginald, please do not be absurd,' when he differed from her in opinion, always carried a note of warning to his ear.

It could not be denied, however, that Lady Car loved to have her own way in most things; but, as she carefully pointed out to him, hers was generally the right way. Neither could it be denied that, from the earliest of their married days, her will quietly but effectually dominated the household.

Felix Hamerton once told him half-jokingly that he was henpecked, but Reginald answered him quite seriously.

'I leave things to Car,' he explained, 'because she is so sensible, and always knows what to do. You see, she takes the trouble to make up her mind beforehand about things, and I hate any planning and arranging, and so she always carries the day.'

'That means that you give in to her, like a submissive husband,' returned his friend, with a half-concealed sneer; for Felix never worshipped blindly at any woman's shrine, and certainly not the fair, self-satisfied mistress of Silcote Hall;

'but you are not in Parliament yet, old fellow,' he added mischievously, and Reginald winced.

It was the one thing in which he had withstood his wife. Lady Car's great ambition had been to see her husband on the benches of the House of Commons, but Reginald Lorimer had no yearning for a political life and a house in town.

He was country-bred, and had simple country tastes, as his father had before him. To preserve his game, look after his farms, breed prize oxen, and do his duty as a justice of the peace, were sufficient occupations for any man, he thought.

'You ought to have married Hamerton,' he said once, when her plausible arguments had pressed him sore. 'Hamerton would have done you credit; he made quite a fine speech in the Richmond case; Rupert told me so. You did not show your usual good taste, Car. You ought to have hooked Hamerton.'

'Please do not be absurd, Reginald,' had been Lady Car's sole reply; but, though her voice was perfectly unruffled, Reginald felt somehow rebuked for his flippancy.

This little conversation had taken place three months before, but Lady Car had by no means given up her intention of seeing her husband in Parliament; only a stronger will than hers had interfered. 'Sister Death,' in Francis of Assisi's quaint phraseology, suddenly laid her cold hand on the busy brain and heart, and called Lady Car to work in other spheres.

CHAPTER II

CHIEFLY RETROSPECTIVE

‘How sharp the point of this remembrance!’

Tempest.

MR. LORIMER’S musings had become vague and desultory. He found it difficult to concentrate his thoughts; they seemed to move obliquely hither and thither, instead of going straight to the point.

He wanted to grasp the situation—What were he and Tottie to do in the future? to solve the problem, how a man was to live without his right hand. But, instead of this, his thoughts meandered and lost themselves; snatches of conversations, broken-off threads of discussion, even soft tones tempted him from the right track. A sort of morbid idea seized on him, that in this new and wholly inexplicable grief it was his bounden duty to live through the past again.

He tried to recall the day, not so long ago, when they broke the news to him of Car’s danger. She had been ill—not so very ill; at least, there had been no anxiety in either of their minds, though Dr. Arnitt’s face had daily grown graver, and he had at last somewhat brusquely expressed his wish that a well-known specialist should be consulted. He had felt a momentary surprise at hearing this, and a vague feeling of uneasiness made him go up to his wife’s room. She looked a little more flushed than usual, but she greeted him cheerfully. Tottie was sitting on the bed, with a large picture-book to keep her quiet.

‘Why does Dr. Arnitt want Robertson to come down and see you, Car?’ he had asked anxiously. ‘In my opinion you look decidedly better; you have quite a colour this afternoon.’

‘Tottie tires me a little,’ she returned, with her usual quiet sedateness; ‘she is a good girl, but it is natural for children to fidget. Will you take her to the nursery, Reginald?’

'Yes, in a moment; but about Robertson?'

'Oh, Dr. Arnitt thinks that it will be as well to have him. He is a little bit fussy, perhaps, but if you don't mind the expense, dear.'

'Expense be——.' Mr. Lorimer's answer had been unnecessarily energetic, and Car looked at him a little reprovingly; latitude of speech was unbecoming in her eyes.

'You have no occasion to put yourself out, Reginald,' she returned, closing her eyes wearily. 'I told Dr. Arnitt you would not mind. I suppose we must do as he wishes. Doctors know best about these things. But now will you take Tottie away, please? Kiss mamma, Tottie, and go with father, like a good little girl.'

'I am more comfy here,' pouted Tottie, with a shrug of her fat shoulders and an unmistakable droop of her lip. 'Go away, dad.'

But Reginald, seeing his wife's tired face, carried off the rebel, smothering her with kisses as he went, and as Lady Car turned on her pillow she could hear childish shrieks of merriment.

'If I do not take care he will spoil Tottie,' she thought, as she composed herself and tried to sleep. He remembered this little scene, and the romp that followed in the nursery, in which Lassie had joined; but there had been no romps with Tottie since. The next afternoon—was it the next, or the day after, the consultation had been held?—he remembered how he came in earlier from shooting to hear the result, and the long time they kept him waiting, while he walked up and down the hall talking to Lassie and chafing at their delay.

He had been impatient enough—patience was not one of his virtues—but no anxiety or foreboding kept him restless; on the contrary, he had taken a great deal of interest in a mock tournament between Lassie and a small black kitten that went by the name of the Fiend, and in which the Fiend was distinctly victorious.

It had just ended when Dr. Arnitt opened the library door and beckoned to him, and then—the rest was hopelessly blurred and confused.

He was trying to take in something that the physician was telling him with a very grave face. Dr. Robertson was sorry to say Lady Car was very ill; her state was most unsatisfactory. An unusual complication had taken place, and nothing could be done; but he was thankful to say there

would be little suffering. He caught these few fragments, and tried to piece them together lucidly into a whole.

‘A complication! Nothing to be done!’ What on earth did the pompous old fogie mean, with his long-drawn-out sentences? What was the use of having a second opinion, if Car were getting well without them? Stop, he had said nothing about getting well.

‘It would be dishonest on my part, my dear sir,’ continued the physician, ‘to hold out any hope; both Dr. Arnitt and I would think it false kindness. We dare not tell you that Lady Car will recover; but I can assure you that there will be scarcely any suffering.’

And then, as he had looked up in his bewilderment and horror, he had caught a grave, pitying glance from Dr. Arnitt.

‘I think he understands now,’ Dr. Arnitt said. ‘Sit down, Mr. Lorimer’; and he put his hand kindly on his shoulder. ‘You have had a heavy blow.’

A heavy blow! He remembered once that he had been struck in the chest by a cricket-ball, and how the breath had seemed all driven out of his body, and strange zigzag lights had danced before his eyes; he was almost as breathless and sick and giddy as he had been then.

He remembered, too, how Lassie, with a dog’s unerring instinct, had jumped up and licked his hand, and how he had pushed the little beast away; and then Dr. Arnitt had brought him some wine, and Dr. Robertson had shaken hands with him very kindly, but he had spoken to neither of them until he found himself alone with his old friend.

‘Will it be long?’ he had asked, and his voice seemed to come dully from a distance, almost as though he were speaking underground.

‘We think not’—Dr. Arnitt hesitated a little—‘I may say we hope not. If it were prolonged it would mean suffering, but, from what Dr. Robertson has ascertained, Lady Car will be mercifully spared this.’

‘Does she know?’ Oh, how hoarsely he spoke! His throat seemed lined with fur.

‘We think she guesses. Dr. Robertson was very careful, very guarded, but I noticed how she watched our faces. Lady Car is very self-controlled; it is not easy to read her thoughts. If you would take my advice, Mr. Lorimer, you will leave her to rest for a while. She has an excellent nurse in Mrs.

Francis. I will look in again this evening, just to see how things are going on, though there is nothing to be done.'

Good heavens! how they harped on that string, nothing to be done! They were dinning it into his ear purposely, as though they were determined to tear all hope to shreds before his eyes; but he had not the spirit to remonstrate at this cruelty. He sat with downcast eyes as Dr. Arnitt uttered a few more kind commonplaces, and when at last he was left alone, he sat there still and motionless, with Lassie curled up into a shivering ball at his feet.

The first thing that roused him was the footman coming in to attend to the fire, and then by and by a message was brought him. Lady Car was asking for him.

He rose at once and shook himself, and as he stumbled up the staircase the clock chimed a quarter-past seven, and he wondered vaguely what Car would think at seeing him still in his tweed shooting-coat; they always dined at half-past seven, and at this hour he had generally left his dressing-room ready for the evening. Car was a great stickler for etiquette and the minor morals of life. But he forgot all about his negligence when he saw her worn face. It seemed to have grown older and thinner all at once, and there was a strained look in her eyes.

As he stood irresolutely a moment holding her hot hand, she beckoned to him to sit down.

'I have been expecting you the last two hours. Why have you kept away so long? I thought you would have come to me at once.' Then, as she saw his face more distinctly, 'Ah, I see, they have told you. They tried to hide it from me, but I was too sharp. Say something to me, Reggie.' To his knowledge she had never called him Reggie before. 'It is so dull lying here thinking—thinking about you and Tottie.'

'Good heavens, how can you take it so calmly!' and then he checked himself. They must not agitate her; he remembered Dr. Arnitt had told him that over and over again.

'I take everything calmly—it is my nature; you ought to know that by this time; and somehow——' here her voice changed a little, and her fingers pressed his—'I cannot believe it—that I shall have to leave you. I do not feel ill enough.'

'Why did you not tell them that? Perhaps it is all a mistake; even clever doctors are wrong sometimes. We will have another opinion. In the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom—eh, Car?'

‘No, dear, there is no mistake. I have been talking to nurse; you know my mother died of the same thing. If one could only believe it.’ Her lips looked blue and dry. ‘But there, we will not talk about it. Stop with me a little this evening, Reggie. I like to see you there. Oh, I forgot; you have not had your dinner yet, poor boy!’

‘Do you think I care about my dinner, Car, with you in this state?’

‘But I care, and if you will please me you will go down at once. Yes, do, dear; perhaps I should only talk too much if you stayed’; and he was compelled reluctantly to obey her. When he returned she was drowsy, and only gave him a faint smile.

He remembered how the days went on. If she grew worse, the change was almost imperceptible to him, and Car never complained. She talked very little—only now and then, about some arrangement she wished carried out. But if he grew agitated, she stopped at once. He saw that the least expression of his grief tried her acutely. One day she made him promise that he would never part with Nurse Francis. ‘Tottie will be safe with her, and she will look after your linen and things.’ And another evening, when he was sitting by her, stroking her hand, but saying nothing, she startled him much.

‘Reginald,’ she whispered—her voice had grown very weak and faint—‘I want to say one thing to you. I was never one for false sentiment. When the right time comes you will marry again. I should not wish it otherwise, only for Tottie’s sake choose wisely, and dear Constance will help you.’

And when he repelled this with strong indignation, she silenced him gently.

‘Hush! there is no need to dwell on it, of course. At the present moment the bare idea is painful to us both; but even dying people might not be selfish, and I have always taken such care of you and Tottie.’

‘You have indeed, my Car!’

But she checked his expression of gratitude; she seemed afraid of any demonstration—she had no strength for it, perhaps. The only time Reginald saw her utterly break down was once when he brought in Tottie to say good-night. Lady Car had felt very low that day; her strength was waning, and she told them afterwards that, when she saw her husband standing there, with Tottie’s rosy cheek pressed against his shoulder, such a sense of separation and remoteness came over

her that she burst into tears, and Nurse Francis, terrified at the sight of her emotion, snatched the frightened child from her father's arms and carried her from the room.

It was long before Car could be soothed. 'Don't let me see her again, Reggie,' she said more than once. 'It is bad for her, and I cannot bear it.' It was her one confession of weakness; but he had never loved his wife so well as he did then, when, in her desolation, she clung to him as her best human comfort.

The end had come quicker than they expected. There was a sudden failure of the heart.

Nurse Francis had summoned him hastily from his sleep, but when he had reached her room, the grey ineffable shadow lay upon her fair features, and 'Sister Death' had taken Lady Car home.

Well, she was at rest, he thought, with a long-drawn sigh. She was a good woman, and had done her duty as well as she knew how to do it. And perhaps they were right, and she was better off. People always said that, though he had a notion that, with all her church-going and reading of good books, she would rather have stayed with him and Tottie.

She had never talked to him on these matters; indeed, it must be owned that they had never talked on any abstract subject. Car had always been intensely practical, and he had no idea how far her faith had consoled and sustained her. She had asked him once to read the Evening Psalms to her, as her eyes were dim; but she had never hinted at a wish for a clergyman, or said a word to comfort him with the assurance that she was resigned to her hard fate.

They had been man and wife five years, and yet so great was her reserve and love of silence that he knew but little of the inner workings of her heart and mind.

A speech of his old playmate Violet Winter occurred to his mind. They had been walking back to the Gate House in the dim starlight, and somehow their talk had strayed to all manner of curious problems, astronomical and otherwise.

'What queer thoughts you have, Mr. Lorimer!' she had said at last, half laughing. 'I should think Lady Car must find you a most amusing companion; for of course you tell her everything.'

The girl had spoken in perfect good faith, but he had been conscious of a strange twinge of pain as he heard her, and as he walked back alone with LASSIE at his heels he revolved Violet's speech with an odd smile.

What a droll idea! Fancy talking to Car about the stars; telling her his theories about Mars, and Dante's idea that the sun was 'the home of those who burn with the love of God in seraphic ardour'! How widely she would open her large blue-grey eyes! 'How can you be so absurd, Reginald?'—that would have been her answer.

Why did he remember Violet's speech now, as he sat hugging his grief by his lonely fireside, with Car's empty chair before him? Why did all sorts of tiresome harassing thoughts come buzzing about him, taking advantage of his dazed condition and making him still more wretched?

Another speech came to his memory—one that his sister had made. She had been telling him a sad story of an accident that had carried off a young married friend of hers before her husband's eyes.

'I am afraid Mr. Rodney will never get over it,' she had said, with much feeling. 'Florence was not clever, but she was so intensely sympathetic. He told her everything, even scientific things that she did not pretend to understand, but she always said she loved to listen to him. And now he will be widowed in every thought.'

He had half smiled over Con's emotional speech—Con was always emotional—but now he recalled it with a sigh. Had he ever found Car wanting in sympathy? She had always been so sorry, so helpful, if he or the child ailed anything. Was it her fault that she was no talker, and that abstract subjects failed to interest her? Certainly not; one can but live up to one's nature, and a limited nature—— Here he pulled himself together sharply. Was he criticising her faults before the wreaths had withered on the newly-turned sods in Silcote churchyard? Shame, shame on him! And he struck his hand fiercely against the carved woodwork of the chair.

The next moment he heard a fumbling at the door-handle, and then it was flung open triumphantly, and a small curly-haired girl, in a black frock and white pinafore, appeared on the scene.

'Is that you, Tottie?' he said gently.

'Yes, it is me, dad'—in a breathless voice. Tottie was plainly hampered and in difficulties. She had encountered the Fiend in her peregrinations, and, in spite of the animal's resistance, had borne off her struggling victim. 'Finny'—her interpretation of Fiend—'has scratched me awful. You must punish Finny, dad.'

‘Put the kitten down and come to me, my little girl.’

And Tottie, with a profound sigh of relief, deposited the Fiend on the rug. The next moment the kitten had transformed itself into a sooty arch, and was uttering ominous growls and other sibilant sounds of demoniacal fury at the sight of Lassie.

‘Never mind Finny. Dad wants you.’ And Tottie clambered up on her father’s knee with an air of profound gravity.

Sybil, or Tottie as she had always called herself, had not taken after either of her parents. The boy had had his mother’s fair hair and blue-grey eyes; but Tottie was more like her aunt Constance.

She had Mrs. Wyndham’s bright colouring and warm hazel eyes, and her brown curly hair was quite rampant, sometimes falling into her eyes, to her mother’s and Nurse Francis’s despair. But what was the use of their confining it with comb or ribbon, when her father always flung them on the floor? Tottie’s curls, unmanageable as they were, were his delight, and all his wife’s sensible speeches failed to make any impression; he hated ribbons and abominated combs, and they should not make a scarecrow of Tottie!

Tottie was rather proud of her smart comb, and reproved her father with some bitterness when she picked up the broken fragments.

‘I don’t love you, dad, one little bit,’ she said severely.

Tottie’s mind was evidently brimful as she climbed up on her father’s knee.

‘Do you see my new frock, dad?’ she began, in an important tone. ‘It is black, like Finny’s coat, and I wears it’—Tottie’s grammar was not always correct—‘because God has made dear mammie an angel for ever and ever, amen—and nurse told me.’

‘Yes, Tottie’—in a sad voice.

‘Nurse kyed a weeny bit when she dressed me, and called me poor lamb; but lambs haven’t got black coats like Finny. It ain’t pretty’—with a slight sniff of contempt—‘not like my beau’ful blue frock what mammie bought me; but I wears it ’cause mammie has gone to be an angel.’

‘Ah, my pet, poor dad has no one but his little girl now.’

Tottie considered this gravely. Her playfellow was not quite happy; in Tottie’s language, ‘he looked as if he were going to kye too.’ She shook her curls out of her eyes, and began to pat him gently.

‘Never mind, dad,’ she said cheerfully. ‘I will take care of you, and play with you whenever you like. Mammie won’t mind if we do make a noise now ; angels never mind anything,’ continued Tottie, with unreasoning faith ; ‘they have wings, and can fly away. But I won’t never be an angel and fly away from dear dad’—as though this were the crowning consolation.

‘Ah, my little Sybil, no !’ and then, to his own and Tottie’s intense surprise, he suddenly burst into tears.

CHAPTER III

MR. HAMERTON MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

‘If a good face is a letter of recommendation, a good heart is a letter of credit.’—BULWER LYTTON.

FELIX HAMERTON was considered by his friends to be a very prosperous and rising young man. ‘He has real grit in him; he will make his mark one day,’ was a speech once made by a leading member of the bar, and this opinion was widely endorsed by his acquaintances.

His father, Colonel Hamerton, had left him a fair income; he was in easy circumstances, young—at this time he was about two-and-thirty—unembarrassed, and was already winning distinction in a profession that he loved. Society smiled on him; some of the best houses were open to the brilliant young barrister; and many were the mothers who would have been more than satisfied had the charms of their young daughters drawn him to their feet.

Mr. Hamerton was a favourite with most women, in spite of an undercurrent of cynicism and pessimism that was pretty evident in his dealing with his fellows. He was kind and courteous, though a trifle reserved; and, though it was impossible to draw him into the mildest flirtation, he frankly showed his predilection for the fair sex, and was always ready to make himself pleasant to them.

He had a flat in Kensington, which was considered to be the model of bachelor comfort, and where he was wont to entertain his friends of both sexes.

His only brother and two married sisters were in India, and, with the exception of some cousins, he had no kith or kin belonging to him. Perhaps this had something to do with the close and brotherly terms which had connected him with Reginald Lorimer and his sister, and the very strength and

sweetness of this adopted tie had prevented him from noticing his own isolation.

It was somewhat disappointing to his well-wishers and friends that Felix seemed so whimsically indisposed to run his clever head into the matrimonial noose.

'I hope you will not be an old bachelor,' Mrs. Wyndham would say to him quite seriously; 'old bachelors are always so selfish, and think so much of a good dinner.'

'I intend to be an exception to the rule,' was Felix's answer; 'and I will promise not to care unduly about my dinner.' But this answer by no means satisfied Constance. Since her marriage she had infused a touching little element of motherliness into her behaviour to her friend, and was always planning delightful little schemes for his happiness.

'I have been so successful with Reggie and Car,' she thought, 'that I really must try my hand with Felix; only he is so sharp he always sees through everything.' And it was certainly true that Mr. Hamerton took a malicious pleasure in thwarting these small devices. He would listen quietly to her praises of some young *débutante*, and chime in with a word of assent now and then, and he would even consent to put in his appearance at some little social gathering where the youthful beauty could be interviewed; but, when the evening came, probably Felix would content himself with one duty dance, and give all his attention to his old friends.

Constance used to confide her disappointment to her brother sometimes; she knew better than to trouble her husband about such things. 'I never talk to Harcourt on such matters,' she would say artlessly; 'he would tell me to mind my own business, and not bother my head about other people. But you are more sympathetic, Reggie, and Felix is your friend.'

Reginald never said much in answer to these confidences; he secretly shared his brother-in-law's opinions on the subject of match-making. He had his own private theory about his friend's obvious distaste for matrimony, though he would not for worlds have hinted his suspicions to Constance.

He had a notion that Felix was not as heart-whole as he wished people to believe, and yet he had the merest scrap of evidence to support this theory.

A fragment of paper with a few words in Felix's bold handwriting had once fluttered to his feet out of a waste-paper basket, and he had converted it into a spill to light his pipe. 'Ma chère Gabrielle, jamais, jamais,' was all he read, nothing

more ; but, as he puffed slowly at his pipe, the words seemed to chaunt themselves into a refrain—'Ma chère Gabrielle, jamais, jamais.'

'Gabrielle !' It had a foreign sound certainly. He remembered that Felix had come back from a three months' holiday abroad in rather a glum condition, and had given a very meagre account of his doings.

'I wish I had taken your advice, Reg,' he had said, 'and had gone to Norway. I don't think so much climbing suited me ; I had a touch of fever at last.'

'You look uncommonly seedy,' was Reginald's retort. But the scrap of paper with 'Ma chère Gabrielle' had not then met his eyes ; that 'touch of fever' was a very comprehensive term.

Felix Hamerton was a dark, slight man, and, though he was by no means handsome, people invariably noticed him when he entered a room. Perhaps the halo of prospective success hung about him and gave him that quiet air of distinction, but he certainly held his own with far more attractive-looking men, and many a fair young face welcomed him with a smile when he approached.

'I like Mr. Hamerton,' one of them said once ; 'he is always nice and kind, and never talks nonsense as some of them do.'

'Why, you talk nonsense yourself, Nellie,' interposed her young brother with brutal candour. 'I heard you and Captain Derrick the other night ; you both talked awful rot, and you seemed to enjoy it.'

'Who cares what a schoolboy thinks ?' was Nellie's vixenish reply, for she was not quite pleased that her conversation with Captain Derrick should have been overheard ; but Tom was such a cub, and so on.

About a fortnight after Mr. Hamerton's conversation with Mrs. Wyndham on the subject of his friend's bereavement, he stepped into a hansom, and bade the man drive to Inverness Terrace.

A young friend of his had a birthday party. He and Daisy were great cronies ; he had known her from her nursery days, and had been peremptorily bidden to present himself on this occasion.

Felix was fond of children and young people, but he preferred, as he said quaintly, to take them in diluted quantities : a mixed gathering of all ages and in all stages of hobble-de-hoyism, or, in other words, a well-dressed rabble, was abhorrent to him ;

nevertheless, with his usual good-nature, he gave up rather a tempting dinner engagement and prepared to sacrifice himself.

Felix was not averse to these small acts of kindness, and willingly consented to be victimised by the little tyrant Daisy, who was a very pretty girl of fifteen. He had a *cadeau* ready for her, a gold bangle—he knew girls loved bangles—and he slipped it on her white arm with a few kind words, as she came up to him, blushing and smiling.

‘How good of you to come so early, Mr. Hamerton! Now I shall enjoy my party. Thank you so much for the pretty bangle.’

‘It is not half so pretty as your speech, Daisy. I hope you meant it.’

‘Of course I meant it. I have been watching for you ever so long. Have you spoken to mamma?’

‘No, not yet; I had to pay my *devoirs* to the queen of the *fête*. Is that a new frock? You look a thorough Daisy-flower to-night—white just tipped with pink.’

‘Yes; mamma chose it. She is over there talking to that fat Mrs. Glendinning. She brought Nora and Gwen; she never lets them go anywhere without her. Oh! and I forgot to tell you Violet Winter is here.’

‘Miss Winter here!’ and there was unmistakable pleasure and surprise in Mr. Hamerton’s eyes.

‘Yes; she is staying with the Sinclairs, and I met her accidentally in the gardens. She was delighted to come. Dear old Vi! I am so fond of her. There! you may go and talk to her, if you like.’

Felix did not at once avail himself of this gracious permission. He lingered a few minutes beside his hostess and the buxom Mrs. Glendinning, who was always so weighted with her maternal cares and a family of eight daughters; and then he slowly made his way towards a corner where a young lady in black was sitting, who looked up at him with a quick, bright smile, and held out her hand.

‘This is quite an unexpected pleasure,’ he said, sitting down beside her, and his voice was full of warm friendliness. ‘I had no idea you were in town.’

‘I came up ten days ago for Gertie Sinclair’s wedding. I was one of her bridesmaids. I am going back to Grantham to-morrow.’

‘To-morrow!’—regretfully.

Violet had been a very pretty girl—exceedingly pretty girl,

they had all thought in those old days when the quartette, as they called themselves, had been so much together, before Constance's and Reginald's marriages had broken up the clique.

In their little bickerings and discussions, it had always been Constance and he against Reggie and Violet. He and Constance had chummed together, and Reginald had invariably taken Violet's part. She had only been nineteen then, and now she was five-and-twenty.

She was still pretty, but she looked older, and some of the freshness had gone. He had never seen her in black before, and it seemed somehow to tone her down. He remembered that she was in mourning for an uncle, for he had read the notice of the death in the paper; but the general's death hardly accounted for the change in her. They had not met for the last nine or ten months, and then he had had little talk with her.

'And you go home to-morrow?'

'Yes; I have no excuse for staying longer. But I am so glad to have this opportunity of seeing you, Mr. Hamerton; there is so much that I should like to ask you.'

'You mean about Lorimer'; for she had hesitated. 'But surely you have seen Mrs. Wyndham?'

'Do you call her that now?'—with a half-smile. 'No, indeed. I called at Hyde Park Gate twice, but she was at Silcote, of course. It was only natural that she should be with her brother.'

'She came up on Wednesday, and brought him and Tottie back with her. She thought the change would do him good.'

'And how is he?'—with visible anxiety.

'Well, I did not think much of him last night, when I dined there. He is very low, poor old fellow, and does not seem like himself. Mrs. Wyndham wants him to go abroad when the days get longer; and I daresay she is right, but of course it takes time for a man to pull himself together after such a blow.'

'Yes, indeed; and then it was so unexpected. I could scarcely believe it when mother told me. Somehow one never thought of death in connection with Lady Car; she looked so strong, so full of life'; and Violet shuddered slightly, and her eyes looked somewhat misty.

'There was some latent mischief. They found it out too late, that was the worst of it; there was nothing to be done. She was very heroic, poor woman, and took it quietly; but it was hard lines for both of them.'

Violet looked at him in a little bewilderment. Was this how he talked of it?

'You never admired Lady Car as much as other people did,' she said at last. 'You always liked a softer sort of woman; so did I. I never could get fond of her. I often told Constance so, and it made her so angry; but I thought her cold and conventional.'

'Need we remember that now?'

'Oh, I did not mean to be unkind!'—her eyes filling with tears at this quiet rebuke; 'I only wanted to make you understand how I felt. She was very kind, and I liked her, but I could never talk to her about things. I tried sometimes, because I missed Constance; but she always misunderstood me, and then I got vexed. I was a little vexed the last time I saw her. I rode over, and Mr. Lorimer made me stay for luncheon, but I wish now that I had not been persuaded.'

'And Lady Car misunderstood you?'

'Yes; she told me that I was too emotional—how I hate that word!—and she seemed to think, though she did not say so, that I managed badly.'

'And that has preyed upon your mind'—very kindly.

'I think it has a little. I am afraid I was not quite nice to Lady Car. Oh, you know what I mean—nice in my feelings, and then never to have an opportunity of doing better! The next thing I heard was, she was dead. They need not have told me so suddenly'; and Violet grew quite pale as she spoke.

'It was awfully sudden to all of us. A telegram was my only source of information—and then I had it out with Mrs. Wyndham. Don't think anything more about it, Miss Winter. I know how these morbid ideas hang about one. I could be remorseful too if I chose. Lady Car often riled me. It was a way she had, but she meant nothing by it, poor woman, and my sarcasms used to vex her.'

'You are trying to do me good at your own expense; that is kind of you, Mr. Hamerton, and I feel all the better for just talking it out. I only wish I could bring her back'; and then she sighed, and changed the subject by speaking of her uncle's death.

'He has left mother all his money. It is a pity; we did not want it, and uncle Duncan would be glad of it.'

'That seems a pity, certainly. By the by, how are they at the Gate House—your mother and Miss Wentworth?'

'Oh, mother has her usual bad headaches! Cousin Tess is

always well ; she enjoys rude health, as old Thomson once told her.'

'Do you still call her that?' asked Felix, with a smile.

'One must call her something'—and Violet's face grew a little hard—'and I could hardly say Theresa. Aunt Theresa—that is what she wanted me to call her ; but I thought Cousin Tess suited her better.'

'Anyhow, it was pleasant to contradict her.'

And then Violet laughed outright. 'Oh, you have not forgotten my old naughtiness, Mr. Hamerton. I am afraid I have not improved ; Cousin Tess and I fight as much as ever.'

Mr. Hamerton looked a little grave ; evidently things were no better at the Gate House than in the days when Violet used to pour out her grievances into Constance's pitying ears. In those old days he would have taken upon himself to lecture her for her want of charity, but he had no right to do so now. For a moment he felt embarrassed ; but Violet again changed the subject. Perhaps she too felt that they were treading on dangerous ground.

'What dear old times those were !' she said, with a sudden softening of her voice. 'Do you remember that moonlight night when Constance made us all turn out to hear the night-ingales, and the practical joke that Mr. Lorimer played on us ? How angry Miss Ashburton was when she saw the state we were in !' Miss Ashburton was the Aunt Cornelia who had brought up Constance Lorimer after her mother's death, and who had married a widower late in life.

'Of course I remember it,' returned Mr. Hamerton. And then they began recalling old reminiscences, until Daisy suddenly burst upon them.

'We are going to dance,' she said breathlessly. 'Bertie proposed it, and mamma does not mind. Mademoiselle will play, and she does play vales so beautifully. You will dance, Mr. Hamerton, and of course Vi will be your partner.'

'I hardly thought you would throw me over so unkindly, Daisy, and on your birthday too. I had fully intended to dance with you first.'

Then Daisy's face grew radiant. 'And I mean to dance with Bertie, for he is quite the nicest boy here,' and Violet rose to hunt out her partner, while Daisy proudly conducted her friend to the upper end of the room, where the dancers were congregating.

'Are you enjoying yourself, Daisy?' he asked benevolently, when they had accomplished a few turns successfully.

'Oh, so much! and it is so good of you to dance with me, when I know you would have so much rather have danced with Vi.'

'What makes you think that, Daisy?'—in a tone of such surprise that Daisy blushed and hesitated.

'Oh, I don't know. Because every one likes dancing with Violet. She is grown up; and then she dances so well. Aren't you glad she is here to-night, Mr. Hamerton? You were talking so fast in your corner, and seemed so comfortable, that I was quite sorry to disturb you. I am so fond of Vi; she is such a dear.'

'I have no doubt that Miss Winter reciprocates your good opinion. She will be a very nice friend for you when you are grown up.'

'So mamma says. She is so fond of Violet; and so is Mademoiselle—she says she is so spirituelle. Don't you think she is very pretty, Mr. Hamerton? Ah! mamma is beckoning to us. I suppose supper is ready. I hope you are as hungry as I am.'

'You shall judge of that yourself presently,' was his cautious answer; but, as he supplied his young hostess with slim sandwiches and oyster-patties, he thought regretfully of the Welsh mutton and Chateau Margaux that he had given up. Those little dinners in Trevillian's rooms were always so snug, the wine excellent, and the conversation above par; one never met a fool or a bore at Trevillian's. And perhaps the cold chicken and tongue were rather uninteresting fare on a cold night.

Nevertheless, Felix stuck to his post manfully, and remained until the youthful guests had departed.

'Upon my word, Hamerton,' observed Mr. Gresham, as he pressed a choice Havannah on him, 'you have been a good fellow to sacrifice yourself to please my little girl here. I hope you are properly grateful, Daisy. When you are a few years older, you will understand that not many men would give up a dinner at Trevillian's to please a chit like you.'

'Daisy knows I have enjoyed her party,' he returned, with a smile at his favourite.

Before the evening had closed, he had exchanged a few words with Violet.

‘When I am down at the Hall again, I will try and call at the Gate House.’

‘That will be kind of you, Mr. Hamerton. Mother will be so pleased to see you ; and as for Cousin Tess——’

‘Oh, I am not in the least afraid of Miss Wentworth,’ was his reply, as they shook hands.

CHAPTER IV

THE CURATE OF ELTRINGHAM

‘Men still had faults, and men will have them still.
He that hath none and lives as angels do
Must be an angel.’

WENTWORTH DILLON.

THE winter had been unusually long, and a cold, bleak spring heralded in the summer, which was spent by Mr. Lorimer among Swiss valleys and in the Austrian Tyrol, from whence feats of Alpine climbing and accounts of long adventurous walks reached his sister’s ears.

‘Reggie is better, one can see that by his letter,’ she said one morning to her husband. ‘After all, he means to join us at Mürren, and to return with us at the end of September.’

‘I think he is wise not to hurry back; he will have had a good long change by then,’ replied Mr. Wyndham, unfolding his paper. ‘When did he leave us, Constance? Oh! I remember; early in May. Well, a five months’ holiday abroad is long enough for any one.’

‘I dread his coming back,’ observed his wife, mournfully. ‘If Tottie had had measles, as we feared, he would have been with us now, but I knew it would prove nettle-rash. If it were not for Tottie, he says he should go later on to Egypt. “But one’s child comes first”—reading a sentence in her letter—“and it will never do to absent myself too long, or my little girl will forget her dad.”’

‘Quite right; very sensible. Mind you keep him up to that, Constance. I don’t hold with a man running away from his duties. Reg must settle down and look after his property.’

‘It is dreadful to think of him in that great house all alone,’ sighed Mrs. Wyndham; and then, as it was late, and her husband was evidently dying to read his *Times* undisturbed,

she gathered up her letters and went off with them to her morning room.

On the afternoon of that day, while Tottie and Nurse Francis were feeding the ducks on the round pond, and Reginald Lorimer and his faithful Lassie were making their way through a pine forest, and inhaling warm spicy incense at every step, the small railway omnibus set down a solitary passenger at the Goat and Compasses, the principal inn in the little country town of Eltringham.

He was a short, thick-set man, with a large head well covered with iron-grey hair, and in appearance he looked like a respectable tradesman in good circumstances. That he was a stranger was evident from the curious glances of the few loungers sunning themselves as usual in the portico of the inn; but it was also apparent that the place was not unknown to him, for he asked no questions, and, grasping his stick firmly, walked up the High Street, and then, without a moment's hesitation, turned down a narrow stony lane, flagged roughly and unevenly, with a turnstile at the farther end, leading to the church and vicarage.

At the turnstile he paused, and, leaning on his stick, looked thoughtfully at the grey walls of the vicarage; then he shook his head slowly, and walked on.

'A bad business,' he muttered. 'Poor Nat! Who would have thought it? and me left.'

At this moment the door of the vicarage opened and closed hastily, and a tall dark young man, with spectacles, and in clerical dress, walked quickly down the garden path and unlatched the gate.

At the sight of the stranger he stood still.

'Is your business with Miss Carrick?' he asked, with an abruptness that seemed natural to him. 'I am sorry to say she is indisposed this afternoon, and keeps her room; but if there is anything that I can do——'

'Thank you kindly, sir. You are my poor brother's curate, I suppose?'

But at these words, uttered in a slow, hesitating voice, the young man interrupted him.

'Then you are Mr. Reuben Carrick? I thought so—I thought so. We were so sorry to hear of the cause that prevented you from attending the funeral; it was most unfortunate.'

'Ay. I should have liked to have been here, and to have

followed him to the grave. There were only two of us, him and me; and he was younger—half a score of years younger, and he was taken first.'

'We must not stand here talking in the road. You are tired from your journey, and perhaps a bit of an invalid still. Come to my place; it is just by, that low house with the porch—I was just going to have my tea—and we can talk over matters a little. I am afraid'—with a meaning glance at the vicarage—'that you are not expected; at least, no one mentioned it to me. You ought to have sent a telegram.'

'There is no need to put any one out,' returned Mr. Carrick, a little stiffly. 'There is a good inn here, and plenty of beds, so they tell me. I should not care to be beholden to my niece, who, I am sorry to say, is almost a stranger to me.'

We will discuss that later on. But, my dear sir, I must insist on your coming in with me. A cup of tea after your journey, and——'

'Thank you; thank you kindly. I will not be so churlish as to refuse your hospitality; but first I must ask you where they have laid my poor brother. If you will have the goodness to point out the spot to me I shall be greatly obliged.'

'We can almost see it from here. It is only a few steps farther on; there, close to the lich-gate. It was Mr. Carrick's own wish. He said he should like to lie close to the place where the bearers stand when there is a funeral. It was a curious fancy, and his daughter was sorry about it. She would have liked the grave to have been under the east window; but, of course, we were bound to carry out his wishes.'

'Ah! Nat was always a bit fanciful from a lad. So he lies here'—striking his stick impressively on the bare sods, on which lay a wreath of fast-withering summer flowers—'just where the bearers rest for a moment? Yes, I see—I see.'

'He talked about it more than once,' went on the young man. 'It seemed to please his fancy. He spoke of the young couples who sheltered there in the rain, and how the children passed up and down that path, and how they searched for daisies and buttercups in that corner where they grew thickest.'

'Ay, I know what he meant, poor lad; and you were right to humour him. I suppose there will be a headstone presently, and a bit of a text or verse?'

'Oh, no doubt. Miss Carrick will see to that.'

'There is a text that seems to suit him somehow, though my niece might not approve of it. His name was Nathaniel,

you know—my father was Nathaniel too. They might engrave the words, and they would fit him to a nicety.’

‘What words, my dear sir?’

‘“An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.”’

The young clergyman looked surprised and a little touched; then he shook his head.

‘He was without guile certainly, the dear vicar, we all know that; but I would not advise that text. Now shall we go?’

Then Mr. Carrick put on his hat again, for his grey head had been uncovered, and they walked silently towards the house with the porch. It was a mere cottage, but somewhat larger than the neighbouring houses. In the porch Mr. Carrick detained his companion for a moment.

‘What is your name, sir?’ he asked civilly. ‘I should like to know before we break bread together.’

‘My name is Logan—Ewen Logan. My people live at Grantham. I think we have met before, Mr. Carrick. I have just recalled the circumstance. You were good enough to procure for me an edition of “Plato’s Dialogues.”’

‘I had a sort of notion that your face was familiar to me,’ was Mr. Carrick’s reply, as he sank down in the one easy-chair offered him with the languor of a strong man to whom weakness is an unpleasant novelty; while his entertainer vanished in search of his landlady, and then rummaged noisily in the low cupboard for various delicacies in the shape of sardines, potted meat, and jam.’

‘Don’t put yourself out for me, sir,’ interposed Mr. Carrick. ‘I never eat heartily at this hour. A cup of tea will fully content me.’

But Mr. Logan disputed this with great energy. ‘Nonsense, my dear sir. A new-laid egg or two after your journey. I generally make a good meal myself. One cannot work without eating. The brain tissues must be nourished and revived, or one’s sermons would be failures. Draw your chair to the table, Mr. Carrick—how strange to say that name again!—you will find that brown-bread toast excellent. Mrs. Saunders, my landlady, is famous for her brown-bread toast.’

Mr. Carrick helped himself silently. He was evidently in no mood for conversation that moment, and after a remark or two which fell rather flatly, Mr. Logan himself followed his guest’s lead.

The Rev. Ewen Logan was by no means a prepossessing looking person. He was tall and thin, with sloping shoulders,

and his plain sallow face had no claims to good looks. A sharp intelligence was his normal expression. He was short-sighted and wore spectacles, and his eyes were somewhat deeply set. There were certain lines about the mouth that spoke of obstinate purpose, and a love of argumentativeness. Tact, finesse, stratagem were unknown words in Mr. Logan's vocabulary. In looking at him one would be certain that he would speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and not always at the most convenient moment.

'He does aggravate a body so!' exclaimed one aggrieved parishioner, to whom he had been administering a pastoral and much-needed rebuke. 'What is it to the likes of him whether the house is redded up? Parson or not, he had no business to poke his long nose into other people's business.'

'Well, if he did call your place a pigstye, Sarah Martin, he only spoke the truth; and it is a crying sin and shame to see those poor children of yours not washed till midday. Mr. Logan is only doing his duty to tell you to your face that you are a poor sort of manager.'

But Nannie Stubbs took a different tone when she found herself sharply admonished for staying away from evening service. It was, 'Highty-tighty! things have come to a pretty pass, James Stubbs, when you stand by and hear your wedded wife browbeaten by a lad that is young enough to be her son. Stayed away three Sundays—sabbath-breaking—and all the rest of it; and me that is as good a Christian as Rebecca Thorne, who is half a Methodist, and goes to chapel on the sly!'

And, indeed, it must be owned that a little more of that charity that thinketh no evil would have added to Mr. Logan's popularity and usefulness in his dealings with his flock.

'I don't hold with snipping talk myself,' observed one godly old woman; 'it converts no one, and only makes ill feelings. There's Nannie Stubbs gone clean against Mr. Logan, in spite of his powerful sermons, and all because he tackled her too sharply about pleasuring on a Sunday evening. The vicar—bless him!—would just have said, "Nannie, I have missed you the last Sunday or two; how's that, my woman?" in a friendly sort of way that would have given no offence. But he is young; he will know better some day, when he has tasted adversity.'

It could not be denied that Mr. Logan was not greatly beloved, in spite of his zeal for the welfare of his flock. In

the schools the children called him Mr. Goggles behind his back, though they answered his sharp pleasantries with great sheepishness.

‘Well, little Threepenny-Bit, have you been a good girl?’—to a tiny little damsel with peach-blossom cheeks.

‘Please, sir, my name is Patty’—putting her finger in her mouth, and looking inclined to cry at the awful flash of those glasses.

‘He do pounce on one so,’ was the comment of an older girl. ‘Law, how I did jump when he asked me my Catechism question out of turn! He sort of snaps your head off with his “Hurry up, Mary Ann, and be sharp about it.”’

Mr. Logan was sadly aware of his want of popularity. In spite of his many faults and mannerisms, and other moral excrescences which he shared in common with most sons of Adam, he was humble minded, and by no means puffed up or inflated with vanity.

The zeal that overbore and over-mastered him had its root in a sincere desire for the welfare of his fellow-creatures, and a tough resolve to do them good in spite of opposing influence; difficulties never daunted him. He loved fighting for its own sake, even though the enemies were ghostly and invisible; like the war-horse in Job, he scented the battle from afar.

And yet with all this he had his moments of discouragement and self-humiliation, when he was keenly alive to his own deficiencies, and craved for appreciation and sympathy; he would take himself to task for his brusquerie and want of softness. ‘How are they to understand how much I feel for them if I lack expression?’ he would say to himself in a contrite manner, when he had left some house of mourning. Even his vicar had remonstrated with him. ‘It is not always wise to tell people so bluntly of their faults, Logan; it draws out the prickles. A little encouragement, my dear fellow, will help them along the difficult road. We are none of us perfect; but, thank Heaven, we have not had Job Brandon’s temptations.’

Such was the nature of Ewen Logan; but, with all his faults, there were two people who fully understood his excellences—his mother and his cousin Winifred.

The two men partook of their meal silently. Mr. Carrick was evidently weary and sad at heart; once or twice he sighed heavily, and then he took a letter from his breast-pocket and scanned it hastily.

‘I suppose you knew that my brother wrote to me?’ he said at last, so abruptly that the curate started and reddened slightly; his thoughts had strayed away a little.

‘Yes; he told me so. I am afraid’—glancing at the envelope—‘that the letter was a shock to you.’

‘Well, sir, I cannot deny that it was so, though I might have known that Nat was likely to muddle his affairs. I am a plain man of business, and, thank God, things have prospered with me; and I have one blessing, though others have been denied to us—I have a careful wife.’

‘I understood you had no children.’

‘Not on earth, Mr. Logan; but we have buried three. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. If my boy had lived—he was the youngest—he would have been my niece’s age. My wife has not got over his loss yet; she is not a talker, but she never forgets. She reminded me this morning that it was David’s birthday.’

‘Mr. Logan looked his sympathy. His guest’s tongue was loosened at last.

‘We were some years married before our first girl was born. Dear, dear! how well I remember that, and Nat’s letter of congratulation! I have it still. He could write a good letter better than most men’; and then he paused, as though oppressed by his reminiscences.

‘You did not see much of the vicar?’ asked Mr. Logan, rather curiously; and Mr. Carrick shook his head.

‘No, sir. Nat was a cut above us, and we drifted apart, and then he married above him. He brought his wife to see us once. She was a slim, dark-eyed creature, but full of whimsies. She and Clem could not get on together; she turned up her nose at the shop and our homely ways, and Nat never brought her again. Now and then I would come down here, but she never made us comfortable, and I left off coming. Nat and I would write to each other at long intervals, and sometimes he talked about paying us a visit, but it never came off. ‘Why, I have never set my eyes yet on his lad!’

‘Harvey is a fine little fellow, as bright a boy as you could wish to see.’

‘Ay; Davie was a bright lad too—took to his lessons, and learnt everything as though he were playing at it. “When I grow up I shall sell books like you, father”; I can hear him say that now. Poor Davie, poor lad!’—his voice becoming a trifle husky.

Mr. Logan glanced at the clock. There would be evening service shortly, and time was precious.

‘You were going to tell me about the vicar’s letter, Mr. Carrick. I believe I can guess at the contents. He has told you that his children will be utterly unprovided for at his death.’

‘That’s so,’ returned his guest, briefly. ‘Ay, he has made a rare muddle of things, by his own account.’

‘It was not altogether his fault,’ replied the curate, eagerly. ‘He talked to me very freely about his affairs; he knew’—hesitating slightly—‘how great an interest I felt. A friend misled him, and he invested his wife’s money in some rotten company, and after her death it went to pieces, and every penny was gone; but he was so taken up with his own loss that he scarcely heeded it at the time. Eltringham is not a rich living, Mr. Carrick, and, as far as I can judge, I should say the vicar has lived up to his income.’

‘So he tells me in his letter, and blames himself in no measured terms for his negligence of his children’s interests. I shall go into business matters fully to-morrow, and if it be as I expect, I shall have to do my best for the boy and girl. Of course my wife and I must do our duty by them.’

An odd, constrained look passed over the curate’s face. ‘You will offer them a home—is that what you mean?’

‘Yes, of course’—almost indignantly. ‘Do you think I could refuse to give shelter to my brother’s children—and he the only brother I had? My wife and I had a talk about it last night.’

‘“Look here, Reuben,” she said to me, “we must do our duty to the poor things, for they are your own flesh and blood, and let by-gones be by-gones. If you bring them here, I will make them kindly welcome, and the boy shall have Davie’s room. If he is a likely lad, he will be useful to you in the shop by and by.” Ah! she is a good woman is Clemency, and reads her Bible to some purpose; and there is a blessing to those who shelter the orphan and fatherless. That is what she says.’

But it may be doubted if the curate heard all this, for he was saying to himself in dismay, ‘Harvey in the shop! Good heavens!’ And then the tinkle of a bell was plainly audible, and he rose hastily from the table.

‘I must leave you, I am afraid, for about three-quarters of an hour; but we will have some further talk when I get back.’

One thing I must say. There is a spare bed in this house, and I will undertake that Mrs. Saunders will make you far more comfortable than you would find yourself at the Goat and Compasses—unless, indeed, you will go to the vicarage.'

'No, no; my niece is indisposed, so you tell me, and I would not disturb her for worlds. I think I will accept your kind offer for to-night at least, if you will allow me to fetch my bag.'

'I will send one of the choir-boys for it; there's no need for you to stir out again.' And Mr. Carrick sank back in his chair with a look of relief.

The churchyard was bathed in evening sunshine as the curate passed quickly through the lich-gate. But he stopped suddenly at the sight of a slim figure in deep mourning that was crossing the road from the vicarage. He even went back a few steps.

'This is unwise, Miss Carrick,' he said, with his usual abruptness. 'You are not fit for service to-night; at least'—with a glance at her pale face—'you must promise not to go into the organ-loft.'

'My head is much better to-night, thank you,' she returned in a low voice, 'and I should prefer to be at my post. Will there be a practice afterwards?' Then, as he shook his head, 'Have you seen Harvey, Mr. Logan? He went out early this afternoon, and we have not seen him since.'

'He was running down the lane with Bob Jenkinson an hour ago. I expect he had tea at the farm. He and Bob will be sure to turn up all right. Miss Carrick'—checking her as she was about to leave him—'I must tell you something. Your uncle has arrived, and I am putting him up at the cottage.'

'Uncle Reuben!' But she said nothing more; only he could see the shade that swept over her face, and the troubled look in her eyes, before she turned away and left him.

'He has come, and I shall know my fate,' she thought, as she passed into the dark organ-loft. And as she pulled out the stops, and the little church was flooded with plaintive melody, the heart of Gloden Carrick was heavy within her.

CHAPTER V

GLODEN

‘I am as poor as Job, my Lord, but not as patient.’

Henry IV.

Two days after Reuben Carrick had made his appearance at Eltringham, and had stood by his brother's grave, Mr. Logan came out of the schoolhouse towards evening, locking the door upon empty benches and dusty floor, followed by a small stolid boy with a face much begrimed and tear-stained, and the air of a humbled and contrite delinquent.

‘Very well, Tommy,’ observed the curate briskly, but not unkindly; ‘you have owned your fault and taken your punishment, and so we will say no more about it. You have promised to be a better boy to-morrow, and not to give Miss Symonds any more trouble.’

‘Please, sir,’ sobbed Tommy, emboldened by this gentleness, ‘I only ’its him back when he whacked me—and he whacked hard, too’; and a spark of returning animosity shone in Tommy's eyes at the remembrance of his wrongs.

Mr. Logan finished locking the door; then he turned round, and his glasses flashed in an awful manner on the culprit.

‘Oh, you hit him back all right,’ he remarked calmly. ‘And a nice bruise you have given him—a poor lame chap, too! Rare sport, wasn't it, Tommy? And you are a contemptible little brute—that is what you are, Tommy Dunn! And a hypocritical little brute too, for pretending to be sorry. Let me tell you, little boy’—transfixing the unhappy Tommy with a glance that struck terror—‘that Cain and Ananias must have been mean little chaps too when they were your age. I daresay Cain hit back many a time before he murdered Abel; and as for Ananias, he must have told plenty of fibs before he came out with a big one like that. So hit away, my lad, and

tell as many fibs as you like, and you will come to the gallows right enough.'

'A little snivelling sneak, that Tommy Dunn!' observed Mr. Logan, irritably, as he crossed the road to the vicarage, while Tommy thrust his jacket-cuff before his eyes and wailed afresh. 'There, I have lost pretty near an hour over that boy, and believed him too when he said he was sorry. A box on the ears would have done him a precious lot more good than setting him to learn all those texts'; and he unlatched the gate, and walked up the neat gravelled path bordered by dark red carnations, that filled the air with their spicy fragrance, and let himself in after his usual custom.

The little square hall was flooded with evening sunshine, but the large bowl of roses that always stood on the carved oak table only contained a mass of withering blossoms. He stood for a moment and shook his head as he noticed this. 'She has no heart to gather flowers,' he thought, 'and there is no one to think of these things for her'; and the shadow deepened on his sallow face as he tapped at the sitting-room door.

The room had been the vicar's study, but by common consent it had become the general sitting-room of the family. Since her mother's death, Gloden had taken a dislike to the pleasant little drawing-room with the Indian cabinets and Chippendale chairs that had been Mrs. Carrick's pride—the relics of past grandeur, and which had always conveyed to the minds of her visitors that the vicar's wife had known better days. Gloden loved the old oak-wainscoted room, where her father always sat, with its well-filled bookcases and worn shabby furniture, and the wide bay window, with its view of the church and the lich-gate, and a corner of the village green with the curate's white cottage and the schoolhouse.

As the curate opened the door in an unwontedly hesitating manner and stood on the threshold, he was conscious of a sudden pang. The big high-backed chair, that had always been filled by the vicar's portly figure, was now tenanted by a slim girlish form. Something in the forlorn attitude of the girl and the blank, unseeing look of her eyes, as she slowly turned towards him, brought a strange lump to his throat. It troubled him to see her there, and to note the change that even those two days had wrought in her.

'I knew it would go hard with her,' he thought, as he shook hands, and made some remark about the fineness of the evening, to which she returned no answer; but, as he sat down opposite

to her, she contracted her brows slightly, and a sigh of mingled weariness and impatience escaped her that was not lost on Mr. Logan.

Gloden Carrick was by no means pretty, but she had very expressive features; the small pale face reflected all the variation of her feelings after a most eloquent fashion.

The vicar, who had been a humourist, used to call her the antelope, much to her young brother's delight; and indeed there was something deer-like in the small head and dark eyes, something springy and alert in her active movements, that made people call her a graceful-looking girl. 'Gloden Carrick,' they would say, 'is certainly not beautiful, but she is quite out of the common, and then she carries herself so well.' But to Mr. Logan no beauty could have been so alluring as that pale thin face, so full of ungirlish gravity.

'You are alone,' he began abruptly, as she did not seem disposed to break the silence; he could read her thoughts pretty plainly—'Why does he trouble me to talk to-night, when I am tired and only want to be alone? If he had any tact, he must know that.' But Mr. Logan only settled himself more firmly in his chair.

'Your uncle will have to go back to Grantham to-morrow,' he remarked. 'He talks of coming up again in a week or so.'

'Yes, I believe so.'

'May I ask where he is now?'

'He and Harvey have gone for a walk. He said that he wanted to talk to Harvey, so I was obliged to let him go. They will not be back yet.'

'So much the better'—with forced cheerfulness, as he saw the girl's reluctance to be drawn into conversation. He had expected difficulties, and, as usual, set himself to overcome them. He would talk himself, and then she would be obliged to answer him. She had been silent long enough; the dumb devil that dominated her grief must be exorcised. Her nature was morbid and predisposed to melancholy, and it was time that she was roused.

'So much the better, Miss Carrick; there is much I want to say to you. I hope you and your uncle have come to some sort of understanding by this time. He has been talking quite openly to me, so I can grasp the situation. I am very well satisfied with the way he expresses himself; he seems an honest, straightforward man.'

'Oh, of course.'

‘Pardon me, Miss Carrick, there is no “of course” in the matter, and it is quite a relief to my mind to know that we have a kind-hearted, reliable man in your uncle. In some ways he reminds me of the dear vicar, and yet they are very different men.’

‘Yes, indeed’—the two words breathed rather scornfully through her parted lips.

‘There is always a family likeness between brothers’—a little pointedly. ‘Nature will assert her rights in spite of our reluctance!’

And at this plain speaking an annoyed flush came to Gloden’s face, and she raised her head a little proudly; but the next moment it had sunk again. Her dejection and hopelessness were too real, too overwhelming, for her to resent this officious rebuke.

‘I am quite certain that he means to do his duty by you and Harvey,’ went on the curate, energetically; ‘he is conscientious, and has a kind heart, and I am sure you must feel grateful to him. Come—you are grateful to him, are you not?’

‘He is very kind,’ she returned, in a low toneless voice. ‘I am quite sure that he means to be kind.’

‘But, all the same, you are not grateful, Miss Carrick. I know you are wishing me at Jericho, but we must go into this thing properly. You know I am sorry for you, and that I would do anything to help you; but, as your friend—your real friend’—in a significant tone—‘I must implore you to accept your uncle’s terms.’

‘Must we talk of it to-night, Mr. Logan?’—in a weary voice.

‘You will not be more ready to-morrow. Ah! I know you so well, Miss Carrick; this is going hard with you, and you are kicking against the pricks. Look here; I don’t want to bother you more than I can help. I will tell you what your uncle said to me last night; he made it all very plain to me. He said, “I have been going through my brother’s papers, and I find things in a pretty mess. Ever since that break-up of the Blechley Bank he has been living up to his income. What with dilapidations and other expenses, I don’t believe there will be a hundred pounds left. Of course we must sell the furniture; but even then——”’

But Gloden interrupted him impatiently. ‘Yes, I know; there is no use going over it again. Of course I know there is no money, but’—her voice sinking again—‘it was not his

fault. How could he know the money would be lost? He thought he was investing it so safely. I think'—struggling to repress her tears—'that the money and the trouble have shortened his life. He was so unhappy about us.'

'He's not unhappy now'—very gravely; 'those who have passed away see with wiser, calmer eyes than ours. I for one believe that.'

'Do you?'—with intense feeling. 'I will try to believe it too. But oh, Mr. Logan'—her voice relapsing into hopelessness—'how is one to go on living? Do you know'—speaking the name with effort—'that Uncle Reuben wishes us to live with him; that he wants us to go to him at once?'

'And you have consented?' Mr. Logan's tone was almost stern in its abruptness, but there was unmistakable anxiety in the deep-set eyes.

'How could I refuse?'—almost passionately, as though she were defending herself. 'I hate the thought of it as I never hated anything in my whole life before; but how can I let Harvey go without *mé*?'

'I knew you would hate it. It is a foregone conclusion.'

'Of course I hate it!' and he saw her thin hands grasp the arms of her chair with nervous force. 'I know I shall loathe my life, but I must not think of myself. Do you know what he said to me that last evening, when you left us alone? "Take care of the little lad, Gloden; I should like you, if possible, to keep near him." Do you think those words are not sacred to me?'

The curate bowed his head. It was his turn now to be silent; she was opening out to him, and he could read the bitterness of her heart. When she told him she should loathe her life, he knew that she meant every word that she said. At a very early stage of their intimacy he had offended her mortally by telling her that her pride was the worst thing about her. 'A haughty spirit like yours needs checking,' he had said quite seriously, after one of their quarrels; and it was long before she forgave him the roughness of this rebuke.

'Harvey is my first duty,' she went on, in a quieter tone; 'what does it matter what becomes of me? My uncle was very kind; he told me to think it over. But I did not hesitate a moment; I said at once, that where Harvey went I must go too; that, if he would take us both in, I would try not to be a burden to him—that I would find work for myself.'

'What sort of work do you mean?'

‘Oh, anything. I am not certificated, but I could teach quite young children; and then I might give violin-lessons—I have been very well taught. He did not venture to ask me to help in the shop’; and she laughed a flat, dreary little laugh that was painful to hear.

‘It was not likely that he would do that; he knew how you would feel about things.’

‘He was very kind, and I could see that his heart was set on Harvey; he talked most of him. He reminds him of David, their boy, who died some years ago. He told me over and over again that he meant to do his best for him.’

‘I am quite sure that you may rely on such a promise. Miss Carrick, I thank you for this confidence, and you know you have my very real sympathy; but there is something I want to say to you.’ But he hesitated perceptibly.

‘Surely you are not afraid of saying anything to me; this is a new thing, Mr. Logan.’

‘If I hesitate, it is not because I fear to tell you the truth, but because I would not willingly break the bruised reed. Heaven knows your inward bruise must be great, but there is one word of warning that I must speak. Do not add to your heavy troubles by undue bitterness over your changed circumstances. Wherever you go, and whatever work lies ready to your hand, remember that no change can really affect yourself; you will be still yourself, the same Gloden Carrick.’

He spoke hurriedly and without looking at her, and this unusual delicacy and softness touched her more than all his blunt speeches.

‘Thank you, Mr. Logan,’ she said gently; ‘you are kind too, and I shall never forget your goodness to my poor father.’ She stopped, rose from her seat, and stood leaning on the table as though for support. ‘I am very tired; I do not think I can talk any more. May I say good-night, Mr. Logan? Perhaps another day I may be a little stronger.’

‘I ought not to have kept you so long,’ was his abrupt answer. ‘Yes, go and rest, and God bless you!’ He wrung her hand until the delicate fingers were almost crushed, but she only smiled faintly, and left him.

The talk had been horrible to her; it was torture to formulate her thoughts and to give them expression. ‘No words were strong enough to tell him how I hate it,’ she said, with a sort of gasp, as she stood by the open window.

It had the same outlook as the vicar’s study, and as she

leant against the woodwork with her hot forehead pressed against the window-frame, she could see the withered wreaths heaped on the fresh earth, with their fluttering streaming ribbons. Some pitying hand—one of the villagers, most likely—had just laid a posy of gay-coloured flowers at the foot. The little attention brought the tears to her eyes. ‘They will not forget when I have gone away,’ she thought; ‘they loved him so much, and he was so good to them. Oh, father, if you had only taken us with you!’ And then she sat and wept a little with passionate self-pity, and that fruitless agonised yearning for the human touch and the human eyes that is the bitterest part of sorrow.

But she was not long left in peace. The next moment there was a sound of scratching at her door, and a large rough-haired terrier, with a brown patch over one eye and a comical intelligent face, somehow forced his way into the room, and, springing into her lap, licked her face with great affection.

‘Oh, Griff! be quiet, dear old fellow. Yes, I know you are sorry for me’—as he looked up in her face with a plaintive whine. ‘Oh, Griff, what are we to do about you?’

But before Griff could answer this question to his own satisfaction, there were quick springing footsteps outside the door, and a pale, delicate-looking lad rushed into the room.

Harvey bore a strong resemblance to his sister. He had the same small head and graceful, erect carriage, but he had far more claims to good looks. His features were finely cut, and he had beautiful dark eyes. Their mother had been a handsome woman, and both brother and sister had inherited from her a certain air of distinction that had been perceptibly wanting in the good vicar.

‘Have you had a nice walk, darling?’ asked Gloden, tenderly, as the boy threw himself down on the window-seat beside her.

‘Yes—no. Oh, how could I think about the walk?’—irritably. ‘Gloden, do you know’—turning his flushed, disturbed face to her—‘that he—Uncle Reuben, I mean—has been telling me about things; that we are horribly poor, and that there is no money for anything?’

‘Yes, I know all about it, dear’—smoothing his rough hair; but he flung himself away from the caressing hand.

‘Don’t, Gloden; I want you to talk to me. I feel as though I had pins and needles all over me. He says’—his eyes dilating painfully—‘that we are to live with him.’

‘Yes, Harvey, I know; but Uncle Reuben wished to tell you himself. There is nothing else to be done. You will not like it, darling, neither shall I; but, all the same, it is very good of him to offer us a home.’

‘He is a good sort, of course’—reluctantly. ‘And then he told me about Davie. We have never seen him, have we, Gloden? and I can’t say I was much interested. How is one to be interested in a chap that one has never seen?’—kicking his feet against the window-seat.

‘David was our cousin, dear.’

‘Was he? Yes, of course; but I can’t help that. One can’t choose one’s uncles or cousins. I daresay Uncle Reuben liked talking about Davie because he was his own boy, and of course I could not shut him up, but I am afraid I was bored.’

‘That was hardly kind, Harvey. You know dear father told us what a grief poor David’s death was to them both.’

‘Did he? I forgot. I don’t think he noticed I was bored. I just said yes and no at the proper places. But, Gloden’—looking injured and miserable—‘how could I bother my head about other fellows when’—his voice becoming rather husky—‘when he had just told me that he would be obliged to take me away from Repton?’

Gloden drew a long breath, as though she were oppressed, but she said nothing; she knew how intolerable the news would be to the poor boy.

‘He says’—with a hardly repressed sob—‘that he ought not to afford it. Don’t, Griff’—as the creature, conscious that his beloved human friends were in trouble, tried to lick his face affectionately—‘that a plain tradesman like him—I am repeating his very words, Gloden—must dispense with those sort of luxuries. A public school, like Repton, costs a deal of money. He means me to go to a grammar-school; there is one at Grantham, and he says I shall get an excellent education. Oh, Gloden, I do hate it so! Think of mixing with all those cads—butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers, and not a gentleman amongst them!’

‘Oh yes, Harvey, there may be gentlemen as well; not every one in our rank of life can afford to send their sons to a public school. Oh, my darling, I am so sorry for you, I am indeed; but we must try to make the best of it. We have no money, and if Uncle Reuben had not offered us a home, what would have become of us?’

‘Oh, we would have got on all right’—with the reckless-

ness of boyhood. As Harvey was only thirteen, his experience of life was not great. 'We should be a precious deal happier living together, you and I, than we shall be in that pokey little shop. What will the fellows say if they hear of it, Gloden?' looking at her anxiously. 'It will be such an awful come-down.'

'We must make the best of it,' repeated poor Gloden. She did not dare to let the boy know how keenly she shared his feelings. 'As Mr. Logan said just now—he was really very nice and kind, Harvey—no change in our circumstances can really influence us—degrade us, he meant, and of course he is right.'

'If only the fellows don't hear about it!' sighed Harvey, with boyish egotism. 'Perhaps it is as well that I am not to go back next term; how could I enjoy anything with this on my mind? And oh, Gloden, I told Uncle Reuben that Griff must go too! We must not leave Griff behind us—dad was so fond of him'; and he hugged the dog as he spoke.

'I was just thinking about Griff when you came in,' was her reply. 'What did Uncle Reuben say, dear?'

'Well, he hemmed and haw'd a good deal. It seems Aunt Clemency does not like dogs; "she says they get under her feet, and worrit her"—yes, he actually said worrit, Gloden—"and the back-yard was the only place for them in her opinion." I am afraid I spoke up then. "Griff is a gentleman, Uncle Reuben," I said; "he is thoroughbred, and has never been into a back-yard in his life. If you are kind to him he will never give you any trouble, for he is the dearest, gentlest dog in the world. Ask Gloden, and she will tell you we could not be happy without Griff, either of us, and the poor old fellow would die of grief"; and of course he had to give in after that, but I could see he did not like it. He muttered something about Clemency, and the new stair-druggeting, and some such rubbish. I don't like the idea of Aunt Clemency one bit; do you, Gloden?' and Harvey rested his head comfortably against his sister's shoulder, and heaved a prodigious sigh.

CHAPTER VI

STILL WATERS RUN DEEP

‘Small griefs find tongues ; full casques are ever found
To give, if any, yet but little sound.
Deep waters noiselesse are, and this we know,
That chiding streams betray small depths below.’

HERRICK.

THERE was to be little respite for Gloden that evening. Harvey had only just finished his speech, when the housemaid brought a message for her young mistress. Mr. Carrick was in the study, and would be much obliged if she would step down and speak to him for a minute.

‘Oh, I quite forgot!’ exclaimed Harvey, in a conscience-stricken tone. ‘Uncle Reuben told me that he should call in again in about half an hour to bid you good-bye, as he should leave by the early train in the morning. What a careless chap he will think me when he knows that I have never given you the message!’

‘You may be sure that I shall not tell him that,’ replied Gloden, quietly. ‘I will go down to him at once. No, Griff; stay with Harvey’; and the dog obediently jumped on the window-seat again.

Gloden paused for a moment before she turned the handle of the study door, as though she needed strength to brace herself up for a new effort. Her nerves were in a state of painful tension. She had had little sleep the previous night, and the day had seemed endless to her. A heavy oppression that almost amounted to physical pain weighed upon her. She was so worn and unstrung that she felt as though the limits of endurance were reached.

The sun had long set, and the soft September twilight made things somewhat shadowy and indistinct. Reuben Carrick, who was tired from his long walk, had seated himself in the

vicar's chair. He did not at once turn round as his niece entered the room.

For one moment Gloden thought she was dreaming; the indistinct light confused her. Surely that was her father's grey head and broad shoulders, his very attitude when he was weary. The next instant Mr. Carrick looked round, and the spell was broken; but the revulsion was too great, and, hiding her face in her hands the worn-out girl suddenly broke into hysterical tears and sobs.

Mr. Carrick sprang from his seat in great alarm. Then his shrewd instinct gave him a clue to this sudden emotion, and, putting his arm round her a little awkwardly, he guided her to a seat.

'What's to do, my poor child?' he said very kindly. 'There, there! you are about tired out with the day's worries. Don't keep it in, my girl; a good cry will do you good'; and he stood patiently by her side, as she fought with her strangling sobs, saying at intervals, 'There, there, poor thing! you will soon be better'—in quite a fatherly voice.

Reuben Carrick had never felt so drawn to his niece as he did at this moment. He had seen a great deal of her during these two days, and they had had more than one long talk together; but he had never left her presence without a chill misgiving how she and his wife would ever get on together. She had been very cold in her bearing to him, and had kept him at arm's length, though he was her father's only brother. He would not have ventured to kiss her, or hold her hand; every look and word told him that they moved in a different plane, and that there was no sympathy between them, and he had not understood how to break down the barrier.

In his heart he had felt sorry for her. He could not look at that strained, tired young face and not see that she was suffering; but there was something unnatural to him in her self-repression. When she thanked him for his kindness to her and Harvey, it seemed as though she were forcing her reluctant lips to repeat some lesson by rote; she said the words mechanically, as though they had no meaning for her. 'You are very good, Uncle Reuben; it is not possible to refuse such kindness'—with what stiff constraint she had said that!

'She is a cut above us, and she knows it; she is her mother over again,' he had thought. 'Felicia and Clemency mixed about as well as oil and water. I doubt if Clemency will ever get on with the girl; she will be forced to leave her alone, and

let her mope herself into the doldrums. Clem is not one to fash herself over a moody, lackadaisical girl who is too proud to be beholden to her relatives.' For Reuben felt a little sore on his own account. He had come down to Eltringham with a heart brimming over with pity for his brother's orphaned children, and ready to do a kinsman's part, and the silent antagonism of his niece's manner had chilled and aggrieved him.

But now, as she sat there in sobbing misery, as helpless as any other girl to conquer the wave of terrible emotion that had swept over her, a new sort of pity awoke within him. 'She is young, poor thing, and she will mend,' he thought. 'Nat has spoilt her, I'll be bound, and she is a bit highly-tighty in consequence. We must be patient with her, and maybe she will learn to put up with us'; and, as this thought passed through his brain, he put out his large soft hand and touched her hair with a timid, unaccustomed touch, and as he did so he remembered all of a sudden the baby girl whom they had buried in Grantham churchyard.

'We meant to have called her Agnes,' he thought; 'but it was not to be—it was not to be.'

Gloden did not know why that uncertain touch on her hair soothed her, but she was grateful for her uncle's patience and consideration, and after a time she recovered the mastery over herself.

'I am so sorry and ashamed, Uncle Reuben,' she said humbly.

'Nay, nay; there is nought to be ashamed of. I suppose tears were given to women to use. You will be easier now than if you had kept it pent in. It is not natural for a young thing like you to put the curb on too often; nature will have her way.'

'I am not one of the crying sort,' returned Gloden, who still felt some apology was due to her uncle. 'I slept badly, and I think I am over-tired; and then Mr. Logan would talk to me.'

'He seems a good-hearted chap,' observed Mr. Carrick, trying to divert her thoughts a little. 'He is not much to look at, and he is over-fond of his own opinion, but there is plenty of sound grit at the bottom.'

'Oh yes, he is very good. Dear father always liked him, though he laughed at him too; but he is so thoroughly in earnest.'

'He is a good parson, eh? Some of his people live down

our way ; there is a cousin of his, a Miss Logan, comes to our place sometimes.'

'Oh yes, his cousin Winifred ; he often talks of her.'

'She is a plain young woman, and reads a good deal. She is always buying or borrowing books. I fancy she is a governess. I have seen his mother, too, a prim little lady in widow's dress. They live in Chapel Street, running off from the Market-place.'

'Indeed !' but Gloden's interested tone was a little forced.

Mr. Carrick glanced at her sharply. 'You are too tired for any more talk, and it will keep—it will keep ; so I will just say good-night and good-bye, for I shall be off before you are up in the morning. I will write and let you know which day I shall be down again. I suppose a week will be long enough for packing up and all that ?'

'Yes, it will be quite long enough. I suppose'—in a somewhat trembling voice—'that the furniture will not be sold just yet ?'

'No, no, not until Fenwick can arrange for the sale ; but you will have nothing to do with that. When I write I will let you know what your Aunt Clemency says about the books and things you want to bring. Your room will not be over large, you know, and it will never do to overcrowd it.'

'Of course I must be guided by you and Aunt Clemency in that.'

'Yes, yes, that's right ; but it is only fair that we should meet you half-way. The books are everywhere, as Clemency says, but we can stow away a few more, I'll be bound. It is the terrier that is the worst difficulty. You see, we are old-fashioned folk, with no young people belonging to us'—with a heavy sigh, due to David's memory—'and we have never kept a dog. Clemency doesn't hold with dogs.'

'Oh, Uncle Reuben, I am so ashamed of giving you all this trouble !'

'Shame has nought to do with it. I must talk it over with Clemency. The lad's heart is set on the creature, and I don't see how we are to cross him. He was a bit contrary about the back-yard ; that seemed to put his back up. But I am thinking about the new red-and-white druggeting that is on the stairs, that your aunt sets such store by ; and then there is Jim, our big black cat. Jim takes to cursing and swearing whenever he sets eyes on a dog.'

'He would soon get over that, Uncle Reuben. You have

no idea what a dear old fellow Griff is; even father loved him, and he was never one for dogs. He has got over all his puppy tricks, and he has such nice ways. He never begs at meal-time, and he knows when people do not want him, and hides away in a corner; and he only barks at tramps and ragged people, and he never tries to bite them; and—and——'

'There, don't moither yourself; we must just put up with him, I suppose. Well, I'll let you know when I can run up and take you both back with me, and you will get all your traps together, keep a good heart, and take care of yourself.' And then he shook hands with her heartily, and went off.

'Ought I to have kissed him?' thought Gloden, remorsefully. 'He kissed me once when I was quite a little girl. He is very kind and good; I think I shall like him. If only he were more polished, and did not call people sir and ma'am; I am sure he is much nicer than Aunt Clemency.' And then she rang the bell, and told the housemaid to fasten up the house, as it was getting late; but, spent and weary as she was, she would not pass Harvey's door. He was lying wide awake, staring out on the summer darkness—which was not dark, only soft with shadowy haze—and obscurity; and, as she bent over him, he suddenly pulled her down beside him, and she felt that his cheek was wet.

'My darling,' she whispered, 'it is so late—nearly ten o'clock, and you are not asleep.'

'How is one to sleep, thinking of this wretched business?' he returned, with an impatient fling under the bedclothes. 'I should have been top of my form next term—Beddoes said so—and in the second team at football too, and there is no end of fun going on next term. It is a beastly shame that Uncle Reuben should send me to a grammar-school!'

'Dear Harvey, you know as well as I do that it is the only thing that Uncle Reuben can do. Would you have him give you a better education than he meant to give his own son? He is not a bit niggardly, but he is only a tradesman, as he says. We must put up with it, dearest, and fight our way to better things. Put it all out of your thoughts to-night, and try and go to sleep. If my head did not ache so much, I would stop with you.'

'No, you won't! You will just go to bed. Father said I was to take care of you; so face about sharp. I won't say another word.' And Harvey buried his head and wriggled

among the bedclothes until his sister had left the room, and then emerged and tossed on his pillow, and finally cried himself to sleep, poor little lad; while Griff, beside himself with sympathy, scratched and whined, and finally jumped on the bed and lay across his chest, thereby causing him the anguish of nightmare, until he succeeded in dislodging him, and finally boy and dog lay in a heap together and slept the sleep of the weary.

But it was long before sleep came to Gloden. Her head ached, and then she grew feverish, and there was no controlling the thoughts that surged through her brain. All at once her father's farewell words rang in her ears—'Good-bye, dear child; always, my good brave Gloden, try to believe it is for the best.' And then the next moment Mr. Logan's speech recurred to her—'He is not unhappy now; those who have passed away see with wiser, calmer eyes than ours. I for one believe that.' What if Mr. Logan were right, and that her father were permitted to look down upon her struggles, and those long years of effort that lay before her, but with no sorrowing glance? The great crowd of witnesses in those quiet resting-places look down with calm eyes that see beyond the smoking battle-fields, beyond wounds and bloodshed, to where the fainting soldier lies, sword in hand. After the battle, peace. 'The rest that remaineth,' that will be his portion when the strife is over. Human impatience cannot mar the tranquillity of the blessed. And as these salutary thoughts insensibly soothed and quieted her, Newman's beautiful lines recurred to her memory—

'A sea before
The throne is spread—its pure still glass
Pictures all earth scenes as they pass.
We on its shore
Share in the bosom of our rest
God's knowledge, and are blest.'

* * * * *

It was not a long journey to Grantham, and before midday Reuben Carrick had crossed the Market-place, portmanteau in hand, and was standing before a low bow-windowed shop, with 'Reuben Carrick, Bookseller, Stationer, and News-agent,' clearly legible in gilt lettering.

As he passed through the shop, a little bright-eyed woman, with grey hair and a red woollen shawl crossed over her chest, looked up and nodded to him with a smile, and then turned her attention to her customer.

‘You will find this a strong, serviceable purse, Miss Logan, and it won’t easily wear out; it is far more durable than the other sort, and three-and-six is none too dear for it.’

‘I daresay you are right, Mrs. Carrick,’ returned the young lady, pleasantly. ‘Cheap goods are always dearest in the end; at least, that is my experience. Yes, I will take the brown purse. Please put it up with the other things. By the by, I hope Mr. Carrick has the book that I ordered last Wednesday, *The Stones of the Temple*, you remember.’

‘I am very sorry, Miss Logan, but my husband has been ill; and then he has been away. He lost his brother, as I daresay you heard; and he was obliged to go down to Eltringham.’

‘Dear me! yes. He was my cousin’s vicar, too; I might have thought of that. Never mind the book, Mrs. Carrick; there is really no hurry. I am very sorry indeed for your husband’s trouble. I can assure you that my cousin feels it very much; he was so attached to his vicar.’

Mrs. Carrick did not answer. She was a woman of few words, and very seldom chatted with her customers.

‘Your order shall be attended to as soon as possible,’ she said, as she handed the parcel. ‘I will speak to my husband about it at once.’

Miss Logan thanked her, and went out of the shop. She was, as Reuben Carrick had described, a very plain young woman. She was somewhat dark-complexioned, and her teeth were slightly prominent; and she was near-sighted, too, and wore pince-nez. But there was something agreeable in her expression, and in the sound of her pleasantly modulated voice. When people knew her they invariably liked her, and her pupils were warmly attached to her.

When Winifred Logan left the shop some more customers entered, and by and by Reuben Carrick came to his wife’s help. For the rest of the day both wife and husband were busy in their different departments, and, except in business, they did not exchange a word. Now and then Clemency raised her quiet eyes to the clock. To her the day had seemed interminable; but she was patient by nature, and she could wait until the proper time came for questioning her husband. It came at last, when the shutters were put up, and Reuben, in his loose alpaca coat and slippers, sat by the fire, that was generally lighted when the evening was come.

The neat little maid had just brought in the supper-tray

and placed it at one end of the table. Clemency sat, knitting in hand, at the other; and Jim, the big black cat, was curled up on the big easy-chair opposite Reuben.

The homely parlour looked the picture of comfort, and Clemency, in her grey gown, with the little red shawl still on her shoulders, seemed the embodiment of tranquillity.

In her girlhood she had been pretty, with a soft mouse-like prettiness, and her eyes still retained their brightness.

She was a thoughtful, self-contained little woman, not given to much speech, unless she were alone with her husband; and even to him she was at times chary of words. All their married life Reuben had been the talker and she the listener, but he could always interpret her silence.

'Clemency has a still tongue,' he once said; 'but her words mean more than most people. When I married her I knew I should have to talk for both.'

He looked at her now, as she sat with bent head turning the heel of a sock. She had asked no questions as yet.

'Well, Clem'—and a little smile came to his lips as he watched the flashing needles and thin fingers—'you are about ready to hear things by this time, I'll be bound.'

'I have been ready a long time, Reuben,' was the quiet reply; but she did not lay down her knitting, and Reuben's story was told to the sound of clicking needles.

It was an accompaniment to which he was well accustomed, and which always soothed him. Clemency's knitting-needles tranquillised her nerves, as much as Reuben's evening paper rested him.

Reuben told his story without interruption, and he told it in the way Clemency loved—with plenty of details and copious annotations of his own; and when he had finished, she looked up at him without a word, but there was a tremulous movement of the lips that showed she was moved.

'So you see it is all settled, wife.'

'Ay, I see that.'

'I shall go down again next week, and bring them back with me. You will be ready by then?'

'Yes, surely, Reuben. Patty and I will set to work at once.'

'That's my good little woman. And I know you will make the poor things kindly welcome. It will seem strange at first, Clem. Our Darby and Joan days will be over. But we are growing old, and after a bit the faces of young folk will be pleasant.'

'If they were only our own, Reuben.'

'Nay, we must not think of that, lass. You will find the girl difficult at first. I doubt she is a cut above us, and takes after her mother. Felicia used to carry her head in the same way.'

'Yes, I remember, Reuben. She had a trick of looking at one through her half-closed eyelids as though one were the dirt under her feet.'

'Gloden is not as bad as that, but I doubt that Nat spoilt her, and gave her her way in things; but she is sensible, and has a head on her shoulders. The boy is a fine little fellow, as bold as brass, and speaks his mind like a prince.'

'Is he—is he like Davie?' asked his wife in a curious inward voice, that with her meant strong emotion.

Reuben shifted his seat uneasily. 'No, no; there is nought in common between them. Our Davie was dark and sturdy, and had fine rosy cheeks of his own, till the fever took him, poor lad; but Harvey is a pale-looking chap, but as handsome as a picture, and he has got his say about everything. Davie was more quiet-like, and took after you.'

If Clemency were disappointed at this description of her nephew, she did not say so; 'One must put up with things and people as one finds them,' was a favourite expression of hers.

'He will have Davie's room,' she returned, looking at her husband. 'We must do up the attic-room for Gloden; it is larger, and there is a cupboard for her things.'

Reuben nodded his head approvingly. 'There are some of Nat's books and some bits of furniture that she wants to bring; and, oh! I forgot one thing, Clem, that you will be sorry to hear. There is a dog, a sort of terrier—Griff, they call him—that it would break Harvey's heart to part with. He is a quiet, well-behaved creature, and I doubt that we shall have to give him house-room.'

A flush came to Clemency's cheek, and her lips looked a little compressed.

'Did you hold out any sort of promise about it, Reuben?'

'Well, I said we would try to put up with him; the boy was so bent on it, you see.'

'If you promised, there is nothing more to say,' was Clemency's only answer; but her husband, who could read her thoughts, saw that the news had displeased her. Griff was the proverbial last straw that broke the camel's back.

She rose from her chair after this, and reminded her husband that it was growing late.

‘I’ll just finish my pipe, and then I’ll come upstairs,’ he said; and she nodded and left him.

She had a lighted candle in her hand, but she did not at once go to her room. She stood for a moment on the dark landing; then she unlocked a door.

It was a small, neatly furnished bedroom that she entered, and had evidently been disused for some time. There was no carpet on the floor, the curtain-poles were bare, and the small iron bedstead was covered with a sheet. She set down the candlestick on the chest of drawers; then she opened one drawer after another. There were piles of beautifully stitched shirts, and some boyish collars and a small tie or two; in the other drawers there were books and toys of every description.

She looked at them all slowly and mournfully; and then she went to the cupboard and took down a shabby jacket and a straw hat trimmed with blue ribbon, and sat with them for a long time in her lap, and the slow, hot tears gathered in her eyes.

‘Seven years ago,’ she was saying to herself, ‘and he was twelve then. Why, he would have been a man by this time—Davie—and helping his father in the shop; and that bed would have been too small for him. He was growing fast; every one said so.’

She sat on a little longer, fingering the jacket, and presently one of the tears fell and wetted her hand.

That startled her; and the next moment she could hear her husband’s heavy footfall ascending the stairs. She rose quickly, and hung up the jacket again; then she opened the door. Reuben was standing outside; he looked as though he were waiting for her.

‘I knew you would go in there,’ he said slowly. ‘I was expecting you to come out.’

‘Ay; I felt as though I wanted a talk with Davie,’ she answered; but there was a smile on her face as she spoke. ‘I have been thinking that he would have been a grown-up man by now. But to me he will always be the boy Davie; yes, always the boy, till you and I see him again.’

CHAPTER VII

'YOU HAVE MADE A MISTAKE'

'It lies not in our power to love or hate,
For will in us is overruled by fate.'

MARLOWE.

THE week that followed was a sorrowful one to Gloden; each day as it passed seemed to stamp its record on her memory with a brand of ineffaceable pain that no future happiness could ever quite obliterate.

Hitherto there had been no complications in her life. Even her mother's death, deeply as it had affected her, had not left her so utterly stranded, with such visible marks of shipwreck and chaos. Then she had forgotten her own grief in her eagerness to be her father's comforter. She had been but young—barely sixteen—but she had grasped the household reins so firmly, with such nervous energy and force, that her youth had been forgotten; and the village children curtsied to her with the same awe as they did to the squire's lady, when she deigned to take up her abode at the Manor-house for a few weeks in the shooting-season, and so play the part of Lady Bountiful for her own amusement.

Reuben Carrick had been right when he had asserted that his brother had spoiled Gloden. Her father's idolising affection had been blind to her defects, and she had her own way so completely in everything that she had no need to assert her strong will. When every one yielded to her opinion and consulted her convenience, it was no wonder if she grew to believe in herself; but, though her faults were many, there was a certain openness and generosity in her nature that prevented this pride and self-reliance from degenerating into mere opinionativeness and haughtiness, and to those she loved she showed a rare unselfishness and sweetness.

But now her father's death opened a deep gulf between her past happy life and the future. She was to bid farewell to the simple paradise of her girlhood, where every face was the face of a friend, and where she could not pass the threshold of her home without meeting the greeting smile and words of her neighbours; some of them, like old Susan Burke, had known her since her birth.

'It will be a bad day for Eltringham when you go, Miss Gloden,' observed Nannie Stubbs, when Gloden went into her cottage the last evening to say good-bye. 'So you are flitting to-morrow, I hear tell; and more's the pity. There! sit you down; for you look terrible bad, to be sure.' And Nannie, who was at her wash-tub, wrung out a cloth with energy, as though it were some relief to her feelings.

'Yes, we are leaving to-morrow, Nannie,' returned Gloden, in a subdued voice. How many times had she said those words since morning? 'I think I have seen every one now but Susan. I left you to the last, because I knew you were busy.'

'I am mostly busy,' returned Nannie, splashing in the soap-suds again. 'I don't hold with sitting down and twiddling one's thumbs like a fine lady; poor people have got to work, as I tell my Sally. Life isn't all fine feathers and flummery.'

'No indeed,' sighed Gloden.

'James and I are bound to work, Miss Gloden, with twelve children, and Sally only seventeen, and no better than she should be.'

But here Gloden hurriedly put in a word. 'Nannie, I want to say a word about Sally. I am very fond of her, you know, and I do think she is very much improved, and if you would only tell her so sometimes, I think it would put a little heart in her; you know, we all need encouragement.'

'If we do, we don't get it, then,' returned Nannie, defiantly. 'There is Mr. Logan, always about the place, with never a civil word for a body. As I tell James, it does put one's back up always to be scolded. "Why isn't Tommy more punctual at school, Mrs. Stubbs?" or, "I will have to keep Mary Anne in if she does not learn her lessons"; and me washing from morning to night to put food in their mouths and clothes on their backs, let alone all the worrit of mind I go through.'

'I know you and James work hard,' replied Gloden, soothingly, for Nannie had a sharp tongue when she liked, and it was never over-sweet on washing-days. 'I often hold you up as examples in the village. "Look at Nannie Stubbs!" I say

sometimes. “She is up at five o’clock in the morning, and hardly sits down all day, and her cottage is always so clean and neat, and so are the children—they are a credit to the place.”

‘Well, to be sure, Miss Gloden’—in a mollified tone—‘and it was very handsome of you to say it; and I will not deny that James is the best husband a body could have, never drinking away his time at the Goat and Compasses, like other folk’s husbands I could name.’

But at this point Gloden struck in briskly, ‘Then about Sally. You will give her a helping word now and then, will you not? Seventeen is not a great age; and it is not Sally’s fault that she is so pretty, and that the lads pay her too much attention. You were young yourself once, Nannie, and you must not be hard on Sally.’

Mrs. Stubbs’s comely face relaxed into a smile. ‘There, there, Miss Gloden, don’t you trouble your head about the girl. If I keep a tight hand over her it is only for her good, and as my mother served me, and I’ll not turn away any likely lad that can earn an honest penny. It is the feckless sort, like that blathering Isaac Stokes, that shall never come near my place.’

‘Isaac Stokes! No indeed!’—with a slight shudder, for Isaac Stokes was the black sheep of the village. ‘Well, I must go, Nannie, for Susan is expecting me’; and Gloden put her soft little fingers in the rough, work-hardened hand.

‘Good-bye, Miss Gloden. You will be fine and missed, to be sure. The village will not be the same place without you and the vicar. But there, you won’t be forgotten!’ and Nannie went back to her washing-tub rather abruptly, and her voice was a little choky.

A few minutes later a pretty, fresh-coloured girl came into the cottage. Mrs. Stubbs looked up at her sharply.

‘Oh, you are here at last, Sally! and not more than an hour later than you should be. It is fine to be you, Sally Stubbs, walking in the lanes, I’ll be bound, with some idle spark or other, while your poor mother slaves at the wash-tub.’

‘I do not know what’s come over you, mother,’ returned poor Sally, her cheeks flaming at this accusation. ‘Everything is wrong as I do now. And I went straight along the road, and came back the same way, and never loitered at the lodge a moment, though Mrs. Reynolds pressed me to have tea with them; and if Sam would put me on my way, and carry my basket for me, it was no fault of mine, and he got very little encouragement.’

‘Oh! go along and take off your hat, my wench, and put on the tea-kettle, for I am as dry as dry can be. Then Miss Gloden has been sitting with me for ever so long, and looking as down as possible, poor thing!’

‘Miss Gloden! Dear, dear; to think that I have missed her! But I will go right up to the vicarage when the children are in bed, and take her some flowers.’

And Sally set on the tea-kettle, and masked the tea, as she called it, in the little brown tea-pot, and set it on the bar to warm. And all the time she wondered why her mother had not flared up at the mention of Sam Reynolds, for the young blacksmith had waylaid her more than once lately. She was almost minded to tell her about the blackbird in the wicker cage that he was taming for her, and which ‘sings so beautifully in the early morning, as never you heard,’ Sam had assured her as he pressed his rustic gift upon her.

Meanwhile Gloden had crossed the village green, followed by the snow-white hissing geese, cackling and stretching out their long necks behind her, after the manner of their kind, and had entered a tiny lean-to cottage close to the schoolhouse.

Susan Burke had been bedridden for fifteen years, and lived alone with her idiot daughter. Margaret, or Marget, as she was generally called, was always regarded by her neighbours as a poor idiot, the rustic mind being incapable of nice classification. In reality, she was one of God’s innocents—a grey-haired child to whom evil was unknown, and the whole world a miracle of kindness. To strangers, the blankness of Marget’s expression and the wavering light of her dull blue eyes were somewhat painful; the spectacle of imperfect and undeveloped womanhood was sadly repugnant. But to her mother Marget was merely a child, without a child’s mischief.

The vast patience of a mother’s love had taught Marget much. She had learnt to keep the cottage clean, and to wait on the sick woman. Now and then a kindly neighbour came to her help, but Susan never owned that such assistance was necessary.

‘There is no need to fash yourself,’ she would say. ‘Marget is as strong as a horse, and nought tries her, and she minds every word I say.’

Marget was standing at the cottage door as usual, in her clean print pinafore and white sun-bonnet. She had a little black kitten in her arms, and her vacant blue eyes were fixed on the village green.

When she saw Gloden she dropped her curtsy. 'It is a fine evening,' she said, in a thick, uncertain voice. To Marget, even when it snowed or rained, it was still a fine evening.

'Stand aside, my woman, and let Miss Gloden pass,' observed a voice from within. 'Ay, Miss Gloden, dear, but I have been wearying to see you. I set Marget to watch an hour ago'; and she quickly raised herself from her pillow.

'I left you to the last, Susan,' returned Gloden, softly. 'I have been saying good-bye all day long, and it has seemed like three days rolled into one. How tired I am!' and the strain of exhaustion in her voice spoke volumes to Susan.

'Ay, He knows all about that, dearie. He was fairly spent Himself when He sat on the well-side, and the woman took to asking Him questions instead of giving Him a drink of water. I never liked her for that; it is what folks do nowadays. They are always so busy with their questions and their words, when it is the cup of cold water that is needed.'

Susan Burke was a large-featured, mild-eyed old woman who had been chastened and disciplined in the school of adversity. A quiet and contented spirit breathed in every word. Few women had had so many trials, and had borne them so uncomplainingly. She had followed her husband and three grown-up sons to the grave; for fifteen years a painful complaint had confined her to her bed, and her only companion was an imbecile daughter; and yet Susan always spoke of her life as a happy one. 'It has been just a bundle of blessings,' she would say. 'Look at me, with my eyesight and hearing, and having no care about the morrow; with a cottage of my own, that Daniel built for me when we were first married; and a stocking full of savings for Marget when I am gone, and no fear of her, poor wench, going to the workhouse.'

Gloden looked round the cottage with mournful tenderness, as though she would photograph it on her memory; on the low-raftered room and latticed windows, with the yellow musk in the red flower-pots.

In after days she could recall it all: the checked blue-and-white curtains of the bed, and the patch-work quilt; Susan in her grey knitted shawl, propped up among her pillows, with her Bible and horn spectacles beside her; and Marget and the black kitten in the rocking-chair. She could even see the gooseberry-bushes in the tiny garden, and the warm sunshine streaming in at the open door. On the red-tiled floor Marget was crooning out a little song, as she rocked herself slowly.

She had taken off her sun-bonnet, and her short grey hair gave her an odd appearance.

'Marget gets on finely,' observed Susan, after she and Gloden had talked a little. 'Twenty years ago I mind how low Daniel was about her. "She is a woman grown," he would say, "and she knows no more than a child of seven. I am most tempted to wish that she may go before us."'

"I'll have nought to do with such wishes, Daniel, my man," I would answer, for it was the enemy, not Daniel, speaking; I knew that well. "Marget is God's child as well as ours, and we may trust Him to deal with His own." Do you know, Miss Gloden dear, I have a kind of fancy that the angels will teach Marget plenty by and by, and that they are beginning their work now? She says such things sometimes as you would never believe. I heard her talking to the flowers to-day. "I'll be a flower too some day—a white, white flower"; and then she spread her arms and smiled, as though she felt herself growing. She is happy from morning to evening, is Marget.'

'Oh, Susan, if I were only like you, and could look on the bright side of things!' sighed the girl.

'You will come to it, Miss Gloden. Patience isn't learned in a moment; we must just take our lesson page by page. I was long in learning to lie quietly on my bed, but now I know it is the right place for me. Oh, I can bide still until He calls me! But ay, my dearie, when He sends for me, what a joyful day that will be! Sometimes I dream that the message has come, and I am flying, flying through the air; and then I wake, to hear Marget breathing in her sleep beside me, and the old brown rafters over my head.'

'You must pray for me, Susan, that life may not seem over-hard to me.'

'I will not put it in those words, Miss Gloden, lest it give offence up above, for we must not be fashioning our own crosses; it will be more dutiful-like to take them as they are sent. But I will pray for you, and welcome, my dearie, that the way may be made plain before your face, and that you may not lose heart over it; and you will think of me and Marget sometimes.'

But Gloden could only just whisper a response to this appeal, as she bent down to kiss the wrinkled brow. She dearly loved the patient, kindly old woman, and the word 'good-bye' faltered on her lips.

Marget stumbled up from her chair, and dropped her curtsy again. 'It is a fine evening,' she said vacantly.

Gloden had meant to visit her father's grave, but as she left the cottage she saw the curate's thin angular form crossing the green. His steps were directed to the vicarage; this was probably intended to be his farewell visit. It would never do to avoid him; so Gloden heaved a weary sigh, and tried to put a good face on it.

Mr. Logan looked at her keenly as he advanced to meet her.

‘Are you coming in? I was waiting for you. Mrs. Stubbs told me you were at Susan's cottage. If you have anywhere to go, I will accompany you—that is’—with a half-smile—‘if you will give me permission to do so.’

‘I am not going anywhere,’ returned Gloden, quickly; everything is done. We are expecting my uncle by the last train, and Harvey will meet him. Shall we go into the garden, Mr. Logan? It will be so close in the house. It has been a warm day—strangely so for September; don't you think so?’

‘I have not thought about it,’ he returned abruptly, as he followed her through the gate. There was an elm tree with a circular seat on the lawn, where they often sat in the summer evenings, and Gloden made her way towards it. She was fevered with fatigue and trouble of mind, and even her hat oppressed her. She took it off, and unloosened the little silk kerchief she wore round her throat.

Mr. Logan did not at once sit down; he stood watching her quick, nervous movements. The signs of trouble on her young face affected him strangely. The brightness of her eyes was quenched with weeping, and the reddened eyelids told their own tale; but she seemed unaware of his close scrutiny.

‘Miss Carrick, I wish that I could see some improvement in you.’

Something in his tone startled her, and she looked up; but he was drawing an imaginary line with his stick on the grass, and his face was quite impassive.

‘You are taking your trouble hard, as I told you before, he went on. ‘What is the use of fighting against it? Circumstances are too strong for you.’

‘Yes, they are too strong for me.’

‘They would be too strong for any girl of your age. You are not weak; but the odds are too great, and you have not proved your armour. Miss Carrick, I am going to disobey you. I must remind you of a conversation that passed between us on this very spot a year ago; you have not forgotten it, I daresay.

To me it was the most important conversation that I had ever held in my life.'

There was no mistaking Gloden's start now. But she drew up her long neck with an annoyed gesture. She had been so unsuspecting; she had brought him to this very spot, never imagiing that he would venture to speak to her again in the way she had forbidden. But there was something uncompromising in his very attitude. She would have risen and left him, but he was standing before her, and it would be easy for him to put out a hand and check her retreat. Once before—she remembered it well—she had so arisen in passionate protest, and he had effectually barred her passage.

'I cannot allow you to leave me until I make my meaning clear to you,' he had said very quietly; and she had sat down again, feeling that he was too much for her.

But in the end she had silenced him. 'There can never be anything between us two but friendship,' she had said to him almost brusquely. 'Please do not tell me again that you love me; it is useless, and it only gives us both pain.'

'I will certainly not tell you so again, if you forbid it,' had been his answer. 'No man has any right to persecute a girl; but the fact will remain that I do love you'; and in her heart she felt that he had answered her well.

But now this allusion to the scene that had passed between them troubled her not a little. Was this the time to speak to her of love, when she was bowed down with sorrow? The silent rebuke in her eyes warned him that he was treading on dangerous ground, but he took no apparent notice.

'I do not think we have either of us forgotten that conversation. To me it ended most disastrously; it certainly left me in no doubt of your meaning.'

'Truth is always the best,' she returned, with that hardening of features he knew so well.

'You mean that if a girl has to refuse a man, she must be careful to cut away the ground utterly from under his feet. When I left you that evening I certainly felt as though my last shred of hope had been taken away from me.'

'I am very sorry, Mr. Logan; but surely you have not borne a grudge against me all this time.'

In her nervousness she had said the wrong thing, and a dull flush came to Ewen Logan's face. It is not pleasant to be misunderstood by the girl that one worships.

'No, Miss Carrick; I owe you no grudge. You had every

right to refuse me, and, as far as I understand matters, you have that right still.'

Gloden winced; he intended to repeat his offer. At all costs she must try to silence him.

'Mr. Logan, for your sake as well as mine I must implore you to say no more.'

'If I were thinking of myself, Miss Carrick, I should probably take your advice. But it is for your sake that I speak, and I must beg you to hear me patiently. Under other circumstances I should not have spoken; I should have waited until I saw my way clearly. But I cannot be silent in your trouble. To spare you pain or annoyance I would willingly cut off my right hand.'

'You are very good,' she murmured, for she was touched in spite of herself by this generous and persistent affection.

'No, I am not good,' he returned, with stubborn honesty. 'It is as natural for me to love you as to breathe this air; I cannot help myself. From the first I felt that I must win you for my wife. Your faults are very real to me, but I love you in spite of them, and if you could only bring yourself to care for me and to overlook my defects of manner, I would do my best to work for you, and to shield you from adversity.'

Gloden was silent; she was trying to find words in which to express her gratitude, and yet it seemed to her as though no words would come. He had been very good to her in her trouble, and she would never forget his kindness to her father. If she could only care for him! She looked up at him as he stood before her, still tracing those mysterious cabalistic signs with his stick. There was something ungainly and awkward in his attitude, and his figure lacked dignity. His sallow face had no redeeming features in her eyes; to her it was utterly commonplace and insignificant. Was it her fault if she failed to recognise the inner beauty of the man's character, its honesty and unselfishness? She liked him as a friend—a trusty, reliable friend; but even in that capacity he failed to interest her.

'I am very sorry,' she said at last, in a hesitating voice, 'but there is no difference in my feelings. There never will be. You have made a mistake, Mr. Logan, in speaking to me again. If you were to ask me a hundred times, my answer could never be different. I grieve to tell you this, but I cannot help myself.'

'No, you cannot help yourself; neither can I. I shall not

ask you a hundred times, Miss Carrick'—with a grim smile. 'No man would court humiliation to that extent; but if you ever want me you will find me ready'; and then he put out his hand.

Gloden felt a momentary compunction as she gave him hers. 'Do not think me unkind,' she said hurriedly; 'I shall always look upon you as my friend.'

'I shall be that, whatever you think of me,' he said gravely; and then he dropped her hand and raised his felt hat, and the next moment Gloden heard the click of the gate.

CHAPTER VIII

HARVEY SCORES ONE

'There is no dearth of kindness
In this world of ours ;
Only in our blindness
We gather thorns for flowers.'

MASSEY.

GOOD-BYE to Eltringham. Good-bye to my dear old life and to happiness,' whispered Gloden, as she dropped her thick veil and shrank back into a corner of the railway compartment as the train moved slowly out of the station.

Harvey still hung out of the window, waving his straw hat wildly. 'Good-bye, dear old chaps!' he shouted hoarsely to a group of loutish-looking lads, who grinned back at him sheepishly, and touched their caps in response. 'What a lot of people to see us off!' he continued excitedly. 'Why, the station was quite full; wasn't it, Uncle Reuben? I did not see Mr. Logan for a long time, until he came up to speak to us. Aren't you glad people were so kind, Gloden?'

But his uncle made a sign to him to be quiet. His keen eyes told him that hot tears were falling one by one under the thick veil.

Gloden had found no words to thank pretty Sally Stubbs for the posy that she had handed in a few minutes ago at the window. She had had no answer for Mr. Logan's grave and kindly farewell, though she noticed how pale and sad he had looked. The crowd of friendly faces oppressed her. If she had had her will, she would have stolen out of her old home silently and unperceived. But the good-bye greetings of his old chums afforded Harvey infinite consolation.

Reuben Carrick showed tact and real consideration when he unfolded his paper and left the grieving girl to her own sad thoughts.

Gloden was not only bidding good-bye to a happy past, to her much-loved home and her parents' grave, but she was saying farewell to everything she most prized—friends, position, the homage and consideration of her poorer neighbours; to the sovereignty and empire that had been so sweet to her.

There are some natures who are born rulers, to whom to be first in a village would seem more desirable than to be on equality with others in a city. Gloden was one of these. Her dominion had been small, but she had governed it absolutely; and Miss Carrick of Eltringham Vicarage had been an authority in her own and her neighbours' eyes.

It had always been a secret grievance to Gloden that her father had not been her mother's equal in birth. Mrs. Carrick had had good blood in her veins, and had been the last representative of a fine old family, but her husband had belonged to the people.

She had been too good a wife to remind him of this fact, but she had never accepted his family. Her only visit to her brother-in-law had had unhappy results, and the relations between her and Clemency had become so strained that her husband had never asked her to repeat it. The atmosphere of the shop and Clemency's homeliness had been hateful to her, and the idea that her husband had spent his youth amid such surroundings had been galling to her pride.

Gloden had inherited much of this sensitive exclusiveness. Like her mother, she laid an undue stress on environment and culture. Refinement was engrained in her very nature. To her, want of polish, an outer roughness of manner, was equal to a defect in nature.

Poverty was no crime in her eyes. She would have borne uncomplainingly any loss of fortune; but the loss of consideration, the knowledge that she must move henceforth on a lower social plane, was wormwood and bitterness to her.

'If I lose caste, and my equals refuse to acknowledge me because of Uncle Reuben,' she had said to herself, 'I will live alone. At least I will respect myself.' Truly the spirit of Felicia Carrick breathed in her daughter.

Reuben Carrick knew all about it as he tried so painfully to read his leader. No fallen princess ever posed more proudly in her hour of humiliation than Gloden; but in his honest heart he read her truly. 'She is young, and Nat has spoilt her,' was the excuse he had always ready. He could not forget the evening when she had wept so bitterly, and he had stood

beside her, smoothing her hair as though she were a child. The remembrance still softened him strangely.

‘If only Clemency will mother her a bit!’ he thought, as again he set himself to read his paper. ‘She has love enough in her heart for half a dozen women, only she is so quiet that folks are slow in finding it out.’

The journey, short as it was, seemed long to Harvey, who was compelled to find amusement in looking out of the window and inciting Griff to growl at imaginary cats—a proceeding that made his uncle shift uneasily on his seat. Presently he coughed, cleared his throat, and finally addressed his nephew.

‘Look here, my lad.’ There was something appealing and remonstrant in Reuben Carrick’s tone.

‘All right, Uncle Reuben; I am looking at you hard enough’; and Harvey turned round lazily.

‘I am a bit bothered about that dog. I have been thinking where we can put him to-night, as you object to the back-yard.’

‘It is not I who object,’ returned Harvey, briskly, delighted at this chance of opening conversation at last; ‘it is Griff, Uncle Reuben. You see, back-yards are always so suggestive of cats and water-butts, that no gentlemanly dog would put up with them for a moment. Griff has rather an alarming mode of stating his objections by howling; you see, it relieves his feelings—only, if you have neighbours, they might object as well as Griff.’

‘That is all very well, my boy,’ returned his uncle, in rather an irritable manner, for the idea of having his slumbers broken by the yelping remonstrances of a broken-haired terrier hurt in his tenderest feelings was not exactly productive of comfort; ‘but we have to consider other people beside Griff. The question is, where can he sleep?’

‘Oh, you need not trouble your head about that,’ returned Harvey, cheerfully; while Griff, perceiving himself to be the subject of altercation, suddenly sat up and begged in rather an abject manner. ‘Griff always sleeps with me.’

‘With you?’ Reuben Carrick actually gasped.

‘He has a quilt of his own, at the bottom of the bed, went on Harvey, with confiding frankness; ‘Gloden made it for him. But I am afraid he never uses it; he likes to curl himself up by the bolster, and sometimes, when it is very cold, he lies on me. You see, cats and water-butts aren’t in his line at all,’ finished Harvey, with an engaging drawl.

'Humph!' was Uncle Reuben's sole answer; but he got rather red as he folded his paper. 'Clem will have to tackle them,' he thought; and he affected not to see Griff, still on his hind legs, looking like a dumb embodiment of woe with a brown patch over one eye.

Harvey chuckled as he turned to the window again. The victory was far too easy to suit his taste; he was so low in his mind that a skirmish or two were necessary to enliven the general misery and flatness. A boy of thirteen, however dearly he may love his father, cannot shed tears for ever; circumstances might be wretched, but the spirit of boyhood would not be utterly quenched. As long as he had Gloden and Griff, he could put up with a good deal; and even the shop, deeply as he loathed it, held various consolations for him in the shape of adventurous books, wonderful knives, and myriads of uncut pencils, and in his secret heart Harvey had unholy thoughts of cajoling Aunt Clemency out of some of these treasures.

Gloden had taken no part in this conversation. They were approaching Grantham, and a few minutes later they were rumbling along in the little omnibus through the clean wide streets of the old-fashioned country town. Grantham was not one of those sleepy old towns where the grass grows between the stones, and there is a general air of drowsiness and somnolence; on the contrary, there was an appearance of briskness and animation about it.

The fresh, sweet country breezes blow down the wide hilly streets. A spacious market-place, a fine old church, and a beautiful hospital were its salient features. In the narrower streets there were quaint old shops, worthy of being photographed, and in the suburbs there were plenty of pleasant dwelling-houses.

Under other circumstances, Gloden would have found much to admire in the grey, harmonious tints of the buildings, but her lips only closed in a firmer line of pain. Her inward sight was picturing a far different scene: a grey church tower, with jackdaws' nests, and an old moss-grown churchyard, bordered by dark sycamores. In the vicarage porch stands a girl, waiting, looking—for whom? 'Oh, father, father!' she whispers dumbly. And then, with a final creak, the omnibus stops, and Reuben Carrick descends and offers his hand to her. Gloden was so disturbed by that inward vision that she was about to enter the shop, not noticing that her uncle had rung at the private door; but the next moment he stood aside to

let her pass into the narrow passage, with its spotless floorcloth and mahogany umbrella-stand. But, in spite of her abstraction, she noticed that the neat, rosy-cheeked maid drew back her skirts with a suppressed shriek, as Griff bounded playfully after his young master.

‘Dear-a-mercy—the dog!’ gasped Patty. ‘Whatever will the missus say?’

As Gloden entered the sunny little back parlour, looking over the very back-yard and water-butt that Harvey had so graphically described, a bright-eyed little woman in brown merino, with a red woollen shawl over her shoulders, came through the curtained door that opened on the shop.

‘You are very punctual, Reuben,’ she said quietly. ‘So this is your niece Gloden. You are welcome, my dear, and I hope you will make yourself at home.’

‘Thank you, Aunt Clemency,’ returned Gloden, shaking hands with her. ‘This is Harvey; you have not seen him before.’

‘No, I have never set eyes on him’; and Clemency looked at him wistfully, as she held his hand. Harvey had followed his sister’s example. He was not going to kiss an aunt he had never seen, a frumpish little woman with a red shawl over her shoulders, who looked no better than a cook. This was Harvey’s unvarnished criticism.

‘Not that she was bad-looking, you know,’ he added. ‘I rather like that sort of crumple grey hair, and her eyes were almost as pretty as Griff’s when he is waiting for a lump of sugar; Griff’s eyes are always so expressive then.’

Reuben knew what that sudden softening of Clem’s eyes meant, as she looked into the lad’s pale face; and, though she did not kiss him, her hand was put out to straighten the brown lock that would drop into his eyes, and, as she did so, a sort of inspiration came to Harvey.

‘You must speak to Griff too, Aunt Clemency. Griff, come here, you rascal, and sit up like a gentleman. Look at him’—as Griff resumed his woebegone expression, and winked one eye slowly—‘he is waiting for you to shake hands with him, or pat him; and perhaps’—with a suggestive glance towards the tea-tray—‘if you were to give him a lump of sugar, he would be friendly with you ever after. Griff is such a gentleman; he never forgets his friends.’

Clemency hesitated. She hated dogs with a good unreasoning hate, and in her private opinion Griff was an ugly,

ill-favoured mongrel; all mongrels had brown patches over their eyes. The very sight of him made her squirm, as Patty would have phrased it; and yet when Harvey raised his eyes and looked at her in that innocent confiding way, 'for all the world like a brown-eyed baby,' as she said afterwards to her husband, Clemency's obdurate heart melted. She took the largest lump of sugar, and held it out to him, and Griff knew better than to snap at it.

'Thank you, Aunt Clemency'; and Harvey rubbed his hands furtively. He had scored another victory; he winked aside to Gloden, who made a very feeble response, and then he stuck his fingers in his pockets, and took private notes of the back-yard.

'You will like to go up and get rid of the dust of the journey, while I mask the tea,' observed Mrs. Carrick, turning to her niece.

Gloden had seated herself, and had taken off her veil and gloves, and they lay huddled up together in her lap. 'She was to make herself at home'—at home, good heavens! and something strangling seemed in Gloden's throat as she looked round the little oddly-shaped room, with its horsehair-covered chairs and mahogany chiffonnier, and the big round table in the middle. Clemency's knitting-needles were sticking out of the work-basket, and a shelf near the fireplace held Reuben's tobacco-jar and a modest pipe or two.

'May I come too?' asked Harvey, with sudden interest; and a smile came to Clemency's grave face. It faded, however, when she heard the pattering of four feet behind her. She stood still for a moment with clouded brow, as though to remonstrate.

'Aren't you going on? Do the stairs tire you, Aunt Clemency?' asked Harvey, innocently. 'What jolly blue jars those are! Did Uncle Reuben buy them?'

And Clemency's lips closed as she resumed the ascent.

'It is ever so much nicer up here,' went on the boy; 'one cannot see the back-yard, and there is such a big passage. Take care of that step, Gloden, or you might come a cropper in this dark corner. I suppose this is the drawing-room?' and Harvey marched into the 'best room, as it was called—a long narrow room with two windows overlooking the street, with a fine display of blue china on the low old-fashioned cupboards, and a big roomy couch covered with spotless antimacassars, on which Griff playfully rolled.

'Harvey!' Clemency's tone was ominously quiet; when she was annoyed she never raised her voice.

'Yes, Aunt Clemency'—coming to her side at once.

'I do not wish to be too strict, my dear, but I think dogs are out of place in a best room; you see he is tumbling those antimacassars that Patty has just washed and ironed.'

'So he is. Come off at once, you disreputable fellow. Can't you hear what Aunt Clemency says? Hands off! There, you see him'—as Griff lay down on the rug; 'he will never touch an antimacassar again. "Hands off," he knows what I mean at once. Oh! he is the cleverest dog you ever saw; he is as intelligent as a child. He knows everything I say, take my word for it, Aunt Clemency. You will never mind him in your best room, though it is a beautiful room, of course'—glancing round with an air of condescension.

Harvey was talking fast; perhaps he was a trifle nervous. But his aunt made no further remonstrance. She led the way silently to a room with a view of the very back-yard that Harvey hated; but, happily, the sight of a bow over the mantelpiece distracted his attention.

'What a jolly bow, Aunt Clemency! I suppose that belonged to Cousin David; he had lots of things, of course. Was this David's room?' and some happy instinct made Harvey drop his voice, and go so close to his aunt that she again straightened the unruly brown lock.

'Yes, my dear, this was David's room. You will find plenty of his things in that cupboard; we will look at them by and by. That was his little bed'; and she touched the quilt reverently. 'My room is close by, and if you knock on the wall I should hear you. David always knocked when he wanted me.'

'Did he, Aunt Clem?' He was still regarding the bow, and in his abstraction he had abbreviated her name. 'It is a nice little room, isn't it, Gloden? though it is not as big as my room at home, and there is no garden, and one can't see the jackdaws.' But here Harvey glanced at his sister's quivering lip, and held his peace.

'Your sister is tired, Harvey,' observed his aunt, quickly. 'Your room is upstairs, Gloden; it is in the front. I chose it because it was large and airy and would hold your things; this is a grand house for cupboards.' Clemency was exerting herself to talk, but Gloden's lips had scarcely unclosed. She murmured a word or two of thanks when her aunt prepared to

leave her. 'I must mask the tea, and see that Patty does not burn the tea-cakes,' she said, as she withdrew.

Gloden stood in the middle of the room quite motionless for a moment. It was a large bare-looking room, with a slightly sloping roof in one corner, and a good-sized window, underneath which stood a handsome chest of drawers with a looking-glass. The ordinary toilet-table was missing. The bed, washstand, and cupboard occupied the other angles, and a new green Kidderminster carpet covered a good portion of the floor. It was a spacious room, but, in spite of the spotless dimity hangings, it had a comfortless look. There was no restful chair, no book-shelves or table; but this could easily be remedied. Gloden had plenty of treasures to beautify the bare walls. One moment of deadly heart-sickness, and then Gloden pulled herself together.

'I will not give way—I will not—I will not!' she said, and she resolutely turned away and began bathing her burning face with the clear cold water.

She had just smoothed her hair, when Harvey interrupted her. 'Come along, Gloden,' he said impatiently; 'don't you want your tea? There is an uncommonly good smell, like ham frying; and I am as hungry as a hunter. What did Aunt Clemency mean when she said she was going to mask the tea? She seems rather a good sort, doesn't she?' and Harvey put his arm round his sister's slender waist in his usual coaxing fashion.

She stooped down and kissed him with a sudden passionate impulse. 'Harvey darling, we must be brave, and try and make the best of things. We must help each other, you and I.'

'Oh, we shall get along somehow'—in a reassuring tone. 'Of course it is beastly hard lines to live in a shop; and don't you hate that pokey little parlour? But this room isn't bad. You have a jolly look-out over the roofs. Why, there is a church spire and a bit of blue sky; and do you see those pigeons, Glow? Look at that white fantail strutting about just opposite us! Somebody in this street must keep pigeons. We will spread food for them on this ledge underneath your window, and then they will get tame. Perhaps Uncle Reuben would let me keep pigeons or rabbits and things in that horrid yard. Do you think he would?'

'We can ask him by and by,' returned his sister, gently. 'I am quite sure neither he nor Aunt Clemency will refuse anything reasonable. But there will be plenty of time for that.'

Come, dear, I am quite ready'; and they went down hand-in-hand.

'It will not be difficult to make him happy,' thought Gloden. 'He is so young that he will learn to adapt himself to circumstances.'

There was certainly no fault to find with Harvey's appetite that first evening. He did full justice to the excellent viands that Clemency had provided for her guests, and her kind eyes brightened as he declared the tea-cakes were first-rate.

'Patty makes them, my dear,' she said.

'Is Patty your cook, Aunt Clemency?' asked Harvey, with boyish curiosity.

'She is cook, housemaid, and parlour-maid all in one,' returned his aunt, drily. 'We only keep one servant, my dear.'

Harvey exchanged an alarmed glance with his sister. One servant! Would he be expected to black his own boots? But Reuben broke an awkward silence by addressing his wife.

'I suppose everything has been going on much as usual to-day?'

'We had a large order from Frampton,' returned Mrs. Carrick, quietly. 'And oh, I forgot, Reuben; Mr. Lorimer is back at the Hall. He came in for some magazines this afternoon, when Miss Logan and Miss Wentworth were in the shop.'

'You don't say so, wife!' and Reuben laid down the toast he was spreading with marmalade, and glanced at her with an air of interest. 'And how did the poor fellow look, Clem?'

'Well, to my mind he looked older and thinner, and he has got rarely brown with his travels. He looked less of a lad since his trouble. The ladies were talking to him; but of course I could not help hearing what they said. It seems he is expecting his sister down again.'

'Dear me, dear me!' returned Reuben, in such an impressive tone that Harvey began questioning him at once.

'Is he a friend of yours, Uncle Reuben?'

'No, no, my lad; we are talking about Mr. Lorimer, of Silcote Hall. He is a customer of ours. He lost his wife about eight months ago, and he has got a bit of a girl. Oh, it was a sad business! She was a fine woman, Lady Car—as handsome a woman as one would wish to see.'

'Where is Silcote Hall, Uncle Reuben? Is it a big place?'

'Yes; it is a fine, large place. There is a park, with plenty of timber; but it is a lonesome place for a young man to live. Why, the house is as big as a barrack. There is a music-room

that Lady Car had built that is the admiration of the county. I saw it when they gave the big fête. Oh, she was a grand hostess! She liked to have her guests about her, and to give them the best of everything. Don't you remember the ball they gave, Clem? Miss Logan told us about it. She said Lady Car looked like a queen in her green velvet and diamonds.'

'Yes, I remember, Reuben.'

But Harvey struck in. 'I like big places. There was a park at Eltringham. I used to go with Bentham when he shot rabbits. He was the keeper. I daresay there are hundreds of rabbits in Silcote Park. May I go, Uncle Reuben? Is it far from here? I can muzzle Griff, or take him in a leash.'

'It is a matter of three miles, or perhaps two and a half, from here. Oh yes; the park is open to every one. Silcote Church is down by the north lodge. It will be a nice walk for you and Gloden one fine afternoon.'

'We will go there to-morrow,' returned Harvey, decidedly. He was never slow in making his plans.

'Reuben, if you will return thanks,' observed Clemency, in her quiet tones, 'I will go into the shop and send Ben to his tea. I daresay Gloden will be glad to see to her unpacking, and to put things straight for the night.'

'Yes, thank you,' was Gloden's answer; and she rose at once with a look of relief.

Harvey's eyes followed his aunt wistfully. He glanced through the half-opened door. The shop looked delightfully snug and inviting; it would be amusing to stroll about, and watch the customers and passers-by. No one would notice him; Aunt Clemency and Uncle Reuben would be far too busy making up parcels; Gloden had disappeared. He hesitated, looked, longed, and finally crept through the door; and then began reading the titles of the books in the glass cases, and finally selecting one, a popular story for boys by Henty, he sat down in a corner and became absorbed in its contents.

No one disturbed him. Reuben was busy at accounts in the cashier's box, and Clemency had her customers; but now and then her quiet footfall lingered a moment, and her eyes rested on the bent curly head. 'It is the very place where Davie loved to sit,' she murmured to herself; 'it might have been Davie himself, helping himself to books, and sitting there like a mouse in its corner'; and her hand touched his shoulder.

'Don't try your eyes, my dear; it is getting dark.'

Harvey started up. 'Is it, Aunt Clem? I have got hold of such a jolly book; I quite forgot where I was. Come along, Griff; we'll have a turn down the street and wake ourselves up'; and Harvey caught up his cap and marched off.

'What a pretty boy, Mrs. Carrick! Is he one of Dr. Woodhouse's boys?' asked Miss Logan, who had come to order some book.

'No, Miss Logan; he is my husband's nephew. He and his sister have come to live with us.'

'Your husband is to be congratulated on having such a nephew,' returned Miss Logan, in her pleasant way; and then she took up her parcel.

Harvey was still at the shop door as she passed. As she smiled at him, he coloured and raised his cap. 'Poor boy! what a come-down from the vicarage at Eltringham!' she said to herself; 'and he looks such a thorough little gentleman. I wonder if he would have liked me to speak to him? I might have told him that I was Ewen's cousin; but he looked so shy. Well, I daresay I shall soon have an opportunity of making his acquaintance'; and then she quickened her footsteps. The soft September twilight was fast stealing on, but Winifred Logan had only just finished her day's work.

CHAPTER IX

'YOU ARE VERY GOOD, AUNT CLEMENCY

Taught by that power that pities me,
I learn to pity them.'

GOLDSMITH.

GLODEN made her fatigue a pretext for retiring early that evening, and persuaded Harvey with some difficulty to put aside his book and accompany her. Harvey was comfortable and unwilling to move, the story was engrossing; but his sister's gentle persistence as usual obliged him to yield, and he went off grumbling good-humouredly. Neither Reuben nor Clemency interposed a word during the brief contest, but when the door closed on the trio—for Griff had of course followed his young master—Reuben stretched out his hand for his tobacco-jar and pipe, while Clemency moved quietly about the room, straightening the chairs, and putting things in order. Once she nearly stumbled, and with difficulty recovered herself. She had set her foot on a small round pebble that Harvey had dropped out of his pocket; it was a grey stone, well rubbed and polished. Clemency laid it carefully by in her work-basket.

Even when she took up her knitting, the silence was not at once broken between the husband and wife. Reuben smoked his pipe a little dreamily. The unaccustomed movements overhead, the quick boyish footsteps passing and repassing, the sound of a window flung up and then closed, seemed to vibrate strangely out of the past. The thought of the young creatures overhead, to whom he had promised to do a father's part, moved and agitated him. 'It is a heavy responsibility for us old folk,' he said to himself, 'but it will bring its blessing. Who would have thought that we should have had young faces about us again? But "He maketh poor and maketh rich," and some day, maybe, we shall know the meaning of it all.'

Reuben was trying to reason himself into tranquil acquiescence, and to silence certain natural pangs that seemed tugging at his heart-strings. The childless man had determined that his dead brother's children should be much to him. 'It stands to reason that their upbringing has been different from Clem's and mine,' he thought, 'but at the bottom we are the same flesh and blood. When they know us better they will feel more drawn to us, and that sort of thing grows—not like Jonah's gourd, in a night, perhaps, but still it will grow; and we are old, and we have learnt to wait for our good things.'

After all it was Clemency who spoke first.

'Reuben,' she said, 'I am thinking you are right about Gloden; she is her mother's image. More than once this evening I fairly started; it might have been Felicia herself. She has Felicia's way of holding her head and casting her eyes down when she has finished speaking.'

'Nay, nay; she is not as fine a woman as her mother,' he returned slowly. 'I remember that first evening when Nat brought her, and she came down to our parlour dressed for the evening, a slim, dark-eyed creature all in white, with a cluster of tea-roses in her bosom. I thought she looked all the world like a picture; and to see Nat's pride in her, and the way he hung about her; do you mind it, Clem?'

'Ay, I remember it plainly. It was the longest week I ever passed. But it is not Gloden's looks I meant. She is no beauty, certainly, with her pale face; not that we can judge of her, poor thing, for she looks as though she had cried for weeks. I felt sorry and sad for her, but one might as well try and lay a finger on a sensitive plant as tell her so. She just shrinks into herself at a word.'

'Ah! we will let her be for a bit. She has had her hurt, and it will take time to heal. But what of the lad, Clem? Isn't he a knowing little chap, and as bright and busy as a bee?'

'Ah! he is all that, Reuben; and if he lives he will make a far handsomer man than ever Nathaniel was. But my heart misgives me when I look at him; he is but delicate, I fear.'

'Nay, wife; that is an over-dark view to take. Harvey is a bit pale and puny; but then, he is a growing lad, and he has been humoured not a little, I can see that plainly. Why, Gloden fairly worships the ground he walks on, any one can see that; and, upon my word, one cannot blame her, for he is a fine little chap. Why'—with an attempt at his old cheery manner—'you will be spoiling him yourself.'

'Maybe you are right,' was Clemency's quiet answer; and then she came a little closer to her husband and laid her hand on his. The perfect understanding that had grown up between them during these long years of wedded life told her plainly all that he was thinking. The little lad who was sleeping in David's bed could only be the son of their adoption; the boy they had lost, and for whom their desolate hearts still craved, was still their boy, their loving, faithful David—to them always 'the boy,' as Clem had phrased it; for her simple literal nature would hardly have grasped the belief of growth which breathed in the poet's words—

Not as a child shalt thou again behold her;
But when, with rapture wild,
In thy embraces thou again unfold her,
She will not be a child.

No, this would not have suited Clem at all. The sweet hope that gave her strength and cheerfulness was the thought that when her eyes closed on earthly scenes, and she opened them on the green pastures of Paradise, no unknown and heavenly youth, but her own boy, radiant with divine health, and her boy still, should be the first to welcome her, and to lead her to her Master's feet.

Clem's gentle, soothing touch was full of comfort to her husband. Then she rose, with the accustomed formula that it was growing late.

She hesitated long as she stood outside Harvey's door. She would not wake him for worlds, but if he should not be asleep, and felt strange and lonesome; and then she turned the handle of the door very gently.

'Is that you, Glow?' exclaimed Harvey, eagerly. 'No; it is Aunt Clemency'—as the faint light showed him a smaller figure. 'No, I am not asleep; I am only tossing about, and making hay of my bed-clothes. Griff, poor old fellow, can't get a wink of sleep either.'

'Do you mean that Griff is on the bed?' began Mrs. Carrick; and then she gasped. Her hand had come in contact with a wet, rough tongue. 'My dear Harvey, this is very wrong.'

'No, it isn't anything of the kind,' returned Harvey, crossly. 'It is no use your worrying me about Griff, Aunt Clem, for if he sleeps on the floor I shall sleep there too; if it is good enough for Griff, it is good enough for me.' And then he repented of his crossness, and continued, in a coaxing voice,

'Come, you will soon get used to it, Aunt Clem, and then you won't mind it in the least; it is such a little thing, and if it makes me happy——' and Harvey put a hot friendly little hand into his aunt's.

'You know, my dear, that I would do anything to make you happy,' she said gently.

'All right, then; we will settle it so,' was the unexpected retort. 'Thank you, Aunt Clem. I daresay there are lots of things that I can do for you in return; you will tell me some of them, won't you? As to being happy,' he went on, confidently, as she sat down beside him, 'you can't expect a fellow to be happy who has just lost his father.'

'No, my boy—no'; and she bent over him, straightening the crumpled bed-clothes and smoothing the hot pillow with motherly hands, quite oblivious of the long hairy body stretched out beside her. From the hour that Harvey thrust that hot, clammy little hand into hers Griff's cause had been won; whoever else interfered with his privileges, it would not be Aunt Clemency.

'I wonder why people's fathers are allowed to die?' went on Harvey, with boyish scepticism. 'It doesn't seem right somehow. Dad was awfully good to us. He gave me a watch last birthday, because I told him the other fellows had watches; and do you know'—dropping his voice—'that Gloden told me that he had gone without a new greatcoat that he really wanted? I wish—I wish now that she had not told me that.'

'She thought it would make you love him all the better.'

'So it did'; and here Harvey bethought himself remorsefully of some of his boyish shortcomings. He was so quiet that Clemency feared he was crying.

'We must find time to-morrow to sort David's books and things,' she said cheerfully. 'You will like to help me with that, Harvey?'

'Oh yes, Aunt Clem.'

'There is his bow and arrows that his father got for him from London—they are real beauties—and his cricket-bat, and a theatre he was very fond of. I did not much hold with the theatre myself; I was afraid it would make him over-fond of playgoing. But there, his father thought different, and David was so clever. He had real lights, and some of the plays were beautiful. He and one of his friends did all the characters, and at the end they had real blue and red lights, though I was scared a bit for fear of the parlour curtains.'

‘I should like to see the theatre.’

Harvey’s voice was getting pleasantly drowsy. A dim notion came into his mind that he might consult Aunt Clemency about the rabbits and a young jackdaw that he would like to keep in the back-yard, and then he thought the subject would keep. Aunt Clemency was getting decidedly prosy ; she seemed saying the same things over and over again. He was a little tired of hearing about David’s cleverness—— But here Harvey passed sweetly into the land of dreams, and Clemency, with a smile on her face, stole out of the room.

A light footstep beside her made her turn quickly, and then she absolutely started at the sight of the tall girlisk figure. Gloden, in her white dressing-gown, with her brown hair hanging loose about her shoulders, and her small pale face and plaintive eyes, looked so young and childish, so unlike the stately young lady from whom she had parted little more than an hour ago.

‘Is Harvey asleep? I was just going to him ; he is very excitable, and sometimes he lies awake for hours.’

‘He was awake, and I talked to him a bit, but he is fast asleep now,’ was Clemency’s reply. ‘Is there anything I can do for you, Gloden? If there is, I shall be glad and willing to do it.’

‘There is nothing, thank you,’ returned Gloden, in a soft cold voice. ‘Good-night, Aunt Clemency’ ; and she went back to her room. ‘She is kind ; she means to be kind,’ she said to herself, as she stood at her window looking at a patch of moonlight that was silvering the opposite roofs ; ‘and she has taken to Harvey. I ought to be glad. I ought to like people to be good to my darling, but I am afraid I am very wicked and selfish. He is all I have ; all that remains to me out of the old life, the dear old life. I want to do everything for him, and not to share him with Aunt Clemency.’

Gloden was very human and one-sided in her affections. She had not been aware herself of this element of jealousy in her nature until the sight of her aunt leaving the boy’s room had suddenly roused it, and she felt as though her lawful monopoly were infringed.

✍ In vain she struggled with the rising enemy. She was too weary and dispirited to wage a successful combat. The insidious poison that works so subtly in human nature, and that festers like a serpent’s sting, was tainting and leavening her sorrow with bitterness. Thousands are the thorny crowns woven by

men and women alike, but there are none so sharp and cutting, so cruelly wounding, as jealousy.

Another time Gloden would have crushed down the unworthy feeling, and fought against it with all her might; but to-night she only brooded heavily over her troubles.

‘What does it matter how I feel about Aunt Clemency?’ she thought. ‘There is no love between us; there never will be. I am only a burden to her. She and Uncle Reuben only think about Harvey. They would like to have him to themselves, and bring him up, as they did David. My darling! as though I would let them!’ and she clasped her hands convulsively in the darkness.

If Gloden’s first night under her uncle’s roof was a miserable one, Mrs. Carrick’s was an anxious one. She slept little. Every half-hour she imagined that she heard Harvey move, and more than once she stole silently to his door to listen to his breathing. A hundred little plans and projects for her niece’s comfort kept her wakeful. Hitherto her life, with all its troubles, had presented no complications. It had been a simple working life. All her ambitions, humble as they were, had been buried in her boy’s grave. For herself she wanted nothing. Her husband was respected in Grantham. Their business, old-fashioned as it was, was flourishing. Reuben was a solid man, and had put money by. What more could any one want?

‘But matters will be different now,’ she said to herself. ‘Things that content us won’t content Gloden. I must have a bit of a talk with her, and tell her that we are plain people and are too old to change our ways, and that she must try to put up with us as we are. It is always best to come to an understanding when there is a difference of opinion.’

So when their simple breakfast was over the next morning, and Reuben had gone into the shop, and Harvey was investigating the back-yard with a view to rabbit-hutches, while his sister stood at the window watching him, Clemency took up her knitting-needles and opened the conversation with a premonitory clearing of her throat.

‘If you are not doing anything, could you spare me a minute, Gloden?’ And the girl turned with a start. She had no idea that any one was in the room.

‘I have nothing to do, Aunt Clemency’—with a forced smile. ‘Harvey wants me to go out with him presently; that is all.’

‘Then, if you will sit down for five minutes, we will have our talk. Patty is not needing me just now, and I shall not

go into the shop for a bit. I was afraid, from your looks and the bad breakfast you have made, that you had a poor night of it.'

'I did not sleep well, certainly.'

'Dear, dear! that is a sad pity. And I made your bed myself to be sure it was comfortable.'

'It was not the bed, Aunt Clemency.'

'No, I suppose not. Oh, I know what you mean well enough. Many are the nights when I have laid awake from night to morning, just staring at the darkness, and thinking of my troubles. But you are young, dear—far too young to miss your sleep.'

'No one is too young to have troubles'—with a sigh.

'You are about right there, Gloden. And to my mind the loss of a parent is a grievous trouble. You may be sure of my sympathy, and your Uncle Reuben's too. And, my dear, if you will let me say it, we will do all in our power to make you as comfortable as we can under the circumstances.'

'You are very good, Aunt Clemency.'

'No, my dear, begging your pardon, I am not good, but I wish to be kind. I am afraid'—hesitating slightly at the sight of the grave, impassive face before her—'that things are very different from what you have been accustomed. Reuben and I are only old-fashioned folk, and our upbringing has been rough compared to yours. We do not pretend to be gentlefolks. Pretence is what no one can accuse us of,' finished Clemency, with a modest dignity that somehow impressed Gloden in spite of herself, and in her heart she respected her all the more for this speech.

'You must not let me be a trouble to you,' she interposed hurriedly. 'Of course I mean to help myself. I shall work. I mean to give lessons—violin lessons—if I can. Or I would teach children who were not too old. It would not be right for Uncle Reuben to have to work for us. He is getting old, and we have no claim, I mean—'

But her aunt checked her. 'You have every possible claim, you mean,' she returned quietly, 'being his own flesh and blood, and the children of his only brother. There is nothing to be gained by shirking the truth, Gloden, however it goes against you to own it.' Clemency spoke with unusual severity. Gloden's evident pride was a serious defect in her eyes. And then her tone softened again. 'Very likely it was only a slip of the tongue, and you meant well. And as for work, it is not likely

that either your uncle or I would hinder you doing anything you thought your duty ; but I will take it upon me to say that there is enough and to spare, if only you will be content with our simple way of living. So you may please yourself about work.’

Gloden fixed her large dark eyes on her aunt's face. ‘I did not mean to hurt you, Aunt Clemency,’ she said coldly. ‘But if you put yourself in my place, I think you will understand my position. Though I am Uncle Reuben's niece, I am almost a stranger to him. We have never been brought up to look to him in things, and now I feel it would be wrong to take advantage of his goodness and yours. Harvey will be a terrible expense to you ; but it will make me happier to earn what I can. I am proud, Aunt Clemency’—her voice becoming less controlled. ‘It is my fault, I know it ; but I think I am right too.’

‘I am not saying you are wrong, Gloden ; perhaps in a way I agree with you. I have never been idle myself, and I don't hold with idle folks, so you are free to take your own way ; only I want you to know, once for all, that you are welcome to your sup and bit, and that neither Reuben nor me will begrudge you anything we can give you.’

‘Thank you very much, Aunt Clemency.’

‘So there is no hurry about your violin lessons. You need not turn to until you are ready for work. And, Gloden, there is something else I was going to say. This parlour has suited us, for we are plain people, and never like to lose sight of the shop ; but there is no reason why you should not use the best room, if you like. I have been talking it over with your uncle, and he agrees with me. We have got into the habit of only using it on Sundays, or when we have visitors, and I have my best black silk on ; but, dearie me ! we need not be afraid of wearing out the carpet—it is a good stout one. So if you like to sit there you will find it cheerful and pleasant, and you can practise your violin as much as you like. When it gets wet, Patty will light a bit of a fire, and then you will be snug. Patty is a good girl, and never minds trouble ; and if you would lend her a helping hand by dusting the best china, it will not make a mite of difference, except perhaps the curtains may have to be washed oftener.’

Then Clemency took a long breath when she had finished her speech. How Reuben would have stared if he had heard her ! But she had prepared it all beforchand in the dark watches of the night.

Gloden may be pardoned if she failed to understand all that this speech involved—the sacrifice of long-established usages and custom, the sense of sacrilege in thus invading the sanctity of the best room by constant use, not to mention the soiling of the spotless antimacassars. Never since the summer day when Reuben Carrick brought her there as a bride had she ever sat down in that room except on Sundays and special occasions, to pour tea out of her best yellow china for her friends, or to listen to Reuben reading her a sermon on the Sunday evenings he stayed at home with her; and this cherished room was to be offered Gloden for her private and particular use. No, Gloden did not understand; but all the same she was grateful for this kind consideration.

‘Thank you very much, Aunt Clemency’—in a far more natural manner than she had yet spoken. ‘I shall be very glad indeed to use the room, for of course I must practise a good deal. I always dusted the china in our own drawing-room at home, and washed it too; and I will dust my own room and Harvey’s, if that will help Patty. And you are very kind to us, Aunt Clemency,’ finished the girl, with a tremor in her voice, as at that moment the shop bell rang, and Mrs. Carrick laid down her knitting.

CHAPTER X

IN SILCOTE PARK

‘When clouds are seen, wise men put on their cloaks.’

Richard III.

WHILE Mrs. Carrick waited on her customers with her usual cheerful readiness, Gloden went thoughtfully up to her room. She was not quite satisfied with herself. She felt that she had not responded with sufficient warmth to her aunt’s kindness; that her thanks had been expressed somewhat awkwardly. That this was owing as much to shyness as to coldness could scarcely excuse her in her own eyes. Aunt Clemency had been kind; she had been more than kind. She had tried to make her understand that she was no burden in her eyes—that they would grudge her nothing that was needful. The very severity of her rebuke had been tempered with kindness.

‘You have every possible claim,’ she had said, speaking of her husband, ‘being his own flesh and blood, and the children of his only brother. There is nothing to be gained by shirking the truth, however much it goes against you to own it.’ Was not that true, every word?

Gloden was to be pitied as well as blamed. It was no fault of hers that all these years she had never seen her Uncle Reuben’s wife. When the green-curtained door had opened, and the little woman in brown merino, with the red shawl wrapped round her shoulders, had come up to her, holding out her hand with that kind smile, she had only been sensible of a shock of repulsion. ‘That Aunt Clemency, that common-looking little person!’ had been her thought; and that utter absence of all response from Felicia’s daughter had struck a chill to Clemency’s heart. Those shrewd, bright eyes had read the girl’s thoughts only too truly.

Gloden was too self-absorbed to be a fair critic. It was not

until she was in the solitude of her own room that she remembered that more than once she had heard her father speak in warm commendation of his sister-in-law. 'Clemency is a good woman,' he said once in her hearing; 'she is just the wife for Reuben, and he thinks no end of her. He says sometimes that it puts him to shame to see the way she lives her religion. There is no talk about what she is going to do, but she just goes and does it; that's Clem's way.'

'Dear father was sorry that he never took us down to see her,' thought Gloden. 'It seemed to worry him when he was ill. "I meant no harm, but I just put it off from week to week. I was always the feckless chap that Reuben called me." I remember his saying that with a smile, and yet he looked sad too. He seemed to long so for Uncle Reuben; and how troubled he was when we got Aunt Clemency's letter, telling us he was ill!'

These reminiscences softened Gloden, and she made a mental resolve she would try and do her duty to the kindly people who had offered her a home. 'I must do my best not to notice little things,' she said to herself, 'or little mannerisms that jar on me. At least, I can be thankful that Aunt Clemency has not the faintest touch of vulgarity about her. She is too sensible to pretend to be other than she is.'

Gloden, in her youthful arrogance and self-sufficiency, thought that she was stating the case very fairly, and that there was something magnanimous in her resolve to tolerate Aunt Clemency, and to overlook her little peccadilloes against good taste, not being the least aware that she was as inferior to her as a crude, unfinished study of a beginner is to a finished work by his master.

Gloden's twenty years of life had not yet shown her the true meaning of the word 'gentlewoman,' so it was no wonder if she failed to perceive that the sweet homeliness of Clemency's nature, her simplicity and perfect truthfulness, and her hatred of all shams, proved her to be one of Nature's patricians, and fit for a king's palace. Gloden, with all her faults, had the making of a noble woman in her. The mellowing influences of age and the shaping hand of adversity were needed to mould her into fitness. But Clemency had been schooled and disciplined, and had learned her lesson, and, in spite of tears, her eyes were still young and bright, for she knew that her treasures were in safe keeping in her Father's house.

Gloden had nothing to occupy her that morning; her books

and other belongings had not yet reached her, and she had no heart to touch her violin. When she was tired of waiting for Harvey, she went down to the best room—'the Chinese room' Harvey called it ever afterwards, out of compliment to some curious old willow-pattern china that Aunt Clemency greatly treasured, and which she had arranged with questionable taste on the tops of the low cupboards. Gloden looked about her far more curiously than she had the previous evening. In many respects it was a very comfortable room. The low window-seats were cosy; the big couch and easy-chair inviting, and some of the china was good. Perhaps—here Gloden hesitated—perhaps one day she might be allowed to replace those crochet and knitted antimacassars with art work or Madras muslin; and yet, she thought bitterly, what did it matter? Who would ever come to see her? She had already decided that Aunt Clemency's friends could not be hers. The grocer's wife and the chemist's lady would hardly be fit acquaintances for Miss Carrick of Eltringham Vicarage. 'I will be civil—I will be as civil as I know how to be to every one,' thought poor Gloden, feeling that there were limits even to good resolutions, 'but they cannot expect me to be friendly and intimate with such people; father was always so particular about the people to whom he introduced me.'

Gloden was obliged to go in search of Harvey at last. To her dismay she found him in the shop, investigating a case of knives. He grew rather red when he saw her, and joined her at the door. But Gloden, with much tact, took no notice of his confusion; he was only a boy, and of course he would amuse himself.

They walked up and down the town, and went into the church, and looked into all the shop-windows that attracted Harvey, but it was agreed that it was too late to think of taking a regular walk. The dinner-hour was at one, and it was nearly twelve before Harvey had been hunted out of the shop.

'We will go after luncheon—dinner, I mean,' suggested Harvey. 'How funny to have six-o'clock tea, isn't it? And I say, Glow, if you are not tired we'll have a look at that park, and see if there are any rabbits.'

'Very well, dear,' was Gloden's answer. So long as Harvey was pleased, she did not care in what direction she went; her object in life was to make him happy. 'There are sure to be rabbits,' she went on, humouring him.

Uncle Reuben looked a little dubious when Harvey volunteered the information that he and Gloden were going to Silcote Park.

‘Nay, nay, my lad ; I fear there is a bit of a storm brewing. It has been uncommonly close and sultry for September. Macintosh—he is one of our farmers, and lives over against Silcote—says it is more like an August day for closeness ; “ We shall have rain before night ”—those were his very words, my boy.’

‘Gloden and I don’t care about weather, Uncle Reuben,’ returned Harvey, with boyish scorn. ‘Rain doesn’t hurt us ; we have got wet through over and over again, and Gloden only laughs. It is just fun to us, you see’—forgetting, poor boy, that there was no fun to be got out of Gloden just now.

‘There’s rain, and rain,’ returned Reuben, who was not easily talked out of his opinion. ‘No one minds a shower or two, but I am doubting this will be a rare downpour. We have had a long spell of dry weather, and the farmers are prophesying that there will be a deal of rain ; so if you will take my advice, my lad, you will keep to a mile out, and no farther.’

‘Oh, we will see about that, Uncle Reuben!’ returned Harvey, easily ; ‘anyhow, I will take an umbrella for Gloden. So hurry up, Glow, and I will give Griff his dinner. May I get it ready, Aunt Clem?’

And Clemency graciously gave her permission.

Gloden was not long, but when she returned the parlour was empty. Her uncle was turning over his account-books, and Harvey was standing in the shop door, talking rather eagerly to a fresh-coloured youth, who was carrying a heavy parcel.

‘Who was that, Harvey?’ she asked, as he took hold of her arm affectionately. ‘I am sure I saw you talking to him this morning.’

‘Oh, that’s Ben ; he is a sort of shopman, or errand boy, or general factotum. Ben is a first-rate fellow. He says he has rabbits himself up at his place, and that there are lots of old boxes about that could be made into rabbit-hutches, and that he would help me with all the will in the world if he had time. He is awfully nice ; you would say so yourself if you spoke to him. Ben Bolt—that is his name.’

‘Yes, dear.’ And then Gloden was sensible of a sudden sinking of heart. Was Ben Bolt to be another thorn in her

side? Harvey was the most sociable little fellow in the world; he made friends with every one. Whatever she might do, he would certainly refuse to live without companionship. The society of Ben Bolt was preferable to his own company; here was the first difficulty.

'Harvey dear,' she began again, 'I am not sure that Uncle Reuben would like you to talk so much to his shop-boy, for Ben cannot be more than sixteen or seventeen.'

'He was eighteen last birthday,' retorted Harvey. 'The Bolts are all small for their age. And he has four brothers and two sisters, and his mother is a widow and lets lodgings.'

'However did he find time to tell you all that?'

'Oh, I was helping him sort the newspapers before breakfast, and we got talking. I did a lot, I can tell you that. Uncle Reuben found us at it, and he looked so pleased. 'That's right, my lad,' he said, and I heard him chuckling to himself, like an old hen when she has laid an egg; and then he told me to choose any knife I liked for my very own, and I meant to show it you when we got out. Is has four blades and a corkscrew, and it is a regular stunner'; and Harvey stood still in the middle of the road to exhibit its beauties.

'How kind they are to you, Harvey!' and Gloden spoke in no grudging tones.

'Yes, awfully. Uncle Reuben is a regular brick, and so is Aunt Clem. She came and tucked me up last night, just as you do, and was ever so nice; and we are going to haul over David's things. I think'—frowning slightly, as though he were solving some psychological problem—'that she rather likes having a boy about the place again; it wakes them up, and seems more natural. I say, Glow, when do you think I can ask them about the rabbits?'

'Oh, not just now, Harvey; do be patient for a little. We have not been here four-and-twenty hours, and they have not had time to get used to Griff yet; the rabbit-hutches will keep.' And then, to divert his attention, she told him about the best room. 'I may sit there always and practise my violin; Aunt Clemency says so.'

Harvey was delighted to hear this. 'There now, didn't I say she was a good sort? Well, the Chinese room isn't bad, and I daresay we shall make ourselves jolly comfortable. I tell you what, Glow—I will learn my lessons there in the evening, and one of these days I'll get a fiddle, and then we will have duets. If it were not for the grammar-school and

all those awful cads, we should get on pretty well. I don't hate it quite so much as I thought I should.'

'My darling, I ought to be very glad to hear you say that'; but Gloden wore her saddest face.

'Well, you are glad, aren't you? What is the good of being more miserable than one can help? and I am precious miserable sometimes, I can tell you. Wait a moment, Gloden; I am going to ask that man the way to Silcote. I fancy we are going wrong somehow.'

'I thought we had given up Silcote. Uncle Reuben said it was going to rain.'

'Not a bit of it; we are going there fast enough. We must be half-way there, I should say'; and then he raced off to question the man, and came tearing back to say they were all right, and they had only another mile to go.

Gloden offered no further remonstrance; the heavy, sunless atmosphere oppressed her, and she felt unusually weary. In reality she was strong and an excellent walker; but, as Shakespeare says—

A merry heart goes all the way,
Your sad one tires in a mile-a;

and Gloden's footsteps flagged, but she hid her fatigue bravely, though she felt secretly relieved when Harvey told her they were in the village of Silcote, and that in another two or three minutes they would be in the park.

'But you aren't tired, Antelope?' he asked, with rough tenderness. 'You are never tired, you know.'

'My head aches a little, dear. I think there must be thunder in the air. I am afraid we are very foolish to come so far.'

'Not a bit of it,' returned Harvey, in a tone of great assurance. 'I don't believe it will rain for another two or three hours; it is just a muggy sort of afternoon. I suppose that is the schoolhouse. Well, it is not such a bad little village'—with an air of condescension—'though it won't do after Eltringham. Dear old Eltringham!' And here Harvey heaved a prodigious sigh, and was actually silent for five minutes, during which time they made their way down a wooded lane, shadowed by the meeting branches of some large trees, with here and there a cottage, set pleasantly in its plot of garden ground.

The next minute they came in sight of the little church and churchyard, and beyond, the grassy slopes of Silcote

Park, with its old oaks and elms, stretching as far as they could see.

They looked over the church, and sat down for a few minutes to rest in the wide stone porch. Gloden would willingly have remained there. The quiet tranquillity of the place seemed to soothe her worn spirits; the grey headstones and grassy mounds, with here and there a garden grave, and the bosky shade and long grass aisles of the park beyond, made a wonderfully peaceful scene. She could imagine how the sunshine would filter through the branches, and the soft breezes sway them with light tremulous motion, until the flicker and green radiance would almost dazzle the eyes.

'I like this; I am glad to be here,' she said half dreamily; but a tear rolled down her cheek as she spoke, and, to conceal her emotion, she rose hastily and walked across the grass to inspect a beautiful marble cross that stood somewhat apart from the other graves. It had evidently been freshly erected, for there was no stain on the spotless marble. 'To the Memory of Lady Car, the beloved wife of Reginald Lorimer, aged thirty-four,' was the inscription.

'Come along!' exclaimed Harvey, impatiently. 'The park is a big place, and we shall not have time to see half of it.'

And Gloden roused herself reluctantly, and the next instant they had passed through the little gate and were threading one of the green aisles.

Harvey soon had his wish. A grey furry tail whisked down a hole close to him, and Griff pricked up his ears and tugged at the leash with a whine that told too plainly that he would fain be rabbit-hunting. Gloden followed them patiently, now down a long green glade, and then into a copse, with nut-trees and gorse and golden brown braeken, and by and by they came to a sort of spinney closed round with brushwood, and then to a narrow grass alley; and here Gloden suddenly flung herself on the trunk of a tree that had been newly felled, and declared herself beaten.

'I cannot go any farther,' she said wearily. 'You must let me rest for a few minutes, and then we must really think of going back; there are at least four miles between us and Grantham.'

Harvey felt a little conscience-stricken. Gloden certainly looked very tired. He had been thoughtless to bring her all this way; but he never remembered her complaining of fatigue before. He gave her a penitent kiss.

'I am so sorry,' he said remorsefully. 'You shall just sit and rest until you feel fit to walk back. There is not a bit of hurry. I will just take another look at the rabbit-warren, and then I'll come back to you. You won't mind my leaving you?'

And Gloden smiled and said 'No.'

She was mentally as well as physically exhausted, and when Harvey had disappeared she leant against the gnarled trunk of an elm and, closing her eyes, fell into a half-doze. She was not asleep, but she had a sense of being lulled and rested by the strange stillness. A faint distant rumbling roused her by and by. It was growing darker, and the sense of oppression grew heavier. She felt convinced that a storm was impending, and the idea of being amongst all those trees made her anxious. If only Harvey had not left her, they would have hurried back through the park, and taken refuge in the church porch. He had been gone a long time—more than half an hour. He was amusing himself, and forgetting how late it was. Boys were so thoughtless and irresponsible. Then a fear came over her. Had he gone too far? Would he lose himself and fail to find her? She was quite ignorant of the extent of the park, and the thought that Harvey might miss his way filled her with sudden apprehension. She rose, called out his name, startling a tomtit that had taken refuge overhead, and then, remembering that it was worse than useless to go in search of him, she sat down again.

The next moment, she heard voices. Yes, that was Harvey's voice. Perhaps he had come across some keeper. Then there was a rustle in the underwood, and Griff suddenly sprang up beside her with a reassuring bark. 'It is all right,' he seemed to say; and then Harvey came in sight. He was not alone. A fair-haired young man in a tweed suit was talking to him, and a small fox-terrier was following them.

'Here I am, Glow!' exclaimed Harvey, eagerly. 'I thought I should never find you. I have been all over the place, and this gentleman has been helping me; and presently we let Griff loose. He tracked you soon enough.'

And then the young man came up to her and raised his hat. He had a pleasant smile, and he looked very young; but Gloden knew at once that this must be the master of the place, Mr. Lorimer.

'Your brother had lost his bearings and was getting anxious. There is a heavy storm brewing, and I am afraid it will be down on us directly. If you will allow me, I will take

you a short cut to the house. We shall be there in ten minutes.'

'You are very kind,' returned Gloden, a little nervously, for she had not expected this; 'but I think it would be better if you would direct us to the church. We could then shelter in the porch until the worst of the storm is over.'

'Impossible,' returned Mr. Lorimer, with friendly insistence. You would be wet through before you could cross the park. The Hall will be your nearest refuge, and, pardon me'—speaking with still more decision—'it is not very safe standing under these trees. There was an oak struck this summer. I will show it you as we pass.'

'Of course it is not safe!' exclaimed Harvey, impatiently. 'You know dad always told us so. And as for sheltering in the porch, we must be miles away from the church. So come along, Gloden, as this gentleman is so kind as to offer us shelter.'

'My name is Lorimer,' observed the young man, quietly. 'Your brother is giving you sound advice. Ah! there is a flash.'

And startled by the blue gleam, and thinking only of Harvey's safety, Gloden no longer refused Mr. Lorimer's kindly offer, and the next moment they were all hurrying through copse and thicket, followed by the dogs.

Harvey had drawn his sister's arm through his, and was inciting her to fresh effort.

'There's the house,' he whispered in her ear. 'What a big place! Ah! here comes the rain. We must run across the open space, Antelope, or you will get drenched.'

And then Gloden forgot her fatigue, and ran with her old lightness, and in another moment they were standing, panting and out of breath, under the lofty porch of Silcote Hall.

CHAPTER XI

THE SQUIRE'S HOSPITALITY

Celia. Here comes Monsieur le Beau.

Rosalind. With his mouth full of news.

Celia. Which he will put on us as pigeons feed their young.

Rosalind. Then shall we be news-crammed.'

As You Like It.

GLODEN felt a little dazed as Mr. Lorimer ushered them into the large square hall, but she shrank back with unmistakable reluctance as he threw open the door of the library.

'We will wait here, please. There is no need to trouble you any further,' she said, with the shy coldness that was natural to her, and which made strangers think her the proudest girl they ever knew.

Gloden herself had no idea how repellent she could be on occasions when her environment displeased her. She seemed to freeze up in a moment. She had a way of arching her long neck and carrying her head with almost a queenly air. 'He does not know who we are. I must not accept his hospitality,' she was saying to herself in an agony of shyness.

Mr. Lorimer was half amused and half repelled by the girl's stiffness. He wondered who on earth she could be to give herself such airs. With his usual impulsive good-nature, he was desirous of sheltering these young strangers. The boy had given him no trouble at all. He was a handsome, well-bred little fellow, and had chummed with him at once. At his first question he had told him everything; how he had lost his way, and how, for the life of him, he could not remember where he had left his sister. 'And she is awfully tired; quite done for. So I really must find her,' he had added; and they had set out together in the most friendly manner. The boy was a thorough little gentleman, but this pale, stately young lady was hardly

to his taste. Then, at the sight of her tired face and deep mourning, he relented.

'The storm will last some time, I fear,' he said courteously; 'and there is no reason why we should make ourselves uncomfortable. Of course, if you prefer the hall I will remain here.' And then Gloden felt as though she had been guilty of some *gaucherie*, and when Harvey nudged her she followed Mr. Lorimer at once.

'We have no right to intrude on you in this way,' she said almost resentfully, for she would rather have been battling through the storm than be accepting this hospitality. 'He little knows who we are,' she thought, and a flush of embarrassment rose to her face.

Mr. Lorimer took no notice of his guest's ungraciousness. He had taken a fancy to the boy, and determined that he should not suffer for his sister's pride. He drew an easy-chair a little farther from the window for Gloden; then he rang the bell, and desired Norton in an undertone to bring in tea.

Meanwhile Harvey looked about the room with wondering curiosity.

'This is a nice place,' he said, in a patronising tone. 'What lots of books and pictures you have got! If I were rich I should buy heaps of pictures; I think they make one feel cheerful. This is a nice picture'—standing before the portrait of a lady with a fair placid face in evening dress. 'She is rather handsome, isn't she, Glow?'

Mr. Lorimer changed countenance slightly. 'That is the portrait of my poor wife,' he said quietly; and Harvey coloured up to his forehead. He remembered too late the marble cross in the churchyard, with the inscription, 'Lady Car, the beloved wife of Reginald Lorimer, aged thirty-four.'

'I am very sorry,' he muttered sheepishly; but Mr. Lorimer put his hand kindly on his shoulder.

'Why should you be sorry?' he said quietly. 'Every one admires that picture. It was done by Montagu. He is an R.A., you know. I can assure you that it is perfectly life-like. I think, as you admire this room, I will show you the music-room. This door leads into it. It was Lady Car's idea, and was only finished last year. It was all her creation.'

'Gloden, you must see it!' exclaimed Harvey, as he stood within the curtained recess. 'I never—no, I never saw such a room in my life. Why, it is grand enough for a palace, and it is ever so pretty!' and of course Gloden was obliged to join

them ; but she made up her mind to remonstrate with Harvey afterwards. These free-and-easy manners of his must be laid aside for the future.

‘He is talking to Mr. Lorimer as though he were his equal. He does not even remember the shop’—which was certainly true. Harvey had a wonderful knack for forgetting unpleasant things.

But even Gloden’s stiffness was not proof against the fascination of the music-room. ‘It is a beautiful room,’ she said in a low voice.

Mr. Lorimer sighed. This room had been Lady Car’s glory, but he no longer delighted in it.

It was an immense apartment, and would have made an excellent ballroom. It was lighted chiefly from above by a clerestory, though there were other windows overlooking the park. There was a balcony alcove, with a grand piano ; but the chief charm of the room was the fine old ingle-nook, with its recessed seats and soft cushions. A small table or two and a half-circle of deep easy-chairs furnished the upper part of the room ; the rest had been left empty. The soft grey-green tint of the whole was wonderfully harmonious and restful ; and Gloden, who loved all beautiful things, felt a strange pang as she looked at it. The woman who had created all this loveliness was in her grave. What was the good of it all ? And her expression softened as she looked at Mr. Lorimer.

‘You are right ; but I do not care for it,’ he answered, interpreting her look. ‘We have only used it once. Sometimes my little daughter plays in it, that is all.’

And then they went back to the library, where, to Harvey’s secret delight, Norton had spread a tea-table with a tempting array of good things.

‘You must allow me to give you some tea,’ Mr. Lorimer said, in a friendly voice, as Gloden walked to the window and looked uneasily at the rain. It was coming down in a steady downpour, while the muttering of thunder still sounded in the distance. And then, as he brought her a cup, he added persuasively, ‘Do sit down again ; you have no idea how tired you look.’

‘I am very tired,’ she returned, and she looked at him fully for the first time, and he saw how large and dark her eyes were. ‘You are very good to us, Mr. Lorimer ; and we have no right at all to intrude on you in this way.’

‘You have no idea what a boon a fresh face is in these parts.

May I ask if you are staying in this neighbourhood, or if you are only passing through ?'

But Harvey struck in before Gloden could answer.

'We have come to live at Grantham, worse luck for us, isn't it, Glow? Of course'—with the utmost friendliness—'you don't know anything about us. You see, we used to live at Eltringham, at the vicarage; but now——'

Here Harvey began to stammer, and finally came to a full stop. With all his good intentions, the shop stuck in his throat. He had forgotten all about it, poor lad! but Gloden, with an impulse of despair, came to his help. Better be humiliated in Mr. Lorimer's eyes than break bread with him under false pretences. She put down her cup, her fingers trembling as she did so.

'I must explain,' she said proudly. 'Our name is Carrick, and father was the vicar of Eltringham. We have come to live with our uncle, Mr. Reuben Carrick. He lives in Market Street, Grantham. I daresay you know the shop.'

'Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, though it kills me to tell it'—that was what Gloden's brusque speech said to Reginald Lorimer. For one moment he was conscious of intense surprise. Was it possible that this exceedingly haughty young woman could be Reuben Carrick's niece? The next instant a sense of pity made him avert his eyes. What it must have cost her to tell him, a stranger, that!

'You must not let your tea get cold,' he said very gently, 'or I shall pour you out a fresh cup.'

And then he collared Harvey, fixing a kindly grip on his jacket, and led him to the table. Harvey found himself supplied with a liberal share of the good things, to which he did ample justice like a true British boy, with no nonsense about him.

'This is an uncommonly good cake,' he said quite seriously.

'Is it?' returned Mr. Lorimer, looking very much amused. 'Look here, you have not told me your name, but I am going to cut you another slice. I was a boy myself about fifteen years ago, and I remember I was partial to a good currant cake with plenty of peel in it.'

'I know the sort,' returned Harvey, eagerly; 'our cook used to make first-rate ones for me to take back to Repton.'

'Oh, you were at Repton! Why, that was my school; I was head prefect there till I went to Oxford.'

Harvey gazed at him with intense fascination. To be head

prefect of Repton was a greater honour and glory in Harvey's eyes than being owner of Silcote Park with all its rabbit-warrens.

'I am not going back there next term,' he said mournfully. 'Uncle Reuben can't afford it; so he means to send me to the grammar school at Grantham. It won't be nice, will it, with a lot of cads? But there is no help for it'—with a shrug of his shoulders—'so there is no good grumbling. You were asking me my name, were you not? Harvey Godwin Carrick; it isn't a bad name.'

'No indeed.' And then Mr. Lorimer crossed the room to fetch Gloden's cup. He was wondering what he should say to her; it was so much easier talking to Harvey, and listening to his boyish confidences. He was beginning to wish himself that the rain would stop; then a bright idea came to him. He hesitated, glanced furtively at Miss Carrick's pale face, made up his mind, and, with a slight apology, left the room.

'Isn't he a brick?' observed Harvey, almost before the door closed. 'I think he is awfully nice; don't you? There is no stuck-up pride in him; one can talk to him as easily as to any other fellow. And, just fancy, he was head prefect of Repton!'

'My dear Harvey,' began Gloden, in a distressed tone, 'I do wish you would remember that things are different now. People don't care to know us when they hear we live with Uncle Reuben. Mr. Lorimer is very kind, but I quite noticed how his manner changed when I said that'; for Gloden, in her excessive morbidness had misconstrued Mr. Lorimer's sudden embarrassment.

This view of the case did not please Harvey at all, and his face clouded. 'Not care to know us! Why, Glow, we are just the same, you and I; we aren't a bit changed because we have to live in a pokey little shop. Dad was a gentleman, and I mean to be one too'; and Harvey, in his boyish indignation and disgust, spoke so loudly that Mr. Lorimer, who was just re-entering, heard every word.

'I have brought my little girl to see you,' he said pleasantly. 'Tottie is a most friendly little person, and loves to see visitors.'

'Is her name Tottie?' asked Gloden. She thought how sad it was to see Mr. Lorimer, looking so young himself, with this mite of a child in her black frock holding his hand. 'Will you come to me, my dear?' and she held out her hand.

But Tottie, peeping out from her curls, put up her face to be kissed. 'I am Tottie,' she said calmly.

'Her name is Sybil—Sybil Grace,' explained Mr. Lorimer, 'but she has always called herself Tottie, and it somehow suits her. Now you must speak to this young gentleman. Tottie adores boys.'

But, as though to prove the contradictoriness of her sex, Tottie shrugged one little shoulder at Harvey, and hid her face on Gloden's lap.

It was impossible not to be amused at this baby coquetry, and one of Gloden's rare bright smiles swept over her face, almost startling Mr. Lorimer with the sudden radiance. 'Who would have thought she could smile like that?' was his inward thought; but Gloden, who loved children, only pressed the little one closer to her.

'Won't you speak to poor Harvey, darling?'

'I likes you best,' returned Tottie, with doubtful veracity, and peeping through her long eyelashes at Harvey all the time. 'This is my black froek that I wears because mammie is an angel; but nurse says I shall soon wear my blue one. I likes my pretty blue one best.'

'You shall wear whatever you like,' returned Mr. Lorimer; 'we will ask Aunt Con what Tottie is to wear. Vanity begins early, does it not, Miss Carrick?' And then, after a moment's hesitation, 'I have been talking to my coachman. He is a walking barometer—he is the most weather-wise person I ever knew, and, as he persists that there is no hope of the storm passing off just yet, and as a three miles' walk in muddy roads would not be a very desirable proceeding, I have ordered the brougham to be round in five minutes, and you shall be deposited safely at your door.'

Gloden put down Tottie and rose to her feet. 'Mr. Lorimer, this is too much. I cannot think of putting you to this inconvenience; you must please countermand this order. The rain will stop—it is stopping now. My brother and I are country-bred—we think nothing of walking three miles; and as for muddy roads, as though we cared for that! Harvey, do come here and tell Mr. Lorimer that we cannot possibly take his horses out.'

But Mr. Lorimer only regarded her with an amused smile. 'The horses are growing disgracefully fat for want of exercise; it will simply be an act of charity to use them. The only favour I will ask is that you will not keep them standing.' Then, as she only looked at him with that air of proud distress, he continued kindly, 'How could I be so inhuman as to allow

you to walk all those miles when you look so utterly done up? Draper will do one or two things for me in the town, so you have really nothing for which to thank me'; and, as though to change the subject, he took Harvey off to look at a new gun he had just had from London, and Gloden was left alone with Tottie, who was staring at her with dark puzzled eyes.

'Was you cross with dad?' she said at last.

Then Gloden laughed in spite of herself. 'Cross with dad? No; he is very kind—far too kind, my little Tottie.'

And then Tottie jumped off her lap and began to play with Griff, while Gloden watched them anxiously; and then Mr. Lorimer came back to tell her that the brougham was at the door.

'Come again soon,' whispered Tottie, in an engaging way, as Gloden kissed her. 'I likes you wery much.'

'Tottie is very frank and outspoken, is she not?' laughed Mr. Lorimer. 'But she is rather exclusive in her tastes; she is not equally gracious to all visitors'; and then, as the footman opened the carriage door, he shook hands with her. 'I hope you will not be any the worse for your fatigue, Miss Carrick. Your brother has promised to look me up again. No, please do not thank me'—as Gloden tried somewhat lamely to express her gratitude; 'I am very glad to do you this little service.'

'Isn't he a rare good sort?' exclaimed Harvey, in a tone of intense satisfaction, as he threw himself back on the luxurious cushions. 'It is like a chapter out of the *Arabian Nights*, for you and me to be driving together in this fine carriage. Did you notice the horses? They are chestnut, and regular beauties. He told me that he had bought them for his wife's use. He told me lots of things when we were looking at the gun; and I say, Glow, he says I may come here whenever I like, and that he shall always be pleased to see me.'

'But, Harvey darling——'

'Oh, I know what you are going to say'—in a vexed voice. 'Bother the shop! I can't always be thinking of that. I wish you would let me finish. Well, he said it, you know, as though he meant it, "You will come, I hope"; and he looked at me in a sharp sort of way, as if he thought I should back out of it. "Don't let your sister keep you away." There, he said that.'

'Not really, Harvey?'

'Yes, he said those very words, "Don't let your sister keep

you away." You see, he thought you proud; and you were stiff with him—awfully stiff.'

'How could I help it?' and Gloden sat bolt upright and clasped her hands with a gesture of despair. 'He thought we were his equals when he saw us in the park, but directly I mentioned Uncle Reuben, his manner changed. Harvey, you are so young you do not understand. In a little country town like this everything is so narrow. He is the squire, the richest man in the place; every one mentions him with respect. Lady Car was an earl's daughter; some one told me so. Do you suppose that he is on visiting terms with his bookseller?'

'Oh, bother!' was all Harvey's answer to this, but he coloured up a little.

'Well, it is not pleasant, but it is no use shutting our eyes to our position. We are living with Uncle Reuben, and we must take the consequences; no one will visit us, and, of course, we shall not care for Uncle Reuben's friends.'

'I don't believe things are so bad as all that,' returned Harvey, obstinately. 'It's Uncle Reuben's shop, not ours; we shan't have anything to do with it. Mr. Lorimer knows all about that, and he said something very nice to me. I was grumbling about the grammar school, and he gave me a friendly pat. "Don't bother your head about that," he said. "I know Mr. Rossitor. He is a thoroughly good fellow; he turns out good scholars. Why, Blenkinsoff—you have heard of Blenkinsoff; he is in the House of Commons now—well, he was educated at the Grantham Grammar School. You will get a sound education there. You look me up, and we will have a talk about it." Wasn't it nice of him?'

'Yes, dear'; and Gloden owned to herself that Mr. Lorimer had been very kind. Certainly it would be grand for Harvey to have such a friend.

During the remainder of the drive she had to listen to Harvey's enthusiastic praises of Silcote Park and its owner. He was far too pleased and excited with their adventure to be silent for a moment.

Mr. Carrick was at his shop door as they drove up; he was watching the weather uneasily. His eyes opened widely when Harvey called out to him. 'Here we are, all right; not a bit damaged. Come along, Uncle Reuben, and we will tell you all about it. We have had a first-rate afternoon'; and then Gloden followed them into the parlour, where Clemency was rearranging the tea-table.

'We have had our tea, Aunt Clemency,' she said quietly; 'and we are not at all wet. Mr. Lorimer found us in the park; he took us into the house for shelter, and he was good enough to send us home in the carriage. I was very much troubled at the idea of putting him to so much inconvenience, but he insisted on it.'

'Dear me, Reuben, just think of that!' and Clemency's eyes grew wide with pleasure. 'I call that really kind and friendly of the squire.'

'Oh, he has a good heart, has Mr. Lorimer,' returned her husband, rubbing his hands slowly together. 'He is always ready to do a good-natured turn for anybody. But I am fine and glad that you lost a wetting. Here your Aunt Clemency and I thought you would be drenched to your skin; but there, you would not take my advice.'

'Oh, I would not have stayed at home for the world,' returned Harvey, excitedly. 'It has been rare good sport, Uncle Reuben. Mr. Lorimer is a brick. He showed us the music-room and the pictures and things, and gave us a scrumptious tea; and then he took me into his den, as he called it, to show me his new gun, and I am to go and see him again just when I like.'

'Nay, you don't say so!' and Mr. Carrick's voice had a tone of awe in it. Gloden slipped away unnoticed. When she returned an hour later, Harvey was still holding forth, the supper-table was laid, and Reuben was in his slippers. Harvey had drawn his chair quite close to him, and was expounding some matter with great eagerness, while Clemency on the other side of the fireplace knitted and listened.

'So, you see, he meant what he said, Uncle Reuben, and of course I shall go and see him; and perhaps he will take me out when he goes shooting.'

Clemency looked up rather anxiously. 'I don't hold with guns, Reuben,' she said, a little tremulously.

'You need not trouble your head about that, Aunt Clem,' returned Harvey, with condescending friendliness; 'every gentleman knows how to shoot, and it is best to learn early. I used to go out with Bentham sometimes; he was the keeper at the Grange. Father never objected, did he, Glow?'

'No, dear, of course not; he knew he could trust you with Bentham—he was such a careful man.'

'Yes; and Mr. Lorimer will be careful too, so you need not be scared, Aunt Clem. Perhaps he will let me bring you

home a rabbit or two; Uncle Reuben said he liked rabbits'; and so Harvey chatted on.

Gloden smiled to herself once or twice as she listened to the conversation. It evidently gave Uncle Reuben a great deal of pleasure to know that the squire had taken to the lad.

'And he was a Repton boy himself. Dear me, Clemency, just think of that! What a little world it is, after all! Well, I am fine and glad that he said a good word for Mr. Rossitor; that will put you in better heart, won't it, my boy? for, of course, the squire's opinion is worth having.'

'Well, I don't know about that, but I suppose I shall just have to put up with it,' returned Harvey, with a yawn. 'If any of the cads bother me, I shall thrash them, that is all. Now I think I will go to bed.' But when Harvey kissed his sister he inadvertently kissed Aunt Clemency too, and never noticed he had done it.

One of Clemency's old blushes came to her cheek, and there was a wonderful softness in her eyes, but she said nothing. And Harvey went off to dream of Silcote Park, and to imagine that he was striding through gorse and bracken with a gun on his shoulder, while white and grey tails whisked into numberless holes, and that when he tried to shoot, his gun somehow changed into a broomstick.

CHAPTER XII

'I AM A WORKING WOMAN'

'There is a sort of instantaneous brotherhood between victims of misfortune. When you have been long in mourning, you feel attracted by every black coat you meet.'—*Thoughts of a Queen.*

WHILE Harvey dreamt the careless dreams of boyhood, Gloden lay open-eyed in the darkness, brooding over the incidents of the afternoon, with an added sense of soreness and bitterness. She was in that state of bruised sensibility when every pin-prick seemed to throb like a wound. A miserable self-consciousness had robbed her of true dignity; she felt she had received kindness ungraciously, almost with hostility.

'I know Mr. Lorimer thought me proud and disagreeable,' she said to herself. 'Every one will misjudge me now. I shall not dare to be natural or like my old self; I shall always be on the defensive. Oh, how is one to breathe in such an atmosphere! and yet it must be endured'; and such a wave of despair swept over Gloden that she shivered as though with physical cold. In the darkness and silence her miseries seemed to magnify themselves and to stretch like a pall over her future life. If any one had told Gloden that night that she was ever to be happy again, she would have laughed out of sheer scorn; for a morbid nature has marvellous implements of torture in reserve for weak moments. Under any other circumstances Gloden would have revelled in such an adventure. By nature she was sociable and fond of society, and her imaginative and artistic temperament delighted in all forms of beauty; and even now, on the background of her thoughts, she recalled the music-room at Silcote, and then the marble cross in the churchyard. 'Poor Lady Car!' she thought; 'how happy she must have been, and yet she had to leave it all! Under such circumstances, when one has everything one wants, it cannot be

easy to die.' And when Gloden reached this point, and could spare pity for another woman, she forgot her own sorrows and fell asleep.

The next morning she was happily distracted by the arrival of her belongings, and during the greater part of the day she and Harvey were busily engaged in putting up bookcases, hanging pictures, and arranging books and ornaments.

Late in the afternoon, when Harvey had grown weary and had gone down to the shop for amusement, Mrs. Carrick came in search of her niece, and stood on the threshold in silent surprise at the changed aspect of the room.

'Dear me, Gloden,' she said at last, 'whatever have you done to the place? It looks almost too beautiful for a bedroom'; for to Clemency's humble notions cleanliness and neatness were the only necessary adjuncts of a sleeping-room.

The bare attic-like room was quite transformed. Gloden's pictures and books furnished the walls; an easy-chair and table and an inlaid davenport that had belonged to her mother gave it an air of comfort; the chest of drawers had been moved from the window, and Gloden had improvised a dainty-looking toilet-table, on which lay her ivory brushes.

Mrs. Carrick looked round on everything with wondering admiration.

'I am glad you like it, Aunt Clemency,' returned Gloden, smiling. 'Harvey and I have worked very hard, and we have not finished yet. I think myself that it looks very nice.'

'Nice! Why, it looks fit for a queen,' returned Mrs. Carrick, in an awestruck tone. 'Do you use those brushes every day, Gloden? They seem to me almost too good to use. And that silver box; why, I should keep it under lock and key if it were mine. Not that Patty is not as honest as the day, and to be trusted with a room full of gold; but in our way of life such things are too fine-like for general use.'

'Do you mean my little Indian casket?' returned Gloden, carelessly. 'Mother always had it on her toilet-table; most of these things were hers. She was very fond of pretty things, and liked to have everything nice about her, and I am just the same. I have some lovely Madras curtains for the window, and a little embroidered cloth for that table, and then the room will be finished.'

'Dear, dear!' was all Clemency could say. To the simple, homely woman there was something rash and almost sinful in this wasteful expenditure of taste and luxury in a sleeping-

room. Gloden's Indian casket and ivory brushes, her pictures and books and dainty bits of china, were outward and visible signs to Clemency of that different sphere in which her sister-in-law and niece had moved. 'She will never take kindly to the place,' she said to herself with a sigh, as she went downstairs; 'she will be like the Israelites when they sighed for the leeks and cucumber of Egypt. We shall never give her what she wants, poor lassie!' and she was rather subdued for the remainder of the evening.

'What's to do with you to-night, Clem my woman?' asked her husband kindly, as she sat beside him as usual, when the young people had retired; but when Clemency had given her version of the transformed attic, he fairly laughed.

'Don't you be getting notions in your head, wife,' he said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. 'Gloden is not to blame for her fads; they come from her upbringing, and will do her no harm. Let her make her place as pretty as she likes; it will, perhaps, reconcile her to her home.'

'It is not that I blame her, Reuben,' returned Clemency, seriously; 'she is kindly welcome to have her pictures and things about, and I never said a word, though they were knocking nails in the walls most of the morning. It is only the feeling that comes to me, that she will pine and dwindle in a life like ours. A young creature like her should be lively and happy, and when she has done grieving for her father, she ought to turn to and take interest in things.'

'Oh, it will come!' was Reuben's answer. 'You can't hurry growing things. Do you remember when Davie's little white rose-tree died, that he had set such store by as never was, and how he cried about it? "I watered it three or four times a day, father, and yet it wouldn't grow, and it has all turned yellow." Dear heart! how we laughed at him, didn't we, Clem? But it taught me a lesson, too, not to be over-careful and over-ready with our remedies. I understand what you mean about Gloden; she has not come down to our level, and we aren't keeping step with her somehow. But you must give her time; don't you lose heart about her, and it will come right one of these days'; and Reuben's cheerful philosophy was full of comfort to Clemency.

The next afternoon, as Gloden was putting the finishing touches to her room, and, in spite of fatigue, looking all the brighter and better for the occupation, Mrs. Carrick again tapped at her door.

‘There is a visitor asking for you, Gloden,’ she said, with an important air. ‘I have told Patty to show her into the best room. It is Miss Logan, and I call it real kind and neighbourly, and I am sure you will be pleased with the attention.’

‘Winifred Logan?’ exclaimed Gloden. She was intensely surprised, but she was not quite sure about the pleasure. In spite of her sincere respect for Mr. Logan, she was a little dubious of the desirability of becoming acquainted with his family; it might place her in an awkward position. And yet, in her friendless condition, any congenial society must be welcome.

‘Yes, her name’s Winifred,’ returned Mrs. Carrick; ‘I have seen it written a score of times. She is a pleasant, well-disposed young woman, and your uncle thinks a deal of her. They have long talks about the books. Then you will come down, Gloden? It is nearly an hour to tea-time, so you will enjoy your chat’; and Clemency withdrew, leaving Gloden in rather a perplexed state of mind.

‘I wonder if I am glad or not?’ she thought, as she hastened down to the best room. ‘At least I can be natural with her, for she knows all about my life.’

Miss Logan was sitting in the low window-seat. She rose as Gloden entered, and came forward with an outstretched hand and smile, and, in spite of Winifred Logan’s plain face, she had a very sweet smile.

‘Ewen asked me to call,’ she said, speaking with the utmost friendliness—‘my cousin Ewen, you know. He wrote to me this morning, and begged me not to lose a day. So, as Saturday is a half-holiday with me, I thought I would come at once.’

‘It was very kind,’ returned Gloden; her colour had risen a little at the mention of the curate. ‘We only came on Tuesday, and of course it is all very strange to us. I think it is very good of you to come so soon.’

‘Ewen insisted on it, and his orders are always obeyed. I am afraid I cannot claim any merit.’

Miss Logan had a brisk manner and a pleasant voice; when she talked, people always forgot how plain she was. Perhaps one reason was that she never thought of herself at all, but always of the person with whom she was conversing.

She regarded Gloden as she spoke with an air of great kindness. Gloden’s brief flush had died away, but her dark

eyes were more expressive than ever in their sadness; they seemed to appeal to Winifred almost irresistibly.

‘Oh, I know how you feel!’ she said impulsively. ‘Just as though you had been torn up by the roots, and flung down anyhow—not even planted. You know, I felt just the same when Uncle Will died, and we had to turn out of the rectory. I know I hated Grantham far more than Aunt Janet did; she said all places were the same to her when Uncle Will was gone. But you and I, Miss Carrick, are not like that, I hope; only a widow could ever feel that pitch of desolation.’

‘No, indeed’—with a sigh. ‘Mr. Logan has often talked to me about Felton Rectory; it must have been a beautiful place.’

‘So it was, and we all dearly loved the old home. Ewen was born there, and I was only a tiny mite of three when Aunt Janet mothered me. Well, we clergy-women have always to endure this sort of rooting up, but all the same it is hard to bear. I daresay it will be long before you care for Grantham.’

‘I shall never care for it. I shall never cease to miss Eltringham and my dear old home,’ returned Gloden passionately.

But Miss Logan only smiled and shook her head. ‘Don’t think me unfeeling if I contradict you. I am just aching with pity for you; you see, I have gone through it all myself, so I have a right to feel for you; and then, I am a few years older. Things will not always seem so horrid. It is like learning to swim—do you remember how one flounders at first, and gets one’s mouth full of cold water, and all the spluttering and the failures?—expertness does not come at once. You will get used to Grantham by degrees, as I did.’

‘Things were different with you,’ was Gloden’s mournful reply.

But Miss Logan would not have this. ‘How do you know?’ she asked shrewdly. ‘Has Ewen given you a daily journal of our doings? I assure you, Miss Carrick, it was terribly uphill work at first. Let me tell you a few things, because we are going to be good friends, I know. In the first place, instead of the big roomy rectory, with all its comforts, we had to content ourselves with a narrow little slip of a house in Chapel Street; not a pretty, romantic cottage, but just a commonplace little house, with two parlours just big enough to hold us, and one little maid-of-all-work.’

‘ We have only one servant here,’ returned Gloden, unable to refrain from a smile.

‘ Oh, here!’ observed Miss Logan, contemptuously. ‘ Do you suppose we have a room as comfortable as this? I have fallen in love with this room; I shall tell Mrs. Carrick so when I go downstairs. But wait; you have not heard me out. Secondly, instead of being a fine young lady, wasting all my time among my flowers and bees, I am a working woman. I teach Mrs. Parry’s children—Dr. Parry is the doctor here. There are four little girls, and a boy to whom I teach Latin and arithmetic. So, you see, I have no sinecure’s office.’

‘ You mean that you are to be pitied too.’

‘ No, that was not my meaning; I only meant to show you that other people beside yourself had their difficulties. I should not like to be pitied at all. I love my little pupils, and I love my work. I am a very cheerful person, and am disposed to look on the bright side of things. Please do not think me egotistical, Miss Carrick, for telling you so much about myself.’

‘ You are telling it with a purpose, I can see,’ returned Gloden, speaking far more cheerfully. ‘ And I think you will be the best person to help me, for I shall have to be a working woman too.’

‘ Then I will help you with all my heart, and we will shake hands upon it; but I shall not let you speak in that doleful tone. I think it just splendid to be a working woman; it makes life so much more interesting.

‘ Oh no, you cannot mean that seriously.’

‘ There, you are just like Aunt Janet; she is always so full of pity for me when the day is wet or cold, though I laugh at her all the time. I don’t expect you to believe me, Miss Carrick, because you do not know me yet, but often when I wake up in the morning I feel as happy as a child, because my day is all planned for me, and I know there will not be an unoccupied minute in it. Oh, how I should hate to be idle now!’

‘ I suppose I must believe you,’ returned Gloden, in such a dubious voice that Miss Logan laughed heartily.

‘ You will find I am a truthful person, though I am not quite so blunt as Ewen. Is he not the very bluntest person you ever met in your life?’

‘ My dear father often said so.’

‘ Ah, the vicar! How attached Ewen was to him! He seems in wretched spirits now, poor fellow—utterly cast down; Aunt Janet quite fretted over his last letter. He was so happy

at Eltringham; he liked the people and the place, and you were so good to him.'

'He was very good to us during my poor father's illness; I hardly know what I should have done without him.'

'It made him so happy to be of use'—and here Winifred looked a little keenly at the girl, as though some half-formed suspicion were taking root in her mind—'but that is Ewen's character. To help people is a natural instinct with him.'

'He used to say very much the same of you, Miss Logan. "You ought to have my cousin Winifred here; she helps everybody." I have heard him say that more than once.'

Then there was a pleased and happy expression in Winifred Logan's eyes. 'Thank you,' she said, very simply. 'I am glad you have told me that; I think a great deal of my cousin's opinion. He is a good man, and good men are scarce.'

'Oh, I hope not.'

'Out-and-out good men are scarce. But how I am chattering, and all this time I have never given you Aunt Janet's message! I daresay Ewen has told you that, since her accident last year, she cannot walk without a great deal of difficulty, and this is the reason why she has not called on you, and she wants you to waive ceremony and to come to tea with us on Monday; I mean a substantial working-woman's tea at six o'clock. I am never home before that hour except on Saturdays.'

'I should like to come very much'; and then Gloden hesitated. 'Oh no, I cannot leave on Monday! Harvey is going to the grammar school; it will be his first day there, poor boy, and he must not find me absent on his return.'

'Then we will say Tuesday, and we will hold a regular council of three, a sort of mutual aid society, and you shall be formally elected into the guild of working women. Do you know, there is one question I am dying to ask you. Is not that a violin-case? Does it belong to your brother or you?'

'To me.'

'Oh, I thought so. I was meditating over the case before you came into the room, but directly I saw your hand, I knew it was yours. I am quite sure that you play exceedingly well.'

'I have been well taught,' returned Gloden, modestly. 'I daresay you have heard of Signor Torriano?'

'Oh yes; I heard him once at St. James's Hall. He was a well-known violinist.'

'He was a great friend of my mother's, and he often stayed with us. He was such a dear old man, and I was so fond of him; his death was a great trouble to me. I was only seven when he taught me to play first, and when I was twelve, he persuaded my mother to take me up to town for six weeks every season, that I might have a course of lessons, and he often came down to the vicarage. I think I was fortunate, for another old gentleman living near us was a violin-player.'

'You must let us hear you play on Tuesday,' replied Winifred, quickly. 'I am passionately fond of music, and so is Aunt Janet. Now I must really go; it is past six, and Aunt Janet will be waiting for her tea. Good-bye until Tuesday'; and Winifred warmly pressed her hand.

'Good-bye, and thank you; you have done me so much good,' replied Gloden, in a low voice; and then she stood by the window until Winifred was out of sight.

'I like her; she is true and kind,' she said to herself; and something like a glimmer of hope stirred within her. A friendly helping hand had been held out to her; she no longer felt so utterly stranded. 'It was good of Mr. Logan to send her,' she went on. 'He was always so anxious that I should know his mother and his cousin Winifred. Why do people say she is so plain? I like her face; her eyes are beautiful. It is a pity that she is so short-sighted. I wonder how old she is? Perhaps seven or eight and twenty. She does not look at all young; and how plainly she dresses! I am afraid, from what she says, they are very poor.' But here Gloden's soliloquy was interrupted by Harvey.

'Why don't you come to tea, Gloden?' he exclaimed in an injured tone. 'We are all waiting; and the hot pikelets look first-rate.' Then, as he tucked her hand under his arm, 'How did you like Miss Logan? She is not much to look at, is she? But she is niceish, rather.'

'Oh, she is much more than that. I liked her very much indeed.'

Harvey opened his eyes rather widely at his sister's enthusiastic tone. Gloden so seldom praised people; she was a little difficult to please.

'So Miss Logan has been to see you,' observed Mr. Carrick, as his niece entered the room. 'She is a very intelligent person; she often comes into the shop with her little pupils. I don't think I have ever known a pleasanter young woman. I have often said so, haven't I, Clem?'

‘Indeed and you have, Reuben. Miss Logan is one of your favourites.’

‘Ay, that she is. We get on politics sometimes, when there are no other customers in the shop; she is a rare talker, is Miss Logan, and has a clear, sound head of her own. She will be a comfortable sort of friend for you, Gloden.’

‘I think so myself, Uncle Reuben.’

And when Gloden told them about her invitation, a pleased twinkle came to Uncle Reuben’s eyes.

‘I am fine and glad about Miss Logan’s visit to Gloden,’ he observed later on to his wife. ‘She looks more natural to-night, poor lassie, and has a bit of colour in her cheeks. Miss Logan will rouse her; she is a sensible, sprightly young woman, and she will get her to take interest in things. Old-fashioned folk like us, Clem, can’t deal with a young thing like our girl here. Our experience is not hers, and it is like teaching a new language to a deaf person to make her understand how we feel about things. It is the young folk who hold together, and small blame to them.’

Gloden had retired to bed that night feeling a little more hopeful, but she woke with the old depression. It was her first Sunday at Grantham, and through the long day she found it almost impossible to battle with the home-sickness that oppressed her.

She and Harvey went to church together, and sat in the corner of the pew that had belonged to Reuben Carrick. Harvey had entreated her to walk over with him to Silcote Church, but she had steadfastly refused to do so, and he was somewhat sulky in consequence.

‘It would be ever so much nicer going to that dear little church in the park,’ he grumbled. ‘I hate a big roomy church like this; and then I could have seen Mr. Lorimer.’

But to this Gloden only repeated her former objections: she was tired, and not inclined for a six miles’ walk, and they must not inconvenience Aunt Clemency on the first Sunday by keeping dinner waiting. But she kept her principal reason in the background—that she had no intention of crossing Mr. Lorimer’s path again if she could help it. It was therefore a shock when Harvey nudged her as the service commenced, and she saw that Mr. Lorimer had just entered the pew a little in front of them. The sight of his fair hair and smooth, boyish-looking face made her cheeks suddenly burn with the remembrance of that afternoon. At that moment he half

turned and caught sight of her and Harvey, and Gloden quickly averted her eyes. But during the service her look wandered more than once to Mr. Lorimer's pew. She could not help wondering if that lady in slight mourning could be his sister. She was a very striking-looking person, and had a beautiful face; Gloden had never seen a more lovely woman. There was another gentleman and two little boys in sailor suits with them. The younger of the boys, a pretty little fellow, kept turning round to look at Harvey, and was gently admonished by his mother in consequence; but Harvey was evidently too strong a fascination, and in a few minutes he was sinning again.

Harvey was anxious to get out of the church the moment service was over; but his uncle took no notice of his impatience. Mr. Lorimer and his party were in the porch before Mr. Carrick rose from his seat.

'Did you see Mr. Lorimer smile at me?' asked Harvey, in a breathless whisper. But Gloden had seen nothing; she had not dared to lift her eyes from her book.

'Who were those people with the Carricks?' asked Mrs. Wyndham of her brother, as they stood in the churchyard waiting for the carriage; 'a young lady in deep mourning and a nice-looking boy. He seemed to know you, Reggie, for he gave you a beaming smile.'

'They are a niece and nephew of Mr. Carrick's who have come to live with him,' replied Mr. Lorimer. 'You know, his brother was the vicar of Eltringham; Logan was his curate. I am afraid it is hard lines for them, poor things! they have been used to a different life. They had lost themselves in a thunderstorm near the Hall the other day, and I gave them shelter. The boy is a jolly little fellow.'

'So Ninian seemed to think. What a naughty boy you were, Ninian darling! Oh, there goes Violet! She does not see us; she little thinks I am just behind her. I must send her a note, and ask her to luncheon to-morrow; may I, Reggie?'

'May you! Is it not your house as much as mine, Constance?' Look here, Harcourt'—turning to a quiet, gentlemanly-looking man beside them—'I vote we put Constance and the boys into the carriage, and that you and I walk on; it will give us an appetite for luncheon.'

'That is always the way when we come to Grantham Church,' returned Mrs. Wyndham, discontentedly. 'Don't

let him take you any farther, Harcourt; remember, you have promised the boys a walk in the afternoon.'

'I don't think Ninian deserves his walk,' returned Mr. Wyndham, quietly, as he put his hand under the boy's chin. 'What do you say, my lad?'

Poor Ninian drooped his head, and turned very red.

'There!' whispered Mrs. Wyndham aside to her brother, in a vexed voice, 'poor Ninian will be left at home this afternoon. Harcourt is so terribly firm. He says that the boys must learn to obey me—that a mother's look or word should be all-sufficient; and really Ninian was very troublesome. I thought Harcourt was taking no notice, but he must have seen everything.'

'Don't you bother your head about the boys,' returned Mr. Lorimer; 'Harcourt knows what he is about. You are far too soft-hearted, Con, and the little rogues take advantage of you. Now let me put you in the carriage.'

As Mr. Lorimer lifted his hat and turned away, he came full upon the Carrick party. Mrs. Carrick, in her little close grey bonnet, was walking first with her husband; Gloden and Harvey were following them. Mr. Lorimer would have stopped and spoken to them, but Gloden bowed to him very stiffly, and passed on. For the first moment she thought Harvey was following her, but she found herself alone. She had nearly reached Market Street before he had overtaken her.

'What a hurry you are in, Glow!' he said reproachfully. 'You might have waited to speak to Mr. Lorimer; he seemed to expect it. He was ever so nice; he introduced me to his brother-in-law, Mr. Wyndham—that was his wife and two boys who drove off in the carriage—and he says I may go and see him next Saturday. He knows Saturday is a half-holiday; and he hoped you had recovered from your fatigue, and sent his compliments; and he is a regular good sort!' finished Harvey, in a burst of enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XIII

VIOLET WINTER

'There are plenty of acquaintances in the world, but very few real friends.'—*Chinese Moral Maxims.*

MRS. WYNDHAM sat alone in the morning room at Silcote Hall. Since Lady Car's death it had been unoccupied. Mr. Lorimer had only needed the library and dining-room for his own use. But since his return from Switzerland there had been some attempt to resume his old habits, and the arrival of his sister and her family furnished him with sufficient excuse for throwing open all the disused apartments.

Constance Wyndham was one of those women whose mere presence diffuses an air of comfort and homishness to any place. When Constance took possession of the morning room on the day after her arrival, Mr. Lorimer felt somehow soothed by the sight of her familiar presence. It even gave him pleasure to see her there. Constance had not thought it necessary to remove any of her sister-in-law's belongings. Lady Car's embroidery-frame still stood in its accustomed corner; her basket of assorted silks, her inlaid workbox, and other trifles, still occupied the table; and when Constance seated herself at the writing-table she used the very blotter and pen that Lady Car had used.

Mrs. Wyndham soon finished her notes, but she did not at once betake herself to any other occupation. She lay back in her chair, and watched with quietly amused eyes the little group gathered on the lawn. Her two boys, Rex and Ninian, were playing lawn-tennis, and Tottie, with round admiring eyes, was watching them. They were handsome, sturdy little fellows, and Constance might be forgiven for the motherly pride that swelled her heart as she watched them.

Mrs. Wyndham was an exceedingly lovely woman. It was

not so much the delicacy of her bloom and the perfection of her features that people so much admired, as a certain brightness that seemed to radiate from her, and which attracted old and young alike to her. Her very unconsciousness of her own beauty heightened its effect; and she had none of those little affectations, those small coquetries and graces, that so often mar a pretty woman. Constance was quite aware that she was handsome; her beauty was one of the many good things that had come to her; she neither despised nor overvalued it. It was delightful to feel that people liked to look at her, but she cared still more to be loved. She was a demonstrative woman by nature, and thought much of the outward signs of affection; but though her husband was a marked contrast to her, she was perfectly happy in her married life. 'I often wonder that you and Harcourt get on so well together,' Reginald had said to her once. 'Of course, he lets you do as you like; as far as that goes he is a model husband, but I thought you always wanted such a lot of petting.'

'Harcourt gives me quite as much as is good for me,' returned his sister, with a charming blush. 'But he hates any demonstration between married people in public; he says it is bad form, and of course he is right.'

'I never thought Con would have taken up with a quiet fellow like Harcourt,' he remarked another time to his wife, when he happened to be in a confidential mood. 'He is one of the best fellows I know; and certainly it has turned out splendidly.'

'Those quiet men can be demonstrative when they like,' returned Lady Car, with her usual shrewdness. 'Any one can see Mr. Wyndham worships his wife. Do you notice how he insists that Rex and Ninian should show her little attentions? I never saw boys of their age so well behaved; and it is not Constance's training, for she would spoil them. Constance spoils every one.'

'Poor little darling!' said Constance to herself, as Tottie began dancing with little skipping steps, hither and thither, out of mere joyousness of heart. Tottie no longer wore her black frocks; her dark curls tossed wildly under a little grey hood. She held up her smock daintily with both hands as she danced.

'The leaves are dancing too. Look at the red and yellow ones! They run away from me, they do; nobody can't catch them,' laughed Tottie.

'Miss Winter, ma'am,' announced Norton at that moment; and Constance rose eagerly from her chair, as a tall young lady in brown, with some dark red chrysanthemums in her hand, entered the room.

'My dear Violet! How glad I am to see you!' and Mrs. Wyndham took the girl affectionately in her arms and kissed her on either cheek.

'Not half so glad as I am to see your dear face again'; and Violet's voice was a little choked. 'Oh, Constance, how I have wanted you, and to see you in this room again!'

Mrs. Wyndham's face grew grave for a moment.

'Oh, poor Car! This was always where she sat in the morning. Reggie looked pleased when he saw me here. Sit down there, Vi, and let me have a good look at you. Felix told me you were looking thin and rather pale when he met you in town.'

'Oh, never mind about me!'—rather hurriedly; 'people often get thin as they grow older. I want to look at you, Constance. Yes, I thought so; you have grown lovelier than ever.'

'How can you talk such nonsense? Look at those great boys! Do you know, I have been married eight years—actually eight years! Can you believe it, Vi?—it is more than eight years since you and I chose the bridesmaids' dresses in this very room.'

'Oh, I can well believe it. The years have been longer to me than to you.'

'I don't like to hear you say that.'

'Why should I not say it, if it be true? You are a satisfied woman, Constance—one can see it in your face; it is as smooth as a child's. You dear old thing! I do love to know that you are so happy.'

'I think I have more than my fair share of happiness. I often tell Hareourt so. Look at poor Reggie'—and then she sighed, and Violet sighed too, out of sympathy.

'You know, I have not seen him yet,' she said softly. 'Mother wrote to him, and we had cards, and then he went away. Cousin Tess told me that you were all at Grantham Church yesterday, but I never saw you.'

'No; you passed us in the porch—there was such a crowd. But it does seem so strange that you have not seen Reg all this time. Why, it is nine months—nearly ten—since poor Car died; but, of course, Reg has been so much away.'

‘Is he better?’—in a low voice.

‘Yes, much better, I am thankful to say; he is quite natural and like his old self now. He begged Harcourt to come down for the shooting as usual, and to bring me and the boys. Felix is coming down later in the week, so we shall all be together. It will be like old times, will it not?’

‘No,’ she said quickly. ‘The old times can never come back. We were young and light-hearted then, and life was not quite so complex as it is now; our old quartette is broken up for ever. Don’t look so shocked, Constance. We are not all as contented as you.’

‘No, I am afraid not. Dear Vi, do you know, it makes me quite sad to hear you talk in this melancholy fashion—you, who ought to be so happy.’

‘I wonder what constitutes happiness?’ observed Violet, with a slight frown, as though she were trying to solve a problem that she found unusually hard. ‘That is always what I am telling myself, that I ought to be happy. Sometimes, when I am in a pious frame of mind, I count up my blessings, and am then amazed at my own ingratitude. You once told me I was a very discontented person, and, upon my word, you were right.’

‘Well, I do not know,’ returned Constance, in a delightfully sympathetic voice. ‘Felix and I always agreed on one point—that your home-life has been spoilt for you.’

A painful flush crossed Violet’s face; but she did not at once answer.

‘You have such a beautiful home,’ went on Constance, gently. ‘The Gate House is such a charming old place, and you have everything that heart can wish; and your mother is nice—she is a thoroughly good woman; and so is Miss Wentworth; and yet——’

‘And yet I am not satisfied’; and now there was unmistakable bitterness in Violet’s tone. ‘Constance, you are too kind to say what you think. You know that I am not necessary to my mother; all my life Cousin Tess has come between us.’

‘You are putting it a little too strongly, Vi,’ remonstrated her friend; ‘you know I always told you you were morbid on this point. Your mother is very fond of you—she always has been; but she is accustomed to depend so much on Miss Wentworth. Of course, with a grown-up daughter, this is a pity; nay, I will go further, and say that it is a great mistake. But

there is no need to exaggerate troubles. You are your mother's only child, and she loves you far more than you imagine. If you were ill, or in trouble, you would soon find this out for yourself.'

'Is it affection to allow me to live in such isolation? Constance, you do not know how utterly out in the cold I feel. Granted that my mother is never actively unkind—is there no deeper unkindness in the fact that my opinion is always disregarded and set aside? that whatever I say or whatever I wish is overruled by a word by Cousin Tess? that her will, the will of an alien, governs my mother and the house; and that I, her daughter, am treated like an irresponsible child?'

'Vi dear! Surely—surely things are better than in the old days?'

'No, they are not better, Constance. It is true, I do as I like and go where I like; that a series of stand-up fights with Cousin Tess have brought me independence; but I am no nearer to my mother's confidence. If I were ever alone with her, if I ever had a chance of using my influence! But Cousin Tess never leaves us for a single night; when she goes she takes us with her.'

'I suppose she feels that she is necessary to your mother.'

'She has made herself necessary. Do you know, mother is perfectly lost without her; she seems incapable of deciding the smallest thing. Do you think that any human being should so entirely influence another; that a mere friendship should exclude the rightful ties of nature?'

'Dear Violet, if you had only married!'

'Ah! that is what people always say. If the right man would but come! But what if he fail to put in an appearance? Is there to be no life for a single woman? I am seven-and-twenty, Constance; the best and sweetest part of my life is over, the bloom of youth gone, and I am necessary to no one. Yes, that is the sting, the hateful secret sting—that I am not necessary to a single human being! Ah!' she continued, still more bitterly, 'if I died to-morrow, my mother would be very sorry; I am quite sure that she would mourn for me sincerely. But Cousin Tess would comfort her; they would go and put flowers on my grave together, and they would be my favourite flowers too. Good Cousin Tess is very observant and kind-hearted; she never makes mistakes about people's tastes.'

'Don't, Vi; I can't bear to hear you!' and Constance's eyes were full of tears. She felt quite a pain at her heart, as she

listened to the girl's wild talk. Why were some lives so full, and others so empty? Why was she, of all women, to be so blessed—to be surrounded by love and sweet observance, and all the tender ministries of life, while all Violet's natural cravings were unappeased?

And she was speaking the truth. Every one in Grantham knew that Miss Wentworth, the handsome, strong-minded woman, ruled the Gate House. Mrs. Winter had lost her husband after a very few years of married life. Miss Wentworth had gone to her in her trouble, and had never left her since; the poor weak creature had clung to the stronger nature in her desolation and helplessness, and Miss Wentworth's influence had only increased with the years. While Violet was still a child, there had been no complications; she had always been wayward and contradictory, but her jealousy of the older woman had been unmarked in those days. But with her growing womanhood had come heart-burnings and divided interests, and an ever-increasing bitterness. 'No wonder she has lost some of her old freshness and brightness,' Constance thought. It is only inward tranquillity and quietness of heart that preserve youth. 'But she will always be sweet-looking,' she went on. 'Violet is not just an ordinary pretty girl; there is so much in her face.' And then the busy, kindly brain began plotting innocent mischief. 'Reg always admired her so much in the old days; I remember his telling me once that she was the nicest girl he knew. I think it would be sweet to have Violet for my sister, and then she would be so good to Tottie. My poor dear boy cannot go on living by himself in this big place. I am quite sure Car would not wish it; she was so sensible about things'; and so on.

Violet little guessed the thoughts that were passing through her friend's mind. In the old times that lay so far back in the distance, she and Reginald Lorimer had had a secret unconfessed liking for each other. Violet had been unconscious of her own feelings; she was somewhat surprised to find what a blank Reginald's marriage had made in her life. 'It was bad enough losing Constance,' she thought; 'but Lady Car seems to spoil everything. Reginald is not a bit the same; he never seems to want me now, or to care to talk to me. I suppose it is always so when a man is married.' But this bold philosophy did not comfort her; she had not so much in her life that she could afford to lose an old friend.

Violet, in her urgent need for companionship and sympathy,

had tried, sorely against the grain, to make a friend of Reginald's wife; but all her efforts to pierce through Lady Car's serene coldness had been in vain.

Lady Car had not cared much for Violet Winter. She thought her fanciful and discontented. An impulsive, emotional girl was not to her taste. To her well-balanced mind Violet's talk was reckless, and in bad form. Lady Car disliked confidences out of her own family. In vulgar parlance, she thought every one should sift their own grievances and their own dust-heaps, and not winnow them in public.

Miss Wentworth was, in her opinion, a very delightful woman; she was superior to the rest of the Grantham people. It was so absurd of Violet to be jealous of such a charming person, and to make herself miserable with imaginary troubles. And so, in her wise way, Lady Car lectured poor Violet, and preached patience to her, and told her she was a foolish child to set herself against her mother's friend. And so it came to pass that there was no love lost between them.

The gong for luncheon sounded at this moment, and, as Violet laid aside her hat and jacket, Mrs. Wyndham explained to her that the gentlemen were shooting in the far covers, and that they had taken their luncheon with them, and that Rex and Ninian must be their father's representatives.

Violet tried not to feel disappointed when she heard this. She was dreading her first meeting with Reginald after his trouble, and she would have much preferred meeting him here than at the Gate House, with Cousin Tess's critical eyes watching everything. She hated talking to her friends in her mother's pretty drawing-room. Cousin Tess's clear dominant voice somehow controlled the conversation, and kept it from straying into any delicious little by-ways or short cuts to confidence. Violet's girlish sophistries and small beguiling fancies died a natural death under those distinct, matter-of-fact tones. In her own home Violet seldom talked except to utter some brief sarcasm. 'No one talks but Cousin Tess; her voice seems to penetrate to every corner of the room,' Violet said once to Lady Car, when the latter was as usual dilating on Miss Wentworth's excellences. 'Do you admire a deep, sibilant voice? Cousin Tess always lisps her s's. Mother says she has what is called the Welsh splutter; to me it is intensely disagreeable.'

'I rather like Miss Wentworth's voice,' Lady Car had returned coldly. 'You do exaggerate so, Violet; no one except you would call it a lisp.'

Violet tried to look unconcerned as Constance made her playful little remark about Rex and Ninian. The little boys were awaiting their arrival eagerly. When Violet had kissed them, Rex placed a chair for his mother, and Ninian, not to be behindhand, unfolded her napkin.

'My sons always take care of me,' observed Constance, placidly. 'Thank you, Ninian darling. Isn't he a big boy, Violet, for five and a half? Rex is like me, but Ninian takes after his father.'

Violet made a suitable response, the little boys chattered freely, and they were soon as merry as possible, and there was great joy when their mother promised that they should go out with her and Violet presently.

'I told Reg that we would go and meet them; they will be coming back about four. Will that suit you, Violet? We will come back to tea, and then you shall start as soon as you like; you need not be home before seven.'

'No, that will do nicely. Will you order the pony-carriage to be round by a quarter-past six?' and when this was settled, they went back to the morning room.

There was so much to talk about that the time passed far too quickly. Violet wanted to hear particulars of Lady Car's illness; and when they had fully discussed this painful subject, Constance dried her eyes and began talking eagerly about their Swiss trip; and then the little boys rushed in to remind her of her promise, and to beg her to put on her hat.

'I have not had such a delicious time for months!' exclaimed Violet, when Constance came down, looking handsomer than ever in her Rubens hat. It never seemed to matter what Constance wore; everything suited her. 'It has done me good only to sit opposite you and look at you.'

'I am so glad,' returned Constance, simply. 'I wanted to do you good. I shall come over to the Gate House one day this week, and have a long talk with your mother. I shall tell her and Miss Wentworth that I mean to run off with you pretty often when I go back to town. You must come and stay with me, Violet; it is so long since you have been. Let me see. The Heathcotes are coming up at the end of October; and then we have promised to take in Colonel and Mrs. Ramsay. They are coming back from India with Nettie, and Harcourt wants me to put them up until they find a house; but after that——'

'After that will come Christmas, and you told me you

intended to spend it at Silcote. Do not trouble about me, Constance; I know what a busy person you are. I should dearly love to stay with you, but I should want you to myself.'

'Then we will wait and see what turns up,' returned Constance, easily. 'I will fit you in somehow between this and Christmas; but, anyhow, you must come over and spend another long day with me here. Felix will be down soon; he is another of your cronies. But there, I cannot answer for the gentlemen; they are too busy killing to be any use to us.'

'There's father!' exclaimed Rex; 'and Uncle Reggie is with him!' and immediately two pairs of sturdy little legs were put into active motion. 'How many birds have you killed, Uncle Reggie? May Ninian and I count them? And oh! do let me carry your gun,' pleaded the little boy. 'Father let me carry his once, and it did feel so nice.'

'You will find it pretty heavy, youngster; and mind, no tricks with it. How do you do, Miss Winter?'—raising his cap. 'It is awfully good of you and Constance to come and meet us.'

'I thought you would say so, Reg'; and then Constance turned to her husband, who was just then shaking hands with Violet. 'Have you had a successful day, Harcourt?' And Mr. Wyndham informed them in a satisfied voice that they had had capital sport.

'I am awfully glad to see you again,' observed Reginald, presently. He and Violet were walking side by side down a narrow woodland path. Rex was strutting before them, with his uncle's gun on his shoulder; it was heavier than he thought, and he was rather red in the face with his exertions; Ninian, who was a trifle envious, followed him closely. 'I ought to have called at the Gate House and paid my respects long ago. I am afraid I shall get black looks from Miss Wentworth for my remissness.'

'Cousin Tess is rather punctilious, certainly; but I do not think she will be hard to you, Mr. Lorimer.' She had never called him Reginald since his marriage, and though once he had transgressed and called her by her Christian name in his wife's presence, he had been so severely admonished by Lady Car for his breach of manners that he had been careful not to offend again.

'You think she will be good enough to overlook my deficiencies?'

'Oh, certainly! Cousin Tess is very good-natured.'

‘I will drive Constance over one afternoon, then, and make my peace with the ladies. How do you think Constance is looking, Miss Winter?’

‘I think she is lovelier than ever.’

‘Isn’t she a darling? Upon my word, I hardly know what I should do without Con; she is a tower of strength to me. When a man has lost his right hand, he needs all the help a sister can give him.’

‘Yes, indeed’—and here Violet’s voice grew very soft; and then she added, ‘You knew how sorry we all were for you.’

‘Yes, thank you. Your mother wrote me a very kind letter.’

‘Oh, mother is always kind. She remembers her own trouble. It is not always easy to express all one feels, but the sympathy is there. It did seem so hard that you, of all persons, should be singled out for such a misfortune.’

This is what Reginald himself felt; but from his old friend Violet’s lips such sympathy was very sweet. But Violet herself feared that her words needed explanation.

‘When I said that, I meant that you were always so bright and full of life, one could never imagine you in trouble. With Mr. Hamerton it was different; he could be grave at times, and——’

Here Violet paused. Her meaning was plain to herself, but she was expressing it awkwardly. What she would have said was this: How could fate have been so cruel as to inflict this blow on Reginald Lorimer, with his light heart and gay *insouciance*, and boyish fund of spirits?

‘I am glad you mentioned Hamerton,’ exclaimed Reginald, feeling that his friend would be a safer topic of discussion.

Violet was very kind. She was saying all that an old friend ought to say under such circumstances, and he felt very grateful to her; but he winced from any more direct mention of his trouble.

‘Do you know, Hamerton will be down here on Friday or Saturday? You must give us the pleasure of your company again, Miss Winter, while he is here. Constance must arrange it somehow; it will be the old quartette party again.’

‘You forget Mr. Wyndham,’ was Violet’s answer.

And then Reginald laughed; and Constance, hearing her brother’s voice, quickened her steps to ask the reason of this sudden mirth, and they were no longer alone.

CHAPTER XIV

‘WERE YOU THINKING OF HAMERTON?’

‘*Viola.* I pity you.

‘*Olivia.* That is a degree of love.’

Twelfth Night.

‘An two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind.’

Much Ado about Nothing.

As they entered the house, Mrs. Wyndham carelessly announced that tea was ready in the drawing-room, but she avoided looking at her brother as she spoke; and a moment later she added, ‘Tottie and the boys will be with us, so we shall be quite a large party; there would not be room for us all in the library.’

‘I leave everything in Constance’s hands when she is here, observed Mr. Lorimer in a low voice to Violet. ‘I am grateful to any one who will save me trouble. You see, I am as lazy as ever. Do you recollect how you used to abuse me for my laziness? You were so hard on me, that actually Constance took my part.’

‘One cannot remember all one’s idle words,’ replied Violet, lightly. ‘I think I am more merciful than I used to be.’

And then Mr. Lorimer drew up a cosy-looking chair for her near the tea-table, and found another for himself beside her, while Mr. Wyndham took up his favourite position on the hearthrug; and the little boys stood like watchful sentinels on either side of their mother, ready to wait on everybody.

The presence of the children was a master stroke of policy on Constance’s part; their bright, eager faces gave a cheerful aspect to the scene. The big stately room seemed to be more habitable at once, and the sight of Tottie stumping about with a plate of frosted cakes in her fat hands drove all gravity away.

Tottie’s curls were wilder than ever, and she looked such a quaint, picturesque little figure in her white smock.

‘Does you want lots of cakes weally, Uncle Harcourt?’ she asked, as Mr. Wyndham coolly abstracted half a dozen. ‘Dad,’ she continued, in indignant remonstrance, as she showed her empty plate, ‘Uncle Harcourt is welly greedy; he has put all the cakes in his pocket.’

‘Shooting is hungry work, Tottie,’ returned her father, lifting her on his knee. ‘See, there are two cakes left for you and me; come, you shall choose first.’

Tottie shook her curls out of her eyes; she had still a grievance.

‘The biggest cakes is in Uncle Harcourt’s pocket; he oughtn’t to put them there,’ she remarked, as she nibbled daintily at her cake, with her head against her father’s shoulder.

‘Isn’t she a darling?’ whispered Constance. ‘I do love to see Reg with her, and yet it makes me ready to cry; he does look such a boy.’

But Reginald, unaware of his sister’s affectionate scrutiny, suddenly broke into one of his old laughs at some new drollery on Tottie’s part. His day’s shooting had exhilarated him. It was pleasant to see himself surrounded by familiar faces; somehow he felt more like his old self that evening.

‘I shall certainly drive Constance over one afternoon next week,’ were his parting words when, an hour later, he stood beside Violet’s pony-cart. ‘I shall make Hamerton come too. You will like to see Hamerton.’

Violet very cordially acquiesced in this. She would be delighted to see any one or every one from Silcote Hall.

‘What do you think of Vi?’ asked Constance, a little eagerly, when her brother returned to the drawing-room.

The children had gone off for a romp in the nursery, and Mr. Wyndham had betaken himself to the library to write his letters. Constance was lying back in one of the deep easy-chairs close to the fire, with a glass screen between her and the blaze. The September evenings were sufficiently chilly to warrant such an indulgence, and Reginald felt a sense of inward comfort as she turned her beautiful face towards him. The presence of this dearly-loved sister made him forgetful of his trouble. If only Constance and Wyndham and the boys could always be with him, he thought, he should in time be content.

Reginald was one of those men to whom the society of women was an imperative necessity. He had little caressing ways that made him a favourite with them. When Constance

put back her head and looked at him, he bent over her and kissed her hair.

‘It is so nice to see you here, Con.’

‘Thank you, my dear’—in a soft, affectionate voice. ‘Come and sit here by me. And now tell me, what do you think of Vi?’

‘She is not so pretty as she used to be,’ he replied, a little reluctantly, for he knew of old that Constance hated to have her friends disparaged. ‘She is awfully nice—she always was—but she looks ever so much older.’

‘Oh, Reg, how can you be so unkind?’ and Constance looked quite injured; this was too disappointing, that he should pick holes in Violet. ‘I think Violet is one of the sweetest-looking girls I know.’

‘Well, I said nothing about sweetness,’ he returned, trying to defend himself. ‘She is awfully nice, of course—I’ve just told you so; but she was quite out of the common a few years ago. Don’t you recollect what a colour she used to have when she came in from riding, and how that horrid Mrs. Finch once asked her if she used rouge?’

‘Yes, I remember; but her complexion is lovely still. She was rather pale this afternoon. I think she was a little nervous at meeting you again. Violet is so full of feeling; she is always so sorry for people when they are in trouble.’

‘Oh, I see what you mean!’ and then he was silent for a moment. This view of the case had not occurred to him; he had not imagined that Violet would be nervous with him. He remembered, of course, that he had not seen her since Car’s death, but he had been absorbed with his own feelings. Her manner had been very kind, and she had spoken to him very gently and quietly, but he had not realised that the meeting had been a little trying for her as well as for himself.

‘I think,’ he added after a time, as though to atone for his disparaging remark, ‘that Miss Winter is nicer than ever.’

‘You need not call her Miss Winter to me. I did not know you were on such formal terms with Violet,’ returned his sister, with a look of pettishness; ‘and such friends as you used to be!’ And then she repented of her petulance, and laid her hand caressingly on his arm.

‘Dear old Reg! It does seem so delicious to be talking to you over the fire like this again, and there is so much I want to say to you before Felix comes.’

‘Oh, there will be no getting you to myself when Felix is

here,' replied Reginald, in a grumbling tone; 'he is such a fellow for monopolising you. We must have Violet over one evening while he is here.'

'There! you said her name as naturally as possible,' returned his sister, triumphantly; 'so I will forgive you for thinking her not quite so pretty. Good looks are not everything. If I were choosing a wife,' she continued artfully, 'and wanted some one who would always be good and loving and amiable, I would choose Violet.'

'Were you thinking of Hamerton?' asked Reginald, innocently; for it certainly never entered his head that Constance should be thinking of him. He did not even know whether in her heart she approved of second marriages; he rather thought not. He had heard her severely condemn one of her friends who had just married again. 'If you are thinking of Hamerton,' he continued drily, 'you are just throwing away good powder and shot on an idea. Felix would not look at Violet.'

'And why not, may I ask?'—somewhat sharply. 'But all the same, I was not thinking of Felix in particular, or of any one.'

'Oh, that is all right,' he returned, in a relieved voice.

But Constance was down on him in a moment. 'Why was it all right?' she demanded severely. She thought it was all wrong for him to encourage Felix in his ridiculous one-sided views. He was the last man, the very last man in the world, to be an old bachelor; he was far too kind-hearted and generous, too large-minded altogether. Felix deserved the very nicest woman possible. She had set her heart on his marrying. Why should not Violet do for him? Come, now, he had put the idea in her head; she would do very well indeed for him, and she challenged him to deny it.

This was a little finesse and stratagem on Constance's part; some feminine subtlety made her suggest this, but she was not speaking seriously. She did not in the least wish Felix Hamerton to fall in love with Violet; as she truly observed, such an idea had not occurred to her. In reality, she would much rather see Reginald seek comfort and consolation in his old friend's society. She thought it might come gradually and naturally; and, though she would not have dared to hint this to Reginald, she certainly intended to give those little opportunities and pushes that help so much to lubricate the matrimonial wheel.

'He will find out for himself Violet would be the most suitable person for him,' she thought to herself; 'when he sees

more of her he cannot help getting fond of her.' And certainly there was some elementary truth in this idea, for propinquity and sympathy have much to do in some love-affairs; and it was far from impossible that, in his loneliness, Reginald Lorimer might turn to his old friend for consolation. So it was sheer diablerie and stratagem that made Constance drag in Felix's name.

'I should advise you to leave Felix alone,' replied Reginald, gravely. Reginald's gravity was a mistake—a gross masculine error; he ought to have laughed it off, and Constance would have laughed with him. But when Reggie put on that solemn face, her curiosity was at once piqued.

'You speak as though Felix were not free to marry,' she said in surprise. 'Of course you are in his secrets. Is he in love with any one? But no'—interrupting herself indignantly—'he would never be in love with any one without telling me. He treats me as though I were his sister; you know that, Reggie.'

'Oh, we all know that you are his guide, philosopher, and friend. Don't look at me so suspiciously, Con. Felix hasn't told me any of his secrets; as far as I know, he might propose to Violet to-morrow.'

'Oh, do be quiet about Violet!' returned Constance. 'I was not serious. I daresay Vi would not have him if he asked her; she has refused several offers—I know that. What I want to know is this: Why did you look so solemn when I talked that nonsense about Felix?'

'I don't believe I looked solemn at all.'

'Oh yes, you did, Reggie; you quite frowned.'

But though Reginald disclaimed this vehemently, and persisted that Felix had never honoured him with his confidence, and that they did not talk over their love-secrets like a couple of schoolgirls, Constance failed to be convinced. She was sure that Reggie knew or guessed something about Felix, and for the first time she doubted whether he was in reality fancy-free. Could it be possible that anything should be troubling him all this time? This consideration so absorbed her that she forgot her harmless little plans for Reginald. She felt that she could not be comfortable until she had seen Felix and questioned him herself. Certainly he was grave at times, but she had always thought that such gravity had well become him, and she had never for one moment thought that he was unhappy. The very idea troubled her. She longed to see him, to convince herself how matters really stood with him. Next to Reginald, no one stood nearer to her than Felix Hamerton. The friendship between them

was a very real one. The mere thought that he had suffered any disappointment affected her poignantly. She had always pictured him coming to her at once in any trouble, and seeking her sympathy.

While Constance was jumping to conclusions in her impulsive way, and making herself supremely uncomfortable, Violet was driving herself rapidly down the Grantham road.

The contact with the crisp September air had brought back some of the old colour to her cheeks. If Reginald had seen her then, he would scarcely have thought her so changed. Violet had not felt so happy for a long time. The knowledge that Constance would be at Silcote for the next few weeks filled her with delightful anticipations. They would meet often; she would have frequent opportunities of enjoying the sisterly sympathy of which she had been so long deprived. Constance would advise her, would help her to shape out her life better. She would give her some idea how to fill up the void and ennui of her present existence, which were her chief trials. Violet's thoughts approached the subject of her old friend Reginald with some reluctance; she hardly liked to admit to herself that she found him a little perplexing.

'One does not like to reason about such things,' she said to herself, as she touched up Vixen a little smartly; it seems hardly fair and honourable. I am sure he misses her. I suppose a man would always miss a good wife, and he has such an affectionate nature that he would attach himself very strongly to any one who was good to him. He is a little older and graver—one would expect that; but he is not so much changed, after all, to hear him laughing with Tottie—the old boyish laugh. No man whose heart was really broken could laugh like that.

'Constance makes herself unhappy about him,' she went on; 'she thinks that he will never get over Lady Car's loss, but I am not so sure of that. She dominated him, she ruled him completely, but I doubt whether she really understood him. She was not young enough; there was no youth about her. I think as a child she could not have been very childlike.'

Violet pulled herself up at this point. Mr. Lorimer's happiness or unhappiness in his married life was no business of hers. She would always be profoundly interested in his well-being, that was all. And here Vixen stopped before the handsome bronze gates that had given the house its name, and the groom jumped down to open them.

It was quite dark by this time, and Violet drove almost at a walking pace down the short avenue. The Gate House was an old Elizabethan house, and was full of rambling passages and small oddly-shaped rooms leading one out of another. Mrs. Winter had lived in it all her married life. It had belonged to her husband, and nothing would have induced her to leave it. It was about half a mile from the town, and stood in a most secluded position. A short lane turning off from the Grantham road led to it. It was called Golden Lane, from the number of oxlips that grew there, and which in spring quite carpeted the tiny wood that grew on one side of the lane.

Strangers always fell in love with the Gate House, its environment was so charming. The little lane, with its tangle of boughs meeting overhead, and its hedgerows with long trails of briony and meadowsweet; the miniature wood, with its nut-trees and wild roses, stretching to the moat; and the somewhat incongruous magnificence of the heavy Flemish gates, a freak of Mr. Winter's father, who had imported them from Belgium at vast expense. There was something in the sequestered look of the place, with its great gardens and wide meadows, that made Reginald often call it the Moated Grange.

When Violet had given Vixen her customary two lumps of sugar, she went into the long shadowy hall that no lamps ever properly illuminated, as the dark oak panelling seemed to absorb all light, and, turning down a side passage with a red hanging lamp, she entered a sort of nest of rooms all communicating with each other, and all of small size, the last being the inner drawing-room, which was Mrs. Winter's favourite room, and where she generally sat.

'The rest are all passage rooms,' she would say plaintively. 'There is no comfort in the morning room, or library, or the Japanese room; people are always passing through them, or pouncing out upon one from behind the curtains.' And so it was that Mrs. Winter was always to be found in the red drawing-room, in a snug corner by the fire, with a handsome screen drawn round her chair to keep off draughts, and her favourite reading-lamp beside her—not that she was an invalid, but she was self-indulgent by nature, and certain comforts were necessities to her.

To Violet's surprise she found her mother alone, a most unwonted thing. She was working as usual, and looked up at her daughter with a greeting smile.

In her early life Mrs. Winter had been considered a beauty,

and she was still very attractive. She was a tall, graceful-looking woman, and her slight languor and want of animation were due more to natural indolence than to lack of health. She made much of small ailments; always laid great stress on her delicacy of constitution and peculiar sensitiveness, and was somewhat injured if people failed to perceive this. In reality she was one of those amiable, nondescript characters which are closely allied with selfishness, and which are generally dominated by a stronger will. Much of Miss Wentworth's influence was due to the fact that she indulged Mrs. Winter in her fads and fancies. If it pleased her to call her indolence ill-health, Miss Wentworth had no objection; she was quite willing to pet and wait on her. If only Violet would have done the same, she would not have so completely lost all influence with her mother; but Violet was too truthful by nature to pander to her weakness. 'Cousin Tess encourages her and makes her worse,' she would say indignantly. 'She is bracing with every one else, but not with mother. If mother only says her finger aches, Cousin Tess makes a fuss as though she were really ill. I have no patience with such nonsense. It is not right to spoil people in that ridiculous way,' finished the girl, with healthy scorn.

When Violet saw that her mother was alone, her eyes brightened involuntarily. It was not often that she got such a lucky chance. She sat down on the rug and began pulling off her gloves. She was just in the humour for a comfortable chat. It would be nice to tell her mother all about her pleasant afternoon.

'You are very late, my dear!' exclaimed Mrs. Winter, languidly. 'Theresa was saying so just now. She has been reading to me ever since tea. You are quite right, Violet; the book is beautiful. I have been listening to such a pathetic scene. I could not help crying over it, and that made my head ache; so Theresa shut the book, and advised me to have a nap while she changed her dress for dinner.'

'Yes, mother'; and then, forgetting to sympathise with her mother's headache, she continued eagerly, 'I have had such a nice afternoon. Dear Constance is looking lovelier than ever. I am sure you would say so. She and Mr. Lorimer are coming over to call on you. Constance sent her love to you.'

'And how does Mr. Lorimer look? No, don't tell me, Violet. We will wait until Theresa comes down; she will be so interested in everything. She has been quite impatient for

your return. Mr. Lorimer is a great favourite with her. She was so grieved when Lady Car died.'

'Yes, I know, mother; but I will tell her about it too—only it is so nice to get you alone sometimes. I want to give you Constance's message properly. She longs for you to see Tottie; she is such a darling.'

'Theresa wants to see Tottie too,' replied Mrs. Winter, languidly. 'Won't you scorch your face if you sit so close to the fire, Violet? You have got such a nice colour for once. Theresa was only saying just now that she was afraid you were losing your good looks—that you did not wear as well as most girls; but I am sure she would not say so just now.'

'Never mind about my looks, mother dear; I want to tell you about Mr. Lorimer.'

'Yes, dear, I know; but hadn't we better wait until Theresa comes down? She does so long to hear all about it.'

Then Violet got up from the rug with a sort of resigned desperation in her face. She knew her mother's mild obstinacy too well. Mrs. Winter was determined that Violet's account should not be solely for her ears. She wanted Theresa to hear it too, if only Violet had been in a yielding mood; but she was in that dangerous state of suppressed excitement that so often leads to reaction. As usual, she felt checked and repulsed, and all desire to tell her story left her.

'I may as well go and dress too,' she said, rather moodily.

A few minutes later Miss Wentworth entered the room. She was a fine-looking woman, rather dark-complexioned, but most people called her handsome. She dressed well, and had a good carriage, and her brisk energy contrasted somewhat favourably with her friend's lymphatic manners. She was a great talker, and smiled a good deal, showing a set of very white teeth. When she chose, her voice was not at all unpleasant, although it had a slight suspicion of a lisp, and she spoke with great rapidity. On the whole people liked her, and found her amusing.

'What have you done with Violet, Amy?' she asked in surprise. 'I hurried down to hear her news.'

'I knew you would,' returned Mrs. Winter, in a distressed tone, 'and I begged her to wait for you. But you know Violet's way, Tessie; if one opens one's mouth she is off at a tangent.'

'Oh yes, I know Violet's way,' returned Miss Wentworth; but she frowned slightly, and her pleasant smile died away.

CHAPTER XV

AN EVENING IN CHAPEL STREET

'Recollection is the only paradise from which we cannot be turned out.'—RICHTER.

HARVEY returned home after his first day at the grammar school in rather a cheerful frame of mind, and Gloden, after much anxious questioning, drew from him the unexpected avowal that it had not been half so bad as he had expected. He rather liked his master; the playground was capital; and though the boys were certainly an awful lot of cads, and he should positively enjoy fighting some of them, he thought one or two seemed a better sort. On the whole things might be worse; and though he still sighed at the remembrance of his beloved Repton and his old chums, it became evident to Gloden that Harvey would soon adapt himself to his altered circumstances, and she hardly knew whether to admire his cheerful philosophy, or to take fright at the idea that such easy adaptability would lead to ultimate deterioration.

As the days went on, she began to hear a good deal about a certain Bernard Trevor. He was Harvey's age; they had played together on the first day, and some mutual attraction made them seek each other out.

'He is really a nice fellow,' explained Harvey, in one of his nocturnal confidences—'a real good sort, I mean. I am sure you would like him awfully.'

'Should I, dear?'

'By Jove! I should think so; Bernard is as jolly as possible. Do you know, I saw his mother the other day. We were walking down High Street, and Bernard suddenly shouted out, "Why, there's my little mother!" and she came up to us, and talked for a long time.'

'And you liked her?'

'I should think I did. She is all right, Glow. She is as much a lady as you are, and she is so pretty and young-looking; and she is a widow, you know. Bernard told me about everything,' he went on. 'His father died two years ago, and they are as poor as possible. He was an officer—Captain Trevor—and Bernard says he will show me his uniform and sword one day. They live in such a little house in Chapel Street, and they know Miss Logan.' And this, and much more, did Harvey pour in his sister's attentive ears.

'Do you think Aunt Clemency will let me ask him to tea?' he asked, rather anxiously; and then Gloden laughed outright.

Harvey was not at all modest in his demands. He had already mooted the subject of the rabbits to his aunt, and had obtained from her a promise to speak to his uncle about it. The result had been that Ben was in treaty for a lop-eared grey rabbit, and he and Harvey had already set to work on some empty book-boxes. Mrs. Carrick had watched them from an upper window. To her it was a moving sight to see Harvey, in his shabbiest jacket, sitting astride an old box and sawing vigorously, while he chattered all the time to Ben. As she looked the tears coursed slowly down her face.

'He does so remind me of our Davie,' she said to herself, as she wiped them patiently away; 'it is almost too much for me at times. It seems as though I had got my boy back; but, thank God, He has him safe in His keeping. Reuben and me are getting so soft on the lad that it seems as though we could refuse him nothing. He fairly masters us, does Harvey, and he is clever enough to know it.

'Bless his heart!' she went on; 'he does seem happy amongst all those chips and shavings. Davie was fond of a mess, that he was. He is settling down as comfortably as possible, and Reuben and me would find the greatest comfort in him if Gloden would not put notions in his head'; and Clemency sighed, for her niece was still her chief difficulty. As the days passed on, they did not come closer to each other; the cold gentleness with which the girl repelled her kindly overtures kept them apart.

'She will never take to us; she almost resents Harvey being so comfortable with us,' she thought, as she went down to give Patty some order. 'She has never entered the shop since she first came; I think it vexes her to see Reuben and me serving the customers. The best room is more to her taste.

But there, I must not judge her too harshly ; it is her upbringing, as Reuben says.'

Gloden felt a slight quickening of her pulses as she took up her violin-case that Tuesday afternoon. She was pleased at the idea of seeing Miss Logan again. In spite of her sorrow, the youth within her refused to be starved and set aside. This utter blankness was not to be borne ; even in her exile she must find some compensation, some oasis in the wilderness where she could refresh her arid spirit with some comforting draught. She must seek work and interests ; 'something that will take me from the shop—that will help me to forget it,' she thought bitterly, as she walked rapidly in the direction of Chapel Street.

A quick step behind her made her turn round involuntarily, and Miss Logan joined her.

'Do you always walk so fast?' she asked, pausing a little. 'I saw you in Market Place, and tried to overtake you. I had to run after you at last.'

'I always walk fast when I am alone,' returned Gloden, with a smile. 'At Eltringham, when there was no one to see me except the cows, I have often run to get over the ground quicker. I ought to have been a boy—Harvey often tells me so. I do so love running and climbing stiles. When I see children racing and chasing each other, I feel it quite an effort not to join them. Not that I feel like that now'—checking herself with a sigh.

'Oh, you will be your old self again one of these days,' was the cheerful response ; but Miss Logan told her aunt afterwards that she never saw any one walk like Miss Carrick, with such alertness and lightness. 'She holds her head very high when she walks, and her feet seem scarcely to touch the ground. I always thought Miss Winter a graceful walker, but Miss Carrick beats her.'

'I hope I am not too early?' asked Gloden rather anxiously the next moment.

'Oh dear, no ; it is I who am a little late. Freddie was a naughty boy, and I had to argue with him. This is the house, Miss Carrick ; I told you we lived in a pokey little place.' And then, as she put her key in the door to let herself in, a nice-looking boy took off his cap to her as he ran past.

'That is a neighbour of ours. Isn't he a pleasant-looking boy, Miss Carrick?'

Now Gloden at that time had not been the recipient of

Harvey's confidence, so she made no remark when Miss Logan added that his name was Bernard Trevor, and that he was a great favourite of hers.

'I believe I am fond of all boys,' she continued; and then a homely-looking little woman in spectacles, with auburn hair and a widow's cap, came out into the passage, and welcomed her in the kindest manner.

'My son's friends are mine, are they not, Winifred?' she said pleasantly; and Gloden told herself that Mr. Logan's mother was exactly the sort of person she had expected to see. All the Logans were plain, but Winifred and her aunt made up for their want of beauty by their pleasing expression and brisk, agreeable manners.

The folding doors were open between the parlours; Gloden had just time to see that one was furnished very nicely as a sitting-room, and the other was apparently used for meals. A neat little maid was just bringing in the tea-tray, when Winifred carried her up to take off her hat and jacket.

'This is my room,' she said; 'Aunt Janet's is just opposite; there is a small room always kept for Ewen; and that is Rebecca's. It is a mere nutshell of a place, is it not, Miss Carrick?'

'You seem to have a wonderful collection of books,' observed Gloden; and certainly books seemed to overflow and almost swamp the little house. Every available space was occupied by them; they lined the narrow passage and one wall in Winifred's room, and even the tiny hall had its bookcases.

'They were Uncle Will's books; but we were obliged to sell a great many—it was impossible to bring them all here. They are Ewen's now. They give Aunt Janet plenty of work to dust and air and see that the damp does not get to them. Uncle Will was so proud of his collection, and Ewen tells us there are very valuable books amongst them. I always call this house "the Bookery"; it is a name I have invented. It does just as well as the Rookery that people think so pretty.'

'I suppose you read a good deal?' asked Gloden. She had just noticed that Miss Logan's hair was very pretty; it was the colour of a ripe chestnut, and it was so abundant that she had arranged it in two thick plaits round her head in rather an unusual style. Her figure was neat and compact, and she had exceedingly pretty hands. 'She has her good points as well as other people,' she thought, 'and she does not look nearly so plain to-day,' which was what people often said of Winifred.

Gloden found it impossible to be shy and distant as she sat at the round table covered with homely delicacies, and joined in their friendly talk. She was disposed to smile when Mrs. Logan, with pardonable maternal pride, began descanting on her son's perfections, while Winifred laughed and encouraged her. Ewen's opinions evidently dominated the little household; the simple women believed that there was no one like him. His brief visits constituted their red-letter days; they were epochs in their lives. 'When Ewen was here at Midsummer'—how often Gloden was to hear this!

She even discovered that a sort of reflected glory surrounded herself. Ewen thought so much of her; young ladies were not generally to his taste. This was from Mrs. Logan, but it struck Gloden most forcibly that Winifred always annotated her aunt's remarks in such a way that Mrs. Logan felt herself encouraged to go on. They seemed to play into each other's hands in a simple, good-humoured way.

'You are quite right, Aunt Janet,' Winifred would say; 'Ewen does not like every one. Don't you remember how hard he used to be on the Harper girls? He would have it that all Kate Harper's little mannerisms and affectations were so absurd, and yet she was a nice girl, too.'

'Dear me! yes, Winnie; and he was so vexed when either Kate or Mary were asked to tea. Naughty boy, he was barely civil to them. I daresay you have noticed that trait in my son, Miss Carrick—that when he does not care for people, he cannot bring himself to be pleasant to them?'

'Oh yes; I quite know Mr. Logan's way. I used to tell him sometimes that he shut himself as tightly as an oyster in its shell.'

'So that makes it all the more flattering when he really likes a person,' struck in Winifred, eagerly. 'Don't you remember, Aunt Janet, when Ewen came after Christmas and saw All Saints, that he said he wondered the Grantham workers had not more taste? Miss Carrick and two or three of the farmers' daughters had decorated Eltringham church so beautifully; but that Miss Carrick was so clever, and——'

'To be sure he did; he was singing your praises half the evening.'

'And so on, and so on, until Gloden grew quite giddy with it. It reminded her of an incessant game of battledore and shuttlecock. She was really thankful when Mrs. Logan interrupted herself to say Rebecca must really take away the tea-

things, as she had to go out; and then Winifred observed that they would go into the other room, and then perhaps Miss Carrick would be good enough to play to them. They must not waste any more time talking about Ewen. Didn't Gloden think his ears must burn, as he sat in his solitary parlour?

Gloden was quite willing to take her violin out of its case, where it had lain untouched for so long. As she took up the bow with unsteady fingers, she tried to forget that she had not touched it since the evening her father had been taken ill.

'Play just what you like, and go on from one thing to another,' Winifred said to her. 'I shall be able to judge so much better if you will play to please yourself.' And then Gloden tuned up her violin, and then leant her cheek tenderly against it, and Winifred began dreamily to admire the thin, delicate hand and wrist, which looked so white against her black dress.

A low, soft prelude, and then, half-unconsciously, Gloden began to play a slow melody with exquisite feeling. Her dark eyes grew large and bright, and there was a rapt expression on her face; for always, as she played, the spirit of the music would wrap her round and enthrall her. At such moments Gloden was beautiful, and Winifred quoted softly to herself Wordsworth's lovely words—

And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

'No, do not stop; go on, go on. Aunt Janet, sit down and listen'; and Winifred's eyes were a little dim as she spoke, and there was a flush on her cheek, for those plaintive, long-drawn chords seemed to vibrate strangely in her heart, and some longing that was not pain, and yet was closely akin to it, took possession of her. This was the music that Ewen had loved, and to which he had so often listened. If he could only be here now!

As for Gloden, she was far away—the walls of the little parlour no longer enclosed her; she is standing in the porch of the vicarage. The freshness of a June evening is round her; there is a scent of lilies in the air; her hands are full of roses; a great brown bee is buzzing round her. Hark! there is the well-known tinkle of a bell. 'I am ready, my dear.' A large firm hand is laid on her shoulder, and she and her father walk slowly towards the lich-gate. Oh, how peaceful it looks! The children are playing on the green; the geese, in single file, are

making their way to the little pond. Marget, in her white sun-bonnet, comes out to look at them. 'It is a fine evening,' she mutters vacantly, as she drops her curtsy.

The melody is changed now; it grows deeper and more intense. The sunshine has faded, and the vicarage garden is bathed in the pale silvery moonlight. The lilies look like a row of white sentinels against the dark walls, but their faint sweet fragrance seems to permeate everything. She is sitting alone, with Griff at her feet, and the tears are falling—falling on her cold hands; by the lich-gate she can see the heaped-up flowers on the little mound. It is all over, her old happy life; good-bye—good-bye to Eltringham, to the dear past, to everything!

Mrs. Logan is crying quietly; the music, so plaintive and penetrating, has touched a painful chord. Winifred has taken her aunt's hand, but her own eyes are not dry. What is this strange feeling of unrest, of trouble—of some shadow that seems to come closer and closer? If only Ewen were here! And then the refrain seemed to go, 'If only Ewen were here!'

It was almost a relief when Gloden stopped of her own accord, and her arm fell wearily to her side.

'Have I tired you? Have I played too long?' she asks a little anxiously, for she is troubled at the silence.

'You have given us a perfect treat!' exclaimed Winifred, jumping up from her seat. 'It was beautiful, only far too sad. It has made Aunt Janet cry. Oh, how I envy you for being able to play like that!' and then, with a sudden impulse, she put her arm round the girl and kissed her. 'Thank you, dear; thank you so much.'

'I am so glad my playing has pleased you,' returned Gloden, simply. The wonderful light had died out of her eyes, and she looked a little pale and drooping. 'Do you think I shall be able to do anything with it?' And this question roused Winifred at once.

'To be sure. We must talk business now, and Aunt Janet must give us her advice. I am brimful of ideas. I think your playing has inspired me. I shall talk to Mrs. Parry about you to-morrow. She is such a kind-hearted creature, she would do a good turn for any one, and it was only the other day that she said that she wanted Hilda to have violin-lessons. Hilda is my eldest pupil, Miss Carrick. She is nearly thirteen, and such a clever girl.'

'That would be delightful!' returned Gloden. 'One pupil

would lead to another; that is why I am so anxious to make a beginning.'

'Oh, I have another idea in my head!' interrupted Winifred. 'I suppose you do not know Miss Winter by name—Violet Winter?' And, as Gloden shook her head, she went on, 'She is a very nice girl. I have often seen her at Mrs. Parry's, and Mrs. Winter has called on Aunt Janet once or twice. They are very rich, and live at the Gate House, a little way down the Grantham road. They asked me to tea once, and I fell in love with the place. Well, Miss Winter plays the violin, and I overheard her once telling Miss Parry that her playing had got very rusty, and that she wished she could have some good lessons.'

'I am afraid I should hardly be up to that. I only thought of teaching very young pupils.'

'Oh, Miss Winter does not play very well,' replied Winifred, quickly. 'She had some lessons when they were in town one season, but she has not made great progress; it is quite a fresh idea of hers to take it up in earnest. I fancy she is in want of an occupation, for she talked about learning Italian too.'

'I know a little Italian,' returned Gloden, modestly. 'Mamma and I used to read it together. I had an Italian master when we went to town. I can speak it a little too; it was always a favourite study of mine.'

'I will tell you what I will do,' observed Winifred, with her usual briskness. 'I will ask Mrs. Parry to give me an extra half-holiday this week, and I will go off straight away to the Gate House and talk to Miss Winter, and I will have a talk with Mrs. Parry too, about Hilda and Rosalie. I do not see why Rosalie should not learn the violin too; she is eleven, and it is well to begin young. I suppose you will not ask high terms at first. I mention this because the Parrys are not rich, and have a large family. With Miss Winter the question is not so important; they can afford to gratify any amount of whims.'

'I should leave all that to you; you will know best what I ought to ask.'

'Very well, then; I will talk it over with Mrs. Parry. She's the clearest-headed woman I know. She never muddles things. You think a great deal of Mrs. Parry, don't you, Aunt Janet?'

'Yes, Winnie dear; but I think my principal reason is that she thinks so much of you. You have no idea what a favourite Winifred is with people, Miss Carriek. Her little pupils dote

on her; they think she knows everything. My son Ewen, now, will not do a thing without asking Winifred's advice. They have been like brother and sister all their lives, and he has grown to depend on her. "Let's ask Winuie"—that is always his first speech when anything is wanted.'

'Never mind all that, Aunt Janet.' But Winifred had a pleased look as her aunt said this. 'Why, you are never going, Miss Carrick? It is hardly nine yet.'

But Gloden persisted that she must go.

'Anyhow, you must wait until you have had a slice of seed-cake and a glass of Aunt Janet's ginger wine. Every one, even Mrs. Parry, who is such a famous housekeeper, praises our ginger wine. No one leaves the Bookery without tasting it, under pain of Aunt Janet's displeasure.' And Gloden was obliged to submit to this good-humoured tyranny.

'I have had such a pleasant evening,' said Gloden, gratefully, as she bade them good-bye. 'I hope you will let me come and see you again.'

'Come as often as you like, and we shall be pleased to see you, my dear'; and Mrs. Logan gave her a motherly kiss as she spoke.

'It made me feel bad to hear her play, Winifred,' she observed, as she and her niece stood at the door watching Gloden as she walked down the long dark street under the quiet starlight sky. 'It brought back the old rectory days, and made me sore all over. Dear, dear! what a world this is! Do you remember the lavender bed down by the pump in the kitchen garden? I could smell the lavender plainly all the time she was playing, and could see you in your little red frock, quite smothered in curls, with Ewen swinging you under the elm trees; and now to think of us two living together in this close little house, with Will gone, and my boy Ewen away!'

'He will come to us at Midsummer,' returned Winifred, cheerfully. 'Don't you get fretting over old days, Aunt Janet, or you will not sleep, and then I shall be vexed that I ever asked Miss Carrick to play. Come in now, and I will read the evening Psalms to you and Rebecca, and then we will go to bed.'

But it was Winifred who did not sleep that night, who was shaping strange thoughts and surmises in her busy brain. 'If he cares for her he has never told me so, and Ewen always tells me everything. When I see them together I shall soon find out what he thinks about her. Poor dear Ewen! I should like him to be happy, but——' Here Winifred sighed a little heavily.

CHAPTER XVI

GLODEN'S FIRST PUPIL

'The labour we delight in physics pain.'

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Gloden gave Harvey an account of her evening with the Logans, he seemed a little dissatisfied.

'I don't like the idea of your teaching the fiddle, Glow,' he said rather discontentedly. 'Just you wait until I am grown up, and I will help you right enough. If you don't like the shop, we will go away and have a nice little house somewhere.'

'My dear boy, I must work,' returned Gloden, firmly. 'We cannot possibly live on Uncle Reuben, and you know how fond I am of my violin. It will be no hardship. It would be ever so much worse to live here and have nothing to do; I think it would kill me in time. You see, Harvey dear, you have your lessons and your games with the boys to occupy your thoughts, and I have nothing—not even a rabbit-hutch to build.'

Whereupon Harvey gave her a mighty hug, and then made a wry face, as though he had to swallow something very unpalatable.

'I hate to think of your doing anything. It is a beastly shame!' and he seemed so low in his mind that Gloden thought it wiser to change the subject.

'He will get used to the idea by and by,' she said to herself. 'It is no use troubling him about it.' But nevertheless she waited anxiously for some news from Winifred.

It came soon. The very next evening Winifred ran in on her way home with a message from Mrs. Parry, that she would be much obliged if Miss Carrick would call on her the following afternoon.

'Both she and the doctor are so delighted at the idea of Hilda having violin lessons; but Mrs. Parry is not quite sure about

Rosalie. She says they cannot afford too many luxuries at once. She owned that the terms were most moderate—you know you left all that to me—but she thought it wiser to begin with Hilda first. I am sure you will get on with Mrs. Parry; she is such a nice motherly woman. It is the large red house by the hospital; any one will tell you'; and Gloden promised she would call.

'I shall have to leave the Gate House until Saturday,' continued Winifred, 'as Mrs. Parry has some visitors staying with her, and I cannot possibly be spared'; and, of course, Gloden insisted that there was no hurry at all.

'Whatever brought Miss Logan again so soon, Gloden?' asked Mrs. Carrick, anxiously, as Gloden came back into the parlour; but, as Harvey was there learning his lessons, she did not mention Miss Logan's errand, and her brief evasive answer seemed to disappoint Clemency, but she said nothing further.

A few minutes later Gloden followed her into the shop. She wished to explain matters, and there was no one there.

'I did not want to speak before Harvey,' she began. 'He does not like the idea of my doing anything, and I cannot bear to vex him. Miss Logan only brought me a message from Mrs. Parry. I am going to give violin lessons to her little girl.'

'Dear me! this is fine news, Gloden'; and Mrs. Carrick's eyes brightened. 'Why, every one thinks a deal of Mrs. Parry, and of the doctor too, for that matter. If they take you by the hand, your name is as good as made. Teach her little girl, did you say? Your uncle will be fine and glad to hear that. It is not that we want you to work, Gloden. I have told you that before, and that you are kindly welcome to the best we can do for you; but if your heart is set on doing something, it is a grand thing to have the doctor and Mrs. Parry to back you.'

'I am glad you think Uncle Reuben will be pleased about it.'

'Ay, I can answer for him. He thinks a deal of the doctor since he attended Davie. He, and Mrs. Parry too, were as feeling as possible. Well, they have their quiver full; the Red House, as they call it, is full of young life. He had not been long married when he was fetched to our poor babe, but I remember as well as it were yesterday the kind message she sent me, and how she came over to our shop the very next week and talked to me and Reuben. There are some things that are never forgotten,' finished Clemency, in her simple way, 'especially the kind words that people give us in our trouble; they seem to stick to one's memory ever after.'

Mrs. Carrick was too much engrossed with the subject to notice that a customer had entered the shop; and Gloden, who was standing with her back to the door, was equally oblivious of the fact.

And so it was that Mr. Lorimer had plenty of time to scan the slim girlish figure and the graceful little head and brown hair with its ruddy gleams, and he could hear every word that she spoke in those clear, quiet tones.

'You are right, Aunt Clemency,' she returned, with unusual feeling; 'the friends who stand by us in trouble are more to us than any number of fair-weather friends.' And then, at a movement behind her, she turned round and encountered Mr. Lorimer's eyes. How long had he been there? He was leaning against a case of books, and had a slightly amused expression in his face; but it changed into friendliness as he stepped up to her and held out his hand.

'I hope you are no worse for your fatigue, Miss Carrick? I think you are looking better.' He might well say so, for the annoyed flush that suffused her face had given her the colour she needed.

'I am perfectly well, thank you,' she replied stiffly.

She could not refuse his outstretched hand, much as she would have liked to do so. Could any position be so awkward as hers? Mr. Lorimer was standing just in front of the glass door with its drawn green curtains, and she could not effect her escape. But Mrs. Carrick, unconscious of her niece's embarrassment, struck in cheerfully—

'Indeed, Mr. Lorimer, I am glad to say that my niece is a sight better the last two days. I am thinking our wholesome air is telling on her; it is fine and bracing for young folks.'

'Yes, it is a healthy place, Mrs. Carrick'; but he looked at Gloden as he spoke. 'I hope you will choose a finer afternoon when you next walk over to Silcote.' He was quite aware that she wanted to pass him, but he felt unwilling to let her go. Perhaps it was a little unfeeling on his part, but it amused him to see her standing there looking so icily repellent, with her downcast eyes and closely-shut lips; but the next moment his good-nature prevailed. 'Poor girl! she is suffering tortures of wounded pride. I will not vex her'; and he was moving back with a kindly smile on his lips, when Harvey suddenly burst out of the parlour.

'I thought I heard your voice,' he said, rushing up to them. 'How do you do, Mr. Lorimer? I am awfully glad to see you.'

Uncle Reuben says I may come on Saturday; and—oh, I forgot! we had such a jolly drive back that afternoon. The horses went at such a rate; didn't they, Glow? and we are ever so much obliged to you.'

Harvey's friendly speech gave Gloden a sudden pang. She had forgotten her manners; as usual, she was only thinking about herself.

'I ought to have thanked you, Mr. Lorimer,' she said in a low voice; and then there was a vexed look in her dark eyes. 'Harvey has reminded me that I was very remiss.'

'No, nonsense,' returned the young man, hastily. 'It was a mere act of humanity on my part to send you home; you were so utterly done up. So you are coming up to my place on Saturday, are you, old fellow?'—putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, 'just as though he were his own brother,' as Clemency expressed it afterwards.

But now, though there was plenty of space for Gloden to pass, and the green-curtained door stood invitingly open, she actually remained, and the next moment addressed Mr. Lorimer in a voice that was at once appealing and humble.

'Will you be so very kind, Mr. Lorimer? Harvey is not used to guns, and he is very rash and incautious, and——'

Here Harvey would have interrupted her with much indignation, but Mr. Lorimer forcibly restrained him.

'Shut up, young man, and let your betters speak.' Then, in the kindest possible voice, 'I quite understand, Miss Carrick; you want me to look after him, and see that he does not get a stray shot. But you need not have a moment's uneasiness on that score. If I cannot attend to him myself, I will put him in charge of Andrews; he has boys of his own, and is a most reliable man. Besides, on Saturday there will be only three of us, and we shall just amuse ourselves with potting a stray partridge or two. Pheasant-shooting begins on Thursday, and we shall not set to work properly until then.'

Gloden kept her eyes fixed on the speaker through this long speech. Then one of her quick, sudden smiles lighted up her face, dazzling Reginald in almost the same manner as though a sudden sunbeam had flashed across his eyes.

'Thank you so much,' she said gratefully, and now there was no coldness in her voice. And then she bowed and entered the little parlour, while Harvey remained in deep consultation with his new friend. He had forgotten all about the shop; in fact, in Harvey's opinion it was just as handy as any other

place for a talk, especially when it was not blocked up with customers. Harvey, comfortably seated on the counter, with his legs dangling down, and his handsome boyish face all aglow with excitement, and the squire regarding him with amused indulgence, was a delightful sight to Clemency, hovering modestly in the background.

'To see him talking to Mr. Lorimer as pleasant and free as though he were talking to you or me,' she said to her husband afterwards—'why, it would have done your heart good to see him; and the squire looked as pleased as Punch.'

'I have taken a fancy to that nephew of yours, Mrs. Carrick,' observed Mr. Lorimer, when Harvey had rushed off for something he wanted to show him; 'he is the nicest little chap I have seen for a long time, and I mean to see more of him.'

'Harvey is always talking about you, sir,' replied Clemency; 'he has taken a fancy to you too. He is always chattering about his afternoon at Silcote. If I may make so bold, Mr. Lorimer, I would ask you to excuse him if he is a little free-spoken for a boy of his age and in his position; but my brother-in-law has spoiled him, and——'

'My good Mrs. Carrick,' returned Mr. Lorimer, with a smile, 'there's nothing to excuse. It is just his freedom from humbug that I like. He is such a thorough little gentleman; but hush! here he comes'; and then they went on like two schoolboys.

'I say, Glow,' exclaimed Harvey, half an hour afterwards, 'Mr. Lorimer is twice the brick I thought him! He is going to give me two white rabbits with pink eyes—he says he has got a splendid pair; and that Andrews will get me a first-rate young jackdaw. He wanted to go into the yard and see the hutch Ben and I are making, but Aunt Clem looked so shocked. She did not much like the idea of the jackdaw, but Mr. Lorimer said that it would not be any trouble, so it is to be called Jim Crow. Isn't he scrumptious? Upon my honour, I do not know a word good enough for him. He is an out-and-out stunner; and you do like him, Glow?' putting his hand under her chin to look into her eyes—one of Harvey's little tricks.

Gloden did not shake it off; she met his anxious look smilingly. 'Yes, dear; I like him. He is very kind to you.'

'Oh, he would be kind to you too, if you would let him,' returned Harvey, with a knowing twist of his mouth; 'only you snub him so. I am afraid'—regarding her with gravely

considering eyes—‘that is a way you have with young men. I suppose you would call Mr. Lorimer a young man. But it is not nice; it spoils you, Antelope—it does indeed. Why, when you are with me you are as different as possible. He would never believe how jolly you can be—a regular dear.’

‘I daresay not,’ replied Gloden, with an air of sadness. ‘No one here will ever understand me’; and then she checked herself, and truthfulness obliged her to add, ‘unless it be Miss Logan.’

‘Bother Miss Logan!’ returned Harvey, in a bored tone. ‘Who cares what a frumpish little person thinks? I want Mr. Lorimer to know you properly, and then he would understand things.’

‘What things do you mean?’

But Harvey would not explain; perhaps he would have found it difficult to do so. In a dim childish way, he felt that Gloden was standing in her own light; that her inner loveliness was obscured by a false mannerism. Not that he was capable of even saying this to himself; but he did long for everybody to know how jolly and good Gloden really was. But how were they to find it out, when she froze them up when they said a kind word to her?

But he was wrong, for Mr. Lorimer thought more of that vivid bright smile than of the girl’s brief haughtiness. Her timid little appeal had touched and interested him. She had not been able to disguise her anxiety for Harvey. ‘She dotes on that boy; and, upon my word, I don’t wonder at it,’ he thought, as he drove himself back to Silcote. And more than once that evening he seemed to recall, as though in a picture, the long dim shop, with its overhanging eaves and small bow windows, and the slight, pale girl in her black dress, looking so strangely incongruous with her surroundings. ‘She makes one smile with her stiff little air of condescension, and yet one cannot help wanting her to unbend and thaw,’ he thought; ‘but there is something pathetic about her, after all.’

Gloden’s visit to the Red House was very satisfactory. Mrs. Parry received her kindly and in a simple motherly way that put her at once at her ease; and she saw the doctor, who shook hands with her, and told her in quite a friendly manner that Grantham air would soon put colour in her cheeks, and advised her not to have too many pupils at first.

‘Hilda will give you trouble enough for two,’ he said, pinching his daughter’s pretty little ear.

Hilda was a bright-faced, well-grown girl, and she had her mother's genial manners. It was arranged that Gloden should give her first lesson on the following day; and then Hilda brought down her violin, and at her request, Gloden played one or two simple airs, and her performance seemed to impress all her auditors.

'I shall never be able to play half as well as that,' observed Hilda in a tone of intense conviction, when she returned to the schoolroom.

'I would not predict that if I were you, Hilda,' returned Winifred, in her sensible way. 'You have no idea what steady application and study will do for you. You are musical by nature. I expect Miss Carrick will find you a pupil after her own heart'; and by this judicious praise, Hilda's flagging spirits were roused.

Winifred was an ideal teacher, as Mrs. Parry often told her friends. She knew exactly when a word of encouragement or commendation was needed, and the right moment for saying it; and, though she praised rarely, she would do so without stint and limit when she thought it necessary.

'You really think that I shall play well if I try very hard?'

'I don't think—I am sure of it; and then you have such nice lissom little fingers, that I am sure you will reflect credit on Miss Carrick. Now we must go on with *Corrinne*; and Hilda obediently opened the book.

Gloden enjoyed giving her lesson, and she pleased Mrs. Parry by telling her that she found Hilda very quick and intelligent.

'I think teaching agrees with you, Gloden,' observed Mr. Carrick, as they all sat at tea that night. 'She has got a bit more life about her, hasn't she, wife?'

'Ay, Reuben,' she returned quietly.

'I did not dislike it, certainly,' was Gloden's reply. 'Hilda Parry is a very nice girl; I should be glad to have half a dozen more pupils just like her.'

'Why, it is fine to hear you say that,' was Reuben's hearty retort. 'I was afraid you might find the wrong notes a little trying; but there, everything in this life has its *fors* and *against*s, as your Aunt Clemency often says. Why, when I see the unripe currants and green gooseberries that you put into your preserving-pan, Clem, it 'most sets my teeth on edge with the sourness; and it is like that with the fiddle, I should

say. Well, Heaven help them! all young beginners are trying, and all teachers need patience. What do you say, my woman?’

‘You are right in the main, Reuben; but Gloden knows her own tastes best. But there is plenty of patience for the asking.’

‘Ay, so there is—so there is. But don’t you lose heart, Gloden. Young folk are as plentiful as blackberries in Grantham; you will have plenty of pupils, I warrant you, before the year turns. Dr. Parry is an authority in the town, and if he takes the trouble to say a word here and there, you will soon form a connection. Why,’ continued Reuben, warming with the subject, ‘what could be easier and more natural than for the doctor to say, “There is a young lady who gives violin lessons, and she is teaching one of my girls, and I am very well satisfied with her method of teaching”? Why, it would be a splendid recommendation. I should not object to hear a little of the fiddle myself now and then, though I won’t pretend that I am educated up to it, or your Aunt Clemency either; but music is music all the world over, and it is mostly soothing in the long run.’

‘Should you care to hear me play a little now?’ asked Gloden with slight hesitation.

She rather wondered at herself as she put the question; but as her uncle rambled on in his simple, kindly way, some look or trick of speech reminded her of her father, and she felt a sudden wish to give him pleasure.

‘Ay, that we would,’ he returned, brightening up. ‘I have been wanting to hear you play, but I was not sure how you might feel about it. Let the girl clear away the tea-things, and we will have a tune now Ben’s in the shop.’

‘Better wait until after supper, and then Gloden will not be interrupted,’ suggested Clemency, with her usual tact; and to this her husband agreed.

So, later on that night, Patty crept up into the passage and listened with wide-open mouth and eyes to the strange, wonderful music that seemed to flood the house. Harvey, with his head on his hands, listened dreamily; but the quiet tears were rolling down Clemency’s cheeks, as she sat with her hand in Reuben’s.

The wife and husband were together in thought beside their boy’s grave. ‘David Nathaniel Carrick, aged 12 years and 6 months.’ They can read the inscription plainly, even in the

dim starlight. The grassy mound is covered with the dead leaves from the acacia overhead. Everywhere are the white gleaming headstones. What are the words graven in the stone? 'Is it well with the child? It is well.' 'And it is well, thank my heavenly Father,' murmured Clemency to herself.

CHAPTER XVII

'YOU WORLDLY-MINDED PERSON'

'I would do as I pleased, and doing what I pleased, I should have my will, and having my will, I should be contented; and when one is contented, there is no more to be desired; and when there is no more to be desired, there is an end of it.'—CERVANTES, *Don Quixote*.

THE next morning Harvey started off in high spirits for Silcote Park. He had wheedled his uncle into allowing him a whole holiday. Mr. Lorimer had told him that he might come as early as he liked, and share their luncheon; and to Harvey the idea of lunching under a hedge greatly added to the delights of the whole expedition. Gloden and Mrs. Carrick both watched him until he was out of sight, and he turned half a dozen times to wave his cap to them.

'Dear heart! how happy he is, bless him!' thought Clemency, as she stole away to her duties; but Gloden stood for a minute longer. 'My darling, I hope I do not love you too much,' she said to herself; 'but'—clasping her hands a little nervously together—'you are all I have. Oh, if I were to lose him!' But here she recoiled, as though the mere thought stung her, and she turned hastily into the dark passage.

All love has these sudden tremors, these numbing pauses of fear and anguish, when one seems to tighten one's grasp on the beloved object. No possession, however absolute and undivided, can ward off those shadowy terrors that reach out of the darkness; not here, not in this world of loss and sorrow, can our treasure be in safe keeping.

'I like your *protégé*, Reggie,' observed Mrs. Wyndham graciously, when later in the afternoon she joined the gentlemen. Harvey had just dashed off to the stable-yard to see the pink-eyed rabbits, escorted by Rex and Ninian. 'What a pretty boy he is! and then, his manners are so good.'

'He is a Repton boy, you see,' returned Mr. Lorimer; 'all Repton boys have good manners, eh, Harcourt?'

And then they both laughed, for Mr. Wyndham had been at Repton too.

'He is a well-bred little fellow, certainly,' observed his brother-in-law; 'and he seems very intelligent.'

'Yes; but, Reggie'—and here Constance looked a little puzzled—'it is very kind of you to have him here, and of course he is as nice as possible; but won't it be bad for the poor boy if you take too much notice of him?'

'Bad! What on earth do you mean, Con? I hope there is nothing infectious about me.'

'Don't be absurd, Reg dear'—and here Reginald winced. It was his wife's favourite phrase, and when she had used it, it had been a little repressing. 'You know what I mean well enough. Would it not be kinder not to take him too much out of his proper place? I heard you telling him just now that he could come as often as he liked.'

'So I did, and I hope he will come. I like the boy immensely, and so does Harcourt.'

'Yes, dear; but are you wise in encouraging him? Remember he is Mr. Carrick's nephew. You do not want to have your bookseller's relations claiming intimacy with you, surely.'

'You are putting it very forcibly. She does not mince matters, does she, Harcourt? She wishes to pose as an astute woman of the world, and take the shine out of us democrats. You have the wisdom of the serpent, Con; but I don't care a brass farthing about all that. The boy is a plucky, gentlemanly little fellow; he is a clergyman's son, too, and he has been well brought up. And it is not his fault that his uncle is a little country bookseller; it does not affect Harvey in the least, and he shall come here and shoot rabbits as often as he likes. And where's the harm of that, you worldly-minded person?'

'No harm at all, dear,' she answered eagerly, for she was anxious to make a point here, 'as far as the boy is concerned; but, you see, he has a sister, the young lady you pointed out to me in Grantham Church.'

But here Mr. Lorimer's patience failed entirely. 'So had the blind beggar a sister, or a brother, which was it?' he returned lugubriously. 'And the blind beggar, or the sister, died; I forget which. It was a riddle, I remember; but I

have got mixed somehow. I know we had to find out something. Stop! I have it. "What relation was the blind beggar to the brother?" Ah, it was a brother.'

'If you are going to be foolish, Reginald, I shall hold my tongue.'

'Do so, my dear'—quite cheerfully. 'I mean you may guess the riddle if you like, though I hate riddles. Come now, Constance, pull yourself together. The blind beggar had a brother—Why, she is off!'—looking round him calmly, as Mrs. Wyndham walked down the beech avenue in stately fashion. 'She never will listen if any one asks her a riddle; women never can bear to be puzzled.'

'I am not sure that Constance is not right in the long run,' observed Mr. Wyndham, shrewdly. 'Don't make too much of the lad, Reg; it might lead to awkwardness. There is no law of caste so stringent as in a country town. Mr. Carrick may expect you to ask him to dinner some day.'

'I tell you what, Con,' remarked Mr. Lorimer, as he marched into the drawing-room and found his sister established at the tea-table, 'you have not improved Harcourt by marrying him. He used to be a goodish sort; but he has grown almost as opinionative and worldly-minded as yourself; and, as evil communications corrupt good manners, I am rather glad Hamerton is to arrive to-night. I shall use him as a sort of buffer when you start an argument.'

But, as Constance only smiled in his face and called him a goose, it could not be said that she was much impressed with this eloquence. And she was very kind and sweet to Harvey when he came in presently, with his hair nicely brushed, and his face glowing with exercise and soap and water.

'One would never think he was a bookseller's nephew,' she said to herself, as she noticed how gracefully and well he held himself, and the perfect ease of his manners.

During the course of the meal there was a pummelling match between him and Mr. Lorimer. Mr. Lorimer was the aggressor, but Harvey responded with the spirit of a Repton boy. Finally Reginald drew him down on the arm of his chair and kept him there a prisoner, and it was in this position Mr. Hamerton found them when he entered unannounced; and it was no wonder that he observed to Mrs. Wyndham privately, that he was glad to see Reginald so much like his old self. Constance felt as though she must apologise for him.

'Reggie is such a one for throwing off things,' she explained

'It is difficult for strangers to believe that he feels so deeply. During those first dreadful months I was afraid the fun was crushed out of him, he was so low and spiritless ; but his long change has benefited him.'

'I was never afraid for him,' returned Mr. Hamerton ; 'Reginald has wonderful recuperative powers. I really believe that he will never grow old ; men of his calibre keep themselves fresh and boyish to the last—in fact, they are old boys !' finished Mr. Hamerton, decidedly.

But though he talked in this manner to Constance, all the time he was thinking to himself, 'Reg is picking up famously. I always knew he would, even when I was most sorry for him. He was terribly cut up at first, and of course that was natural. Lady Car had a hold over him, and he was lost without her. But I have come to the conclusion that, unless a man be married to a woman in mind and heart and soul, he is not utterly widowed. If that poor woman had lived, the best part of Reginald would have atrophied, literally wasted away, through defective nourishment ; and yet it was no fault of hers, or of his either. Incompatibility of nature. How often might that be written up against many a marriage !

'Upon my soul,' went on Felix, in his moralising way, for he was much given to inner argument and psychological disquisition, 'many and many a fine fellow, ay, and woman too, have just dwindled and wasted with what Milton calls "pining atrophy."'

Gloden felt unusually restless that afternoon. She would willingly have walked a mile or two out on the Silcote road to meet Harvey, but how could she be sure that he would be alone? Something had been dropped about sending him back in the dogcart. Anyhow, she thought it safer to choose another road.

By chance she decided to go in the direction of Stanbridge, but she had not walked for more than ten minutes before she saw Miss Logan in the distance. She was just turning out of a little wooded lane, and she quickened her steps with an exclamation of surprise when she saw Gloden.

'How good of you to come and meet me!' she said in a pleased voice. 'I have just been paying my promised visit to the Gate House. Mrs. Winter insisted on my having tea with them, and then Miss Wentworth would show me the new conservatory ; so I am dreadfully late.'

'I had not the least idea of meeting you,' replied Gloden ; 'it is only honest to tell you so. Harvey is spending the day

at Silcote Park ; so I thought I would take an aimless walk, just to walk off my restlessness. I had a notion that I was on my way to Stanbridge.'

'So you are, if you turn down the next corner by the Bull and Dragon ; this is the Grantham road at present. But if you have no special object in your walk, you might turn back with me, and give me the benefit of your society.'

And to this Gloden willingly agreed.

'Did you say your brother was spending the day at Silcote Park?' continued Winifred, curiously. When Gloden knew her better, she found she was brimful of harmless curiosities about other people, though she never said ill-natured things about them. 'I had no idea you knew Mr. Lorimer, beyond that chance encounter you mentioned.'

'Neither do I. I have not the slightest acquaintance with him, only he has taken a fancy to Harvey. Harvey gets intimate with everybody ; I never knew such a sociable nature as his. But, all the same, it was very kind of Mr. Lorimer to invite him.'

'It is just like him,' was Winifred's reply. 'I used to know his poor wife slightly. She was not a person who allowed people to be intimate with her unless she chose, and in my case'—with a whimsical look—'she did not choose. But Mr. Lorimer was always as nice as possible. He never gives himself airs ; if he likes you he does not care whether you are rich or poor, or whether you live in a large or small house. Lady Car was different ; a person's environment was of importance to her. So many women are like that.'

'It seems rather small.'

'Well, perhaps I am putting it too coarsely. Lady Car was really a nice creature, and most people thought a good deal of her ; she was quite an authority in the place. She was very kind to the poor—quite a Lady Bountiful, but she was a little exclusive in her friendships. To quote her own words, she "did not care to fill the Hall with nobodies." And, my dear'—with a funny look—'I really cannot claim to be somebody. Oh ! do you mind my stopping to speak to Mrs. Trevor a moment?' as a fair, delicate-looking woman in deep mourning was about to pass them. Gloden had seen her once before in the town, and they had glanced at each other in rather an interested manner. On Winifred's mentioning Gloden's name, Mrs. Trevor held out her hand at once.

'Your brother and my boy are becoming fast friends,' she

said pleasantly; 'so I feel as though we ought to know each other. I hope you will allow him to come to tea with us sometimes. He and my Bernard are just of an age, and their tastes seem to be similar.'

'Thank you—you are very kind—if you really wish it.' Perhaps there was a slight hesitation in Gloden's manner, for Mrs. Trevor looked at her rather curiously.

'I do most certainly wish it. Bernard's friends are always mine; we have no interests apart.' Then, in a sweet, winning voice, 'Miss Logan has talked of you to me. We have both known trouble, Miss Carrick. I hope you will allow me to call upon you some day.'

'I shall be very pleased,' returned Gloden, in a low voice; but the blood rushed to her face. A glance told her that Harvey was right, and that Mrs. Trevor was a thorough gentlewoman. There was something peculiarly pleasing in her voice and manner. Was it possible she meant to ignore the shop, and to meet her upon an equal footing?

'I hardly thought Mrs. Trevor would care to call,' she said, as they walked on.

'Why not? She is most interested in you. She noticed you in church last Sunday. I am sure you will like her, Miss Carrick. She is very sweet and gentle, and yet there is so much in her; she bears her change of position so bravely. They are dreadfully poor. She is obliged to have another lady to live with her to make ends meet, and she embroiders for one of the West End shops; she works most beautifully. I should not tell every one that in Grantham. So, you see, she has no right to be proud. As I told you before, we are working women, and there ought to be freemasonry between us. Mrs. Trevor is very liberal minded.'

'Does she know Mr. Lorimer?' Gloden could not have told herself why she asked this question.

'No. She only came to Grantham just before Lady Car's illness, so there has been no opportunity of meeting. Besides, Mrs. Trevor goes nowhere; she keeps very much to herself. She comes in to us sometimes, when Bernard is busy with his lessons, but she seldom stays long. Aunt Janet likes her immensely. But there! you have never questioned me about my visit to the Gate House.'

'Your look tells me you have been successful.'

'Indeed. I hoped my face was a complete blank; but you are right. Miss Winter quite jumped at my delicious bait.'

I had a grand talk in committee with her mother and Miss Wentworth, and I am glad to say that for once they were all agreed. This needs interpretation,' as Gloden looked puzzled. And thereupon Winifred entered on a brief and temperate account of the family politics, which left Gloden under the impression that Miss Wentworth was a strong-minded woman who liked to have her say in everything, which was not far from the truth, and that Violet sometimes felt herself too much coerced by the dominating influence of her mother's friend.

'Miss Winter's position is a little difficult,' went on Winifred. They were pacing up and down Chapel Street, for Gloden had declined to enter the house, on the pretext that the evening was so beautiful, and that she had not had enough exercise. 'Of course, a grown-up daughter would like to be her mother's sole confidant—that is only natural, and a strong, monopolising friendship like Miss Wentworth's must be greatly in her way. We all want Miss Winter to get married, but she is a little fastidious and stand-offish.'

'It must be horrid for her,' returned Gloden, who had grasped the situation at once.

'Well, it is not pleasant; but now let us get to business. Miss Winter would be very glad to practise the violin with you, and read Italian, if you could give her two afternoons a week. I told her Hilda was to have an hour on Monday and Thursday afternoons; so she said at once that she would fix on Tuesday and Friday. So I have settled that you will go to her at three o'clock on Tuesday.'

'You have really settled it? You are loading me with benefits, Miss Logan. I am really so grateful to you that I hardly know how to express myself. Thanks to you. I shall have two pupils.'

'Well, that will do tolerably for a beginning,' returned Winifred, who was secretly much pleased at the result of her benevolent efforts; it warmed and exhilarated her to do a kind action for any one. 'Helping lame dogs over stiles' was her forte, as she often said. 'I am going to write to Ewen tomorrow—he always has a Sunday letter from me—and I shall tell him of this grand opening. Now I really must say good-bye, for Aunt Janet is peeping over the wire blind; she thinks we are hatching some conspiracy or other.'

'Good-bye, then; and thank you a thousand times,' returned Gloden, gratefully; and she turned her face towards Market Street, feeling cheered and far more hopeful.

‘I shall not have to live without friends, after all,’ she said to herself. And then a sudden light sprang into her eyes, for a smart dogcart was coming down the street, driven by a man in livery, and Harvey was beside him, waving and gesticulating, and the next minute he had jumped down to meet her.

‘It has been the jolliest day I ever spent,’ he shouted, as soon as he was within speaking distance. ‘And look here, Glow, what Mr. Lorimer has sent you, with his compliments!’ and Harvey held up proudly a fine brown hare and a brace of partridges. ‘The rabbits are in a basket underneath the seat; they are real beauties!’ finished Harvey, almost breathless with excitement. ‘And I do believe that Mr. Lorimer is the nicest man I ever saw in my whole life!’

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GATE HOUSE

* Witch-elms that counterchange the floor
Of this flat lawn with dusk and bright ;
And thou, with all thy breadth and height
Of foliage, towering sycamore.

'Till from the garden and the wild
A fresh association blow,
And year by year the landscape grow
Familiar to the stranger's child,

In Memoriam.

It was with somewhat mixed feelings that Gloden set out to keep her appointment with Miss Winter. She had given her first lesson to Hilda Parry on the previous afternoon, and it had been very successful. Mrs. Parry, with much tact, had left her alone with her pupil ; and, as Winifred was shut up in the distant schoolroom with the other children, Gloden had no cause for nervousness, and she and Hilda were soon on excellent terms with each other. In teaching, some of Gloden's finer qualities came into play. She was patient and painstaking by nature, and her own enthusiasm and love of music seemed to communicate itself almost magnetically to her pupil ; and, as usual, when Gloden forgot herself and her dignity she was charming. When the lesson was over, Rosalie brought a message that her mother would be pleased to see Miss Carrick in the drawing-room, and she found a quarter of an hour's chat with Mrs. Parry quite refreshing. From that day she only looked on her visits to the Red House in the light of a pleasure. The good-hearted doctor and his wife soon got interested in her, and as time went on they mutually liked and respected one another. Dr. Parry's large-hearted benevolence and wide views easily triumphed over mere conventional obstacles, and,

as his wife always shared his opinions, they soon agreed that it was their duty to be kind to Miss Carrick.

'She is a thorough gentlewoman, any one can see that,' Mrs. Parry observed to her husband; 'and then she is Miss Logan's friend, and Hilda has taken such a fancy to her. Really I wonder Miss Logan is not jealous of her. I do not think there can be any objection to our showing her a little attention.'

'Certainly not,' returned the doctor, briskly; but his eyes twinkled a little, for, as usual, his wife had assimilated his opinions, and was innocently and unconsciously reproducing them as her own. Was it not only the other day that he had remarked that, in their dealings with Miss Carrick, it would be well to take her on her own merits, and not remember that Reuben Carrick's shop was in the background? 'If only our Hilda were as ladylike, I fancy you and I would be satisfied, Cecilia,' he had concluded, and now here was Cecilia endorsing his speech with annotations of her own.

It was this harmless habit that made certain malicious folk call her 'the doctor's echo.' 'Mrs. Parry has no opinions of her own; she only reflects her husband's,' they would say, which was somewhat of an exaggeration. But the doctor, who never laughed at her, only looked at her now with kindly amused eyes, and suggested that Miss Carrick should be asked to tea.

But Gloden's first visit to the Gate House was far more formidable. In the first place, she and Miss Winter had never met, and Gloden, shy and reserved by nature, seldom got on well with strangers. Her retired life had seldom brought her into contact with fresh faces, and during her visits to town she had been far too much taken up with her musical studies to mix in society, even if she had had the opportunity of doing so.

To a proud and sensitive nature like Gloden's, the first steps towards achieving independence are thickly sown with thorns. It was not an easy thing for Miss Carrick of Eltringham Vicarage to enter any house except on terms of equality. She was quite willing to work and to do her best for Miss Winter, but, in her present prickly state of mind, it was more than likely that her first impression on Violet would be as unfavourable as possible. 'You will find her very shy and distant at first,' Winifred had said; 'but she feels herself in an uncomfortable position, poor girl!' And Violet's reply to this had been that she got on with most people, and that she did not expect that Miss Carrick would be an exception.

Gloden's nervousness was increasing as she turned off the Grantham road and entered the shady little lane that led to the Gate House. Already she could see the handsome bronze gates shimmering in the distance. Involuntarily her steps slackened. The next minute she started with a slight scream, as a large black retriever suddenly cleared the low hedge beside her and alighted at her feet; but, as the animal only wagged his tail and looked up in her face in a friendly way as though to apologise for startling her, she soon recovered herself. The next moment a young lady came hurriedly out of the nut-copse. 'I am so sorry Captain frightened you!' she exclaimed apologetically. 'He is always startling people by jumping over the hedge, but he means no harm. Look! he wants you to take notice of him; he is quite ready to shake a paw with you'; and, as though understanding what his mistress said, Captain held out a black curly paw.

'He is a beautiful creature,' observed Gloden, caressing him, whereupon he circled round her with excited barks of pleasure.

'Be quiet, Captain, and behave like a gentleman,' remonstrated his mistress. Then she looked at Gloden in a friendly manner. 'You are going up to the Gate House, are you not? You are Miss Carrick, I know'—with a glance at the violin-case that Gloden was carrying. 'Let me take you through the copse—it is so shady and pleasant; and then we can go in by the garden door.'

'I hope I am punctual,' observed Gloden, in rather a professional tone. 'Miss Logan told me that I was to be here by three.'

'Oh yes, thank you,' returned Violet, carelessly. 'Is this not a delicious little copse? quite a miniature wood. In the spring it is quite full of oxlips; you can see the pale yellow patches everywhere. Captain and I spend a good deal of our time in the wood. I have my books, and Captain has his own private amusements.'

'It is very peaceful and pleasant,' returned Gloden. 'I do so love the country,' she added, in a lower tone; but Violet heard her. She was walking a little in advance, but she turned round.

'And so do I. I should hate to live in a large town. I have always been used to the country. Why, I was born here. Fancy spending twenty-seven years of life in one place, Miss Carrick—that is, with the exception of brief visits abroad. No wonder I feel rooted.'

Gloden looked at her without answering for a moment, and her glance was very grave and penetrating. Violet's careless ease and engaging manners had taken her by surprise. She was speaking to her as she would to any ordinary visitor, and with the utmost friendliness. How pretty she was! Gloden was moved to sudden admiration; Violet's warm hazel eyes and soft brown hair and small refined features always made an impression on strangers. In her grey tweed dress and deer-stalker's cap she looked young and piquant, and the worn look that Mr. Lorimer had noticed was not so apparent. Violet's looks varied with her moods, but to those who had known her in her fresh young bloom there was a marked change in her.

'When one is rooted, it is very painful to be transplanted,' observed Gloden, slowly.

And then it was Violet's turn to look at her curiously. She had heard a great deal about Miss Carrick from Winifred, and was quite disposed to pity and befriend her, though she kept her intentions to herself.

'Of course, you will only be on terms of civility with Miss Carrick,' Miss Wentworth had observed during luncheon, laying marked sibilant stress on her words.

'On terms of civility? Oh, of course,' she had returned; but it was impossible for Miss Wentworth to deduce anything from this vague answer.

When Gloden made this little speech about transplanting, the sadness of her voice told its own pathetic story.

'Oh, I forgot!' returned Violet, penitently. 'I am so sorry I said that; of course, you have just gone through the uprooting process yourself. Miss Logan told me all about it.' And then she added, with charming tact, 'I once passed through Eltringham on my way to Stylehurst. I thought it such a pretty place.'

'You have seen Eltringham?' and now Gloden's professional dignity was quite forgotten, and she was speaking in quite an animated manner. They were crossing the moat by means of a slight rustic bridge, and before them lay a wide lawn, with old shady trees and thick clumps of rhododendrons and other shrubs, with only a low fence dividing it from the green meadows. The afternoon sun was shining on the warm red walls and small-paned windows of the Gate House. 'What a dear old place! It looks like the Moated Grange,' she continued, interrupting herself, 'only the moat is dry.'

‘Oh, you are thinking of Tennyson,’ returned Violet, smiling. ‘I know what you mean.

‘About a stone-cast from the wall
A sluice with blacken’d waters slept,
And o’er it many, round and small,
The cluster’d marish-mosses crept.

The moat has always been dry in my time. Look at the ferns growing in it. In the earlier part of the summer it was quite full of wild flowers. When I was a little girl I called it my moat garden.’

‘It is so peaceful here,’ murmured Gloden; and, indeed, others beside Gloden fell in love with the quaint old Elizabethan house, with its picturesque setting of green lawn and meadows, the last dotted over by feeding cattle. ‘When I compared it to the Moated Grange, I meant in its happier times, before Mariana came to it.’

‘Its happier times! Do I remember them?’ observed Violet, in a curious inward voice; and then she repeated still softly—

‘But when the moon was very low,
And wild winds bound within their cell,
The shadow of the poplar fell
Upon her bed, across her brow.

There is the very poplar’—pointing to it, laughing, ‘and, by a curious coincidence, I actually see its shadow as I lie in bed. Now, as there is not the least hurry, let me take you round this path and show you our dahlias.’

Violet was acting with her usual impulsiveness. Winifred’s description of Miss Carrick had already prepossessed her in her favour, but she was hardly prepared for the extreme refinement and grace of carriage that distinguished Gloden from other girls. She was very fastidious in her likes and dislikes, but there was something about Miss Carrick that attracted her at once. ‘She is not one of the ordinary everyday people,’ she said to herself, as they walked down a side path leading to the kitchen garden.

‘You said just now that you passed through Eltringham,’ observed Gloden, unable to refrain from the question. ‘Did you go into the village?’

‘Oh yes,’ returned Violet; ‘but it is a little country town, is it not?’

‘We have got into the habit of calling the cluster of cottages by the church green the village,’ explained Gloden.

‘Ah! I understand now; but I think we saw everything.

We had two hours to wait for the Stylehurst train, so we had luncheon at that funny old inn in the town; it was crowded with farmers that day. And then we looked over the church. There was a low grey house near it, with great yellow roses climbing over the porch, and my friend and I decided that it must be the vicarage.'

'You are right,' replied Gloden, in a low voice. 'I have lived all my life in that house.'

'It must be a sad change for you'; and Violet's voice was full of sympathy.

'How sad I will not say. I should not care to live again through the weeks that I have just passed. One's home seems a part of one. When I first came to Grantham I seemed hardly sure of my own identity. I daresay you have never known that curious feeling, when one seems a stranger to one's self.'

'It sounds rather like a paradox, but I think I grasp your meaning. Yes, Miss Logan told me all about it. She seemed to pity you excessively.'

'Miss Logan is very nice, is she not?' The painful contraction of Gloden's throat, and the sudden rush of bitter-sweet memories, warned her to change the subject.

'Yes, very nice indeed,' returned Violet; but she spoke without enthusiasm. She liked Winifred with a calm, equable liking; she admired her straightforwardness and thorough honesty, and envied her for her cheerful serenity, but there was little in common between them. Violet, who was critical and retrospective, demanded a great deal of her friends, and in consequence she had few intimates. Constance Wyndham was her only close friend, and it would not be too much to say that she loved her dearly; but even Constance at times had failed to satisfy her.

'A thoroughly happy woman cannot understand me,' Violet would say to herself. 'Constance is very dear, very large-minded and lovable, and she has plenty of imagination; but she is so brimful of satisfied life, that my yearnings seem to her to border on discontent, though she would never tell me so.'

As soon as Violet had opened a little gate that admitted them to the kitchen garden, a blaze of colour met their eyes. A grand phalanx of dahlias stood in stately rows, turning their broad solid faces towards them, and forming a mass of almost dazzling bloom.

Gloden, who was passionately fond of flowers, fairly gloated over the beautiful sight. The wonderfully varied shades of

ruby and pink, orange and yellow, creamy white and pale delicious lilac, formed an exquisite foreground, while the delicate tints of the single dahlias made them look like floral ladies against the broad massiveness of the gay knights who flaunted their bravery beside them.

‘I wonder what a world without flowers would be?’ murmured Gloden, half to herself. ‘Fancy the poor old earth without her children!’

Violet did not immediately answer this speech. She revolved it slowly as they made their way back to the house. It pleased her; in the dull prose of her daily life, it was like stumbling on a line of poetry that suited her. No, this was no ordinary girl.

‘I must introduce you to my mother and Miss Wentworth before I take you up to my private den,’ she observed, when they had reached the side door. ‘I have a little growlery of my own on the first floor, which I call my castle. There are plenty of sitting-rooms down below, but they all communicate with each other in a tiresome way, so there is no chance of privacy.’

Gloden fully endorsed this remark as she followed Violet through room after room, all quaintly and handsomely furnished, and full of pictures and choice antiquities gathered together by generations of Winters, until they reached a large inner drawing-room, shut in with heavy red silk curtains, where two ladies were sitting, one working, and the other reading aloud, their ordinary afternoon employment. Both of them bowed, and Mrs. Winter half rose from her seat as Violet introduced Miss Carrick; but Miss Wentworth drew her brows together and addressed Violet a little abruptly. As she often said, she never minced matters, but always came to the point at once.

‘I thought your lesson was to be at three, Violet? It has just chimed the half-hour.’ She spoke in a tone of polite inquiry, rather tempered with reproof.

‘Yes, I know,’ returned Violet; ‘but it is such a lovely afternoon that Miss Carrick and I were tempted to linger out-of-doors. I suppose you have no objection, Cousin Tess?’—with a slight curl of her lip.

‘It is no concern of mine,’ returned Miss Wentworth, calmly; ‘only your mother remarked just now that it was a pity to waste Miss Carrick’s valuable time.’

‘I don’t think we lost our time. Anyhow, we shall make

up for it presently,' was the curt answer. 'Will you come with me now, Miss Carrick?'

Then Miss Wentworth coughed a little meaningly, and Mrs. Winter called her daughter back.

'I was thinking, Violet,' she said languidly, 'that Miss Carrick might play to us a little, if she would be so good. Theresa thought—that is'—as Miss Wentworth frowned—'we both thought that it would be as well to judge of her style of teaching. You know what I mean, Miss Carrick'—looking at her pleasantly; 'it would be more satisfactory to all parties, and would give us a great deal of pleasure, for we heard you play most beautifully.'

'If you wish it,' returned Gloden, stiffly, 'I can certainly have no objection.'

But there was such repressed haughtiness in her manner that Violet took alarm.

'I thought I told you, mother, that there was no need of troubling Miss Carrick,' she said impatiently. 'I daresay she will play for us by and by, but I should prefer taking her to my room now. When we have finished, I will bring her back to have some tea. Come, Miss Carrick; I am determined not to waste your valuable time any longer'; and Violet's tone was decidedly sarcastic.

'You see, my dear Amy, how little Violet respects your wishes,' observed Miss Wentworth, taking up her book again. 'It was only at luncheon that you told her that you would like to hear Miss Carrick play; that you were anxious to see if Miss Logan's account of her wonderful execution were not a little exaggerated.'

'I thought that was your speech, Theresa.'

'Was it? I could have declared the words were yours; but we always think so alike, Amy. I remember I did tell Violet that we ought to be allowed to judge of Miss Carrick's style of playing; but, as Violet's sole aim in life seems to thwart every wish I am so unfortunate as to express, no wonder that she carried Miss Carrick off.'

Miss Wentworth spoke with real bitterness; she looked warm and angry. She was not a bad-natured woman, but she had a quick temper, and Violet always aggravated her.

'Dear Theresa, I wish you would not talk so,' observed Mrs. Winter, plaintively. 'It is such a trial to me that you and Violet do not get on better together. I am sure I try to keep the peace, but it seems as though you had always a

grievance against the poor child; and she was looking so pretty and bright just now, quite like her old self.' For there were times when Mrs. Winter writhed a little under the yoke of her devoted friend, and natural maternal yearnings made her long for fuller intimacy with her daughter.

'I do not know what Violet's good looks have to do with it,' returned Miss Wentworth, sharply; 'but it is a pity that she shows such self-will to the best of mothers—for you are that, with all your faults, Amy.'

Then Mrs. Winter, whose feelings were easily touched, began to cry, and, in spite of herself, to feel injured. It was not kind of Violet to take Miss Carrick off in that abrupt fashion.

'If you were only firmer, and put your foot down; but where Violet is concerned, you are as weak as water. If Violet were my daughter—which Heaven forbid,' she added piously to herself—'do you think that I should allow her to master me on every occasion? Why did you not say, "Violet, I must insist upon having my wishes carried out. I particularly desire to hear Miss Carrick play"?''

'I do hate a contest of wills between Violet and myself,' sighed Mrs. Winter. 'She is masterful, as you say, and perhaps I am a little weak.'

'Weak as water,' interpolated her friend, with more truth than politeness.

'There is no need for you to say such hard things, Theresa. We are not all alike, and I suppose I was born so.'

'That is a mischievous fallacy, Amy. I have often argued this with you before. We can correct and overcome our faults of nature. There is a sermon on that subject that I will read you next Sunday; it puts all this so lucidly before one. Weakness can be strengthened. I used to tell you so when Violet was a child, and you refused to punish her for her wilfulness.'

'I do so hate giving pain to any one, even for their good,' lamented Mrs. Winter. 'I like people to be comfortable, and I like to be comfortable myself. You may smile, Tessie, but you do not know a mother's feelings.'

This was Mrs. Winter's reserve arrow. She had more than once seen Theresa wince, as though it struck her. The most strong-minded woman has her weak point, some undefended part, where the enemy's javelin may enter with deadly thrust. And there had been a time in Theresa Wentworth's life when she had hoped to be a wife and mother like other women, and

the disappointment had been felt keenly. Even now she did not love to be told that she could not enter into a mother's feelings; it seemed to hurt her pride and her heart, and it invested Amy with some sacred and mysterious dignity.

'Perhaps not. But I may as well go on with our reading; it will be using our time more profitably than in fruitless discussion.'

And, without waiting for her friend's permission, she began to read in a clear, resonant tone; and poor Mrs. Winter, who never ventured to contradict her when she was in this lofty and virtuous mood, sighed wearily as she went on with her work, and wished with all her heart that she were more like Theresa, and that she were not such a poor weak creature.

CHAPTER XIX

THE YOUNG VIOLIN-PLAYER

‘There is a pleasure that is born of pain.’

OWEN MEREDITH.

As soon as they were out of hearing, Gloden said gratefully, ‘Thank you so much for coming to my relief; but I am afraid I have been cowardly. I ought to have played to your mother just now.’

‘I saw how much you disliked the idea.’

‘Yes; but all the same I was wrong. I must try to conquer this tiresome shyness, and to take everything that comes in the day’s work; but I have never been asked to play just in that way’; and her lip quivered.

‘Mother meant well, but she expressed herself a little awkwardly. Miss Logan has given us such glowing accounts of your execution, that I hope you will let us hear you some day, when you are more accustomed to us’; and Violet spoke so winningly that Gloden’s wounded pride was insensibly healed.

‘I will play for you whenever you wish it,’ was her answer. ‘I know I was wrong; but I felt, if I played just then, that I should not have done myself justice. My poor violin has to suffer for my moods. With a sympathetic audience, I can forget everything and lose myself in the music; but under those circumstances this would have been impossible.’

‘Never mind,’ returned Violet, gently; ‘you will know us better soon. Now, this is my den, sanctum, or whatever you like to call it.’

Gloden looked round it with interested curiosity. It was rather an oddly-shaped room. One of the corners had been cut off, and the only window, a deep, low bay, formed an angle of the room; a low padded seat occupied the entire recess.

The view was restricted, but charming; it looked over the moat and rustic bridge to the nut copse and the lane.

The room was low, and a heavy beam ran across the window; but all available space had been utilised. Bookcases lined the lower part of the walls, and the upper part was wholly covered by choice engravings and photographs. An old oak bureau, a curiously-carved table, and two or three easy-chairs composed the furniture.

'How delightfully quaint!' exclaimed Gloden; 'that window recess is charming. I am afraid, in your place, I should spend most of my time there.'

'I am very fond of my dear old gable room,' returned Violet.

And then they established themselves cosily in the recess, and for the next hour worked busily. Now and then Violet would have strayed off into desultory conversation, but Gloden refused to be seduced into idleness.

'We must not waste our time,' she said firmly.

And, though Violet pretended to grumble, she respected her young teacher's conscientiousness. At the end of the hour she suddenly interrupted herself.

'There! I have had a splendid lesson, and am entirely convinced that I know nothing at all, which is a wholesome frame of mind for a beginner.'

'I cannot endorse that,' returned Gloden, seriously; 'but you have been badly taught, and your style is faulty. You have a good deal to unlearn before you can make progress, but you have a good touch.'

'You are trying to encourage me, but I am quite flattened out. You are a capital teacher, Miss Carrick; you seemed as though you enjoyed the lesson as much as I did.' And Gloden did not deny this.

'I always liked the idea of giving violin lessons,' she replied. 'Dear father and I used to talk about it. We planned, if anything should go wrong, that I should turn my talent to account. Teaching is no hardship to me.'

'So I see. Now I propose that we go down and have some tea, and then we will read some Italian afterwards. We are a little erratic to-day, but it does not matter. I hope that Miss Logan gave you my message.'

'I am not sure that she brought me any special message.'

'Well, I will refresh your memory. I particularly requested that there should be no hard-and-fast rules; that the two

hours' study should not be too rigidly enforced. I believe I need companionship and occupation, so, if you are not otherwise engaged, I hope you will sometimes extend your stay.'

'Thank you; I see what you mean, and will willingly oblige you until the evenings get shorter and darker. If we are going downstairs, I think I will take my violin. My conscience is still uneasy, you see, and I want to get the better of my cowardice.'

'That is plucky of you, and I will not combat so good a resolution. You shall leave it outside in the lobby, and then it will be handy if you want it. This is the quickest way to the red room'; and she preceded Gloden down a narrow passage lighted from the staircase window, and opened the door.

Gloden followed her closely; and then a sudden wave of shyness assailed her. The room seemed full. A lady in a long grey cloak was sitting by Mrs. Winter, and a dark, slight man was talking to Miss Wentworth.

'Constance, my dear Constance!' exclaimed Violet, in a delighted tone, as she almost flew across the room; and the next moment a voice that sounded strangely familiar addressed Gloden. Mr. Lorimer was just coming out of the Japanese room; he stopped short as he saw her.

'Miss Carrick, this is a surprise. I had no idea you knew the Gate House people. Let me find you a seat, and then I must speak to Miss Winter.'

'Thank you; any seat will do. Please do not let me detain you.' She spoke with the cold sedateness that always veiled extreme nervousness.

Mr. Lorimer glanced at her, then he went across the room and talked a little to Violet; while Gloden sat holding her head high, and looking very dignified and unapproachable, but trembling inwardly in agonies of trepidation. What was she to do? Miss Winter ought not to have exposed her to this ordeal. She was in a false position among all these people. Mrs. Winter would think her in the way. If it were not for the Italian lesson, she would slip away unobserved. She could easily do it; she was close to the curtained recess. She would find her way back to the gable room, and await Miss Winter's convenience; she had no right to intrude on the family in this manner. At this point she half rose, but Mr. Lorimer was making his way back to her.

'Miss Winter has asked me to bring you some tea,' he said pleasantly. 'I wish you would not seclude yourself in that

corner, as though you disliked the present company.' Then, sitting down beside her, he continued in the same friendly voice, 'Have you known the Winters long? They are very old friends of mine.'

'I have never seen them before'—and now Gloden's cheeks began to burn—'I am giving Miss Winter violin lessons; we had the first lesson this afternoon.'

'Indeed'—in a tone of great interest—'and in the gable room, I suppose. So you teach the fiddle, Miss Carrick? You are quite in the fashion, every one writes a novel or plays the fiddle nowadays.'

'I am afraid necessity has more to do with it than fashion.'

'Oh, I daresay,' returned Mr. Lorimer, carelessly; but of course he knew what she meant. She had to earn her livelihood, poor girl, and very likely she did not take to it kindly. 'I used to play the fiddle myself once, but my people seemed to have an objection. My sister was almost abject in her entreaties, she said it was the most painful hobby that I had ever indulged in, and so I gave it up. One does not like to be a nuisance.'

'If you had persevered you would have ceased to be a nuisance,' returned Gloden, quietly.

'By Jove! should I? I never thought of that. But I am an easy-going fellow, and like to please people, so I just chucked it up. I don't mind telling you,' he continued, in a confiding way, 'that there was no chance of my doing much, and when Hamerton—that's Hamerton over there—called it beastly eaterwauling, I thought I had had almost enough of it.'

Gloden smiled; she could not help it. The frank boyishness of Mr. Lorimer's manner seemed to drive away her nervousness and to put her more at her ease. She began to like him, and to feel some pleasure in his society; and then a sudden recollection put her on her guard again.

That quick, wavering smile gave Reginald a feeling of triumph. The very difficulty of making way with her and of disarming her cold reserve gave a piquancy to his intercourse with her. He had sought her out in her distant corner with the good-natured intention of making her more comfortable, but he became interested and remained.

He was quite aware that she snubbed him in a ladylike way, and kept him at a distance, and the experience was a new one; he never remembered having been snubbed before. The discipline was wholesome; besides, it showed a great mind to

forgive injuries. So he began talking to her about Harvey, until he saw his sister looking at him, and then a sudden idea came into his head. He excused himself to Gloden, and waited for an opportunity of drawing his sister aside.

'Con, I want to speak to you a moment. The young lady over there to whom I was talking just now is Miss Carrick.'

'Yes, I know. Miss Wentworth has just told me so'; and Constance's voice was a little indifferent. 'She looks rather out of it, Reggie.'

'No wonder, when no one takes any notice of her. That is why I talked to her myself.'

'There is no need for you to absent yourself so long. Miss Wentworth was a little sarcastic about it. She said you were such a stranger that they did not like losing a minute of your company; and, you know, Reg——'

'What do I know?'—quite ignoring her meaning.

'Well, it is not quite easy to explain; and you always take me up so. You are so dreadfully democratic.'

'Oh, I know now at what you are aiming. We will drop all that, if you please. I want you to talk to Miss Carrick, Constance, and befriend her a little. I think it would be only kind. There! Violet and Hamerton are with her now, but you can watch your opportunity.'

Constance threw back her head and smiled amiably in her brother's face. She had not the slightest intention of walking across the room and talking to Miss Carrick; it was just one of Reg's ridiculous, lax ideas which Car had always so disliked. He would associate on terms of equality with any one. She had thought it a mistake of his to single out Miss Carrick and to talk to her so long. There were positively no limits to Reg's good-nature; but she was determined not to be drawn into it.

'Thank you, dear. I will see about it,' she said calmly. 'But Mrs. Winter is looking at us; go and talk to her now'; and Reginald was just making his way to his hostess, when Violet's clear voice arrested him.

'Mother dear, Miss Carrick will play for us now, if you still wish it. Mr. Hamerton has been asking her.'

'I shall be delighted, Vi.'

'A gentleman can often prevail when we poor ladies meet with refusal,' observed Miss Wentworth, so audibly that Gloden heard her and coloured with annoyance.

'Miss Carrick brought down her violin on purpose to play

to mother,' returned Violet, firing up in a moment. 'Neither of us knew any one was here, so your speech goes for nothing, Cousin Tess. Perhaps you would rather not play now, Miss Carrick'—in a low voice.

'I don't think I need be so foolish as that,' replied Gloden, very properly. 'Miss Wentworth is only punishing me for my backwardness. Next time I will do as I am asked at once.'

'Hear, hear!' exclaimed Mr. Hamerton, clapping his hands softly. 'I applaud your good resolution. Where is the violin-case? May I fetch it?'

But Gloden thanked him, and declined; she would rather fetch it herself.

'Miss Carrick seems a very peculiar young person,' observed Miss Wentworth confidentially to Constance. 'I never saw a young woman in her position give herself so many airs. She crossed the room just now like a tragedy queen, and as though every one were looking at her; and you know that she is just a mere nobody, and has to work for her living.'

'I know all about her,' returned Constance, quietly. But this sort of talk was not to her taste. 'Dear Mrs. Winter'—leaning forward a little—'I do hope you will spare Vi to me as much as possible. We want her to-morrow for a long day, and if she could stay the night——' But while this little matter was being argued, Gloden returned with her violin and took up her position against the curtains.

Gloden was in a curious mood, bordering upon recklessness. She had informed Violet, only an hour and a half ago, that it was impossible for her to play to an unsympathetic audience, and yet here she was, crossing the room in sleep-walker's fashion, hardly alive to her surroundings, and with her violin in her hand.

But all the time the proud spirit within her was saying, 'They all patronise and keep me at a distance. Not Mr. Lorimer, perhaps, but the others. I will show them that I can play; that I have something in me that they cannot touch. I will not allow this foolish nervousness to get the mastery over me. An hour ago I could not have played, now I can. I feel it.' And it was under the irritant of some unknown pain, for which she could find no name, that Gloden began to play.

Mr. Hamerton, who was close to the girl, was struck with the strange proud look in her eyes as she passed him. His

profession had given him a good deal of insight into character, and the few words he had exchanged with her had excited his interest. He now watched her closely. It was not that he admired her, for he thought her rather plain than otherwise; but she somehow attracted him.

Reginald had sunk down on a settee beside Violet, with his arms lightly crossed over the arm of his sister's chair; but, as Gloden played on, he straightened himself, and his look became more intent. Except at St. James's Hall, or in other concert-rooms, he had seldom heard such playing as this.

For the first moment the music had dragged a little harshly, as though the player's mood affected the instrument. Then there was a change. Gloden's brow cleared as though by magic. She drew her bow delicately and lightly across the strings in a sort of tender prelude. Then came warmth, colour, and melody. A passionate protest of sound seemed to flood the room. By and by it trembled and wavered into plaintive, pathetic chords. Was it a miserere, a dirge? It grew slower and more solemn.

Good-bye to the hopes of youth, to the glorious anticipations of manhood, of womanhood, to all things human. 'Ma chère Gabrielle, jamais, jamais.' Why should those words have risen suddenly to Reginald's memory, when he saw Felix Hamerton's fixed dark face? Yet it came again and again, 'Jamais, jamais, ma chère Gabrielle.' But in another minute he had forgotten Felix. Those sweet, long-drawn chords seemed playing on his own heart-strings. Why had this sadness returned? What was the meaning of this sudden feeling of strange vacuum—this divine discontent? What did he want? Was it Car, his painstaking and affectionate helpmate, whose strong white hand had helped him over the rough places of life—was he pining for her? But he knew that the grief at her loss had settled into calmness. This pain was more subtle and penetrating; it stretched into unknown depths. He sighed as though the vagueness troubled him, and then he looked at the young violinist.

Gloden had no idea, as she took up her position against the red silk curtains that divided the two drawing-rooms, what a striking background it would make to the contrast of her black dress. As she manipulated her bow, he could see the delicate white wrist and thin hand. What had become of her paleness and her proud melancholy? Her eyes were bright; there was warm colour in her face; her lips were

parted; she looked transformed — almost beautiful. ‘Good heavens!’ he said to himself, ‘the girl is a genius, and she knows it. She is a disguised princess of art.’ But what more he would have told himself in his dreamy soliloquy was checked by the sudden silence. Gloden had struck the last chord.

The next minute Constance had started from her chair and was half-way across the room, and her beautiful face was flushed, and there were tears in her eyes.

‘Thank you—thank you so much,’ she said very earnestly, and holding out her hand. ‘It was exquisite; it was simply perfect! How have you ever learnt to play like that? Miss Carrick is a wonderful performer, is she not, Felix?’

‘Miss Carrick would not allow us to remember her existence,’ replied Mr. Hamerton, quietly.

Then Gloden turned to him with a radiant smile. ‘That is the greatest compliment you could have paid me,’ she said gratefully. ‘So few people understand that it is only the music, not the performer. Until I can forget myself I can enjoy nothing.’

‘I am delighted to have secured such a teacher for dear Violet,’ murmured Mrs. Winter aside to her confidante. ‘She is a remarkable player, is she not, Theresa? She reminds me of Mademoiselle de Mersac.’

‘Mademoiselle de Mersac’s playing was far more brilliant,’ returned Miss Wentworth, grudgingly. ‘I am not fond of these funeral dirges; but Miss Carrick plays well, though there was affectation in her style. She poses too much for my taste, but I suppose we must ask her to play again.’

‘Thank you, you must excuse me,’ returned Gloden, as Miss Wentworth, with much volubility, besought her to give them another treat. ‘I must really go now; it is getting so late.’

The fire was fast dying out. She looked wan and exhausted; whenever she played in this passion of self-forgetfulness, whenever she suffered herself to be carried away and possessed by the music, there was always this exhaustion for a time.

‘Of course you shall go if you wish it,’ observed Violet, kindly; but when, a minute afterwards, she and Gloden walked through the rooms, Mr. Hamerton followed them.

‘One day I hope you will let me hear you play again,’ he said, with kindly seriousness. ‘I never pay compliments, do I, Miss Winter? so you must believe me when I tell you that you have given me intense pleasure.’

‘One cannot help believing you when you speak in that way, returned Gloden, simply, and there was no trace of coldness and haughtiness in her manner as she shook hands with him.

She knew nothing about Felix Hamerton. She had never heard of him; he was a stranger among strangers. He had just crossed her path, and she might never see him again; but his look and manner inspired her with confidence, and she felt that she should not forget him. ‘He is a true man, and there are not too many in the world,’ she thought, as she walked down the little lane, with red hips and haws shining in the hedgerows. ‘But something tells me that he is unhappy, or my violin would not have said so much to him. I wonder if I am too imaginative about people when I form these hasty conclusions? Sometimes they are wrong, and I find out my mistake, but I am often right. It is interesting to make up stories about people, and it does no harm. Some men have no secrets in their life; Mr. Lorimer is one of these. To look at him, one would say his life was perfectly simple. He has known trouble. Yes, indeed, we are born to trouble; but there is no background, no hidden mystery. I hardly know what I mean; I am just guessing about strangers in the dark; but there is a worn look about Mr. Hamerton’s face, as though he has suffered.’

Gloden was amusing herself with these fanciful speculations. It was a favourite habit of hers; but by and by a question obtruded itself. Why had Mr. Lorimer not thanked her as he bade her good-bye? Every one else in the room had paid her some compliment, but he had been perfectly silent. ‘Good-bye, Miss Carrick’; those had been his sole words, and he had scarcely looked at her as he had given her his hand. Was it her fancy that then there was a slight coolness in his manner? Strange to say, this question troubled her during the remainder of her walk.

‘Reggie,’ observed Constance, as they drove home in the twilight—they were in Reginald’s dogcart, and Mr. Hamerton sat behind them—‘I am very much struck with Miss Carrick; she looks quite a gentlewoman, and then she plays so beautifully. It is such a pity that she has not been trained as a professional; she could play at concerts.’

‘How do we know that she would like that, Constance?’

‘Why not, dear? People would think ever so much more of her, and then she would make money; even now she is good enough to play at “At homes,” and that sort of thing. I really

feel very much interested in her. Miss Wentworth told me just now that she was dreadfully poor, and that she was quite dependent on Mr. Carriek. It does seem such a poor sort of life, living in a back parlour, and giving violin lessons in Grantham. She ought to come to town and study, and then make her *début*. I wish I could talk to her, and put the thing properly before her.'

'There is no reason on earth why you should not talk to her.' But Reginald spoke in rather an irritable tone. For almost the first time in their lives, he and Constance were not quite hitting it off; she was not in touch with him, somehow. She had at first refused, or as good as refused, to make Miss Carrick's acquaintance, and now she was taking upon herself to direct the course of her life. Why should she play at concerts, and be turned into a professional hack? A delicate, shy girl, a girl with plenty of pride in her, too, was not the best sort to come out in public; and he wondered at Constance for making such a proposition.

'But, Reg dear, how could it be managed?' went on his sister, quite innocent of the fact that her remarks were making Reginald cross. 'I could not call on her; it would look too patronising, and she would not like it. Perhaps'—reflectively—'Violet might think of something; or—— I have it—they have their lesson in the gable room. You remember the gable room, Reg. I will drive over one afternoon, and run up there as I used in the old days. We are much too formal at the Gate House now; it is that tiresome Miss Wentworth, I believe. But I shall tell Mrs. Winter that I must have one of my old chats in the gable room, and then I shall get my way.'

'As you women always do,' returned Reginald, drily; but he refused to be drawn into any further discussion about Miss Carrick's fitness to make her *début*. He drove on, touching up the mare rather smartly, and talking incessantly about the boys and Tottie.

'What are you and Harcourt going to make of Rex?' he asked. 'As his godfather I have a right to be consulted, but Harcourt is so confoundedly close about the boys.'

But all the time he talked, and Constance answered, Felix sat silent, looking down the dark road and at the faint moonlight stealing over the tops of the trees, and his lips were firmly closed; but within himself he was saying over and over again, 'Not my Gabrielle now, or ever will be. All that was finished long ago.'

CHAPTER XX

A FIRESIDE CIRCLE

‘I love everything that is old—old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine.’—GOLDSMITH’S *She Stoops to Conquer*.

‘Tell me the tales that to me were so dear,
Long, long ago—long, long ago.’

THOMAS HAYNES BAYLEY.

CONSTANCE WYNDHAM had been quite in earnest when she declared her intention of giving Miss Carrick advice about her future. She was one of those large-minded, liberal women who delight in playing the part of Lady Bountiful to their less fortunate neighbours, and who do not object to be regarded in the light of a minor providence. Natures of this calibre are bound to be rash, and at times to act impulsively; the full tide of their sympathy and benevolence is apt to overflow its marginal boundaries, and to fertilise alien pastures. Sheer warmth of heart, and a desire to see those she loved as happy as herself, had made her an unblushing matchmaker. ‘Do as you would be done by, and a little more,’ was Constance’s motto, and the mere urgency of need was a sure passport to the inner citadel of her tenderness.

She had already several cases of shy poverty, as she termed them—needy sempstresses, broken-down governesses, and even a bankrupt costermonger, who looked upon her as a sort of wingless angel. A struggling artiste, a genius whose light was obscured in a remote country town, appealed at once to her imagination and heart. Here was another human being who needed help and guidance; for, with the zeal of hasty conversion, Constance had already repented of her momentary lukewarmness. She remembered now that Reginald had appealed to her, and asked her to befriend Miss Carrick, and that her response had been hardly satisfactory. Since then she had changed

her mind. She would do what Reginald had wished her to do. She would extend the ægis of her beneficence over the young violin-player; she would interest Harcourt in her; their house should be thrown open for her *début*. Constance, who held charming little receptions in the season, was not at all unwilling to furnish some novelty for her guests. The more she reflected the deeper grew her enthusiasm, and when Violet arrived the next morning, she was half amused and half provoked to find that Constance could talk about nothing but Miss Carrick and her wonderful playing.

‘She is a natural genius; she only wants good training,’ she remarked, almost with solemnity. ‘She almost made me cry. I thought about poor Car, and the tears were absolutely running down my cheeks. And did you see Felix’s face?’

‘No; he had his hand over his eyes.’

‘Ah! but I saw him; he looked as though some vision had come to him. I never saw such an expression in his eyes before. Then he got up and shook himself; he did not think that I noticed him, but it was a revelation.’

‘Of what?’

‘How is one to explain?’—rather thoughtfully. ‘Felix is an enigma. But I do not want to talk about him. Was your mother pleased with Miss Carrick?’

Then Violet frowned impatiently. ‘She was quite enthusiastic until Cousin Tess damped her. You know her tiresome way when she does not take to people; a little bit of praise, and then a half-sneer and a good deal of fault-finding. She calls Miss Carrick’s style of playing affected and exaggerated, and she will have it that she poses for effect.’

‘Miss Wentworth is a Philistine. You may tell her so if you like.’

‘Yes; but she has the thews and sinews of war, and is terribly strong. And now mother has quite changed her opinion. Miss Carrick has too many mannerisms, she is rather conceited, she gives herself airs, and so on. Don’t you know exactly how mother would echo every word that Cousin Tess has said? It put me in such a rage that I went out of the room.’

‘You ought to have stood up for poor Miss Carrick. She is not in the least affected; she is a little stiff and reserved, perhaps, but she is really very nice in her manners.’

‘What is the use of saying the same thing over a hundred times?’ returned Violet, wearily. ‘If I get mother’s ear for a

moment, I can make her believe anything ; but if Cousin Tess chooses to contradict me, she veers round like a weathercock. "If dear Theresa be right—and she always is right—then I must be wrong"—with a sad mimicry of Mrs. Winter's tone.

'You poor darling! how trying it must be for you!'—kissing her. 'Well, never mind, we will circumvent the Empress'—one of their old names for Miss Wentworth ; and thereupon she retailed her little plan for Miss Carrick.

Violet listened with somewhat mixed feelings. Constance was right, and Miss Carrick's talent was far too good to be wasted on Grantham ; but she would be sorry to lose her. She was already interested in her, and was looking forward with pleasurable anticipation to her next lesson. But if it were for Miss Carrick's good—and then she accused herself of selfishness, and threw herself heart and soul into Constance's scheme.

'You know, Violet,' Constance was saying at this point, 'Harcourt is so dear and kind that he will do anything to please me. I daresay that he would advance money for the training if I have not enough in my private purse ; you see, it would only be a loan, an investment, as I should tell him, and Miss Carrick would repay it. He did it once with Caroline Morgan ; you remember, Vi, when we set her up in her school at Brighton. It was rather a pull on us at first, and Harcourt grumbled a little ; but she has paid us back every penny. Her school is doing splendidly, and she has two of her sisters to help her. Harcourt was so pleased when I took him the money and read him Caroline's letter.'

'I daresay Mr. Lorimer would help you.'

'Oh, I should not ask Reggie,' returned Constance, hastily. 'It is no business of his ; it would not do for him to mix himself up in Miss Carrick's affairs.'

'I suppose not'—a little doubtfully.

'Reg is the last person in the world to be consulted,' was the decided answer ; 'he is far too soft-hearted and unpractical. He would not see any reason why he should not put himself forward to help Miss Carrick, and in his position it would be so damaging.'

Violet felt inclined to ask why, but some inward doubt made her abstain from putting the question. Of course, Constance knew best about such things ; she had her brother's welfare so much at heart, that she was not likely to make mistakes. And now that he was a widower, and the best

match in the county, as Miss Wentworth had once delicately put it in her hearing, it certainly behoved him to be careful.

Violet grew a little weary of the discussion at last; her bumps of benevolence were not so largely developed as Constance's. She endeavoured to wind it up to a conclusion by cordially inviting her to pay an early visit to the gable room, to open negotiations with Miss Carrick.

'I think it will be best to talk things over with her before we make plans that may come to nothing,' she said quietly.

And at this strong hint Constance reluctantly changed the subject. Like other enthusiastic people, she rode her hobbies a little long and heavily.

After all, Violet's visit was a great success. In the afternoon they drove out with the boys in search of the sportsmen, and brought them back in triumph to tea; then followed one of those delicious twilight hours which the quartette had often enjoyed in old days, when they gathered round the fire in the library; but on this occasion it was a quintette, as Reginald significantly informed his brother-in-law.

'Could you not take yourself off somewhere, Harcourt, and have a smoke?' he asked, with a persuasive pat on the back. 'Order him off, Con; you have him well in hand. He is an interloper; we want to be just the old quartette again, don't we, Violet? I beg your pardon, I mean Miss Winter.'

But Mr. Wyndham refused to be turned out; he said he meant to stay and keep them all in order.

'What makes you and Violet so ceremonious?' asked Constance, innocently. 'Why, you were actually apologising to her just now for calling her Violet; it is so odd to hear you.'

'I have no wish to be ceremonious with an old friend and playmate,' returned Reginald; 'but Miss Winter always calls me Mr. Lorimer.'

'Yes, of course,' returned Violet, hastily; 'but there is no formality in my feelings. One grows out of such things, and we have seen so very little of each other for the last few years.'

'You began it,' he half whispered. 'I was so surprised when you first mistered me; it made me feel quite small.'

Violet coloured a little; the subject embarrassed her. It was foolish of Constance to make such a personal remark. How well she remembered the occasion, and the somewhat scornful surprise in Lady Car's eyes, when Mr. Lorimer had addressed her carelessly by her name! From that moment she had decided to put things on a different footing.

'She does not recognise old friendships. She will not approve of our intimacy,' she had said to herself, with a swelling heart.

She found it a little difficult to respond to Mr. Lorimer's jesting remark. He was in a mischievous mood—she could see that clearly; but Mr. Hamerton came to her relief.

'Upon my word, Reg, I think Miss Winter is right, and one does grow out of these things; and in my opinion the change is for the better. I remember the time—before Wyndham put in his claim—when I took the liberty of calling his wife by her Christian name, but I stopped it on her wedding-day. You will bear me out in that, will you not, Mrs. Wyndham?'

'I thought you dreadfully punctilious, and told Harcourt so. I quite cried about it; did I not, dear? And he only laughed at me. But I shall always call you Felix; you may be sure of that.'

'And I am infinitely obliged to you,' he returned, with a grave smile. 'I have only you and Reg in England to call me by my Christian name. By the by, I must read you a letter of Laura's about her son and heir; I know it will interest you.'

'Yes, of course. And you must tell me about Sophy too, and your brother Charlton. There are a hundred things I want to ask you when I get you to myself; but you and Reg are so inseparable just now.'

'You see, we have a community of interest; we are just now full of fire and fury, and bent on shooting partridges. Even the charm of your conversation, Mrs. Wyndham, could not tempt me to forsake Reginald.'

'Ab, I know!' she returned contemptuously. 'You are all the same, you men. Even Harcourt, good as he is to me at other times, cannot be induced to give me a moment of his society now. Well, I will bide my opportunity'—significantly.

'Is it not time to dress?' suggested her husband, who had been all this time trying to read his paper by a distant lamp: but it took a good deal of argument to induce Constance to move. She liked the play of the firelight and the desultory talk and small vague sentences, alternating with silence. During dinner the gentlemen always talked politics or argued with Felix, but here in the gloaming the womankind held the sway. Of course they were wasting their time, as Harcourt said, and talking infinite rubbish. Not altogether, though. For example, Reginald was recalling a squirrel-hunt they had

had one autumn afternoon, and how he and Felix had climbed the tree, while Constance stood below weeping and wringing her hands for fear Reggie would be killed. Certainly the branch had broken, and he might have had an awkward tumble if it had not been for Felix's presence of mind and ready help. And did Miss Winter remember, pray, how she had scolded them all round, like the veriest termagant, instead of rejoicing over his escape ?'

'You deserved to be scolded,' returned Violet. 'It was cruel of you to frighten Constance in that way ; and you know Mr. Hamerton said himself that if you had fallen you must have been killed, and if he had not caught you—— Well, we will draw a veil over that.'

'I shall not forget it, Felix,' observed Constance, 'and how grateful I was to you. Well, dear, what is it? Must we really go? and we are all so comfortable.' But Mr. Wyndham's sole answer to this appeal was to hold up his watch before her eyes, and then she yielded and went off meekly enough.

But that evening there were no politics discussed—perhaps Violet's presence restrained them ; but at dinner and afterwards it was still of the old days that they talked, and Reginald and Felix capped stories which Mr. Wyndham criticised and annotated in his shrewd clever way. Only now and then his eyes softened as they rested on his wife's bright face. He had not been there. How strange that sounded to him! Had there really been a time in his life when the beautiful woman beside him had not been the very heart of his heart? And as though she guessed his thought, Constance's hand stole into his under the cover of the tablecloth. Married though they were, they were still lovers, and could understand each other without a word.

'You shall not feel yourself out in the cold while we are telling our foolish stories'—that is what her warm pressure told him.

'Harcourt is laughing at us. But it was before your time, old man. We could not have got such a rise out of Con if she had had you to back her. There was not much fun when you began prowling about the place ; even Miss Winter turned sober.' And then Reginald turned to Violet and asked her if she had no special little reminiscence which they had forgotten ; whereupon Violet exchanged an amused look with Constance, and they both laughed.

But it was in vain that the gentlemen pressed her for an explanation ; she only shook her head and laughed again.

'We must get to the bottom of this, Felix,' observed Reginald. 'You are up in cross-examination, and all that kind of dodge; I think I shall leave you to settle the business.'

'There is not the slightest need for me to cross-examine Miss Winter,' returned Felix, looking at the girl meaningly. 'I recollect the occasion perfectly. Wyndham was expected that evening; it was Christmas Eve. You had been in an insane mood all the afternoon, and had teased your sister until she was almost beside herself. Miss Winter had been singing "The Mistletoe Bough" to us, and very likely that gave them the idea, but Mrs. Wyndham suddenly electrified us with the suggestion that she and Miss Winter should hide. "You will never find us, if you search from now until midnight," she said, "and the exercise will do Reggie good."'

'To be sure; I remember now,' interposed Reginald. 'Don't cut it short, Felix; let Wyndham have it'; and then Violet began to blush.

'Oh, I always finish a story that I have begun,' returned Felix, coolly. 'You had only been engaged about a week, Wyndham, and were coming down to the Hall for Christmas. 'It was your first visit, and your *fiancée* was particularly anxious that Reginald should be on his best behaviour, and that you should be received with fitting honours.'

'And I came by an earlier train than I had said.

'Yes; you arrived full two hours before you were expected, and we were still searching for Miss Winter. I believe Mrs. Wyndham had come out of her hiding-place directly she heard the door-bell, for she passed us looking very flushed, and went into the drawing-room. Will you continue the story, Mrs. Wyndham?'

'Oh dear! I was quite shaking with nervousness,' returned Constance, unable to keep silence at this opportunity. 'It was so dreadful meeting Harcourt like that, and I did not dare tell him that Violet was within hearing. I was too much in awe of you then, dear, and I was afraid you would think our game childish. I only felt I must get you out of the room somehow. You were standing just by the grandfather's clock, Harcourt, and I could not induce you to move. I kept begging you to come into the library and see Reg, but you would not take my hints.'

'Of course not. I wanted you all to myself, and I only thought you were a little bit shy of me.'

'Yes; but it was most embarrassing for Violet as well as myself, and there she was listening to all your foolish talk.'

‘Indeed I was not!’ interposed Violet, indignantly. ‘I had my fingers in my ears, and I never heard a word.’

‘Well, I thought you did, and I was ready to sink into the ground; and then I heard, or pretended to hear, Reg calling me, and I ran away, and Harcourt followed me, just as Felix entered by the other door.’

‘I am to be allowed to finish, then,’ observed Mr. Hamerton, as Constance ceased to speak. ‘I had given up the search in disgust. I had beaten over the whole area of the ground-floor, cupboards and all, and Miss Winter was still invisible; so I threw myself down on a couch and took up my paper, and then it was well I had no nerves, but I certainly did jump when a voice from the grandfather’s clock addressed me, “Do please unlock the door, Mr. Hamerton, and help me out,” and there was Miss Winter. To this moment I don’t know how you managed it.’

‘In the grandfather’s clock!’ exclaimed Mr. Wyndham, almost unable to believe his ears; and then he threw back his head and laughed. ‘Why have you never told me, Constance? Ah! I understand why you seemed so embarrassed. But how on earth could Miss Winter find room?’

‘Well, you see, it was under repair; there were no works, and even the face was removed. It was a mere skeleton case, so she had plenty of air.’

‘Yes, but I was horribly cramped. I could not have borne it five minutes longer. I thought once of putting my head through the hole and begging to be released, but I was ashamed to appear in such a guise before Mr. Wyndham; besides, I should have had to unstop my ears and open my eyes.’

Violet said this with such droll naïveté that all three gentlemen burst into peals of laughter, and the merriment was still at its height when Constance gave the signal to rise from table.

‘I never thought we should have such an amusing evening,’ she observed, as she and Violet drew their low chairs to the fire. ‘Dear Reg is quite himself to-night, and Harcourt does love to hear those old stories. Felix put it very nicely and delicately, but it was no laughing matter; Harcourt was not to be kept in order at all, and I was so afraid you would hear his silly compliments. Ah! you think he is quiet; he was never a great talker, but when we are alone he is so different.’

‘I always said you were the happiest woman I know. I told Mr. Hamerton so this evening.’

‘And what did he say?’

‘That you and Mr. Wyndham exactly suited each other, and

that a more satisfactory marriage had never taken place. He spoke with so much feeling; you would have liked to have heard him.'

'Poor dear Felix!' And then she said thoughtfully, 'One ought to make large returns for so many blessings. Sometimes when I am happiest I feel as though I must go out and do good to somebody; as though it would be a safety-valve, and would let off my surplus happiness. I have more than my share,' she added; and now her eyes were shining with feeling. 'What do you think, Violet? Have I robbed any other woman of her share? I hope not. But when I look round on Harcourt and my boys and Reggie, not forgetting dear old Felix and you and all my friends, I almost tremble to think that I am beginning my heaven on earth.'

'You deserve it all, Constance; you are the most generous-hearted woman I know.'

'Oh, don't praise me!'—putting up her hands imploringly. 'Would you commend a traveller who is walking well on a smooth road, with beautiful prospects round him? Harcourt and Reggie praise me far too much for my soul's welfare, but all this cannot last; I must grow grey and old like my fellows, and the troubles will come.'

'Yes, dearest'—touched by the sadness on her lovely face. 'But when they come you will be strengthened to meet them. I do not think I ever heard you make such a foreboding speech before, but perhaps I have forgotten; no one was ever less morbid.'

'Is it morbid to talk seriously? You should hear my conversations sometimes with Harcourt,—on Sunday nights, for example, when we have been to the Abbey service and have heard a grand sermon. Indeed, we have always been like sisters, and I don't mind telling you that the only trouble I could not bear would be to lose Harcourt.'

'You would bear that too, Constance, for your children's sake.'

'Should I? You speak very decidedly, but I am not sure; but it is the one thought that will intrude even at my happiest moments—my very happiness breeds it. But it is foolish to talk in this strain, and they are all coming in. Go and sing something, only for heaven's sake let it be lively.'

'What makes you so pale, love?' whispered Mr. Wyndham, a little anxiously, as he made his way to his wife's corner, while Mr. Hamerton and Reginald joined Violet at the piano.'

'We were only groping a little in the dark, Violet and I,' she returned softly. 'Sit down by me, Harcourt. Violet is going to sing to us, and I like to have you near me. When the boys are grown up and have gone out into the world, we shall be a regular Darby and Joan, shall we not?'

He assented to this with a smile; but her answer had not satisfied him, and before he slept that night he made her tell him what she and Violet had said, and when she had finished he rebuked her with grave tenderness.

'What faithlessness, my darling!'

'But it is there—always the fear. Why does it come, Harcourt? You are so much stronger than I; you ought to teach me how to repel it.'

'And what if the same fear assail me?' And as she looked at him wonderingly, he half smiled. 'It must always come to those who love intensely. The fear is an integral part of love. Do not disquiet yourself about it, my sweet wife. I shall not be taken from you an hour sooner because you have it; neither shall I lose you a moment before your allotted time. Now do you feel more satisfied?'

'I am always satisfied when I have you to talk to me,' she answered simply; and before another half-hour had passed she was sleeping as calmly as a child.

'I shall not tell her Dr. Littleton's opinion,' he said to himself, as he went back to his dressing-room to finish his letters. 'It would be a shame to cloud such perfect happiness; besides, there is no need to tell her.'

'Take care of yourself, do not overwork yourself, and you may outlive me.' Those were Littleton's words, and he meant them too. 'A weak heart. What does that signify? Hundreds of men have weak hearts. Moderate exercise, plenty of work, and a quiet conscience, and I may make an old man yet. God grant it for my wife's sake!' For it was of her he had thought when he went to the clever specialist to ask him the reason of some troublesome symptoms that had lately troubled him; of her, and not of the brilliant future that his friends had prophesied for him.

Two years before he had made his maiden speech in the House of Commons, and since then he had been regarded as a rising man, and one who would be invaluable to the members of his party.

CHAPTER XXI

'I AM NOT FREE'

'Duties are ours, events are God's.'

CECIL.

WITH all her good intentions, Mrs. Wyndham found it somewhat difficult to carry out her little scheme. Numerous engagements obliged her to defer her visit to the Gate House. There were shooting breakfasts, luncheons, and a dinner to which she and her husband had been invited, and it was ten days before she could secure a leisure afternoon.

In the meantime Gloden had again accidentally encountered the young master of Silcote Hall.

It happened in this wise.

Gloden had left the Gate House, and had just turned out of the little lane into the Grantham road, when she saw a young man in shooting dress walking down the middle of the road, with his gun on his shoulder and two dogs following him closely. At the sound of footsteps behind him he turned, and to her surprise she saw it was Mr. Lorimer. He pulled off his cap with a look of unmistakable pleasure when he saw her, and joined her at once.

'I am in luck to-day,' he said genially, as Gloden, perhaps to hide her shyness, stooped down and caressed the dogs. 'I have had capital sport at the Gate Farm, and now I have the pleasure of meeting you. We are going as far as Grantham together, are we not?'—as she seemed to hesitate what to do next. But Mr. Lorimer seemed to think it the most natural thing in the world that they should walk on together, and as it did not seem possible to get rid of him, Gloden resigned herself to her fate.

'Don't you find that thing heavy?' he inquired, with a glance at her violin-case.

But Gloden only shook her head with a dissenting smile ; and, indeed, as he noticed her light springy step and upright carriage, and the alertness of her movements, there seemed no need to offer his help.

' You have been to the Gate House, of course ? '

' Yes ; I am always there two afternoons in the week. '

' I suppose you keep regular days ? ' he observed carelessly.

' Tuesdays and Fridays. ' Then Gloden felt as though she had been a little indiscreet. ' I give Hilda Parry violin lessons on Mondays and Thursdays, ' she said hurriedly. ' The Parrys are so kind ; they have promised to find me some more pupils. I hope soon to be fully occupied. '

' The work seems to agree with you, ' he returned, looking at her a little keenly. ' You seem as fit as possible ; ever so much better than when I found you in the plantation. I never saw any one so done up as you were that afternoon. '

' I believe I was very tired. '

' I should think so. Grantham seems to agree with you after all. '

' Oh no ; please do not say so ! ' for this was more than Gloden could swallow. ' If you only knew how I hate it ! ' Then, as he looked rather surprised and disconcerted at the energy of her tone, she went on apologetically, ' Perhaps it is horrid of me to say that when people are so kind in finding me work, but if you only knew what *heimweh*—real home-sickness meant, you would understand how I long for Eltringham. '

' Should you care to go back to it now ? ' he asked in a sympathetic tone. He was not sorry to hear her speaking in this way. It showed that under her coldness there was plenty of heart. She had quite lost her prim manner, and was talking to him as naturally as possible.

' You mean, should I care to go back with strangers at the vicarage ? It would be painful, of course, but I think I should choose the pain. I would be willing to live in a cottage—a little whitewashed cottage on the green—if I could only wake up every morning and find myself at Eltringham. '

' By Jove ! you are fond of the place. ' And then he stopped, and asked a little curiously, ' Were you thinking of Eltringham when you played to us on Tuesday ? '

But as he put this question, the blood rushed to Gloden's face.

' No, ' she said, rather shortly ; and then she turned her head away and bit her lip. Why had he asked her such a

question? If he could only have read the proud, ambitious thoughts that had surged through her mind when she had commenced playing! Those wild yearnings that had infused such pathos into the notes, those passionate appeals and regrets, seemed to stretch and widen into infinity. Could she give them a name? How was one to brand or label the immeasurable cravings of the human soul?

Reginald felt somehow as though he had said the wrong thing.

‘I could not tell you that afternoon what I felt about your playing. I believe’—with a laugh, as though to hide deeper feeling—‘that the music fairly bowled me over. I had a fit of the blues afterwards, for which I have to thank you, Miss Carrick.’

‘Oh, I am so sorry!’

‘There is no occasion for you to be sorry. I rather liked it myself, only it has filled me with the desire to hear you play again. If I were to drop in at the Gate House on Tuesday afternoon by accident—the Winters are such old friends, and are always glad to see me—would you play to us again?’

‘You must not do that,’ she returned decidedly. ‘My time is pledged to Miss Winter, and it is no part of our programme that I should entertain her visitors.’ She spoke with considerable firmness; and then her manner changed. ‘Please do not expect me to do that, Mr. Lorimer. I think, I am almost sure, that Mrs. Winter does not care for my playing, and it would create awkwardness. If there be any other opportunity, I shall be very happy to play to you.’

‘Thanks awfully. I am quite sure lots of opportunities will turn up, and then I will keep you to your promise.’

But he thought it safer policy to change the subject. He supposed Miss Wentworth had been ungracious; he knew of old that it was not always easy to gain her favour. Very likely she had made up her mind to keep Miss Carrick in her place, and not to encourage Violet in any intimacy with her young music-teacher. Perhaps she did not come into the drawing-room at all, and he could hardly ask for admission to the gable room unless Constance were with him. He must just wait and see what turned up; but on one thing he had fully made up his mind—that Miss Carrick should play to him again.

He was astonished himself at the persistency with which her playing haunted him. He had wakened up one or two

mornings with those wild melancholy strains sounding in his ears ; and not only that, but her striking personality that day had been a revelation to him.

Was she always transformed in the same way ? When she played he wanted to hear her again, and to answer his own question. He had not thought her at all pretty, hardly good-looking, when he had first seen her—only a pale, unhappy-looking girl, with a proud, chilling manner. Not insignificant, certainly—Miss Carrick could never be that ; but, compared to other women that he knew, to Constance, to his own poor Car, to Violet Winter, she was almost plain.

He looked at her now as these thoughts passed through his mind, and he acknowledged that he had been wrong in his first hasty criticism, and that she was certainly not without her good points. She was wonderfully graceful, and her face was full of expression ; but she did not look as she had looked that afternoon at the Gate House, with the background of red silk curtains behind her, and the glow of some strange beauty in her face. Then, by an odd transition of thought, he wondered what Car would have thought of her. He imagined her sitting in his place, looking fair, calm, and stately. 'Good execution, but too many mannerisms for my taste, Reginald' ; he could almost hear her say that.

'How is Harvey ?' he asked, rather abruptly ; for they were nearly in sight of Market Street now, and Miss Carrick had become rather silent. 'By the by, I shall expect him to look me up next Saturday.'

'But you are engaged ; you have visitors,' she objected.

'What of that ?' he returned airily ; 'the more the merrier—that is the motto at Silcote Hall. If I had my own way, I would cram the house from now to Christmas. Well, perhaps not this year'—checking himself as he remembered this was hardly a speech for a disconsolate widower to make—'but most years. I am a very sociable person, Miss Carrick ; I am fond of my fellow-creatures, and I am especially fond of giving them a good feed.'

'Yes ; but about Harvey, Mr. Lorimer,' she said, colouring, but keeping to her point, for she was glad of having this opportunity of speaking to him. 'You are very kind to my dear boy, and you made him so happy in giving him those rabbits, but you must not encourage him too much. Harvey is so young, he does not quite understand. If you are too kind to him you will win his affection, and then he will be always

wanting to go to Silcote, and you will find him terribly in the way.'

'Not a bit of it; he and I understand each other perfectly,' was the blunt answer.

'Yes; but you must not be so kind,' she persisted, though her task was making her a little nervous, and she was stumbling over her words. 'It is putting Harvey in a false position. You must see that, under his present circumstances—in our present situation'—correcting herself—'he must not expect to be on terms of equality with people. In the old days it was different, and people were glad to know us; but now—Surely you understand what I mean, Mr. Lorimer'—a little resentfully, for he did not show the least intention of helping her.

'I know you have been talking awful rubbish, begging your pardon, Miss Carrick. Oh, I understand what you mean well enough, but I am not going to put it into words. You may just make your mind easy about Harvey; he is a fine little chap, and I am going to see a good deal of him. He is coming up to Silcote on Saturday, and I will send him back in the dogcart. You are not afraid to trust him with me?'

'Oh no, of course not.'

'All right. I was half afraid you were going to say that next. What an awfully scrupulous person you are, Miss Carrick! Harvey and I are easy-going, happy-go-lucky people, not your sort at all. On second thoughts,' continued Reginald, reflectively, 'your kind of conscience would not suit me; it is too prickly. It would give me moral indigestion. Ah! here we are at Market Street, and I am sorry to see you intend to leave me. Will you let me step in and give Mrs. Carrick this brace of partridges? I meant to have offered them to you, but, on my honour, I dare not after this amazing display of scrupulosity. I see plainly that you intend to have nothing at all to do with me.'

Then Gloden, for once in her life, acted on a curious impulse, for she put out her hand palm uppermost in a most suggestive way.

'If you really meant those partridges for me, I will take them, and thank you very much, Mr. Lorimer; but you must not be so extravagantly generous. Harvey brought back some beautiful game from Silcote ten days ago.'

'Did he? I forgot that. Well, you are making handsome amends for all the rubbish you talked'; and Mr. Lorimer's face brightened. It brightened still more as Gloden thanked him with one of her radiant smiles.

'Aunt Clemency,' she said, a little breathlessly, 'I met Mr. Lorimer just now, and he has given me these partridges; he has just shot them. Uncle Reuben will enjoy them; he is so fond of game.'

'Yes, but he rarely tastes it; beef and mutton are more in our line. I don't call to mind that the squire has ever sent us even a rabbit before; but it must be all along of Harvey.'

'Of course it is Harvey, Aunt Clemency,' returned Gloden, a little sharply; and then she went up to her room.

'Was I wrong to take them? Was it forward of me?' she asked, tormenting herself in her usual fashion. 'But when he said that, that I meant to have nothing to do with him, I could not help putting out my hand for the birds. He is so kind that it quite pains me to be so stiff and disagreeable; but I do it for the best.' And she sighed; for Gloden was young, far too young to lead this self-dependent, repressive life, and the youth within her was beginning to clamour and rebel against such unnatural conditions.

Another week passed. Harvey had paid a third visit to the Hall. There had been no further present of game; but Gloden was beginning to be afraid that Harvey intended to spend all his weekly holidays there, and that he regarded Silcote as his private hunting-ground. The Wyndham boys, young as they were, were additional attractions to him, and when Mr. Lorimer invited him to bring Bernard Trevor with him on the following Saturday, Harvey's cup of bliss was filled to the brim.

'Isn't it awfully jolly of him, Glow?' he exclaimed that evening, as they walked up and down the best room in the twilight. This was an old habit. Harvey called it 'prowling a bit.' They would walk up and down with arms interlaced, keeping step and talking hard, until Gloden declared she was tired. 'Bernard wants to go dreadfully, only he says his mother does not know Mr. Lorimer, because she never goes out. Won't he be fine and pleased, as Aunt Clem is so fond of saying? He will be ready to jump out of his skin when I give him Mr. Lorimer's invitation.'

'Will his mother let him go?'

'Of course she will, like a shot. Bless you! everybody in Grantham thinks no end of Mr. Lorimer. The boys are as envious as possible when they hear I am going to Silcote. Bob Stourton—his father keeps the grocery stores, Stourton Brothers, in High Street—he is a mean, carneying sort of chap, and I can scarcely keep my hands off him. Well, what do you suppose

Bob had the cheek to say yesterday? Wouldn't I take him to Silcote just to see the rabbits? Catch me. Stourton Brothers, indeed!' and Harvey gave a short derisive laugh.

'But, Harvey dear, our position is not much better. Uncle Reuben says that Stourton Brothers are so rich that they mean to retire. They have a private house now near the Parrys', and there's some talk of my giving violin lessons to the two girls.'

'Yes; but they are awful cads. Do you think Mr. Lorimer does not see the difference?'

'Ah! but think of Uncle Reuben, Harvey.' She ought not to have said it, but the words escaped from her involuntarily.

'Come now, I call that too bad, Glow,' replied Harvey, in an injured tone. 'You are always spoiling things for a fellow, and it is not fair, either. Why, Stourton Brothers wear white aprons, and you can see Stourton junior any day in the butter department, slicing fat bacon for the old women, and dropping his *h's* all over the shop. And to compare them with poor old Uncle Reuben! It is not nice of you a bit, Antelope; and as for Aunt Clem, though she does talk about being fine and proud, well, that is only her way, and I am as fond of her as possible!' cried the lad bravely, only his cheeks were burning in the darkness. 'And if she isn't a lady like our own mother, she is a lady in her way, and it is a grand way too.' And Gloden had nothing to answer to this tirade.

But, after all, it was Harvey who was nearer the truth than Gloden, for Clemency's innate gentleness and sweet old-fashioned notions made her at least a lady of the new kingdom, where reality, and not its shadow, shall be the only coinage; where all disguises of mere rank or circumstance shall be torn away, and in that goodly company of heaven's aristocracy the first shall be last and the last first.

By and by Mrs. Wyndham found her opportunity, and one afternoon, just as the violin lesson was over, and Gloden had opened Dante, there was a knock at the door that Violet evidently recognised, for she jumped up, exclaiming, 'That is dear old Constance!' and brought her in triumphantly.

She greeted Gloden with much cordiality, and then settled herself cosily in the window-recess, talking all the while.

'Is this not like old times, Vi? only Miss Carrick is an interloper. Now, pray do not look alarmed, Miss Carrick, for my visit is to you as well as to Miss Winter, so, you see, you are not a bit in the way. Were you going to read Dante?

Never mind; the gruesome old Florentine will keep, and I want to talk to you instead, and this is my first visit to the gable room for a year and a half at least. Do you remember that Reg always would call it the ‘gabble room,’ because he said we did nothing but chatter in it?’

‘One does not forget that sort of thing, Constance.’

‘No indeed; and you and Reg were such great allies. Now, I am going to make a daring proposition. Do let us have tea up here instead of in the drawing-room.’

‘By all means,’ returned Violet, easily. ‘Cousin Tess will be in a nice temper. She always is when I order tea up here, but I often do it. I have arranged a code of signals with Dawson. There!’—as she manipulated the bell—‘he will know now that I want tea for three, and he will send Dorcas up with it.’

And Violet was right. Ten minutes had barely elapsed before a neat-looking housemaid appeared with the tea-tray. A low table was drawn to the window-recess, and Constance examined the cups with childish interest, gloating over their quaint shape.

‘The same dear old cups!’ she said enthusiastically.

Constance was a clever strategist. She did not at once open her mission. She waited until Gloden seemed at her ease with her, and then she approached the subject by judicious praises of her playing.

‘You have real genius, Miss Carrick,’ she said seriously; ‘you carried us all away the other day. We were an appreciative audience, I can assure you. Mr. Hamerton, who is no mean judge, agreed with me that it was a sin and shame to hide such a talent.’

‘Do you call this hiding it?’ returned Gloden, in surprise, but she was not a little gratified by this warm commendation. ‘I think I am getting on famously. I have two pupils already, and I expect I shall soon have more.’

‘Pupils! Ah, I daresay!’ exclaimed Constance, contemptuously; ‘but fancy wasting such execution on a few Grantham young ladies! You must come to town, Miss Carrick, and go in for regular training under Boski. You have heard him play, of course. He is what my brother would call the boss of violinists, and then he is so strict. He never takes a pupil who he thinks will not do him credit, and the mere fact that Boski has given you lessons will be a brilliant recommendation in itself.’

‘I have no doubt you are right, Mrs. Wyndham, and I am a devout admirer of Boski; but his lessons are among the good things that are not for me.’

‘But that is nonsense,’ returned Constance, speaking so exactly like her brother that Gloden quite started; she seemed to hear him say again, ‘You have been talking awful rubbish.’ ‘You may have your good things too if you will only open your hands widely enough. Let me finish what I was saying, and we will discuss details afterwards. I am quite sure that a year under Boski would enable you to play at concerts, but of course he would settle all that. You would have to take lodgings in town. I know of some nice rooms near Regent’s Park, not at all dear, kept by an old servant of mine. Mrs. Drake is such a nice woman. She has a permanent lodger, an old lady who pays her well, and then she has these two other little rooms. You would not be too far from Boski’s there—he lives in Connaught Square. It would be just a nice little walk, and I would come and look after you and introduce you to some nice people; so you would not be dull. Besides, Boski would insist on six hours’ practice a day, so you would really have no time to mope.’

‘May I say a word now, Mrs. Wyndham?’ asked Gloden, humbly, but there was a contumacious sparkle in her eyes.

‘No, not yet; you shall have your turn presently, and I have not quite finished. Of course, you are going to tell me that Signor Boski’s terms are exorbitant. So they are for rich people, but he is very generous with his poorer pupils, and is always willing to lower his price for them; he is far more anxious for his pupils to do him credit than to make money out of them. He is a great friend of mine, and I know what a generous-minded man he is.’

‘I have always heard so’—in a low voice.

‘Then you have heard the truth; and I have only to introduce you in my own way, and I will guarantee that he takes an interest in you. The want of means, my dear Miss Carrick—you see, I am speaking very frankly—need not deter you in the least; my husband and I would arrange that. It would be a safe investment. You would make your *début* at Princes’ Hall, and then at our house; engagements would flow in, and you would very soon repay us. Come, is this not a grand programme for your future?’

‘It is indeed,’ returned Gloden, but she spoke in a dreamy manner. Mrs. Wyndham’s glowing description had roused a

tumult within her. Why, this was one of her old air-castles that she had built so long ago, and it was impregnated with the scent of lilies and the sweet spicy breath of the pine-woods. How often she had closed her eyes and seen herself standing, violin in hand, on the platform of some crowded concert-room—at St. James's Hall, for example, or at the Crystal Palace, with Manns, baton in hand, below her—she could hear the applause, the bravos, and the clapping of hands. 'The celebrated young violinist, Gloden Carrick'—that is what they called her. Perhaps there would be a bouquet or a wreath flung at her feet, but that would be in the evening. 'Oh, I beg your pardon!'—waking up to the fact that there was dead silence, and that both Mrs. Wyndham and Violet were looking at her curiously. 'I did not mean to be rude, but your words made me think about so many things.'

'That is what I want you to say—that you will think about it very seriously. I hope you do not think me interfering, Miss Carrick, but I am so used to help people; and they never mind me—they know it makes me so happy.'

'You are very kind—you are more than kind, and I am ever so much obliged to you.' And then Gloden stopped, and there was a great softness in her eyes. It seemed to her at that moment that in all her life she had never seen such a lovely face as the one before her, and surely she was as good as she was beautiful.

'Then you will let me help you?'—with graceful entreaty.

'I would let you help me if I could accept help from any one, but there are other hindrances beside my pride. You tempt me very strongly, Mrs. Wyndham. The life you describe is one that I should love, and, though perhaps I ought not to say it, I do not think that I should have disappointed your expectations; but I am not free to choose my life.'

'Not free, my dear Miss Carrick?'

'No. I have my young brother to consider. I have promised my father—I promised it when he lay in his coffin—that I would never leave Harvey; on his deathbed he committed him to me as a sacred charge. I said then that I would keep near him, that I would find some way for our being together as long as he needed me; but I said more than that afterwards. This is why I am living at Grantham, though I hate my life here, because I am too poor to make any sort of home for him; because it is better for him that I live in this way. But perhaps by and by, when he is older and I

have formed a connection, we may still have a home of our own.'

'Could it not be arranged for Harvey to come to town too?' asked Mrs. Wyndham, but she spoke with some hesitation. 'Perhaps Mr. Carrick would be chargeable for his nephew's maintenance?'

'Impossible! Not for worlds would I ask him; he and Aunt Clemency would be shocked at the mere idea. They are old-fashioned people, and have such limited ideas; and then they are so fond of Harvey—it would be so cruel to propose to take him away; besides—oh, there are so many besides!—Harvey would be miserable in London. He is a country boy; he likes plenty of space and freedom, and though he looks so well he is not strong; more than once we have been anxious about him. No, no; if everything else were arranged—Signor Boski's lessons, Harvey's maintenance, and my own—I could not doom my poor boy to London lodgings.'

'I did not expect all these difficulties,' sighed Mrs. Wyndham. She was grievously disappointed, but even she could not say that Gloden was wrong; on the contrary, she admired the girl for her resolution and devotion to her brother. 'We could not have the boy on our hands too,' she said afterwards to Violet. 'Harcourt would have put down his foot at once, and rightly too. We might have got him into Merchant Taylors', perhaps. Dr. Morton would have helped us, but he is a delicate-looking boy, and I am afraid the underground railway and small lodgings would not have suited him; but it does seem such a grievous pity that Miss Carrick should be sacrificed.'

'Perhaps she will not always be sacrificed,' returned Violet; 'and after all she is doing the right thing.'

'Have you really made up your mind to the impossibility of my scheme? Is there no loophole left, no glimmer of hope?' asked Constance, when Gloden rose as though to close the conversation.

'There is no loophole that I can see,' she returned; but she was very pale now, and there were tears in her eyes. 'But, all the same, I shall always feel grateful to you for your generous proposal; so few people would have interested themselves in a stranger.'

'Ah, but all people are not Constance,' observed Violet, with an affectionate glance at her friend. 'You will know what she is one day, Miss Carrick.' And then they both accompanied Gloden to the top of the staircase.

'I don't wonder she interested him,' said Constance half to herself, as Gloden looked back at them with one of her brilliant smiles. 'There is something very unusual about her; she somehow takes hold of one.'

'Of whom are you speaking?' asked Violet a little inquisitively, as she bent over the balustrades.

But Mrs. Wyndham was prudent, and did not explain herself; for 'Speech is silver, and silence is golden,' thought Constance.

CHAPTER XXII

GABRIELLE DE BRIENNE

'I have a room wherein no one enters
Save I myself alone ;
There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
There my life centres.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

'FELIX, I want to ask you a question.'

'Excuse me for one moment, Mrs. Wyndham. If you will allow me to ring the bell and despatch these letters, I shall be ready to answer a score of questions.'

'Ah, very well,' returned Constance, carelessly ; 'finish your business first. There is not the least hurry, but, as I have been as quiet as the traditional mouse for the last hour and a half, I thought I might break the silence.'

'You have been as good as gold,' returned Mr. Hamerton, as he addressed his last envelope, 'and you shall have your innings presently. I have been dull company for you this afternoon, but I will make up for it by and by'; and he gathered up his letters and business documents, with a word or two to the servants, while Constance laid aside her knitting and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

It was a damp, cheerless afternoon in October. There had been rain earlier in the day, nevertheless the squire and Mr. Wyndham had driven out some miles to join a shooting-party at Combe Lea ; but the morning post had brought Mr. Hamerton such a budget of business letters that he had been compelled to remain at home.

With the exception of a brisk constitutional with Rex and Ninian as his companions, he had been writing most of the day, and, as he came forward to the fire, he stretched out his arms with a gesture of mingled weariness and relief, and sank in the easy-chair with the air of a man who had earned repose.

‘How tired you look, Felix! and yes, I think—I am sure—that you are thinner. Harcourt says you work far too hard.’

‘Does he?’—rather indifferently. ‘I will get myself weighed when I go back to town. I wonder what sort of a bag he and Reginald are making? Fancy losing a day at Combe Lea because of that confounded Brabazon case! It is hard lines, isn’t it, Mrs. Wyndham?’

‘I suppose I ought to sympathise with you, but, you see, I am the gainer. I have never got you alone for a single minute, Felix, and I do so want to talk to you. We never have one of our cosy chats now.’

Then he smiled at her, but made no answer. He was quite content to sit there in the yellow firelight, watching the branches of the elms sway to and fro, while the damp leaves pattered down on the grass. He loved October, dry or wet, crisp or humid; he loved the mellowness and the softness, and the full flavour of the late autumn days with their suggestive melancholy, and perhaps the touch of frosts toward night that warns of the coming winter; and he loved, too, the companionship of the fair-faced woman who sat opposite to him, and he was quite willing that she should discourse to him in her cheerful, bright way. Perhaps she wanted to talk to him about Rex. He and Reginald were fellow-sponsors, and he took a great deal of interest in the boy; indeed, both the little lads were dear to him. But Constance’s next speech gave him a shock; it might have been a hand-grenade, it rooted him so effectually.

‘Felix, we are old friends—chums, as you men call it, and I want to ask you a question. Have you ever been in love?’

He was so astonished that he sat up erect in his chair and stared at her; but Constance, who was watching him closely, saw that he had turned a little pale and caught his breath.

‘Dear friend,’ she said very softly—and nothing could be more caressing than her manner—‘don’t think me horrid for asking the question so bluntly; but you know how much I have your interest at heart. I do not think Laura and Sophy could be more anxious for your welfare. And I have so often wondered why you are so averse to matrimony.’

‘All men do not marry,’ he returned, defending himself somewhat lamely; but the firm lips twitched a little nervously, and he did not look at her as he spoke. ‘You know I think you almost perfect, Mrs. Wyndham, and you have full liberty to speak to me as you choose; but if I could bring myself to

accuse you of a fault, it is that you are too anxious about your friends.'

'You are putting it very kindly, Felix. You mean I am an interfering, match-making woman, and in a way you are right. I must meddle in my friends' affairs, and try and put them right. If I love people, their interests are mine. I cannot separate myself from them. Harcourt often lectures me about it. He calls it abandoned self-indulgence, an over-exuberant sympathy'; and then she stopped, and looked in his eyes, as he slowly raised them to her. 'Tell me all about it, Felix; our old friendship gives me the right to ask. Who is she, and where did you meet her?'

'Mrs. Wyndham'—and then he tried to laugh, but it was a failure—'are you a witch? Who has put such a suspicion into your head? Have I ever dropped a word that could lead you or any one to imagine that I am not a whole-hearted bachelor?'

'Never,' was the frank answer. 'You have always been cheerful and even-tempered, and your thoughtful moods are as much a part of your nature as Reggie's light-heartedness belongs to his. No word or look has betrayed you until this moment, when my abrupt question took you by surprise, and you were not quite ready with your answer.'

'Then why——' he began, but she interrupted him.

'It is not easy to say how the surmise has arisen. I think it was a chance word of Reggie's; he looked rather solemn one day when I was talking about you.'

'I can assure you, Mrs. Wyndham, that, in spite of our close friendship, Reginald and I have never spoken on this subject. He has often chaffed me on my supposed hard-heartedness; lots of my friends have done that. A bachelor is a fair target for married men's jokes.'

'Nevertheless, I am sure Reggie guesses something,' returned Constance, gravely, 'though he would be angry with me for hinting at such a thing. But why are we wasting time like this, Felix? You will tell me, will you not, about this old trouble? For trouble there is, and must be; I am certain of that now.'

And, thus hardly pressed, Felix yielded up his secret. To no one else would he have told it, except to this woman, who had taken a sister's place to him; and, strange to say, as the seal of silence was removed, and his lips spoke the beloved name, the heaviness of that hidden burden that he had carried so many years seemed to lighten strangely.

And this was the substance of what Felix Hamerton told that October afternoon, while twilight faded into dusk, and then into darkness; and Constance listened in that moved sympathetic silence that is more eloquent than words.

It was during that long summer wandering seven years ago that he had encountered his fate; when the fair face of Gabrielle de Brienne had first flashed on him, for whose dear sake he was indifferent to all other women.

He was staying in the little village of L——, tired out with Alpine climbing, and in the mood for a few days' perfect rest and idleness in one of the most delicious of Swiss valleys.

The tiny hotel where he put up was full of guests, but he managed to secure a small room, and, having unpacked his portmanteau and refreshed himself, he sauntered idly through the gardens and across a rustic bridge leading to some overhanging woods, which clothed part of a ravine; beyond these were glorious peaks, clad in eternal snows. The whole scene was superb, idyllic, permeated—nay, saturated with beauty, and as he crossed the little bridge, a curious thought came into his mind. 'If I ever marry,' he said to himself, 'I will bring my bride here; it is just the spot for honeymooning.' And then he laughed at his own thoughts, for the busy young barrister was fancy-free, and the woman who was to be his helpmate had not yet entered the Eden of his youth.

A little path led upward through the wood, and here and there rustic seats had been placed for the use of the climbers; but the irony of fate led him aside from the beaten track to explore a little glade, that looked to him wonderfully inviting.

A sort of archway of tangled branches admitted him to the dell, which was a mere clearing; but nature, with lavish hands, had embellished it with a thousand flowers, and there, standing under a ladder of sunbeams filtered through the trec-tops, like some glorified youthful angel crowned with yellow sunshine, was a slim girl in white, who looked at him with grave dark eyes, as he stood there for a moment almost petrified with surprise, for he had thought himself alone in the woods.

Ever afterwards, he told Constance, that picture haunted him, and became to him like a waking dream. It would flash upon him suddenly as he talked and jested with other women. The tiny glade, with its flower-spangled grass, and the sunbeams playing on the girlish, uncovered head; he could see every fold of her white gown, and even the bright clasp at her waist. Her hands were full of flowers; but what struck him

more than the unconscious grace of her attitude, was the grave, quiet penetration of those dark eyes. And yet how momentary it had been! Surely he had not lingered more than a few seconds before raising his cap. With a muttered apology he had turned away and begun climbing the ravine, but after a while he had desisted. He was breathless, and some feeling of curiosity made him pause and descend the ravine again. He would return to the hotel; he had had enough fatigue for one day. He would loiter in the gardens until it was time for *table d'hôte*.

If he expected to see the white-robed nymph cross the little bridge to the *châlet*, he was disappointed; he had the gardens to himself. But as he seated himself at table beside an acquaintance, a lively American widow, he saw her a little lower down. She was sitting between a good-looking young man, evidently a Frenchman, and a fragile, pretty woman in gay attire. They were all talking and laughing together. Once their eyes met, and she blushed slightly, as though she recognised him; but she did not look his way again. Now and then a low sweet laugh reached his ear, but he could hear that their conversation was carried on in French.

'Who are those people, Mrs. Brandon?' he asked of his neighbour, as they went out into the garden to enjoy the sight of the mountain peaks bathed in the moonlight, and he looked significantly after the three retreating figures. 'Garde tu, ma petite,' he heard the gentleman say tenderly, as the young girl stumbled slightly over a fragment of rock in the path; 'pas si vite, Gabrielle.'

'Oh, that is the Comte de Brienne and his wife and sister. She is an American. I knew her slightly before she was married, when she was Valeria Grant; she calls herself Valerie now. She was a pretty creature, and the New Yorkers went mad about her. They were mad after another fashion when she took up with a French count; but they are pretty devoted to each other.'

'And that young lady is his sister?'

'His step-sister. Yes; she is Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Brienne. She has just finished her education, and they have taken her out of the convent. I daresay he intends to find her a husband as soon as possible. She is really a charming girl—*spirituelle*, but rather gentle and dreamy; the nuns are to blame for that. Valerie is another sort; she has *chic*—you know what I mean. I guess she makes her husband

pretty mad at times'; and Mrs. Brandon nodded her head knowingly.

'I wish you would introduce me,' he said a little eagerly.

And Mrs. Brandon promised with ready good-nature to do so; but either she forgot her promise or she lacked opportunity, for she left the next day without giving Felix the introduction he desired. The whole of that day he saw nothing of the comte and his party—they were absent on some excursion, and did not return until late—but just as he was dropping off to sleep, he was roused by voices that sounded as though they proceeded from the balcony outside his window. 'Good-night, Valerie; sleep well, ma pauvre, if thou canst. Take the best of care of her, Etienne. Good rest to you both, my dear ones.' Those low sweet tones belonged to Mademoiselle de Brienne; he would have sworn to them anywhere.

The next morning they were invisible, and, alas! he had no Mrs. Brandon to question. He ate his *déjeuner* discontentedly, and strolled about somewhat aimlessly. He had his book with him, but he did not read. The mountain air, the dazzling snow-peaks, seemed to intoxicate him, and dispose him for mere idle dreaming; he was in that dangerous state of bodily indolence and mental activity when any excitement would be welcome.

Later in the day he was returning from a walk down a steep little road, which he had discovered would bring him by a short cut to the *châlet*, when he caught sight of a slender figure in grey standing beside a wayside cross, and looking up at the rude painted figure of the Christ with tender, reverent eyes. Under the straw hat he saw the gleam of golden brown hair. It was Mademoiselle de Brienne. He raised his hat and would have passed her, but she turned round and looked at him almost appealingly, and he involuntarily stopped.

'Is it possible that you need my assistance, mademoiselle?' He addressed her in French, and her face at once brightened.

'That is kind, monsieur,' she returned, with childlike naïveté and frankness. 'You are English, and I speak the language so badly. Will you have the kindness, the infinite kindness, to direct me to the *châlet*? I have missed my path and am lost.' As she spoke the last word she threw out her hand with an eloquent little gesture.

'With all the pleasure in life, mademoiselle. I am going back myself, and will conduct you. This is a short cut to the *châlet*. If we take that path, we shall be in the ravine where

I saw you yesterday. But'—an after-thought occurring to him—'the path is too steep and difficult; we had better take the lower road'; for, with masculine cunning, he was determined to prolong the walk as much as possible.

But the convent had not taught Gabrielle to comprehend mannish wiles, so she answered with the utmost faith and credulity, 'If monsieur be good enough to be my guide, I must leave the route to him.' At which Felix did feel momentarily ashamed of himself; but the temptation was too strong, the pleasure of looking into those lovely eyes too great, and after an instant's hesitation he determined on taking the lower road.

Mademoiselle de Brienne accompanied him willingly. She was not at all shy, and answered his questions with perfect frankness; the word 'spirituelle' that his American friend had used was exactly suited to her. There was a gentleness and a freshness about this young girl that was almost indescribable. The purity and gravity of the cloister still lingered about her, but every now and then the natural joyousness of her young life seemed to break in upon her sedateness; at such moments she was charming. To Felix Hamerton she was a revelation. He had never imagined this delicate and unique type of girlhood; the dark eyes and pure oval of her face, and her pale olive complexion, appeared to him his ideal of feminine beauty. She was evidently very young and undeveloped, but the years and life would soon ripen her, the slender figure would round and fill out; but as he looked at her he thought that no change could improve her.

Before long he knew all that there was to know about her. She was eighteen, so Etienne had taken her away from the convent. Etienne was her brother, the Comte de Brienne. He was the best and dearest brother in the world. Had monsieur spoken to him? Valerie was not French, or Catholique; she was an American, and Etienne had fallen in love with her beauty. Ah! she was droll at times, this dear Valerie, but one could not help loving her.

How was it she had strayed away so far from the châlet? Would not the comte be annoyed? This was Felix's next question; but Gabrielle only shook her head with a sigh.

Doubtless monsieur was right. Etienne was careful with her—he had always a view to the proprieties; but Valerie was by no means strict. But Etienne would not know of her escapades—he was miles away; a sudden business had called him to Paris.

‘To Paris! Is it possible? Do you mean, mademoiselle, that he has left you behind?’

‘But yes. How could it be otherwise? Had not monsieur heard what had happened yesterday—how Valerie had slipped in the ravine over a loose rock, and had hurt her foot? It was all black and swollen, and Lisette, her maid, had informed them that madame had not closed her eyes all night for the pain. Could monsieur conceive such *tristesse*? The poor Etienne had gone off so unhappy; when anything ailed Valerie he was miserable.

‘But he will return, mademoiselle.’

Ah, yes, he would return—in a week or ten days at the most, and then they must go back to Brittany, where they had their home. Etienne would have liked to live in Paris, but he always said he was not rich enough. ‘That is because of me, monsieur,’ she continued simply, ‘and because of the two little sisters, Foinette and Marie, who are still at the convent.’

‘Are you not glad to see the world, mademoiselle?’ he asked gently.

‘Yes, truly, monsieur; but all the same I cried when I left, and the good sisters cried too. I was their child, do you see, and I had been there so long—ever since mamma died; for what could Etienne do with three little sisters when he was fighting for his country? It is startling at first to have one’s freedom, and to see people; but when I go to sleep at night I am always back in the old convent garden, among the tall white lilies, that are the flowers of our Lady, and always I seem to hear the tinkling of the bell calling us to the chapel. But, monsieur, will not the *châlet* be in sight? You must be fatigued with all this foolish talk.’

‘Is it too far? Have I tired you?’ he exclaimed anxiously, for this idea had not occurred to him before, and he fancied that she looked a little weary. ‘Will you sit down, mademoiselle, on that fallen log, and rest a while?’

But she shook her head. ‘You must not tempt me, monsieur; Valerie will be so anxious. She charged me not to go too far. When Valerie gets anxious about any one she cries, and then Etienne is angry; he does not like her to shed a tear.’

‘But if I have tired you, mademoiselle, I shall never forgive myself,’ returned Hamerton, in such a remorseful voice that Gabrielle smiled.

‘Why should you speak in that way?’ she said. ‘It is not your fault or mine that the road is so long; but indeed I did

not know it was so far. At the convent our walks were not long, and there were no hills to climb and to put one out of breath.'

'Courage, mademoiselle; I see the roof of the *châlet* between the trees,' he observed in a relieved tone. 'Shall we take this by-path? it will bring us to the little glade where I saw you first.'

'Ah, ciel! how you startled me that day!' she exclaimed, with her low laugh. 'I was in a dream. I was back in the convent garden among the beehives, and Sister Thérèse was droning—droning out of her big book; and then something crackled, and there you stood, monsieur, framed in green leaves, as though it were your *fête* day, and you looked as though you had seen a ghost or a *pixie*.'

'Or a woodland nymph—one of Diana's maidens,' he replied gravely. 'Now give me your hand, mademoiselle; this is a difficult bit of the path'—and as she laid her warm soft palm in his, Felix felt a singular throb at his heart.

At the bridge he left her, and went back to the little glade and threw himself upon the grass. 'Gabrielle,' he murmured to himself—'Gabrielle. So that is her name, and it fits her to a nicety'; and then he recalled every look and every word she had spoken. 'I have never seen any one like her,' he finished, as he pulled himself together and returned to the *châlet*; 'she is so grave and sweet and innocent, so childlike and impulsive, and yet she is womanly too.'

At *table d'hôte* he watched anxiously for her, but she did not appear, and he heard afterwards that she had taken her meal with the comtesse, whose accident confined her to her room. The next morning he lingered in the gardens and ravine, but Mademoiselle de Brienne was invisible; but after the late *déjeuner* he encountered her in the corridor leading to the salon. She wore her white gown and a little black lace fichu, with a knot of crimson flowers, the whole toilette appeared charming to him. A blush came to her face when she saw him, but she evidently expected to be addressed.

'Good morning, mademoiselle. I trust you have recovered from your fatigue yesterday, and that Madame la Comtesse is progressing well.'

'Thank Heaven, yes, monsieur; the poor foot is less swollen and inflamed. Lisette, and that kind Madame Carruthers—how should one pronounce a name so difficult?—had improvised a couch in the salon, and Pierre had carried

the poor Valerie in his strong arms. It was better for the dear sufferer to be in the salon; it was so airy, and she could talk to people and forget her foot. Valerie wishes to thank you, monsieur, for your goodness to me yesterday,' finished Gabrielle; 'she saw you in the garden before *déjeuner*. Is it your pleasure that I make the introduction?'

'Certainly, mademoiselle; it would gratify me much to be presented to madame.'

And then Gabrielle gravely and with much dignity introduced the infatuated young man to the salon, where the fragile, bright-eyed countess lay in a nest of Indian shawls on a couch.

She held out her hand to him with a brilliant smile.

'I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Hamerton. You are a friend of Mrs. Brandon, are you not? I saw you talking to her at *table d'hôte*. You were very good to bring my runaway home yesterday; she was a naughty child, and strayed too far. Yes, Gabrielle chérie, you were as *méchante* as possible. I was in a terrible fright. My husband has put her in my charge, and she has only left her convent three weeks, and is like a child learning to walk alone. Ah, what an absurd education for a woman! Do you not agree with me? But I suppose it is treason to say so. There, Gabrielle, Mrs. Carruthers is waiting for you, and Mr. Hamerton is going to amuse me a little. We are compatriots, or at least nearly so'; and, dismissing her with a light kiss on either cheek, the voluble little countess went on with the conversation.

CHAPTER XXIII

‘YOU HAVE MY BEST WISHES, MONSIEUR’

‘Stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest—
Home-keeping hearts are happiest ;
For those that wander they know not where
Are full of trouble and full of care :
To stay at home is best.’

LONGFELLOW.

VALERIE COMTESSE DE BRIENNE was certainly a fascinating little person. Under other circumstances Mr. Hamerton would have found his *tête-à-tête* decidedly amusing, but her abrupt dismissal of Gabrielle somewhat disconcerted him, and it cost him some effort to conceal his chagrin.

Perfectly oblivious of his slight constraint, Madame de Brienne chatted on in her free American way. She was a clever little person, and had considerable humour—*esprit*, as her Parisian friends called it ; there was something naïve in her thorough satisfaction with herself and her surroundings.

‘I guess that I have made a lucky hit,’ she had said, when she informed her immediate circle in New York that she had accepted the handsome French count. ‘Etienne is just mad about me, and I calculate that I shall make it last.’ And Valerie kept her word, for the Comte de Brienne literally idolised his sprightly but fragile wife.

She adapted herself with wonderful ease to her change of circumstances, and took intense pride and pleasure in beautifying the old Brittany chateau. She delighted in hearing herself addressed as Madame la Comtesse, and secretly adored her husband. She showed a great deal of kindness to his step-sisters, and refused to understand the ill-natured hints of Mademoiselle Stéphanie de Brienne, that it was a pity that her nephew should be saddled with the maintenance of three step-sisters. ‘You will find out the inconvenience for yourself,

Valerie,' she added grimly, 'when Gabrielle is old enough to leave the convent, and Etienne has to provide her trousseau and dot with your money.' But if Valerie winced at this plain speaking, she put a good face on it.

'She is terrible—this old Aunt Stéphanie of yours, Etienne,' she said, with a grimace, when mademoiselle had left the chateau; 'she puts my teeth on edge with her sour speeches.'

'Pauvre petite!' observed the comte, tenderly; 'but we must have patience. Mademoiselle has a high spirit; she is a great lady; she never forgets that she is a de Brienne.'

'I am de Brienne too,' returned the little comtesse, stoutly, on which the comte kissed her hand; 'but she shall not set me against those poor dear girls just because they are poor, and we have to maintain them. What if it be my money?' continued Valerie, recklessly; 'it is yours too; we have nothing separate, have we, Etienne?'

'Mon ange! Your generosity is admirable, and I—I am the happiest of men. What do we care for Mademoiselle ma Tante? She is Catholique, but you, my Valerie, are the better Christian, and the saints will bless your goodness to those poor children.'

'Chut! You will turn my head, my friend, with all these compliments.' But Valerie's bright eyes were slightly moist. Ah! well, she loved power; her rôle pleased her. She had no children of her own—not yet, but perhaps one day that happiness might be given to her. It was not a difficult part to carry bon-bons and cadeaux to the convent, and to be almost smothered in kisses in return. 'See how Madame la Comtesse loves these poor little ones'—that was what the good nuns said to each other.

Madame la Comtesse, with her sprained, bandaged foot, was in need of amusement. The hotel was emptying fast, and a clever young English barrister was not to be despised. Valerie loved society, and, though she no longer flirted, Etienne did not like it, her cleverness and vivacity made her very attractive to men, and she accepted their homage as her right.

To his delight, Mr. Hamerton soon found himself on intimate terms with Madame de Brienne. Her helpless condition made his assistance indispensable. He could fetch and carry; offer his arm when, with the aid of a gold-headed stick, she managed to hobble to the *salle à manger* or to a garden-seat; and, as Gabrielle was always with her, he could enjoy her society without stint or limit.

Madame de Brienne's free American notions were very far

removed from the traditional Parisian etiquette. Mademoiselle's scanty grey hairs would have stood on end if she could have watched the trio; that Gabrielle should be conversing with an unmarried man; that she should saunter about the garden and even in the ravine under his guardianship would have seemed inconceivable to her.

'When the cat is away'; how runs the good old proverb? Perhaps her husband's absence made Valerie a little reckless. 'What is the poor child to do?' she said to herself; 'I cannot chain her to my couch. These French notions are absurd—antiquated. Mr. Hamerton is a gentleman, his people are good, he is quiet and gentle, one can trust him. When Etienne returns he can take Gabrielle about with him, and then there will be no need for Mr. Hamerton. Why should she lose her holiday for an idea, a bubble, a paltry French sentiment?' And it was in this way that madame washed her pretty little hands of all possible mischief.

The count was detained in Paris, and more than a fortnight passed—an enchanted fortnight to Mr. Hamerton; while to Gabrielle? Alas for her, that a sweet new light had begun to dawn in those lovely eyes; while the mere sight of the quiet young Englishman would bring a vivid blush to her cheek. They were always together at *déjeuner*, at dinner, and even when they drank their coffee on the balcony. In the fresh dewy mornings he knew where to find her—in the little chapel half-way up the road, above the *châlet*. Sometimes he would saunter up the hill to meet her, as she came down, looking pure and sweet in her white gown, with her missal in her hand. At other times he would steal into the dim scented chapel and watch her kneeling at her devotions. It did him good only to look at her. They were not of the same church, and yet he longed to kneel beside her, and join those pure petitions.

'Of what sins could she accuse herself?' he thought, when he saw her approaching the confessional. The sight made him angry, and drove him away; and then his brow cleared as he softly quoted Tennyson's words—

I know her: the worst thought that she has
Is whiter even than her pretty hand;

for he felt, with a lover's unreasoning instinct, that he could have staked his all on the purity and goodness of this young girl, of whose existence three weeks ago he had not been conscious. Yes, he loved her—he knew it now—with the whole

strength of his nature ; and, if possible, he meant to win her for his wife. And why should it not be possible ? As far as Gabrielle herself were concerned, he would have no difficulty. He could not be blind to the fact that already there was strong sympathy between them ; they talked less, and the silence between them was often unbroken. She grew shyer with him, and sometimes her voice trembled. Yes, he could make her love him—he was sure of that.

Would the Comte de Brienne countenance such a marriage for his step-sister ? True, the difference in their religion was an obstacle ; but he thought it might be got over. He was not a religious man himself, he owned with compunction ; possibly the comte might be equally worldly, as he had allied himself with a Protestant. He need not consider this point. If Gabrielle married him, she should be free to worship as she liked.

Then as regarded other matters. She was poor and dependent on her brother ; her dot would be small. She could not expect to make a great match. He had some private fortune of his own, and his prospects were good. He could offer his wife every comfort, and an entrance into the best society ; he thought even the Comte de Brienne need not look down on him. On the whole, he was far from hopeless.

That day, as they strolled together through the ravine, he talked much about himself and his earlier life. He drew a vivid portraiture of his sisters Laura and Sophy, and of his only brother Charlton ; and he explained to her, smiling a little to himself at the naïve ignorance she displayed on all practical matters, the nature of his profession, and his plans for the future.

'I shall marry. It is always best for a man to marry,' he said rather hurriedly ; 'and I am domestic, and should like a fireside of my own.'

'Monsieur should please himself, certainly' ; but she turned aside as she spoke to break off a flowering branch beside her, and he could not see her face.

'You think I am wise, that my circumstances would warrant such an intention ?' he persisted, somewhat foolishly it must be owned, for what could this convent-bred child know of such things ?

'Monsieur is the best judge of his own circumstances,' she said shyly ; 'to me,' she continued, laughing a little over the wonder of being consulted, 'monsieur seems rich, fabulously rich —n'est-ce pas ?'

'No, mademoiselle; but I have enough for comfort, and it seems to me'—looking at her downcast face—'that we are alike in not caring about money.'

'I have never had money, monsieur, in the convent. We did not need it; and now Valerie is so kind she gives me all I want. If I ask for anything it is *mais oui certainement*, as though it were the most natural thing. Such generosity makes one ashamed.'

'I should love to give you things, mademoiselle.' He said it almost under his breath; but she heard it, and a blush overspread her face, but she made no answer. 'Perhaps I ought not to have said that,' he continued, and there was softness in his tones; 'but sometimes you seem such a child to me.'

'But I am not a child, monsieur,' she whispered.

'I know that. Please forgive me. If you knew how I reverence you, Mademoiselle Gabrielle'—her name escaping him in his excitement. 'I want you to do something for me.'

'For you?'—lifting her dark eyes to his face.

'Yes, for me. We are friends, are we not? great friends, so I trust. Will you take my hand and say that you wish me success—that you hope my dearest wish on earth may be fulfilled? I think it will be a good omen for my future if you could tell me that.'

She stood for a moment hesitating, as though she were doubtful of his meaning. 'Is that all?' she asked at last, in a low voice.

'It is all that you can do for me at present.'

'But it is such a bagatelle,' she returned, trying to laugh. But his repressed agitation communicated itself to her, and he could see that she was trembling; her very fingers were fluttering as she placed her hand in his.

'You have my best wishes, monsieur. May *le bon Dieu* give you your heart's desire. Have I said that rightly?'

'You have said it perfectly; thanks a thousand times. Now we must go back to madame'; for he was afraid of himself—afraid that if he remained longer with her, he might be tempted to speak more openly of his hopes. His heart's desire; did she guess what that was? He had no means of knowing, for Gabrielle did not open her lips again; and the moment they entered the garden she left Felix to make his way alone to the seat where madame was reclining, and took refuge in the house.

'What have you done with Gabrielle?' asked madame, a

little inquisitively, as she looked up at him. ‘She has sped across the grass like a frightened fawn.’

But Mr. Hamerton returned an evasive answer; he had an idea that Madame de Brienne guessed at his infatuation for her young sister-in-law, and did not discourage it. He wondered if it would be well to make her his confidante, and get her to plead his cause with her husband; but before he could make up his mind on this point, she began another subject.

‘I wanted to speak to Gabrielle; she would be so pleased. My husband is returning to-night; he will arrive late, and perhaps he may bring a friend with him, the Comte D’Arcy. They are old friends, and have fought in the same regiment. He was Etienne’s colonel——’

‘And the comte returns to-night?’ He felt a sudden pang as he said this. Their time of freedom, of happy wanderings, of careless surveillance, was over. Gabrielle would now be always under her brother’s wing. The Comte D’Arcy would be a bore; he almost felt vexed at madame’s radiant good-humour. She was delighted at the prospect of seeing her husband again, and had made a brilliant toilette in honour of the occasion.

‘My husband seems in high spirits,’ she continued. ‘He speaks of having something very pleasant to communicate to me, to enliven my fête day. He is mysterious; perhaps he has some wonderful cadeau. I have never met Count D’Arcy. La comtesse died last year, and he was in retirement. He has a fine estate in Normandy. Etienne has often spoken of it.’

She talked incessantly in this strain, until Felix made an excuse to leave her. In the corridor he came upon Gabrielle; she was standing at a window, looking at the snow-peaks with the last pink glow lingering on them. She wore a jewelled cross at her neck that had belonged to her mother, and the rubies shone redly on her white dress as he stepped up to her. She started and would have moved away, but he detained her. He must keep her by him a moment. After this evening they would not be alone together.

‘Mademoiselle—Gabrielle’—he separated the words involuntarily—‘there is something I must tell you. Madame has just informed me that the comte is to arrive this evening.’

‘Etienne! but that is good news. Why do you look so solemn, monsieur? I shall be charmed to see that dearest of brothers. Oh, how enchanted Valerie will be!’

‘Madame certainly seems in wonderful spirits. Your brother is to bring a friend with him, the Comte D’Arcy.’

Then Gabrielle's eyes began to sparkle.

'The brave colonel, who is Etienne's hero? But it will be adorable to see and perhaps speak with him. He is so brave; once he saved Etienne's life. Valerie must tell you that story, but it always makes her cry. In the convent chapel Marie and I have often prayed for him—for the brave man who carried our dear wounded one out of the battle. Once I gave him my intention. When one is grateful, monsieur, and has nothing else to offer, one can always give one's prayers—"the dew of charity," as Sister Nathalie used to say, "which are drawn up to heaven, and return again in showers of blessings." Was she not right, monsieur?'

'How can I tell?' he replied a little hoarsely, and his eyes fell under that pure glance; 'but doubtless you are right. I am glad my news has pleased you; for myself, I shall regret our pleasant walks and talks. With your brother and the Comte D'Arcy, I am afraid my society will be no longer needed.'

He tried to speak coldly, nay, indifferently, but his eyes told another tale, and a deep glow spread over the girl's face.

'One must always need one's friends. Why do you speak as though you would be *de trop*, monsieur? Etienne will be charmed to make your acquaintance.'

She spoke quickly, almost nervously, moving away all the time. But he followed her closely, and they reached the head of the stairs together.

'One moment before you descend, mademoiselle—only one moment, Gabrielle.'

'And then, as she turned to him, steadying herself by laying a hand on the balustrade, he put his over it with a firm detaining grasp. 'Tell me one thing for my comfort—that you do not want to get rid of me; that you will always keep me for your friend?'

It was a declaration of love, said in those tones, and her head drooped until her face was hidden.

'Speak, Gabrielle—just that word.'

'I never want monsieur to leave us,' she whispered; and then at the sound of footsteps she almost tore her hand away.

'I am not wrong—she loves me,' he muttered to himself. 'I will speak to the comte to-morrow.'

When he entered the *salle à manger* half an hour later, he saw at once that the travellers had arrived. Madame was seated beside her husband looking positively radiant, and on the other side of Gabrielle was an elderly, weather-beaten man with a grey moustache, who looked every inch a soldier.

Madame la Comtesse made the necessary introductions, and both the gentlemen accosted Mr. Hamerton with perfect civility and good breeding. The Comte de Brienne thanked him for his polite attentions to his wife.

'Madame tells me how much she is indebted to you for your kindness, monsieur. She would have been terribly ennuyée in this strange place without your friendly services. I am heavily in your debt, Monsieur Hamerton.'

'I am afraid the debt is all on the other side,' returned Felix, trying to appear at his ease; and then he glanced at Gabrielle. She was listening attentively to something the Comte D'Arcy was telling her. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes downcast, but she looked unmistakably happy. But throughout the meal Felix never once heard her voice. She was evidently too shy to venture on any conversation with the hero. As soon as dinner was over they all disappeared, and he saw them no more that night.

The next morning he half made up his mind to walk to the little chapel as usual, but a moment later he saw Gabrielle pass under his window. Her brother was with her. They seemed talking rather earnestly, and she did not look up. Felix took his walk in another direction, lost his way, and came back heated and tired to find *déjeuner* nearly over. Madame de Brienne, who was rising from her place with her husband's assistance, nodded to him with a smile. Gabrielle had probably just quitted the table, and he sat down in no pleasant mood to appease his hunger. Things were not going well this morning; as he had predicted, the arrival of the stranger had spoiled everything. He had letters to write, which kept him in his own room for a couple of hours. When he had finished he went down into the garden. After strolling about aimlessly for a little, he questioned one of the servants, and learnt from him that the Comte de Brienne and his friend had driven out; he believed madame was with him.

'But not mademoiselle?'

No; Pierre believed that la jeune demoiselle was in her room. Would monsieur like to question Lisette?

But Felix could not take such a liberty. He would only place himself where Gabrielle could see him from the window. He had already discovered that her room was near his. He would read, or pretend to read, and perhaps by and by there would be a shadow on the grass, and he would see her standing before him in her white gown, and some flowers in her hand—

always some flowers. 'Monsieur, what are you reading?' for ever she would have some such question to put to him. Oh, he could hear her voice so plainly! But he waited hour after hour, but she did not come, and his heart began to feel like lead in his breast. Was she ill? Had anything happened to vex her? Why was she shutting herself up in her room, and driving him to despair, instead of basking in the sunshine and the sweet air as usual?

When he heard the sound of wheels, he dragged himself up moodily and went up to his room to prepare for dinner. Thank Heaven! they must meet in half an hour, and even if he could not speak to her, he would be able to see from her face if anything troubled her, and afterwards, before he slept, he would demand an audience from the count.

What was his disappointment, then, when he entered the *salle à manger*, to see her empty chair. He looked so pale and apprehensive that Madame de Brienne, who was watching him, leant forward and, under the cover of her husband's talk, said in a low voice in English—

'My little sister has a bad headache, and we have recommended her to rest. Come to me in the garden presently. I have much to tell you while the gentlemen take their walk'; and then she unfurled her fan and motioned away the soup. 'It is too hot to eat, my friend,' she said, addressing her husband. 'It seems to me that we shall have a storm presently, and the fear of it has taken away my appetite.'

'Is she not a coward, count?' returned her husband. 'Fear of a thunderstorm is thy last fancy, my Valerie. Shall I remain with you in the garden, or will you take refuge with Gabrielle?'

'Now you are laughing at me, Etienne,' observed madame, with a pout; 'and I hate any one to laugh at me. No, no; go—go with your friend and finish your business. Mr. Hamerton will take care of me; is it not so, monsieur?' and she looked across at him with her brilliant smile.

But Felix only responded with a bow. He was not in the humour to indulge in harmless badinage with the fascinating Valerie. His thoughts were with the dark-eyed girl who was suffering in her chamber above, or with Lisette's kindly ministrations. 'May le bon Dieu give you your heart's desire'; he could hear her say that over and over again.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LOST PARADISE

'That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more :
Too common ! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.'

TENNYSON.

'MR. HAMERTON, why are you so triste and bored this evening? Have your English letters brought bad news?'

Madame de Brienne put these questions in her usual airy fashion, as she disposed of herself and her laces comfortably on the balcony seat. Lisette had just brought her out some light wraps; but, in spite of her gay *insouciance*, an unprejudiced observer would have detected a slight uneasiness in Valerie's manner.

'My domestic budget has been perfectly satisfactory,' returned Felix, striving to appear at his ease, but failing signally. 'How have you passed the day, madame?'

'To tell you the truth, Mr. Hamerton, it has seemed like three days rolled into one, so much has happened in it. What do you suppose is the wonderful piece of news my husband has brought? It has almost taken my breath away. Etienne is so impetuous; if he thinks of a thing, it is already done. He was like that in his courting—"Take me or leave me; but if you leave me, I shall blow my brains out." That is the sort of wooing that makes a woman sure of her own mind. Oh, these de Briennes are terrible! Their yea is yea with a vengeance.'

'And the news?'

'Oh, the news?'—and Valerie's voice was a little shrill, as though it were not quite under her command—'is nothing more or less than the betrothal of Mademoiselle de Brienne to the Comte D'Arcy; voilà tout, monsieur.'

For one moment, one insupportable moment, there was dead

silence ; the solid ground beneath Felix's feet seemed to rock ; and then, in a voice that sounded strange to himself—

‘Are you jesting with me, madame?’

‘*Mon Dieu*, should I jest on such a subject? Etienne's sister, too. Alas, no; it is a fact accomplished, it was arranged in Paris. They were all there—*Mademoiselle Stéphanie* and the *Marquise de Beauvilliers*. She is Count D'Arcy's sister. It is a brilliant match; my husband is enchanted. Think of a man like *Comte D'Arcy* wishing to ally himself with our little one, who has no special beauty, at least at present, and whose dot will be so insignificant! No wonder my poor little sister is overwhelmed.’

‘Good heavens, madame!’ exclaimed Felix, in a tone that betrayed inward torture. ‘Is this what you call a marriage? That child, who has but just left her convent, and a man old enough to be her grandfather.’

‘Fie, Mr. Hamerton; you are exaggerating. The comte is not sixty yet; and he is a fine-looking man. True, he is a widower, but he has no children; he is a kind-hearted gentleman, and a brave man. He will treat *Gabrielle* with the utmost tenderness. Do you think Etienne would give his cherished little one to a monster? The comte is his friend. In old days they were in the same regiment. *Comte D'Arcy* saved my husband's life; he carried him out of the battle under fire. Etienne is devoted to him; he says nothing has ever pleased him so much as this marriage.’

‘One moment, madame. Has *Mademoiselle de Brienne* consented to this monstrous arrangement?’

‘You talk strangely, Mr. Hamerton’; and *Valerie* drew herself up a little stiffly. ‘But perhaps your English notions make it difficult for you to understand. *Gabrielle* is a good, obedient child. She adores Etienne; his will is law to her. She reverences the *Comte D'Arcy*; it is part of her family creed. To me she confided that she had no wish to marry; so many girls say that. The subject agitated her, but she knew better than to remonstrate. And the comte was very gentle with her; his manners are perfect. In spite of his grey hairs, any woman could lose her heart to him.’

‘Am I to understand, madame, that *mademoiselle* is not permitted a choice in her own destiny?’ Felix's words came thickly through his dry lips.

‘*Gabrielle* is quite resigned to her brilliant lot,’ returned madame, rather pettishly.

She was a kind-hearted little person, and hated to inflict pain; and this sombre young Englishman, with his pale face and fierce eyes, seemed to reproach her as though she were the author of his unhappiness. Why had she not been more strict in her surveillance? He has lost his heart to Gabrielle. It was a pity, certainly, but he would get over it. Etienne would not have entertained his suit for a moment; he was ambitious for his sister. Gabrielle was not striking at present, but she held the prospect of future beauty.

‘I have been talking to her for more than an hour,’ she went on; ‘until she told me that I made her head ache. The comte is adorably generous; he will make magnificent settlements. He has a fine estate in Normandy, and a suite of apartments in Paris that are truly superb; and he intends to refurnish her rooms in the chateau. He already regards her with true affection.’

‘Madame, why have you permitted us to be so much together? Could you not see?’ and then he stopped, almost choked with his emotion.

Then Valerie started, and two burning spots came into her check.

‘Mr. Hamerton, for Heaven’s sake be careful, or you will get me into trouble with my husband. I was careless; I meant no harm. How could I guess what was in Etienne’s mind? We had not discussed Gabrielle’s marriage. She is so good; she is a little angel of patience and resignation; she would not grieve us for worlds. If you value my peace—her peace—ah, what am I saying?—the peace of a happy united family, go away, and leave us together. I am selfish; I ask too much, perhaps; but you do not know the De Briennes. Etienne is proud; he has a high spirit. He would not permit an Englishman to love his sister, or to talk to her; he would regard it as an insult. The De Brienne women hear of love first from their husbands.’

In her misery she laid her small feverish hands on his arm. It was evident that Valerie was in grim earnest for once in her life. Her reckless disregard of family traditions might cost her and Gabrielle dear. Perhaps she was selfish in her fear, but she was nevertheless very sorry for the young man.

‘Very well, I will go; but I must see her first,’ he began; but Valerie gave him a little push.

‘Hush! they are returning, my husband and the comte. Go into the house. I want Lisette; she must bring more

wraps—anything—everything. They must not find us talking like this. Another shawl; yes—go—go!’

She stamped her tiny foot in her impatience, and Mr. Hamerton reluctantly went on her bidding. He found Lisette, gave her the order, and went up to his room. He was still numb and dizzy with the blow he had received, and which the irony of fate had dealt him; the walls of the *châlet* seemed to suffocate him; but he must be near her this one night more!

As the thought passed through his mind, the faint gleam of something white at the far end of the corridor attracted his attention. The end where he stood was dark, but the moonlight illumined the upper part. Could it be Gabrielle? It moved, and then stood still. His heart began to beat more quickly; the painful stricture of the throat relaxed, and he drew his breath more freely; then he walked noiselessly up the corridor.

It was Gabrielle, but she was absorbed in her thoughts and did not hear him. Was she at her devotions? Her hands were crossed over her bosom, and her lips were moving. She looked paler—etherealised in the white light, and there was a great sadness in her beautiful eyes.

‘Jamais—jamais. Oh, mon Dieu, must it be so?’ he heard her murmur. But at his softly uttered ‘Gabrielle’ she turned and extended her hands to him.

‘It is you, monsieur. I saw you with Valerie; she has been telling you. ‘Ah!’ for his grasp hurt her, and she was looking in his face as though she saw something there that pained her.

‘Yes, I have heard. Gabrielle, for God’s sake tell me if you are happy; if your brother’s arrangement pleases you. You have been weeping; your eyes are swollen. Gabrielle, my dearest, will you not refuse to marry this man, who is old enough to be your father?’

‘Oh, hush, monsieur!’ and she strove to disengage herself, casting a frightened glance behind her, but he held her hands too tightly. ‘You are kind; you mean well; but you do not understand our customs. How can I refuse to marry the husband my brother has chosen for me?’

‘But it makes you unhappy?’ he asked tenaciously.

‘Unhappy? Oh no. I have to obey Etienne, and I reverence the good man who is to do me so much honour. It is true that I wept a little, because I did not want to be married, and I begged that Etienne would send me back to the convent,

where I was so happy ; but they laughed at me and called me a silly child, and Valerie talked about my corbeille. Perhaps I am foolish,' she continued ; 'but life is so solemn, and the future frightens me ; and I must bid you good-bye, monsieur, and that troubles me too ; but I shall never forget your kindness.'

'Gabrielle, I cannot let you go. How am I to live without you ?'

Then she looked at him with a smile of divine tenderness. 'I shall pray for monsieur, that le bon Dieu may give him his heart's desire.'

'My heart's desire ? Oh, Gabrielle, when you know !'

'It is not for me to know monsieur's private affairs,' she said quickly, and there was a new dignity about her that recalled to his mind that she was a De Brienne. 'Monsieur has been good to tell me so much already. It is well to pray for one's friends—that the saints and the Holy Virgin may have them in their keeping ; and in my new home'—she sighed, and then recovered herself—'I shall still remember my friends. Will you suffer me to go now, monsieur ?'

'One word. Is there to be no hope at all for me ? Have you indeed given your word to marry the Comte D'Arcy ?'

'Most certainly my word is given. We are affianced ! Is that not the term ?'

'And you mean to be happy, Gabrielle ?'

'I mean to do my duty ; happiness is a gift of le bon Dieu, n'est-ce pas, monsieur ? It is for Him to give or withhold ; that is what the good sisters taught me. But I will pray always for monsieur's happiness.'

'I am not worthy of your prayers,' he replied, kneeling down beside her and covering the thin young hands with his kisses.

These were his last words to her, and only a deep sigh answered him. Then he left her, and stole down the gallery. He paused for an instant on the threshold of his room, and looked back. Her hands were crossed on her bosom again, and she was looking up at the clouds scudding across the moon.

The next day Felix left the châlet. When he took leave of the Comte de Brienne and his wife, Gabrielle was with them. She looked very grave and pale, and when he took her hand it was cold as ice.

'I wish mademoiselle every happiness,' was all he said.

'Monsieur has my good wishes also,' she returned, almost inaudibly.

But Valerie, who was watching them both very closely, shivered as though she were cold.

'I always honour a brave man, Mr. Hamerton,' she said, in the lowest possible voice, as he bowed over her hand.

But to this no response was possible; and then as he went out the gate of his paradise closed behind him.

Such was the substance of the story that Felix Hamerton related to Constance, but he told it very briefly. It was not until years afterwards, when the circumstances of his life were changed, that he ever told it in its entirety. Nevertheless, Constance wept freely as she listened.

'Felix, my poor Felix, do forgive me!'

'Forgive you, Constance!' he repeated, in his surprise. He had expected sympathy, and even her tears did not astonish him; but this was the last speech he was prepared to hear.

'Yes, forgive me for having teased you so unmercifully. When I think of all the nonsense I talked, I am ready to sink into the ground with shame. But how was I to guess that your life had held such trouble? You have been so patient and so long-suffering. Well, it has taught me one lesson—never to judge any one again.'

'Then in that case I am content to be a finger-post.'

'Oh, do not laugh; I cannot bear it. What a story—how pathetic! That sweet Gabrielle! And it is seven years ago. Let me think a moment. Was it not the time when you came back looking so ill, as though you had had a fever?'

'I had had a touch of fever in Paris.'

'Yes, I remember. We were all so shocked at your appearance; but we never guessed'; and her eyes were full of tears again.

Then he took her hand and pressed it in his brotherly fashion.

'You are very good to give me so much sympathy. Your kindness makes me feel as though I ought to have told you before; but it is not easy to speak of such things.'

'I understand what you mean, but it is safe with me. I should not speak of such a thing even to my husband. Felix, this is not all, surely. In all these years have you heard nothing, have you never seen her again?' But she was almost sorry that she asked the question when she saw his face.

'I have seen her once,' he returned; 'it was in the opera-house in Paris two years ago. I recognised her at once. She looked much older—ten years older, but very beautiful. I

always knew how beautiful she would be some day. She was blazing with diamonds, but her grandeur had not changed her. I could read that in her eyes; she was still Gabrielle.'

'Do you think she is happy, Felix?'

'How can I tell? Did she not say herself that happiness was a gift of le bon Dieu? Her eyes were sad, but then she had just lost her child.'

'Her child?'

'Her only one—a boy. Madame de Brienne told me; I met her accidentally at Cannes. She was very friendly and pleasant. She was talking about her two children, when she told me that suddenly. "He was two years old, and as beautiful as an angel," were her words. "The count idolised him; he will never get over it; the sorrow has aged him. Gabrielle is as unselfish as ever. She hides her own grief that she may not add to his, but her boy was everything to her. I tell Etienne that she is more a saint than a woman. I never knew any one so good. The poor people round the Château D'Arcy quite worship her."'

'Do you think she saw you, Felix?'

'I do not know—I am not sure, but I almost think not. Until I spoke to Madame de Brienne the sad look in her eyes troubled me, but of course it was the loss of her child.' He sighed a little wearily. 'Let us change the subject; it is not good to dwell on the past.'

'Let me say something more, and then you shall be left in peace. Does not the mere fact of her being married make things easier to bear? Do not think me unsympathetic, Felix; I could not be that, but seven years is a long time, and——' She hesitated.

'You want to ask me if I have not got over it, but you lack courage. In a way I suppose I have, but while Gabrielle lives I feel as though no woman could ever take her place. Do I shock you?'

'No, for I understand you too well. You have a faithful nature, Felix. Perhaps I ought not to say it; but if the count be old——' Then she saw at once that the remark displeased him.

'We must be very careful not to formulate such a thought, even to ourselves,' he returned slowly. 'The count is hale and hearty, and I trust has many years of life before him.' Then he paused a moment, and went on as though he were pursuing an old and familiar line of thought. 'The mere fact of your

hinting that shows that you have not grasped the salient point of Gabrielle's character. She is utterly unselfish; she would not rest until she had taught herself to love her husband. There would be first gratitude and veneration for the hero, and then affection for the father of her boy.' He spoke as though he were thinking aloud, and Constance felt rebuked—as though she were treading uninvited in some holy place. Gabrielle de Brienne was only a sacred memory to Felix; but none the less, so she felt, had she spoilt his life. But for that brief romance of his, he might be making some other woman happy. 'Oh, the pity of it!' thought Constance, speaking out of the fulness of her satisfied life. 'If any man deserves a good wife, it is Felix; he is so strong and so gentle, and I think he is less selfish than other people.'

'I have talked you into the blues,' observed Felix, regretfully. 'Let me ring for the lights'; and he put his hand on the bell.

He had scarcely done so before they heard carriage wheels, and the next moment Mr. Lorimer and his brother-in-law entered the room. They looked fagged and muddy, but seemed in high spirits, and consoled with Felix on losing the day's sport.

'Do go and change your things; you are both as wet as possible,' remonstrated Mrs. Wyndham.

'Well, it was a trifle muddy,' remarked Reginald, 'especially in the spiuney; in fact, it was a perfect swamp. Well, come along, Harcourt; I am as hungry as a hunter. I feel like Esau before he had his lentils. By the by, Felix, Sir William sent you his compliments, and would be glad to see you on Friday.'

'Thanks awfully, but I have made up my mind to go up to town to-morrow; honour bright, Reg, I cannot spare another day. If you like to invite me to eat my Christmas dinner with you, I will not refuse; and perhaps I might stay over the New Year.'

'But we wanted Reg to come to us, didn't we, Harcourt?' and Constance looked appealingly at her husband.

'No, no,' responded Reginald, eagerly; 'Hamerton is booked, and I mean to keep him to his engagement. You and Harcourt and the boys must come too. I hate Christmas in London, and it will be a less dreary affair if I can see you all round me here.' And as Reginald seemed in earnest, the thing was definitely arranged, though Mr. Wyndham pretended

to grumble as soon as he reached the privacy of his own dressing-room.

‘Reginald makes us awfully comfortable, and I believe he likes to have us, but we must not tire out our welcome; a fellow does not always want to be saddled with his own belongings.’

‘We should never tire out Reggie,’ returned Constance, confidently. ‘He does love to talk to you, Harcourt—he often tells me so; and the change is so good for you.’

‘When Reginald marries again, he will not want us quite so often,’ observed Mr. Wyndham.

But to this Constance made no reply. Felix Hamerton’s sad story had struck deep; for the present at least she was cured of her love of match-making.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LETTER WITH THE BLACK SEAL

'God keeps a niche
In heaven to hold our idols ; and albeit
He brake them to our faces, and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised, complete,
Their dust shook off, their beauty glorified,
New memmons singing in the great God-light.'

E. B. BROWNING.

THERE are curious coincidences in life. Ever afterwards Felix Hamerton thought it one of the strangest experiences that had ever befallen him, that he should have told that story to Constance on that evening. If he had guessed what was in store for him, would he ever have brought himself to break the silence? But not then or afterwards did he answer this question.

Human life is full of these mysterious surprises.

Our friend has gone away, perhaps to the other end of the world ; he has passed out of our daily existence ; we have ceased to think of him ; the hand of Time, the inexorable, has blotted out the familiar lineaments from the canvas of the present. One day we remember him ; something he has said or done occurs to us with peculiar vividness ; his face, his very tricks of voice and manner, are fresh in our memory. Suddenly we look up ; there is our friend coming round the corner and smiling at us. A sort of shock goes through us. What does it mean ?

Or, again, we have heard nothing for so many years ; but no news is good news, so all must be well. All is well, indeed, but not in our way. That black-edged envelope with the foreign stamp bears a sombre message to us.

Such a letter lay beside Felix Hamerton's plate the next

morning. He glanced at it curiously once or twice as he went on with his breakfast. Such letters were no novelty to him; his business brought him a host of strange correspondents. Had he ever seen that small pointed handwriting before? A sort of conviction that it was not quite unknown to him made him at last break the heavy black seal and read the signature. Constance, who was that moment glancing in his direction, saw a quick startled look spring to his eyes. Then he laid down the letter again, and made some attempt to finish his meal.

A little time afterwards she encountered her brother in the hall. He had been interviewing his housekeeper.

'Where is Felix?' she asked.

'He has gone for a walk,' was the reply. 'He said he had some business to think over, and he wanted to be alone; something vexatious, I expect, for he looked awfully glum. He has made up his mind to take the 5.40 train from Grantham. I shall drive him in, and be back in time for dinner.'

'I suppose Harcourt is writing his letters in the library. By the by, Reggie, he has quite decided that we must go back on Monday. He wanted to leave me behind for a few days, but I would not hear of that; he does not give himself proper time for his meals unless I am there to look after him.'

'I must not press you to stay,' returned Reginald, discontentedly, 'but it is a pretty clean sweep—Hamerton this evening, and you and Harcourt and the boys on Monday. I shall be fit to hang myself on Monday evening.'

'Dear Reggie, if you knew how I hate to leave you!'—pressing his arm caressingly. 'But you must go out more. Go over to the Gate House—Mrs. Winter is always so pleased to see you; and then you must run up to us for a week or so at the end of next month.'

'Oh, I shall get on all right,' was his reply to this; 'don't bother your head about me. Harcourt is very good to spare you so much as he does. Would you like me to drive you over to the Gate House to-morrow, to say good-bye? We could bring Miss Winter back if you like.'

And Constance joyfully consented to this. If Reginald chose to suggest Violet of his own account, she would not throw cold water on his plan; on the contrary, she would go at once to the library and write the most persuasive little note to Violet, bidding her be ready for them on the following afternoon.

Felix did not come in to luncheon, but Reginald did not seem at all surprised.

‘I suppose he has gone for a good long stretch, and will get some bread and cheese at an inn; that is generally his way. He has left orders to have his things packed up. Harcourt and I are going for a stroll by and by, but we shall be back long before it is time to start for Grantham. Will you come with us, Constance?’

But Mrs. Wyndham excused herself. She could not quite divest herself of an uneasy fancy that Felix had received some bad news. It was hardly like him to absent himself so long on this last day. As she needed exercise, she put on some wraps—for the day was damp and chilly—and walked briskly up and down the avenue. Felix would see her on his return, and would join her. But she had walked for more than half an hour before she saw him coming through the copse. He was walking slowly as though he were tired, but he quickened his steps as soon as he caught sight of her.

‘You have come out to meet me,’ he said at once.

‘Yes. What a time you have been! It is past three, and—oh, Felix, what is the matter?’

She had not intended to put the question so abruptly, but she was almost startled by the change in him. He had a grey, worn look on his face, and yet his eyes were strangely bright. Perhaps it was a little odd of her, but at that moment she realised how Felix would look when he was old. His features seemed pinched and dwindled, but as he spoke the impression disappeared.

‘Shall you be afraid to sit down?’ was his reply. ‘My walk has taken it out of me, and I want to show you something.’

Then she looked at him in speechless dread, as he took the foreign envelope from his pocket. He had a small book in his hand, which he put carefully in his pocket.

‘You have taken a sister’s place to me,’ he said quietly, ‘and I am going to let you read this. Do not hurry with it. I must go to the house for a few minutes to speak to Norton, but I will be back directly.’

‘But she laid her hand on his arm. ‘Let me go back with you and ask Norton to give you some wine; you look dreadful.’

‘There is no need; I will ask for it myself, and a crust of bread as well. I have forgotten all about luncheon. Let me find you here when I return’; and then he left her.

Constance watched him until he was out of sight. She was

afraid to read the letter, she was so sure that it contained bad news. Nevertheless, his confidence gratified her; she liked to feel that he trusted her.

The letter was as follows:—

DEAR MR. HAMERTON—We have met so recently that I shall not need to recall myself to your memory. Ah! how little we thought, that day at Cannes, when I was telling you about my darlings, that this terrible thing would happen. My husband is in great trouble—what do I say?—we are all in trouble. That dear angel whom we loved so tenderly has passed to her rest; our beloved Gabrielle is gone, and the Count is broken-hearted.

In the old days your heart was broken too. I saw it in your face, though you said so little. Can you forgive me my careless surveillance, my gross negligence? Ah! it was all my fault. Etienne knows it now, and he has permitted me to write. 'It is long ago,' he says, 'and young men's hearts are soon healed'; but I tell him not always, for you have never married.

This is one reason why I am writing this letter—to ask you to pardon my frivolity and carelessness; but there is also another reason—that our dear one has sent you a message. Do you start, dear Mr. Hamerton? Did you believe yourself forgotten? No, a thousand times, no!

Let me tell you how it happened.

It seems to me, on looking back, that my poor Gabrielle has slowly faded from the hour they laid Gaston in his little grave. Maternity was a passion with her, and he was her only one, and so lovely; to see him was to think of the angels. And then her husband was old. Perhaps she hid her grief too much, that she might not pain the Count, and her health suffered. But at first no one noticed it. When the physician's verdict came, it was a shock to us all. No hope—not a vestige of hope; and we all loved her so.

I was with her when she died, and never was death more peaceful or more welcome. "I shall go to him"; those are good words, Valerie.' I think that was almost her last speech.

Two days before her death, I was sitting beside her. She was propped up with pillows, that she might see the sunset. Those sunsets from the Château D'Arcy are superb. It seems sometimes as though the gate of heaven were open, and one had a glimpse of the jasper throne.

All at once she began speaking of you, and of those days at the chalet. If I ever see you I will tell you everything, and perhaps such words may console you for a past pain. How beautiful she looked as she spoke them! In spite of her weakness there was such radiance in her eyes, as though the fight were over, and she had gained her rest. But I will tell you a few words she said.

'Monsieur was very good; he saw it all. He knew what he was to me; but he went away, and left me to do my duty. He was so generous, that he spared me suffering. Mon Dieu, what it was to see him go! But it is all over now.'

And by and by—

'I have seen monsieur again, Valerie. That night at the opera-house. He was changed and older, but I knew him; I should know

him anywhere. He does not look happy ; I fear that he has not yet forgotten.'

And then, a little while afterwards, she drew the missal I am sending you from under her pillow, and looked at it. 'I used it at my first communion, and every day since ; my old name, Gabrielle de Brienne, is in it. When I am dead, will you send it to Monsieur Hamerton ? Tell him it is a token that I have not forgotten my friend, that never have I ceased to pray that le bon Dieu may now and in eternity grant him his heart's desire. Perhaps'—and then with such a smile ; ah, if you could have seen it !—'perhaps our hearts' desires will meet us there for the first time.'

There ! my hand is weary, I can write no more ; my husband tells me I have written too much already.—I remain, dear Mr. Hamerton,
yours most sorrowfully,
VALERIE DE BRIENNE.

When Felix returned, Constance was weeping, but she checked her tears as he sat down beside her and put out his hand silently for the letter. All her life long Constance remembered that moment, and the heap of moist yellow leaves that lay at her feet or were swirled slowly down the avenue. Some of the trees were almost bare now, and through the stript branches she could see the dull October sky. There was something sombre and solemn in the prospect ; summer and youth, and the brightness of life, seemed over—that was what it seemed to say—and there only remained decay and death and human sorrow.

'Ah, Felix, it is better so' ; that was all she could find to say.

'Much better,' he returned gently. 'Thank you in Gabrielle's name for those tears, Constance ; but there is no need for you to shed them.' And then he murmured half to himself, but she heard and understood him, 'Perhaps our hearts' desires will meet us there for the first time.'

They sat a little longer in silence. Constance's tact told her that no speech was needed to convey her sympathy—the tears she had shed for the unknown Gabrielle had told him all he wished to know. Presently he rose and held out his hand.

'There, it is over ; but I will not say the world is a poorer place to me while I have such true friends remaining. We will not speak of this again, you and I. Now I am going to wish you good-bye. When Reginald comes in, tell him I have gone to my room. God bless you ! and thanks a thousand times for your sympathy.'

And before she could answer him he was gone.

'It is as dull as ditch water without Hamerton,' observed Reginald, later on that evening. 'You have hardly opened your lips all dinner-time, Constance, and now you have buried yourself in a book.'

Constance coloured a little at her brother's reproach, but her husband answered for her.

'Constance looks tired; I vote we have a game of billiards, Reginald. I think she will be glad to get rid of us to-night.'

And Constance was too honest to contradict this. Reginald's talk wearied her this evening. She was haunted by the remembrance of the solemn look in Felix's eyes as he quoted Gabrielle's words. Oh, it was better far that she should be taken from a world that had never suited her—better that he should think of her blissful and reunited to her child, than remember her in her imperial beauty. By and by the pain would fade, and only a sacred memory remain; and he was too young to lose all the good of his life for a memory. 'Time heals everything; by and by he will be consoled,' thought Constance, with a touch of philosophy.

When Violet Winter opened Mrs. Wyndham's note, a flush of pleasure came to her face.

'Constance and her brother propose calling on us to-morrow afternoon,' she said, in a tone that betrayed her satisfaction. 'She is leaving on Monday, and wishes to bid us good-bye. I am to go back with them, she says, and stay over Sunday.'

A dubious 'Humph!' fell from Miss Wentworth's lips; but Mrs. Winter, who was counting a troublesome bit of cross-stitch embroidery, made no observation.

'Did you hear me, mother?' asked Violet, a little impatiently.

Then Miss Wentworth gave a little sniff of displeasure.

'It was only the other day that you were staying at the Hall,' she remarked, in a judicial manner. 'I don't know what you think about it, Amy, but it strikes me that Mrs. Wyndham is not showing her accustomed good taste. In her brother's peculiar position, she ought to be a little more careful.'

'Of what, Cousin Tess?' and Violet looked dangerous.

'I was speaking to your mother, my dear,' returned Miss Wentworth, who in her provoking moods was wont to set aside Violet as though she were a child, 'and I know she will agree with me. People are talking already about Mr. Lorimer. When I was calling at Combe Lea the other day, Lady Martin asked me, in rather a peculiar tone, if Mr. Lorimer were not a great deal at the Gate House. It was not so much the question as the way she looked that put me at once on my guard.'

'I wonder you care to repeat gossip, Cousin Tess,' returned Violet, disdainfully. 'I hope you told Lady Martin that Mr.

Lorimer has always been a great deal with us'; then she carried off her letter, and shut herself up in the gable room. 'If I had stopped downstairs a moment longer, I should have lost my temper,' she said to herself, and her cheeks were burning. 'How dare she insinuate that it is bad taste for me to go so much to the Hall? as though he would ever think of such a thing now, if he did not then!' But Violet did not fill up the gaps in her sentence. Could not even her friendship be sacred from desecration?

'I wish you had not said that, Theresa,' observed Mrs. Winter, with mild reproach. 'Violet is so very sensitive, and so soon takes alarm. You know what a disappointment it is to me that the dear child does not settle; and if only she and Reginald Lorimer would come together I am sure I should be delighted. She is seven-and-twenty now,' she added, in the tone of regret which matrons are wont to use with regard to their unmarried daughters.

But Miss Wentworth chose to feel aggrieved at this remonstrance.

'I was not talking against Reginald Lorimer,' she said stiffly. 'He would do well enough for Violet, and I for one would be thankful to see her married, for certainly her temper does not improve. But I must maintain my opinion, that nothing could be in worse taste than the way Constance Wyndham tries to make a match between them. If he came over here of his own accord I should say nothing, but she brings him with her, and then they take Violet back with them.'

'Dear—dear! I wish you would not put such uncomfortable ideas into my head, Theresa. Lady Martin, too, seems to suspect something. It puts us all into such a delicate position; and then poor Lady Car has not been dead more than nine or ten months, so it is dreadful to have all this talk. What are we to do about Violet? She will be so disappointed if I beg her to refuse; and after all Constance is leaving on Monday, so there can be no harm for this once.'

'That is how you always compromise matters,' returned her friend, in her harsh sibilant voice. 'You have no backbone, Amy; I always tell you so. In your heart you agree with me, do you not?'—pausing for an instant, and fixing the poor lady with one of her dominating looks.

'I would much rather that Violet should stay at home after what you say,' returned Mrs. Winter, in a hesitating voice.

'Just so; I was sure that your good sense would triumph

but you lack courage to disappoint Violet, though it is for her own good. That is what I call false kindness.'

'Yes; but, Theresa, Violet is no longer a child.'

'You mean that she will take her own way? She has done that ever since she could run alone; but even a grown-up woman will consent to be guided sometimes. Let me go and talk this matter over with her. It will make no difference to me if she lose her temper, and I shall insist on her hearing my view of the case. Violet is not wanting in delicacy, and I shall be very much surprised if she persist in going back with them.'

But this bracing treatment alarmed Mrs. Winter, and she refused to allow Theresa to go up to the gable room. A scene with Violet always agitated her nerves. She would talk to her herself, and see what was to be done, but she could not have dear Constance's feelings hurt. And she and Violet were so fond of each other, and after all there might be nothing in it. How did they know that Reginald Lorimer had a thought of Violet?

Miss Wentworth raged inwardly. She was a woman who always grasped an idea quickly, and acted on it. Lady Martin's significant looks had really troubled her. She would have been the first to rejoice at the prospect of Violet's marriage, but she thought these frequent visits to the Hall under the present circumstances were in the worst possible taste.

'If he wants her he knows where to find her,' she argued shrewdly; 'and it is never well to make things too easy for men—a little difficulty enhances the pleasure. I know enough of human nature to lay any amount of odds that Mr. Lorimer will take another wife before next year is over. He is too sociable to enjoy loneliness, and he will marry all the quicker that Lady Car made him so comfortable.' And in the main Miss Wentworth was right, though she might have expressed her meaning more pleasantly.

When Violet re-entered the red drawing-room, two or three hours later, she found her mother alone. The moment was propitious, and she could not let it pass.

'Mother dear,' she said, kneeling down on the rug, and speaking in her softest voice, for there was a worried look on Mrs. Winter's face, 'what am I to do about Constance's invitation? Do you think you could spare me until Monday?'

'Do you really want to go, Violet?'

'Of course I want to go. I think I am happier at Silcote

than at any other place; but then, Constance and I are such close friends.'

'You don't think that it would be better to decline just this once?' Then, as Violet drew herself up and looked hurt, she continued apologetically, 'I do not wish to interfere with your pleasures, my love, and I think it was a mistake Theresa saying what she did; so if you have set your heart on going——'

Then Violet smiled and kissed her. 'Thanks, mother dear; then I will go in spite of Cousin Tess's shocked sense of propriety. It is a comfort that one's mother is married, and not an old maid'—which was a little spiteful on Violet's part, seeing that she was victorious.

Miss Wentworth looked very glum when she saw Violet's trunk carried down to the carriage the next afternoon, but she made no remark.

Violet greatly enjoyed her visit. Constance was not quite in her usual spirits, but she was more affectionate than ever; Violet rather missed Mr. Hamerton—she had seen so much of him lately; but Reginald took care that she should not find herself dull. He was full of animation, and seemed to find a good deal of pleasure in her society. On Sunday afternoon they were in the park together. Constance had gone back to the house to give some order, and while waiting for her they paced slowly up and down the avenue.

Reginald had been silent for a few minutes, and then he said casually, 'I suppose you are still having violin lessons with Miss Carrick?'

'Yes, indeed; and I am making good progress. Miss Carrick is such a splendid teacher. I quite look forward to my lessons.'

'You find her interesting?' Reginald put the question carelessly as he kicked some red and yellow leaves that lay in his path.

'Most interesting. She is so thoroughly in earnest. She so evidently believes in herself and in all she does, and then any one can see she is a gentlewoman. If it were not for Cousin Tess, I should make a friend of her; as it is, we suit each other perfectly.'

'Your friendship would be a grand thing for her,' observed Reginald, with unusual seriousness. 'I pity Miss Carrick. Her position is so uncomfortable, and no wonder she finds it galling. Why should you mind Miss Wentworth? She has nothing to do with your friends.' Then Violet looked up in

surprise; she had not imagined that Mr. Lorimer felt any interest in Miss Carrick.

‘I should like to hear her play again,’ he went on.

‘Should you?’ and then Violet checked herself and began to smile mysteriously. ‘After all, I think I will take you into confidence, Mr. Lorimer. Cousin Tess and I have been concocting a charming scheme. We are going to give some musical At Homes next month. You know how dull November is. Well, we think a few social gatherings will be a boon to the neighbourhood. We must have them in the afternoon, because of people coming from a distance. Just tea and coffee, and then Miss Carrick will perform. Cousin Tess said it was an excellent idea. Miss Carrick would be a novelty, and everything else is so stale; so if you like to reserve your Thursday afternoons, you shall have a card.’

‘Oh, you may count on me,’ returned Reginald, with admirable promptitude. ‘I call it a capital notion. You will be a benefactor to the neighbourhood. It seems a pity we can’t utilise the music-room for the same purpose. Perhaps when Constance comes down at Christmas——’

‘What are you saying about Constance?’ asked his sister, who joined them this moment; but when they had enlightened her she became enthusiastic at once, though she gently but decidedly negatived the idea of the music-room. ‘It would not do at all, dear—not at present, I mean,’ she said, in a tone that at once conveyed to Reginald’s ear that he had been indiscreet. ‘After February you might entertain, but not before. Are you sure, Violet, that Miss Carrick will play at your *réunions*?’

‘Certainly she will play. She was quite excited at the idea; she said that it would be such a splendid advertisement for her, and would help her to get pupils. I think her great desire is to make herself independent of her relations. I daresay, in her place, I should feel the same. There cannot be much sympathy between them.’

‘It is a grievous pity that that boy stands so much in her light,’ observed Constance, regretfully; ‘but for him she might achieve a brilliant success. Don’t you agree with me, Reggie?’

‘No, I don’t,’ he answered a little shortly. ‘I hate brilliant successes for women; and it is far better for her to stick to her lessons and look after the boy’; and then he sent the dry crackling leaves flying again.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. LORIMER HAS HIS OPINIONS

'Labour is life! 'tis the still water faileth ;
Idleness ever despaireth, bewaileth ;
Keep the watch wound, or the dark rust assaileth.'

FRANCES S. ASGOOD.

THE dark hollow of the year,' as Carlyle phrased it, was before Gloden. Every roadside, every patch of woodland, every plantation breathed the same story of gradual decay. The dry leaves that fluttered from the trees collected and lay in rotting heaps under the feet of the passers-by. The bracken in Silcote Park looked yellow and shrunken. At night and in the early morning there was a suspicion of frost in the air; the grey skies and sombre melancholy of November were approaching. Nevertheless, any clear-eyed observer of human nature would have detected an added cheerfulness in Gloden's manner.

There is a surprising elasticity in youth. The old well-worn comparison between life and the shipwrecked mariner is profoundly and pathetically true. The billows of human trouble roll on perpetually, now submerging and now being gallantly surmounted by the brave swimmer; at one moment the huge crested wave has rushed over him, beating the strength out of him, and the next has carried him on a few more paces, until finally he finds himself on the shore, looking out over the tangle of seaweed and broken spars of his wrecked hopes. 'All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me,' wrote the minstrel king of Israel. How many a quivering, palpitating heart has re-echoed those words!

'Good-bye to Eltringham, good-bye to my dear old life and to happiness,' had been Gloden's moan, as she looked back despairingly at the grey walls of the home that had sheltered her youth; and in the bitterness of that farewell she really

believed that she was bidding farewell to all joy. Nevertheless, the sap of her youth was still mounting, and in due season the fresh young buds must inevitably appear. Happiness entombed in the rocky cave of grief is for ever awaiting its resurrection. When the angry billows have spent their force, they recede, there is calm and stillness, and the white sails gleam in the sunshine; while under the ripples and the dancing waves the drowned mariner has sunk fathoms deep. 'There is a time for everything,' wrote the wise man—a time for grief, and a time for healing; a time for regret, and a time for budding hopes, and for spreading out young wings in the sunshine; and such a time would come by and by to Gloden.

Since Mrs. Wyndham's visit to the gable room, there had been a marked change in Gloden's manner. She was still sad, but she no longer drooped so persistently. Recognition and the delicate breath of flattery were expanding her perceptibly; her work braced and interested her; contact with congenial minds such as Winifred Logan and Violet Winter refreshed her mentally. When she woke in the morning the day looked no longer like a stretch of barrenness that must be traversed before night; not an hour was unoccupied.

Clemency, waiting on her customers, or busying herself with her homely tasks, marvelled secretly at the girl's patience and perseverance as the opening door brought the sound of the violin hour after hour. When she was not giving lessons, or helping Harvey with his, she was practising beside the window in the old room looking over Market Street; and more than once Reginald Lorimer, riding past with his dogs, caught sight of the small brown head against the curtain, and the quick motion of a white hand drawing the bow across the strings. But, though he checked his mare to a foot pace, there was no sign of recognition on Gloden's part; if her hand shook slightly, there was no one near enough to notice it.

Harvey's visits to Silcote were becoming constant; his half-holidays were all spent in the Squire's company, and very often Bernard Trevor accompanied him. Mr. Lorimer, who abhorred solitude, found the lads excellent company; but Harvey remained his prime favourite, and he was always contriving new pleasures for him.

One Saturday evening Harvey came home almost breathless with excitement. The Squire had been teaching him to ride; they had gone ever so far. He had ridden Robin; he was as steady as old time. Scrivener had told him that he went a

good pace, too, and Mr. Lorimer had praised his pluck. They had had a gallop, and he had stuck on all right. And as Gloden uttered a startled protest at this—'Oh, you need not look so scared,' he went on; 'Mr. Lorimer knows what he is about. He was quite close all the time, and once when I dropped the reins, he put out his hand and caught hold of them. I lost my hat, but we went back and picked it up. Oh, it was glorious—glorious! and I am to have another ride next Saturday.'

Well, it was no use remonstrating; the Squire and Harvey were sworn friends, and meant to remain so; and, as Uncle Reuben took Harvey's part, Gloden and Clemency were obliged to content themselves with a head-shake or two and a few whispered entreaties in the lad's ear to do nothing rash.

Robin's beauty, his gentleness, and his wonderful speed were frequent topics of conversation with Harvey. Once he coaxed Mr. Lorimer to ride in the direction of Grantham, and Gloden, trudging along the road, suddenly saw them coming towards her, the Squire on his bay mare Lady Alice, and Harvey mounted proudly upon Robin. Griff found him out at once, and flew at Robin's heels, barking with joy, which made that paragon of gentleness dance on three legs immediately.

'Pray don't be nervous, Miss Carrick!' exclaimed Mr. Lorimer, reassuringly, as he noticed how pale Gloden turned; 'Robin is all right, and so is Harvey. Be quiet, old man!' and he patted Robin's neck caressingly.

'Come here directly, Griff. Oh, you bad dog! how could you behave so?'

Then Harvey, with boyish impertinence, broke into a fit of laughter. 'What a duffer you are, Glow! Why, Robin has been dancing on three legs most of the way, hasn't he, Mr. Lorimer? He is in fine spirits, aren't you, old boy? Isn't he a beauty, Gloden? I wanted you to see him, that is why I asked Mr. Lorimer to come this way; I knew you would be prowling about. Don't you wish you could ride too, Antelope?'

'Don't I wish for many things?' returned Gloden, smiling, as she stroked Robin; and then she looked up and encountered the squire's glance.

'It is no use asking you not to spoil Harvey,' she said softly.

'I am glad you have made up your mind to that,' he

returned lightly. 'I am helping on Harvey's education. I have taught him how to hold a gun, and now I am giving him riding lessons. Don't you think you owe me some gratitude, Miss Carrick, for bringing him on like this?' He spoke in his usual careless, good-humoured way, but he was a little taken aback when she raised her dark eyes and looked at him wistfully.

'I do, indeed; but I can never hope to repay your kindness,' she said, with an emphasis that left no doubt of her meaning; and then she drew back with a grave smile and bow, and walked on.

'What on earth did you call your sister just now?' asked Reginald, as they rode on.

'Eh, what?' exclaimed Harvey, absently. 'Oh, I know—Antelope. Dad often called her that; she is rather like a deer, you know.'

'Ah, I see'; but, though he said nothing more, the name pleased him; it was so appropriate to the large startled eyes and small head, and the graceful carriage and the light tread. That shy look of gratitude she had given him haunted him all the way home.

In the first week in November the Winters gave their first At Home—'Tea and chrysanthemums,' Violet called it, for there was a fine show of chrysanthemums in the big conservatory; but the young violin-player was the chief attraction. There was a goodly gathering at the Gate House. Gloden came early with Winifred Logan, and kept modestly in the background, though Mr. Lorimer and one or two others sought her out.

'You do not look a bit nervous,' were his first words, as he greeted her; 'not half so much as when Robin pranced the other day.'

'No, indeed'; and then, as she looked round at the crowded room, her eyes seemed to brighten. 'All these strangers do not trouble me in the least. When I begin playing I shall see no one—the music and I will be alone.'

'I call that selfish, Miss Carrick. What have we done that you should shut us out like that? Music ought to widen your sympathies and make you love your fellow-creatures better. When I listen to playing I like, I always seem to grow philanthropic.'

'Ah, you do not understand,' she said, a little impatiently. One cannot limit one's self to one's audience—the feeling

is too vast ; one is carried away. How is one to interpret the thoughts of a great master if the human countenances before one are appealing to one's consciousness? No ; when I play let me forget every one—even my friends.'

'You are beyond me there,' returned Reginald, vaguely discontented at this ; and then, as Dr. Parry came up to them, he went back to the red drawing-room.

By some curious coincidence, he sat in the same place that he had occupied when he first heard Gloden perform ; but Winifred Logan, not Constance, was in the seat before him. When Gloden came modestly forward and took up her station in the shadow of the curtains, he quietly crossed his arms on the back of Winifred's chair. He could look at her as long as he liked ; she and her music were alone together—he would not forget that.

There was no doubt of Gloden's success that afternoon. Dr. Parry's benevolent face was beaming ; he was in luck to have secured such a finished mistress for his little Hilda, so he told himself, as he heard the whispered encomiums that passed through the room. But Gloden's face did not brighten as the compliments flowed in upon her ; she looked a little absent and distrait.

'I expect you find all this a bore,' observed Mr. Lorimer in his casual manner ; and Gloden, who had not perceived his approach, started slightly. 'Let me take you out to see the chrysanthemums ; they will do you good' ; and after a moment's hesitation she consented.

There was no longer that barrier of unyielding stiffness in Gloden's manner to the young squire. He was Harvey's friend, and as such entitled to her courtesy and gratitude ; they were on neutral ground, and she could accept his attentions as she would from any other gentleman. 'He knows all about us now,' she said to herself, 'and if he chooses to be pleasant and friendly to Harvey's sister, there is no necessity for me to point out his mistake to him.'

Mr. Lorimer took no advantage of this slight concession. He was beginning to score a little, he told himself modestly ; Miss Carrick was not nearly so stand-offish as she was.

'What a mass of bloom !' observed Gloden, as they entered the conservatory, which was just at this moment empty. 'How beautifully those golden and brown and dull red tints blend and harmonise ! It is a perfect feast of colour.'

'I am glad you like it,' returned Reginald. 'We were

thinking of building a new conservatory to open out of the music-room at Silcote; it was a pet scheme of my poor wife's, but it was never carried out. She had a passion for chrysanthemums.' He checked a sigh, and then went on, 'Do you care for compliments, Miss Carrick? I have never told you yet how much I have enjoyed the music you gave us.'

'I did not play as well as usual,' she returned quickly; 'and it was all your fault, Mr. Lorimer.'

'My dear Miss Carrick!'—in extreme surprise.

'Why did you imply that I was selfish,' she continued, 'because I said that my music seemed to shut me out from everybody? I could not forget your words, and for once I was conscious of my environment. I saw you quite plainly, Mr. Lorimer; you were at the end of the room, and you had your arms crossed on the chair before you, and you were looking as though you were trying to understand something.'

'By Jove!' muttered Reginald; then aloud, 'I must have been an awful nuisance, I am afraid; but I cannot endorse your statement. You played splendidly. I wished my sister could have heard you.'

Then Gloden flushed as though she were gratified. 'Do you know what your sister proposed?' she said, looking at him in her quiet, serious way, and there was something in her calm sedateness that always attracted him. She had none of the airs and graces of the ordinary young lady; he had long ago discovered that she had no sense of humour. Violet Winter was infinitely more amusing, and could say far cleverer things. 'Mrs. Wyndham was anxious that I should go up to town and study under Signor Boski. She was so kind about it; she took so much trouble. It is her opinion that a year or two under Boski would enable me to play at concerts.'

'Ah, no doubt,' he returned coldly. 'My sister is a clever woman, and never advances an opinion unless she is sure of her ground. Signor Boski is a great friend of hers.'

'So she said; she seemed so sure, too, that he would reduce his terms at her recommendation. I cannot tell you how grateful I was for her kindness, and I hope she understood that. I am afraid she tempted me sorely.'

'Do you mean that such a life would suit you?' he asked, and he had quite lost his genial manner. 'I thought women did not care for publicity, and all that sort of thing. In my opinion, they are much safer and happier in their own homes.'

‘Do you not think that depends on their home, Mr. Lorimer?’ she returned, and there was sadness in her tone. ‘I have lost the only home I could love. If my father had lived—ah, these *if*’s!—I could have lived all my life happily at Eltringham; but now——’ She paused.

‘Oh, you do not know what may turn up,’ he replied confidently; ‘you have not settled down yet. If I may venture to hazard an opinion, you will feel quite differently by and by, when you get more used to us.’ But Gloden shook her head.

‘It is not the people or the place,’ she returned quietly. ‘I am making friends already, and Miss Winter and Miss Logan are so good to me; but if I could have my way I would leave Grantham to-morrow, and put myself under Signor Boski. It is work that I want—hard work, and guidance and sympathy. If one has a vocation, Mr. Lorimer, it is one’s duty to follow it; but, as I told your sister, I am not free.’

Then he looked at her a little curiously. ‘You mean that Harvey is the obstacle. Yes, I know; Constance told me’; and then he added, a little obstinately, ‘and I am not sorry to hear it. I don’t believe the life would have suited you a bit; they would have worked you to death between them.’ And as she opened her eyes a little widely at this contradiction, he continued somewhat decidedly, ‘I am not an ambitious sort of person; I like to lead a peaceful existence under my own fig tree. I think heated rooms and applause no end of a nuisance, and if Harvey were a little older he would agree with me.’

‘Do you know you are just a little damping, Mr. Lorimer?’

‘Am I? Well, I do not feel especially repentant, but I suppose I have no right to be talking to you in this paternal way. My sister is more of your way of thinking, and Hamerton would be too. You see, my domestic virtues have been over-cultivated, and, as I said before, I hate publicity for women; in my opinion they ought to have something better. But we shall never agree, shall we?’—turning to her with a good-humoured look.

But Gloden felt a momentary pang as he said this. She had no idea that Mr. Lorimer held such strong views, or she would never have mooted the subject. These easy-natured men sometimes had a fund of obstinacy underneath their smooth manners; but it was quite evident to her, from Mr. Lorimer’s remarks, that a womanly woman was more to his taste, and he disliked excessively the *rôle* of an artiste for any of his personal friends. And, strange to say, Gloden felt some

regret as she admitted this fact to herself; and yet, after all, what did Mr. Lorimer's opinion matter to her—a country squire who refused to hold advanced views on the subject of women, and whose ideas were hardly up to date? Gloden, who was tenacious by nature, longed to argue him out of his old-fashioned notions, but she wisely refrained.

'I think we ought to go back,' she said, rising from her seat; 'I feel more rested now.'

Then Reginald laughed outright. 'Does an argument rest you? We were on the brink of a disagreement just now. Come, I will make my peace with you. I will not cancel a word I said, and I wish Constance had never mentioned Boski's name, but I will own that it is hard lines for you under your present circumstances, and that I think you put a good face on things—to quote Harvey, "you are awfully plucky."' "

'Thank you,' she said, breaking into a smile; and then they went back to the room, and Miss Wentworth, who had noticed their absence with much displeasure, pounced on Reginald as he entered, and Gloden did not see him again.

But on the following Thursday he was there, and again the week after, and each time he occupied the same place. Gloden, pausing in her playing for a moment, would glance towards his corner. He was always in the same attitude—his arms crossed on the chair before him, and his grave, intent look fixed on her. Sometimes she wished that he were absent; the consciousness of his presence prevented her from losing herself; the remembrance of his disapproval of her ambitious scheme haunted her with singular persistence. Why had he taken up that attitude of quiet resistance? What was it to him that a stranger like herself should wish to be trained for a professional life? And yet his hurt tone, his want of geniality, kept recurring to her memory, and she even once took Harvey into her confidence. It was one evening late in November, and she had just returned from the last 'At Home' at the Gate House. She had walked home with Winifred Logan, and had heard from her that her cousin was expected for a few days shortly—a piece of intelligence that produced rather mixed feelings in Gloden's mind.

When she reached home she found that her Aunt Clemency had lighted a fire in the best room, and was on her knees tending it as she entered.

There was no change in the somewhat strained relations between them. Gloden was always perfectly civil, but she

never abridged the distance that kept them apart; she never volunteered confidence, or expected any in return; and she still regarded Clemency's maternal tenderness for Harvey with jealous suspicion, though, to do her justice, she tried to combat the feeling. With her uncle she was far more genial; she treated him with marked respect and consideration. All her hauteur and reserve seemed kept for Clemency; but, true to her nature, Clemency never resented this, and, with a loyalty for which Gloden would not have given her credit, she always concealed her wounded feelings from her husband. 'Reuben's getting fond of her, and I won't be setting him against her,' she said to herself. 'It is ill-doing, stirring up strife in a house. Gloden has got a cold manner, but she means no harm. I must just mother her, and bear with her'; and Clemency acted up to her word nobly.

'You and Gloden get on famously, Clem,' Reuben once said to her, in his dense, masculine way.

But Clemency only smiled, and held her peace. It would not have helped her, or Gloden either, to have told him that there was no sympathy between them. 'It is better to hold one's tongue than to make mischief,' thought Clemency.

When Gloden, coming out of the November dampness and chillness, saw Clemency on her knees coaxing the fire, a feeling of compunction crossed her.

'How kind you are, Aunt Clemency!' she said, more pleasantly than usual. 'It is so cold, and it is beginning to rain.'

'There is nothing like a bit of fire for comfort,' returned Clemency, adding another stick; 'it will burn up in a moment, Gloden. Patty was busy; the Sedgewicks are coming in to supper, and she has some cooking to do.'

Then Gloden's pleasant expression clouded over. Mr. Sedgewick was the linen-draper in Market Place—a warm, substantial man, as her uncle called him, who was certainly making his pile; and Mrs. Sedgewick was a comely, rosy creature who dropped her *h's* rather freely, and called Gloden 'Miss.' But they were educating their children well, and would some day have the happiness of seeing them despise their parents, and set them aside after the manner of the youthful generation.

'The Sedgewicks!' she repeated blankly; 'and of course you are lighting the fire for them'—in an injured tone, as though she repented of her former gratitude.

‘No ; they are only coming in late for a bit of supper and a smoke afterwards—at least, your uncle and Mr. Sedgewick will smoke, and Sophia and I will keep them company. I would send you up your bit of chicken, Gloden, only your uncle’s feelings would be hurt, and he would not understand ; and then there is Harvey.’

‘Of course I shall come down to supper, Aunt Clemency.’

‘Well, there is no call to come until it is ready,’ returned Clemency, good-humouredly.

She was anxious to smooth things all round, and perhaps she was shrewd enough to guess that Gloden’s presence would hardly promote her friends’ cheerfulness. If she would have made herself pleasant, and volunteered to play to them, things would have been easier. But it was not only unselfish consideration for her niece’s well-being that had made her light the fire ; and it was after Mrs. Carrick had gone downstairs that Harvey joined her, and they sat on the big couch nestled together, and in the firelight Gloden repeated the substance of her conversation with Mr. Lorimer.

‘I never thought he was that sort of man,’ she concluded. ‘Don’t you think it was a little foolish and old-fashioned of him, Harvey?’

But Harvey stoutly contested this.

‘Not a bit ; and you are awfully prudish yourself, Glow. We had a talk about it, he and I.’

‘About me?’ and Gloden looked intensely surprised.

‘Yes. He told me you had had a bit of a scrimmage at the Gate House, and that he was afraid he had vexed you ; and then he asked me if I liked the idea of Signor Boski. And I told him I thought it would be awfully jolly for you to play at concerts, only I was afraid there would be no such luck, as we had not got any money—hardly any, I said, because, you know, there is that hundred and fifty pounds that Uncle Reuben is keeping for us.’

‘And what did Mr. Lorimer say, Harvey?’

‘Well, he did not look pleased ; and then he said I was too much of a child to understand. And then I fought him—he is teaching me to box, you know—and that finished the argument neatly ; but he had his innings first, and said some sharp things. He said he hated to see women stuck up before a mixed audience ; at least, women he knew, not other people. That if he had a sister he should look after her, and, though he did not care much about the shop, he thought it better

than a London lodging ; and he said he vexed himself about it rather, because his sister had put the idea into your head.'

'Yes, I see.'

'Oh, he was awfully nice about it. I tell you what, Glow—he thinks no end of you. He said you were too refined and sensitive to be knocked about in the world, and he wished I were a little older and could protect you. He said that after our wrestling bout, as we were walking through the spinney, and I am sure from his manner that he meant every word.'

Gloden was sure of it too, and she was much touched. It was evident that Mr. Lorimer took a great deal of friendly interest in her, and she was glad to know this.

CHAPTER XXVII

'YOU ARE NOT HAPPY HERE'

'Oh, how good it feels,
The hand of an old friend!'

LONGFELLOW.

ONE afternoon Gloden was returning from the Gate House, and walking briskly, as was her wont. The days were shorter and colder now, and as the road was a lonely one, Mrs. Winter had advised her daughter to take her lesson at an earlier hour, so that Miss Carriek might be set free by four. Violet willingly agreed to this, and, though Gloden smiled a little at this motherly precaution, and assured Violet that a dark road under wintry skies would not have daunted her in the least, she was obliged to submit to her friends' scruples.

On this occasion she and Violet had lingered so long over their leavetaking as they stood warming themselves by the hall fire, that it was long after five before she crossed the rustic bridge over the moat and groped her way down the little lane. But Gloden, who was country-bred, cared nothing for the loneliness. She was cold, and walked fast. She had no fear of losing her way; she knew exactly where the cross roads met—where she had encountered Mr. Lorimer. She was thinking of him now, and of their conversation in the chrysanthemum-house, as she struck into the Grantham road. It was a curious fact that the young squire of Silcote was often in her thoughts just then.

She was almost sorry when she reached Market Street. Exercise, even in the most inclement weather, always exhilarated her. She would willingly have walked half a dozen miles farther, but she knew that her Uncle Reuben disapproved of these unconventional ways, so she controlled her restlessness. She very seldom entered the shop, but she remembered Patty

had a face-ache, so she considerably spared her the trouble of opening the door for her. There were seldom any customers at this hour, and she was inwardly chagrined, therefore, to see a gentleman standing with his back to her, so near the glass door that she would have to pass quite close to him.

As she did so she paused involuntarily. Surely that long neck and those sloping shoulders were familiar to her. 'Mr. Logan!' she exclaimed out loud, and Ewen Logan turned with a start, and a flush mounted to his forehead. Clemency, who was serving him, saw the flash of joy in his eyes.

'Miss Carrick!' and then he stood holding her hands and forgetting to let them go. 'I was just asking about you. Your aunt told me you would be in soon, so I thought I would wait.'

'Mr Logan will be wanting a talk with you, Gloden,' observed Clemency, in her mild way. 'I am vexed, that I am, that that Patty has forgotten to light a bit of fire in the best room; but there, her face has been troubling her, and put things out of her head. But if you will step into the parlour, Mr. Logan, you will be kindly welcome.'

'You are very good, Mrs. Carrick, and if you will put up those books for my cousin, I will take them when I leave. Shall I follow you, Miss Carrick?' and there was no mistaking the suppressed eagerness in his voice.

'He is glad enough to see her,' thought Clemency, as she made up the parcel in her painstaking manner, for no pressing business ever hurried her quiet, deliberate movements. ('It is waste of time to hurry,' she would say; 'what is the use of doing a thing badly, and having to do it all over again?') 'But I misdoubt if Gloden cares as much to see him, though she was pretty hearty in her greeting; but it would be a blessing if some good sensible man would persuade her to marry him, for violin-playing is a poor set-off for a husband and children.'

Gloden's brow contracted with vexation when she heard of Patty's forgetfulness. The little parlour, with its shining mahogany chiffonnier and horsehair-covered chairs, was abhorrent to her; but to Mr. Logan, hungering and thirsting for the girl's presence, it was a shrine of heavenly comfort, with its neatly-swept hearth and Reuben's big easy-chair, with its usual tenant, Jim, curled up on it.

'I am so sorry Harvey is out,' she began, as she took off her hat and jacket and flung them down carelessly on a chair, until Clemency should spy them out and carry them away.

Clemency never remonstrated with her niece; she would pull out the fingers of the gloves and smooth them tidily, while Gloden only tossed her head a little disdainfully. She hated Aunt Clemency's primness and old-maidish ways. 'What does it matter?' she asked once, when she was stung into momentary irritation. 'Uncle Reuben always leaves his pipes about, and you do not seem to object to that.'

'A wife is bound to put up with her husband,' returned Clemency, with unwonted dignity; 'when you are married, Gloden, you will find that out for yourself. There's a deal of putting up, and bearing and forbearing, in matrimony. I often mind what an old aunt of mine, Aunt Peggy Winterbotham, used to say. She was never married herself, but she always talked as if she had had a dozen husbands. "Honeymoon" they call it; I should give it another name. "Temper-test" would fit it far better, I should say.''

'Harvey will be so sorry to miss you,' went on Gloden, smoothing down her hair with both hands, an action strangely familiar to the curate. A look of tenderness came into his deep-set eyes, but Gloden only saw the gleaming of the glasses. 'He is having tea with one of his schoolfellows, Bernard Trevor, and Griff is with him.'

'I have seen Harvey, returned Ewen, absently. 'Mrs. Trevor is a friend of ours; Winifred is very fond of her. Bernard brought him round to see us. He looks well, uncommonly well.'

'Oh, he is much stronger; and did you notice, Mr. Logan, he is grown? He is quite tall for his age.'

'Grantham seems to suit him. But he grumbled a bit; that is Harvey all over. He says he hates the grammar school.' And then his manner changed, and he looked into the girl's eyes. 'We will talk about Harvey by and by; I want to hear about something else. How are things with you? You look well, you are not quite so thin; perhaps you do not dislike Grantham as much as you feared.'

'Do you think,' she said impulsively, and she frowned as she spoke, 'that this'—looking round at the little firelit room—'is a good exchange for the dear old room at Eltringham?'

'Comparisons are odious,' he replied gently, for he had made up his mind to be gentle with her; 'it looks to me very comfortable, and you know of old that I do not mind shabbiness. You have another room, Winifred tells me, where you can practise and read to your heart's content.'

‘Yes,’ she returned ungraciously, ‘but I have not grown to love it yet.’

‘Well, perhaps not’—in a good-humoured voice, for he saw plainly she was in one of her perverse moods.

Probably the sight of him had brought back her homesickness, and in this guess he was right. Gloden was answering him shortly, but the tears were very near her eyes. His ungainly figure and sallow face were associated with her former life. She was almost surprised herself to feel how strongly she was drawn to him; she had always respected and liked him, but she had never felt him so much to her. She was standing before him, with her hands hanging down among the folds of her dress. With a sudden uncontrollable impulse Ewen took the right hand gently in his, and for more than a minute she did not withdraw it; in reality the action chimed in with her softened thoughts of him, but Ewen could hardly be blamed if he interpreted her compliance after his masculine fashion. Perhaps, after all, absence had done something for him.

Unfortunately, Patty entered with the tea-tray at this moment, and Gloden’s hands were again fingering the folds of her dress. It was clearly necessary to choose some safe topic of conversation while the girl was clattering round the table with plates and knives, and eyeing them both with undisguised curiosity.

‘You have seen a great deal of my cousin Winifred,’ he began. ‘I hope you have become good friends.’

‘Yes, indeed; how is one to help liking her? She is so kind, so true, so perfectly unselfish.’

‘Winnie is all that,’ he returned, very much pleased. ‘She is a thoroughly genuine person; that is why people always get on with her.’

‘And Miss Winter is another friend of yours,’ he continued, after a moment’s silence.

‘Yes, indeed; and she is charming. She is very different from your cousin; she is so pretty and taking, and——’

‘Oh, we all know that Winnie is no beauty,’ he observed in a vexed voice, as though he resented this speech.

Then Gloden felt she had expressed herself awkwardly.

‘I was not thinking of Miss Logan’s looks. What do they matter, after all? Your cousin is so good, so lovable, that one never stops to inquire whether she is plain or not; but when one is with Violet Winter it is quite different. She is good too, but one cannot help admiring her; she is so graceful,

and her voice is so refined, and then she has such charming manners. She is quite the prettiest girl in Grantham.'

'When she was younger people called her lovely, but she was never as handsome as Mrs. Wyndham.'

'Perhaps not. I call Mrs. Wyndham beautiful; it is the only word that expresses her.'

Then Mr. Logan smiled, as though he were amused.

'There are some nice people in Grantham, then?' he asked mischievously.

And then Clemency entered the room.

'I have just made the tea, Mr. Logan,' she said, pausing near the chair where Gloden had thrown down her hat and jacket, and, after her usual custom, straightening her niece's gloves. 'My husband is coming in directly, and we shall be pleased and proud if you will take a cup with us, sir.'

'You are really too good, Mrs. Carrick'; and then he looked at Gloden, as though expecting her to endorse the invitation; but she was staring at the fire, and took no notice.

'I shall be very glad of a cup of tea,' he continued, after a moment's awkward hesitation. He felt sure, from Gloden's manner, that she wished him to decline; but he could not resist the temptation of breaking bread with her again. He looked wistfully at her as she moved slowly and reluctantly to her place opposite to him. He could read her thoughts pretty accurately. It galled her inexpressibly that he should see her under her altered circumstances, and be a spectator of her aunt and uncle's homely ways, when he remembered her under such different circumstances. How often she had poured out tea for him in the dear old study, or in the dim, sweetly-scented drawing-room, fragrant with roses and lemon verbena! And then she thought of the melon-shaped silver pot of which her mother had been so proud, and the delicate Wedgwood china, and Aunt Clemency's staring red-and-blue teacups gave her a real pang.

'Will you kindly ask a blessing, Mr. Logan? My husband is just serving a customer, but he will be in directly; and you'll find those scones very good, sir, if Gloden will hand them to you,' she continued appealingly, presently glancing at her niece.

And then Reuben came in, looking hearty and pleased to see Mr. Logan. And the two men began to discuss Grantham affairs, while Gloden sat silently by, and Clemency only interposed to press some more tea-cake on her guest.

‘And when do you leave Eltringham, sir?’ was the first thing that really roused Gloden from her abstraction.

‘Not until Easter. Mr. Snowden wishes me to remain until then, and of course I am willing to oblige him.’

‘And then?’ asked Reuben, with kindly inquisitiveness.

‘Well, Mr. Carrick, it is an open secret that the bishop means to offer me the living of Clacton-over-Fields.’

And, as Gloden uttered a surprised exclamation, he bent forward as though he were answering her.

‘It is not much of a living—my cure of souls will number about five hundred—and is only worth about two hundred a year, but there is a good house and garden, and my mother thinks I could take pupils.’

‘Oh yes,’ she returned quickly, ‘that is always what dear father advised; and then you could have your mother and cousin to live with you—’

But here she stopped, warned by a peculiar expression in Mr. Logan’s eyes that she was treading on dangerous ground. In her pleasure at hearing that such a piece of good fortune had accrued to her old friend, she had forgotten the last conversation they had held together, but Ewen’s keen look suddenly recalled it. ‘If you could only bring yourself to care for me, and to overlook my defects of manner,’ he had said to her humbly, ‘I would do my best to work for you, and to shield you from adversity.’

And the next moment this thought rushed into her mind, ‘This is why he has come to Grantham, to tell me about Clacton-over-Fields, and to ask me to go there’; and then she felt a little giddy and sick, and rose from the table with a muttered excuse. She had been so pleased to see him; but if he came for this? Oh, why was he so persistent, so obstinately bent on making her uncomfortable? Why was he so cruel to her, and to himself too, when he must know how hopeless it was?

Gloden remained away as long as she dared. When she returned to the parlour she found Mr. Logan was just taking his leave.

‘I shall see you again,’ he said, as he shook hands with her. ‘Mrs. Carrick tells me that you are generally practising your violin in the morning. As my time is limited, perhaps I may look in to-morrow’; and, without waiting for an answer, he turned away.

And again Gloden felt that he had been too much for her.

When she woke the next morning, she felt as though some dreadful ordeal lay before her. She had lain awake for hours, planning how she could escape an interview with Mr. Logan, and she determined at all hazards to avoid him. She would go out for the whole morning. It would be treating him badly, but it would be far kinder in the end. He had no right to take it for granted that she would remain in to see him. It would be giving him encouragement; it would be better to hurt his feelings than that. ‘He will take the hint; he is obstinate, but he is not dense,’ she said to herself, when she had arrived at this conclusion.

‘I have told Patty to make up a good fire in the best room,’ observed Clemency, when they had finished breakfast, and Harvey had caught up his books and rushed out. ‘It is a raw sort of day—your uncle thinks we shall have sleet presently; and Mr. Logan talked about looking in.’

‘Yes, I know; but he was not certain—he only said perhaps,’ returned Gloden, hurriedly. ‘Don’t trouble about a fire, Aunt Clemency; I think I am going out.’

Then Clemency looked at her niece incredulously; it was evident that she could not believe her ears. Then she went on with the business she had in hand, piling up the breakfast-cups on a tray.

‘I would not do that if I were you, Gloden,’ she said quietly; ‘Mr. Logan told me before you came down that he meant to come. “I must have a good long talk with your niece”—those were his exact words; so it would be putting a slight on him not to be here, when I told him that you always stopped in in the morning.’

‘I am sorry you told him anything of the kind,’ replied Gloden, stiffly. ‘You will have to talk to him yourself, Aunt Clemency, for I am certainly going out.’

Then a little flush mounted to Clemency’s face as she carried the tray away. She would not argue the matter. If Gloden chose to be contrary, and to put this affront on her old friend, it was no business of hers. ‘Heaven help the man who marries her!’ she thought, as she called Patty to bring her a bowl of water and a tea-cloth.

Gloden’s feelings were not very enviable as she went upstairs to get ready for her walk; it was not a tempting morning for a stroll, and the best room looked delightfully warm and snug as she passed it. It was early yet; she could have an hour’s practice. But before half an hour had passed she laid

aside her bow. She remembered suddenly that Mr. Logan was an unconventional person; he might not think ten o'clock too early for his visit. The idea alarmed her, and before ten minutes were over she and Griff were on their way up the town.

She had chosen the Silcote road, as she dare not pass Chapel Street or the Market-place, for fear of meeting Mr. Logan. When she had walked another mile, she meant to branch off in the direction of Donnington. She and Harvey had often planned to walk to Donnington, but all his half-holidays were now spent at Silcote, and, except on Sunday afternoons, they rarely went out together.

Gloden thought that she had managed very cleverly to avoid her old friend, but fate was too strong for her. She had only just left the town behind her, when she became aware of a black angular figure in the distance; but before she could beat a retreat, Griff had rushed up to it with a delighted bark of recognition. Gloden grew hot and then cold, as Mr. Logan came eagerly to meet her.

'This is luck!' he said, in a pleased voice, as he joined her. 'I was just prowling about until it was time for my call. Of course, you did not expect me for another hour.' And then he looked at her, and something in her expression struck him. 'You know I said I should call this morning.'

'You only said "perhaps,"' she returned faintly. 'I was just taking Griff for a walk.'

'And you meant to be back in time to see me?' and he looked at her a little searchingly.

But Gloden had no answer ready. She could not tell him to his face that she had gone out to avoid him, neither could she stoop to utter a falsehood; but her embarrassed look and silence were sufficient answer. Mr. Logan's face changed.

'You knew I was coming to talk to you, and you went out to avoid me,' he said, in a harsh, strident voice. 'Was this kind, Miss Carrick?'

'I did not mean to be unkind,' she answered.

But her evident nervousness did not allay his displeasure. Last night she had been gentle and gracious to him; there had been a softness in her mien that had given him hope, and now she had put this insult on him. Any other man would have gone away and left her, but Mr. Logan was not to be turned from his purpose by any amount of silent opposition; he had come to Grantham to say a certain thing, and he meant to say it. Nevertheless, the blackness of his brow did not become a wooer

‘It was useless to try and avoid me. I should have followed you,’ he went on, in the same offended voice. ‘I have come to Grantham with a purpose—a purpose that concerns you, and you cannot prevent my saying what I have to say, however difficult you make it for me to speak. Shall I speak now, or will you come back with me to Market Street?’

Ewen’s authoritative tone excited Gloden’s resentment. No man had a right to speak to her in such a manner; she would not bear it for a moment.

‘I am not going back,’ she said coldly. ‘Is it any use to tell you, Mr. Logan, that I should prefer to walk alone?’

‘By heavens, no!’ he returned angrily. ‘You are treating me as badly as possible; we have not met for months, and yet you tell me to my face that you do not wish for my society. I would not have believed that even you could be so cruelly hard.’

Then, in spite of herself, she was touched by the pain in his voice. After all, he had a right to be angry with her.

‘There is no need for us to quarrel,’ she said more gently. ‘If I make it evident that I do not desire your company, it is because your manner does not please me.’

But he misunderstood her. ‘What does it matter about a man’s manner,’ he retorted stormily, ‘if his heart be right? Could any man love a girl better than I have loved you? I have my faults, God knows, but I should not be ashamed for you to read my thoughts.’

‘Mr. Logan, will you let me say something? I thought—I hoped that you would never speak to me in this way again. I told you last time that you were making a mistake. Why did you not believe me?’

Then he stopped, and looked at her very sorrowfully. ‘It is no mistake on my part. It is as natural for me to love you as to breathe the air; I think I have told you that before. Such a love as mine is not to be despised or thrown away.’

Then she remained silent. She did not despise him; in a way she loved him, for his honesty, and his uprightness, and the gentleness of his nature. He was a good man—she knew that, and he had been very kind to her; but if she and he were alone in the world, she could not have brought herself to marry him. But how was she to tell him so?

‘Let me tell you more about myself,’ he went on eagerly. ‘Things are different now. As the vicar of Clacton-over-Fields, I shall have a better position to offer you. The house is good—it is nearly as good as Eltringham Vicarage, and the garden far

prettier. There is a little farm attached that I think of taking into my own hands. You once told me you would dearly love farming; and in his holidays Harvey could live with us.'

No answer. He looked wistfully at her, and went on. 'You are not happy here; the shop does not suit you. I saw myself last night how you felt about things. If you would marry me, I think you would care for me in time. I would not ask much—only the right of being your husband, and protecting you; I have love enough for both. I know you trust me. In a way we are friends. I should not be afraid of waiting until you could love me in return.'

'How good you are!' The words burst from Gloden in spite of herself. Oh, why could she not love this simple, kindly nature? What did it matter that he was awkward and brusque in his manner? Could she not overlook his insignificance, his want of attraction? He was offering her much—an assured position, a home almost as good as the one she had left, congenial work and protection for herself and Harvey, and last, but best of all, a love that would last her whole life. And he asked so little in return. He would be patient with her, until she had learned to care for him. And yet, why could she not bring herself to say yes? 'How good you are! I am not worthy of such affection,' she said, almost despairingly.

They were approaching the little village of Silcote, but Gloden, dazed and agitated, had failed to recognise it. The next minute a young man in a dark tweed coat came out of a cottage they were just passing, with a beautiful black pointer at his heels; and Gloden was startled to recognise the Squire.

He raised his hat, and seemed as though he were going to speak; then he glanced at her companion, and drew back with a muttered 'Good-morning.' A denser person than Reginald Lorimer must have detected unusual traces of perturbation on Mr. Logan's face. He never even saw Mr. Lorimer, as he listened to that involuntary exclamation.

'You are worthy of far more than I can give you,' he returned quickly; and Reginald overheard him, and stood stock still in the road, looking after them.

'It is not difficult to understand that,' he said to himself, as he walked on. 'Now, I wonder who that fellow is? I seem to know his face. By Jove! I have it now. It is Logan; he was a curate at Eltringham. Of course he has fallen in love with her there. He is not much to look at; she is a cut above him, I should say. I wonder what sort of

answer he will get? She looked awfully flushed and uncomfortable when she recognised me. He is making love to her—I'd take my oath of that. Confound his impudence! But these clerics have cheek enough for anything'; and Reginald kicked a stone out of his path with decided irritation. "You are worthy of far more than I can give you." The deuce take it! the fellow must be a prig.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

'IT IS NOT MY FAULT'

'We, ignorant of ourselves,
Beget often our own harms, which the wise powers
Deny us for our good ; so find we profit
By losing of our prayers.'

Antony and Cleopatra.

REGINALD LORIMER had just pulled himself together and walked on in the direction of Grantham, when Gloden turned quickly to Mr. Logan. There was a flush on her face, and a singular expression in her eyes.

'Do not say any more to me ; I cannot bear it. Why do you make me suffer so ? I am not ungrateful, and I am not hard. It is not my fault if you have no power to touch my heart—it cannot be my fault.' She spoke almost passionately, as though she wanted to clear herself from some inward accusation.

Mr. Logan's hopes died a natural death as he heard her. 'You have no power to touch my heart.' Could that indeed be the truth ? Was it possible that his great love could fail to elicit any response ? Had it come to this—that he must give it all up ? Then for the moment there was despair in his heart, and, for all his courage, he could not answer her.

'If you had only believed me, and spared me this !' she went on. 'If you knew how your kindness hurts me ! It may be easy for some women to say no, but to me it is simple torture. A dozen years hence, if I live, I shall blame myself for this ; I shall believe that it is somehow through my fault that this trouble has come upon you.'

And then she shivered a little, as though the wind were suddenly cold. This roused him.

'You shall not blame yourself,' he said harshly. 'You have given me no encouragement. When you came out this morning

to avoid me—well, a fool could have understood the meaning of that; but I would not listen to reason. I thought that if you were unhappy, you could be persuaded; that perhaps I should be able to touch you. But I give it up'—spreading his hands with a gesture of utter hopelessness. 'You are right; you will never care for me.'

'Not in that way.' And then her voice choked, and no effort could keep the tears back. Oh, how wretched it all was! The bleak, wintry prospect; the wan, miserable face of the man beside her; the pitiless necessity that compelled her to give him pain; the inexorable laws of human life; its sadness and sorrowful complications. 'If I could only help my own nature!' was her inward cry.

'And there is no other way that would satisfy me,' was Ewen's answer; and then he stopped himself. 'But there is no need for you to make yourself miserable about me; a man can always bear what he has to bear.'

'And you will get over it?'

'Oh yes, I shall get over it. I have my work to do, and of course I do not mean to shirk that. The heart is taken out of me for the present. Clacton will be the abomination of desolation, at least for a while.'

'But your mother will be with you.'

'Yes; but even a mother cannot comfort a man under all circumstances, though she be the best of mothers.'

'Mr. Logan, when you tell me this, you make me wish that I had never been born to bring this misery upon you.'

Then he turned upon her with a stern rebuke. 'You must not say that; it is wrong. How are you or I to know what is best for us? If I had borne my trouble better, you would never have said that to me; so the sin is mine.'

'No—oh no!'

'But it is. I ought not to have shown you my unhappiness so plainly, but for the moment I was utterly overwhelmed; the iron had entered into my very soul. But I shall never be so contemptible in my weakness again.'

'You are not contemptible, Mr. Logan. How can you talk so?'

'Well, I will not talk any more; we are near the town'—for they had turned unconsciously, and were retracing their steps. 'Should you mind if I left you? I think it would be better for us both if I were to bid you good-bye.'

'Oh no; do not leave me so'; and Gloden put her hand

on his arm to detain him. 'Do not leave me with bitterness in your heart; it may be long before we meet again. Tell me at least that you forgive me.'

Then he took her hands, and held them firmly. 'There is no bitterness in my heart against you; only a great sorrow, that I must learn to bear like a man. You have done me no wrong; you cannot help yourself. If I could only be different!' He looked at her moodily; then his glasses grew a little dim. 'God bless you! I can at least without sin pray for your happiness.' And then Gloden did let him go.

She stood still until he was almost out of sight, but he did not once turn. He walked doggedly on, his shoulders bent, his thin, ungainly figure lessening in the distance; and Gloden watched him with a dull ache at her heart.

There was a rude bench behind her, on which she sank wearily. Well, it was over; she had done her day's work, and she had done it thoroughly. She had robbed an honest man of his sweetest hope and purpose in life, and yet no sinner had been so innocent as she. She had done all in her power to like him; she had tabulated his virtues; she had told herself over and over again that no man was ever more deserving of a woman. 'He has fewer faults than other men. What is a little brusquerie and a dictatorial manner, when he is really so kind-hearted and humble-minded?' she had told herself. 'It is not necessary that a man should be handsome. If I loved him, I should get used to his little ways.' And yet, in spite of these arguments, she had turned upon him almost fiercely. 'It is not my fault that you have no power to touch my heart.' That is what she had said to him.

Gloden could give no reason for the sudden feeling of irritation that seized on her when she met Mr. Lorimer's questioning glance. He was about to speak to her, and then he had checked himself. Had he suspected anything? But why should he suspect anything? She had a perfect right to be walking with a friend.

'Are you not a little imprudent, Miss Carrick?'

And Gloden started in good earnest. She had heard no footstep, and there was Mr. Lorimer standing before her, while the pointer laid a cold black nose on her lap.

'It is just beginning to sleet,' he continued carelessly. 'I suppose you are tired, and that Mr. Logan—the gentleman who was with you, I mean—has gone back for an umbrella.'

'Mr. Logan! Oh no; he was obliged to go back—to leave me. I was tired.'

'So you seem'—sitting down beside her in a friendly manner; while Gloden, painfully conscious of her red eyes, made much of Nan, and wished Mr. Lorimer a hundred miles away. Why was he always crossing her path now? There was some fatality about it. When she least expected it, he started up before her.

'I was awfully surprised to see you sitting here alone,' went on the Squire; 'and you were so deep in thought, too, that you never even looked up. Why, you quite jumped when I spoke to you.'

'You startled me so.' Gloden took care not to look at him as she spoke.

But Reginald had sharp eyes, though he chose to appear unconscious. His curiosity was fairly roused by this time. He had met Mr. Logan striding moodily along in the direction of the town, and then he had come upon Miss Carrick sitting in a very despondent attitude, and he knew perfectly why Nan was absorbing all her attention.

'Don't you think we had better be walking on?' was his next observation. 'You must not sit here any longer; it would be a clear case of suicide'; and he gave her his hand as though to help her to rise.

Evidently Gloden was to be allowed no choice in the matter; anyhow, she yielded to Reginald's good-natured air of authority.

'But there is no need to take you out of your way,' she observed, rather feebly. 'You were going home to luncheon, were you not?'

'Oh, my luncheon is rather a movable feast, and I have no one to please but myself—at least, until Tottie is old enough to keep me company. When are you coming to see Tottie again, Miss Carrick? She is very faithful to your memory still. 'I love my Carricks'; I actually heard her say that the other day.'

'What a darling she is! I should love to see her again.'

'Your desire can easily be accomplished; Tottie is always on view in the afternoon. What does that reproving glance mean?' For Gloden, surprised by this into self-forgetfulness, had allowed him to have a glimpse of her swollen eyelids. 'Am I putting my foot into it as usual—shocking the proprieties? I am afraid Tottie and I have no chaperone. Still, there is another way; Tottie can come and see you.'

‘Oh no—I mean you are very kind. Mr. Lorimer, please don’t think me rude—I would not be that for the world—but I would rather not take you out of your way. I know it is your luncheon-time, and—and I am not good company to-day; I have been worried.’

‘I was thinking myself that you seemed a trifle low,’ he replied cheerfully. ‘I often have a fit of the blues; a big house all to myself—for, of course, Tottie does not count for much—is enough to make a man feel hipped.’

‘I think you bear your troubles wonderfully,’ she returned, with a sigh.

‘Well, I don’t know about that’—shaking his head. He had taken no notice of her hint that he should leave her. ‘I wish I had Aladdin’s lamp at this moment, or that some genii would metamorphose this stick into an umbrella. This sleet is coming down rather unpleasantly; I am afraid you will get awfully wet.’

‘It does not matter,’ she returned indifferently.

‘You are anything but a fair-weather friend,’ continued Reginald, trying to jest. ‘I made your acquaintance in a thunderstorm. Now, if I were to believe in omens, I wonder what such a commencement would portend?—that I am always to look out for squalls when I am in your vicinity?’

But if he expected her to enter into the spirit of his joke, he was unpleasantly disappointed. It chimed in too ill with her strained and harassed mood.

‘It means that you had better have nothing more to do with me,’ she broke out with sudden bitterness; ‘that I am a source of trouble to myself and other people too.’

Then he understood perfectly the cause of her present distress. ‘She has refused the fellow,’ he said to himself, and he thought that her tears showed true womanliness. ‘She is not the ordinary sort,’ he went on to himself. ‘She would not lead on a man to propose to her out of sheer vanity and love of conquest, and then turn him adrift without a moment’s scruple.’ And then he said in a kind voice—

‘One takes a morbid view of things when one is a bit low; if the sun were shining now instead of this confounded sleet, you would feel quite different. Why, in the spring I felt fit to hang myself; I could not stay in the house some evenings. I used to let the dogs loose, and take the whole lot for a walk—they were company for me, you see—and when I had had a five miles’ tramp I used to eat an enormous

supper, and turn in and sleep like a log. It was better than brooding over the fire, like an old woman with the face-ache.'

'Or a young woman with the heart-ache'—rather drily. Reginald's manner was so droll, that it was impossible to refrain from a smile.

'I am afraid young women's troubles have not been much in my line,' he returned, delighted with this transient gleam of sunshine, though it was a very poor specimen of a smile; 'but I should think the same sort of thing would suit them. Take my advice, Miss Carrick; next time you are in the doldrums, go across country as a crow flies—stiles, five-barred gates, and all. Harvey will be delighted to give you a lead, and in an hour's time you will find yourself as hungry as a hunter. Good lack, young gentleman, what is the meaning of this?'—as a vigorous young arm was thrust into his, and an affectionate push almost sent him in the road.

'How fast you two walk!' grumbled Harvey; 'I am nearly out of breath catching you up. What were you saying, Mr. Lorimer, about being as hungry as a hunter? By Jove! if you only had my appetite.'

'Mine is Brobdingnagian.' And as Harvey looked rather perplexed, 'My dear boy, have you never heard of Swift's celebrated romance, *Gulliver's Travels*, wherein the inhabitants are represented as giants about "as tall as an ordinary church steeple; everything else on the same prodigious scale," so of course their appetites were immense? But you have plenty to learn yet'—shaking his head sadly.

'Oh, come, now, there is one thing you don't know, does he, Glow? that Aunt Clemency has made a steak-pudding for dinner. She makes awfully good steak-puddings, Mr. Lorimer, with kidneys and eggs and all sorts of things.'

'Once in my life,' observed Reginald, solemnly, 'I partook of the dish you mentioned. It was at the house of a tenant. I was dead tired and wet through, and Farmer Denison was good enough to invite me to take a knife and fork; that was his mode of wording the invitation, I remember. "Take a knife and fork with us, Squire." There were four of us,' he continued, in a melancholy tone, 'but I assure you I went for that pudding, and in a short time only the dish remained.'

Harvey seemed to enjoy this anecdote. And as they were crossing the Market-place at that moment, more than one passer-by greeted the squire, and then stood and looked after the group rather curiously. Then a sudden inspiration came to Harvey.

He chuckled, looked at his sister, then darted on in front, bolted into the shop, and returned breathless just as Mr. Lorimer was shaking hands with Gloden. Mr. Carrick followed him.

‘Don’t go, Squire,’ he said politely. ‘My little chap here tells me that you are as hungry as a hunter, and that it is your luncheon-time, and that you have got a fancy for a steak-pudding. My wife and I will be fine and proud if you will take a snack with us.’

Then a look of extreme delight came into Reginald’s eyes. He hardly knew himself how famished he was until Harvey had begun to talk of the pudding. It is needless to say he accepted with alacrity.

Gloden, who was too much astonished at her uncle’s audacity to make a remark, went off to her room to change her wet things ; while Harvey allured Nan with a bone into the backyard ; and Clemency, just a little bit flustered out of her usual calm, went in search of a clean napkin and to bid Patty take up the pudding carefully.

For one moment Gloden thought of sending down an excuse that her head ached, and that she did not need any dinner, but there was no bell in her room, and she was afraid that Harvey would make a fuss ; so she hastily bathed her face and smoothed her hair, and then glided into the room, and into her place, so quietly that Mr. Lorimer, who was speaking to Mrs. Carrick, did not notice her entrance, and started perceptibly when he saw her.

Clemency commiserated kindly with Gloden on her lack of appetite. ‘You have got a sort of chill with your wetting,’ she said. ‘I shall tell Patty to brew you an early cup of tea ; there is nothing like a cup of tea for a headache.’

‘Mrs. Carrick, if you would only give my cook the receipt of this pudding, I shall be eternally obliged,’ observed Mr. Lorimer. ‘In my opinion it is a masterpiece of cookery.’

Then it was evident that Clemency was very much pleased, and Reuben Carrick’s eyes twinkled.

‘My wife is a rare cook, Squire. She has taught our girl a heap of things. In my opinion, every lass, high or low, should know how to cook. In our great-grandmothers’ times the ladies were not above such work, but now every young chit of a girl thinks more about playing the piano and getting a smattering of French that would not be known for such by a native, than of beating up eggs for a cake or making a stew.’

‘Tottie shall be properly instructed in the art, Mr. Carrick,

returned Reginald, easily. 'She has already been detected making mud-pies in the spinney. We must not allow her talent to rust.'

And again Harvey exploded. 'That is the jolliest part about Mr. Lorimer,' he observed confidentially to his sister afterwards; 'he does make one laugh so. It is not so much what he says, as the droll way he says it, that is so killing. Was it not nice to see him sitting there talking so comfortably to Uncle Reuben? I tell you what, Gloden; he enjoyed himself awfully.'

'Oh, do you think so?' asked Gloden, rather dubiously. But Harvey was right. Mr. Lorimer had thoroughly enjoyed himself.

In the first place, it was a new experience, and he loved new experiences when they were not too unpleasant, such as the extraction of a big double tooth, for example. It had never fallen to the lot of the young squire of Silcote to partake of early dinner in a small parlour behind a shop, with a pleasing view of a back-yard. Then, though the viands were homely, they were excellent, and he had added the sauce of keen appetite. If any other ingredient entered into his enjoyment, he did not own it even to himself; only the sight of Gloden in her humble environment filled him with a sort of wonder. 'Any one could see that she does not belong to the place,' he said to himself. But he made no attempt to draw her into the conversation, and contented himself with chattering commonplaces to Clemency.

'I have got a half-holiday to-day, and I was just thinking what I could do with myself,' observed Harvey, presently. 'It is such a beastly sort of afternoon, you see; but now you have come'—nudging Reginald affectionately—'we shall find plenty to amuse us. Come along, and I will show you the Chinese room, where Gloden practises her fiddle.'

Mr. Lorimer accepted this invitation with alacrity; but he stopped when he perceived that Gloden showed no intention of accompanying them.

'I hope that you intend to do the honours of the Chinese room, Miss Carrick,' he observed, with languid politeness. 'Harvey and I would only get into mischief alone.'

'Perhaps you had better go up and have a look at the fire, Gloden,' put in Clemency, rather anxiously. 'Patty has been a little forgetful lately.' Then Gloden felt herself obliged to go.

Reginald looked round with an air of satisfaction; the old-fashioned cosiness of the room pleased him. Patty had not forgotten her duty, and a bright fire welcomed them. Outside

the prospect was sufficiently dreary; the sleet had turned to rain, and the wet street and heavy grey sky were not inviting.

'I am afraid I am weather-bound for the present, and must trespass on your hospitality,' he said, with a hypocritical regret in his tones. And then he spied the violin-case, and his eyes brightened. 'Now, if you would play to us!' he suggested, in a persuasive voice.

'Oh, bother the fiddle!' returned Harvey, discontentedly. 'I thought we should have played chess or backgammon. Gloden plays chess awfully well, and I am first-rate at backgammon. We could have tossed up, you know—chess heads, and backgammon tails, or we might have played by turns; and there are some chestnuts I meant to roast; and——'

'Look here, Miss Carrick!' exclaimed Reginald, in a tone of desperation, 'if you are going to spoil the boy in this way, I shall have to give him up; spoilt children are intolerable'—and here he took Harvey gently by the ear. 'Little boys should be seen, not heard. Your sister is going to discourse sweet music to us, and if you do not shut up and hold your tongue, I will bundle you down the staircase, neck and crop.'

But here Harvey broke away, and began dancing round him in well-simulated rage.

Well, after a time peace was restored; and presently Harvey was seated on the rug in front of the fire, with Griff beside him, watching the chestnuts with absorbed attention, while Mr. Lorimer, lounging at his ease in the roomy window-seat, listened dreamily to the strains of the violin.

After all, the request had not been unpalatable to Gloden. When anything agitated or excited her, it was easier for her to play than talk; music always calmed and refreshed her, as the harp of the young shepherd refreshed the tormented spirit of Saul.

Reginald, glancing from under his half-closed eyelids, saw the colour come to her pale cheek, and the light to her eyes. 'Do not stop,' he said more than once, and there was something urgent in his tone. The movement of the little thin hand seemed to fascinate him. When at last she laid aside her bow, and looked at him with an apologetic smile, his expression startled her.

'I forgot. Why did you let me go on playing?' she said, shocked at her own forgetfulness and absorption. 'Harvey will be so tired, too. You ought to have stopped me, Mr. Lorimer.'

'I could not bring myself to do that. I cannot thank you, Miss Carrick; no mere words could thank you.' And then, as he stood aside to let her pass, there was a strange look in his eyes. But he was conscious of no actual thought—only a deep and subtle pleasure stirred him, as her dress brushed against him; and when he took her hand to bid her good-bye, a sort of thrill passed through him. 'I shall come again; you will let me come again?' he said, in a voice so low that Harvey did not hear him.

Then Gloden's womanly instincts took alarm. 'I think it would be better not,' she said hurriedly; but she dropped her eyes as she spoke. 'You know what I mean, Mr. Lorimer'; and her voice faltered a little.

'I shall not try to guess; but if you will not give me permission, I am afraid I shall come all the same. I do not feel as though I can keep away'; and before she could answer him, he had called Harvey and had left the room.

'What did he mean? Why did he look at me like that? I will never play to him again. He must not come here.' But, though she told herself this, some unerring voice whispered that if he had a mind to come, it would be difficult to keep Reginald Lorimer away.

CHAPTER XXIX

‘WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU, EWEN?’

‘Love that asketh love again
Finds the barter nought but pain ;
Love that giveth in full store
Aye receives as much or more.’

DINAH MULOCH.

No one would have changed places with Ewen Logan as he walked back to Grantham. Then, and ever afterwards, he told himself that it was the bitterest hour of his life. Never since he had attained manhood had he been conscious of such bruised sensibility, of such mental aridity and lack of hope. The purpose and meaning of existence seemed utterly frustrated and set at nought. For more than four years he had nourished the secret hope that Gloden Carrick would be his wife, and had possessed his soul in patience.

‘All comes to him who waits,’ he had often told himself. ‘In time she will realise the value of a love like mine. I will not lose heart. I will never give her up—never!’

But now for the first time despair had entered his soul. ‘It is not my fault if you have no power to touch my heart.’ Those were the words that had torn away the last shred of his hope—that showed him the truth in its bald and hideous verity. He would never win her ; no amount of devotion or passionate insistence would ever make a responsive spark. She was not for him ; and as he owned the humiliating fact, it seemed to him as though the winter of his life were come.

Poor Ewen ! He was heavily handicapped. Was it any fault of his that nature had been so niggardly with her gifts ? After all, what did his ungainly figure and short-sightedness matter in comparison with his good honest heart ? The graces of manner may be much, but the virtues of uprightness and

faithfulness are surely more. And to some women, even thin, sloping shoulders and clerical peremptoriness cannot obscure the inner beauty of true manliness and trustworthiness.

It was Ewen's loss that he had set himself to attain the impossible, while all the time the woman who should have been his helpmate dwelt beside him unrecognised and unrewarded. Had any one told him that he was the poetry of Winifred's life, he would have opened his eyes in amazement. He and Winifred were cousins, friends, chums; all his life he had looked upon her as a sister; he had told her all his troubles, he was sure of her sympathy; the tie of relationship made their bond a closer one than that which united Constance and Felix Hamerton.

Ewen took advantage of his position to lecture Winifred; he commented severely on any small failing or trifling dereliction of duty; and Winifred took his rebukes so meekly, with such sweetness of temper and cheerfulness, that he almost enjoyed his post of censor.

But, on the other hand, Winifred was not without her modest triumphs. She knew that she was necessary to Ewen—that he, as well as his mother, relied on her strong common sense and unfailing cheerfulness for most of their home comfort; and this knowledge was a continual spring of joy to her.

Winifred had no illusions about herself; she nourished no secret hopes that she would ever be more to Ewen. Her affections were never demonstrative, but deep down in her heart Ewen's image reigned supreme; his faults as well as his virtues were dear to her; his mannerisms were only beauties. Ewen was Ewen, and she had no fault to find with him.

Winifred had long tutored herself to look for Ewen's marriage; he would fall in love and marry like other men. When that day came, she meant to love his wife; she would take her into her heart and cherish her as a dear younger sister. Ewen's children should be as the very apple of her eye. 'They shall love their Aunt Winnie,' she would say to herself, in this shadowy day-dream of hers, as she trudged backward and forward to her work. She never dreamt about her own future; she was just 'Aunt Winnie,' and nothing else.

Many other women are as selfless and unexact in their aims as Winifred Logan, and as ready to immolate themselves and their ideals on some shrine of domestic duty—who make no demands for themselves, and who find their happiness in the happiness of others, and pass twilight existences, growing grey

before their time. 'She hath done what she could'; may we not believe that such words will be said over many a one whose heart was often sore and wrung in this life at seeing others feasting in high bliss in upper rooms, while they are bidden to no such festivities? To some the bread of affliction and the water of affliction are freely dealt—denied hopes, wasted affections, famine of the heart's desires; and yet 'she had done what she could,' she had waited and suffered patiently and without bitterness. In this life she had not received her good things; they are laid up for her in the divine treasury.

Ewen cared nothing for the sleet that drove in his face and melted on his hat-brim; nature was sympathising with him in his drear hour, and not mocking him with sunshiny smiles. He was in no hurry to return to Chapel Street, where his mother's anxious eyes would follow him about the room. He chafed at the idea of confinement to four walls; he walked on until he grew stiff and tired with exertion before he set his face homewards. Mrs. Logan uttered a cry of dismay when she saw him. He was wet through, and looked utterly fagged; a little river was running down his shoulders on her neat oil-cloth.

'Oh, Ewen, where have you been?' she exclaimed, lifting up her hands. 'You must just go upstairs and change your clothes. Rebecca is vexing herself because the dinner is nearly spoilt; but we must keep it waiting for all that. Go, like a good lad, and I will just fetch a clean cloth for the oil-cloth.'

And Ewen, with some reluctance, followed his mother's advice. But he could eat nothing, and very soon went off into the next room, on the pretext of writing his next Sunday's sermon; but, as he sat there with the books before him, the thought of his crushed hopes and the cruel purposelessness of his life drove all but the text from his mind. How was he ever to preach a sermon again? His tongue would cleave to his mouth with misery.

Winifred had had a hard day's work. The care of five high-spirited children, with all the insolence of youth and health, was certainly not a sinecure's part, and, dearly as she loved her pupils, and was beloved by them, there were occasional conflicts of wills.

The Parrys were famed for their hospitality, and the Red House was seldom free from guests, and the arrival of some favourite cousins had caused riot and insubordination in the schoolroom. Winifred, who had intended begging for a holiday

on the score of Ewen’s brief visit, discovered for herself that it would be cruel to ask for it, and that her presence for the next few days would be indispensable.

‘It is rather hard,’ she said to herself with a sigh, as she closed the gate of the Red House behind her; ‘Ewen will be obliged to go back to Eltringham on Saturday afternoon, and what good will my half-holiday be to me? I shall see so little of him—only in the evening, and then I am tired. Ewen comes so seldom now, and when he goes to Clacton——’ But there she checked herself; she could not trust herself to enter on that subject. A dim fear that duty would detain her at Grantham had more than once crossed her mind.

As she let herself in with her latch-key, Mrs. Logan stepped noiselessly out of the parlour. Her face wore an anxious expression.

‘I hope you are not wet, Winnie, my dear’—feeling her tenderly over the arms and shoulders.

But Winifred only laughed. ‘Of course not. It is quite fine, Aunt Janet. Where is Ewen?’

Then Mrs. Logan shook her head. ‘I will come up with you a moment,’ she said mysteriously; ‘there is no need for me to make the tea until you are ready. It has been a long day, Winifred, and I have been wanting you more than usual. Let me hang up your cloak; you will be for changing your dress, of course; it seems a pity to wear a good material like that in the evening. I will give you out your old black silk; with a lace bow, it will look as nice as possible.’

Winifred gave no heed to this economical remark. ‘What’s wrong, Aunt Janet?’ she asked, coming to the point as usual. ‘Why are you puckering up your forehead and talking under your breath, as though some one were ill?’

‘Dear me, Winifred, how sharp you are!’ returned Mrs. Logan, nervously; ‘there is no keeping anything from you. Why should you think anything is wrong? I am quite sure that Ewen hasn’t spoken more than a dozen sentences since breakfast-time.’

Then Winifred, with a trace of impatience in her manner, took the old silk dress from her aunt’s hands.

‘I wish you would sit down, Aunt Janet, and tell me everything straight out. Ewen was as cheerful as possible this morning. He was going to call on Miss Carrick, but he walked with me first to the Red House, and we were talking about Clacton all the time. How soon did he come back?’

‘Oh, my dear, not until long past dinner-time—the joint was nearly spoilt; and then he came in wet through, and looking as fagged as though he had walked twenty miles. I made him change his things, but he could not eat more than two or three morsels—he said he was too tired; and then he went off to write his sermon, and he is writing it still for all I know.’

Winifred remained silent—her eyes were fixed on the floor; then she roused herself.

‘Did he speak of Miss Carrick, Aunt Janet?’

‘Only a word or two. He said he had seen her, and that she was very well, but he did not enter into particulars. I think he must have been disappointed in his visit, he looked so glum and out of sorts. It is very strange, is it not, Winnie? Ewen has such a sweet temper; he is so seldom cross.’

‘Don’t trouble about it, Aunt Janet; we will just leave him alone—that is always the wisest way. He is a little over-excited about Clacton; it is such a wonderful thing to him, you know. Why, he is only just thirty, and to have a living offered to him. It shows what a good opinion the bishop has of him.’

‘That was just what I was saying to myself, Winnie. Why, I could hardly sleep all night with thinking of it all. And how proud your uncle would have been! But there, you will be wanting your tea, and the kettle will be boiling over. Come down to the fire as soon as ever you can, for you must be nearly starved, Winnie.’

And Mrs. Logan bustled away, drying her eyes as she went; while Winifred, with a grave look on her face, finished her toilet. But she was very cheerful when she came downstairs, and she took no notice of Ewen’s taciturnity. She would not allow her aunt to question him about his progress with the sermon. ‘Students never like to be questioned,’ she observed smilingly, and she covered his silence by talking herself on every possible subject except one—she never mentioned Clacton.

Ewen, numbed and frozen by hours of solitary brooding, felt a little warmed and cheered by his cousin’s placid liveliness. He did not refuse food, as he had at dinner, and he showed his need of it by the avidity with which he swallowed it. When Winifred quietly replenished his cup he took it thankfully, and when he at last pushed aside his plate there was more colour in his face. Neither of the women offered any objection when

he announced his intention of going back to his sermon. Mrs. Logan looked after him wistfully, and her lips opened, but Winifred nudged her significantly.

'Let him feel free to do as he likes,' she whispered, and as usual her good sense prevailed.

When prayers were over, Mrs. Logan gave her son an appealing glance.

'You will not be sitting up, my boy,' she said, laying a thin hand on his shoulder, with the worn wedding-ring very loose on it, and her voice was soft and coaxing.

'No, mother, I think not,' he answered, with unusual gentleness; and then a touch of compunction made him add, 'I will try to be more sociable to-morrow.'

Winifred said nothing, except a brief good-night as she left the room; but an hour later she opened her door gently and crept downstairs. She was still in the old black silk that looked so worn and shiny in the daylight, and a little grey woollen shawl was over her shoulders. Her pince-nez was dangling from her neck, and the large, short-sighted eyes looked a little pathetic. The little parlour was so dark that for a moment she could not distinguish anything. Ewen had turned out the gas, and had sat down to the fire as though to warm himself; his elbows were on his knees, and his chin propped on them. Winifred could see the gleaming of his spectacles as she came towards him.

He made no remark as she knelt down and roused the fire; but when a tiny blaze spurted up, she turned to him and said quietly, 'What is wrong with you, Ewen?' Then he started in earnest.

'What do you mean?' he returned, and his voice was rather gruff. 'Why are you not in bed, Winnie? It is half-past eleven at least.'

'It is more than that,' she replied placidly. 'I am not sleepy, so I thought I would keep you company. Tell me all about it, Ewen. I have guessed your trouble already; it flashed upon me in a moment. It is about Miss Carrick; you care for her'—Winifred could not bring herself to say 'love'; the word stuck in her throat—'and she has disappointed you.'

A dark flush sprang to Ewen's brow. 'How could you know? I have never mentioned her name,' he stammered. 'Are you a witch, Winnie?' for there was something uncanny to him in the way she had surprised his carefully-guarded secret.

‘No,’ she said quietly; ‘but it is not easy to deceive me. You and Aunt Janet are all I have in the world, and your joys and sorrows are mine. You believe that, do you not, Ewen?’

She spoke without excitement. She was still kneeling before the fire, and her strong white hands were loosely folded before her. There was nothing in her expression or manner that conveyed the idea of suppressed emotion; it might have been his childish confidante Winnie begging to share his trouble.

For a moment he hesitated, but she had chosen her opportunity well; the quiet hour, the shadowy room, were all in her favour. After all, why should he keep his pain to himself, Winnie was reliable; she never chattered about other folk’s business; she had a still tongue when she chose; she always knew the right thing to say, and when to say it. And so it was that Ewen opened his heart to her, and the story of his four years’ love was made plain to her.

Winifred listened to it all in silence; she knew better than to interrupt him by a word. Now and then her eyes grew moist, and once she shivered slightly; but she had herself well in hand, and Ewen never noticed these signs of agitation.

‘It is all over, Winnie,’ he finished; ‘she will never care for me—never!’

She seemed to take counsel with the fire before she answered him. If Ewen hoped that she would contradict him, he was disappointed. To Winifred’s strong common sense, it would have been cruelty to fan the expiring hope.

‘No,’ she said, very slowly and sadly, ‘she will never care for you; you are right to give it up, Ewen.’

He winced at her plain speaking as though she had touched a wound. In spite of his despair, was there still a lingering spark of hope that Winifred had quenched?

‘All these four years have been years wasted. I have given her the best of my life!’ he exclaimed bitterly.

Then Winifred turned her face to him. ‘They have not been wasted, Ewen,’ she said softly. ‘No time or love that we give to one of our fellow-creatures is ever or can be ever wasted; it is blasphemy even to hint at such a thing.’

‘I do not understand you,’ he replied drearily. ‘What has been the use of it all, either to her or myself?’

‘Dear Ewen, that is more than I can say. No man, or woman either, could ever properly answer that question; nevertheless, it is the truth I am telling you. Your love for Gloden Carrick has not been wasted, and never will be.’

‘I cannot follow you, Winifred.’

‘No, dear, perhaps not; one must work out all these problems for one’s self. If I did not hold this belief’—and here her voice trembled a little—‘I should not be the contented woman I am. You must take this comfort to yourself—that the love you have felt for Gloden all these years has wrought some blessing for her, if not for yourself. Ewen, you know more than I; it is for you to teach us. “Through much tribulation——” How does that verse end?’

‘Don’t, Winnie; you make me ashamed of myself. What a selfish fellow I have been! But she has bowled me over utterly. How am I to live my life without her? Do you know, I hate the idea of Clacton.’

‘Never mind all that, Ewen.’ Then, as he looked at her in surprise, ‘Never mind how you feel about things; you must just go on living, and let the feelings take care of themselves. You are unhappy, my poor boy—yes, I know that—but all the same you will do your duty.’

He shook his head. ‘Just now, before you came downstairs, I told myself that I should never be able to preach again.’

‘You will preach far better than you ever have done; this pain is part of your clerical education. I am not afraid either for you or your people.’ Then she stopped, and said persuasively, ‘You will let me tell Aunt Janet about this?’

‘Is it necessary? Why should we make her unhappy?’

‘It will not make her more unhappy; she already guesses that you are in trouble. I think we owe it to her, Ewen.’

Then he made no further objection. ‘You must tell her not to speak to me about it. Gloden’s name must not be mentioned between us.’

‘I think you may trust Aunt Janet; and it is far better for her to know.’ She hesitated, cleared her voice, and then went on a little hurriedly, ‘When you and Aunt Janet are alone together at Clacton, it will never do to keep her in the dark about things.’

‘What on earth do you mean, Winnie? Why should mother and I be alone?’

‘I had not meant to speak of this to-night, Ewen, and it is so late; but perhaps I had better say it. You will make a home for Aunt Janet, of course—it is what you and she have always wished; but it does not follow that you are to make one for your cousin; but Winifred did not look at him as she spoke.’

‘What nonsense is this?’ he exclaimed angrily. ‘Are you refusing to cast in your lot with us after all these years? You know as well as I do that you are necessary to my mother, and that neither of us can get on without you.’

‘You will soon learn to do without me,’ she replied, but, in spite of her efforts, she could not keep the tears out of her voice; ‘and Aunt Janet is stronger and better now. Indeed—indeed, you must try and see things from my point of view. How could I live in dependence on a cousin?—not even a brother; and how do you suppose I could get my living in a place like Clacton-over-Fields? No, no; you and Aunt Janet will be as cosy as possible, and you must just leave me behind. Mrs. Parry will be too thankful to find room for me in the Red House, and if you choose to give me an invitation for the midsummer and Christmas holidays, why, I shall accept it thankfully.’

‘But, Winifred, this is absurd. As long as I have a roof over my head I shall expect you to make your home with us. You are my mother’s adopted daughter, and——’

‘And Ewen Logan’s adopted sister,’ she finished playfully, but her eyes were wet. ‘Thank you a thousand times for your generosity, my dear cousin, but my mind is made up. When Aunt Janet goes to Clacton Vicarage, I shall take up my quarters at the Red House as an independent working woman. Now I really must bid you good-night, or rather good-morning, for it will soon strike one, and I am positively growing sleepy’; and then she took his hand and smiled in his face, and Winifred’s smile was very sweet.

CHAPTER XXX

BROTHER DANIEL

'Adapt thyself to the things with which thy lot has been cast ; and the men among whom thou hast received thy portion, love them, but do it [sincerely].'—M. AURELIUS ANTONINUS.

As Reginald Lorimer walked home through the wintry twilight that evening, he told himself that not many days should elapse before he found some pretext for repeating his visit.

When he had said to Gloden that it would be impossible for him to keep away, he was acting under the influence of an overmastering impulse. He no longer disguised from himself that the girl attracted him strangely. She was unlike any one whom he had ever met. She reminded him of some rare flower hidden in a deserted garden. She had unfolded slowly and with reluctance, but it seemed to him now as though her pale bloom had a delicate beauty in it that exactly suited his taste.

But though this new friendship, as he termed it, was beginning to dominate his thoughts, he never called it by its right name ; the idea that he was falling in love for the first time in his life, before Car had lain in her grave a twelvemonth, would have shocked him utterly.

But he was lonely and restless—this is how he put it to himself—and Gloden Carrick's music and her soft voice and quiet movements soothed and rested him. He was at his ease with her. She never seemed to expect him to pay her attention, and even when she was in one of her perverse moods, and kept him at a distance, she amused and interested him.

'She gives me very little encouragement,' he said to himself, as he walked leisurely down the Silcote road ; 'she is always trying to put me in my right place. She is the proudest and the pluckiest girl I ever knew. But I like her all the better for her quiet insolence ; it seems to draw a fellow on, and,

though she told me just now that it would be better for me to stay away, there was a look in her eyes that contradicted her words. If she would only let herself go and forget all this nonsense about her uncle's shop, we should be good friends.'

But though Reginald's will was good, he was unable to carry out his intentions. One of Lady Car's numerous cousins wrote to propose a visit to Silcote. The young squire, who was the soul of hospitality, gladly welcomed his guest; and Sir Charles Egerton, who found his quarters comfortable, was easily induced to send for his wife and eldest daughter. After all, Reginald was to eat his Christmas dinner at his brother-in-law's house, for pressure of business detained Felix in town, and as Ninian had a bad feverish cold, Constance was unwilling to leave home.

And so it was that Mr. Lorimer found no opportunity of repeating his visit to Market Street, and was obliged to content himself with sending messages through Harvey when he spent his usual Saturday afternoons at Silcote Park.

Harvey had a great deal to say about Sir Charles Egerton, who, he informed Gloden, was one of the biggest swells he had ever seen, but not a bad fellow on the whole. And about Lady Egerton, who was a flimsy, conceited piece of goods, in Harvey's estimation, with a fine lady's drawl, and a patronising air that angered him excessively. And he had scant reverence for the slim, large-eyed Ursula, who was at that uncertain age of budding womanhood when youthful *gaucheries* blend with tremulous dignity. To Harvey this big, solemn young person was an anomaly.

'There is nothing she can do, and nothing she cares about, except reading; and Lady Egerton is always nagging at her for hunching her shoulders and spoiling her eyes,' went on Harvey. 'I pity her for having such a mother. I think Mr. Lorimer pities her too, for he is always trying to draw her out.'

'I wonder you care to go there so much under the circumstances,' was Gloden's rejoinder.

But Harvey flared up at this. What did it matter if a hundred disagreeable people were at Silcote, as long as he had his friend?

'He is jollier than ever, I can tell you that, Glow,' he finished. 'He is just like a great big brother to me.' And thereupon Gloden held her peace.

But she was very grateful in her heart to Harvey's friend; and now and then the thought crossed her that, if only circumstances had been different, she might have been his friend too.

'He is always trying to be kind to me now,' she said to herself. 'I think it is his way to be kind; he likes to see people happy, and to be happy himself. He has a sunshiny nature, one can see that, in spite of his trouble. And he is not selfish; he would go out of his way to help people.'

Gloden told herself that she was glad, very glad, that Mr. Lorimer had not come again. It was far better for them both that there should be no repetition of his visit. And yet when Christmas had arrived, and the Hall was empty, she was conscious of a vague feeling of discomfort.

It was her Uncle Reuben who had returned from the station, and had brought them the news that he had seen the squire and his guests entering the London train.

'They had a mountain of luggage with them,' he remarked; 'it took all the porters to wait on them. The Squire saw me, and wished me a happy Christmas, and sent his kind regards to the ladies. And where is Harvey?'—interrupting himself. 'There was a goodish-sized box, and as heavy as lead, waiting for him at the station, which I brought up with me. The stationmaster told me it had just come from London, and that he was going to send it on. It is a present from the Squire, I'll be bound. He will spoil the lad. We shall never make an honest tradesman of him, shall we, Clem?' and Reuben rubbed his hands gleefully, quite unaware that his words had given Gloden a stab.

'Make a tradesman of you, my darling!' she repeated indignantly to herself. 'Never, if I have to go on my knees to prevent it!' and the next moment she heard Harvey calling to her excitedly to come and inspect his treasure.

Uncle Reuben was right. It was the Squire's Christmas gift to his boy-friend. Harvey was almost voiceless with delight. It was a set of carpenter's tools in a handsome oak box—the best and handsomest that could be got for money; and Gloden felt a little pang at the costliness of the gift, but she dared not give vent to this feeling.

'How very, very kind!' she murmured, as she pretended to inspect a chisel.

Harvey gave a scornful little laugh; his voice wasn't quite under control.

'Kind!' he repeated. 'Can't you find a bigger word than that, Glow? He gets better and kinder every day. He has got the heart of a king; he is magnificently generous!' And here, in despair of finding fitting words in which to express his

feelings, Harvey brought the hammer in contact with the table so sharply that Griff started from his sleep and began to bark furiously.

'Hold your tongue, you duffer!' exclaimed his young master, brutally; for if dogs had nerves like humans, where were you? Lie down, and leave your betters to talk. By the by, Glow, I have never given you the Squire's message, and it was a pretty long one, I can tell you; I don't remember the half of it.'

Gloden felt a little injured at this. When Harvey had so much, he might have taken the trouble to remember a message. But it was no good scolding him; boys were proverbially careless.

'I shall think of it directly,' continued Harvey, pleasantly; he was ignorant of his sister's hurt feelings. 'Won't I make a famous set of book-shelves for Uncle Reuben's birthday? He will be fine and pleased—ay, Glow? Don't you wish you were me, instead of being a girl, and then Mr. Lorimer could send you presents?'

'I would rather that you should have them,' she replied gently. 'Have you remembered any of the message yet, Harvey?'

'Well, I think I have it now. He sent his love, and——'

'He did nothing of the kind; you ought to be ashamed of yourself for inventing such things'; and Gloden coloured with annoyance.

Harvey looked up in placid astonishment. 'Why are you exciting yourself so? Well, perhaps he did not send love; it was kind regards, or some such rubbish. You must not expect me to remember all that. Now, don't interrupt me again, or I shall forget everything. His kind regards, and he was awfully sorry, and all that kind of thing, that he had not been able to call and say good-bye, but he wished you a happy Christmas, and hoped you would be comfortable.'

'And is that all?' It was a disappointing message, but of course Harvey had forgotten half.

'Well, it is all I can remember,' replied Harvey, truthfully; 'but he was a long time saying it. I think, from his manner, he had been wanting to come dreadfully, only those old Egertons prevented it. I know he said he was awfully sorry two or three times over, and then he told me to take care of you, and not let you tramp out all weathers. "Your sister is delicate, and you must look after her." I could not help laughing at that. You are not delicate, are you, Glow?'

Gloden shook her head ; she felt slightly mollified. He had meant to bid them good-bye, then, and it was not his fault that he had been unable to do so ; and he had begged Harvey to take care of her. It was kind—it was very kind of Mr. Lorimer to trouble himself about her. After all, the message had not been so disappointing, and she forgave Harvey for his thoughtlessness.

Harvey's grand tool-box made him completely happy, and gave him and Bernard Trevor plenty of occupation. Uncle Reuben's bookshelves were measured, and a wood box for Aunt Clemency designed, and during the daylight hours both lads were busy in a lower room that was turned into a workshop.

To Gloden Christmas could not be otherwise than dull. Violet Winter had gone to town, so there were no more visits to the Gate House for the present ; and, in spite of efforts on hers and Winifred's part to appear as though nothing had happened, their relations were somewhat strained, and Gloden saw little of her friends in Chapel Street. But she fought her depression bravely. She practised her violin, and studied Italian sedulously, and was always ready when Harvey wanted her to walk or play chess with him.

It was evident, too, that Clemency had something on her mind, though, as usual, she kept it to herself ; but the reason of the secret uneasiness that marred her enjoyment of Christmas was this : Clemency had one brother, to whom she was much attached. He was a draper at Stapleton, a town about eighteen miles distant, and it had always been a custom for Daniel Moore and his family to spend Twelfth Night with Clemency and her husband.

For the first time in her life Clemency looked forward to this evening with dread. Daniel was Daniel, and she could not pick holes in her own flesh and blood ; but whatever would Gloden say to Eliza, with her dressiness and loud voice ? 'Not that there is any harm in Eliza,' thought Clemency with momentary compunction ; 'for she is a good-hearted creature, and makes Daniel an excellent wife, and she has an eye for business that makes me ashamed of myself. But though Lavinia and Mary Anne are my own nieces, they are not to my taste. It is their upbringing, poor things ! Eliza was all for accomplishments and outward show, and so their manners have suffered. They are young and flighty ; maybe they will settle down when they get husbands of their own.'

'I suppose you have been hearing from Daniel,' observed

Reuben, one evening when the young folks had retired, 'and you have been ordering your goose as usual?' for hot goose was always the *pièce de résistance* on these occasions.

'I am afraid Dan and Eliza would be affronted if we passed them over this Christmas,' returned Clemency, in a deprecatory tone.

Then Reuben laid down his pipe and stared at her in surprise. 'Whatever has come to you, wife?' he asked mildly. 'It is not like you to be setting aside old customs. Why, Daniel and Eliza have eaten their Twelfth Night supper with us ever since we were married. And there's Lavinia's sweetheart, too; he is a decent sort of young chap, they tell me, and she would be bringing him, of course.'

'I am thinking of Gloden, Reuben,' returned his wife, slowly. It is no want of good-will to my own belongings, but there is your niece to be considered. Gloden is stand-offish by nature, and she does not take to our friends, and Lavinia and Polly are not always as nice-mannered as I should wish them to be.' And here Clemency broke off in much distress, for a most unusual frown was spreading over Reuben's forehead.

'You astonish me, Clem,' he said rather severely. 'Do you suppose your folk are to suffer because my brother's children have come under my roof? Nay, nay; there is no justice in that. Daniel shall eat his Twelfth Night supper here as usual. Your relations shall be as kindly welcome as mine. Gloden may be uppish, but she must put aside her pride for one evening, and help us entertain our guests. I am not one for spoiling young people, and keeping them from doing their duty. So you will set about writing at once to Daniel, if you wish to please me; and you can tell Lavinia, with my love, to bring her spark if she likes—Hector Bradley; isn't that his name? A heathenish sort of name, too, for a clerk in a bank.'

'Very well, Reuben,' returned Clemency, dutifully; for she knew better than to argue with her husband when he was in one of his high moods. Any want of consideration to Clemency always set his back up, as he phrased it.

'She is a cut above most women, and no one shall look down on her,' he would say in his rough chivalry; for no knight ever fought more bravely for his lady of delight than Reuben Carrick for the rights of his homely little wife.

'My brother and his family always have supper with us on Twelfth Night,' observed Clemency, a little timidly, when she found herself alone with her niece the evening before the festivity.

Gloden looked up from her work in some surprise. 'I did not know you had a brother, Aunt Clemency.'

'Dear heart! to think of that, and Daniel the only brother I ever had! but it is not often we meet, for we are both of us busy people.'

'I suppose he lives at a distance?'

'Well, it is not what you call far. Stapleton is about eighteen miles from here. He has the draper's shop, and he and Eliza are most busy all the year round; but on Daniel's birthday and mine, and on Twelfth Night, we generally sup together.'

'That must be very pleasant for you,' returned Gloden, with chilly politeness.

An irritable sensation, as of multitudinous pins and needles, began to torment her. The draper's shop at Stapleton loomed largely in the background of her consciousness.

Clemency, who was very sensitive on the subject of her belongings, detected a certain irony in Gloden's tone.

'We have always been good friends, Daniel and me,' she returned. 'Eliza did not hit it off with me at first. She was a smart woman, and thought a deal of things about which I never troubled my head. But there, it takes all kinds of people to make up a world; and she is thoroughly good-hearted. As for Lavinia and Polly, they are not your sort, I am afraid; but it is their upbringing, poor lassies. Eliza was always for spoiling the girls.'

'Are they—are they all coming to-morrow?' asked Gloden, faintly.

'Dear me! yes. Eliza never stirs anywhere without the girls; and they will bring a visitor with them too. Lavinia has a sweetheart; he is a very steady, promising young fellow. Daniel says his name is Hector Bradley, and he is in the Stapleton bank.' Then, as she caught sight of her niece's face, she added hurriedly, 'I hope you will put up with it, Gloden, if the company is not to your taste; for, as your Uncle Reuben says, it is ill work breaking with old customs.'

'I hope I shall never interfere with any of your old customs, Aunt Clemency,' returned Gloden, shortly, as she folded up her work.

She did not wish to appear ungracious, but there was no mistaking her manner; and poor Clemency went downstairs with a sigh, to see the batch of mince-pies that Patty had turned out of the oven.

Meanwhile, Gloden carried her grievance to Harvey; but if she had hoped for sympathy she was disappointed. Harvey first listened with deep interest to his sister's account, and then the sight of her disgusted face so aroused his risibility, that he flung himself face downward on the old chintz couch in convulsions of mirth.

Gloden gazed at him in affronted silence. 'How can you be so absurd, Harvey?' she said at last.

'Absurd! you will kill me, Gloden, if you stand there looking like a tragedy queen. Why don't you see the fun of things, like me? Did you say the fellow's name was Hector? I wonder if he has a brother Achilles? And he is Lavinia's young man. Good lack, what names! Cheer up, Glow; it will be a regular lark. Perhaps they will play kiss-in-the-ring and hunt-the-slipper.'

'It is no use talking to you, Harvey, when you are in one of your ridiculous moods.'

And as he only buried his head in the sofa-cushions in another convulsive fit of merriment, Gloden left him; and Harvey jumped up and went in search of his aunt.

He found her making an apple-turnover for his supper; he had made the remark at dinner-time that apple-turnovers were first-rate. At the sight of his favourite delicacy, he gave her a rough hug, and then seated himself on the kitchen table.

'You are a first-rate hand at cooking, aren't you, Aunt Clem? Are all those tarts and pies for the supper to-morrow? What are you doing now?'—for Aunt Clemency had turned her attention to some eggs, that she was beating up with much energy.

'It is only the custard; but I want to give my mind to it.'

But, disregarding this hint, Harvey propped his chin on his hands and watched the operation.

'Why did you not tell us you had a brother?' he began abruptly. Is he like you, Aunt Clem? He must be a good sort if he is.'

Then the soft colour came into Clemency's faded cheek. 'He is better than I shall ever be, my dear; but your uncle says we should never be taken for brother and sister. He is a fine-looking man, is Daniel; and Eliza was an uncommonly handsome girl. They called her the belle of Stapleton when she was young. I think Lavvy features her mother; Polly has no good looks to boast of.'

And Achilles—I mean Hector—is he good-looking too?

‘He is nothing out of the common, Eliza says ; but he has good principles, which is a sight better than good looks. I am afraid they are not your sort, Harvey, or Gloden’s either. My folk are plain people, and do not pretend to hold up their heads like gentlefolks. They have not had your advantages ; there’s a deal in that.’

‘All right ; I see what you mean. Well, I won’t spoil your custard any longer, Aunt Clem’ ; and Harvey rushed off.

When Aunt Clem made these humble speeches, he never knew how to take them. ‘We must just put up with it, you know,’ he said, with unusual seriousness, when his sister came to wish him good-night. ‘Don’t mount your high horse, Glow ; it is not worth it. We shall have to be civil for Aunt Clem’s sake ; and they may not be so bad. Just follow my example. I am going to enjoy the fun and the tuck-out’ ; and with this philosophical remark, the young follower of Epicurus turned over on his pillow and was soon asleep.

CHAPTER XXXI

AMONG THE PHILISTINES

‘Do what thou mightest, and come what come can.’

Ancient Proverb.

‘In one respect man is the nearest thing to me, so far as I must do good to men, and endure them.’—M. AURELIUS ANTONINUS.

GLODEN was somewhat rebuked by Harvey’s philosophical cheerfulness, and certain pricks of conscience made themselves felt.

The next morning she asked her aunt quite pleasantly if she could not help Patty; and, after a momentary hesitation, Clemency inquired if she would mind polishing the glass and china for the supper-table.

‘The shop takes me off so much,’ she said apologetically, ‘and it is not as though I could give my mind to things; and Patty is young, though she is willing. When my sister-in-law gives supper-parties, she has Lavinia and Polly to help her, and they are full of notions that they have got from their smart friends. They think a deal of smartness,’ she continued, with a glance at Gloden’s black stuff, ‘and that is why your Uncle Reuben insists on my wearing my new black silk that he bought me last Christmas, and that has lain in lavender ever since, though it is far too good for the occasion.’

‘I cannot make myself smart, I am afraid, Aunt Clemency,’ returned Gloden, quickly, for this hint was not thrown away on her.

‘The frock you wore at Dr. Parry’s, when they had that children’s party and you played for them, would do as well as possible, and it fits you to a nicety.’ For Clemency loved a quiet daintiness in dress, and Gloden’s fine black cashmere, with soft ruffles at neck and wrists, was just to her taste, and in her opinion set off the slim, graceful figure remarkably well.

‘I will wear it if you wish, Aunt Clemency,’ was Gloden’s reply, for she had made up her mind to behave as well as she could. Harvey’s words, ‘We must be civil for Aunt Clem’s sake,’ had appealed to her sense of rightness. ‘I will try to make myself pleasant for this one evening,’ she said to herself; and she dressed herself in time to help Patty with the table.

‘Dear me, Gloden, I call that beautiful!’ exclaimed Mrs. Carrick, as she rustled into the room in her new black silk, a little breathless with her haste. ‘I wonder whatever Eliza and the girls will say to that?’ For Gloden, who had an innate talent for decorations, had decked the table very prettily with holly-berries and evergreens, and had folded Aunt Clemency’s fine napkins in some wonderful manner. ‘They look for all the world like white flowers,’ she admiringly continued.

‘I am glad you are satisfied,’ returned Gloden, looking at her work with pardonable pride. ‘The fire is burning up beautifully in the best room, Aunt Clemency, and the tea-table is all laid out, and looks as nice as possible.’

‘That it does; and I am ever so much obliged to you, Gloden,’ returned Clemency, warmly. She would have liked to have given the girl a kiss in token of her gratitude, but she dared not venture on such a liberty; no kiss had yet passed between them. ‘I will not forget this in a hurry,’ she continued; ‘for, what with your Uncle Reuben wanting me so much in the shop, and fearing that things would never be ready, I got quite in a fidget. But now I am a lady at large, and can just sit with my hands before me.’

‘Gloden, there is a button off my wristband!’ exclaimed Harvey, bursting into the room. ‘Come and sew it on for me, there’s a good girl’; and Gloden immediately went in search of her workbox.

‘Eliza won’t get over those napkins,’ thought Clemency, as she moved away after them with a pleased smile; and the next moment the door-bell pealed through the house.

Harvey dragged Gloden with him to peep over the banisters.

‘That is brother Daniel,’ he observed, in a loud whisper, as a big man came within view. ‘And do you see that stout party in purple satin? My word, isn’t she a stunner!’

But Gloden would not listen to any more, though Harvey still insisted on leaning over, at the peril of his neck, for a good look at the girls.

‘That Hector Bradley looks rather a cad,’ he remarked, in

an injured voice, as he rejoined his sister. 'He has red hair, and looks all collar. They are awfully smart, those girls; they are all colours of the rainbow. I hope they won't think you a dowl, Antelope'; and then he relaxed into a chuckle. 'I don't think much of Lavvy's young man.'

'I suppose we must go down now,' observed Gloden, after a few minutes; and, as Harvey wanted his tea, he agreed to this with alacrity.

The sound of voices was almost deafening when they entered the room. The Moore family had excellent lungs, and it was a habit of theirs to talk all together, which was rather confusing to strangers, and especially as their good opinion of themselves prevented any shyness.

'I suppose this is the niece you have been telling me about, Clem?' observed Mrs. Moore, a high-coloured woman of goodly dimensions, dressed in questionable taste; and she shook Gloden's hand heartily. 'I am glad to see you, miss; and, as we are amongst friends, I can tell you you are a lucky girl to have found such snug quarters. Reuben is a warm man, though he keeps it close'; and she shook a fore-finger at him playfully as she spoke.

'How do you do, Mrs. Moore?' remarked Harvey, easily. 'I am very well, thank you, and so is Gloden. Why do you call Uncle Reuben a warm man, eh? I suppose it is some joke. You are a little warm yourself, are you not? Shall I fetch a fire-screen? or perhaps you will prefer a fan. It is not pleasant to feel hot, is it?'—with the utmost friendliness. 'I never suffer from heat myself. I wonder'—confidentially—'which is Miss Lavinia and which is Miss Polly? I suppose it is Miss Lavinia in the pink frock, because that gentleman is talking to her. He is engaged to her, is he not?'

'Bless me, what a precocious young gentleman you are!' returned Mrs. Moore, delightedly. 'Yes, that is Lavvy. Come here, Lavinia. Here is some one wants to make your acquaintance.' And in another moment Harvey was in the midst of a group; for not only Lavinia, but her sister, Miss Polly, and the red-haired, large-collared Hector joined the circle.

Harvey was quite equal to the occasion. He leant against the mantelpiece, with one foot crossed over the other in an easy attitude, and a lock of hair tumbling over his forehead. 'Why did they call you Hector?' Gloden heard him say. 'Was it a family name, Mr. Bradley? I am not finding fault with it,'

continued Harvey, with engaging politeness, 'but I have the misfortune to be curious by nature. It is one of my besetting sins, Miss Polly. You are Polly, aren't you?'

'Dear heart! they are all in love with him already,' thought Clemency, as she rinsed out the orange-coloured cups that were the pride of her heart; 'and he is behaving like a prince, bless him!'

'I hope—I hope they will not find out how he is chaffing them,' thought Gloden, in an agony, as the tittering laugh waxed louder and louder. 'He is in such high spirits to-night, and so brimful of mischief, that I am afraid that he will end by doing something dreadful, and it is no use my trying to keep him in order.' But she quailed inwardly as scraps of conversation reached her ear.

Harvey was becoming audacious. He seemed to have taken a fancy to Polly—a plain, good-tempered-looking girl, with a loud voice and an outrageous style of hair. 'Doesn't it hurt you to have all those pins running into you?' he observed by and by. 'It must bother you awfully to get your hair into that frizzy pile. Oh, it is the fashion, is it?'—some remark to this effect having reached his ear. 'Don't you wish you were queen, and could stop all these stupid fashions? If I were you I should comb it quite smooth; it would look ever so much nicer.'

'You leave Polly's hair alone, and hand me another muffin,' interrupted Mrs. Moore, in high good-humour. She was charmed with the boy, and so was Polly, and so was Lavinia, only she did not dare to show it openly, as Hector was jealous by nature. 'He is beginning early, is he not, Reuben, making love to my Polly like that?'

'Who could help falling in love with Miss Polly!' exclaimed Harvey, sentimentally; and then he caught an imploring glance from Gloden.

'It is all right, Glow,' he whispered, as he handed her some cake; 'we must do at Rome as the Romans do. Miss Polly likes it hot and spicy. She asked me if I admired hers and Lavvy's style of hair, and she wondered that you did not do yours more in the fashion; so what was I to say when she had turned her head into a pincushion?'

'But do be careful, Harvey. It is very nice of you to make yourself so pleasant to these people, but there is no occasion to carry it too far.'

'Polly declares that she is a sort of cousin,' went on Harvey.

'I was obliged to tell her that there was no relationship between us. It was precious cool of her, wasn't it? I mean to try brother Daniel, for a change.' And, to her horror, she saw him the next minute plant himself opposite Mr. Moore, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, in exact and striking imitation of the portly draper, while he questioned him affably about trade.

'It is rather a good business, is it not?' he observed blandly. 'Drapery is not in my line, but one never knows what may happen.'

'You are right there, young sir; and it is as good a business as a man need have, if he has a proper knowledge of textures.' Brother Daniel said this with a twinkle in his eye. He was a heavy, loosely-built man, but he was acute enough not to be bamboozled by a slip of a lad, who was poking fun at him. 'And what do they mean to make of you, my boy? I suppose Reuben will be putting you into the book trade.'

'I was thinking of being a commercial traveller myself,' returned Harvey, mildly. 'They have rather a jolly life of it, and know how to make themselves comfortable. Of course, one would prefer being Archbishop of Canterbury, and if I had only stayed at Repton, there is no knowing what I might have done.'

But here there was a sudden truce to Harvey's nonsense, as Polly interrupted him by a querulous complaint that they were all as dull as ditch-water, and wouldn't his sister come out of her corner and play them a tune?

'We will get Hector to ask her,' she continued, as Harvey hesitated; and Gloden was presently accosted by the young man.

'The ladies hope that you will give us a tune on the fiddle,' stammered Mr. Bradley, a little awkwardly. 'We shall be truly obliged, miss, as things are just a little flat, and there is nothing so rousing as a good tune.'

'I am very sorry, but I am afraid I cannot play to-night,' returned Gloden, stiffly. There were limits to everything. How was she to stand up before all those vulgar, noisy people, and play to them? The thing was impossible.

'Oh, come, now! I hope you won't be so disobliging,' went on the fascinating Hector, with an affable smile; 'we are all in the family, so to speak.' But Polly, who had been listening, broke in a little petulantly—

'You need not be so persuasive, Hector. If Miss Carrick

does not wish to amuse us, let us play post; we shall get far more fun out of that. I have got a pencil and paper in my pocket, so I will put myself down as Petersham; and what will you be, Lavvy?’

Gloden did not stop to hear any more; she would take refuge in her own room until supper-time. No one would miss her, and Aunt Clemency was below, looking after Patty and the goose. She gained the door unperceived, opened it, and came face to face with Reginald Lorimer. Her surprise was so great and so undisguised that Mr. Lorimer could not refrain from a smile.

‘You look as though you were interviewing a ghost,’ he said, shaking hands with her. ‘Your looks are wonderfully eloquent, Miss Carrick; I will allow that my presence is unexpected, but I trust I am not unwelcome.’

‘We are pleased to see you, of course’—in a flurried tone, ‘but there is nowhere to ask you to sit down. They are playing games in there, and the supper is laid in the parlour.’

‘Come down to the shop a moment; the noise those lively young people are making won’t let us hear our own voices. I want to tell you why I am here.’ And, to her own astonishment, Gloden meekly allowed herself to be conducted downstairs.

The shop was still lighted up, though the outer door was closed. Mr. Lorimer gravely handed her a chair, and leaned easily against the counter.

‘I like this old shop,’ he remarked, glancing round him approvingly; ‘it is so quaint and old-fashioned, and all those books have such a friendly look. I should not mind being in the bookselling trade myself; it is perfectly respectable.’

‘Mr. Lorimer, please tell me why you are here.’

‘Called to order,’ murmured Reginald. ‘You are a terribly practical person, Miss Carrick. The fact is, some papers that my lawyers require have been left by mistake at the Hall, and there was nothing for it but to fetch them myself; so I have come down for one night. I go up to town again tomorrow by the 11.30 train.’

‘And you called here on your way to Silcote?’

‘Precisely so. It came into my head suddenly that I would look you and Harvey up, and ask him to breakfast with me. I suppose Mrs. Norton will have something for us to eat, though I am not sure; he must take that on faith. I had no idea that you had a party, and my spirits sank at the sight

of the supper-table. Mrs. Carrick was good enough to ask me to stay,' he continued, looking at her as though to judge the effect of his words.

She flushed up at once. 'Mr. Lorimer, please do not. You have no idea how dreadful it is. You have heard the noise, and I am afraid it will get worse and worse. Harvey is enjoying it, because he is only a child, and sees the fun of everything, and just for once he does not mind; but I came away because I could not bear it. I have never been accustomed to such things'; and there were tears in her eyes.

Reginald looked away quickly; her emotion made him feel uncomfortable. He did not like to tell her how sorry he was for her.

'Yes, I know; it must be an awful bore.' But his tone said more than his words.

'They are Aunt Clemency's relations, but of course they are nothing to us,' went on Gloden. 'And they are so ill-bred and familiar. Harvey is making fun of them all, and I am so afraid they will find it out before the evening is over. If you only saw them, you would understand. Aunt Clemency is a hundred times better than they are.'

'I have a great respect for Mrs. Carrick,' he replied quietly, and Gloden felt somehow as though she were reproved. 'It is hard lines for you, and Harvey too; for I expect the young monkey sees things as clearly as you do. Won't it make it better for you if I stop?' and his voice grew persuasive. 'It won't hurt me, and no one will be the wiser; and I should rather like it myself.'

'I would not have you stay for the world,' returned Gloden, vehemently; 'it would make things worse for me.'

But what other argument she would have used was never known, for at that moment Polly of the frizzy hair flew down the staircase shouting loudly, with Harvey after her, the game having degenerated into a romp.

'Give it up; it is not fair! You have cheated, Polly!' exclaimed Harvey. But his boisterousness died away at the sight of the squire; the lad's face grew crimson as he met his friend's eye.

'What's the game, Harvey?' asked Reginald, with a droll look. 'I thought the house was coming about our ears.'

And Harvey, who looked rather ashamed of himself, became slightly cross. 'Gloden would not play the fiddle to them, so we had games; and they said they liked noisy ones'; for

Polly, giggling and abashed at the sight of a strange young man, had fled to her sister.

'Suppose you play your fiddle now,' observed Mr. Lorimer, looking kindly at the girl; 'you will have one appreciative auditor, and it will keep the barbarians quiet.'

'Do you mean that you are coming too?' asked Harvey, incredulously; and his brief sulkiness vanished. 'I would not have believed even you could be such a brick. Isn't he a brick, Glow?'

'Oh, you must not expect your sister to endorse such a flattering statement,' returned Mr. Lorimer, with a laugh. 'But we understand each other, don't we, old fellow?'—pulling his ear in an affectionate manner. 'Miss Carrick, I have made up my mind. I am going to see you through this, and no amount of argument will stop me. Now, will you take my advice about the fiddle?' And as he evidently meant what he said, Gloden wisely held her tongue.

There was an astonished silence as the trio entered, and Mr. Lorimer said quietly, 'Your niece is going to play to us, Mr. Carrick.' And Gloden in silence took out her violin from its case.

Why was it possible for her to play now? But Gloden was too prudent to ask herself that question. But as she played, Polly's giggles and Hector Bradley's loud whispers died away.

When Gloden raised her eyes, they rested on Reginald's rapt face, as he and Harvey sat together in the window-seat. Aunt Clemency, re-entering the room, seated herself behind her husband and listened with moist eyes and a happy heart.

'Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast,' wrote the poet; and even an honest draper might feel his soul uplifted by those sweet, searching strains. Daniel, looking across at Clemency's placid features, thought of the old days when he and the little lass went blackberrying together in the deep, fragrant lanes.

'I can call to mind how she looked then,' he thought, 'in her pink sun-bonnet, and her lip black with the juice.' 'I must pick my posy for mother, Dan,' he could hear her say that; and the way she looked at him, with the curls tumbling out of the sun-bonnet, and her eyes dancing with eagerness. 'A bit thing,' as their father always called her, when she nestled up to him on Sunday evening.

'Well, I never!' ejaculated Mrs. Moore, in awestruck tones, when Gloden had finished. 'I am thinking, Clemency, that

your niece must be fit for the stage. I have heard fiddle-playing in my time. Bob Rogers used to play at our place when he was courting Penelope, but this beats Bob.'

'Come and have a bit of supper, Eliza,' was Clemency's answer. 'The Squire has promised to take a knife and fork with us'; and Clemency's voice was full of modest pride as she spoke.

'Law, now, you don't say so!' ejaculated Eliza; but her voice hardly expressed pleasure. The presence of the distinguished stranger was a decided incubus to the good woman; and, in spite of Mr. Lorimer's affability and his excellent appetite, there was a certain restraint on the general hilarity.

Hector indeed whispered soft nothings in Lavinia's ear, but Polly had become very prim and silent. Harvey was too busy enjoying his own supper to pay her any attention, and all his remarks were addressed to Reginald.

As for Gloden, she was thankful to sit silent. She felt Mr. Lorimer's presence was a sufficient protection. She did not want him to talk to her, and he had the tact to leave her alone.

'I knew I should make things easier for you,' he said, when he took his leave. 'I should have despised myself if I had left you unprotected in that bear-garden. We kept the cubs in order, didn't we, Harvey?'

'You have been very, very kind, and I am not ungrateful,' returned Gloden. 'I know that you only stayed on my account.'

'You are very clever to have found that out,' he returned lightly; but her look haunted him all the way home. 'The life is killing her by inches,' he said to himself. 'She cannot stand it much longer. Her pride suffers, and her feelings suffer, and, upon my soul, I don't believe I can stand seeing her there much longer either.' But at this point Reginald checked himself suddenly, and began whistling 'Young Lochinvar' at the top of his voice, until Lassie heard him and commenced barking excitedly and then all the other dogs about the place began barking too.

CHAPTER XXXII

'BOYS WILL BE BOYS'

'There is one thing of which I am afraid, and that is fear.'

MACKENZIE.

WHEN Gloden woke the next morning, she was conscious of some pleasurable sensations which were at first difficult to trace to any special cause, and it was some time before she acknowledged to herself that she had been much gratified and touched by Mr. Lorimer's kindness of the previous night.

'It was good of him to stay when he must have hated it so,' she said to herself; 'but of course he knew that his presence would be a restraint. How few young men would have acted so unselfishly!'

But it was doubtful if Reginald would have endorsed this. A mild taste of Bohemianism was a novelty to the young squire; the genus Moore was unknown to him. As he ate his supper he was smiling to himself at the idea. How shocked Constance would have been if she had guessed how he was disporting himself!

But the next minute Gloden's thoughts veered round to Harvey. 'Poor boy, how disappointed he will be!' she thought; for the snow was falling fast, and the driving particles quite darkened the room. 'Uncle Reuben was right; he said there would be a heavy fall to day, though Harvey laughed at him; and now it will be impossible for him to go to Silcote. I wish Mr. Lorimer had not asked him; he will be so restless all day.'

Gloden's sympathy was thrown away, for at the very moment that she was cogitating so ruefully over the boy's disappointment, Harvey was making his way as fast as he could down the Silcote road. Harvey, in spite of an adoring sister and aunt, was no more perfect than other boys of his age. He was self-willed and headstrong, and was capable at times of a vast

amount of naughtiness. He knew, when he looked out of his window, that Gloden would not hear of his going to the Hall.

'But she always forgets that I am not a girl, to mind weather. Mr. Lorimer says boys ought to be tough. Why, he called me a molly-coddle one day when it rained, and I was afraid of getting wet. He shan't call me a molly-coddle to-day.'

So Harvey dressed himself with guilty haste, and, taking his boots in his hand, crept down in what Clemency would have called 'his stocking feet.' Patty stared at him when she saw him lacing his boots, and with the collar of his coat drawn up to his ears.

'You are never going out, Master Harvey,' she protested. 'Why, the milkman says there is a rare snowstorm brewing. He looked pretty nearly frozen. You couldn't find your way out of the town, I'll be bound.'

'Hold your tongue, Patty,' returned Harvey, good-humouredly. 'Griff and I know what we are about; don't we, old boy? We aren't made of sugar and salt. We are going to have a lark this morning.' And while Patty was still shaking her head, he slipped out of the shop door.

'Poor little chap, how disappointed he will be!' thought Reginald, as he sat down to his solitary breakfast. Tottie was not beaming at him from the opposite side of the table as usual, 'making daddie's bexfast,' as she termed it. She was in the nursery at Hyde Park Gates, tyrannising in her babyish fashion over Rex and Ninian, and being petted and spoiled by her Aunt Constance.

Reginald was not in the best of humours. The snowstorm was an awful nuisance. He wanted to get back to town. Hamerton expected him to dinner, and he had half promised to drop in to afternoon tea with the Greshams, with whom Violet Winter was staying. He was seeing a good deal of Violet just now, and the Greshams were of opinion that he was only waiting for the first anniversary of his wife's death to pass before he proposed to Violet; and Constance and Miss Wentworth were of the same opinion.

'They will be engaged before Easter, you may depend on that, Amy,' Miss Wentworth said more than once. And this belief made Mrs. Winter very happy.

Reginald hated the idea of being boxed up in his big lonely house, with nothing especial to do except to turn over his papers and knock about the balls in the billiard-room; but it would be madness to attempt the journey. Constance would not expect

him. The documents could be sent on to his lawyer when the snow fell less heavily. The groom must make his way somehow to Grantham and send a couple of telegrams, and he must kill time as best he could; and he proceeded to do this by sauntering through the rooms with his hands in his pockets and Lassie at his heels, thinking rather irritably about the events of last night.

When Gloden found Harvey was not in his room, she questioned Patty a little anxiously, and her distress was so great when she found out that he was really gone, that Clemency found it difficult to soothe her.

Gloden had gone in search of her aunt at once.

‘Oh, Aunt Clemency!’ she exclaimed, almost in despair, ‘Harvey has set out for Silcote; but he will never get there. No one could find their way in such a snowstorm; the postman said he could hardly see a yard before him.’

Clemency looked aghast when she heard this; then she put her hand kindly on her niece’s shoulder.

‘He is a very naughty boy,’ she said seriously; ‘but you must not lose heart like this, my dear. Harvey is a shrewd lad, and has a head on his shoulders; he will not be losing his way, I’ll be bound.’

‘But he will be wet through, and he is so delicate,’ returned Gloden; the poor girl’s lips were trembling as she spoke. ‘He has more spirit than strength, Aunt Clemency; and if he should take cold—and the doctor always told us to be so careful.’

‘Nay, nay, dearie; the weakly ones often fare best, and he has gained flesh wonderfully since he has been with us. It is downright naughty and perverse of him to have given us the slip like this, but I doubt we are spoiling him amongst us’; and Clemency shook her head seriously as she pondered over the lad’s delinquency.

‘Couldn’t Uncle Reuben send some one to see if he is safe?’ implored Gloden. And Clemency carried this request to her husband.

‘Your uncle declares he has no one to send,’ she said reluctantly, when she came back to the parlour, ‘and he will have it we are troubling ourselves unnecessarily. He thinks Harvey is far too sharp to miss his way; besides, the snow was not so thick an hour ago. He says he is eating his breakfast, for sure, at this moment, and that we had better get ours.’

But Gloden was not to be consoled in this easy fashion.

‘I would go myself if I thought I could possibly find my

way,' she said disconsolately; but Reuben only scolded her in his good-natured manner for making such a poor breakfast.

'You and Clem are fashing yourselves for nought,' he went on; 'the young rascal is making a hearty meal at this moment, and laughing at us all in his sleeves. He deserves a thrashing, that he does, though he is not likely to get it. "Spare the rod and spoil the child," eh, Clem?'

'You never laid a finger on Davie,' returned Clemency, tenderly. 'Do you mind that day of the hard frost, Reuben, when Davie gave us the slip, most as Harvey has done, and went off to skate on the big pond? You said then that he deserved a caning, but he had two helps of apple-tart at supper, all the same, in spite of all that I could say.'

Then Reuben gave one of his low laughs of amusement. Gloden listened to them vaguely. Those endless reminiscences of the boy David, that were so sweet to the bereaved parents, could not divert her thoughts from the young truant; a strange heaviness and presentiment of evil affected her nerves. The noiselessness of the falling snow, the semi-darkness and the dreary look-out on the back-yard, gave her a feeling of suffocation. She thought of the wide ditches on the Silcote road, and the white desolation of the park. How was any lad, however sharp, to keep to the footpath that led to the avenue? At this very moment he might be wandering round and round the Hall, unable to find the right turning. And at this point her eyes looked so wide and strained, that Clemency asked her husband rather hurriedly if it were not time for him to be in the shop. But Reuben, manlike, refused to take the hint.

'There is no hurry, wife,' he said, unfolding his papers; 'customers will be scarce this morning.'

Then Gloden in desperation rose from the table. The best room overlooked the street; it would be better to endure the cold there than the sight of those black walls.

Clemency followed her, and knelt down to kindle the fire that Patty had just laid. The room was still in disorder from last night's festivity, but Gloden took no notice of the fact; she made her way to the window-seat, where Mr. Lorimer had sat the previous evening, and tried to pierce through the white density.

'It grows worse,' she murmured; 'I cannot see across the street.'

Then Clemency, giving another finishing touch to the fire, rose and joined her.

'You are troubling over-much, my dear,' she said kindly; 'we must not forget Providence is watching over the little lad. There is not a sparrow falls unseen; we must mind that, Gloden. A half-hearted faith is worth nothing.'

'I know that, Aunt Clemency'—with a sigh of impatience; 'and yet accidents happen every day. People are drowned and run over, in spite of their faith. I often puzzle over that.'

Clemency was silent. The only answer that occurred to her would have been cruel at such a moment; that they had met the doom foreordained for them, would hardly be a comforting reflection to Gloden at the present time. 'We cannot rightly understand things,' she said at last, softly; 'there is a terrible mystery in life. One man is called to lie down in his bed and suffer, and another is taken by some sudden judgment. There are paths that wind and paths that are just short cuts, but they all lead to the same end. One need not mind drowning if it is God's way of fetching us home.'

'Aunt Clemency'—in a troubled voice—'you may be right, but I cannot bear it. If harm should happen to Harvey, I could not think it for the best; it would seem to me terrible—terrible. Think if he were to be lost! He may be wandering about in Silcote Park now. Oh'—quickly rising from her place in uncontrollable agitation—'I must go after him! What does it matter what happens to me? I cannot endure this any longer.'

Then Mrs. Carrick put her arms firmly round the girl. 'Nay, nay, my dear, you are excited. Do you suppose your Uncle Reuben and I would suffer you to run into danger? and what good will it do Harvey? The storm was not near so thick two hours ago, though it means mischief now. Take heart, child; your uncle is probably right, and Harvey, bless him! is just eating his breakfast, and laughing at us all.'

And Gloden, after a long struggle, tried to take this reasonable view of the case.

Clemency was relieved when she saw her straightening the room and dusting the china as usual. She even offered to wash up the glass, and put away the old-fashioned silver that Clemency only used on state occasions—those thin, worn old teaspoons that had belonged to her grandmother were treasures not to be lightly used—and Clemency was only thankful to see her occupied.

It was some hours before the storm lessened, and it was nearly three o'clock before Reginald could send off his groom

with the telegrams and a note for Gloden. The poor girl's anxiety by this time had taken the form of a racking sick headache, and Clemency had just tucked her up carefully on the big couch with some warm rugs and shawls, and a hot bottle to her feet, when Patty brought up the note.

Gloden tore it open. 'Oh, he is all right, Aunt Clemency!' she exclaimed with a sob, sinking back on the couch; and Mrs. Carrick read the note for herself.

DEAR MISS CARRICK (it began)—I feel sure you will be anxious about Harvey. The young rascal tells me that he gave you the slip this morning, so I am sending off Evans to assure you of his safety. You may imagine my astonishment at seeing him. I am afraid my welcome took the form of a lecture on his idiocy; but, as you have often said to me, 'boys will be boys.' He did not turn up until long after breakfast-time, and as he had had a good soaking, we had his things dried, and wrapped him up by the fire. He looks rather like a mummy at present. I shall keep him with me to-night, as I think he has had enough fatigue; but I will bring him over on my way to the train to-morrow morning.

Trusting that you have not been very uneasy, and with kind regards to Mrs. Carrick—Yours sincerely,
REGINALD LORIMER.

'There, my dear, what did I tell you?' observed Clemency, tearfully; and in the fulness of her joy she kissed the girl's cheek. 'Providence has been good to us, and we might have spared ourselves all our worrying.'

'I am not unthankful, Aunt Clemency,' returned Gloden, gently; 'but if you knew what I suffered!'

Then Clemency smoothed her hair. 'I know all about it, dearie, and my heart was just aching for you; but you must try and get a sleep now, and I will bring you up some hot tea presently.' And Gloden promised faintly to do her best.

'She will just sleep like a worn-out baby,' she said to Reuben, when she acquainted him with the contents of Mr. Lorimer's note. 'It went to my heart to see the pitiful look in her eyes all the morning. But there, I should have felt the same if it had been Davie. It seems strange to me at times to think we shall never know anxiety about Davie again. Those who mother lads have a deal to go through in this world.'

'You are mothering Gloden to-day, aren't you, Clem?' observed her husband, slyly.

And Clemency's quiet smile lighted up her face. It was true that the barrier had broken down a little between her and Gloden.

Reginald had made the best of things in his letter. He did

not tell Gloden that Harvey had never reached the Hall until nearly one o'clock, after five hours of wandering. He and Griff were utterly exhausted when at last they found their way to the back door.

Reginald broke into an angry remonstrance when he first saw him. 'Wly, you young idiot, what folly is this?' he began; and then his wrath died away at the boy's miserable condition. Harvey was sobbing with cold and exhaustion; and Griff looked a draggled and disreputable object as he dragged himself to his young master, and with a dog's unselfish devotion began licking his hand.

Reginald rang up his housekeeper furiously, and begged to know what was to be done with the young lunatic; and then he put his arm round Harvey and petted him, and told him not to be a duffer, and he would soon feel all right again.

'You had better give him some hot wine and water, sir,' advised Mrs. Norton; 'and then a hot bath, and put him to bed, while we get his things dried.'

But Harvey, becoming restive with warmth and petting, refused to go to bed, so Reginald wrapped him up in his wadded dressing-gown; and as soon as Harvey had appeased his appetite, and had related his forlorn tale, he was so far recovered that he challenged his host to a game of chess.

'I suppose you will let Glow know if you keep me all night,' he remarked, as he languidly set the pieces. And then Mr Lorimer wrote his note.

'You deserve a jolly good licking for giving your sister all this anxiety,' observed Reginald, sternly, as he returned to his seat.

And then Harvey grinned defiance. In reality he was as penitent as heart could wish, but nothing could long subdue Harvey.

'I don't believe I should be here now if it had not been for Griff,' he observed lazily, as he took a pawn. 'He stood still and whined when I was turning off from the road. We had been beating about the park for hours, and I was so tired out that I thought I must give it up; but when the old fellow whined, I made up my mind that he should be leader, and he brought me straight to the back door. You should have seen Norton's face when he looked out and saw us.'

Harvey became weary of chess presently, and entreated for a game of billiards.

'I will go on wearing the dressing-gown if my things are not dry yet,' he went on.

And Reginald agreed with his usual easy good-nature.

Griff followed them stiffly. The fire in the billiard-room had been recently lighted, and the room was only half warmed. Griff infinitely preferred the soft rug in Mr. Lorimer's dressing-room, and he coiled himself up on the divan with a low whine of disgust.

'You must not get cold, Harvey,' observed Reginald. 'There is not much of a fire.'

But Harvey was too much engrossed with his stroke to heed this. 'That was a jolly fluke,' he returned, as the ball rolled into the pocket. 'You need not give me thirty again. I shall be ahead of you in no time if I fluke like that'; and he broke into a crowing laugh. It was a regular lark, he thought, as he stumped round the table in the gorgeous dressing-gown. A *tête-à-tête* dinner, and 'beggar my neighbour' afterwards. Could any boy ask more?

CHAPTER XXXIII

'I LOVED HIM TOO MUCH'

'Of comfort no man speak :
Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs.'

Richard II.

THE following morning, as Gloden was about to leave her room, there was a quick tap at the door, and the next moment Patty entered with a note.

'A man on horseback brought it, Miss Gloden,' she remarked. 'He didn't wait for any answer ; he said he had a message for the Red House.'

'For Dr. Parry?' and Gloden turned very pale as she opened the note ; a quick prevision of evil made her divine the contents.

DEAR MISS CARRICK (wrote Reginald)—I am sorry to tell you that Harvey is very unwell, and I am sending for Dr. Parry. ('No good beating about the bush,' thought Reginald, as he wrote this.) He was all right when I wrote to you yesterday, but in the evening he seemed very cold and shivering, and I persuaded him to go to bed, and Mrs. Norton gave him a warm drink. I looked in at him before I retired myself, and he was sleeping fairly comfortably ; but when Mrs. Norton went to him early this morning, he seemed so feverish and complained of such pain and difficulty of breathing, that we thought it only right to send off at once for Dr. Parry. As I know you will be uneasy about him, I shall send the carriage for you at nine o'clock. Harvey begged that you would come to him at once. In great haste—Yours sincerely,
R. LORIMER.

Mrs. Carrick was making the coffee when Gloden entered the room a few minutes later, in her hat and jacket.

'What's to do, my dear?' she asked anxiously, startled by the girl's set white face.

'He is ill—Harvey is ill ; read that for yourself, Aunt Clemency,' returned Gloden, hoarsely, throwing down the note on the table.

And Clemency's fingers trembled a little as she took it up 'If it is the truth, God help us all,' she thought; and then, with her usual unselfishness, she set herself to comfort Gloden.

'It is his chest, no doubt; nice hot linseed poultices, that's what he will be needing. Don't you fash yourself, Gloden, my dear. I have perfect confidence in Dr. Parry; if any one would have saved my Davie, it would have been Parry. Reuben'—as her husband came in from the shop—'Gloden is in a bit of trouble. Mr. Lorimer has written to say Harvey is but poorly; he has got a feverish cold, I doubt, and it has flown to the chest. The carriage is coming for her in half an hour, and I mean to get on my things and go with her, if you and Patty can do without me for an hour or two.'

'Dear me, dear me!' returned Reuben, tremulously; and he put on his spectacles to read the note, and then took them off again to wipe them. 'Oh, we will get along all right, the lass and I. Don't you moither yourself, Clem; you will be a deal of help to Gloden.'

'Indeed, Uncle Reuben, I do not need Aunt Clemency,' began Gloden, her youthful selfishness disliking the idea of any interference.

But Reuben shook his head solemnly. 'Sit down and eat your breakfast, like a good lassie,' he said in his kind way. 'You will need your strength if there's nursing to do. Your aunt has had a deal of experience; there is not a better hand at nursing, though I say it, and you will be glad enough of her help. It will be pleasant for you to have a woman at hand, for, with all the goodwill in the world, young men are not the best of sick-nurses.'

Then Gloden held her peace; the thought of Mr. Lorimer had not even occurred to her.

Clemency was quite aware of Gloden's reluctance, but her good heart took no offence; she even made allowances as she went off to put on her bonnet and give Patty her orders. 'It is natural that she should want to nurse him all herself,' she thought; 'I remember it went sorely against me when Reuben would sit up with David; I was jealous even of my boy's father, so I have no call to be hard on Gloden. It has not entered her heart that Mr. Lorimer is as good as unmarried, and a young man still, and that it might be awkward for them both; but I am bound to think of these things for her, and I know that Reuben wants me to go.'

There was little talk between the two during the drive to

Silcote. Now and then Clemency made an observation, but Gloden only answered in monosyllables. She was pondering gloomily over what Dr. Tritton had said about Harvey's delicacy of constitution, and never even noticed when one of the horses slipped on some frozen snow, though Clemency's heart went into her mouth, as she told Reuben afterwards.

Dr. Parry's carriage was still at the door when they reached the Hall; he and Mr. Lorimer had just left Harvey's room, and were coming downstairs. Reginald had a bothered look on his face, but Dr. Parry uttered a cheery exclamation at the sight of Mrs. Carrick.

'Come, our patient is in luck's way,' he said; 'there is not a nurse in Grantham to beat Mrs. Carrick.'

But before Clemency could answer, Gloden pressed forward.

'I intend to nurse my brother, Dr. Parry,' she said decidedly, hardly looking at Reginald as he shook hands with her. 'I know Aunt Clemency will kindly help me, but you must give your orders to me as well.'

'Settle that between yourselves, ladies,' returned the doctor, in an offhand manner; 'but my directions must be strictly followed.'

And then Mr. Lorimer left them for a few minutes. When he returned Dr. Parry had gone. Gloden, who looked much distressed, came forward to meet him.

'Which is Harvey's room, Mr. Lorimer?' she asked; 'I must go up at once.'

But he put his hand on her arm. 'You shall go in a moment, but I must speak to you first. There is no hurry; Mrs. Norton is with him. Indeed'—as she looked at him impatiently—'you must give me a minute. If Harvey be ill, I shall never forgive myself.'

'But he is ill,' she interrupted; 'Dr. Parry could not disguise the fact. It is pneumonia—that is another word, is it not, for inflammation of the lungs?—his temperature is very high.' Then, as she noticed his expression, 'But it is not your fault. How could you guess, when you gave the invitation, that Harvey would be so mad as to go through that snow-storm?'

'No, I was not to blame there,' returned Reginald; 'but let me make a clean breast of it. It was my fault that Harvey was all those hours in the billiard-room. I was a fool to allow it. The fire had not been long lighted, and Dr. Parry thinks that a good deal of the mischief is due to that; so you may imagine my feelings.'

‘Oh, you did not know,’ she said hurriedly. ‘Perhaps Dr Parry was wrong in putting it down to that; he was wet through and worn out’—and here her voice choked. ‘Do please take me to him, Mr. Lorimer’; and then Reginald led the way upstairs.

‘We put him in the south room, because it had been recently used,’ he observed; ‘and I am glad now that we did so. Parry says it is the best room we could have chosen.’

And then, on hearing voices, Mrs. Norton opened the door. She was a pleasant-looking woman, and had been housekeeper at the Hall as long as Reginald could remember; she and her husband were the oldest servants there.

‘The young gentleman is very feverish, ma’am, so you will be pleased to be careful and not let him talk,’ she said in a low voice; and then she caught sight of Mrs. Carrick, and nodded to her in a friendly way.

The good housekeeper had often had a chat with Clemency over the counter. But here the sound of a hard, dry cough reached Gloden’s ear, and she pushed past her.

Harvey was at the farther end of the room; he was propped up with pillows, and looked flushed and feverish. As Gloden threw her arms round him, he pushed her gently away.

‘Don’t, Glow. I don’t deserve it; it serves me right. It was real mean of me to play you that trick.’ But here the painful cough checked his penitent confession.

‘My darling, hush! Dr. Parry says you must not talk.’

‘It is a regular cropper,’ panted Harvey. ‘Of course I have got a bad cold, only I wish it did not hurt so’; and he put his hand to his breast. ‘There!’—his face twitching with the pain—‘it almost took my breath away. ‘Why, there’s Aunt Clem’—with a ghost of a smile. ‘Aunt Clem, I know I was very naughty.’

‘There’s a brave lad; but you will be good now, Harvey, and mind what your sister says. There is to be no talking, the doctor says.’

‘But you are going to stop,’ pleaded Harvey; ‘you will let them stop, won’t you, Mr. Lorimer? I couldn’t part with Glow; and it is nice to have Aunt Clem. You’ll be fine and glad to stay, won’t you, Aunt Clem?’

‘They will stay if you obey orders, and hold your tongue,’ returned Reginald, trying to be stern.

And then he turned to Gloden, and asked her softly if there were anything he could do for her; but she shook her head

without looking at him. She wanted nothing but to be left alone with Harvey. But as he left the room, a sudden thought struck her, and she went after him. He was walking slowly down the corridor, but he turned back when he heard her footsteps. ‘You have thought of something,’ he said eagerly.

‘No; there has been no time to think. I only want to be certain that you meant what you said just now to Harvey, that we may stay. Are you sure that we shall not be a trouble? But I could not leave him. If only he had not been taken ill here, in this house!’

‘I am quite sure you do not mean to be unkind,’ replied Reginald, gravely; ‘but you would not like any one to make such a speech to you. Oh, I forgive you’—as she looked disturbed at this. ‘You are too much bothered to know what you are saying; but I am only too glad that the little chap should be here. If you care to please me, you will just make yourself at home, and ask for everything you want. My servants have literally nothing to do, and it will be a charity to employ them. Will you tell Mrs. Carriek this?’

‘You are very kind’; and then she looked up in his face rather pitifully. ‘He is very ill, Mr. Lorimer; I have never seen Harvey look quite so ill as that, and it is so sudden.’

‘Oh, these sort of things are always sudden.’ But Reginald did not add that Dr. Parry had told him that he had just lost a patient with inflammation of the lungs in two days. ‘Parry is coming again this afternoon.’

But Gloden made no answer to this; she had said all she wanted to say, so she went back to the room.

Clemency had already divested herself of her bonnet and cloak, and was sitting, knitting in hand, beside the bed; but she left her place as Gloden entered.

Harvey beckoned to her to come closer. ‘I don’t want Aunt Clem to hear,’ he whispered; ‘but I am glad to be ill here; it is better than David’s room and the back-yard, eh, Glow?’ and as Gloden looked round her, she endorsed Harvey’s opinion.

The south room was always appreciated by Reginald’s guests. In reality it was Constance’s old room, and the furniture had been left intact. It had a large bay window overlooking the park. Some of Constance’s books had been left in the book-case, and her writing-table and easy-chair still stood in the bay. A couch, covered with blue cretonne, was drawn to one side of the fireplace, and blue cretonne curtains shaded the

small brass bedstead. When Violet Winter had slept at the Hall, she had begged for Constance's old room, and since then it had been used by Ursula Egerton.

'Isn't it a jolly room?' continued Harvey; and then another of the cruel stitches made him finish with a groan.

Before many hours were over Gloden was thankful for her aunt's company, for that night and the next day Harvey grew rapidly worse. Clemency was a good nurse, as Dr. Parry had once said, and had all the instincts of one. Her touch was at once light and firm, and her eye and nerve never failed her. As the temperature of the patient grew higher, and the pulse became more frequent and full, and the difficulty of breathing grew more marked, Clemency did not lose her courage or her quiet cheerfulness, and she never failed to give the right word to Gloden when the poor girl appealed to her in her trouble.

'Oh, Aunt Clem, I cannot bear it! I will ask Mr. Lorimer to send for Dr. Parry back!' she exclaimed once; for the doctor had paid his second visit. His directions had all been given to Clemency, but Gloden had ceased to resent this. All selfishness had been swallowed up in her intense anxiety; she was certain that Dr. Parry had looked grave, though he had reserved his opinion.

'There's no need to trouble Mr. Lorimer,' returned Clemency, quietly. 'Dr. Parry will be here before night.'

Then Gloden uttered a low moan. There needed nothing else to prove to her her darling's danger: Harvey had become light-headed, and was rambling to himself in an aimless way of the old Repton days.

'It was a beastly fluke of Jones minor,' he muttered.

'Aunt Clemency, he is worse—I am sure he is worse. Look at his eyes! he does not seem conscious of our presence.'

'Ay, the fever is high, my dearie, but it is only what we are bound to expect. You must keep up your heart, Gloden; there's not many girls of your age that has such a notion of nursing, and the doctor will soon find that out for himself, though, being older and having had children of my own, and us being such old friends, he gives me all the directions.'

But Gloden was too full of misery to take heed to this delicate compliment, and when the door opened and Reuben Carrick stepped in on tiptoe, with the air of a man well used to sickness, she slipped past him and went out. She wanted to get away from the sound of that hoarse voice, and the dry, suffocating cough.

Reginald, prowling restlessly about the house, came upon her crouched on one of the old-fashioned window-seats in the corridor, looking out drearily over the whiteness of the park. He hurried up to her with a remonstrance.

‘This is very wrong, Miss Carrick; you will take cold in this draughty passage, after being in that warm room so long.’

‘I wanted a breath of air,’ she returned, in the strained high voice that betrayed jarring nerves; ‘the room seemed to suffocate me, and there was nothing I could do. Aunt Clemency does everything far better than I. When will Dr Parry be here, Mr. Lorimer?’

‘I am expecting him every minute; he said he would come as late as possible to-night, and it is ten now.’

‘If he would only come! It is so cruel to see my darling suffer. He is worse—I know he is worse’—and now she was cold, and shaking all over—‘and he is all I have in the world.’

‘I don’t like to hear you talk in that way.’

‘In what other way can I talk when I know the danger he is in?’ she returned, almost harshly.

And Reginald was silent out of sheer pity. How was he to contradict her when Dr. Parry had refused to hazard an opinion? The boy was in a bad way; it was impossible to deny that. He was a delicate little fellow, and those hours of exposure and fatigue had been too much for him. And then his cursed carelessness about the billiard-room; the room had been like a vault. Some one had told him that it was a bad sign when delirium came on in the early stages of inflammation of the lungs, and he wondered what Dr. Parry would say to that. He would have given much to be able to speak a cheering word to the girl. His heart was full of pity for her, and anxiety for his favourite; he would almost have consented to have taken the boy’s place if he could have spared her this pain.

‘It is all my fault,’ he sighed at last; and Gloden roused up at this.

‘It is strange, but I don’t feel as though I could blame you,’ she returned, in a softer tone than she had used before. ‘You meant kindly, and it was only a mistake. It was the dear boy himself who was to blame; and it was my fault too, because I had spoiled him, and that made him self-willed. Mr. Lorimer, if he does not get over this illness—and he will not; I feel he will not,’ she added hysterically—‘it is because I loved him too much, and God is punishing me for it.’

‘No, no; you must not be so hard on yourself.’ He had

not a notion how to comfort her, but as he spoke he put his hands over hers and held them firmly. 'You could not love him too much,' he said vehemently; 'he is a dear little chap, and I love him myself. I never took to a boy in my life before as I have taken to Harvey.'

'Yes; and he was so fond of you,' she murmured. She made no effort to free herself from the kind hands that held hers; indeed, she was hardly conscious of the pressure.

'And I would not lose heart if I were you,' he continued. 'We will have down another opinion if you like, but I have great faith in Parry; I would trust Tottie to him if she were ever so ill. Now you will go back to Harvey, will you not, and hope for the best?'

'Yes, I will go back to him,' she returned meekly.

She could not have recalled a word of their conversation, and yet she felt insensibly soothed by Reginald's sympathy. As he released her hands, he put his arm round her as though to assist her to rise.

'When Parry comes I will send him up,' was all he said as he left her at the door; but Gloden's 'Good-night, and thank you,' were spoken almost gratefully.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CLEMENCY'S REWARD

'Misfortune may make us proud, suffering makes us humble.'

Thoughts of a Queen.

DR. PARRY remained at the Hall all that night. Mr. Lorimer proposed it; he told the doctor that it would be a relief to him personally to have him at hand, and Dr. Parry consented very willingly.

'If there is not some slight change for the better before morning, I will not answer for the consequences,' he said very plainly to Reginald. 'I was just thinking that it would be as well if I could be on the spot; it is one of those cases that will be short and sharp. His temperature must not go any higher.'

Gloden felt a glimmer of hope when she heard Dr. Parry would sleep there, but Reuben Carrick, who was going back in the doctor's brougham, carried a heavy heart with him.

'I wish we did not set such store by the lad,' he said to Clemency, when she accompanied him to the head of the stairs. 'It will go hard with us to part with him.'

But Aunt Clemency, in her simple faith, would not hear of this. 'We will not weaken ourselves by troubling about the future, Reuben. When sorrow comes the strength comes with it. I must just give my mind to following the doctor's orders. "When the child was yet alive"; I always think of David's words.' And then she bade Reuben put up the collar of his coat, to keep him from the cold, and went back to Harvey.

It was a trying night for every one; even Reginald found it impossible to sleep, and more than once he put on his dressing-gown to listen at the door of the sick-room. But to Gloden it was a night of anguish. Clemency, moving about the room in her quiet way, would glance at the girl pityingly from time to time. Gloden was always ready to assist her, to see what was

wanted, but the moment she was free again she returned to her place beside Harvey. Clemency could never have guessed at the thoughts that were passing through Gloden's mind. When she said to herself, in her pious way, that the dear Lord was giving the child one of His hardest lessons, she was very near the truth.

During those weary hours, strange, self-accusing thoughts mingled with her anxious ones for Harvey. At one moment she could think of nothing but of him; the next, she was regarding her past conduct to her uncle and aunt with feelings of remorse and abhorrence. In that solemn watch with Clemency, the truth without any disguise seemed to start up before her and upbraid her with her want of tenderness.

When she saw Clemency's pale face bending over the boy—who was not Davie, not her own flesh and blood—and remembered all her goodness to them both, she hated herself for the jealous pride that would have separated her from the boy. How she had wronged the gentle and kindly soul, who had never given her a reproachful word! How patient she had been with her!

'Why did I never see it before? Why have I taken all and given nothing?' thought the girl. 'It is for this I deserve punishment, not because of the love I gave my darling. It cannot be a sin to love those who are given to us; it is only our want of love for which we shall be judged.'

There are some natures whose latent nobility is only roused by painful circumstance—who need more than others the purification of suffering. An atmosphere of unfailing sunshine would only enervate them; they require a more bracing discipline. In tropical countries vegetation becomes rank; so in a life of ease Gloden's faults would have increased. Her pride needed humbling, her strong will had to learn how to bend to others; her self-love to be eradicated; she had to see herself in the mirror of perfect truth, before she could experience that salutary shame that brings redemption.

'Lie down a bit, Gloden,' urged Clemency once towards morning; 'it is only a tough body like me that can put up with watching and loss of sleep. It makes me feel bad to see your white face, my dear.'

'Oh, Aunt Clemency, I cannot rest! I do not deserve to rest.'

And as the thin little hand with its worn wedding-ring rested on her shoulder, Gloden, with a sudden impulse, touched it with her lips.

'You are so good, so forgiving!' she murmured.

Clemency flushed up with surprise; the caress was so utterly unexpected. Then her good heart seemed to grasp the meaning, and the next moment she put her arms round the girl and laid her head on her shoulder, holding it there with her hand.

'There—there, you poor child,' she said tenderly. 'I would bear it all for you if I could; but the dear Lord knows best, and we can trust Him. It is borne in upon me that this sickness is not for death; I have been thinking so all the night'; and as Gloden hid her face in her neck in a sudden passion of tears, she rocked her gently to and fro, as though she were a baby.

'It is only a mother's love that knows how to look on at suffering,' thought Clemency, when she again stooped over Harvey. 'It is the sword-piercing that many a woman feels in a small measure, though there was only one that could have borne to stand beside a Son's cross. I always had a more kindly feeling for St. John,' she went on, in her simple manner, 'than for any of the others, for the way he took her along with him to his own home. If Reuben's father had not been David, I should have called our little lad John.'

A few minutes later, Gloden, who had at last consented to lie down on the couch for half an hour, heard her call her softly.

'Gloden,' she said quietly, 'I think Harvey is breathing a bit easier, and his skin is not so dry; he has not been rambling so much during the last half-hour.'

But Gloden, worn out with the long watching, was in no state to mark the improvement. 'You must not give me hope,' she said, in a faint, exhausted voice that made Clemency look at her sharply.

'Gloden, my dear,' she said, with unusual decision, 'you will just put yourself back on that couch, and shut your eyes like a good child, or I shall have more than one patient on my hands. You may trust me to call you if there is any change.'

And Gloden, who felt herself unable to stand, threw herself down, and fell into a heavy sleep.

'Young eyes are not used to watching,' thought Clemency, as she sat down by the bed. She was tired, and her head throbbled with weariness, but her heart was full of peaceful happiness. Old prophetic words seemed to echo in her ears: 'Then shalt thou say in thy heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have been bereaved of my children, and am

solitary?' And again, 'For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.'

'Ay, it is true,' she said to herself, as she glanced at the sleeping girl; there is a power of truth in those words. The Lord be thanked for His goodness. We have children in heaven, and children on earth; for Harvey will live, please God, to be a son to Reuben; and now Gloden has opened her heart to me, I feel as though I have nought left to pray for.'

When morning came, Dr. Parry endorsed Mrs. Carrick's favourable opinion of the patient.

'He has taken a turn for the better,' he said to Mr. Lorimer, as they sat down to breakfast together. 'I begin to hope that we shall pull him through after all, though last night I would not have said as much; but we must not halloa until we are through the wood.' And then he began eulogising Harvey's nurse. 'Mrs. Carrick is a trump,' he said enthusiastically. 'I wish I could get her for our matron at the hospital. If I were at death's door, I would rather have that woman to nurse me than any of our trained nurses. She has a genius for it; she has a cool head, never gets flurried, and never forgets an order.'

'Miss Carrick seems to me a good nurse too,' observed Reginald, who had been much struck by Gloden's devotion the last two days.

'Humph—yes; she has a head on her shoulders; but she has not Mrs. Carrick's staying powers. But she has done very well on the whole, poor thing; she seems wrapped up in the lad. Nice boy—very.'

'Oh, Harvey is more than that—he is a fine fellow; and if you pull him through, doctor, we shall all be your debtors for life'; and Reginald's voice was slightly husky. He was surprised himself to find how much he cared for the boy. 'I think I had better adopt him,' he said to himself, with an attempt at a smile.

When Dr. Parry had left, he sent up a message, begging that one of the nurses would speak to him, and, as he hoped, Gloden came down to him. She looked very pale in spite of her long sleep, and Reginald pushed a chair near the fire, and told her to sit down and rest a moment.

'Oh, I cannot stay,' she said hurriedly; 'Aunt Clemency is going to lie down for a couple of hours, while I take care of Harvey.' And then she looked up at Reginald, as he was leaning against the mantelpiece watching her. 'Do you know

that Dr. Parry thinks that Harvey is a little better?—"less bad," were his words, and he says that the improvement is owing to Aunt Clemency's nursing.'

'Yes; he said as much to me.'

'Oh, she is so good, so kind!'—in a choked voice. 'If my dear boy recovers, I shall never be able to do enough for her. I have not been good to her, Mr. Lorimer.'

'Oh, I would not be troubling my head about that now,' remarked Reginald, in his easy-going philosophy. 'You have got to take care of yourself, and look after Harvey—that is your whole duty of woman at present; you may make as much as you like of Mrs. Carrick when you have got her home again.'

'You always say kind things,' returned Gloden, with a faint smile; 'but you don't know how I have treated Aunt Clemency. I thought myself better than she, and I cannot hold a candle to her. Harvey has not been ill more than three days, but I feel as though I have been living through a lifetime of repentance.'

'Anxiety and fatigue have made you morbid,' observed Reginald, treating this confession in an offhand way. 'That is just how I went on about Car,' he thought—'I made myself out an utter brute; but I think differently of things now.' And then he smiled pleasantly as she looked at him with wide, anxious eyes. 'It is an awful mistake, thinking about one's self at such times; there's no good to be got out of it at all. Take my advice, Miss Carrick, chuck all those morbid thoughts overboard, and start afresh; it will be much better for everybody.'

'Yes, you are right,' she said, so humbly that Reginald felt quite uncomfortable. 'You make allowances for every one, Mr. Lorimer, even for me, though you know how proud and disagreeable I have been to every one.'

But here he checked her. 'I am not going to let you talk in that way,' he said, with brusque kindness. 'Disagreeable! Why, you are the pluckiest girl I know; the most patient of saints would have turned rusty in your place. Come, now, if you call yourself names, I shall just tell you plainly how much I respect and admire you.'

But here Gloden stopped him. 'Please don't talk so, Mr. Lorimer'—blushing a little. 'But, of course, it is my fault for troubling you with my stupid thoughts; but somehow you always seem to do me good. I think you have a healthy way

of looking at things. Now I must really go back to my post.' And he reluctantly let her go.

'Do her good,' he remarked to himself, as he sat down in the seat she had just vacated, and took Lassie's head between his knees. 'I felt an awful duffer talking to her just now. I wish I had Hamerton's knack of putting things; she will find me uncommonly stupid when she comes to know me better. I know Car did—poor dear Car!' and here he sighed. He always sighed in this oppressed manner when he thought of his wife. His eyes were gradually opening to the fact that his marriage had not brought him all he had expected. 'If Car had lived, I know we should not have hit it off exactly,' he had said to himself once. 'I was always sure to kick over the traces, and Car couldn't bear running out of her groove.' And there was a good deal of truth in this. 'I never noticed before what wonderful eyes she has got,' he went on; 'they seem to darken and change their colour with every word she speaks. I daresay she has not treated Mrs. Carrick very well, but she has a hard life of it, poor girl!' And here Reginald fell into a brown study, as he twirled his moustache and stared at the fire.

There was still cause for great anxiety about Harvey. When Dr. Parry came the next day, he looked a little grave and spoke vaguely of the danger of a relapse. 'If he gets through, it will be by the skin of his teeth,' he muttered, as he put on his greatcoat in the hall. Later in the day he told Mr. Lorimer that Mrs. Carrick was not to be allowed to sit up.

'I can't have my best nurse knock herself up,' he continued, 'and she has been up for three nights; so Mrs. Norton and Miss Carrick must do it between them. I had Carrick round at the Red House last evening, begging me to see that his wife had her proper rest. 'She will just go on until she drops, doctor,' he said. 'She will never give in—that's her way'; so I have kept my promise by ordering her off to bed.'

'Mrs. Norton is a capital nurse; there is no need for Miss Carrick to sit up,' returned Mr. Lorimer.

'So I told her, but she chooses to be obstinate about it; that young lady has a will of her own, and no mistake. Well, we shall have her breaking down one of these days.' And Dr. Parry, who had daughters of his own, went off grumbling.

'Suppose I have a try,' thought Reginald, as he closed the door upon the doctor; and then he went upstairs and begged Gloden in a low voice to come outside for a moment.

She followed him reluctantly. 'Do you want me particularly, Mr. Lorimer? Aunt Clemency is going to bed, and I am very busy.'

'You are not too busy to give me five minutes, I hope. Mrs. Norton will look after Harvey all right'; and he coolly drew her to the window-seat, and placed himself beside her.

'Miss Carrick, I want you to do me a great favour'; then, as she looked at him apprehensively, 'I want you to go to bed, and allow me to share Mrs. Norton's watch to-night.'

'You!'—very much surprised at this request. 'I don't think Dr. Parry would approve of a fresh nurse for Harvey.'

'You are wrong; he is quite willing for me to do it, though he said at the same time that Mrs. Norton would do quite well alone. But I know you would be happier if I keep an eye on him.'

'But I could not leave Harvey,' she replied, quickly; for the determined look on Reginald's face alarmed her. 'I know Mrs. Norton is a careful woman, but while he is so ill I could not keep out of the room, and you must not ask me to do so.'

'But if I do ask it'—very persuasively—'don't you think you could trust Harvey to me?'

'Yes, of course; and I know how good you would be to him. But indeed—indeed I could not leave him to-night. If anything were to happen! Dr. Parry does not seem quite satisfied about him, and if he should have a relapse.'

'You are conjuring up fears; Harvey is not any worse to-night. Miss Carrick, I am in earnest. I cannot let you lose your rest in this way. There is no one to look after you, and you will not take care of yourself; you will be utterly worn out.'

'What will that matter?' she returned recklessly, amazed by this pertinacity on Mr. Lorimer's part. 'I cannot and I will not leave Harvey to-night.'

Then there was a hurt look on the young man's face. 'Very well, then, there is nothing more to be said'; and Reginald stood up and prepared to leave her. 'I may as well wish you good-night.'

'Why do you speak as though you were offended with me?' she asked, troubled by his manner. Since the first time they had met, he had never spoken to her coldly or indifferently before.

'I have no right to be offended,' he returned stiffly; but I must confess that I am hurt. I had hoped that you would have trusted me; but no matter. I see I expected too much.'

Gloden turned to him quickly. 'You have no right to make it such a personal matter. It is no want of trust on my part. How can I help trusting you when you have been so good to my darling?' Then her voice trembled, and her eyes were full of tears. 'You shall not say that again; I cannot bear it; it seems to make everything so much worse. You shall stay with him if you like.'

'Do you really mean it?' and Reginald's face grew radiant; 'and you will try to sleep?'

'I don't know about that; but I will at least absent myself until morning.'

Then there was a look of triumph in Reginald's eyes; after all, he had prevailed with her. He felt as happy as a king as he went off to Harvey's room. She had not shunted him after all; his will had been stronger. But Gloden, tired and unnerved as she was, wept long and bitterly in her little room.

'Why was I so weak?' she said to herself again and again. 'Dr. Parry and Aunt Clemency both tried to persuade me, but I was firm with them; but when he looked so dreadfully hurt, I could not bear to pain him.' But though Gloden chafed and fretted over her ready submission, and would have given worlds to have taken back her word, she kept her compact with Mr. Lorimer religiously, and he had the satisfaction of seeing her the next morning looking all the better for her enforced rest; but when he told her so, Gloden blushed and made no response.

CHAPTER XXXV

REGINALD KNOWS HIS OWN MIND

‘The pleasure of love is in loving. We are happier in the passion we feel than in what we inspire.’—ROCHEFOUCAULD.

FROM that night Gloden was conscious of a subtle change in Mr. Lorimer’s manner. It was as though her acquiescence in his request had given her a new claim on him. The unaffected cordiality that had always been so winning had deepened into something quieter and stronger; each day she was conscious of an added gentleness and deference; when he looked at her, there was a new meaning in his eyes.

Neither was the change solely on Reginald’s side. Even while Gloden had wept hot tears of indignation over her own inexplicable weakness, she was conscious of some secret unacknowledged pleasure in the thought that Mr. Lorimer was watching over her young brother.

The next morning, when she entered the sick-room and saw him leaning back in the chair she always used, with his fair hair ruffled, and his eyes heavy with want of sleep, her heart felt suddenly drawn to him, and her hand trembled with some unwonted feeling as he took it in his.

‘You are better,’ he said in a low eager voice, that brought the colour to her face. ‘I can see for myself that you are more rested’; and as she turned away without answering, he followed her closely.

‘Harvey is better too. Mrs. Norton is sure of it.’

‘Do you think so? Oh, my darling, are you really and truly better?’ and Gloden sank down on her knees beside the bed and laid her cheek against Harvey’s hand.

Reginald looked at her for one moment—at the coils of brown hair and the white shapely throat, and then at the soft cheek resting against the little rough, boyish hand; a sudden

strange glow came into his eyes, and he turned abruptly away. At that moment he knew the truth—that he loved Gloden Carrick as he had never loved before, and that henceforth life would have no meaning to him unless she would consent to be his wife.

The thought was overwhelming, and he felt a little dizzy as he walked from the room. He dare not trust himself in her presence, lest she should read his secret in his eyes.

‘It is too soon,’ he said to himself, as later on he sat down in his chair before the library fire, with Lassie stretched on the rug at his feet. ‘It is very soon’; and as he spoke half aloud he raised his eyes to his wife’s picture. In the soft firelight, her fair face seemed to look down on him with a smile. At the same instant some words came back to his memory, and the weak tones of her voice as she said them. He had been sitting by her bedside one evening, not speaking much, but stroking her hot hand with that pitying tenderness that one would use to a sick child, when she had suddenly clasped his hand a little feverishly.

‘Reginald,’ she had said in a faint inward voice, ‘I want to say one thing to you. When the right time comes you will marry again; I should not wish it otherwise’; and again, ‘Dying people ought not to be selfish, and I have always taken such care of you and Tottie.’

‘Car always meant what she said,’ he thought, and again the dull throb made itself felt as he recalled his old married life. ‘She always liked to see me happy; but it is far too soon. I will not speak to her until February is over, and then——’ His eyes brightened, but he did not finish his sentence. He rose from his chair, and walked to and fro, pushing away the furniture that was in his way; then, as though the library were too narrow for his restlessness, he went into the great empty music-room, while Lassie, faithful as ever, followed him step by step with shivering and reluctant devotion. The ways of men were wonderful to Lassie, casting furtive glances of longing at the warm bearskin she had left.

He was craving to see Gloden again, but he would not seek her. More than once he stole up to Harvey’s room, but he dare not trust himself to enter; he felt that she would read his thoughts. He would stand and listen to the sound of her light footsteps, and then go back again to his solitude.

But the longing to see her increased towards evening, and

he found it hard to keep his resolution. Perhaps she would come down to him to wish him good-night, or to give him a report of the day. He would wait a little, and then—— But at that moment the light sprang to his eyes—he had heard her speaking to Lassie in the hall; she was on her way to him, and Reginald got up from his seat and walked to the fireplace.

Gloden hesitated for a moment on the threshold; she was sensible of an unaccountable timidity. Mr. Lorimer did not come forward to meet her as usual. ‘Aunt Clemency wished me to come and tell you that Harvey is so much better to-night,’ she said a little hurriedly; ‘he is quite himself, and has spoken to me.’

‘And you have come down to share your good news with me; that is very kind, Miss Carrick.’ He had offered her a chair, but she had motioned it away, and now he had gone back to the rug, with his arm resting on the mantelpiece. Gloden thought he was shielding his face from the blaze; she had no idea how keenly she was watched. ‘It was very good of you to come to me. I was getting dreadfully tired of my solitude.’ Reginald tried to speak in his usual easy fashion, but something in his voice made Gloden look at him.

‘I am sorry you are dull,’ she said gently. ‘I am afraid you miss Tottie, and it is all our fault keeping you here. These rooms’—looking round her—‘must seem very large and empty sometimes.’

‘I am not dull in the way you mean,’ he returned quickly. ‘I have had pleasant thoughts to keep me company. Tottie is not much of a companion to me yet; our conversation is limited. You may make your mind easy about me, Miss Carrick; I am staying here for my own pleasure.’

‘I wish I could be sure of that’—rather wistfully. ‘Dr. Parry says it will be a long time before Harvey gets strong, it has been such a severe attack; you will not get rid of us yet, Mr. Lorimer.’

‘I never want to get rid of you again,’ rushed to Reginald’s lips, but he restrained himself. ‘You know by this time that I am glad to have you and Harvey,’ he said quietly. ‘Please do not get it into your head that you are any trouble to me. I know what a scrupulous person you are.’

‘It is impossible to thank you properly,’ she returned seriously. ‘I have never even thanked you for all you did last night. I have not given you Aunt Clemency’s message yet, Mr. Lorimer. She hopes that you will not sit up late, as

Mrs. Norton tells us that you never closed your eyes at all last night.'

'Mrs. Norton has no right to tell tales, and I never felt better in my life. I think nursing must be my vocation. Now tell me, what arrangements have you made for to-night?'

'Oh, I am going to take the first part of the night, and then Aunt Clemency will relieve me. She will come to me at one o'clock.'

'Honour bright?'

'Oh yes, of course.'

'I don't know whether you are to be trusted. You want a lot of looking after, Miss Carrick, and I begin to think it is my business to look after you.'

He checked himself, as Gloden put out her hand a little timidly and wished him good-night. He did not venture to detain her, but as he walked beside her down the hall, he told himself again that he could not trust himself to be much with her. At the foot of the staircase he bade her good-night again but on the landing she turned round and saw he was still watching her. As she waved her hand he smiled back at her, and then walked slowly away.

Gloden's heart beat a little quickly as she re-entered the sick-room; in her whole life she had never seen a smile like that. Ewen Logan, though he loved her with the whole strength of his nature, had always looked at her with some solemnity in his eyes; but the peculiar tenderness of Reginald's smile was a revelation. It was the smile with which a man looks on his nearest and dearest.

'I must never go and wish him good-night again,' she said to herself, with quick sensitive alarm. 'Of course he understood that Aunt Clemency sent me; but, though he was very kind, he did not seem quite like himself.'

But Gloden never guessed how strong had been Reginald's impulse to call her back as she moved slowly away from him up the broad staircase, and to take her in his arms and pray her never to leave him again.

After all there was no relapse. Harvey's progress, though slow, was satisfactory, and Reuben Carrick's face grew brighter after every visit.

'He will do now, Clem,' he would say as he stood looking down on the boy. 'Of course he is pulled down, poor lad; but we will make a man of him yet, please God'; and Clemency's low-toned 'Ay, Reuben,' always came like an echo.

‘It is the first time we have been parted,’ he said somewhat ruefully one evening, ‘and the days and nights seem to double themselves. I feel lost without you, wife, and that’s the truth. But there, I am a selfish old fellow to be thinking of my own lass, while you are mothering Nat’s children.’

Then Clemency looked at him with her tranquil smile. ‘Reuben, my lad,’ she said, using the phrase that had often come to her lips in the old courting day, when she was a trim, bright-eyed lass, and Reuben was her sweetheart—‘Reuben, my lad, it has been in my mind to tell you something that will give you pleasure. Nat’s girl is my girl now.’

‘Now, what might you be meaning by that, Clem?’ observed Reuben, in a puzzled drawl; but Clemency laughed joyously at his bewilderment. How was he to know without telling that her loving motherly heart was no longer a-hungered?

‘Gloden and me, we understand each other,’ she said in her gentle way, that gave a charm even to her homely language. ‘Her heart, poor lassie, is no longer closed to me; Harvey’s illness has broken down the hardness in her. Ay, but God’s ways are wonderful and past finding out. Who would have thought of you and me having a daughter to cheer us in our old age?’

‘I am fine and glad that the girl has come round.’ But though Reuben said no more, that slow brightening of his eyes was eloquent to Clemency.

‘Clem is rarely happy,’ he said to himself, as he trudged patiently along the snowy roads; for Griff, as usual, had declined to accompany him, but spent his days and nights on the rug in Harvey’s room, only retiring under the bed when the doctor made his appearance. ‘Well, she has had a heap of patience with her—I could see that for myself—and now she is reaping her reward. I always knew there was grit in the girl, though, like all young lassies, she had her whimsies and fads; but I am finely glad that things have come right between her and Clem.’

Reuben always walked over to Silcote every evening when the shop was closed. No weather, however rough, would have kept him from wishing Clemency good-night, for the sturdy, quiet man had the heart of a lover for the homely little wife who was the sunshine of his life.

Clemency’s eyes used to shine as she saw him creeping noiselessly into Harvey’s room night after night; she would put down her knitting and slip her hand into his, as they stood together by the bed.

Reuben never stayed long, and they were never alone except for those few minutes when she followed him outside into the dim landing to bid him good-night. Now and then she would beg him to be easy in his mind and stay at home. 'Harvey is doing nicely now,' she would say, 'and there is no cause for you to be braving the weather like this, and you no longer a young man, Reuben'; but his answer was always the same.

'Ay, the lad is doing finely, thank God; but it is yourself I come to see. It would be against nature not to set eyes on my wife's face once in twenty-four hours. So good-night to you, lass'; and Reuben would shake hands with her gravely, his huge hand nearly swallowing up her little palm. He knew well that Clem would be too shy to offer one of her wifely kisses out of her own house, though he missed them keenly.

Clemency would watch him until he was out of sight, and then go back to her work with the love-light still in her eyes—that strange, mysterious radiance, God-given and divine in its origin, and which is as lovely in aged eyes as in the eyes of youth.

Reginald's quick ardent love was only a flickering torch as yet, compared to the steady lamp lighted in Clemency's quiet eyes. It takes a lifetime of proving and bearing before the full mellow glow can be reached, that light that comes from God, and burns to all eternity.

To the student of human nature, there is a solemn beauty in the love-idylls of the world. The aged couple tottering downhill together, with their old hands still clasped, and leaning on each other in their feebleness, touch us as nearly as the young lover and his lass. The old widow who has followed her young husband to the grave a lifetime ago, and is still faithful to his memory, lays herself down contentedly to die, knowing that in eternal youth she shall clasp him again. 'I shall go to him.' Is not that the longing cry of every bereaved heart, be it old or young? 'To him, to her'; those dear ones within the veil.

When the long strain of anxiety was over, and Harvey was slowly but surely recovering strength day by day, and was beginning to tyrannise over his nurses, Gloden felt happier than she had done since she lost her father. The secret springs of her youth overflowed as they had in the days of old; and Clemency smiled to herself when she saw the brightness of

the girl's eyes, and noticed how often she sang, out of pure joyousness, as she sat over her work.

In spite of Gloden's many faults, there was nothing small or mean in her character. Half-measures were abhorrent to her. From the hour of her reconciliation with Clemency there had been no return of her proud reserve. Harvey, lying hollow-eyed on his pillows, his face shrunken to half its size, felt a faint surprise as he heard her altered tones. 'She is the same jolly old Glow as ever,' muttered the lad, as he closed his eyes out of sheer weakness.

One night when she was about to leave him, and Clemency had gone out of the room for a moment, he put out his hand to detain her.

'What is it, darling?' she asked, sitting down beside him. And then she looked sadly at the little hand that had clutched hers. Alas! it was no longer rough and brown; its blue-veined whiteness for once put hers to shame. She kissed it with sudden passionate tenderness. 'Oh, Harvey, do—do get well soon!' she exclaimed.

'Dr. Parry says I am getting on like a house on fire. What an old goose you are, Glow!' but Harvey's voice was a trifle unsteady. 'Look here'—putting his arm round her neck as she stooped over him—'I want to ask you something. What made you kiss Aunt Clem just now?'

Then a deep blush came to Gloden's cheek.

'Are you getting fond of her?' persisted Harvey, trying to see her face.

To his delight, a whispered 'Yes' reached his ear.

'Really and truly, Gloden?'

'Yes, dear, really and truly. Oh, Harvey'—remorsefully—'I wish I had been more like you. You took to her from the first.'

'Well, I don't know about that,' returned Harvey, with a restless movement under the bed-clothes that made Griff, who was curled up on his feet as usual, supremely uncomfortable. 'She was rather frumpy at first, don't you know. When she came through that glass door I thought she was the cook—cooks have pleasant faces sometimes—but when she tucked me up that night I found out she was a good sort, and so I stuck to her.'

'Yes, my darling; you were always so sweet and loving to her, so no wonder she is so fond of you. But, Harvey dear, I am so grateful to her. Dr. Parry says you would

never have pulled through without her care and nursing, so I feel she has given you back to me.'

'I would not talk to him any more if I were you, Gloden,' observed Aunt Clemency, as she came in at that moment. 'Harvey gets a little feverish when people talk to him at night.'

'I am not a bit hot, and we are having a jolly talk,' grumbled Harvey; but Gloden rose at once and kissed him.

'You are quite right, Aunt Clemency, and I ought to have remembered,' she said gently. 'You must go to sleep now, Harvey; our talk will keep till to-morrow.'

Clemency and Gloden slept by turns on a little bed in Harvey's room, and as Clemency moved about the room, putting things straight for the night, she saw Harvey was lying with his eyes wide open, watching her.

'Is there anything you want, my dear?' she asked, a little anxiously.

'No, Aunt Clem; I am quite comfy, as Tottie says. I was only thinking how jolly it is that Glow and you are such good friends.'

'Ah, that it is, Harvey'; and Clemency paused to give emphasis to her words. "'He maketh men to be of one mind in a house"—that is what I am always saying to myself.'

'Is that a text, Aunt Clem? It sounds like one. What a lot of texts you do know! Well, you and I have always been friends, haven't we? But I wanted Glow to find out for herself how good you are, and all that, because when Glow once likes a person she never changes. Then he lay and looked at her a moment. 'Are you going to like her as much as you do me, Aunt Clem?'

'I am going to love her as though she were my own girl,' returned Clemency, quietly; but Harvey was clever enough to read this answer truly.

'Oh, you may like me best,' he returned in a sleepy tone, 'because we have been friends for so long, and I remind you of your boy. Glow never minds if people like me best.'

As soon as Harvey had had strength enough to know his own wishes, he had begged for Mr. Lorimer's company. It was quite an understood thing that Reginald should come and see him once or twice a day; and as he grew stronger these visits were lengthened, until Reginald spent every afternoon in Harvey's room.

To Gloden as well as to Harvey these hours were the

pleasanter part of the day; those quiet firelight talks, while Harvey played with Lassie, and Aunt Clemency sat by and knitted or dozed in her snug corner, were almost as delightful to her as they were to Reginald. Harvey, who was still languid and indisposed to much exertion, was quite content to see his friend, and showed no impatience if he and Gloden talked about books or music. Reginald was always lending her books now, and by his orders the room was kept gay with hothouse flowers.

‘Harvey and I are getting quite spoiled,’ she said one day, when Clemency had gone down to speak to Mrs. Norton, and Reginald had brought up a portfolio of rare engravings to amuse her. She spoke with unusual seriousness, and there was a momentary sadness in her clear grey eyes. ‘How do you suppose Market Street will look to us after this?’

‘I hate to think of you in Market Street,’ was Reginald’s impetuous reply. ‘When I see you there you remind me of a disguised princess; the place is not fit for you——’ But here the deep flush on Gloden’s face checked him.

‘I do not like it myself,’ she said in a low voice, ‘and Harvey does not like it either; but I have made up my mind that I will try to be as contented as I can. Uncle Reuben and Aunt Clemency are so good; they make me ashamed of all my pride.’

‘Oh, you are not proud now, not a bit,’ returned Reginald, in a cheery voice. ‘I used to be terribly afraid of you. I thought you never meant to have anything to do with me.’

‘I am afraid I was very disagreeable.’

But Reginald only shook his head and smiled, and then he took another engraving out of the portfolio. He must not allow himself to touch on personalities. When he was near her he was so keenly alive to his own feelings that he was obliged to keep himself well in hand. These visits to Harvey’s room, these fireside talks, were perilously sweet, and each day he found it harder to restrain himself. ‘If it were not so soon; if I might only speak to her now!’ was Reginald’s inward cry; but he was strong enough to keep firm to his resolution. ‘In six weeks, perhaps less,’ he said to himself, ‘I will go down to Market Street and ask her to be my wife.’

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE SQUIRE PUTS IN A WORD

‘As I approve of a youth that has something of the old man in him, so I am no less pleased with an old man that has something of youth.’

CICERO.

THERE was one person who received the news of Harvey’s illness with feelings bordering on dismay, and this was Constance Wyndham. The idea of a colony of Carricks being located at Silcote Park for an indefinite period made her seriously uneasy.

In his sister’s opinion, Reginald’s impulsive nature was singularly liable to lead him into mischief. He was kind-hearted and impressionable—dangerously so, she thought; he would be brought into daily contact with the young violinist; he would see her morning, noon, and night; they would have their meals together, and a close intimacy would be the result. But on this latter point Mrs. Wyndham was wrong.

Mrs. Carrick and her niece had hitherto taken their meals in a pleasant upstairs sitting-room that Lady Car had fitted up for her lady guests; it was conveniently near Harvey’s room, and Mrs. Norton had proposed this arrangement, thinking that it would spare her master some awkwardness.

Reginald had acquiesced somewhat reluctantly, when Mrs. Norton had pointed out how far more suitable it would be for Mrs. Carrick and the young lady.

‘You see, sir,’ she had said, very sensibly, from her point of view, ‘it will save all awkwardness. Mrs. Carrick and I have been on friendly terms, and Norton has often smoked a pipe in their parlour; and she would very properly think that her rightful place would be along with us in the housekeeper’s room. But then the young lady has had a different bringing-up, and quiet meals in the tapestry room would be more to her taste.’

‘Well—well, perhaps you are right,’ returned Mr. Lorimer, hastily; but he had winced inwardly at his housekeeper’s plain speaking. ‘Mrs. Carrick might prefer it, as you say; she and her niece are very different people, and I hope you will see that Miss Carrick has every attention from the servants.’

‘And she is to have the Reynolds room, sir’—rather doubtfully; for the room, so called after a portrait of Angelica Kauffmann that hung over the mantelpiece, and painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, had always been reserved for important guests. It had a carved oak bedstead, which was greatly admired, with a quilt worked by the Duchess of Portland, the lifelong friend of the celebrated Mrs. Delany. ‘I wonder what Mrs. Wyndham would say to master putting Mrs. Carrick’s niece into the Reynolds room,’ thought the housekeeper, ‘when the bachelor’s room and the turret room are both empty?’

When Constance had read her brother’s letter, detailing the particulars of Harvey’s illness, and begging her to send on his things, as he would be unable to return to town, a cloud came over her face; but as Violet Winter was present at the breakfast-table—for she had been staying with the Wyndhams ever since Christmas—she dare not give vent to her feelings.

Constance really thought that Reginald and Violet were beginning to understand each other; they had been a great deal together lately, and she had noticed more than once that Reginald had shown a decided preference for Violet’s society, and it had seemed to her that the wish of her heart would soon be gratified. Reginald would marry again, and his chosen wife would be Violet. Constance hugged this idea secretly and closely, until she grew to believe in it; but it never occurred to her that Violet saw quite as much of Felix Hamerton.

‘Harcourt,’ she said to her husband, when she found herself alone with him that evening, ‘Violet will be leaving us for the Greshams’ on Monday; so, if you can spare me, I think I will take Tottie back to Silcote, and spend a day or two with Reginald.’

Mr. Wyndham looked up from his paper in some surprise. ‘Did Reginald ask you to send her back? I should think he would be glad for us to keep her for the present.’

‘Oh no; he never likes to be separated from Tottie,’ returned his wife, decidedly. ‘He has often said how much he misses her, and, though I love to have her with me, I know the dear child’s place is with her father.’

‘Very well, my love, you know best; but you must recollect that the Hall is pretty full just now.’

‘Yes; and it is so awkward for Reg, poor boy, with all those people about him. I know he will be glad of my help.’

And then Mr. Wyndham said no more; he saw his wife’s heart was set on a visit to Silcote, and he never thwarted her if he could help it.

But an unforeseen obstacle occurred. Ninian caught another heavy, feverish cold, and Constance, who always nursed her children devotedly, found herself unable to leave home for the present.

One afternoon, when Harvey’s convalescence was making good progress, Reginald found he had some business to do in Grantham, and he went up to the south room to ask if he could do any errands for Mrs. Carrick.

He looked at Gloden as he entered. She was sitting by the fire with some delicate white work in her hands, and perhaps it was the blaze that flushed her and made her look so well.

‘Well,’ he said, taking up his usual position on the hearth-rug, and glancing down at her with a smile, ‘I wonder what commissions I can do for you and Mrs. Carrick in Grantham?’

Clemency put down her knitting a little eagerly. ‘If you will be near Market Street, Mr. Lorimer, I shall be kindly obliged to you if you would look in on my husband. He has sent word that he has got a touch of his old rheumatism, and that the damp is trying him a bit, so that he will not venture up here this evening.’

‘And you want me to give him a message?’

‘Well, you see’—wrinkling her brows a little anxiously—‘Harvey is doing so finely that I think I could leave him comfortably for a few hours to-morrow. Reuben says that Patty seems to have come to the end of her tether; and if I could get down there early, and have a bit of dinner with Reuben, and maybe a cup of tea, I could see after things a bit. And Gloden says she can spare me.’

‘Aunt Clemency is fidgeting a little about Uncle Reuben’s rheumatism,’ observed Gloden, raising her eyes from her work; ‘and, though she will not own it, she is getting homesick. I tell her she can have a long day at Grantham to-morrow; Harvey will not want her until evening.’

‘Of course not; it is an excellent plan. Very well, Mrs. Carrick, I will tell your husband of the pleasure in store for him. I am quite sure he misses you terribly.’

‘Reuben does not miss me more than I do him,’ returned Clemency, quietly. ‘Husbands and wives are as bad to separate as the two halves of a pair of scissors; one won’t work properly without the other.’

‘Mr. Lorimer,’ interrupted Harvey, who had been listening to this with some impatience, ‘I wish you would give Bernard Trevor a message from me. I want him to come up one afternoon and have a game of Halma with me; Gloden has promised to teach him.’

‘I don’t think you ought to trouble Mr. Lorimer in this way,’ observed Gloden, reproachfully.

‘He does not think it a trouble; do you, Mr. Lorimer?’ Harvey persisted.

‘No, old fellow, of course not. Bernard shall have his message all right. ‘Now, Miss Carrick’—stooping over her as though to compel her to look at him—‘what can I do for you?’

‘Nothing, thank you, Mr. Lorimer’—in a low tone.

‘You are too much afraid of giving me trouble, I suppose’—looking full into the large clear eyes a moment, and his hand lightly touched hers. ‘Well, good-bye! I am not sure that I shall not be back in time for a game of Halma after all; I know Harvey wants his revenge.’

The thaw had set in with a cold drizzling rain, but Reginald splashed cheerfully through the half-frozen roads and the shallow brown puddles with their thin glaze of ice, that broke under his tread. His thoughts were busy as he strode on, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left; for wide meadowlands seen under slow continuous rain are not an exhilarating prospect, especially when the hedgerows were black and bare, and there were no grazing cattle making dots of colour in the landscape.

He had been formulating a plan during the last two days that had pleased him mightily, and the thought of which made him break out every now and then into light-hearted whistling. Clemency’s message had furnished him with an excellent excuse for calling on Reuben Carrick. Kind actions came naturally to Reginald, and, though he was by no means faultless, and had no higher aims and ambitions than other young men of his age, it was a clearly-understood fact to those who knew him that the Squire would go a long way out of his road to help any one. Even old Sal, the weeding woman, who was known for miles round for her cranky temper and marvellous vocabulary of uncomplimentary terms, was once heard to say

‘that the Squire was that soft that he would go a mile to give a shilling where other folk would not stir to give sixpence.’

There were no customers in the shop as Mr. Lorimer entered, and Reuben Carrick had betaken himself to the parlour. He looked well pleased when he saw his visitor.

‘That’s good news,’ he said, as Reginald gave him Clemency’s message; ‘and Patty will be fine and glad to see her mistress. She is like a calf that has forgotten its way to the shed, without Clem behind her to show her the way. And so the lad is doing rarely, is he?’

‘Indeed he is; he is to get up this afternoon, and sit by the fire for half an hour. That is a grand advance, you know. Parry is very careful of him; and as for his nurses, Harvey is in luck’s way all round, and is in danger of being spoilt.’

‘Ay, ay, my wife sets great store by Harvey. He is a good lad, too, and he has taken to us from the first. That was what pleased Clem so; her heart went out to him at once.’

‘Well, you know I am very fond of him myself,’ returned Reginald, pulling at his fair moustache a little nervously; ‘Harvey and I are great friends. Mr. Carrick, there is something I want to say, only I am afraid how you will take it. I have had a good deal of talk with him one way and another, for Harvey is as open as the day, and speaks all his mind, and he has set himself dead against the grammar school.’

‘I don’t rightly understand you, Squire,’ returned Reuben, a little stiffly. ‘Harvey has never made any complaint to me. You see, I have done for him as I should have done for my own poor lad if he had lived. David was at the Grantham grammar school; Clemency has some of his prizes still.’

‘Of course it is not for me to dictate to you, Mr. Carrick,’ replied Reginald, pleasantly. ‘You are Harvey’s rightful guardian; but I take a great interest in the boy, as you know. He is a fine little fellow, and he ought to turn out well. The boys at the grammar school are not quite up to his level. You see, Repton has spoiled him; he has got a hankering after his old school. I know how you think about things, Mr. Carrick; you intend to give him a good solid education that will be suitable for the purpose you intend him to fill, but I am afraid Harvey will never take to the bookselling business.’

‘Perhaps not, if his sister put notions in his head’—and Reuben spoke a little sternly. ‘That is what my wife and I have always felt about Harvey. He is so young and pliable that we could fashion him easily to our way of thinking if it

were not for Gloden thwarting us at every turn. I am loath to blame my own niece, but Gloden has a few stiff-necked notions of her own. Nat spoilt her by giving in to all her whims, and now she is setting Harvey against the business, though it is a good business, and keeps us all in comfort. I am put about when I think of it, Mr. Lorimer.'

'I can feel for your disappointment,' returned Reginald, in a sympathetic tone; 'but it would be wiser to look things in the face, would it not? Now, I am going to make you an offer. Send Harvey back to Repton, and let him work for a scholarship, and then perhaps he could get to one of the universities.'

But Reuben interrupted him. 'There is the Grantham scholarship; what should hinder him from trying for that?'

'Oh no, Mr. Carrick. He would have to work far too hard for that; the competition is too great. Take my advice; send him to Repton, and I will gladly halve expenses with you. I would say more than that, only that I fear to offend you, but I would willingly take the expenses of Harvey's education on myself. I have far more money than Tottie and I know how to spend. You know, my wife, Lady Car, was very rich.'

'Say no more, Squire, say no more,' replied Reuben, with such firmness that Reginald was silenced. 'Thank you kindly all the same, but Nat's boy must not be beholden to any one but his uncle for his education, and, if you will excuse me for saying it, you are young, and will marry again, and may have boys of your own to send to Repton. Now, I will just turn over in my mind what you have been saying,' continued Reuben, slowly; 'and I will have a talk with Harvey, and see what notions he has got in his head. I don't hold with public schools, and bringing up young people above their station; but my children are all provided for, the Lord knows'—and here Reuben's voice grew husky—'and if Harvey's heart is set on Repton, it is not out of my power to send him. You see, Squire, I have laid by a goodish bit—more than enough for my wife, if I should be taken first, and Harvey may as well use it now as afterwards.'

'I am afraid I had no right to interfere,' observed Reginald, as he rose to go; but Mr. Carrick would not allow this for a moment.

'You have been a true friend to us, Squire, and no one has a better right; and I thank you heartily for the offer you made just now, though I don't see my way clear to close with it.'

Well, you must be getting back, I suppose. I wish you had a finer evening for your walk; you will be rarely splashed by the time you get back.'

When Patty brought in the tea-tray, she found her master still sitting in his elbow-chair, staring into the fire—'just as though he saw trouble coming,' thought Patty, who was superstitious by nature.

'I have had a bit of a blow,' said Reuben to himself. 'I wish I had Clem here to talk it out with, for silence is an ill companion when one's heart is full. It will take time to get used to the idea that Harvey is not to take David's place after all, and look after Clem and me when we are old and feeble. It seems that we have hatched a duckling after all, and he will be for venturing out on the pond while we are for dry ground and not wetting our feet.

'Ah, well! there is only one life for all of us, young or old, and it is poor work harassing young folk with old-fashioned notions that they have no stomach to swallow. As I told the Squire just now, I could afford to give Harvey a fine education if I chose. Gold is for the using, though not for the abusing; but what troubles me is that the business, that was good enough for father, and which he brought me up to carry on, should be despised. It makes one miss Davie worse than ever'; and the slow painful tears gathered to Reuben's eyes as he sat in the twilight. Reuben's bones and his heart were aching sorely. If only Clemency could have guessed how badly her husband was longing for her!

Reginald's position made him somewhat of an authority in the neighbourhood, and a word from the Squire had more weight than the speeches of other people. 'Mr. Lorimer would never have said what he did if he could not show chapter and verse for it,' thought Reuben, as he at last took down his pipe. 'Harvey has been fretting about things which he has kept close from me. I suppose Gloden has told him that there was no help for it, and that he must put up with the grammar school—though there was no call for him to be a tradesman. It was not likely that she would know of my savings; Clem and I have always kept our concerns to ourselves. He was always talking about Repton when he wasn't himself. Clemency told me that she feared he was hankering after it. Ah, well! I must do rightly by Nat's boy; and he is a fine lad, as the Squire says. It is wonderful how he has taken to him.'

Reginald felt satisfied with the result of his mission, as he walked back in the darkness. The rain had ceased, but the cold dampness seemed to cling about him, and made him long for the fireside. It was hard for the poor old man, he thought, to spend the savings of a lifetime on a young scapegrace of a nephew, who chose to assert himself even at this tender age; but he was deep in Harvey's confidence, and for the life of him he could not help siding with the boy.

'Look here, Mr. Lorimer,' Harvey had said one evening when he had lain on the rug, with Lassie curled up into a round breathing ball beside him, 'it is beastly hard lines on a fellow, being taken away from Repton and put among all those cads. Gloden says I must make the best of it; but if Uncle Reuben thinks I am going to sell books over the counter all my life, he is mistaken. I would run away and go on the stage first.'

'Well, you have the making of a clown in you,' had been Reginald's reply to this, and he had made himself very witty at Harvey's expense. But, all the same, he had felt sorry in his heart for the bright little fellow, who was his sister's darling, and had led such a happy life.

But he felt more at ease about him now. Mr. Carrick's eyes were open, and he had little doubt of the result; and thereupon he put Harvey out of his mind, and thought of Gloden, as he had seen her last.

Would she be still at her needlework? he wondered. And would the sudden bright smile that he loved come to her face as he opened the door?

When he had been absent for an hour or two, it was strange how he hungered to see her again. There was something magnetic in her power over him; the mere sound of her low tones made a thrill pass through him. The strength of his passion for this pale, quiet girl with the clear soft eyes, filled him with awe and astonishment. As he walked up the avenue, he looked eagerly up at the window of the south room. The curtains were still undrawn, and the soft yellow lamplight streamed out into the darkness. How warm and homelike the old Hall looked! Then he started, for at that moment a slim dark figure glided into the bay. He could see her distinctly, with the light behind her, and the turn of her long neck, as though she were speaking to some one within the room. Could she be looking for him? Yes; she had turned—he could see her face. And then the curtain dropped from her hand.

'My long absence has made her uneasy,' thought Reginald. 'Or perhaps Harvey had asked her to look out for me'; and then he raised his hand to the bell. As it pealed through the house, Lassie jumped up from the rug with a joyous bark of welcome.

'I am afraid I am very late, Norton,' observed his master in cheery tones.

'You are dreadfully late, Reg,' echoed a familiar voice; and Constance's lovely face beamed on him from the library door.

CHAPTER XXXVII

'I CANNOT STAY HERE ANY LONGER'

Ros. His hair is of a good colour.

Celia. An excellent colour: your chestnut was ever the only colour.
As You Like It.

REGINALD was conscious of a quick revulsion of feeling as he saw his sister's face. It was as though a cold breath had suddenly tempered his enthusiasm; but the next moment he hated himself for his lukewarm welcome.

'My dear Constance, what on earth does this mean?' had been his greeting words; but she had only laughed, and kissed him affectionately.

'Come and warm yourself, Reggie,' she said brightly. 'I want to have a good look at you.'

But Reginald only glanced at his splashed gaiters a little doubtfully. 'I am not fit to be seen, I am afraid. The roads were horrible, and it was so dark that one could not avoid the puddles.'

In Lady Car's time he would have gone up straight to his dressing-room after having warmed himself by the hall fire; but Constance had no mind to part with him so soon.

'Take off your ulster, and never mind your gaiters,' she said comfortably. 'It is too late for tea, of course; Norton will soon ring the dressing-bell. But there is no reason why you should not have a nice warm before you dress.'

Then he followed her reluctantly into the library.

'Sit down, Reg dear,' she said, pointing to a chair beside her. Constance was still in her walking-dress. She stood beside him for a moment, smoothing his damp, ruffled hair with her warm, soft fingers. 'You dear old fellow, are you half as glad to see me as I am to see you?'

'Of course I am glad to have you, Con. But why have

you taken me by surprise in this way? When you last wrote you were nursing Ninian.'

'Oh, Ninian is all right again. It was only a feverish cold, after all, and that never lasts long with children. Well, I will tell you why I came off so suddenly. Harcourt was obliged to go down to Brighton. Mrs. Wyndham is ill, and wanted to see him, and José begged him to come at once; so it came into my head that I would run down here. I only planned it at breakfast-time, and here I am.'

'But you might have sent me a telegram'—in a slightly injured voice. Then a faint surprise was visible in Mrs. Wyndham's eyes; that Reggie would not be overjoyed to see her had certainly not entered her head. 'Not that I mind, of course,' he continued hurriedly, 'only it would have been more comfortable. Your room would have been all ready for you, and now'—he bit his lip—'I am afraid Mrs. Norton will have to put you in the turret room.'

'Yes, I know'; and Constance coloured slightly. 'I have been talking to Mrs. Norton, and she tells me that Miss Carrick is in the Reynolds room; but the turret room will do very nicely.' And then recovering herself as she saw a vexed look on her brother's face, she continued cheerfully, 'It will be the first time I have ever slept out of my old room.'

'We were obliged to put Harvey there, you know, Con; it was a matter of life and death.'

'Oh, of course, dear, and you did very rightly. And how thankful you must be that he is recovering so nicely, poor little fellow! It must have been a very trying time for you, Reg. I did so long to come down and help you.'

'Oh, we got on all right. Mrs. Norton is good in an emergency. We were terribly anxious at first, and so was Parry; but now he is able to sit up, and begins to look like himself.'

'How delighted his sister must be, and Mrs. Carrick! They must be very grateful to you, Reggie, for all your kindness.'

Then he gave an abrupt laugh. 'I don't quite see where the kindness comes in. As the boy was taken ill here, I suppose we were obliged to keep him. I had nothing to do with his nursing.'

'No; but all the same, you must have been put to great inconvenience. Mrs. Norton has been telling me about everything, and how the tapestry room has been given up for the use of the nurses. She certainly could not have arranged

better, as I told her. And she says it was your wish that Miss Carrick should have the Reynolds room.'

'I thought she would be near her brother,' returned Reginald, feeling as though some explanation were demanded; and then he remembered that the bachelor's room was still closer.

But Constance took no notice of his momentary confusion. 'It was so like Reg,' she thought, 'to make no distinction. He would treat Mrs. Carrick's niece with the same consideration as he would a duchess.'

'There is the dressing-bell,' she said, rising from her seat, with her plush mantle dropping from her shoulders. 'You look so tired, Reg dear, but you will be better after dinner'; and then they went upstairs together.

Reginald dared not enter the sick-room in his damp, muddy condition. He looked longingly at the closed door as he passed. He must make haste over his dressing, and then perhaps he could secure a few quiet minutes with Gloden. But as he opened his door, he came face to face with Constance.

'I have not changed my dress this evening, dear,' she said apologetically. Bridget had no time to unpack my things, and the room was so cold. The fire is burning up nicely now, and it will be all right by bedtime.'

'It is your own fault, Con; you ought to have telegraphed. Mrs. Norton has had no time to make you comfortable.'

Reginald's tone was a little unsympathetic, but Constance's appearance at that moment annoyed him. She would expect him to go down with her. Yes, of course; she was waiting for him, and there was a reproachful expression in her beautiful eyes.

'I don't think you are half glad to see me, Reg,' she said, passing her hand through his arm, 'or you would not scold me a second time for not sending a telegram.'

Then Reginald felt as though he were a brute. 'You must not say such things, Con,' he returned, pressing her hand more closely to his side. 'Have I ever in my life been sorry to see you?' And Constance was instantly mollified.

After all, it was impossible not to feel glad that he should not have to eat his dinner in solitude. Constance had so much to tell him; it was so pleasant to meet her eyes as she beamed at him between the lights and flowers. Just for the first moment he had felt things would be spoiled for him; but, after all, how could Constance, his sweet-tempered, affectionate Con, interfere with his comfort? She would be as good as possible

to Gloden. And then he remembered, with a feeling of relief, that Mrs. Carrick would be spending the next day at Grantham. Somehow he dreaded Constance seeing her homely little figure, in the old red shawl, moving about the south room.

'I suppose you have seen Felix lately?' he asked, forcing himself with difficulty out of a reverie, when the dessert-dishes had been handed round, and Norton and his subordinate had left the room.

'Oh yes; we have seen him nearly every evening since Violet has been with us. She is at the Greshams' now. Violet is looking so well, dear; I think being in town suits her. It is so deadly dull for her at the Gate House.'

'I saw Miss Wentworth in the town this afternoon,' observed Reginald. 'She had been calling on the Logans and Parrys. She says Mrs. Winter is far from well, and that she had been asking the doctor to come over and see her. I thought she looked a trifle anxious as she spoke. I should think Violet ought to come home if her mother is not well.'

Constance brightened up at this speech. It really looked as though Reg missed Violet, and wanted her back. Well, it would do him no harm to miss her a little longer; it did not do to make things too easy for him. A little difficulty would make him far more anxious to secure her; so she answered quietly—

'Mrs. Winter is always ailing more or less, and I daresay the cold thaw tries her. Violet cannot well come home before the Courtenays' ball. You know, Fred Courtenay is a cousin of Violet's, and he is coming of age on the twenty-ninth; it will be a grand affair, Felix says. Violet made him promise to go too, though he hates those big dances.'

'I used to like them myself,' returned Reginald, carelessly, as he cracked his filberts.

'Oh, you and Felix are different people,' replied Constance, with a sigh, as she thought of Gabrielle; 'but it is so like Felix to forget himself and to give other people pleasure. Violet told him that she would have to dance with a lot of empty-headed boys, and that a little rational conversation towards the end of the evening would be refreshing, and so he said he would go. I went with Violet to choose her new dress, and I think she will look lovely in it. It is that pale pink that is so delicate, like the inside of a blush rose. What are you smiling at, Reggie?'

But at this question the colour mounted to Reginald's fore-

head. He had been thinking, as he listened to Constance's description, how well Gloden Carrick would look in pale pink.

'Oh, nothing,' he returned hastily. 'These filberts are not good; I have just come upon a maggot. Where shall we have our coffee to-night? If they have not lighted the drawing-room fire, we will go back to the library.'

'Oh yes; the library will be far warmer,' replied Constance, shivering a little as she drew a white fleecy wrap round her. 'It is much colder here than in London.' Then, as they went out into the hall together, she said doubtfully, 'I suppose I ought not to see Harvey to-night?'

'Certainly not'—with decision. 'But that reminds me'—glancing up at the clock—'that I must just run up and bid him good-night, before he goes to sleep.'

'Very well; but don't be long,' returned Constance. And Reginald ran lightly up the staircase.

'What a boy he is still!' thought his sister, as she sank into her favourite low chair. 'I think Reggie will never be as old and staid as other people. But how well he looks! I never thought Reg was half so good-looking, but he is positively handsome to-night. If only Vi were here!'

And then Constance began castle-building as usual, with those delightful aerial bricks that bring down no dust or noise in their ruin. Oh, these wonderful Châteaux en Espagne, with their visionary towers and turrets lifting up their heads to the clouds, baseless, unsubstantial, but supremely beautiful, and bathed in 'that light that never was on land or sea'! How few of us have not essayed the airy architecture! For life at times seems sadly dull and prosaic. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning tells us—

Life treads on life, and heart on heart;
They press too close in church and mart
To keep a dream or grave apart;

and the real and the actual and the commonplace weigh heavily on us until our very thoughts seem dingy; and so the atmosphere grows foggy, and our daily life looks like a ploughed field with uniform furrows of duty, and the sky is grey and interminable. Then we wave our wand; our eyes close. When we open them we are in the streets of a strange city. There are gorgeous buildings, lakes shimmering in moonlight or sunshine, gaily-dressed people with smiling faces, who greet us and pass on. 'What are the Arabian Nights to these?' we say. But as we gaze there is a change. The glittering buildings are overthrown,

the faces vanish, the landscape is a blank, and we are treading wearily up the steep furrows, too sick at heart to wave the magic wand again. Useless as the mirage to the thirsty traveller are these empty visions of the soul, that only increase its hunger after true happiness; and in our lonely and unsatisfied hours we should do well to take Thoreau's noble words to our hearts: 'We will remember within what walls we lie, and understand that this level life too has its summit; and why from the mountain-top the deepest valleys have a tinge of blue; that there is elevation in every hour, as no part of the earth is so low that the heavens may not be seen from, and we have only to stand on the summit of an hour to command an uninterrupted horizon.'

'No part of the earth is so low that the heavens may not be seen from.' A whole sermon lies in that sentence, spoke by the hermit of Walden.

Unconscious of his sister's dreams, Reginald crossed the passage with light springy steps; but before he could knock at the door, Gloden appeared on the threshold.

'Hush! he is asleep. You are so late,' she said, a little reproachfully. 'He wanted to see you, and was so disappointed, poor boy!'

'I could not come before,' he returned quickly. 'Walk up and down the corridor with me a moment—I want to speak to you; unless we go into the tapestry room.'

'I was just going there; Aunt Clemency is waiting for me.'

But his only answer was to put his hand on her arm and turn her lightly towards the staircase.

'Let us walk a little. You shall go to her directly; but I have not spoken to you to-day. Do you know my sister, Mrs. Wyndham, has come?'

'Yes,' she said, glancing at him a moment as the light from the hall lamp fell on his face; 'Mrs. Norton told us. You must be very glad to have her.'

'Yes, for some things. I am not over-fond of my own company, but I think we were very comfortable as we were. What have you been doing to-day, Miss Carrick? I suppose you and Harvey did not miss me much this afternoon?'

'I am afraid Harvey did miss you,' she replied, turning her neck aside with that quick shy movement he knew so well, for there was something almost caressing in Reginald's voice. 'He grumbled a good deal when he found you did not return, and set me to watch at the window for a long time.'

'I saw you,' he replied, feeling a momentary disappointment that she had not stood there of her own accord. 'I could see your figure and your hand distinctly. I was thinking of you as I walked up the avenue, and how dull you must be. You have not been out for nearly a week, and that is why you are looking so pale to-night.'

'I don't believe I am pale at all,' she said, trying to laugh; 'and the weather has been so bad. If it would only clear up, Griff and I would walk into Grantham. I want to see Miss Logan; and I might go as far as the Gate House, to find out if Miss Winter has returned.'

'She is not coming back just now; I can tell you as much as that. She is staying in town for the Courtenay ball, on the twenty-ninth.'

'Yes; but there are some books that I ought to take back, and I am very fond of the walk to the Gate House, and I dare-say Mrs. Winter will be glad to see me. She is so nice to me now. I am afraid I am not very fond of Miss Wentworth, but as she treats me civilly I ought not to complain.'

'Oh, she is a worthy creature; I have rather a respect for her myself,' returned Reginald, who was disposed to think well of an old friend. 'When shall you go to the Gate House, Miss Carrick? To-morrow you will not be able to leave Harvey.'

'Oh no, of course not; but perhaps the next day.'

And thereupon Reginald began thinking how pleasant it would be if he were walking with Lassie in the vicinity of the Gate House, and he were to see her coming along the road. But at this moment Gloden held out her hand and wished him good-night.

'Your sister will be wondering what has become of you,' she said quietly, 'and Aunt Clemency will be waiting for me. Please remember me to Mrs. Wyndham. She was very kind to me once, and I shall like to see her again.'

'What a hurry you are in!' he said deprecatingly; 'and there is nothing that you have to do to-night.'

But Gloden was firm. It was very pleasant, it was more than pleasant, to be pacing slowly up and down the well-lighted, wide corridor in this friendly way with Mr. Lorimer, and to hear him speaking to her in that kind voice, but if Mrs. Wyndham were to come upstairs, would she not be surprised to see them together? No; it was time for her to go back to Aunt Clemency.

'Good-night,' she said softly, as she put her hand in his. 'I daresay I shall see your sister to-morrow.'

And Reginald felt himself dismissed.

'Of course I shall bring her up to see you and Harvey,' he said, going down a step or two, and then looking up at her as she stood there a moment.

How often Gloden recalled that little scene afterwards!—the broad staircase and the warm spacious hall below, and Reginald looking up at her with that bright deprecatory smile on his face, and a halo of lamplight round his fair hair. How often, through the days that followed, she remembered that kind look!

She drew back with a faint blush, and resumed her walk. She was in no mood for Aunt Clemency's placid talk at that moment. She wanted to be alone and to think what that look meant, and why there was such a glow in Reginald's eyes when he looked at her now. He had always been good to her, but now there was a gentleness in his voice and manner that seemed to draw her towards him. Was it possible—— But here Gloden checked herself, and walked on faster.

'I will not think it,' she said to herself indignantly. 'It is not maidenly, or right. He has said or done nothing to put such a thought in my head. It is his nature to be kind; he is getting used to me, and treats me as an old friend.' But though Gloden tried to convince herself that Reginald's persistent kindness meant nothing, an inward voice made itself heard—

'He is beginning to love you, and you know it. You have seen that look in Ewen Logan's eyes. Take care of your own heart, or trouble will come to you. Reuben Carrick's niece is no fit match for the master of Silcote Hall.'

'You look tired, Gloden,' observed Mrs. Carrick, when the girl at last joined her. 'What have you been doing with yourself, my dear?'

'I have been walking up and down the corridor to give myself exercise. I should like to walk miles to-night, I am so restless. Aunt Clemency'—standing beside her a moment—'how long do you think we shall stay here—I mean, before Harvey can be removed to Grantham?'

Mrs. Carrick put down her knitting-needles and looked at her niece a little anxiously. There was a strained, worried tone in the girl's voice.

'We will ask Dr. Parry,' she said quietly. 'Perhaps he

will give us leave to take Harvey home in another week or so. I suppose you are thinking that we ought not to trouble Mr. Lorimer a day longer than necessary; and you are right there, for, though he has been as kind as kind, he will be glad to have his house to himself again.'

'Of course he will'—in a low, vehement voice—'and we have no right to be such a burden on him. We are taking up all the best rooms, and are waited upon as though we were princesses. Aunt Clemency'—kneeling down beside her, and putting her arms on the table—'I don't think it is good for me to be here; it enervates me somehow. I am not like you. I love luxury, and soft living, and beautiful rooms. It is my nature to like them, and I cannot help myself.' Gloden's cheeks were burning, and her head went down on her hands as she spoke. 'It is no use for me to pretend to be better than I am, and all these things are of consequence to me. I hate to live without them, and being here will make it all the worse to go back.'

It was an honest confession and a true one; and, though it pained Clemency to hear it, the eternal youth within her helped her to respond.

'I understand how you feel, Gloden my dear,' she said, stroking her hair with motherly touches. 'Market Street will seem twice as humble when you go back to it. It won't be the home to you that it is to me; and that is natural, for where Reuben is, and where my children have been born and died, must be better than any other place on earth to me. And sometimes,' she continued, dropping her voice as though she were touching sacred ground, 'I have put up a prayer that I may never leave it until I am called to stand in the streets of the heavenly Jerusalem, for even the stones of the back-yard where Davie played are dear to me.'

'Yes, I know, Aunt Clemency, for it is impossible for me to forget Eltringham, though I have not thought of it so much since I have been here. Then will you speak to Dr. Parry, and tell him that it is so dull for Uncle Reuben, and that Mr. Lorimer must want his house to himself, and ask him how soon it will be safe to move Harvey?'

'I am thinking that Harvey will be ill pleased if he hears me say that.'

'We cannot help that,' returned Gloden, firmly. 'Mr. Lorimer must not be sacrificed any longer. It is ungenerous; it is mean to take advantage of his goodness to us. We must

spare him all the more because he does not spare himself; and you must tell Harvey this.'

'Yes; and we will see what Dr. Parry says, and be guided by his advice. But if he tells us that we must stop longer?'

'But he must not tell us that,' she returned, a little wildly. 'It is not good for Uncle Reuben to be so long alone. I shall have to go to him, and leave you with Harvey. I cannot stay here any longer; it is bad for me. Ah! I cannot tell you what I mean; but I must go back and work, and forget it all.'

Then a sudden comprehension of the girl's meaning came to Clemency, and there was a great softness in her eyes.

'Don't you fash yourself, my dearie,' she said tenderly. 'You have a strong, brave heart, and God helps those who help themselves. If Parry says Harvey can't be moved yet, you shall go to Market Street and look after my Reuben, while I bide here with Harvey. Mr. Lorimer knows the world, and he'll see that you could not be the one to stay; he'll understand that fast enough. There, we will say no more about it till I have spoken to Parry'; and she kissed Gloden's forehead, and then rolled up her knitting.

'Poor child!' she said to herself, when Gloden had gone off to her room. 'I have had my doubts more than once when I have seen him looking at her. She is afraid of herself, and she is afraid of him. Whatever Parry says, I must get her away from here. For the Squire is like a cat in the dairy looking for the cream; he is always after her, and treading so soft that one can hardly hear him. As I tell Reuben, prevention is better than cure, if there is a cure for the heartache.'

Meanwhile Gloden was looking sorrowfully at her own pale face in the heavily-carved glass, yet without seeing it. 'I think she understands,' she said to herself, 'and will help me. By telling her I have burned my ships. I should be ashamed to stay now, however strongly I may be tempted. He will think me unkind; but that is better than making him miserable. If—if he is beginning to care for me—a sob rose in her throat, but she checked it—'I must help him and myself by doing the right thing, even if it pains me to do it; and perhaps——' And here, though she was alone, the hot colour came to her face. Market Street was not a hundred miles away. If he were in earnest, if he were not amusing himself with a pleasant friendship that meant nothing, he could come to her there. 'And perhaps he will come,' whispered the voice within her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MISS WENTWORTH BECOMES UNEASY

'We are easily consoled at the misfortunes of our friends when they enable us to prove our tenderness.'—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

MISS WENTWORTH was growing secretly uneasy ; she was convinced that Mrs. Winter was more ailing than usual. She had always been lethargic and indisposed for mental and bodily exertion, but she had never seemed so listless and dull. There was a dwindled look about her, and she showed a disposition to fret over trifles.

It was in vain that her friend strove to rouse her ; nothing interested her. She sat huddled in shawls over the fire, seldom opening her lips except in peevish complaints.

'You had better keep her as warm as you can,' Dr. Parry had said. 'The cold tries her ; her heart is very weak, and she has no vitality. I will come and see her again in a day or two. What has become of Miss Violet ? She ought to cheer her mother up ; she is too low down altogether.'

'Dr. Parry says there is no use in your coming downstairs, Amy,' observed Miss Wentworth, briskly, when she re-entered the room. 'He will have it that there are too many draughts with all the sitting-rooms opening into each other, and that you will be far more snug up here.'

But the invalid objected to this prudent advice. 'It is quite as warm in the red room, Theresa,' she said fretfully ; 'and I always wrap myself up when I go downstairs. I hate sitting in a bedroom, even with that screen round the bed. I shall sleep all the better for the change of room.' And she persisted in disregarding the doctor's orders, in spite of Miss Wentworth's remonstrances.

'I don't know what has come to you, Amy,' she said that evening, in her harsh, vibrating voice, but there was anxious

tenderness in her eyes as she spoke. 'You don't seem to mind what any one says. You never used to be so bent on taking your own way.'

But Mrs. Winter made no reply to this. Though the atmosphere of the red room felt like a hothouse, with the immense fire and standard lamps, and heavy plush curtains shutting out every vestige of draught, Mrs. Winter still seemed chilly, and shivered in her luxurious nest of Indian shawls.

'Dr. Parry says I ought to have Violet home,' she observed by and by, fingering the fringe of her shawl with restless fingers. 'He says I want cheerfulness. Violet never used to stay away like this.'

'Would it not be a pity to have her back just now?' asked Miss Wentworth, in a meaning tone. 'You know what Constance said in her last letter, and there is Fred Courtenay's coming of age, and she has got a new dress and all.'

And Mrs. Winter said nothing more about her daughter's return that evening. But a day or two after the news of Harvey's illness had reached the Gate House, she questioned Miss Wentworth a little anxiously about the Carricks.

'They are still at the Hall, are they not, Theresa?'

'Yes, dear,' returned her friend; 'and in my opinion they are likely to remain there for some time to come. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and I should say the Carricks are having a fine time of it. Reginald may well call it Liberty Hall. It is enough to bring poor Lady Car out of her grave, to have such goings on.'

'It is not Reginald's fault,' replied Mrs. Winter, with more animation than usual. 'How could he help himself, with that poor boy at death's door? But I can't help worrying about it, Tessie; it keeps me awake at night, thinking of that Gloden Carrick up at the Hall all these weeks.'

'What have you got in your head now, Amy?' asked her friend, in genuine surprise, for this was a new fancy. 'I thought you were quite easy in your mind about Reginald. Constance told us that he was paying Violet marked attention, and that every one was noticing it.'

'Ah! but there is many a slip between the cup and the lip,' returned Mrs. Winter, fretfully. 'I have set my heart on seeing Violet at the Hall. She is eight-and-twenty, Tessie, and it is time she was settled. My health is not so good as it was, and I should like to see her Reginald's wife before I am taken.'

You two would never get on together unless I were here to keep the peace.'

'We should be like poker and tongs, and want the shovel to separate us,' replied Miss Wentworth, grimly.

But Mrs. Winter was too much in earnest to smile at the jest. 'You are always telling me that Violet is going off and losing her freshness,' she went on, pursuing her own line of thought, 'but Constance says she is prettier than ever. Gloden Carrick has no good looks—at least, she is too pale and stiff-looking for my taste—but I noticed at those musical At Homes when she was playing, that Reginald never took his eyes off her, and I cannot get it out of my head that he admires her.'

'Well, why should he not admire her?' returned Miss Wentworth, rather irritated by this. 'There is no need for him to be blind to the merits of other girls because he happens to be in love with Violet. If he has any eyes in his head, he must know Gloden Carrick cannot hold a candle to Violet.'

'Still, I cannot help wishing that Violet were back, and then we could have Reginald over here.'

But Miss Wentworth pooh-poohed this idea. Amy was always so full of ridiculous fancies. Even if Violet were to return to-morrow, the weather was so bad that Reginald would never be able to find his way to the Gate House. It would be a shame to disappoint the Courtenays; and what was the good of paying ten guineas for a new dress if it was not to be worn? Violet was enjoying herself, and it would be very selfish to recall her for a nervous whim. And Miss Wentworth's common sense was so crushing that Mrs. Winter was silenced.

'Your mother is rather ailing, and I got Dr. Parry to see her,' was all she wrote to Violet. 'He says the severe weather tries her, and that we must keep her as warm as possible.'

Violet shrugged her shoulders over Theresa's letter.

'Cousin Tess always fusses if mother's finger aches,' she said to Constance. 'I darsay she is much as usual. How can any one enjoy good health if they take no exercise, and live in hot rooms? Mother wants rousing and taking out of herself.'

Violet had never been in better spirits. She was very dependent on her friends and environment for happiness. She was going from one pleasant house to another, and was fêted and caressed to her heart's content. She had enjoyed Reginald's society, and they were on their old intimate footing; and she had seen a great deal of Felix Hamerton, and the old quartette had been very happy together.

Once or twice Miss Wentworth's conscience pricked her, when she saw her friend's pinched face and anxious expression. 'I will write to Violet to-morrow, and tell her her mother wants her,' she would say to herself; but on the next day Mrs. Winter would revive and seem a little more cheerful, and then she thought that she would put off writing for another day or so.

Mrs. Winter was always talking about Violet now, and when she and Miss Wentworth sat together in the red drawing-room of an evening, when only a falling coal or the nibbling of mice behind the skirting-board broke the silence of the Gate House, she would go back to old days, when Violet was a happy, romping child, and she would tell Theresa anecdotes about her cleverness, and her father's fondness for her, breaking off with a sigh.

Miss Wentworth used to listen with praiseworthy patience. She never checked these endless stories that were always cropping up now. If it made Amy happy to remember the baby Violet in her blue shoes, walking unsteadily among the daisies, she would try not to look bored; but now and then a puzzled expression would come into her eyes, and she would put down her crochet.

'What makes you always talk about Violet when she was a baby?' she said once. 'I should think she must be more to you now.'

But a wistful look came to Mrs. Winter's face, and for a moment she did not answer.

'A mother always remembers her baby,' she said at last 'I like to think of the time when there was never a word between us, and I could say what I liked without fear of an impatient answer. Yes, I know what you are going to say, Tessie—that Violet has always been masterful; but I will not have you always flinging that in my face. It was my fault as well as hers. A weak mother makes an overbearing daughter. I know that now. Last night I was dreaming that Marmaduke was sitting on the lawn with me, just by the big cedar, and I had on my white dress—he always liked to see me in white—and Violet was playing between us. She had her puppy and a ball, and Marmaduke was saying—— What was he saying?' and Mrs. Winter looked a little bewildered.

'I know what I say,' interposed her friend, vigorously—'that it is time for you to take your draught and go to bed. Come, I won't have you sitting up later. I never dreamt much myself,' went on Theresa. 'I don't hold with dreams;

they are tiresome things. You are always in some ridiculous position or other. Riding on a clothes-horse instead of your brown mare; or swimming in a yard or two of seaweed, and making believe that you are in the open sea; or going to an evening party in your night-dress and slippers, with perhaps an umbrella under your arm, till you could laugh with vexation when you wake. Let me help you upstairs; there is no need to ring for Harriet.' And there was no lack of tenderness in the way she supported the invalid.

'I am not satisfied about her,' thought Miss Wentworth, when she left her for the night. 'She is losing flesh every day. I told Dr. Parry so, and he did not contradict me. This fretfulness is new, too; Amy was always so sweet-tempered and easy to manage'; and Miss Wentworth's face worked a little. With all her faults and want of tact, she had given her friend a life's devotion. 'Violet has taken no notice of my letter,' she continued; 'if she does not come home soon of her own accord, I must give her a stronger hint.' But as yet Mrs. Winter was no better, and Violet had not been recalled to the Gate House.

Reginald had hoped that his sister's presence would not interfere with his visits to Harvey's room; but in this he was mistaken, and he soon found that, unless he wished to arouse Constance's suspicions, he must curtail them very decidedly. On the first morning after her arrival she had gone with him to visit the invalid, and had been very sweet and caressing in her manners to Harvey; indeed, when she spoke to him her eyes had been full of tears. The little white shrunken face with the large hollow eyes appealed strongly to her motherly feelings.

'How ill you have been, my poor dear boy!' she said, leaning over him to kiss his forehead. And then she had said a great many kind things to Gloden. Reginald, seated on the bed in his usual fashion, thought that his sister's manner was perfect. Gloden's shyness had quite thawed under her sweet looks and tones, and the memory of her past kindness was still warm within her.

'You must let me come and relieve you sometimes,' Constance had said; 'you look as though you needed air and exercise. Rex and Ninian taught me how to play Halma, and I could have a game with Harvey while you freshen yourself up by a brisk walk.'

'Thank you very much,' Gloden had returned gratefully, while Reginald beamed approval; 'but as Aunt Clemency is

away, I shall not be able to leave Harvey to-day. But perhaps to-morrow afternoon.'

Then Reginald's eyes grew thoughtful. He was wondering what errand he could devise that should take him to Grantham while Constance played Halma, shut up safely in Harvey's room.

Constance did not remain long. She had to write to her husband and Violet, and Reginald did not venture to remain behind her. But he nearly cursed himself for his moral cowardice when at luncheon Constance proposed that he should drive her to Grantham, though he could find no pretext for declining. Constance was hardy, and could not live without plenty of fresh air, and the roads were so muddy for walking, and it was natural that she should want to call at the Gate House when she and Violet were such friends. So he put on a cheerful face, and made himself very pleasant during the drive, though he inwardly rejoiced when the servant told them that Miss Wentworth was out, and that Mrs. Winter was lying down in her room.

'What are we to do now?' he asked, hoping that Constance would be ready to return home. But no, nothing was further from her intentions. She would call on Mrs. Parry and the Egertons, and if Reginald would only drive her round by Beechfield, she could inquire how old Mrs. Paget was; Violet had told her how ill she had been.

'I am afraid I am not very attentive to my neighbours,' returned Reginald, a little gloomily. 'You are a terribly sociable person, Con; you make such long visits that there is no getting you away.'

'We will have tea at the Egertons'—their tea-table is charming,' was Constance's reply; 'and Dora and Willie are such delicious children. And if we could find Winifred Logan in, you might drop me there for a few moments.'

'Is there no one else?' asked Reginald, sarcastically; but he felt he was in for it, so he might as well do things with a good grace.

Constance enjoyed her afternoon immensely. Reggie was in such good spirits, and drove so well. It was quite late when they returned, so late that there was barely time to dress for dinner. Mrs. Carrick had returned an hour ago, and the young gentleman had been up most of the afternoon, Norton informed them; and Reginald vowed mentally that he would steal away after dinner, and leave Constance to her own devices.

Evening visitors were rare at the Hall. In spite of the

Squire's popularity, it could not be expected that people would care to leave their comfortable firesides to walk through dark lanes on a January evening, and when it was necessary to carry a lantern to prevent them from stumbling into a ditch. But there was one person who occasionally walked over from Grantham for a chat or a game of billiards, and this was Captain Boythorn, a retired naval officer, who invariably turned up in the worst weather and in the best of spirits.

Captain Boythorn was rather a favourite with Reginald. He liked the hardy old veteran, with his sea-stories and simple, guileless nature. Lady Car had liked him too, and had always received him graciously; but when the door-bell pealed through the house, and Captain Boythorn was announced, Reginald muttered something the reverse of complimentary.

'Hang it all! he comes far too often. If you give him an inch he takes an ell,' growled Reginald. Nevertheless, he welcomed his visitor with some show of cordiality. 'It is very good of you to turn out on a night like this,' he said, as Captain Boythorn entered.

He was a hale, vigorous old man, with snow-white hair and moustache, and a rough, weather-beaten face.

'You see, I have my sister with me.'

'I thought you were alone, Squire, or I would not have come in this unceremonious way,' returned Captain Boythorn, 'though I am delighted to see my old friend Mrs. Wyndham. I said to my wife, I expect Lorimer must be a bit lonely up at the Hall, and I daresay he will be glad of a game of billiards; so I put on my pilot coat and walked over.'

'And we are charmed to see you, Captain Boythorn,' returned Constance, secretly marvelling why her brother looked so grave. 'Is the billiard-room fire lighted, Reg? Perhaps I had better go and see'; and Mrs. Wyndham tripped away, leaving the two gentlemen over their wine. And as soon as they had had their coffee, Reginald led the way to the billiard-room.

'I will be with you in a moment, Boythorn,' he said hastily, 'and then you shall have your revenge. You will find some excellent cigars in that cabinet.'

It was too late, of course, to see Harvey, but perhaps he would have the good fortune to find Gloden alone in the tapestry room. He must and would bid her good-night; but, to his disappointment, the room was empty. A book he had lent her was open on the table, and the grey sock that Mrs.

Carrick was knitting. They must both be in Harvey's room. He dare not knock, but perhaps if he were to wait a little he could apologise to Captain Boythorn. He had a good excuse in his anxiety to know how Harvey had passed the day.

At this moment a footstep passed the door. He knew that light tread well; it was Gloden. But as he hurried out to intercept her he could see her hastening in the direction of the Reynolds room. He had not thought how late it was, and in his fear that she would enter her room without seeing him, he called her by name. 'Gloden!' he said it almost unconsciously. 'Miss Carrick'—correcting himself at once.

But she had heard it, and her hand dropped from the door.

'Did you want me?' she asked faintly. There was no displeasure in her face; only a curious expectant look. Why had he called her Gloden?

'No; only to wish you good-night, and to ask you how Harvey is. I have seen nothing of you to-day. My sister made me drive her to Grantham, and we paid quite a round of calls; and now Captain Boythorn is here, and I must play billiards with him. You have not thought me neglectful, have you?'

Gloden turned her head aside for a moment, as though she were embarrassed. It had been a long, dull day, and she had missed him sorely, and more than once she had pictured him happy with his sister and forgetting her existence. 'No, of course not,' she answered hastily; 'we knew that you were taken up. Harvey told me to wish you good-night for him. He is so much better to-day; he sat up for more than two hours.'

'And you have not been dull?' How he wished she would look at him! She was shyer than ever with him to-night. He could see the delicate nape of her neck, and the exquisite curve of her cheek, with the long lashes lying on it.

'Oh no.' But the fib was so transparent that it failed to take Reginald in.

'Of course you were dull,' he returned vehemently, 'shut up in that room all day; but you are going to the Gate House to-morrow, and the walk will do you good. You must start early and give yourself plenty of time, the afternoons are so terribly short.' Then a door opening near them made him start. 'Good-night,' he said involuntarily; but it was only Mrs. Carrick coming out of the south room, and he held her hand a moment longer. 'I shall be going myself to Grantham, and I daresay

we shall meet somewhere on the road. Now I must go back to Boythorn.'

'Good-night,' returned Gloden, as she raised her eyes for a moment; and then a sudden thought came to her. Why had Mr. Lorimer mentioned the shortness of the afternoon? Did he not know that she was going in the morning? She must call him back and tell him so. 'Mr. Lorimer,' she said, hardly raising her voice, but he heard her, and turned at once.

'What is it?' he asked, hurrying back to her.

But she had already regretted her impulse. 'If I tell him that, it will look as though I wanted him to meet me, and feared to miss him. He will find it out for himself, of course.'

'I only wanted to tell you that Bernard is coming to-morrow to see Harvey,' she said, a little nervously.

'All right; they will be company for each other in your absence.' And he nodded to her brightly and walked off, leaving Gloden still standing there, with a vexed, uneasy look on her face.

'He will think it so strange of me not to tell him that Aunt Clemency wishes me to go in the morning instead of in the afternoon, but I shall ask Harvey to explain it to him. I cannot think why I find it so difficult to say things to him now; I have never been so foolishly nervous with him before. I think it is his manner, and the way he looks at me. I wonder why he started so when Aunt Clemency came out of the room? Perhaps he was afraid that it was his sister, and she should see him speaking to me. Mrs. Norton says he thinks so much of her opinion.'

Gloden could not rid herself of a sense of worry. She felt as though she had treated Reginald badly by not telling him of her change of plan. But most likely she would see him before she started; he would hear Griff bark, and come out of the library. She was nervous, and making much of a trifle. She had acted quite rightly; Mr. Lorimer would think all the better of her for her backwardness. And then he had forgotten himself; he had no right to call her Gloden.

CHAPTER XXXIX

‘WHISPERING TONGUES CAN POISON TRUTH’

‘Fire that is closest kept burns most of all.’

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

GLODEN woke the next morning with a strange feeling of heaviness. As she opened her eyes, she half hoped that the weather would prove unfavourable for her intended walk to Grantham, but in this she was disappointed. It was a clear, still, wintry morning, and already a faint brightness seemed to promise some measure of chill, tepid sunshine later in the day. It was in vain that she tried to reason away her uneasy feelings by telling herself that her long confinement to the house had made her nervous and fanciful; some subtle inner voice still made itself heard, expostulating with her for her false prudery. ‘You ought to have told him,’ it said. ‘He knows you too well to accuse you of forwardness. It was a mistake not to have been open with him. He has a right to feel injured.’

Gloden got out of patience with herself at last. ‘What a fuss I am making about a mere trifle!’ she said resolutely. ‘As though there were not a way out of my difficulty. I will go down to the morning room and tell Mrs. Wyndham where I am going. Very probably there may be some errand to do for her in the town; and if Mr. Lorimer be with her, I can explain that Aunt Clemency is to blame for my change of plan.’ And after this she felt more comfortable.

‘Don’t hurry back, Glow,’ observed Harvey, when she bade him good-bye. ‘Mrs. Wyndham is coming up this morning. You will take Griff, of course. And oh, I say, Uncle Reuben is going to have tea with me this afternoon; Aunt Clem told me so. He wants a good long talk, so he is coming early, and Ben will look after the shop.’

‘That will be very nice,’ returned Gloden, rather absently,

as she buttoned her gloves. ‘Come, Griff’; and Griff, who had been sitting erect on his haunches, quivering with expectation, uttered a short bark of excitement, and flew down the staircase.

Gloden followed more slowly; but before she could reach the morning room, where Reginald was reading his *Times*, she encountered Mrs. Wyndham.

‘Are you going out?’ she asked in surprise.

‘Yes; there are some things to order in the town, and Aunt Clemency said the afternoon would be too late. Is there anything that I can do for you—or Mr. Lorimer?’ She put in the last word hurriedly.

‘No, thanks,’ returned Constance, with her charming smile. ‘I daresay we shall go out before the brightness of the day is over. I hope you will enjoy your walk, Miss Carrick. I will go up and have a game of Halma with Harvey when I have finished my letters.’

Well, there was no help for it; she could not go in search of Mr. Lorimer, and nothing else could serve her purpose. Then she remembered that to reach the gate she must pass the windows of the morning room. He would be in one of the rooms; she knew his habits well enough to be sure of that. By this time he would have been to the stables and visited the kennels; then he would have brushed himself down after the embarrassing attentions of his four-footed friends, and would be engrossed with the *Times*, which would just have arrived.

Yes, she was right. There was a tweed coat-sleeve in the morning-room window; the hand with the oddly-shaped signet ring that he always wore was distinctly visible. Then Gloden averted her eyes, and walked on faster. Had he seen her? Should she hear him throw up the window, and call to her to stop? No; there was dead silence, the fact being that Reginald’s head was that moment turned away. Norton had just entered the room with a message for his master, and though Lassie grew excited and barked nervously at the sight of Griff, Reginald took no notice.

Gloden never enjoyed a walk less. She was out of tune with herself, with everything. Another time she would have exulted in the pale sunlight and the crispness of the cold air. The bare fields and hedgerows looked less dingy; there was a reflected brightness on the long pool. By the Giles’s cottage some yellow-billed ducks were disporting themselves in it.

Gloden despatched all her errands; then she looked in on Uncle Reuben as she passed Market Street. She must call there again for some things that Patty was getting ready for her, and then she went on to the Gate House.

There was no need for her to go in, she thought. She would inquire how Mrs. Winter was, and when Violet would be back. There was very little sympathy between her and Miss Wentworth. She was just leaving her books, with a civil message, when to her surprise the butler asked her to walk in. His mistress was alone, and had seen her from the window, and would be glad if she would walk in. Gloden was in no hurry to return, and she would be pleased to hear about Violet; so she complied with this request, and followed the man through the suite of rooms to the red drawing-room.

Mrs. Winter was sitting close to the fire. She did not rise as Gloden entered—only held out her hand with a faint greeting smile.

‘I wanted to see you, Miss Carrick; sit down’—motioning her to a seat near her. ‘I hope your brother is better.’

‘Oh yes; we are quite happy about him now.’ Gloden spoke a little nervously. She was shocked as well as surprised at the change in Mrs. Winter’s appearance. The pleasant comely face was dwindled and shrunken, and so, indeed, was the whole figure. She looked half her size, and there was a restless, anxious look in her eyes.

‘I am grieved to see you look so ill,’ she began, and a feeling of wonder crossed her mind that Violet should be still away. Could she know that her mother was so seriously indisposed? But as she said this, a fretful frown came to Mrs. Winter’s face.

‘Miss Wentworth is always telling me that I look so bad, but Dr. Parry says there is nothing much amiss with me, and he knows my constitution. I am more moped than ill. It is dull for two women to be alone in this big house; and Violet is always away now. Now tell me about Harvey; I suppose you will be bringing him back soon?’

‘Yes, we shall take him home as soon as Dr. Parry allows it; but Aunt Clemency fears it will be another ten days or so before he can be moved. Did you know that Mrs. Wyndham is at the Hall?’

Then a vexed expression came into the invalid’s eyes.

‘Yes; she and her brother called yesterday, and Evans told them that I was lying down. Theresa was out, or she would

never have allowed them to be sent away; she knew how I was longing to see Constance, and Reginald too. I wanted to tell him that Violet would be coming home soon; that is what he came to find out. I daresay he thinks it strange of her to stay away so long, unless Constance has told him about the Courtenays' dance.'

Gloden hardly knew what answer to make to this. Mrs. Winter's manner was a little strange. As she mentioned Reginald's name she darted an odd, suspicious look at Gloden.

'It is time she was at home now,' she continued fretfully, 'only Theresa is always putting me off when I want to send for her. Perhaps Violet feels a little delicate about coming back to this neighbourhood just now'; and her tone was a little significant. 'You are such friends with my daughter, Miss Carrick, she has taken such a strong fancy for you, that I do not mind telling you in confidence that Mr. Lorimer is paying her marked attention. Constance tells me that they evidently understand each other.'

'He that is giddy thinks the world goes round,' and for one moment Gloden felt as though the walls were rocking round her; then she drew her breath hard. 'Indeed!' was all she contrived to say.

And again Mrs. Winter looked at her suspiciously.

'Every one in Grantham knows that Reginald Lorimer cared for Violet before he married Lady Car, and they say there is nothing so strong as a fancy revived. Constance made up that match. Reginald was young, and Lady Car a fine-looking woman and an heiress. Reginald is charming, but these easy-tempered men have seldom got deep feelings; Violet must take her chance of that.'

'Do you mean that Mr. Lorimer is paying attentions to your daughter?' asked Gloden, in a quick, hard tone. Mrs. Winter's voice seemed to be miles away. And then, fixing her eyes on her face, 'Do you mean they are engaged?'

For one moment Mrs. Winter hesitated. She had not meant to say so much, but that sudden pallor in Gloden's face alarmed her. Her suspicions were verified. Reginald was playing fast and loose with Violet; he was paying attention in secret to Gloden Carrick—the hurt, proud look in the girl's eyes revealed her secret. Gloden was her child's rival. She was a dangerous, designing girl; propinquity favoured her. Violet was away and could not defend herself; her mother must defend her. If a plausible falsehood could arrest the

mischievous, it would be right to utter it. The temptation was sharp and sudden, and the answer came glibly to her lips—

‘It is not made public yet. It is far too soon; Reginald has not been a widower a twelvemonth yet.’

‘But they are engaged?’—almost harshly.

‘I would rather you did not ask me,’ replied Mrs. Winter, hastily; ‘I have said too much now. Violet will be angry with me. When I said that they understood each other, it was all that I ought to say. They do not even correspond; they think it better not.’

‘But all the same they are engaged?’ Gloden’s persistence meant one thing—she would drag the truth out of Mrs. Winter. Why had she cast dust in her eyes by saying Mr. Lorimer was paying attention to Violet? The real fundamental fact that she must elicit was this—was Reginald Lorimer engaged to Violet Winter, or was he not?

‘He is.’ Mrs. Winter turned a little pale as she uttered this falsehood; but it was spoken, and Gloden rose from her chair. The air of the room, its soft scented atmosphere, seemed to suffocate her.

‘It is late; I must go now. I fear my visit has tired you,’ she said, putting a strong force on herself.

But Mrs. Winter held her fast. ‘You will not tell any one that I said this? You will keep my confidence sacred?’

Then Gloden bowed; she had come to the limits of her endurance, and could not speak another word. Her throat felt parched and dry, and there was a gnawing pain at her heart. As she crossed the moat she noticed that the brief winter sunlight had already faded, and the little wood looked black and sombre.

She could not think; her mind was a perfect blank. She could only recall stray fragments of what had passed. ‘It is far too soon; Reginald has not been a widower a twelvemonth yet.’ And again, ‘These easy-tempered men have seldom got deep feelings. Violet must take her chance of that.’ But here Gloden stood still in the lane and smote her hands sharply together. Ah! it was coming to her now, what it meant, this dull gnawing at her heart. What a fool she had been, to think for a moment that Mr Lorimer’s kind speeches, his caressing tones and words, meant anything! It was his way to be kind. He was treating her as he treated Harvey; she was Harvey’s sister, that was all. He was charming, as Mrs. Winter said, but he had no deep feelings. Why, his conduct

proved that. He had liked Violet in those old days, and yet he had allowed his sister to talk him into a marriage with an heiress. He had not cared for his wife—not much; he had been good to her as he would be good to any one who depended on him, but his spirits were wonderful certainly, for a widower who had not lost his wife a year. Oh, why had she been so blind to this defect of character? Why had a winning manner and a few kind words wiled the very heart out of her breast?

For standing there in the little lane, with its black overhanging branches, and its sodden mass of last year's leaves trampled underfoot—with the grey winter sky above her, and that dull despair at her heart, Gloden no longer sought to deceive herself. She knew that she cared for Reginald Lorimer far too much for her peace of mind. And he had been playing with her! No, that was too hard a thing to say; he had been simply the kindest of friends. It was a mistake, it was a cruel, needless mistake, but he had meant no harm. These easy-tempered men have seldom deep feelings. He was to marry Violet, and Violet must take her chance; and, alas! she must take her chance too. But she had never imagined pain like this. The dull misery of her sensations was sufficient evidence that a secret, unacknowledged hope had lurked unseen all this time. The delicacy of feeling that had prompted her instinctively to leave the Hall without delay was nothing more than a maidenly withdrawal from attentions that were only too gratifying. If he were in earnest he could follow her, she had said to herself proudly, never for one moment imagining that Reginald was Violet's affianced lover. Oh, how piteously she had deceived herself! A great sob of mingled humiliation and pain rose to her throat. And yet she scarcely blamed him. He had meant to be kind; it was his nature to say soft things. His easy temper, his charming manner, were to blame, not he, Reginald Lorimer, her friend, who had pitied and been good to her ever since she had come to Grantham, a proud, unhappy girl, whose little world had fallen into ruins.

Suddenly a scene flashed before her. There was the staircase and the hall below, flooded with yellow lamplight, and a few steps below her, Reginald, looking up at her with a smile on his face and a halo round his fair hair. That tender, deprecating smile—— And here Gloden shivered, and the icy contraction of her heart seemed to relax, while tears, the

saddest tears she had ever shed in her life, rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Oh, the arid desolation of such tears, the waste and pity of them, and yet what myriads of women have shed them since the world began! There are terrible mysteries in life, unsolved and countless enigmas; as the poet has most justly observed, 'Sorrow is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart.' It is sad, nay, it is almost intolerable, to think of the pent-up force of affection in women's hearts that never finds legitimate outlet. We may comfort ourselves with repeating Longfellow's words, that 'affection never is wasted'; and doubtless in a higher and nobler sense this is true, yet is there no brackish taste as of salt tears in the returning fountain, though it may yet flow forth in a tide of blessings?

We say 'God knows,' and the mysteries of human sufferings are indeed only known by inscrutable Wisdom. The meaning of many a bereaved and saddened life is hidden from our eyes. It may seem to us that weeping endures too long, yet it may be that fertilising influences flow unseen into other lives, even from those whose lot seems barrenness, a mere Sahara, sterile and unfruitful. For there is no human life that need be utterly fruitless, and trouble rightly borne, of whatever nature it may be, will be like the scars on the face of the veteran who has fought victoriously the battle of life. 'It is better to be in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting,' said the wise king, and many shall rise from that sorrowful banquet with hearts strengthened and purified by that bitter discipline.

Gloden was tasting the full bitterness of the cup at this moment. It never entered into her mind to weigh Mrs. Winter's words dispassionately. How was she to detect the falsehood? But there was sore remorse in the bosom of the weak woman who had inflicted the mischief. When Miss Wentworth returned some hours later, she found Mrs. Winter in a pitiable condition of nervous excitement; but it was not till late at night that she at last drew from her an account of her conversation with Gloden Carrick, her jealous suspicions, her prevarications, and lastly her deliberate falsehood.

'I don't know what came over me, Tessie,' she said feebly. 'I never remember telling a lie before since I was a child, but I got so frightened on Violet's account. Oh, you may look as though you don't believe me, but I am telling you the

truth. Reginald is making up to both the girls, and there is some entanglement between him and Gloden Carrick.'

'Come, come,' returned Miss Wentworth, soothingly, 'I cannot have you exciting yourself in this way. You have got Violet on your nerves. Things will come all right if you will only leave them alone. Meddling and match-making do no end of harm. It was wrong of you to say that to Miss Carrick, but I don't see how you are to contradict yourself now. Very likely it will come true; so my advice to you is to put the whole thing out of your head. Violet will be here next week, and we will have Constance and Reginald over to dinner.'

'And you don't think any worse of me for telling that lie, Tessie? I wish I had never said it. I was always a truthful person.'

Then Miss Wentworth patted her thin hand as though she were a child.

'I don't think it was right of you, Amy. You must not expect me to say that, for good work is never done with bad tools; but we all do wrong sometimes. Now let me read you your chapter, and then you had better take your composing draught and go to bed.'

But though Mrs. Winter took this sensible advice, there was little sleep for her that night; that proud, pained look in Gloden's eyes seemed to haunt her all through the long hours, the young face with the sudden pallor on it to stare out of the darkness. 'She loves him, and I have sacrificed her to my child,' she said to herself, and the meanness and shabbiness of her lie seemed to reproach her.

Theresa had not been hard upon her. She said there was nothing to be done, but she felt she could never forgive herself. 'If I could only undo it!' she moaned; and she half made up her mind that she would send for Gloden the next day, but her good resolutions faded with the morning light.

Meanwhile Gloden walked to Market Street and then back to the Hall with rapid steps and unseeing eyes, like one walking in her sleep; but as she neared Silcote her pace slackened. 'I must be strong; he must never guess it—no one must guess it,' she said to herself, almost fiercely. 'I think it would kill me; the shame of it would kill me if any one were to find it out. Oh, how proud I am! He was right when he said it, but I think I can bear any pain but this—that he should ever know that I cared for him.'

The thought was like a spur to the thoroughbred, and put her on her mettle. She would not have feared to meet Reginald at that moment, but he and Mrs. Wyndham were at luncheon.

'Who was that?' he asked in surprise, when the door bell sounded, and Gloden had been admitted.

'It was Miss Carrick, sir,' replied Norton.

Reginald looked at his sister for an explanation.

'Oh, I forgot to tell you, dear, replied Constance, calmly; 'Miss Carrick had to go into Grantham this morning. She wanted to know if we had any errands for her. I would not trouble you, as you were reading your paper. I shall be quite up to another walk if you like to take me, Reggie.'

'I think you have had enough, and so have I,' he returned shortly.

And Constance, who saw he was put out, said no more; but what was half an hour's constitutional before luncheon? Why, they had only given the dogs an airing, and she had been looking forward to a long walk.

Reginald would have found it difficult to escape his sister's company that afternoon, but he shut his eyes to this fact.

He had been defrauded of his pleasure. Ever since yesterday he had been counting on this walk to the Gate House with Gloden. He would have her to himself, and perhaps he would permit himself to say a few guarded words about his feelings. He would make her understand the reason for his delay, and would beg her to trust him till the right time came. He wanted to be certain that she understood him; it would make him far more comfortable.

Why had she not told him that she was going in the morning? It was not kind of her to disappoint him in this way. Why had he not seen her pass? And then he remembered Lassie's bark while he was speaking to Norton. If he had only seen her he would have been with her before she had reached the avenue. Reginald had never felt so utterly put out. He could hardly answer his sister's remarks without betraying his secret annoyance, and as soon as luncheon was over he went up to Harvey's room to seek an explanation.

But Harvey was dozing, and Mrs. Carrick made him a sign not to enter. Then she rose noiselessly, and followed him out into the passage.

'If you are wanting Gloden, Mr. Lorimer,' she said quietly, 'she has gone to her room to lie down. Her head was bad.'

and she could not eat her dinner.' Clemency always called luncheon dinner, and her late repast supper. 'She looked fit to drop when she came in, poor child.'

'I understood that she was not going out till this afternoon,' returned Reginald, in a moody voice.

Mrs. Carrick looked at him in mild surprise.

'The Squire looked a good deal put out,' she told Gloden afterwards, when she took her a cup of tea. 'I suppose something had gone wrong with him. He wanted to know why you had changed your plans; but I said we wanted Harvey's things before the afternoon, and that you had gone early to oblige me, and then he said no more.'

'I am glad you told him that, Aunt Clemency,' returned Gloden, so languidly that Mrs. Carrick looked at her a little anxiously.

'Your head is no better—I can see that,' she said decidedly; 'and you must lie there a bit longer, and let the pain have its way. Your uncle is with Harvey, and they are having a rare talk. Now I will make up the fire, and the half-darkness will rest your poor eyes. Harvey won't want you except to say good-night.'

'Very well, then, I will stay here a little; and thank you, Aunt Clemency'; for Gloden felt it was a blessing that physical pain had given her a good excuse for remaining quietly in her room. Nowhere else would she be safe from the risk of meeting Reginald. She wanted time to collect her forces, and look her trouble in the face. When Aunt Clemency had gone out, closing the door noiselessly behind her, she lay somewhat soothed and quieted by the soft firelit darkness, but with a great sadness in her eyes. 'He shall never know it; I must be very brave,' she said to herself; and then in her young extremity she folded her hands and prayed that she might be strengthened to take up her woman's cross of suffering, and not be crushed beneath it.

CHAPTER XL

A LETTER FROM ROME

'Here are a few of the unpleasant'st words
That ever blotted paper.'

Merchant of Venice.

HARVEY had asked for his sister a good many times before she came into the room, looking exhausted and heavy-eyed after her severe attack of pain. He beckoned to her eagerly to sit beside him.

'Are you better, Glow, quite better? Aunt Clem was right, and you do look bad—just like dad when he had one of his neuralgic headaches. Are you too tired to talk?' looking at her with affectionate scrutiny.

'No, dear,' she said gently; 'the rest has done me good, and my headache has nearly gone. I was sorry to be away from you so long, and to miss Uncle Reuben, but indeed I could not help it.'

'Never mind, I can have my innings now, and I have such a lot to tell you. Glow, why are people so awfully jolly? I don't deserve it a bit. Look how you and Aunt Clem have nursed me, and how good Mr. Lorimer is, and now there is Uncle Reuben; and—and I don't know how to thank you all!' and Harvey's voice was decidedly choky.

'You darling, who could help being good to you?' And here a salutary thought came to Gloden. Ought she to be utterly cast down and miserable, when her prayers had been answered and her treasure restored to her? 'What has Uncle Reuben been saying?' she asked, stroking his hair.

Harvey's face was positively radiant. He seemed bursting with some wonderful, delightful secret.

'Will you try to guess, or shall I tell you at once? No; I cannot keep it in a moment longer. I am to go back to Repton next Easter.'

Gloden started ; then a look of alarm came to her eyes. It could not be Uncle Reuben ; it must be some one else who was giving Harvey the desire of his heart.

‘How frightened you look, Gloden. Why, you have turned quite pale. I suppose it is with pleasure. When Uncle Reuben told me straight out that I was to go, I made such a goose of myself. Put your head down on the pillow beside me, Glow, and I will tell you all about it. Yes, now we are comfortable’—as Gloden put her arm round him. ‘Oh, if we had only dad, how happy we should be!’

‘If we had only dad! Oh, father, father, forgive me if I have thought too little about you!’ and Gloden hid her face for a moment in remorseful pain.

‘Uncle Reuben told me that he wanted a serious talk with me,’ went on Harvey ; ‘so Aunt Clem trotted away and left us to ourselves. And then he asked me if I were happy at Grantham, and how I liked Market Street and the grammar school and my work, and what I meant to do when I grew up to be a man ; and then he told me how he hoped I should take to the shop. And all the time he was asking me these questions, he was looking at me so sharply, as though he wanted to read my thoughts.’

‘And you told him you hated it.’

‘Well, of course I didn’t blurt it out like that. I said I was very happy with him and Aunt Clem, and that they were awfully good to me, and I hoped, when I grew up, that I should be able to do something for them in return ; but that I was afraid that I should never care for bookselling, or for the grammar school—all the boys except Bernard Trevor were such cads ; and—and—— But I can’t repeat all I said.’

“‘I suppose you want to be a clergyman, like your father?’” he said presently, pulling his whiskers and looking very thoughtful.

“‘That is what Gloden would like me to be,’” I answered ; “but I rather think I should prefer being a barrister. It must be such jolly fun, cross-examining witnesses, and I should like to wear a wig.” But he did not smile a bit when I said that ; and he was silent so long that I got frightened and thought he was offended with me for telling him the truth.’

‘Oh, I hope not’—for Harvey paused here.

‘Not a bit of it ; he was only thinking. And then he told me that Mr. Lorimer had been talking to him about me, and that he wanted me to go back to Repton. And oh, Gloden,

what do you think?'—taking hold of her chin to make her look at him—'Mr. Lorimer actually wanted to halve expenses, if Uncle Reuben would have consented. What do you think of that?'

'That I am very thankful that Uncle Reuben would not hear of it. Harvey dear, you know we have no claim on Mr. Lorimer.'

'No, of course not; but was it not awfully kind? I am ever so much obliged to him for thinking of it, and I mean to tell him so. Well, Uncle Reuben said a lot after that—that he had saved a little money, and that if I liked I might go back to Repton at Easter; and that it depended on myself how long he would keep me there, but if I did well and got a scholarship, he would try to send me to Oxford or Cambridge. And so it was settled, and it was when I was trying to thank him that I made such an ass of myself that he fetched Aunt Clemency to give me some wine.'

'Oh, Harvey, my darling, I am so glad!'—with a congratulatory kiss; and a sudden rush of gratitude for Reginald's kind thought made her breast swell so that she could hardly speak.

Clemency could have given her a moving account of the boy's agitation at his uncle's words. In his weakened state he had not been able to restrain his feelings, and when she entered the room he was sobbing for very happiness, and Reuben was patting him with his big hand as though he were an infant.

Gloden begged him to say no more that night, and they would have a long talk to-morrow; but Harvey was not to be silenced at once.

'I was thinking just before you came into the room, Glow, whatever will you do with yourself when I am at Repton? It will be so awfully dull for you.'

But Gloden refused to enter on this part of the subject. She was very, very happy to think that he had got his wish, and she would do very well with her pupils and violin. And 'There's not anything to prevent my going to London now,' was her unuttered thought, but she put it resolutely away. Her mind was too chaotic for plans; to-night she would think of Harvey, and not of herself. And when Harvey at last allowed her to leave him, she went in search of her Aunt Clemency to express her gratitude.

'It is Mr. Lorimer who put the idea into your uncle's head,'

returned Mrs. Carrick. 'When Reuben heard how Harvey was set against the business, and was always harping on Repton, he made up his mind to swallow his own disappointment. I won't deny we were both a bit sore about it at first, for we had hoped Harvey was settling down nicely; but it is no use crying over spilt milk or spoiled purposes. Harvey will behave none the worse to us because we have given in to him and allowed him to take his own way.'

'Harvey loves you both dearly, Aunt Clemency; he will never forget this.'

And a sweet, sad smile came to Clemency's face. 'He says he will be our boy still; he has a good heart, has Harvey,' was all she said, but her hands trembled a little as she put aside her knitting. It was the old who ought to sacrifice their wishes, she thought. What if she and Reuben were disappointed? In a few years their children would be round them again; the babies she had borne and laid in their coffins, and David their darling and hope. 'I shall go to them'; that was her daily comfort, her supreme joy.

Reginald slept restlessly that night. Some sinister influence seemed to pervade his dreams. He seemed for ever walking through strange terrible places, and the object of his search was Gloden. He could see her black garments waving in the distance, but he could never overtake her.

Now she would be standing at the edge of some precipice, looking down at him with a solemn sadness in her eyes, waiting for him to join her. He could see her beckoning hand as he essayed to climb; but the rock crumbled beneath his feet, and he could gain no foothold. Now a river separated them, and, after having vainly looked for a bridge, he had cast himself into the torrents. He could feel the cold water closing round him, but when he tried to swim his limbs seemed weighted with lead, and he began to sink. As the waves washed over him he could hear the wailing of a violin in the distance; he was drowning, and she was playing his death dirge.

He woke himself with difficulty, only to dream the same thing again. But this time he was in a crowded room, and the people were pressing on him. She was on a platform, and her violin was in her hand, but she was not playing. There was a wreath on her head, and she wore a white gown that fell in folds to her feet, and when she saw him a look of anguish was on her face. 'Too late,' he heard her say; 'you have come too late.' But as he tried to push his way to her through

the people, there was a crash, and the roof seemed to fall on her, and the cry he uttered woke him.

It was still early, but he had had enough of it, so he lighted a candle and began to read; but he dozed again before the servant brought him his hot water.

'I wonder what possessed me to dream in this preposterous way?' he thought, as he dressed himself; but the dismal nocturnal visions had left a feeling of depression, and he tried vainly to throw it off.

It was a relief to see Constance's serene face, with its smiling welcome.

'Such a lot of letters for you, Reggie,' she said lightly; 'and one from Rome. Who is your correspondent, I wonder?'

'I only know one man there at present—Bertie Glenyon. You know who I mean—poor Car's favourite cousin. They were like brother and sister. He used to stay with us for months at a time. Poor old Bertie! he went to Rome when his last sister died; he is all alone now.'

'Oh yes, of course I know Bertie Glenyon; he was so fond of you, Reggie.'

'Yes; but this is not his handwriting'—taking up the letter. 'Give me some coffee, Con, and then I will read it; the rest are mere business letters. Oh no; there is one from Felix. I asked him to come down from Saturday to Monday.'

Constance handed her brother his coffee, and then she began to read her husband's letter, for no amount of business prevented Harcourt Wyndham from writing to his wife every day. But a sudden exclamation from Reginald made her look up.

'Read that,' he said, throwing her the letter across the table. 'The poor fellow is ill, and they are afraid of typhoid fever'; and Reginald twisted his moustache rather savagely.

The letter was from the English chaplain, but it had been written at Herbert Glenyon's request. He implored Reginald to come to him at once; he was all alone. The people of the hotel where he was staying did not understand illness, and seemed afraid of entering his room.

'I have sent for a nurse,' wrote Mr. Thorn, 'but she can speak very little English; and the poor Mr. Glenyon seems very forlorn. We hope the illness will not be serious, but one can never tell; and it is evident the doctor does not think much of his constitution.'

'Car always said she was afraid he had no stamina,' muttered Reginald, as Constance read the passage aloud. 'He

had rheumatic fever when he was one-and-twenty, and he was never the same afterwards.'

'Yes, and Car helped to nurse him; at least she amused him during his convalescence. She was very fond of him, Reg; she so often talked about him.'

'He reminded her of Edgar,' was Reginald's response. Edgar was the name of Lady Car's only brother, who had died young.

'To be sure; and Car was so devoted to Edgar. Well, Reg, this is very sad. Illness is bad everywhere; but to be alone in a foreign country, and at the mercy of strangers, is far more deplorable. But you will go to him?'—looking at him wistfully.

'I suppose I must'—in an impatient tone; 'but it is an awful nuisance, and I expect I shall have to be away so long, too.'

'Well, you could hardly leave him until he is strong again. Dear Reg, I know it is a worry for you having to start off in this sudden way, and I am very sorry for you; but it is a clear call of duty. You could hardly refuse, for dear Car's sake.'

'I am not thinking of refusing,' returned Reginald, in an injured voice. 'Bertie and I are old chums. Of course I must go to him, poor beggar, though I wish he had taken my advice and stayed in England. Well, it is no use talking; I must get off by this evening train, and you must write and put off Hamerton. I will go into the library and have a look at Bradshaw, and then I will let you know what time I shall have to start.'

'The fates are against me, that is pretty evident,' he thought, as he sat down to study his Bradshaw; and then the memory of his dreams flashed across his mind. With all his good-nature and his friendship for Bertie Glenyon, he felt it was hard lines to have to leave England just now.

But upon calm reflection, his good sense came to his aid. Of course it was a personal sacrifice for him to go away; but, as Constance had said, it was a clear call of duty, and it would be safer for him to be in Italy until February had passed.

It was growing terribly hard for him to keep his resolution in his present state of mind. Five weeks seemed endless; if he stayed at Silcote he doubted whether he could refrain from speaking much longer. If Gloden cared for him she would surely wait, and he knew he had no rivals. 'Logan, poor old chap, is quite out of the running,' he thought, with profoundest pity for the hapless curate.

Yes, he would make the best of it. How could he neglect poor Bertie, who was Car's favourite? He would put a good face on the business and do his duty. He would set about his preparations like a man, and not act like a love-sick boy, who could not bear to lose sight of his sweetheart. He had a great deal to do. He was expecting his bailiff, and would have to go down with him to Giles's farm about some repairs. He would not try to see Harvey until the afternoon; he should not leave Silcote until six. He would coax Gloden to take a turn with him in the corridor; and then he wondered how she would look when he told her he was going away.

He was very busy until luncheon; he had to interview Mrs. Norton, and to give special orders for his guests' comfort. Constance would stay a day or two longer and look after things for him; and she had promised to take Lassie away with her, as the little animal would pine in her master's absence.

It was nearly three o'clock before he was free to go up to the south room; but, to his chagrin, Gloden was not in her usual place, and Mrs. Carrick informed him that she had gone out for a breath of air. 'She will not be long,' she continued. 'Harvey likes her to have tea with him, and she never disappoints him if she can help it.'

'Do you know which way she has gone?' he asked carelessly.

But Mrs. Carrick shook her head; she had no idea, neither had Harvey. She was but poorly after her severe headache, Clemency informed him, and she said the fresh air would do her good.

It was vain for Reginald to hope to overtake her, so he sat down and told them of his intended journey. Harvey's lamentations were loudly expressed, but Reginald cheered him up by promising to write to him. 'I will come up and wish you good-bye, old fellow, before I go,' he said presently, when half an hour had passed. 'Come, Lassie, we must go down now.'

He wanted to make a final attempt to see Gloden alone. He would walk up and down the avenue until he saw her coming. There was no possibility of her coming through the park this weather; the roads were tolerably dry, and so was the avenue, though it looked desolate enough this bleak January afternoon. No, she could not escape him, and his spirits revived at this thought, and as he paced up and down he wondered what he should say to her.

The click of the gate roused him, and then he turned and saw her coming towards him.

Gloden had only a moment's preparation while he hastened towards her, but there was such marked gravity in her manner that Reginald thought she had heard of his going, and was sorry to lose him.

'Why did you not tell them where you were going?' he said, with that reproachful tenderness that is so flattering to a woman's ear, for it claims a certain right of control. 'If I had only known which road you had taken I could have met you half an hour ago, and there is so much to say before the carriage comes round.'

'Are you going out?' asked Gloden, a little coldly. Poor girl! every nerve was quivering at the sound of his voice, but she dare not betray the least emotion.

Reginald's face fell at her words. 'I thought you knew, that some one had told you, that I start for Rome to-night.'

'For Rome! To-night!' If her life had depended on it, Gloden could not have prevented herself from that exclamation; but as she turned her face to him, Reginald almost started. She looked different somehow; some subtle change seemed to have passed over her. The soft grey eyes had lost their brightness, and there was a slight trembling of the firm, beautiful mouth. She had not heard, and yet she looked like that. He suddenly remembered yesterday's headache; she was not well, that was what it must mean. And then he plunged into his explanation. He spoke so rapidly that, in her sad bewilderment, Gloden could hardly follow him. His friend was ill, and he must go to him; he would be away a long time. On these three points her mind fastened itself. He was going away—away—away. Why, the very wind seemed to blow the word into her ear; and he was talking so fast—so fast.

'And you must promise me to take care of yourself'—that was what he was saying, 'for you do not look as you ought. Remember what I have been telling you.' Had he been telling her anything except that he was going away? 'You are to make yourself at home. My sister will remain a day or two longer, and she will be glad of your company. Harvey is coming downstairs to-morrow, and then you can all be together. You are being moped to death upstairs. In a few days Harvey will be able to have drives, and then you must go with him. The servants will have nothing else to do except to obey your orders.'

His kindness almost seemed to stifle her. How she longed

to throw it all off! What would Violet say if she could hear him talk?

'You are very kind,' she said, speaking with difficulty; but we shall not be much longer at Silcote. Dr. Parry says Harvey may go home next week.'

'Oh, I have settled all that with Mrs. Carrick, he returned, in an off-hand voice. 'She is going back to Grantham tomorrow or the next day—Mr. Carrick needs her; but you will stop on with Harvey. That is what I meant when I said you must take care of yourself. You and Harvey will have the run of the house, and he will find plenty of amusement, and will soon get strong. And as for you——'

'But there is no need for us to remain,' she returned, in a strained voice. 'It will be much better for us to go back with Aunt Clemency. Harvey will be quite well enough, and we cannot trespass on your kindness any further.'

'Kindness!' he began scornfully; and then his voice softened. 'You are using the wrong word. There can be no kindness in my dealings with you. There is nothing in the world I would not do for your comfort. You know that well enough by this time, Gloden.'

It was a declaration of love; but in her bruised hopelessness the words hardly pierced her consciousness. She thought of them afterwards with a faint surprise, and wondered why he said them. Did she know? She only knew two things—that he was going away, and that Violet Winter was his affianced wife.

'I think it is time that you understood me,' he went on. And then he checked himself, for at that moment a figure glided out from the trees. It was only Constance, wrapped up in her fur cloak, who was coming to the gate to look for him. She uttered a surprised exclamation as she saw Gloden.

'I did not know you were out, Miss Carrick,' she said, in an astonished voice. 'Reggie, where have you been? I have been looking for you all over the house. Tea is ready, and Macpherson has come up for orders.'

The opportunity was over, he told himself gloomily, as they all walked back to the house. And she had said no word to him that he could hug to himself or treasure up when he was far away. She had hardly spoken, and her manner had been constrained and ill at ease. Was she unhappy? Was anything troubling her? The doubt tormented him.

'I shall come up and wish Harvey good-bye before I go,

he said, when they parted at the library door. And then he followed his sister into the room where Macpherson was awaiting him.

The carriage was at the door, and the luggage was being brought downstairs, before he went up to the south room. They were all there, but Gloden was in the farthest corner with her work. He shook hands with her last.

‘Good-bye,’ he said hurriedly; ‘take care of yourself.’ But the pressure of his hand said more than that, and for a moment Gloden raised her eyes. That wistful look, so gentle, so uncomplaining, and yet so full of hopeless sadness, went to Reginald’s heart.

‘Good-bye; thank you for all,’ she faltered, and then she took up her work again. Five minutes later the horses’ feet sounded in the avenue, and Reginald Lorimer was gone!

CHAPTER XLI

GLODEN'S RESOLVE

'Strengthen me by sympathising with my strength, not my weakness.'

ALCOTT.

THERE are moments in one's life so braided with fiery, unextinguishable pain that their record is never completely effaced. And such a moment came to Gloden as she heard the ringing of the horses' hoofs growing fainter in the distance.

For a few moments she sat motionless, with her hands in her lap, and a sense almost of despair at her heart. Then she took up her work again. He had gone, and it was all over; but Harvey was spared to her, and she had still her art. It should not master her, this strange, fierce pain. She was strong, and would grapple with it. 'No quarter to the enemy that threatened her woman's peace'; and before the colour had returned to her lips she was talking to Harvey, and listening to his lamentations over this sudden loss of his friend.

'I shan't care to be here without him, shall you, Glow?' he observed disconsolately. 'He was always so jolly, don't you know. It made me feel better just to hear him laugh; and you were beginning to like him awfully too.'

But Gloden was spared all answer to this embarrassing remark, as Mrs. Norton that moment brought her a message from Mrs. Wyndham. She hoped Miss Carrick would give her the pleasure of her company at dinner. She was lonely without her brother, and she begged that Harvey would spare her for this one evening.

Gloden would willingly have declined this invitation, but Harvey was vehement in this entreaties that she would not refuse.

'You know you like her, Glow,' he said, when he had gained his point, 'and the change will do you good. You are

looking as seedy as possible. And Aunt Clem and I will be quite jolly, and you can tell me all about it afterwards.'

'What does it matter? What does anything matter?' thought Gloden, as she went off to change her dress. 'It is all in the day's work. I would rather be with Harvey, of course, but if one is unhappy there is no need to be selfish. If only one could always remember that!'

But her mood changed when she entered the drawing-room; Constance welcomed her so kindly, there was such gentle warmth in her greeting, such unmistakable pleasure on her lovely face, that Gloden thawed in spite of herself.

'Now we shall be cosy!' exclaimed Mrs. Wyndham, as she placed her guest in the chair that had always been Lady Car's. 'It is so good of you to come down; I should have been so dull all alone in this big room, and then it would have been so dismal to go through all the courses without exchanging a word. Oh, there is dinner!'—as Norton appeared at the door; 'we must have our talk afterwards.'

'There is something I want to speak to you about,' Mrs. Wyndham began again, when they had returned to the drawing-room. 'Reggie ought to have told you himself, but he said that he preferred that I should manage it. You know that I am going down to Bournemouth in a fortnight's time, to stay with my mother-in-law. Brighton does not suit her. I shall take rooms in the same house with her, and Reginald proposes that Harvey should accompany me. Dr. Parry wished him to have change of air before he went to Repton, and this will be a splendid opportunity. I am going to leave the boys and Tottie at home, but Harvey will be a nice companion for me, as Mrs. Wyndham goes out so little.'

'It is very good of you,' replied Gloden, with a painful flush at this fresh instance of kindness on Reginald's part. 'But indeed I could not think of troubling you.'

'My dear Miss Carriek,' returned Constance, in a comfortable voice, 'Harvey will be no trouble, and it is my brother's affair. He proposed that you should accompany us. Now, please don't look so alarmed'—as Gloden started up at this. 'You shall do just as you like about that, and if you prefer trusting Harvey to my care, I will not press you against your inclination.'

'That is kind of you, for I could not come—indeed I could not; and as for Harvey——'

'Oh, we will leave Harvey to answer for himself. I don't

think he will refuse me, and I should dearly love to have him. Reginald would be so disappointed if I fail to carry out his little scheme; he was so full of it at luncheon. I will talk it over with Mrs. Carrick and Harvey to-morrow, and you shall have nothing to do with it'—looking at her with the charming smile that gave her such a strong resemblance to her brother.

Gloden did not answer; a sudden impulse was moving her. Why should she not seize this opportunity? Mrs. Wyndham would leave the Hall in a day or two; they might never be alone together as they were now. An excited look came to her eyes; she spoke quickly, almost nervously.

'You shall do as you like about Harvey. I have no right to refuse for him until he knows himself; you shall settle it with him and Aunt Clemency. There is something else I want to say to you'; and here her voice trembled so that Constance looked at her in surprise. 'Do you remember that afternoon in the gable room when you spoke to me about Signor Boski?'

Then Constance started up rather eagerly. 'Do you mean that you have changed your mind?' she asked quickly.

'No, I have not changed my mind'—with visible sadness in her manner; 'but circumstances have changed. Do you remember what I said then? That I was not free to choose my life. You tempted me sorely; but as long as Harvey needed me, I could not leave him.'

'I understand what you mean'—with that responsive sympathy that belonged to Constance's nature. 'You would not desert Harvey, but now he is leaving you, so after all you are free.'

'If Harvey goes to Repton he will not need me,' replied Gloden. 'We were talking of this to-day. Aunt Clemency and Uncle Reuben do not really want me; they would be quite happy going back to their old life together, and Harvey would spend his holidays with them. There is no reason why I should not go up to London to study for a year or two. There are two hundred pounds belonging to us, and perhaps Uncle Reuben would let me use some of that, and if you can induce Signor Boski to reduce his terms——'

'You may leave all that to me,' returned Constance, with delightful assurance. 'I shall have no difficulty with Boski; he would do anything for my husband or myself; I could explain the reason, only it is rather a long story; but when I tell him how you are circumstanced, he will be generosity itself. Miss Carrick, I cannot tell you how pleased I am to hear that you

seriously mean to turn your talent to account ; you are positively wasted at Grantham. Fancy spending your life in teaching a few children like Hilda Parry ! I will keep my word, and you shall make your *début* at our house. Now, don't smile as though you think I am over-sanguine, but if Boski takes you by the hand your fortune is made.'

'Then I shall owe it to you.'

'Nonsense, child ; you will owe it to Boski's training and your own industry and perseverance. There is no royal road to fame. Now, when do you mean to come up to town ? When Harvey goes to Repton ?'

'There is no need for me to wait for that,' was Gloden's reply ; and then her voice changed, and the strained look came into her eyes again. 'Why should I wait ? Harvey will be at Bournemouth, and it will be so dull here without him. I could not bear it. Let me come soon. I want to work ; I want to forget Grantham. I will work, I will practise from morning to night, if you will only let me come.'

'I let you come, my dear child ! You know how pleased I shall be to see you in your proper sphere. You know I leave here on Tuesday. I will speak to Mary Drake about those rooms I mentioned. You will be delightfully comfortable. Mary is such a good creature, such an honest soul ; and there is another advantage. The old lady who lives upstairs is deaf, so she will have no objection to your violin.'

'Then will you arrange it ? and I will speak to Aunt Clemency.'

Gloden's tone was grave, and there was no enthusiasm in her manner. For a second time in these few months she was going to uproot herself. She had hated Grantham, and now the very stones of the place were dear to her. How often had she seen Mr. Lorimer riding through the town with his dogs behind him, and as he smiled and raised his hat the day seemed no longer gloomy ! But now, how was she to stay and see him riding with Violet beside him, and to hear the Grantham bells pealing for the Squire's marriage ? No ; there were limits to endurance. She could not bear this ; she must put a few miles between herself and Silcote, until she had crushed down and utterly stamped out this rebellious pain.

'And I will speak to Uncle Reuben, too, about the money,' she went on, in the same matter-of-fact tone ; 'and I must talk to Harvey, to see if it will disappoint him very much not to find me at Grantham when he comes back from Bournemouth.'

‘But he will find you in London,’ was Constance’s smiling reply. Harvey shall come back with me for a week or two, and we will show him some of the London sights. And he must pass through London on his way to Repton, so you will have countless opportunities of seeing him; and I daresay you will spend your summer holidays at Grantham. Boski is always away in Italy during August and the greater part of September.’

‘Yes, I must be with him as much as possible; but I mean to tell Aunt Clemency and Uncle Reuben that Harvey will spend his holidays with them. They are so good to him; they make him so happy, and give in to all his boyish whims, that I could not bear to rob them of him.’

‘No, you are right. And he is so much at Silcote; he and Reginald are devoted to each other. Reg will miss him dreadfully when he is at school. What! are you going? It is not late yet’—glancing at the timepiece. But she rose as she spoke, and put her arm round the girl’s slender waist. ‘I am going to be very proud of you,’ she said kindly, and then she kissed her on the cheek; ‘and I do love being proud of people.’

‘Will you do me one favour?’ asked Gloden, hurriedly. ‘I do not want you to mention this to any one—not even to your brother—until it is quite settled. There may be difficulties; I have not spoken to Uncle Reuben yet.’

‘If there are difficulties, send him to me, and I will smooth them. No; you are right, and we will keep our own counsel for the present.’

‘She is wonderfully interesting,’ thought Constance, as she went back to her chair. ‘She is not pretty, but her face is full of expression, and her mouth and eyes are beautiful; but she does not look happy. I wonder if Reggie—— But no, Reggie is fond of Violet—I am sure of that. Well, I shall have plenty to do when I get home again. Signor Boski must come to dinner, and I must settle things with him; and there is Mary Drake too. The rooms were not over-stocked with furniture; I must see about that. How surprised Reggie will be when he hears Miss Carrick is at Regent Park! I am not sure that he will be pleased; he never took any interest when I told him about Boski. Reg is a little bit humdrum and behind the times in his ideas of women. He hates women doctors and women speakers, and he rather pooh-pooed the idea of Miss Carrick being a professional violinist. I suppose Car infected him with her notions; Car, poor dear, was always a little narrow.’

'I have burnt my ships,' thought Gloden, gloomily, as she retired to her room. 'Is it very cowardly, I wonder, to run away? But no, under some circumstances it is wiser to flee than to fight. In London all this will seem like some bad dream, and I shall wake up in my right mind. Henceforth I will live for my art and Harvey. Oh, my darling, my bright, happy darling, how little you know what you make me suffer when you talk so much of him!'

It was not until the following evening that Gloden found an opportunity of unfolding her plans to Mrs. Carriek. Constance was dining at the Gate House, and would not be home till late, but Gloden had promised to breakfast with her the next morning, and tell her the result of their conversation.

A pained look came into Clemency's eyes as she listened, but she made no observation until Gloden had finished. The motherhood within her had instantly grasped the truth, and, though the name of Reginald Lorimer was never mentioned between them, she knew without telling that some strange trouble had come to the girl, and that sorrow of heart was driving her away from Grantham.

'Are you angry with me, Aunt Clemency? Are you too much disappointed in me to tell me what you think of my plan?' asked Gloden, grieved at her aunt's silence.

But there was no anger in Clemency's soft pitying voice. 'Nay, Gloden my dear; what should anger me? I know it is no unkindness or coldness of heart that makes you anxious to leave us; but there, I will not ask the reason. Words are not always wise, even between the closest of friends. I may be a bit troubled at the thought of losing you just when I have begun to find you such a comfort, but we will not talk of that.'

'Oh yes, we will talk of it,' returned Gloden, touched by the delicate kindness and unselfishness of this speech. 'Dear Aunt Clemency, you are always far too good to me, and I do not deserve such consideration. But indeed it is right for me to go away; my sense of duty tells me to go. Will you try to make Uncle Reuben understand this?'

'To be sure I will. Your uncle will not cross your wishes; you may be certain of that. You shall do what is best for your own happiness. You have a grand gift, as Reuben says, and it may be your duty to take Mrs. Wyndham's advice and cultivate it.'

'And you think Uncle Reuben will let me have some of the money? Half of it is mine, I know; but if I get on and earn

money, I will pay back every farthing that I take from Harvey's share. Uncle Reuben can trust me.'

'Ay, for sure he'll trust you; and you need not stint yourself for a few pounds. Nathaniel's children are welcome to all we have. Don't cry, Gloden my dear; you have got a brave heart—I know that well, and God's blessing goes with those who help themselves. I will make it right with your uncle, and you will come to us when Harvey has his holidays, and we will be as happy as happy together.'

But not all Clemency's kind words could check that burst of wild weeping, which would have its way.

'I doubt but the Squire has made mischief out of sheer kindness and goodness of heart,' thought Clemency, when Gloden had left her. 'And yet it is not in his nature to harm anything. Ay, but we women are poor weak things, even the best of us. We can put up with unkindness, but a loving look or word takes us off our guard. It is likely enough that he has been making love to her without meaning it or thinking how she would take it; but it has gone deep—ay, it has gone deep. Gloden is not one of those half-hearted girls who can fling it back to a man. It would pretty nearly kill her to stop and fight it out; but I must not give Reuben a hint of that.' For Clemency's old-fashioned delicacy and sweet wholesomeness of nature would have put many a fine lady to shame. Not to her own husband would she have confided her suspicions about Gloden. 'That God who made women's hearts must also mend them,' was her simple creed. 'There is no pain that He cannot heal,' she would say. 'It is only we who are too clumsy and too shortsighted to do much good; it is far safer to leave it all to Him, and not spoil His work with our bungling.' And perhaps Clemency's simplicity was wiser than the world's wisdom.

When Gloden talked over her plans with Harvey, she was surprised to see him look grave for a moment.

'Aren't you pleased, darling?' she asked a little piteously. 'I thought you wanted me to play at concerts, and make money; you used to like the idea so much.'

'Yes, and I like it now. I want you to be famous, you dear old thing'—with a prodigious hug; 'and it will be awfully jolly for you to live in London and have lots of nice friends. I was only thinking how Mr. Lorimer would feel about it. I used to tell him that you meant to play at concerts and that sort of thing; but he said more than once

that he hoped that it would never come to pass—that that sort of life would not suit you at all, and that it was very wrong for people to encourage you in such an idea, and he looked as though he meant every word he said.'

'I don't see that Mr. Lorimer has anything to do with it!' exclaimed Gloden, proudly. 'Harvey, you must promise not to write to him about this until I give you leave. It is my affair, and has nothing to do with any one else.'

'Won't he be hurt, Glow?' pleaded the boy, rather anxiously. 'He is such a very intimate friend, don't you know.'

But Gloden was not to be moved by this. He need not mention her in his letters at all; he would have plenty to tell him without that. When he came back from Bournemouth it would be time enough to write about it. And Harvey reluctantly acquiesced in this.

Reuben Carrick made no strong objection to Gloden's plan, though it was plain that he did not wholly approve of it. 'I don't hold with girls living alone in London,' he said at first, 'and I don't believe Nat would have approved of it either.' But when Clemency pointed out to him that she would be under Mrs. Wyndham's wing, and in the house of an old and trusted servant, Reuben gave way. Gloden was welcome to take as much of the money as she needed. Harvey's share could take care of itself. She had never settled down in Grantham, and he feared she never would. So perhaps it might be well not to cross her whim; and Clemency dared not hint that it was no whim on Gloden's part.

Finally, after much correspondence on Constance's part, it was settled; and Gloden took leave of her pupils, and paid her parting visit to the Logans.

Winifred was a little quiet; but there was no want of friendliness in her manner, and she expressed very real regret at losing Gloden.

'Perhaps you are right to go,' she said doubtfully; 'but such a life would have few attractions for me. I am not an ambitious woman like you. I hoped we should have seen a great deal of each other this summer. You know that I am going to take up my quarters in the Red House when I have settled Aunt Janet at Clacton.'

'Yes, and it seems such a pity. Surely your aunt and cousin must need you?'

'So they say; but I tell them that they will get on very comfortably without me. It is far better for Ewen not to be

encumbered by female relatives, and then perhaps he will marry.'

'I hope he will,' returned Gloden, feelingly; 'he deserves a good wife.' She looked at Winifred as she spoke without any conscious meaning, but a dull flush came to Winifred's face.

'We none of us know what lies in the future,' she said, in rather a subdued tone.

Winifred's brightness was somewhat clouded just now. The parting with her aunt was a real grief to both. It seemed to place her at a greater distance from Ewen. It was hard to feel that she could no longer fill a daughter's place to Ewen's mother; that they would leave her behind, and begin their new life together. And the knowledge that it was all her own doing did not make it easier for her to bear.

Duty is a hard taskmaster sometimes. Winifred had come to one of those difficult places in life when every step is taken with pain, but not once did her resolution falter.

'It is best for him, and it is by far the best for me,' was all she ever said to herself; but there were silver threads in the soft brown hair before the summer months were over.

And so it was there were changes at Grantham, and one morning while Reginald Lorimer sat over his solitary breakfast in the hotel he read the following letter from Constance:—

MY DEAREST REGGIE—Your last letter has been such a delight to us. We are so charmed to hear that Mr. Glenyon is making such progress towards recovery. Though you feel you cannot leave him just yet, I hope it will not be necessary for you to accompany him when he goes for change of air; but I fear he will not want to part with you—you are far too good a companion, dear Reg. I am so glad to be at home again, and you may imagine how pleased Harcourt is to have me back. He says husbands and wives ought never to be parted, and that he means to bring in a bill to that effect next session; but I am sure I never willingly leave him. Rex has grown immensely, and Ninian looks so much stronger; as for Tottie, she is sweeter than ever. Harcourt declares she grows more like me every day, and I am so amused when people say, 'I did not know you had a daughter, Mrs. Wyndham.' It is so strange she should resemble me, and not her own mother; but then, the boy took after Car. Harvey is the picture of health. He has been such a nice companion for me, and really I am not surprised at your affection for him, for he is a dear little fellow, and his manners are simply perfect. We are giving him a round of London sights, and he says he never was so happy in his life.

What do you think, Reg? Miss Carrick is in London. She has come up to be trained for a professional life by Boski, and I have found her comfortable rooms at Regent's Park with our old servant, Mary Drake. She has been settled a month. Boski is charmed with

her playing. He says she has been well taught, and has no tricks to unlearn; but he is very strict with her. I am afraid he makes her work far too hard, for she is certainly a little thinner; but the life evidently suits her. You know how she hated Grantham and the shop and the Carricks' homely ways, and it is so wise for her to break with it all. Even Boski said the other night that it would have been madness not to develop her talent; he agrees with me that she has genius.

Last night we were talking things over—she was dining here—and when I asked her if she would go back to live at Grantham, she positively shuddered. 'Never; I will never live there again if I can help it,' was her answer, and she looked as though she meant it. Poor Violet looks a little brighter, they say. But there, my boys and Tottie have come to interrupt me, so I will finish this with the children's messages. Ninian wants you to bring him a Roman kite, if there is such a thing; and Rex says he would rather have some carving tools; Tottie sends nothing but a hundred big kisses. She says, 'Dad is a naughty man to stay away so long.' 'I don't think Uncle Reg is ever naughty,' says Ninian, 'or mother would not always be loving him.' Do I love you, my Reggie, the only brother I ever had?

Well, God bless you, dear, and bring you back to your loving
sister

CONSTANCE.

CHAPTER XLII

THE EVENING OF THE BALL

‘If it be summer news,
Smile to it before ; if winterly, thou needst
But keep that countenance still.’

Cymbeline.

MANY weeks before Constance wrote that letter to her brother, the long-expected ball took place that was to be given in honour of Fred Courtenay’s coming of age. Violet was at that time staying with the Greshams, and as it was one of the houses that Felix Hamerton most frequented, he and Violet met constantly. Violet had never felt happier in her life. She was surrounded by kind and appreciative friends ; her home troubles were in the background ; her mother and Cousin Tess were quite comfortable without her. There was no need for her to go back just yet to the old dull life in the moated grange. Life ! Had she ever lived before ? she would say to herself, after one of those long earnest talks with Felix Hamerton. Violet always told herself that she was heart-whole, and that in all probability she would never marry. The general type of men whom she met in London did not specially interest her. Her girlish fancy for Reginald had long ago died a natural death. His easy, unembarrassed manners were far too affectionate and brotherly to deceive her for a moment. They were close friends, but he would never be more to her than he was now.

Violet grew restive when she noticed Constance’s innocent little manœuvres to bring her and Reginald together, and she often wondered secretly at her blindness. How was it that Constance failed to perceive the strange, undefinable change in him ? He was not less bright, but he was often silent and distract, as though his thoughts were elsewhere ; her conversation never seemed to absorb him. Violet had a keen suspicion that

this change was in some way connected with Gloden Carrick. When her name was mentioned, he always seemed to listen intently, though he said nothing; and once when Constance spoke of her rather abruptly, she saw him change colour as though he were embarrassed. But Violet wisely kept her suspicion to herself. She was warmly interested in Gloden, and was quite willing that her old friend should be happy in his own way.

Reginald was Reginald, and of course no one could be nicer; but Violet thought, if she ever married, she would like her husband to be stronger and more earnest in purpose. A man whose indolent good-nature allowed him to be drawn into marriage with a woman who, with all her virtues, was perfectly unsuitable to him, was not the man to whom she could vow a life's allegiance.

Violet would sigh sometimes to think that the Sir Galahad of her dreams would never prove reality, and then she would take herself to task for her discontent. What did it matter if she did not marry? Would not friendship with these two men satisfy any woman? Reginald was so dear, so kind to her; and then it was such a privilege that Mr. Hamerton would single her out from a crowded room to talk to her.

Felix Hamerton, with his quiet thoughtfulness and grave kindness, was no mean factor in Violet's present happiness and satisfaction with her surroundings, and on his side he found great pleasure in her intelligent sympathy. In spite of her eight-and-twenty years, Violet was pretty enough to throw younger girls in the shade. She was very graceful, and there was a simplicity and unconsciousness about her that were very attractive.

Felix had always admired her, and he had greatly marvelled when Reginald had swerved in his allegiance to her, and had married Lady Car. At that time he had been too self-absorbed, and too much saddened by his secret love for Gabrielle, to be strongly attracted by any other woman. But Gabrielle's death had turned pain into a blank and the blanks of life offer an irresistible surface to new impressions; and to any one who understood human nature, with its complex mysteries and contradictions, it was no wonder that Felix should at this time feel himself insensibly soothed by Violet's womanly sympathy and intelligence. He met her with pleasure, and listened to her with interest, and by and by he found himself comparing her with other girls of his acquaintance. And what struck him most

was that there was nothing artificial about her—no little tricks of manner, only a noble unconsciousness that somehow reminded him of Gabrielle. The French word *spirituelle* could be applied to her. 'I do not wonder that she is not married,' he would say to himself, as he walked back to his rooms after one of those pleasant talks. 'The men she meets are not up to her; she is miles above them; they could not appreciate her. Reg might have done so, and she would have been the making of him'; and then a sort of surprised pity crossed his mind that so sweet a woman should be mateless.

Violet looked almost lovely on the evening of the ball; her dress was perfect, and just suited her. Daisy's artless expressions of admiration were most naïvely uttered.

'You must have your card quite full,' she said earnestly; 'and you must dance lots of times with Mr. Hamerton, for he will be quite the nicest man there.'

'Mr. Hamerton will not come early, you silly child,' returned Violet; 'and we are going to sit out the three dances that I am to reserve for him. I shall be quite tired by then, and you know Mr. Hamerton never cares about dancing.'

'Oh, but he does waltz so beautifully, and of course he will want to dance with you. Mother, doesn't Vi look beautiful?'

But Violet refused to hear any more compliments. Daisy was a dear little thing, but she was much too outspoken. Why should Mr. Hamerton care to dance with her? It was silly of the child to say that.

Daisy's prognostications were correct, however, and before half an hour had passed Violet's card was filled up, and 'F.H.' written against the three dances.

He would not come until late—perhaps not until half the evening was over; she knew he hated balls. And then she started, for at that moment she saw him entering the room. The room was hardly full yet; why had he come so early? She answered her partner a little absently; her eyes were following the slight dark man who was quietly making his way through the dancers. He had seen her at once, and was coming straight towards her.

'Shall we take another turn now, Miss Winter? The floor is not quite so crowded.'

'In another minute. I think Mr. Hamerton wants to speak to me'; and Violet blushed a little as she spoke.

Mr. Hamerton looked gravely at her; then he turned to the gentleman beside her. 'Could you spare your partner to me a

moment, Cotterill?' and then he leaned forward and whispered a word or two in the young man's ear, and the next moment took Violet's unresisting hand and placed it on his arm.

'Captain Cotterill will find another partner. I want to speak to you particularly—not here; it is too noisy. It will be quieter outside.'

'What can you want with me?' returned Violet, rather disturbed by his manner. He had not shaken hands with her, or greeted her in the customary manner. 'Captain Cotterill will think me so rude.'

'Never mind Captain Cotterill,' returned Felix, quietly; 'he understands all about it. I told him I had an important message for you; a telegram has just arrived from the Gate House. I called to speak to Mr. Gresham, and he was out, and Mrs. Gresham showed it to me. Your mother is ill—"alarmingly ill," were the words.'

'My mother ill!' and in a moment Violet's radiant bloom was dimmed, and she looked at him piteously.

'I will repeat it exactly—"Tell Violet her mother is suddenly and alarmingly ill. She must come at once."'

'At once!' and Violet glanced with despair at her ball dress.

'There is no time to change your dress,' as he noticed her look; 'the last train to Middleton goes in twenty minutes, and we shall have to get on from there. I have brought wraps, and there are rugs in the carriage. You must not lose a moment. I will take you to the cloak-room.'

He spoke with rapid decision, and Violet instinctively obeyed him. She threw on her fur-lined cloak, drawing the hood over her head, and he put her into the carriage. 'Drive as fast as you can,' she heard him say, and then he turned to her and asked her gently if she were warm.

'It is not a long journey—only half an hour to Middleton, but I fear we shall have to drive ten or twelve miles, and the night will be very cold.'

'This cloak is very warm; I shall take no harm,' she returned, almost impatiently. 'Are you sure we shall be in time, Mr. Hamerton? Where is the telegram? Did you bring it?'

'No; but I have told you every word. There was nothing more. There is no fear of our losing the train; I have provided against that. I know how hard this suspense must be for you. When did you hear from home last?'

'Only the day before yesterday. Cousin Tess wrote as usual. Mother is such a bad correspondent. She said nothing to make

me anxious, only that the weather was so cold, and that mother was keeping in her room. I cannot understand it. Alarmingly ill, did you say?’

And Felix quietly repeated the telegram. ‘It must be something sudden and unexpected,’ he finished.

And then the lights of the station flashed across the road, and in a few more minutes Violet found herself in the compartment, with Felix opposite her. As he leant forward to arrange the rugs, he said gently—

‘I am not going to talk to you. I think you would rather be quiet; but I want to explain why I am here. Mr. Gresham was dining out, as you know, and was not expected back until late, and when Mrs. Gresham showed me the telegram she did not know what to do, so I suggested that we could just catch the Middleton train. There was no one else. Do you understand?’

But Violet only looked at him a little bewildered. ‘It was very kind of you to come for me,’ was all she said; and then she drew back in the corner.

He was right; she could not talk. The sudden shock made her confused and giddy; the reaction was terrible. Half an hour ago there had been lights, music, happy faces, and laughter, and now they were rushing through the darkness, and there was a great terror at her heart. Then she looked at Felix, and his presence seemed to give her a vague comfort. She was not alone—not utterly alone!

‘The half-hour’s journey seemed endless before they reached Middleton. And then there was a long weary time to be spent in the inn parlour, while the ostler was roused and a conveyance got ready to take them to Grantham. Felix had some hot coffee prepared for them.

‘We have a long cold drive before us,’ he said, as he brought her a cup. ‘You must husband your strength, for you do not know what you may have to do for your mother.’ And Violet obediently drank the coffee.

But they were both thankful when the horses were brought round, and they were on their road again. They could only see the carriage lights before them. Now and then Felix glanced at his companion; but he seldom spoke to her, except to mention some landmarks they had passed. The perfect stillness of her attitude touched him. She was gazing out into the darkness with unseeing eyes; the pale sad face, framed in the fur-lined hood, haunted him afterwards. That passive

patience, that look of quiet pain, reminded him strongly of Gabrielle.

It seemed hours before that long drive was at an end, and they were in the dark grounds of the Gate House. One or two of the upper windows were lighted, but the lower part of the house was in darkness. Evidently they were not expected; no one had thought of the late train to Middleton. It was some time before they were admitted. The old butler started back when he saw them.

‘How is your mistress, Dawson?’ asked Felix, anxiously.

‘Good heavens, sir, we never thought our young lady would come to-night!’ returned Dawson, in a shaking voice. ‘My mistress is dead. She was dead before we sent the telegram, only Miss Wentworth would have it go.’

Felix uttered an exclamation; but there was none from Violet, only a strained look in her eyes that showed she understood. She submitted passively when Felix drew her into the hall and placed her on the old settle before the fire. For a moment he hardly knew what to say to her. He held her cold hands, chafing them between his own, while Dawson stood beside them, with the tears running down his cheeks.

‘Can you tell us how it happened?’ he asked at last, for he thought it would be better to rouse Violet out of this numb apathy. ‘You would like to know?’—stooping over her.

And the lips framed the word ‘Yes.’

‘There is not much I can tell you, sir. My mistress has been ailing for a long time past, and has looked a deal worse than usual since Christmas’—here Felix felt a slight trembling in the hands he held—‘but we none of us thought it serious. Yesterday and to-day she kept in her room, as the weather was cold; and about seven, just as I was getting the dinner out, we heard her bell ring sharply, and then Craven came down to say that mistress had fainted, and that Dr. Parry was to be fetched. But when he came there was nothing he could do.’

‘Where is Miss Wentworth?’

‘We cannot get her out of the room, sir,’ replied Dawson. ‘I think the shock has crazed her a bit, for she will not believe my mistress is dead. Dr. Parry took her away, but she is back again. She says it is nothing but a faint, and she won’t listen to any of us.’

‘Mr. Hamerton’—and here Felix started, for a sudden excited look had come into Violet’s eyes—‘I must see my mother; I must go to her.’

‘Yes, you shall go to her,’ he said soothingly.

‘But I must see her alone. She is my mother, my own mother, and I must have her to myself.’ But here the girl’s throat became convulsed, and she could say no more for the dry sob that seemed to choke her. But he understood her.

‘Will you let me go first and arrange for you? You can trust me; I quite understand. I will come back and fetch you as soon as possible.’ And then she let him go.

At the head of the stairs he encountered Craven, Mrs. Winter’s maid. The poor woman’s eyes were swollen with weeping. Most of the servants at the Gate House had been in the family ever since Mrs. Winter’s marriage, and were much attached to their indulgent mistress.

‘Oh, sir!’ was all she could say.

‘Which is the room, Craven? Miss Winter wishes to see her mother alone. I hear Miss Wentworth is there.’

‘So she is, sir, and none of us can coax her away; but it is right that Miss Violet should have her wish. I am sure it makes one’s hair rise to hear her talking and making-believe that my mistress is alive. It would never do for Miss Violet to hear her. This is the way, sir. Miss Wentworth has been sleeping in the dressing-room lately, to be within call of my mistress.’

Felix stood by the door a moment; he had no terror of the dead, but he hesitated to intrude on the sacred privacy of sorrow. He had never liked Miss Wentworth in his heart; he had thought her brusque and domineering, but he could not but pity her now.

She was kneeling by the bed, and was holding the dead hand in both hers, as though she were trying to warm it, and it was terrible to see the straight outline of the form under the white covering, and to hear her talking to the deaf, unresponsive ears.

‘I know I was wrong, Amy,’ he could hear her say. ‘I ought to have sent for Violet; it was bad of me to put it off day after day. But you will forgive your stupid old Tess; you are never long angry with her. It was so nice to have you all to myself, and Violet always upsets you so. I did it for the best, Amy dearest—indeed I did. I have always loved you so much, and tried not to cross you; but you would never be so unkind as to leave me. Oh, how cold you are!’ and then she tried to warm the hand in her bosom.

‘Miss Wentworth,’ said Felix, very firmly, and he laid his

hand on her shoulder, 'I must ask you to leave the room for a little. Miss Winter wishes to be alone with her poor mother.'

'Violet here!' and a terrified expression came to Miss Wentworth's face. 'I will not see her; she will reproach me for not sending for her, as Amy has been doing. How could I know that this fainting fit would come on? But she is not dead'—looking at him fiercely, as though daring him to contradict her; 'Amy would never die and leave me, when I have devoted my whole life to her.'

'If you do not wish to see Miss Winter, you must let me take you away,' he said, still firmly grasping her arm; and the poor soul was so dazed and bewildered with the anguish of the shock that she had no strength to resist him. He led her from the room and put her in Craven's charge, and then he went in search of Violet. She started up when she heard, and came towards him unsteadily.

'Will you go in alone?' he whispered. 'Your mother looks very peaceful, almost as though she were sleeping.'

Then great tears welled up in Violet's eyes. 'I must have her to myself. I never have before,' was her reply; and then she passed into the chamber of death.

'Oh, mother, you understand me now! You know I always loved you, dear!' was her cry as she laid her head on the dead breast.

There is nothing sadder in life than a misunderstanding between two hearts that yet love each other dearly, and especially it is sad when the cloud comes between mother and child.

Poor Mrs. Winter's weakness and unreasonable dependence on her friend had created the gulf that had yawned between herself and her daughter. Violet's tender affection for her widowed mother had been thwarted and outraged. Her jealousy could ill brook Miss Wentworth's injudicious and tactless interference. 'I am nothing to my mother; she does not need me,' had been her inward cry ever since she had grown to womanhood; and yet there had been warm maternal feeling in the mother's heart, and she had secretly craved for greater demonstration on her daughter's part.

'Oh, if I had only loved her more; if I had only been more patient, more forbearing!' How often that is the first cry of the bereaved heart! We have no great acts of unkindness with which to reproach ourselves, but how many times have we vexed and saddened the dear one who is stretched out before

us in the rigidity of death ; how many a thorn have we unthinkingly planted that has pierced and wounded !

They have hungered perhaps for the very caresses that we are lavishing on their dead faces ; how would they have joyed to hear those fond expressions of tenderness ! We have not willingly hurt them, perhaps, but we have lessened their sunshine, and now we have repented too late.

Too late ! these are the words that Violet is saying in her bitter weeping, as her tears rain down on the pale hands ; and yet who can say—who dare say, that our passionate petitions for forgiveness are not heard ? In that other world, in that still paradise of the waiting soul, they may hear us ; or pitying angels may carry the message, and bring back to us the sweet sense of forgiveness. For, however it may be with the living, the dead are all our own, and even in her desolation Violet felt as though her mother had been given back to her.

CHAPTER XLIII

'YOU DO NOT HATE ME, THEN?'

'Discouragement, depression, weakness, apathy; there is the dismal series that must be for ever begun, and re-begun, while we are still rolling up the Sisyphæan rock of life.'—AMIEL'S *Journal Intime*.

WHILE Violet wept and prayed beside her dead mother, Felix was pacing restlessly up and down outside the closed door. He dared not intrude on that sacred privacy of grief, and yet he feared to leave her absolutely alone. When he judged that she had been there long enough, he sent Craven to coax her away. He had already given orders that her room should be prepared for her, and he hoped that she would lie down and get a few hours' sleep. He would not see her again until she had grown calmer, and then he would ask her how he could best help her.

The Winters were singularly devoid of near relatives. Mrs. Winter's only brother was in Ceylon, and the Courtenays were only second cousins. They were rich, worldly people, and, though tolerably good-natured and much attached to Violet, they were not friends for adversity. Dr. Parry, who was an old friend as well as the family doctor, had already given the necessary orders, and had suggested that Mr. Farren, the lawyer who had always managed Mrs. Winter's affairs, should be at once informed of her death.

As soon as it grew light, Felix walked over to Silcote Hall. By a strange coincidence, he had already arranged to sleep there for a night to look after some extensive alterations in which Reginald was greatly interested. He would telegraph to his servant to bring him some clothes, and, as he and Reginald were about the same height, he thought he could find some garments for his present need, as, in spite of his ulster, he was shivering in his thin dress-suit. He breakfasted at the

Hall, and then, feeling tolerably refreshed and rested, he went back to the Gate House. As he crossed the road, he thought how utterly desolate it looked—the house with its closely-drawn blinds, and the leafless trees of the little wood with their thin bare branches. Dawson, who admitted him, told him that his young mistress was in the library; she had already seen Mr. Farren. Miss Wentworth had not yet left her room.

He went at once to the library. Violet was sitting by the fire, but she rose when she saw him. Her eyes were heavy and swollen, but she was otherwise quite calm. The black dress she wore added to her paleness; but she spoke quite naturally.

‘I am so thankful you have come,’ she said at once. ‘Mr. Farren has been here. He says my dear mother has left no special wishes. She made a will just after my father’s death, but it was very brief. I told Mr. Farren that I was sure she would wish to be buried with my father—at Grantham. There can be no doubt of that.’

‘I should think not. But have you spoken to Miss Wentworth? It is just possible that your mother may have mentioned her wishes to her.’

Then a distressed look crossed Violet’s face. ‘No; I have not seen her. I felt I could not. Oh, Mr. Hamerton’—as she met his grave, pitying look—‘I do feel so wicked! I never want to see her again.’

‘I was afraid that this might be your feeling.’

‘She has kept me away from my darling mother’—and now her eyes began to fill. ‘Craven has been talking to me. She says mother has been ill and wanting me for weeks, and that Cousin Tess always put her off with some excuse. She wanted me, poor dear, and I never knew it, and now I can do nothing for her.’

‘It was a grievous mistake. But, my dear Miss Winter, you have nothing with which to reproach yourself. If you had known, you would have come to your mother. The blame lies with Miss Wentworth, not you.’

‘Yes; she kept me away for her own purposes. And how am I ever to forgive her? I have never been hard to any one before, but when I think of her, my heart is full of bitterness. She was my enemy—my secret, cruel enemy—all my life. She has come between me and my sweet mother!’ and Violet broke into a passion of tears.

It was true, and he could not contradict her. She had been grievously wronged by her mother's friend. With all his heart he sided with her; but he knew that such bitterness would only aggravate her sorrow and lower herself. For, as Amiel has justly observed, 'The beautiful souls of the world have an art of divine alchemy by which bitterness is converted into kindness, the gall of human experience into gentleness, ingratitude into benefits, insults into pardon.'

Felix's noble nature led him to take higher views of duty than other people. He would say and do nothing to make the breach wider between these two women. It was necessary that Violet should see her, and learn her mother's wishes; and, if possible, he would try to soften her just resentment. So he waited silently until she had regained her self-control, and then he said—

'You may be sure of your friends' sympathy. I know how Mrs. Wyndham and Reginald have always felt for your unfortunate position. Miss Wentworth has been much to blame. She has not treated you well; but I think, when you see her, that you will feel less hardly towards her. She is in great trouble.'

'And is not my trouble great?'

'Yes, dear Miss Winter, for the Divine Will has taken your mother from you, and yours is a very real affliction. I know what I felt when my mother died, so I can feel for you. It is a great blessing for ourselves when we learn to pardon injuries. The greater the injury the nobler the pardon; and I would not have you otherwise than noble.' He said these last words with a smile so sweet and encouraging that she felt somewhat comforted.

'You think I ought to go to her?'

'Yes; for she will not dare to come to you. Her conscience is tormenting her. Last night she was so stricken and confused by the shock that she could not be reasonable. Remember, in spite of her faults, she was your mother's trusted friend, and that now she is dependent on your kindness.'

'I will go to her,' returned Violet, slowly. 'Will you wait here for me?' And as she crossed the hall and ascended the stairs, some words Felix Hamerton had said still rang in her ears. 'I would not have you otherwise than noble.' Could she ever forget those words and the smile that accompanied them? It was like a ray of heavenly sunshine when some closed shutter is opened. 'The greater the injury the nobler the pardon'; he had said that too.

Miss Wentworth had insisted on occupying the dressing-room, though the door that communicated with the chamber of death was locked, and the key had been secreted by Craven; but in her confused condition the unhappy woman thought that it had been done by Violet's orders, and her first words when Violet entered were a passionate protest against her cruelty. It was evident from her appearance that she had not slept or shed a tear; her eyes looked a little sunken, and her face deadly pale. She burst out almost into a wail when she saw Violet.

'Yes, I know I have wronged you. I ought to have sent for you, and told you she was ill; but you always upset her so; you were not patient with her as I was. I never refused to give in to her little whims, but young people are so hard. But you are cruel; it is barbarous to shut me out of her room, when I loved her so, and would willingly have lain there in her place.'

Violet looked at her, bewildered. Had grief robbed her of her senses? 'I do not understand you, Cousin Tess,' she said at last.

'Not understand me! Why have you taken away the key? I wanted to say my prayers beside her. She was the one creature who loved me, and now I have lost her. We have been friends for thirty-two years, and I always hoped I should go first. It is cruel revenge to keep me away from her.'

'Cousin Tess,' returned Violet, firmly, 'you must listen to me a moment. I am taking no revenge; I would not be so cruel to my mother's friend, however she has treated me. The key is in the other door; you can go in when you like. I gave no orders, but perhaps it is as well that this door should not be opened.'

Miss Wentworth grew calm at once. 'Thank you, Violet,' she said quite humbly, and then a dull flush came to her cheek. 'No, you are right; I have not treated you well. I only thought of Amy, and not of you. I wanted to keep her to myself, and to do everything for her, and I knew you were happy with your friends; but'—her voice breaking—'I never thought it would come to this. I would give a good ten years of my life to have brought you here in time. When I knew she was gone I nearly lost my senses; I felt you would never forgive me.'

'You must not say that,' returned Violet, gently. Felix

Hamerton was right; the sight of the poor, stricken creature, who had lost the one friend of her life, excited her pity. ‘I must try to forgive you for my mother’s sake.’

Then Miss Wentworth burst into tearless sobs. ‘I never meant to harm you,’ she panted out. ‘I used to be fond of you when you were a little thing, but when you grew up there was no love lost between us; and then you were always so hard and proud with me. But I shall not be a trouble to you any longer; when my poor dear is laid in the ground, you will be rid of me. Thank Heaven, I need be dependent on no one; it was only love kept me at the Gate House, and because I knew she could not do without me.’

‘Cousin Tess, there is no need for such talk at present,’ returned Violet, in an exhausted voice. ‘The Gate House can be your home as long as you care to make it so, but I have to think of other things now.’

But it was long before Miss Wentworth could give her attention to Violet’s questions; her strong intellect seemed almost warped by this sudden trouble.

It was some time before Violet returned to the room where Felix was anxiously expecting her, and then she looked so white and spent that he would not allow her to speak until she had taken some wine.

‘I wish I could have spared you this,’ he said, almost tenderly.

‘No; it was right for me to go. Poor Cousin Tess! she is in a deplorable state of mind.’

‘And you would not wish to change places with her?’

‘No indeed; and I am thankful that I do not feel quite so unforgiving. She has told me all that I want to know. My dear mother wished to be buried at Grantham, and to have everything as quiet as possible. She said all this to Cousin Tess when she was ill five years ago.’

‘Very well, then; as Mr. Courtenay is not here, would you like me to arrange things with Mr. Farren? You know I shall sleep at the Hall to-night.’

‘I should be truly grateful if you would’; and then she looked up at him with a sad smile. ‘You see, I have never had to manage anything. Mother and Cousin Tess always settled things without me.’

‘Then I will go to him at once. You know, if your old friend Reginald were here, how gladly he would have helped you, so I will take his place. I will see you again this

evening. If you will follow my advice, you will lie down, for you are looking very ill and exhausted.'

But Violet shook her head. 'I have letters to write. There is Uncle Rupert in Ceylon, and Mrs. Courtenay; oh, if only Constance were in town!'

'Yes, I know how much you must want her, but she will not be back for another fortnight. Is there no one else?'

'No one whom I care to have with me just now. Never mind, do not look so grave over it; I shall do very well. There are so few people whom one cares to have near one in sorrow.'

'She is very brave and patient,' he said to himself as he walked into Grantham. 'I suppose Miss Carrick is too new a friend, for she did not mention her; but she has known trouble.' He half thought that he would go to Market Street, for Gloden was just then preparing for her departure; but he changed his mind. He was not certain that Violet would care to have Miss Carrick just then. But all the remainder of the day he felt oppressed with the sense of her great loneliness. Her friends were all at a distance.

The next day, when Violet saw him, she told him that Dora Courtenay was coming to stay with her.

'Her mother thinks it is so hard for me to be alone,' she said to Felix. 'Dora is the eldest daughter, and is very good-natured. But I would so much rather be by myself; no one can help me just now—no one but my dear Constance, and she cannot come to me. I did so long to write and tell Dora to put off her visit; but the Courtenays are our only relations except Uncle Rupert, and I was afraid of hurting them.'

'Yes, it is always a pity to repel any offered kindness; and perhaps, after all, you may find her some comfort to you,' was Felix's reply.

In his heart he was thankful that Dora Courtenay was coming. She would not be much of a companion to Violet, but it would be better for her to have some one with her. The relations between her and Miss Wentworth were necessarily so strained that the presence of a third person would be a relief to both. Dora Courtenay was a kind-hearted girl, and she was devoted to Violet. If her society were too irksome, Violet could always go to her own room. He was quite grateful to Mrs. Courtenay for her motherly thought for her.

After this he did not see Violet again until the day of the funeral, when he went down with the Courtenays and Harcourt

Wyndham. In spite of it being a quiet funeral, Grantham Church was half full. Mrs. Winter had been an old inhabitant, and people wished to show their respect and sympathy. Many of the shops were closed; and as he passed up the aisle he noticed Gloden and Mrs. Carrick in one of the side pews. He was struck with Gloden's expression; it was so strained and sad.

Violet bore herself with great calmness, but Felix thought she looked very worn. Her cousin, Mr. Courtenay, supported her. But one thing touched him greatly.

It was at the close of the service, and they had all gathered round to look at the coffin with the wreaths lying on it. Violet had given one long last look, and was turning away, when she saw Miss Wentworth standing all alone, still gazing into the grave with dry-eyed misery. Miss Wentworth had aged very much in these few days. When people are no longer young, grief has a withering effect on them. The fine, handsome-looking woman had a worn look, and there were few who did not pity her that day.

For Violet life might still have sweet gifts in reserve—she was still young enough to hope for brighter days; but to Theresa life was over.

The weak, helpless soul who had leant on her for so many years had gone, and she was left desolate. Her work was over, and now she was alone. There was a dull, despairing look in her eyes as she stood there; and then a hand was slipped into hers. For one moment she and Violet stood hand-in-hand, and then the girl gently led her away.

That night, as Violet was sitting alone in her room, she heard a knock at her door, and Miss Wentworth entered.

'Violet,' she said, in a broken voice, 'I cannot rest. I shall never be able to rest until I have asked for your forgiveness. I can see it all now, and I know that I have wronged you. Dearly as I loved Amy, I had no right to come between her and her child. Ah! you have been weeping, but the blessed relief of tears is denied me.'

'Poor Cousin Tess!'

'Ah, you may well pity me! But it is kind of you to speak so gently. You do not hate me, then, although I have injured you?'

'Most certainly I do not hate you. At first I had wicked feelings. I thought I never wanted to see you again; but all that has passed. For my sweet mother's sake there must be peace between you and me.'

‘God bless you, Violet! I will never forget this. Then you do not wish me to leave the Gate House at once?’

‘Cousin Tess, how can you say such things?’

‘But this house is yours—everything is yours; you are the mistress here.’

‘Yes, the most unhappy mistress. But it shall not be my first action to turn my mother’s friend out of her home. For over twenty years you have devoted yourself to her. Cousin Tess, as long as you choose to remain here, I will do my best to make you comfortable.’

Miss Wentworth sighed heavily, and her lips quivered. ‘May I kiss you, Vi?’ Then, as Violet turned her smooth cheek to her, the elder woman kissed her with cold, trembling lips. ‘You shall never repent this generosity,’ she said, almost abruptly; and then she left her.

But Violet’s heart felt heavy as lead when she was left alone. Yes, she had been generous. She had heaped coals of fire on her enemy’s head. She had not refused the shelter of her roof to the woman who had spoiled her home-life for so many years, and who had been her mother’s friend. But the Gate House would never be a home to her while Theresa Wentworth remained in it. There was no sympathy between them. Their common loss would not bring them nearer. Theresa’s narrow, domineering nature had only softened to one person. She had no wide interests, no intellectual yearnings. Her nature was ordinary, her affections contracted. Her niggardly sowing through life would bring her meagre harvests. For the truth is an awful one, that we shall reap as we sow; if we invest the whole of our affection on the one object, and it be taken from us, great indeed will be our penury. Let us love more generously, let our sympathies widen in ever-increasing circles, that when our hour of trouble comes we may have human hearts to cherish us and give us comfort.

Violet was striving to act nobly, but her heart felt very sore at times. What was she to do with her life, and the riches that had come to her?

The first real comfort that came to her was when Constance came to stay a day or two with her. The moment she saw Constance’s pitying face, and felt her arms round her, she felt that life was not without its consolations so long as her sister-friend was spared to her.

Constance took her back with her to London. She would take no refusal, hear no excuse. Violet should not mope her-

self to death at the Gate House ; she needed petting and love, and not to see Miss Wentworth's doleful face at all hours of the day. Vi was a darling to be so good to her ; no one else would have behaved in such a Christian manner. But she must not be alone with her just yet.

Violet was too sad and weary to dispute the point ; she was only thankful to be allowed a few weeks of peace. Constance had promised that she should be perfectly quiet ; the little upstairs sitting-room that Mrs. Wyndham called her own was put at her disposal. She need see only the few old friends that she valued.

When Felix Hamerton heard that Violet was with her friends at Hyde Park Gate, he felt entirely satisfied about her, and, as he was very busy, he did not call for a week or two. When he did, he was glad to see a great improvement in Violet ; she had lost the strained, painful look that had made him anxious ; there was a quiet sadness that spoke of submission and a chastened will. Her deep mourning made her seem older, but he thought he had never seen her look so sweet.

CHAPTER XLIV

WHAT REGINALD THOUGHT

‘He who has most of heart knows most of sorrow.’

BAILEY.

WHEN Reginald Lorimer read his sister's letter over his solitary breakfast, he almost refused to believe his eyes. He read the sentences again and again, until the smarting sense of intolerable pain told him that he fully grasped the sense. Gloden Carrick had left Grantham for ever; she had gone without giving him any hint of her purpose; Harvey had not mentioned her in his last letter. Without leave-taking or a word of warning, she had gone up to town, to work out her career as an artiste.

He was bitterly hurt; the angry tide of emotion that swept over him revealed the depth and intensity of his feelings. Even an easy-tempered man has his moments of scathing wrath. Never in his life had he felt such passionate resentment; not only his heart, but his pride was wounded. His opinions were nothing to her; she had chosen the very life which she knew would separate them most effectually. Reginald felt himself hardly used. For the first time in his life he was really and truly in love, and it was no mere lad's love; Violet, with all her sweetness and brightness, had never attracted him as this thoughtful, clear-eyed girl had done. And it had been no sudden fancy. At first he had only pitied her; her sadness and refinement and her uncongenial surroundings had roused his chivalrous feelings. Then he had heard her play, and had seen her expression lit up by a strange beauty. Little by little he felt himself enthralled and infatuated, until there was no face so dear to him, and he knew that life would mean little to him unless he could make Gloden Carrick his wife. And he was just beginning to hope that his affection was returned; she

had been shy and conscious with him of late, and he had secretly rejoiced over these signs, and now and then there had been a timid tenderness in her eyes that had made his heart beat faster. Surely she understood him, he thought. She knew what she was to him, and how, for her dear sake, he was willing to put up with her humble connections. It could not be a pleasant idea to the young Squire of Silcote that his wife's relations were only tradespeople in Grantham, and that he must come in contact with them continually. Lady Car, with her high-born connections and aristocratic tastes, had tried to inoculate him with her fastidious notions, but Reginald had always been something of a radical; he loved Gloden for her own sake, and her environment was nothing to him.

How he had dreamed of the future in those solitary walks of his through Rome! He used to picture their future life together at the Hall. What a stepmother she would make for Tottie! She loved children, and her ways were always gentle with them; nothing touched him more than to see her with his child. And then there was the music-room. What parties they would give, and how grandly her violin would sound! They would make Constance bring Boski down, and astonish the neighbourhood; his darling should have as much music as she liked.

And then she had once told him that she loved luxury; she had accused herself naïvely of a craving for the good things of life. Well, there were Car's rooms, that she had fitted up with such taste, and her jewels. Some of them must be put aside for Tottie—Constance had told him so with affectionate plainness; but there would be ample for both, and amongst them there was a necklace of sapphires and diamonds which he thought would look well on a certain slender white throat. But now he must put aside all these dreams; he had only deceived himself; Gloden cared nothing for him. Had she loved him, would she have acted in opposition to his expressed opinion? Would she have left the place without a word of leave-taking? But there was more than this; there was one sentence in Constance's letter which filled him with gall and bitterness, which he felt he should never be able to get over, and it was this: 'I asked her if she would go back to live at Grantham, and she positively shuddered. "Never; I will never live there again if I can help it," was her answer, and she looked as though she meant it.' She shuddered at the thought of living in the place where his home was, for Silcote was only three miles from

Grantham. She was eager to turn her back on the old life which had first made them acquainted with each other.

No, it was all a delusion. She had never loved him; she only loved her own pride and ambition. She would rather be the fêted artiste than the country squire's wife; a quiet, hum-drum existence such as other women led was not to her taste. What a fool he had been to have set his heart on this cold, shy girl, whose only affection—he would do her justice there—was set on her young brother!

And he had been on the eve of writing to her. The allotted time was up; the anniversary of Car's death was over, and he saw no reason for delay. He thought that he would write from Rome. He would ask her frankly to be his wife. Oh, if he had written! And here the burning flush came to his brow. At least he had been spared this crowning humiliation. Gloden should never know how nearly he had asked her to be his wife.

Bertie Glenyon wondered what made Reginald so unlike himself that day. He looked seedy and miserable, and for many days after that he was decidedly glum. It may be doubted whether Reginald had ever suffered so acutely in his life. He had been simply stunned by his wife's death, and it had taken time to make him understand what he was to do with his freedom. But now his tenderest feelings were outraged.

Gloden was lost to him; but his love for her was not to be rooted up in a moment. He must regret her still. Well, he should never marry again—that was all. No woman should have a half-hearted affection from him again. He and Tottie must suffice for each other.

He wondered drearily what Constance would say when he told her that he should never take another wife to himself. He could imagine the urgency of her arguments; and, then, for the first time in his life, he would be stern with her, and forbid her ever to speak to him on the subject again.

'Silcote Hall shall have no mistress until my little girl has grown up'—he thought of saying that to her; but the idea of those long years of loneliness made his heart fail within him.

But he never once thought of Violet. The young heiress of the Gate House was only his neighbour and friend. 'Violet will not marry, either,' he once said to himself; 'and Felix is a confirmed bachelor. When we are old people we shall laugh over our love-stories, or tell them to Tottie.' But even the idea of these companions in misfortune could not reconcile

Reginald to his hard lot. No man, as Constance often told him, was less fitted for a solitary existence. Even Lady Car had owned this, and had begged him to marry again.

Reginald hated the idea of returning to Silcote. He deferred it as long as possible. When Bertie Glenyon was convalescent, they left Rome together, and went to the south of France for a month or two; and then he went off with an artist friend for a trip through the Ardennes and Holland.

It was not until the end of June that he passed through London on his way home to pick up Tottie and see his sister. Violet had only just returned to the Gate House. She had been nearly three months at Hyde Park Gate. Mrs. Wyndham had not seen her brother for five months, and she was puzzled to account for the change in him. He looked well, only older and more matured, and he was decidedly graver, the first evening of his arrival, though he was very affectionate, and seemed delighted to be with her and Tottie; but there was none of the old brightness in his manner.

'Reggie does not seem in good spirits,' she said to her husband that night, 'and yet he is as dear and nice as possible; and he never asked after Violet until I mentioned her. He has stayed away all these months, and even now he does not seem anxious to see her, for when I asked him when he would go over to the Gate House, he said he did not know, and that there was no hurry. He spoke in such an off-hand way.'

'My dear Constance, I always told you that Reginald was not thinking of Violet Winter, and now you will allow that I am right.'

'I begin to fear so; but, Harcourt, if you only knew how disappointed I am. Violet is such a dear girl; it is not because she is rich I wanted Reg to marry her, but because she has such a sweet, sincere nature.'

'I rather think that Mr. Hamerton agrees with you, my dear.'

Then Constance put her hand impulsively on her husband's arm. 'Oh, Harcourt, do you think so really?' and her eyes began to sparkle with pleasure.

After Reggie, Felix was her chief care. If she could only see him happy, and consoled for Gabrielle's loss! But somehow, with all her astuteness, she had never guessed this. Could it be really true? But Mr. Wyndham refused to say another word on the subject, and Constance had to begin her delightful castle-building over again.

Reginald's altered looks troubled her greatly; but any questioning seemed to irritate him. He was all right. What could Constance mean? He had never been better in his life; he had grown stouter—Harcourt had told him so. Foreign life agreed with him. He was afraid he should find Silcote slow.

'But, Reggie, dear, you must not be dull,' had been her reply to this. 'You must ask your friends, and fill the Hall. Harcourt and I will not be able to come down until September; but there are the Lankesters, and the Ralph Glenyons—you have not invited them for an age. You are so fond of old Lady Glenyon, and Dora and Isabel are such nice girls. Why don't you make up a nice house-party for August, and have Felix and Bertie Glenyon to meet them? And then Violet can come over, and——'

'Oh, I hate to have a lot of people staying in the house!' returned Reginald, rather crossly. 'Felix and Bertie are coming down later on, and we shall be three bachelors together. You may get a house-party together in September, if you like, and then you and Harcourt can help me; but I don't want people yet. Perhaps I shall run over to Ryde and have a little yachting with Bertie, and then we shall take Felix with us.'

All this was perfectly reasonable. If Reginald liked to postpone his house-party to September, and enjoy a little yachting instead, no one could have any objection; but it was a new thing for him to be so restless. Five months of foreign life were surely enough to have disposed him for home enjoyments. How she wished Tottie were not such a baby, and could be more of a companion for him! This was what she feared for Reggie—that, unless he married again, he would just drift into an aimless, unsettled life.

Reginald was not more than three days at Hyde Park Gate, but he promised to pay a longer visit later on. The real cause of his reluctance to stay was the fear of meeting Gloden. He was still too bitterly hurt to be able to conceal his feelings, and he dreaded any unexpected meeting. It was not until the last evening that her name was mentioned. He had been out with Constance all the afternoon—they had been shopping together—and on their return, Reginald saw a letter waiting for him with the Repton postmark. Constance saw it too.

'That is from Harvey,' she said at once. 'Does he write to you regularly? Miss Carrick says he is so well and happy; she hears from him every week.'

‘Is Miss Carrick well?’ asked Reginald. He was still standing by the hall table, so that his back was towards her. He spoke in a cool, indifferent tone.

‘Yes; but she works far too hard. I have threatened to speak to Signor Boski. If she goes on at this rate she will kill herself. Violet was so concerned, she begged me to speak to him. Come in and have some tea, Reggie.’

He followed her slowly into the drawing-room. If she would only let the subject drop. But Constance, who was strongly interested in her *protégée*, and had forgotten her fears for Reginald, went on in her warm, enthusiastic manner.

‘She is working splendidly, and Boski never grumbles at her as he does at his other pupils. From the first he spoke highly of her talent; he calls her his most promising pupil. He only lets her play to us here quite privately, but Harcourt does so enjoy it. We have her here on Sundays, because it is so lonely for her in lodgings. She used to refuse sometimes, until I told her how much Harcourt loved sacred music. It is such a treat to hear her play Handel and Mozart.’

Reginald was silent; if he had stayed over Sunday they would have met. And then he forgot for a moment the bitterness of his anger against her, and a soft, dreamy look came into his eyes.

Yes, they would have met here in this very room; he would not have said much to her, only a bare word or two of civility. She would have noticed the difference in his manner directly, but that could not be helped.

And then some one would have asked her to play, and he knew exactly where she would have stood—against those amber curtains, which would make such a striking background for her black dress. Ah! he could see her distinctly, the graceful figure swaying slightly, and the small deer-like head, and the thin little hand drawing the bow across the chords. He could hear the slow prelude, soft yet piercing. Ah! there is colour in her face now; the light has come to her eyes. What is the sad refrain that accompanies it? Farewell to love—to the dreams that were so fair and beautiful; life is ambition, is vanity, and love’s crown a withered laurel wreath.

‘Dear Reggie, you will come to us again soon,’ Constance said to him, almost tearfully, when he bade her good-bye the next morning.

As she stood at the door with him she was more than ever convinced that something was amiss with him, and she was so

downhearted after his departure, that her husband gently expostulated with her.

‘I never saw Reg look better in my life; you know, love, that you said so yourself the first day.’

‘Yes, he is well—at least, there is nothing the matter with his health; but, Harcourt, surely you noticed how extremely grave he was last evening. I never heard him laugh once. Ah! you may smile, but my intuitions are always right. Something is wrong with Reggie.’

‘Then why did you not ask him what was the matter?’

‘But I did, Harcourt, over and over again, and he always put me off. He almost seemed vexed with me once or twice, and you know how good-tempered he is.’

And though she said no more to her husband then, Constance still felt secretly uneasy. Reggie was disappointing her—he would have nothing to do with Violet; and now he was withholding his confidence from his only sister. The truth was, Reginald was so sore and humiliated that not to his closest friend would he have hinted at his trouble, and certainly not to Constance, who had innocently helped to thwart him. But for her ready help, Gloden could not have carried out her scheme, and somehow the knowledge of this raised a barrier between them. In vain he told himself that this feeling was ungenerous and unworthy of him; he was powerless to help himself. For the present, at least, it was better for him and Constance to be separated; he loved her too dearly to inflict his moods on her.

But it was a dreary return home; the whole place seemed haunted to him. In spite of his efforts, the thoughts of Gloden mixed with everything. As he sat by himself in the library in the summer evening, he could see her coming in to bring her report of Harvey. He dared not pass the south room, so strong was the impression that the door would open, and he should see her on the threshold. There was the window-seat, where they had sat together that first sad evening—was it so sad, after all?—when he had held her little cold, trembling hands and had tried to comfort her.

Yes; and it was in the corridor that they had walked backwards and forwards to exchange those few words that had been so precious to him; and at night he could never rid himself of the fancy that he should see her at the head of the staircase, waiting to bid him good-night. Even the avenue was haunted by her presence, for it was there that he had walked

beside her that last day, when he had told her that there was nothing in the world that he would not do for her.

Ah! if he could have that time over again! For in spite of her falseness, how sweetly she had borne herself to him! That beautiful blush that came into her face so often when he had looked at her, what could that mean? Tut! what a fool he was! And he would start up with a suddenness that made Lassie bark furiously.

Those evenings grew almost intolerable at last. In the day he had plenty of occupations. He could ride over his farms and talk to his bailiff, and there were his tenants to interview, and tennis-parties at his neighbours'.

Now and then he went over to the Gate House, and Violet was always pleased to see him. Miss Wentworth was an invalid; some internal malady that was latent in her system had developed itself after Mrs. Winter's death. Violet was very good to her, but when she got worse Miss Wentworth insisted on having a nurse.

'She is very patient, and gives me no trouble. She likes me to sit with her for an hour in the evening,' Violet told Reginald, when he came over one afternoon towards the end of July. 'But she will not let me be much in her room; she says it is not good for me. Cousin Tess is so thoughtful for me now.'

'You are looking very well,' was Reginald's reply, for there was a soft bloom that made Violet look years younger; 'and you do not seem so dull and depressed.'

'That is because I have so much to do. I am acting on Mr. Hamerton's advice, and making friends with my poorer neighbours. I am quite ashamed to see how grateful they are for any little kindness I show them.'

'Yes, indeed; you are growing quite a Lady Bountiful. The Logans were singing your praises just now. Well, I must not stay; Glenyon is coming down by the 6.10 train, and I must meet him.'

'Is he coming alone?' and Violet rearranged a bowl of crimson carnations as she spoke.

'Yes. Felix will meet us in town; he cannot spare time to run down just now. He will only give us a fortnight at Ryde. Do you know he won his case after all?'

'Yes. I read his speech; it was splendid!' and Violet's eyes were very bright. 'How proud you must all be of him!'

'I should think so. Wyndham always says Felix will be

in the House by and by. He has a clear head, and then he knows how to speak. Shall I give him your congratulations?’

‘Yes ; and please tell him how good Cousin Tess is to me. He will be so glad to hear that.’

And then Reginald took his leave.

Violet’s eyes were a little wistful as she took up the carnations again, but there was a soft, contented smile on her lips.

‘There is no one like him,’ she said to herself. ‘Constance often says so. He is so wise and strong, and helps every one. I shall always be grateful for all he has done for me.’ But Violet was not speaking of her old friend Reginald.

CHAPTER XLV

SIGNOR BOSKI'S PUPIL

'Great griefs I see medicine the less.'

Cymbeline.

'Measure your mind's height by the shade it casts.'

BROWNING, *Paracelsus.*

WHILE Reginald Lorimer was trying to forget his disappointment in fresh scenes and constant excitement, Gloden, with the same object, was throwing herself with feverish energy into her work. In one respect she was more fortunate than he—in possessing an engrossing and absorbing occupation that left her scant leisure for brooding and regret. Signor Boski was an arbitrary master, and his demands increased with his pupil's capacity and docility. His very strictness implied that he considered Gloden a promising pupil, and that no pains would be thrown away on her; and the girl, who dreaded an unoccupied moment, rejoiced in the heavy tasks imposed on her.

Sometimes, as she sat at her solitary meals in the room that Constance had made so pretty, she would smile bitterly at the thought that this was the life she had chosen for herself in the past. Well, she had got the desire of her heart; she was at work in London, under one of the most famous professors, and what good was it to her? Her work was mere drudgery and weariness, and the fame that once allured her seemed like the bitterness of the apples of Sodom. What joy would it yield, when she was hungering and thirsting for the sight of one face that had always beamed approval on her? At such times it seemed to her as though her misery were very great.

But she was strong, and her pride helped her. She would not be crushed by her misfortunes. Other women had been

disappointed and had lived down their pain, and she would not weakly succumb. She was not happy, but happiness was not obligatory. Life meant duty, effort, a ceaseless conflict with her own nature. Others had fought and conquered. It was ignoble, it was unmaidenly, it was altogether unwomanly, to pine because the love for which she craved was given to another. Her art was much to her; by and by it would console her. But there were times when she rose to a higher plane than this. When she was listening at some concert to her master's music, or sometimes when she was playing to herself in the twilight, then it would seem to her as though there were something grand and sweet in her suffering; when the love denied was as the very alabaster-box that would break in blessing, not only over the Master's feet, but over the head of the man she loved. At such moments it was possible to rejoice in his and Violet's happiness; when the reflected lights from their life's bliss seemed to gild her own with soft mellow light; when she could think of them calmly, and pray for their happiness. If only such exalted moods could last! But human nature cannot always breathe in such rarefied air. The craving for her own personal happiness would make itself felt, and the battle would have to be fought all over again. But, speaking of this part of her life afterwards to one who loved her, Gloden once said—

‘I think this sort of pain which enters so largely into a woman's life is often misjudged and misrepresented; but I can never be too sorry for any woman who loves unhappily; there is no pain that is so unendurable and so embittering. It takes the whole strength of one's Christianity to bear it in a proper spirit; it seems to change one's nature.’

‘But you were very strong, Gloden,’ her friend had answered.

‘No; I was very weak and most unhappy, and it seemed to me as though life was not worth living, and that is what every one feels. One is not strong enough to endure such utter blankness, for the one image that is blotted out leaves such an awful blank; but to other women who have suffered in the same way I would say, “Pride will not help you; you must pray hard for a better strength than that. And, above all things, do not look upon such sorrow as a humiliation. Bear it as you would bear any other affliction that God has sent. For a while you will have to walk under cloudy skies before the light of heaven falls on you.” Man is born to

trouble, and woman is born to trouble too; but there will be sheaves of blessings even for lonely ones who have sown their seeds with tears—seeds of daily duties well fulfilled, and duties to others.'

Gloden's daily walk across Regent's Park or in Kensington Gardens was her one recreation, and Harvey's letters her only pleasure. Her Sundays at Hyde Park Gate were at first very trying. She could not hear Reginald's name mentioned without secret emotion, and Constance had little tricks of manner and speech that brought him too forcibly to her mind. The brother and sister were not in the least alike, but they had the same vivid brightness of smile and the same quickness of speech. It caused Gloden some effort to be at her ease with Violet during the months she stayed with Constance. Violet had strongly attracted her from the first, but the thought that she was her successful rival detracted from the pleasure of her society. It was only after a long and bitter struggle that Gloden conquered her reluctance to be with Violet, but at last her sweetness and gentleness won her in spite of herself, and before Violet left Hyde Park Gate they were better friends than ever.

'She is very dear,' Gloden said to herself, as she bade her good-bye, 'and I will not grudge her her happiness, for she is worthy of him.' And that night she prayed for them both, and went to sleep very sweetly, feeling that she had gained a victory over herself. She felt more at peace from that hour, for after all generosity brings its own reward. When we open our hearts more widely to our fellow-creatures, who knows what angelic visitant may pass through the portal? By and by she grew to love those Sundays that she spent with Constance and her husband. Her cheeks ceased to burn rebelliously when Reginald's name was mentioned. After all it was a comfort to hear of him constantly, and to know what he was doing. And Constance was not chary of her news; she had grown very fond of Gloden, and talked to her as she would to Violet.

Gloden often wondered when the news of his engagement would be made public. She longed to ask Constance, but she could never muster up courage; the words seemed to die on her lips. Sunday after Sunday she would expect the announcement, but it never came. As August grew near, she began to dread the return to Grantham, but her mind was soon set at rest on this point. There would be no fear of

her meeting Reginald; Constance told her that he intended cruising among the Channel Islands, and that she and her husband would join him at St. Malo. The house party was postponed until the middle or end of September, and when Gloden heard this she breathed more freely. Harvey joined her in London, and they went down together. Clemency received them with quiet rapture; she was longing for a sight of her boy. Harvey looked well, and was much grown, and seemed delighted to be with them again. School life had not spoiled him—he was still as simple and affectionate as ever; and, though he grumbled long and loudly at Reginald's absence, he consoled himself by spending most of his time at Silcote, riding with the old coachman when he exercised the horses, or shooting rabbits under the gamekeeper's careful supervision. Reginald had left word that he was to have the run of the house, and he and Bernard Trevor found plenty of amusement roaming over the park and home farm, and coaxing Mrs. Norton to produce some of her good things, for they were quite at home in the housekeeper's room.

Clemency looked at her niece a little anxiously that first evening.

'I fear you are but poorly, Gloden,' she said tenderly, as she bade her good-night. 'You have been overworking, and have grown thinner and paler; you must be idle for a bit now.'

But Gloden only shook her head with a smile. 'Hard work suits me, Aunt Clemency. I could not be idle if I tried. I shall work down here as much as ever, unless Harvey wants me.' But as Clemency still looked at her wistfully, she continued, 'Believe me, dear, I am well, only I am tired of myself sometimes, and then the work helps me.'

And Clemency said no more; her old-fashioned delicacy dared not probe the girl's hurt. There was a sad gentleness about Gloden that touched her; she was graver and quieter, and looked older, and even Harvey complained that Antelope was not up to fun now.

Gloden felt a strange pleasure in visiting her old haunts. The very stones of Grantham had grown dear to her. One day, at Harvey's request, she went up to Silcote, and wandered through the park and garden, and then when she was tired they went into the house. The old associations that had driven Reginald away from his home, and that had made him loathe his life there, filled Gloden with delicious sadness. It soothed

her, it made her almost happy, to walk through the rooms where every article of furniture reminded her of the young Squire. As she sat down in the window-seat at the end of the long corridor, a smile came to her lips.

'He was very kind to me then,' she said to herself. 'Nothing can spoil that.'

Tottie, who was pushing her doll's perambulator up and down the corridor, stumped up to her, and shook her curls off her face; London was very hot, and she had been sent down to Silcote with her nurse.

'What was you smiling at?' she demanded peremptorily. 'I never saw nothing at all.'

'I was smiling at my own thoughts, darling,' returned Gloden; and then she lifted Tottie on her lap and covered her round, smooth cheek with kisses. 'Love me a little, my sweet, for I love you so much.'

'Dad loves me too,' returned Tottie, looking longingly at her dolls. But he is always going away; he runned away, and Aunt Connie kyed, she did. Did you kye too? Dad is going to bring me a lovely new doll when he comes back.'

'Do you want dad very badly, Tottie?'

'Yes'—rather doubtfully. But I did not kye when he runned away. May I kiss you good-bye and get down now?' And Gloden consented reluctantly to this.

How could he bear to leave his child so much? Tottie was such a darling, with her tumbling curls, and dark eyes, and rosy cheeks, and fat sturdy legs; and then, as the child trotted away to her nursery, Gloden rose with a sigh, and walked back through the park to the little church. She would sit in the porch and wait until Harvey was ready, and look at the white gleaming tombs in the twilight. It was lonely, but she did not mind it; the only ghosts she feared were those of her imagination—those sweet shadowy memories that started up every now and then and beckoned her with faint smiles and outstretched hands. Why had he been cruelly kind? He had lured her heart out of her bosom by his looks and words. How was any girl to resist such delicate kindness? Too well she knew the mischief that had been done, and that was now irreparable; it was her nature to be faithful, and she knew that she must always love him.

That evening, as she played in the best room, Clemency stood outside with the quiet tears coursing down her cheeks. How the violin wailed! What thrills and sobs of pain seemed

to echo through the room! What drawn-out harmony, faint and sweet, as of some patient soul in purgatory, praising God for the cleansing fires! 'Life is pain, and pain is purification, and after pain comes peace'—that is what it seemed to say. 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain.' But here it seemed to pause and waver; and then a mighty crescendo—a wave of triumphal and final sounds: 'Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory.' Yes, the victory—the victory over self, over pain, over all that hinders perfection, and keeps the soul in its low prison-house of personal desires.

'The creature seems to understand her,' thought Clemency, wiping her eyes as she went downstairs. She always called the violin the creature. 'It might have been made out of her own heart-strings, only it sounded as though one of them were broken. Well, God help women's hearts, for they are mighty delicate things, and brittle to a rough touch, and only the Son of a mortal woman could understand what they have to bear.'

Gloden spent most of her leisure time with Violet, as Winifred was away spending her holidays under Ewen's roof. Miss Wentworth was growing slowly worse. She had been up to London for the best advice, and an operation was considered necessary. But the physician warned Violet that even this might not ensure lasting benefit, and that practically her days were numbered. 'We can prolong, but we cannot hope to save life,' he had said; 'the mischief is of long standing.'

Miss Wentworth took the news very calmly; she had insisted on hearing the truth. 'None of my family were long-lived,' she said quietly, 'and I never expect to make an old woman. You must put up with me for a few months, Violet, and then I shall cease to trouble you.'

'You are no trouble to me, Cousin Tess, and I hope you will be spared a long time'; and Violet evidently meant what she said.

The patient, cheery invalid was a very different person from the loud-voiced Theresa Wentworth, and Violet no longer desired her absence. The sick-room at the Gate House was a bright and cheerful one. Theresa bore her sufferings bravely, and said little about them except to her nurse and doctor. When Violet went into her room she always found her cheerful, and ready to take interest in all her doings.

'She is really heroic,' Violet once said to Gloden, as they sat together in the gable room, that was still Violet's favourite resort. 'Dr. Parry tells me how much she suffers; he says she

is seldom out of pain, and yet she never complains. In her place I should be so moody and irritable; and then she is always missing Mother.'

'Poor thing! she was truly attached to her.'

'Yes; she has begged me to let her grave be as near Mother's as possible. The only time I have seen her agitated was when she asked this. To pacify her I had to select the very place, and it did seem so dreadful when she may live a year or two longer, but it has quieted her mind. She often speaks of her "green garden," as she calls it.'

'She must be a great care to you.'

'Not so much as you may think. We have such an excellent nurse, and so many friends come in to sit with her. I always go to her after dinner for an hour or two until her bed-time, and then she likes me to read to her and tell her the news of the day. She says it gives her thought for the many hours that she lies awake; but I am scarcely with her at all in the day-time.'

'And you are not lonely?'

'No'—with a quick vivid flush that set Gloden wondering; 'my solitary life is full of interest. The day is never long enough for all I have to do; and now I ride so much, I feel as though I have strength sufficient for ten women.'

'I suppose you will be quite gay next week?'

For in a few days Reginald was expected home in time to receive his house party; and again the sensitive colour came to Violet's face.

'Yes,' she said quietly; 'there will be a large party at Silcote, and Constance says I must be there a great deal to help her, and of course I shall be glad to do so. I am always so happy when my dear Constance is expected; I think I love her more every day.'

'I am not surprised at that; no one can help loving Mrs. Wyndham,' returned Gloden.

And then, as she walked back from the Gate House, she told herself that Violet would take her place openly at Reginald's side as his *fiancée*, and that it was the thought of this that had brought the blushes to her cheek. How thankful she was that the holidays were over, and that she was going back to her work! She was eager to be back in her quiet lodgings again. It would be easier to forget them both when she had only the fear of Boski before her eyes. She had not worked well at Grantham—Harvey and Violet had made such demands on her time; but now she would buckle to in earnest.

When she paid her first visit to Boski after her return, the old professor, who was in a bad temper, looked at her sarcastically.

‘Holidays do not seem to suit you,’ he said drily. ‘Do you need to be reminded that a musician ought not to look as solemn as one of your English undertakers? You are too young for such gravity; you must amuse yourself, and you will do better. Come, now, let us hear the result of these two months of idleness.’ But with all his fault-finding he was not ill pleased. Gloden always played better after one of these tirades, which seemed to put her on her mettle.

That month was the most lonely that she had ever spent. With the exception of her landlady Mrs. Drake and Signor Boski, she did not exchange a word with a single creature.

Her Sundays were especially solitary. When her letter to Harvey was written, she hardly knew how to occupy herself between the services. Reading wearied her, and she was not always in the mood for playing. She would sit at her window with her hands folded in her lap, looking down at the passers-by. The shop-girls in their cheap finery walking with their sweethearts, or some artisan in his Sunday clothes, wheeling his child in the perambulator, while his wife, carrying the baby and leading another, dragged meekly beside them. How happy they all looked! how engrossed with each other! When the child in the perambulator cried, how her father whistled and chirruped to her! They were poor people; the mother looked worn and delicate, but the children were clean and well cared for. Their home was humble, but they loved their little ones, and doubtless they loved each other. Life did not only mean work and drudgery. Hark! one of the children was speaking.

‘What shall I do with them flowers, dad? I wants to push Sal, I do.’

‘Give ’em to me, Jem; I’ll mind them for you. Why, look at him, mother; he is pushing the p’ram as never was!’

‘Ay; he is strong and big for his size. If only Sal took after him!’

And then the little procession went on again, Jem red in the face and pushing manfully, and Sal crowing, with the tears still on her cheeks.

Gloden’s thoughts followed them for a while. Then she took up her violin and began to play softly to herself, ‘He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.’ And as the melody flowed over her soul, and the church bells began chiming for Evensong, she

thought less of the arid wastes of life, and more of the heavenly pastures. And then came thoughts of Eltringham, and how one Sunday evening her father had preached upon this very text; and how, as they paced the lawn together in the June twilight, between the white lilies, he had said to her, 'Be good, and you will be happy, my child; never forget that, Gloden.'

'Oh, father, I will be good!' and Gloden clasped her hands together. 'What does it matter if I am happy or not?' And then she laid aside her violin and dressed herself, and went down to St. Margaret's.

And so the weeks went on. Gloden worked hard, and took her daily walk and tried to be content; but it was terrible loneliness for a girl. If she could have had Griff with her he would have been a comfort, but she dared not bring him to London. Clemency told her in her letters that the poor animal had pined sadly at first after she and Harvey had left; but Bernard Trevor had taken him out on his first half-holiday, and since then he had seemed more cheerful.

'But he is as sensible as a Christian,' wrote Clemency, 'and it is my belief that he always knows when the postman brings a letter from you or Harvey, for he looks in my face and wags his tail as much as to ask if you are coming back, and when I say, "Not yet, old fellow," he just shrinks under the table in a dejected manner.'

'If I could only have my dear old Griff here!' Gloden would say to herself; but she consoled herself with the thought that the Wyndhams would be back soon. They were expected home towards the end of October, and then her Sundays would cease to be solitary.

CHAPTER XLVI

AT HYDE PARK GATE

‘Silence does not always mark wisdom.’—S. T. COLERIDGE.

THE first day that Mrs. Wyndham returned to town she wrote a little note to Gloden, telling her that she would expect her on the following Sunday at the usual hour.

It was Gloden’s custom on fine Sundays to walk through Kensington Gardens and across the Park on her way to Hyde Park Gate. She liked the long walk and the fresh air, and if she were too early she would sit down on one of the seats, enjoying the rest and quiet. On this first Sunday after Mrs. Wyndham’s return, she started earlier than usual. The soft autumnal air seemed to lure her. It was a lovely afternoon, and only the yellow leaves that strewed the grass bore witness that the summer was over, and that the breath of decay had already touched everything.

As she approached Hyde Park Gate she saw the Wyndhams’ house was gorgeous with the crimson festoons of the Virginian creeper, and at the same instant she remembered that Silcote Hall would be clad in the same brilliant foliage. She knew well how it would look this afternoon as one walked up the avenue, every window draped and festooned with the lovely creeper. At this very hour, perhaps, Mr. Lorimer would be standing in the porch, with all his dogs round him, preparing for his afternoon walk. Somehow it was impossible to sit quietly under the trees, so Gloden wandered aimlessly down one long path after another, the crisp leaves scrunching under her light footsteps, and the soft vaporous sunlight stretching between the tree-boles, until a distant clock striking four reminded her that Mrs. Wyndham would be expecting her. Rex and Ninian would have finished their Sunday lessons by this time.

As Gloden entered the house, Constance came out of the

little conservatory with some dark red chrysanthemums in her hand. She kissed Gloden affectionately, and then put them against her grey dress. It was the first day that Gloden had laid aside her mourning, and Constance looked at her approvingly.

‘How nice you look, dear! I have such a weakness for grey tweed, and it suits you so well. You must have some of my chrysanthemums to give you colour, for you are far too pale, you naughty girl. Now will you go upstairs into the drawing-room, and I will follow you in a few minutes. You will find Reggie and the boys there.’

‘Reginald!’ For an instant Gloden could hardly draw her breath. Happily, Constance was giving her attention to the flowers she was arranging, and did not notice that her lips turned white. It was so unexpected. She was so utterly unprepared for it. ‘May I stay with you?’ was all she could say.

But Mrs. Wyndham only shook her head with a smile. ‘I am going to Harcourt. He wants to show me some letter he has written; but Reggie will amuse you until I come. He knows you were expected. Take off your things, dear. There! you have no idea what a finish those chrysanthemums give.’ And Constance nodded to her and went off to her husband’s study, perfectly unconscious of the volcano she had raised.

He was expecting her; he had heard her ring, of course. Well, she must go through with it. It was nine months since they had last met. The thought that he was here in this house, and that she should see his face, almost turned her dizzy; it was some minutes before she could school herself into calmness—before she could summon up courage to turn the handle of the door, but by that time she had herself well in hand.

There was a small anteroom leading to the drawing-room, only divided by heavy amber plush curtains. As Gloden drew these back, she saw Reginald at the end of the long room, standing by the window, with the two boys near him. As he heard her footstep he turned and came to meet her, but there was no smile on his face as he greeted her.

‘How do you do, Miss Carrick?’ he said gravely. ‘It is a long time since we met, not since I went to Rome’; and then he put a chair for her, and sat down himself, drawing Ninian between his knees. ‘I hope London agrees with you?’

‘Yes, thank you,’ returned Gloden, in a low voice; and then she spoke to the boys, while Reginald still looked at her with the same marked gravity.

The poor girl felt a little bewildered; this was not what she

had expected. She had dreaded to meet the bright, affectionate smile, and to feel the close hand-clasp. Never before had she seen him look gravely at her. He was changed, too; he looked thinner and older. This was not the old Reginald whose memory was only too dear.

If she had only known that Reginald was far more nervous than she was! He had been schooling himself ever since the morning for the meeting that he dreaded, and now it was come he was overdoing his part. At the first sight of her the old soreness and anger returned, and, strange to say, the grey dress and cluster of dark red chrysanthemums added to his displeasure. She could dress herself gaily now that she had her desire; no doubt she wished to charm her London audiences. At Grantham she had never decked herself with flowers. A moody look came to his eyes as these thoughts passed through his mind.

As for Gloden, there was a lump in her throat that rendered speech difficult. Why was he so stiff and strange in manner? Had she displeased him in any way? Perhaps he was vexed at the career she had chosen for herself; and yet what would that matter to Violet's lover? But she must break this unnatural silence, that seemed as though it had lasted for hours; in reality it was only a few seconds.

'Harvey was so sorry not to see you these holidays, Mr. Lorimer.'

Then at the mention of his favourite's name Reginald's moodiness relaxed a little.

'Poor dear fellow!' he said, with some of his old heartiness. 'I was vexed to disappoint him, but I could not help myself. I shall run down to Repton while I am in town. I have always promised to look him up.'

'That is very kind of you'; and then quite unexpectedly her eyes filled with tears. Reginald looked surprised.

'Oh, there is no kindness in the matter; I am very fond of my old school, and it is an understood thing that I should show Harvey all my haunts. How did he look?' And now his manner softened. 'I hope you are no longer uneasy about him?'—for perhaps the tears in her eyes were on Harvey's account.

'No, indeed. He is very well, and has grown so much, and he is so happy at Repton; he was not even sorry when the holidays were over. You were very good to let him be so much at Silcote, Mr. Lorimer; he and Bernard enjoyed themselves thoroughly.'

'It is just as well some one should make use of the place,

for I am rather sick of it myself. I think I shall go abroad again in the winter.' Then Gloden looked at him in such manifest astonishment that he felt confused. He was an ass to have said that, of course.

Happily, at this moment Rex and Ninian struck boldly into the conversation. Uncle Reg should not go away any more into those nasty foreign places, they declared; he must stay at home with mother and them. 'Tottie won't know you if you go away again, Uncle Reggie!' exclaimed Ninian; 'she says she likes a stay-at-home daddy best.'

'I saw Tottie when I walked over to Silcote with Harvey, observed Gloden; but she repented of this rash speech when Reginald looked at her rather strangely.

'Did you go to Silcote? I wonder you took the trouble,' he said drily. 'I suppose you are rejoicing in shaking off the dust of Grantham, Miss Carrick? I daresay you hate the very remembrance of the place. Oh, I can quite understand your feelings. It is an awful bore when one does not care for one's surroundings. I remember you once aired your views to me on the subject.'

'I am afraid I said many foolish things,' returned Gloden, sadly, 'but I should be sorry for you to remember them.' And then she said bravely, 'I hope Miss Winter is quite well. I have not heard from her lately.'

'I believe so,' returned Reginald, indifferently. 'She was over at Silcote last week; she and my sister are great chums.'

And then, to his manifest relief, Constance came back bringing her husband with her, and the painful *tête-à-tête* was over. 'The sooner the better,' thought Reginald, uneasily; for, in spite of his anger, he felt himself falling under the old charm again. There was a new sweetness, a humility in Gloden's manner that disarmed him. But why did she look so sad? He supposed Constance was right, and that she was working too hard. There was a worn look about her, and yet she had never seemed so attractive to him. There was something magnetic in the large dark eyes, and every tone of her low voice thrilled through him.

Constance's presence put them more at their ease, and Reginald relapsed insensibly into his old manner; but though Gloden talked and laughed, there was a dull ache at her heart. What had come between her and that kind friend? Was she to lose his friendship as well as his love? Was he to pass out of her life? No pain she had ever felt equalled this, that she

should be nothing to him. It was a relief when Mr. Wyndham begged her to play to them, and her violin was in her hand again.

Reginald had seated himself in the darkest corner of the room, where the lamplight could not fall on his face; he had drawn Ninian on his knee. But the whole room was full of his presence to Gloden, and it was to him she played, and to him alone.

‘What have I done that you should take your friendship from me?’ That was what she was saying in every chord. ‘Am I to have nothing—nothing? Must it be good-bye to this too?’ This was the refrain through all the variations, crescendo, diminuendo, obligato, until Reginald felt as though he were steeped in dirge-like melody. Then it changed. Ah! what was that she was playing? ‘Oh, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him’—patiently! Ah, the drawn-out sweetness of the chord!—‘and He shall give thee thy heart’s desire—thy heart’s desire.’

Reginald’s eyes were moist in that dark corner, and his heart heaved with strong feeling. ‘Oh, my darling,’ he was saying to himself, ‘if only you could have cared for me! If only this gift of genius had not set you out of my reach! But you went away and left me without a word, and took the hope of my life with you.’

Yes, that was the sting that still worked its deadly venom, and that his man’s pride could never forgive her. She had seen his love; he had made her feel it, although he had spoken no word; and she had thrown it aside, and had gone her own way without one thought of him. He looked at her, standing in the soft mellow lamplight, with the crimson chrysanthemums against her white throat and the wonderful light in her dark eyes, and he knew that she had never looked more beautiful; but her beauty, and her genius, and her love were not for him.

But as she played on, his anger seemed to die a natural death, and his heart softened to her. Was it her fault that nature had made her so—that her work was more to her than love? Was he ungenerously to resent this, and hold himself aloof from her? Would it not be better that they two should be at peace? True she had given him this suffering to bear, but had she sinned so that there was no forgiveness? He had not treated her well; he had been stiff and cold with her; perhaps this was why she had looked at him so reproachfully. He must alter this. They would meet so seldom that surely they might keep the peace.

Meantime Gloden's passionate impulses of regret had spent themselves, and the sacred anthem had calmed and strengthened her. Patience, that was what she wanted—patience to fulfil her life's work, and to walk in the path ordered for her. Not here, perhaps, should her heart's desire be given to her, but her treasure-trove would be found some day, laid up safe for her in sunny Paradise.

'There are the church bells,' she said suddenly, and her hand fell to her side, and after that she would play no more. She must go and pray for him and herself too; that would be better even than music.

She had meant to go alone, for Constance often remained with her husband and the boys, but to her surprise Reginald joined her in the hall.

'I am going to church too,' he said quietly; 'that is, if you do not mind my company. Harcourt will follow us presently'; and, without waiting for her answer, he opened the door.

But it seemed to Gloden, as they stepped out into the autumnal darkness, as though nothing had ever happened so strangely before—as though she were in some dream; the very waving of the tree-tops in the moonlight gave her a feeling of unreality. The sense that after all these months she was alone with him, that they were walking side by side, was so utterly overpowering that she could hardly find breath to speak.

'Ought we not to have waited for Mr. Wyndham?' she said at last.

'No; he was afraid he should be late'; and then he took the Prayer-book out of her hand. 'We have never been to church together before, have we, Miss Carrick?' and Reginald spoke in his old pleasant voice. 'I am rather glad of having this opportunity of speaking to you, for it seems to me as though we had become strangers to each other.'

'I do not know why,' broke involuntarily from Gloden. Were her unspoken prayers answered already? Would he really speak kindly to her again. Oh, if he only knew how she hungered and thirsted for his kindness—how little would content her now!

'I will make a clean breast of it,' returned Reginald, trying to speak with his old frankness. 'I was a little hurt that you left Grantham without giving me warning. I thought we were such close friends, but of course I know now that I was wrong. But never mind that'—hurrying on, as he found himself on dangerous ground—'I daresay you had good reasons. What I

want to say now is that no doubt you acted rightly ; your playing to-night has convinced me of that. You remember I once told you I disliked a public life for women, but in your case I will allow I was wrong ; you have undoubted genius. I have never heard such music as yours—never.'

'Thank you for telling me this' ; and then Gloden stopped. After all, Reginald's speech had given her little comfort. But she had no idea of the magnanimity that prompted him to utter it. Only a sense that he owed this acknowledgment to her, that she had a right to demand it from him, could have induced him to open his lips on the subject. He would be generous to her, and say little of his wounded feelings.

'I am sorry that I hurt you,' she went on. Here a stab of recollection made her voice constrained. 'But I was obliged to make up my mind very suddenly. I cannot make you understand without telling you my reasons ; but I am grieved that you should think me wanting in consideration after all your kindness.'

'Hang my kindness !' thought Reginald, angrily. Somehow her speech displeased him. It was a laboured apology, and he wanted no apology. He did not even care to hear her reasons. He had made his acknowledgment, and his conscience was satisfied ; but she had certainly not met him half-way. 'Want of consideration for his kindness'—and this from the girl he had hoped to make his wife.

'Constance tells me that Boski is very proud of his pupil,' he said lightly ; and again that dull pain made itself felt. He had changed the subject. There was no warm response to her faint apology. He was right, and they had become strangers to each other. 'When do you suppose you will play at your first concert ?'

'Not before next May.'

'Why, that will be another six months'—in surprise. 'I hope you will not work yourself to death in the interval. The game is not worth the candle in my opinion ; but I forget I am speaking to an artist. You looked much better at Grantham, even though you hated the place. Don't you hope the sermon will be short, Miss Carrick ?' for at that moment they reached the church door.

Then a sudden wild impulse possessed Gloden. This should not be their last word to each other. She put her hand on his arm to detain him.

'Mr. Lorimer,' she said, and her voice was full of pleading

sweetness, 'I see you are hurt with me, and I cannot bear it; I have enough to bear without that. Please forgive me. I would not have hurt you for worlds, only I could not help myself. Try to believe that.' And then she turned and left him so quickly that he had some difficulty in following her; and when he had entered the pew, she was kneeling, with her face hidden in her hand.

Reginald was in a turmoil through the service. What did she mean? She had said too much or too little. He had been a fool to enter on the subject. With all her pride and ambition she was soft-hearted—he knew that well—and this softness of heart prompted her to make this apology to him. But how sweetly she had spoken! How wistfully she had looked at him! 'I would not have hurt you for worlds.' Pshaw! she meant nothing by her girlish penitence; for as the grand chords of the organ rolled through the church, certain words were beating wearily in Reginald's brain. 'I asked her if she would go back to Grantham, and she positively shuddered. "Never; I will never live there again if I can help it."'

It was a strange service to both of them, and when it was over they parted at the church door. Gloden would not hear of the gentlemen walking part of the way with her. Mrs. Wyndham would be expecting them, she said, and it was already late. She would take the train back as usual.

'I will see Miss Carrick to the station,' observed Mr. Wyndham. 'Tell Constance not to wait for me, Reg.' And Reginald had no excuse to offer for accompanying his brother-in-law.

'Good-bye,' was all Gloden said; but it was too dark for him to see how pale and sad she looked.

Reginald never knew what he said in answer as he lifted his hat, and the next minute the crowd of churchgoers had hidden her from his sight.

CHAPTER XLVII

IN FOGGY NOVEMBER

'Old friends are best. King James used to ask for his old shoes ; they were easiest to his feet.'—SELDEN.

'I AM glad I said that ; whatever he may think of me, I am glad I said it.' How often Gloden repeated these words to herself that night ! and, though her cheek burned in the darkness at the thought of her impulsive speech, she did not wish it unspoken. Womanlike, she forgot her own pain in a revulsion of tenderness. Mr. Lorimer was hurt with her ; in some way he had felt himself slighted. Well, she had humbled herself, she had asked him to forgive her, and yet the wrong had been wholly on his side. Why had he made her love him ? Could anything atone for that ?

Reginald was far from satisfied with himself that night, and for some days he felt miserable and ill at ease. Gloden's gentle words rang in his ears ; her soft appealing eyes haunted him. Why had he brought this pain on himself ? He would not see her again. He loved her better than ever—far too well to trust himself in her presence again. Then he remembered that he had not answered her ; that there had been no word of goodwill on his part. What would she think of him ? In some way he must assure her that he bore her no unkindly feeling ; but how was he to bring this about ?

An idea came to him at last. And one afternoon when Gloden returned from her solitary walk, she found a large hamper with 'Silcote' on the label, and a tiny 'R. L.' in the corner. She opened the lid eagerly. The hamper was full of flowers—chrysanthemums of every possible shade and hue, delicate fronds of ferns, and lovely hothouse flowers. The conservatory at Silcote must have been robbed of its choicest blossoms. They had been cut with no sparing hands. The

little room seemed steeped in fragrance and beauty. There they lay, with their silent lovely messages of peace and goodwill, with no written word to endorse their meaning. And how sadly and reverently Gloden touched them! Too well she understood why Reginald had sent them. They were to deck the grave of a past and buried friendship. Perhaps in a way—she began to think this—he had cared for her too much, and yet too little. He owed it to Violet to break off a friendship which he found too beguiling; this was the meaning of his altered manner. From henceforth they were to meet on the footing of ordinary acquaintances.

This was what the flowers preached to her day after day, until the lesson sank deep into her heart. If only she could have arrested their decay! A few of the fading leaves were safely hidden away among her treasures. Gloden did not go to Hyde Park Gate for some weeks after this. She had caught a heavy cold one damp evening returning from a concert, and she made this her excuse. She dreaded going there; and as Mrs. Wyndham had her house full of visitors, she noticed Gloden's absence less.

November that year was unusually mild, and Gloden found the close, muggy weather very trying. The heavy atmosphere, the absence of light, oppressed and stifled her; but she fought her depression bravely, and worked harder than ever.

One day when things were at a low ebb with her, and she felt unusually languid and weary, she had an unexpected pleasure. She had just finished her luncheon, and was wondering drearily what she should do with herself during the next hour, when there was a brisk knock at her sitting-room door, and the next moment Winifred Logan entered the room. Gloden, who was sitting listlessly by the fire, sprang up from her chair with an exclamation of delight, and the two girls warmly embraced each other.

'Dear Winifred, how rejoiced I am to see you again! I had no idea you were in London.'

Then Winifred laughed, and dropped her pince-nez. 'I wanted to take you by surprise. I had to bring Hilda and Kate up to their grandmother's, and as I had to do a little shopping for Aunt Janet, Mrs. Duncan asked me to remain the night; so if you will give me some tea, I can stay with you until half-past six.'

'And it is only three now. But you must take off your bonnet, and look as though you were at home'; and Gloden carried her off to her neat little bedroom.

Winifred looked about her with much interest. She inspected the bookcases full of Gloden's favourite works, her father's picture hanging opposite her bed, and Harvey's photo with Griff beside him on the little table by the window; and when they returned to the sitting-room, she put on her pince-nez again and made another tour of inspection. In her opinion Gloden had remarkably snug quarters. There was a comfortable couch and easy-chair, and an old-fashioned escritoire; there were flowers on the little round table—some of the Silcote chrysanthemums—and red and yellow leaves in tall blue china jars on the mantelpiece. Gloden had somehow given an air of refinement to the room by little touches and finishes. A bit of chiuu, a bracket with red leaves and berries from Eltringham in an old Japanese bowl, a little stand of photographs, and a draped easel. Winifred admired and approved. She tested the softness of the couch with its down cushion, and the restfulness of the easy-chair, and then she put her hands on Gloden's shoulders and turned her face to the light.

Gloden tried to shake her off, but Winifred held her fast. Then she shook her head with decided disapproval.

'I cannot compliment you on your looks,' she said abruptly. 'What have you been doing to yourself, child?'

But Gloden turned a deaf ear to this remark. 'Sit down and get warm,' she said peremptorily, as she drew the easy-chair nearer to the bright little fire. 'I have asked Mrs. Drake to make one of her famous tea-cakes for us; she is a Westmorland woman, and comes from the land of cakes. I always have four-o'clock tea, and her black cat generally keeps me company. Now, Winifred, talk—talk; I want to hear all your news, and about Mrs. Logan, and Clacton, and your cousin'—bringing out the last word with visible hesitation.

Winifred's brown, short-sighted eyes had a wistful expression, and she stifled a sigh as she answered—

'Clacton is a dear place, and Aunt Janet is as happy as a queen. It is so nice to see her going among the cottages, with her goody basket, as she calls it, on her arm. She spoils all the old women dreadfully, and Ewen is always telling her so, but I don't think he minds it much.'

'And you liked the vicarage?'

'Yes; but it is far too big, as Ewen says. They have to shut up some of the rooms, and Aunt Janet will find the passages draughty in winter. It wants a dozen boys and girls to fill it and make it cheerful. Ewen means to advertise for

pupils in the spring; he says he has not half enough to do, and yet I am sure he works hard enough.'

'And he is well?'

'Yes, I think so,' returned Winifred, slowly; 'but his life is not full enough of interest; that is why I think taking pupils will be good for him. He wants young people about him to rouse and stimulate him. There are only agricultural labourers and a small farmer or two in his parish; there are no gentle-people within six or seven miles.'

'It must be very quiet, certainly.'

'Quiet! I should think so; one is thankful sometimes when the crowing of a cock breaks the stillness. But all the same the vicarage is delightful. Ewen's study is simply perfect; it looks out on a sunny little lawn and a row of beehives under a rose hedge. There is a mulberry tree near, and an elm tree with a circular seat; and a kitchen garden and a poultry yard, which are Aunt Janet's delight; and there is a field, too, belonging to the vicarage, and an Alderney cow, so Aunt Janet has her heart's desire—a real dairy.'

'I am glad Mrs. Logan is so satisfied with her new home.'

'Dear Aunt Janet! she deserves to be happy. She has been so patient and uncomplaining all these years; and Ewen is so pleased to have her with him. She fusses after him from morning to night—don't you know her ways, Gloden?—and I think he loves her little attentions. Ewen is far more gentle than he used to be'—with another sigh.

'I wonder they let you leave them.'

Then a pained look came into Winifred's eyes. 'They wanted me to stay; Aunt Janet quite cried about it. She says when Ewen has pupils she will have far too much to do, and Ewen agreed with her; but I refused to make any promises. I am going down again at Christmas; it is my "holiday home," as I call it.'

'But it might be your real home too,' persisted Gloden.

But Winifred only blushed a little and shook her head. No one knew how she longed for the sweetness of such a home, with what reluctance she had left Clacton, and the weary heart-sickness that at times assailed her. She had only those two, Ewen and Aunt Janet, and they missed and needed her, and Ewen was unhappy. Why, then, did she shrink from accepting his brotherly offer of a home? Simply because her honest woman's heart told her that her independence was safer, that she was acting rightly and wisely in refusing to live in

her cousin's house. Ewen would marry one day—she always maintained that; under any circumstances she would have to make way for his wife, and the thought of this was simply unendurable. 'Better never enter paradise than be turned out of it,' Winifred would say to herself; and so Clacton vicarage, with its beehives and roses, and its low-pitched rooms and low latticed windows, and pigeons cooing and fluttering under its eaves, was only to be her holiday house.

Winifred, in her wise, staid womanliness, turned her back on the pleasant meadows and whitewashed cottages, and the lime avenue leading to the little Norman church. She would wake up in her room at the Red House, and think longingly of it all—of the sunny terrace where Ewen thought out his sermon, and where the earliest roses bloomed; and of the pleasant parlour—Aunt Janet never would call it a drawing-room—where they sat in the evening, and where Ewen would read aloud to them while they worked.

'Winifred, my dear,' Ewen had said to her that last evening when Aunt Janet had left them alone, 'I wonder you can have the heart to leave us when we want you so badly; it is not like your unselfishness and kind heart. I thought my cousin Winnie would never have turned her back on us.'

He spoke reproachfully, even sadly; but, though her heart melted within her at his words, she was true to her own sense of duty.

'Winnie will never turn her back on the kindest and best of cousins,' she said, trying to smile as she answered. 'You know, Ewen, if you or Aunt Janet are in any trouble, you have only to send for me; no duty would keep me from you for an hour.'

'But you still persist in your resolution of going back to the Red House. You are a faithless woman, Winifred.'

'No, dear'; and now the tears were in her eyes. 'I am only too faithful to you and Aunt Janet, and my heart will always be with you both.'

'Then why not stay, Winnie?' and here he took her hand. 'Come, my dear, come, let us have no more of this high-flown nonsense. Your place is here with my mother, who wants you every day of her life, and with me, who have always been your brother.'

For one moment Winifred wavered; the kindness of Ewen's voice brought a mist before her eyes. But there was one thing dearer to Winifred than her own personal happiness, and

that was truth. Ewen might call himself her brother, but it was no sister's love that made Clacton her earthly paradise.

'Ewen dear,' she said gently, 'you must not press me against my conscience; it is my duty to work. Send for me when you want me, but let me go now.' And then she rose and bade him good-night.

She turned the conversation now by telling Gloden all the Grantham news. She had been to the Gate House and had seen Violet, and Violet had spent an evening with the Parrys. She was looking bright and well, and had given a fairly good account of Miss Wentworth. As for Mr. Lorimer, they saw nothing of him, went on Winifred; his house party had engrossed him. She had met him one day as she and Hilda were walking down the Silcote road. He was riding, and had not stopped to speak to her; he had merely lifted his hat and smiled at them. 'Dr. Parry dined at the Hall one day,' she continued, 'but he thought the Squire looked a trifle dull and out of sorts, not in his usual spirits. He talks of running away again, I hear.'

'I am rather surprised at that,' began Gloden, and then she checked herself. Why should she speak of his engagement to Winifred? Evidently Violet had not confided in her.

She changed the subject abruptly by ringing for tea, and after that Winifred talked more of her own work and Gloden's; and as Winifred, who was very quick in spite of her short sight, had noticed that a cloud had passed over the girl's face at the mention of the Squire's name, and as she had already formed her own conclusions, she guessed that something was wrong between them.

If only Gloden had found courage to speak openly to Winifred, she would soon have been set right on the subject of Reginald's supposed engagement to Violet Winter. Winifred could have assured her that it was a sick woman's fancy, and that no such thought had entered his or Violet's head.

'In my opinion there is some one for whom he cares far more,' Winifred would have added; for she had seen enough during those musical afternoons at the Gate House to warrant her private belief that the Squire was over head and ears in love with Gloden.

But the opportunity was lost. Nothing would have induced Gloden to break through her reserve. If only the suspense were over, she would think, and the news of his engagement made public! The sword of Damocles was over her head, and it might be as well that it should fall.

When Winifred took her leave that evening, she kissed Gloden more affectionately than usual.

'Take care of yourself, my dear,' she said, with kind abruptness; 'we working women have to look after ourselves.'

Winifred's visit had done Gloden good, but a few more days of yellow fogs and clinging dampness brought back the old lassitude. Gloden had never in her life known what November in London meant. She missed the fresh country air of Eltringham and Grantham. The short sunless days, the long evenings, were equally repugnant to her. At times she felt strangely ill; her nerves suffered from constant loneliness and hard, incessant work; and, in spite of all her efforts, her thoughts brooded perpetually on the one forbidden subject.

One afternoon as she was sitting copying out some musical score, working as usual by lamplight though it was only three o'clock, she had a second unexpected visitor. A knock at the street door had arrested her attention, and she sat pen in hand listening with conjectural curiosity to a slow heavy footfall on the stairs, and a moment later Mr. Carrick was announced.

'Uncle Reuben!' she exclaimed joyfully, as the sturdy figure and grey massive head appeared in the doorway. 'Oh, dear Uncle Reuben, how glad I am to see you!' for the sight of the familiar face was pleasant indeed.

'Ay, I made sure you would be glad to see me,' returned Mr. Carrick, patting her benevolently on the shoulder, but looking at her somewhat keenly under his rugged eyebrows. 'What's to do with you, my lass? Miss Logan has been up at our place giving such a poor account of you that your Aunt Clemency quite took on about it. "You must go and see the girl," she said to me more than once, and so to quiet her I promised to do a bit of business at our London house, and come on and see you afterwards.'

'How good of Aunt Clemency to send you! But I am well—quite well'—flinching a little under that mild gaze—'only one has no air to breathe, and one never gets a gleam of sunshine. You must not be anxious about me, Uncle Reuben; when the weather is brighter I shall get out more.'

'Ay, perhaps so,' he returned absently, for he was wondering what on earth Clem would say to the girl. She had a dwindled look, like a plant that had been left too long in the dark, and there were purple lines under her eyes, as though she slept badly. But he kept these thoughts to himself, and answered her with assumed cheerfulness. 'We shall have

Christmas soon, and then Harvey and you will have some fine skating on the Silcote pond, for they say we are to have a severe winter; and maybe so, for the hedges are full of berries, hips and haws, as red or redder than sealing-wax; the lanes are quite cheery with the crimson glow of them.'

'Don't talk to me about the country, Uncle Reuben, returned Gloden, wistfully. 'If you knew how I longed to get out of the reach of these hateful fogs! They seem to shut one in a wall of close white vapour. Yesterday I had to go to Signor Boski—he lives only half a mile away—and, do you know, I lost myself twice. It was so horribly unreal too—one felt like a ghost gliding through the whiteness; and the gas-lights were so yellow, and everything had a muffled sound. I was quite choked and breathless by the time I reached Boski's house.'

'Ay,' returned Reuben Carrick, slowly, 'the country air is a deal wholesomer and sweeter. I daresay it is because I am country-bred, and have lived in it all my life, but this sort of air fairly stifles me. I know when Nat had a London curacy once—he took it for a little while—he had much the same look with him that you have, Gloden. He said it took his strength away, and made him feel as weak as water.'

'But I am not weak in the least, Uncle Reuben,' Gloden protested. 'I could walk miles now if I had Harvey or Griff. How is the dear old fellow? Do you think he misses us still?'

'Well, there now!' returned Reuben, 'I meant to have told you about Griff. Clem says his cleverness beats everything. He spends his days in the shop; I believe he thinks he has to mount guard over the books, for he growls if any shabby-looking customer enters the shop. And he will never wait for his dinner one minute, were it ever so. As sure as Patty says it is served, he jumps up with a bark, as much as to say, "Aren't you ready?" and if we are waiting on a customer, he just goes on barking at intervals in an exasperated sort of way. And he won't sleep anywhere except in Davie's room—I mean the room where Harvey always sleeps—and no amount of coaxing on Clem's part can prevent him from scratching at the door until he is let in; and he lies on the bed too—the young rascal taught him to do that. But then, he has fairly conquered Clem, though she never could abide dogs.'

'You are both so good to him, Uncle Reuben.'

'Oh, as to that, he always has his bit and sup with us, and the warmest corner of the rug of an evening. By the by,

Gloden my dear, your aunt has sent you some of Patty's cakes, a currant loaf of her own baking, and some of our country butter and cream, for she has made up her mind that you are just starving yourself.'

'No, indeed, Uncle Reuben; but all the same I shall enjoy the cakes, and you shall enjoy them with me, for I mean to have up tea at once. You must break bread with me in my London lodging, and I promise you your tea shall be just as you like to have it'; and though Reuben protested that he had just had his lunch and wanted nothing, Gloden had her way.

'I suppose you will not come to us until Christmas,' observed Reuben, tentatively, as he stirred his sugar carefully in his slow, precise way. 'I will take you back with me to-night if you will.'

'No, dear, I could not do that,' she returned gently. 'What would Boski say? He is a terrible disciplinarian, but he is so good and generous to me that I must not complain. I must work hard for another five weeks before my holiday is earned.'

'Well, well, you have made your bed, and must lie in it, I suppose'—in a regretful tone; 'but too much fiddling is a bad thing in my opinion. When you have had enough of it your old quarters are open. I can't say anything fairer than that.'

'No, indeed.' She had just risen from her place to put the kettle on the hob, and on her way back a sudden impulse made her stoop and kiss the grey head. 'Dear Uncle Reuben,' she whispered in his ear, 'I am not ungrateful for your great kindness, but my home can never be at Grantham; dearly as I love you both, and have grown to understand you; I am happier here at my work.'

'Have your own way,' he returned quietly. 'I told Clem I would give you the chance; but she said I might as well spare my breath, for you were not one of those who change their plans with every mood, but take the bad days along with the good, and make no complaint.'

'There is the Squire now,' went on Reuben, 'he is looking quite down in the mouth, and as peaky and dull as when his wife died last spring. 'What's to do with you, Squire?' I said to him when he came into the shop yesterday, but he just tried to laugh it off as though he ailed nothing. He has been sending us game off and on ever since September, and he won't be thanked for it either. He has got a bountiful heart, as

Clem often says, but I would like to know what's gone wrong with him. Well, I must be going, if you will just put up the empty basket. I wish I could have taken you with me, but folks know their own business best, and I don't hold with interfering with them,' finished Reuben, in his simple didactic way.

CHAPTER XLVIII

A BIRTHDAY GIFT

'Nevermore alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall commend
The uses of my soul.'

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

ONE afternoon, about a week after Reuben Carrick's visit to London, Violet Winter was crossing the Park very near the Albert Memorial. She had come up the previous day to spend a week with the Wyndhams. A new oratorio was to be performed at the Albert Hall that night, and Constance was anxious that she should hear a young Swedish singer, who was just then the rising star. Mr. Wyndham had taken a box for the occasion, and Felix Hamerton and Gloden were also invited, and, as it was Violet's birthday, Constance told Gloden that she would take no refusal.

Violet had been spending the morning very happily with her friend, making out a list for a certain grand reception that Mrs. Wyndham was to give in a few weeks' time, and planning her toilette for the occasion; but after luncheon, as Constance had an engagement, Violet went out to refresh herself by a solitary stroll.

It was one of those mild sunny days that belong more to September than November, and which contrast so strangely with the leafless trees and fast rotting leaves; the soft blue sky, with a white fleecy cloud or two, stretched over the long line of houses before her, and as she walked her eyes tracked a spiral curl of white smoke rising slowly in the ether.

'What a delicious crispness there is in the air!' Violet said to herself. 'Who could imagine that in another day or two it will be December? There is something attractive in the slow, lingering decay of nature; this dying autumnal loveliness

reminds me that I am nine-and-twenty to-day, and that youth is over. Not that I regret it,' she went on, truthful even in her self-soliloquy. 'I would not exchange this peaceful feeling for the old restlessness and dissatisfaction. If only dear mother could be with me now!' and then she checked herself, and her eyes brightened involuntarily, for surely she knew that figure that was approaching her; no one except Mr. Hamerton ever walked exactly in that way. Yes, of course it was he; he was raising his hat with a smile as he perceived her.

'How strange that I should meet you!' exclaimed Violet, with naïve surprise, as she gave him her hand. 'Were you coming to us?'—for of course Constance had not expected him until dinner-time, when Gloden also would make her appearance.

'I called at the house, but Mrs. Wyndham was out, and Marshall told me that he thought you had gone into the Park, so I came on the chance of meeting you. Is it not a wonderful afternoon for the 26th of November? It is more like October. Surely you are not going in yet'—with a reproachful look. 'Let us take a turn down that path.'

'Certainly, if you wish it,' returned Violet, readily. 'Constance will not be back for another hour; she had to drive to Notting Hill Gate for the character of a servant. I ought to have accompanied her, but I was selfish enough to prefer a solitary prowl.'

'I am glad you did not go,' was Felix's answer; and then he looked at her with a pleasant smile. 'It is your birthday to-day, is it not, Miss Winter? Let me wish you every possible good wish. Do you know, a little bird whispered the fact to me a few days ago, so I took the liberty of bringing you a little souvenir.'

'It was very kind,' murmured Violet, blushing slightly. How she would prize the souvenir! But surely it was just a little bit strange and unconventional of Mr. Hamerton to bring her a present. She wondered what Constance would say; for Mrs. Wyndham, with all her liberality and good-nature, was rather a stickler for the minor morals.

'Let us sit down for a few minutes,' observed Felix, abruptly. 'There is no one passing, and I want to speak to you, and I can never get you alone; that is why I came this afternoon, in the hope of finding you alone.'

Violet felt a little shock of surprise as he said this. What could he want to say to her? She glanced at him rather timidly. He was not smiling; his eyes had a grave, intent

look. There was a tiny case in his hand ; the next moment he had placed it in hers.

‘Will you tell me what you think of my birthday present?’ he said very quietly. But any one who knew Felix Hamerton well would have guessed at once that some strong emotion was beneath this seeming calmness.

Violet opened it a little nervously. But when the blaze of diamonds flashed out on her, she grew crimson, and closed the case again and hurriedly gave it back to him.

‘Mr. Hamerton,’ she stammered, but her heart beat so violently that she could hardly speak, ‘you know—you must know that I cannot take that.’

But, to her bewilderment, the little grey-gloved hand was detained as well as the case.

‘Why not, Violet?’ he said, looking at her gently. ‘Do you not care enough for me to wear my ring?’ And then he added tenderly, ‘I hope you are not going to tell me that, for I have grown to love you very dearly.’

Was it possible that she heard him say these words? For a moment the green park swam before her eyes ; the fading sunshine seemed to be of dazzling brightness, and glittered like gold. Then it cleared again, for he was speaking still more earnestly.

‘You will not tell me that I have been indulging in a false hope ; all these months I have been trying to get closer to you. My life has not been a happy one ; I have had my troubles, like other men ; but if you can care for me enough to be my wife, I shall think myself blessed.’

Again the eddying circles of brightness before her eyes, and an audible throbbing at her heart ; and then the calmness of an assured and wonderful happiness.

‘Can it be really true?’—those were her first words. ‘You have made me so happy,’ she added simply ; and the next moment Felix, still holding her hand, drew her from the seat, and then they paced slowly away from the houses, with the setting sun behind them.

‘It is November ; it was wrong to let you sit. I must take care of you now ; you have never had any one to take proper care of you yet, you poor child. Violet, you may be sure of one thing—that I shall try to make you happy. You will not refuse to wear my ring now?’

Was it likely she would refuse? There was no one in sight ; they had the wide green park to themselves, and at his bidding

she drew off her grey glove, and let him place the ring on her finger.

'Now you are mine,' was all he said for a few minutes ; but when he looked at her again, the sight of her sweet face, with its shy happiness, seemed to move him too strongly.

'Dear Violet,' he said in a low voice, 'there is something I must not hide from you, for above all things we will be absolutely true to each other. I think I loved you first because you reminded me of one whom I loved and lost. Some day you must let me tell you about Gabrielle, for it is to her I owe anything that there may be good about me. She was an angel of goodness, and she has gone back to her native heaven.'

This noble frankness touched her to the heart. Violet had not been all these years in Felix Hamerton's society without becoming aware of a deep underlying sadness beneath his seeming cheerfulness, and she had often wondered what was the cause of his secret melancholy.

The knowledge that she was not his first love was no shock to her, and could not stir the surface of her full content. The man whom she honoured above all other men had offered her his love, and had plighted his troth to her ; no sadness in the past, no pale disturbing ghost, could trouble her happiness.

'Thank you for telling me this,' she said, looking at him with earnest candour in her eyes. 'I shall value your confidence very highly ; I always fancied that you had known trouble. Gabrielle, did you say ? that is not an English name. May I hear about her now ?'

'No, dear'—pressing her hand ; 'it is too long a story, and we will keep it for another time. To-day there must be no sadness, no shadows from the past, to trouble our happiness. It is a double anniversary, the day of your birth, Violet, and the day of our engagement.'

'Yes,' returned Violet, dreamily.

The sunshine had faded now, and a faint white mist was rising from the ground. It had grown chill and grey, and they were lighting the lamps in Exhibition Road, but no day had ever seemed so beautiful to her. When she woke that morning, how was she to guess that this great gift was to come to her ? that the loneliness of her life was over ?

'It is growing dark,' observed Felix. 'Mrs. Wyndham will have returned and will be wondering at your absence. She is my dearest friend, Violet, my dearest but one now, and you will let me tell her about this.'

‘Of course you may tell her. Dear Constance! she is my friend too.’ And then, in that silence which is so eloquent between two lovers, they crossed the road opposite the large corner white house where the Wyndhams lived.

Constance was alone in the drawing-room. The great standard lamps were still unlighted, but the firelight made a circle of brightness round the little tea-table. As Violet drew back the curtain, with Felix in the shadow behind her, Constance, thinking she was alone, accosted her with playful reproach.

‘Oh, Vi, you naughty girl, where have you been? I have been dying to tell you of my successful expedition, and actually Felix has been here.’

‘May we tell you our news first, Mrs. Wyndham?’ asked Felix, quietly; and then, as she saw their faces more plainly, Constance knew in a moment what it was they had to tell her.

‘Oh, Vi, Vi, is it really true? My darling, how glad I am!’ and Mrs. Wyndham took the girl in her arms and kissed her again and again.

But when she held out her hands to Felix, her beautiful eyes were wet; and as he held them in a silent grasp, she said very sweetly—

‘I need not wish you happiness, dear Felix; I know you will have it. If only Reg could be equally fortunate!’ and then, with a little laugh of happiness, ‘You dear people, to come and tell me this so quickly!’

‘We have not lost much time, have we?’ returned Mr. Hamerton, looking at Violet with a smile. And then, as he placed a chair for her, he said quietly, ‘Will you give us a cup of tea, Mrs. Wyndham, and then I must go back to my rooms to dress? Violet will be glad to rest a little.’

For his keen eyes detected signs of repressed agitation in the girl’s manner. The very weight and intensity of her happiness oppressed her; she was almost overpowered by Constance’s delight. Felix’s ready sympathy understood her at once.

Never in her life had Violet known the luxury of being comprehended without one word of explanation. During the next half-hour she felt how quietly she was shielded from all embarrassment or from any need of exertion.

When Felix rose to go, he said, as he took her hand, ‘Now you will go to your own room and rest, will you not? and then you will be able to enjoy the oratorio. Mrs. Wyndham, I leave her

in your charge. Do not talk to her ; she has had enough talking for the present.'

'So you mean to obey him already, Vi,' observed Constance, with an amused smile, as Violet rose from her seat.

But the girl looked at her a little wistfully. 'Do not think me unkind, Constance dear ; but he is right, and it will be better for me to be alone a little. It is not rest I want ; only to be by myself, and to try to realise it.'

'My dear child, do you think I do not understand what you feel ? I will not be so selfish as to detain you. Let me come with you and see if your fire is burning nicely. Barlow is often so careless. I will not stay one moment, so you need not be afraid.' But, though the fire was good, Constance still lingered for a minute.

'Vi, just let me say this ; it will make me more comfortable. I always wanted Reg to marry you, but now I see I was wrong. Felix will suit you far better ; he is cleverer and stronger than Reggie, though Reg is the dearest fellow in the world, but you always liked a man to be strong.'

'Yes ; but he is far too good for me' ; and Violet's lips trembled a little.

'No, dear, I cannot allow that ; but, next to my Harecourt, Felix is the noblest man I know. He will be so good to you, Violet—so thoughtful and tender. But there, I am breaking my promise ; I will fly.' But the next moment she was back again. 'Dear Violet, I am so sorry, but I must ask one thing. May I tell Gloden ?'

'I suppose so. Mr. Hamerton will not wish it to be kept a secret.'

And then Constance did vanish. And Violet sat down by the fire, and as the light flashed upon the diamonds, a moved, humble look came to her face.

'I am not worthy of this happiness,' she said to herself. 'He is far above me in everything ; but at least I will do my best to deserve it. The very fact that he loves me will make me think better of myself' ; and then she kissed the ring softly. 'Oh, my darling, my darling ! your love gives me the right to call you that now.'

An hour later Gloden arrived. She took off her hat and cloak and went up to the drawing-room, and after a few minutes Constance came to her. She had been talking to her husband, and had only just finished dressing.

She had never before seen Gloden dressed for the evening.

She was in white silk—a relic of her past life—and her neck and arms gleamed ivory white through the rich falling lace; the total absence of ornament only made her appearance still more striking, and for the first time Constance really admired her. There was something peculiarly attractive in the slight, graceful figure, and the small beautifully-shaped head with its soft brown hair.

‘Have you lost your cold?’ she asked kindly. ‘You are looking remarkably well, better than I have ever seen you; but you want colour. Shall I go down and pick you some of those dark red chrysanthemums? Yes; I remember how well they suited you before.’

But as she turned to leave the room, Gloden caught her hands. ‘No, no, thank you all the same, Mrs. Wyndham; but I should prefer to wear no flowers to-night. I am sorry if my plainness offends your eyes.’

But Constance vehemently protested against this. ‘My dear, you are looking perfectly charming. You and Violet will make excellent foils to each other. She is to wear black gauze—Violet always looks so well in black—and I have arranged some stephanotis and maidenhair as a relief. I have insisted that she should wear her pearls too, for of course this is a grand occasion.’

But here Mrs. Wyndham found herself checked in her intended disclosure. Ninian had come in to say good-night, and Rex followed him, and the next moment Felix and Mr. Wyndham entered together.

Felix threw a quick glance round the room before he spoke to Gloden. As usual, she was pleased to see him; but she did not notice any difference in his manner, not even when Violet entered.

The quiet had done Violet good. She had no longer that painfully oppressed feeling. She could smile now in answer to Felix’s quiet greeting, but no one watching them closely would have known that these two were recently-affianced lovers. Felix talked on still to Gloden, while Violet gave her attention to Mr. Wyndham. Nevertheless Felix had taken in every detail—the calm sweet face, and the pearls that scarcely showed against the round white throat, and he did not lose one of her words.

At dinner she sat beside him, and now and then they would exchange a few remarks together; but Gloden, sitting opposite them, never suspected that anything unusual had happened. She only thought Violet was looking very pretty and happy.

Constance found no opportunity to impart her news to Gloden until the oratorio was half over. Violet had gone to the back of the box a moment to speak to Felix, and had left her seat beside Gloden vacant. Mrs. Wyndham took it.

'Gloden,' she whispered, 'I have been wanting all the evening to tell you something. It seems unkind that you should not share our happiness, and Violet said that I might tell you.'

It had fallen, then, the sword of Damocles. For one moment Gloden drew a hard breath that seemed to pain her. Then she looked at Mrs. Wyndham quite calmly. Had she not for months prepared herself for this?

'I know your news, dear Mrs. Wyndham,' she returned quietly. 'It is very good news indeed. I thought Violet looked very happy to-night, and of course this is the reason. I must wish her joy; but'—bringing it out bravely—'I wonder Mr. Lorimer is not here.'

'He is coming up next week,' returned Constance, placidly. She was not in the least surprised at this mention of Reginald; she only wished he were here to share their pleasure, and thought it nice that Gloden should remember him. 'I wanted him to bring Violet up—it would have been so much pleasanter for them both; but he could not leave just then. Something has gone wrong with the Slaters at the Fiveacres Farm, and Reggie said he must stop and see them through their troubles. Oh, here comes Violet back! I must give up my seat now'; and Mrs. Wyndham moved tranquilly away, perfectly unconscious of Gloden's mistake.

Gloden's hands and feet were cold, and she felt as though her teeth chattered a little. Nevertheless, she played her part well.

'Dear Violet,' she whispered, 'I cannot say much now, but I wish you every happiness from my heart. You both deserve to be happy. Will you tell him so from me?'

'Certainly, if you wish it; but you might congratulate him yourself. May I come and see you one day, if you are not too busy?' And then hastily, as she felt Felix take his place behind her, 'Is not this music lovely? Ah! Mdlle. Ferber is going to sing the solo. We must not lose a note of this.'

Violet was soon happily absorbed in the music, which seemed to blend so exquisitely with her new joy; but the sweet high notes fell flatly on Gloden's ear, and the melodious trills, which they said afterwards resembled bird notes, sounded

like mocking discord to her. It had come, then; the blow had fallen. Good-bye to hope, to love. Henceforth life would mean nothing but duty.

Years afterwards she remembered that evening, and the miserable blank feeling that had crept over her as she sat beside Violet. How well she recalled every incident! Some one from a box near had cried, 'Bravo!' softly, as the pure liquid notes floated through the hall, and Violet had leant back in her seat smiling. The next moment Felix's dark face was very near hers, and he whispered something in her ear; but Gloden, wrapt in her own Nessus-like shirt of wretchedness, never noticed Violet's expression, though she remembered it afterwards with stupid wonder. Of course, Mr. Hamerton was speaking to her of Reginald. Of Reginald—— Stop; she must never call him that, even to herself; he must be Mr. Lorimer. 'I am sure he is fond of you, Antelope. He thinks ever so much of anything you say.' Tut! why did that silly boyish speech come to her mind now?

But these recollections were not to be banished. The solo had closed, and the choir had burst into a wild pathetic refrain. What words were those blending with the singers' voices?

'Kindness! You are using the wrong word. There can be no kindness in my dealings with you. There is nothing in the world that I would not do for your comfort. You know that well enough by this time, Gloden.'

Did she know it? Reginald's future wife was sitting there beside her, with that soft, satisfied smile on her face.

CHAPTER XLIX

CROSS QUESTIONS AND CROOKED ANSWERS

'So grave, so wondering, so content,
As one new waked to conscious life,
Whose sudden joy with fear is blent.'

JEAN INGELOW.

THAT night Gloden fought the hardest battle that poor human nature can fight, for the enemy of her peace lurked in her own bosom. The very strength and force of her character added to the bitterness of the conflict. Like all young creatures, she craved for personal happiness, and it was not easy to dislodge the demon of selfishness and discontent. Gloden was in no measure meek and submissive by temperament. She took her troubles hardly. She had pined in proud misery during her first few months in Grantham, and it was not until her anguish at Harvey's danger broke down the barriers of her chill reserve that the softening influences of discipline fulfilled their needed work.

'I was ever a rebel,' she would say to herself sadly, for she never deceived herself on the subject of her faults. 'When trouble came, I fought it as though it were a personal adversary. I am afraid I was what the Bible would call very stiff-necked.'

But, despite her seeming coldness, Gloden's nature was intense; when she cared for any one, no change was possible to her. The tenacity of her affections equalled their strength. Her friendship for the young Squire of Silcote had insensibly merged into love, and no effort, no force of reasoning, had weakened the vivid impress of his individuality and the magnetic attraction of his affection. Even when she made the fatal mistake in regarding it as a thoughtless flirtation on his part, she was incapable of any lasting resentment.

She was always excusing him in her own mind. She had

been weak and credulous. Was it likely that a man in Mr. Lorimer's position could seriously be in love with Reuben Carrick's niece? The young heiress of the Gate House would be a fitter mate for him. He had done her no wrong—that is, no intentional wrong; for

Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as want of heart;

and it had just been want of thought on Reginald's part. Young men, even the best of them, were so heedless of their looks and words. Her father had often told her so. And Mr. Lorimer's kind nature predisposed him to say pleasant things. It was she who ought to have known better. The sentry of prudence had played her false, and that most artful and dangerous of all enemies had taken possession of the unguarded citadel.

But Gloden's good angel did not forsake her that night, and before long she was breathing a humble petition that the grace of selflessness might be vouchsafed her. 'Let me be able to rejoice in the happiness of others without demanding my share continually; help me not to love him less—that would be impossible—but to love him more worthily.' And when Gloden had attained to this prayer the victory was hers.

For there are bloodless battles fought, watched by the great cloud of witnesses with breathless and undying interest—fierce conflicts that leave their scar on the soul for evermore. These are the marks of victory—wounds by which the faithful soldier will be known in the other world. Here he may have suffered and fallen; the host of the alien may have routed and driven him from the field again and again, but he would not yield himself up as a prisoner. No; battered, bleeding, disarmed, he has again returned to the charge, 'faint, yet pursuing.'

Gloden remembered, when she was in the cab the previous night, that she had never appointed an afternoon for Violet to come and see her. She had driven off straight home from the Albert Hall, and had found no further opportunity of speaking to her.

But the following evening she received a little note from Violet, fixing the next afternoon for her visit. The last passage in her letter rather puzzled Gloden. 'Mr. Hamerton will fetch me on his way to Hyde Park Gate. He dines here every evening; Constance insists on it, as I shall not be long in town.'

'How strange,' she thought, 'that Violet should care to see Mr. Hamerton so often!' But she supposed that Mr. Lorimer's intimate friend was hers too. It would be pleasant to receive him in her lodgings, for she liked him, and always found his conversation so interesting.

She was secretly dreading the interview with Violet, but she made up her mind that she would behave as well as possible. Violet should not complain of any lack of sympathy; she would enter into all her plans for the future. 'I will not think of myself at all,' she said to herself, as the hour approached for Violet's visit. 'I will try and forget for one afternoon that there is such a person as Gloden Carrick; if I once remember my own existence I shall be lost.'

It was rather a strange resolution, but Gloden acted up to it. When Mrs. Wyndham drove up to the door and deposited Violet, Gloden received her with a pleasant smile.

'It is so good of you to spare me a whole afternoon when you are only going to stay a week in town,' she said, kissing her; and then, when Violet had thrown off her wraps and had established herself cosily by the fire, she made a little speech that she had carefully prepared beforehand, but she was standing behind Violet as she spoke. 'Dear Violet,' she said, 'I said hardly anything to you the other night, but it was not because your news surprised me; I have been prepared for it a long time. I was sure—oh yes, I was quite sure—that he cared for you, and I do hope that you will both be very happy.'

Violet found this speech a little perplexing. 'What can you mean, Gloden?' she asked, in a surprised voice. 'How could you be sure when I had no idea of it myself? Even Constance did not venture to believe it. Do you know'—dropping her voice—'when he first spoke to me I felt as though I had no breath with which to answer him; it seemed such a miracle to me that he could really love me.'

'Then you were very blind,' returned Gloden, with a forced smile, 'or else you were too humble. As for Mrs. Wyndham's incredulity, you are making a mistake there. It was the dearest wish of her heart; she has often told me so.'

'You don't mean it!' and Violet blushed with pleasure. 'I had no idea of that; I thought every one was as much taken by surprise as I was. You know how quiet he is, Gloden—so much graver and deeper in feeling than other men of his age; so, although he was very good to me, and paid me a great deal of attention, I never dreamt it was anything but

friendship. You know how many years we have known each other.'

'Of course, you were old playfellows.'

'Well, no, not exactly that; but I was hardly grown up when I saw him for the first time. But until Reginald's marriage we saw a great deal of each other; he was always coming down to the Hall.'

'Yes, of course; and then you were such close neighbours.'

'That was just it; we were always meeting either at Silcote or at the Gate House. Dear mother liked him so much; it is such happiness for me to know that now. She liked them both, but Reginald was really her favourite. He was so bright, and mother loved brightness.'

'I was rather surprised to hear you call him grave just now,' observed Gloden, who had been struck by a certain incongruity in Violet's speech; 'he seems so wonderfully light-hearted in spite of his troubles.'

'Oh, I was speaking of Mr. Hamerton, not Reginald. Have you not got a little mixed? Do you know, Gloden, I rather prefer a man to be grave. Of course Reginald is delightful, and I am very fond of my old playmate, but he would never have come up to my ideal. He seems to me a little lacking in strength of purpose, and in my opinion a man ought to be strong.'

'What a pity!' and Gloden's tone was so tragical that Violet laughed; but if only she could have read Gloden's thoughts! Gloden felt herself disappointed, almost hurt, with Violet. There must be something defective in her love, or she would never have spoken of Reginald's faults to her. There was a want of reticence, a freedom of speech, that troubled her. 'Fond of her old playmate'; how could she speak of her future husband in that light way?

What if Mr. Lorimer were wanting in strength of purpose? should not his faults be sacred to his *fiancée*? There might be motes in the sunshine, but it was hardly necessary to point them out.

In Violet's place she would not have allowed that her lover was lacking in any virtue. The woman who loved Reginald Lorimer would never have admitted that he was not her ideal; but Violet seemed quite unaware that she deserved censure.

'That is why I am so happy,' she went on, 'though I have never deserved such happiness. The man whom I am to marry is all and more than all that I can wish him to be. He is

above me in everything. And oh, how I rejoice to think that I shall always be able to look up to him, and that he will never disappoint me !’

This speech so utterly contradicted the last that Gloden could only look at her in mute surprise ; but Violet went on calmly.

‘He always seemed apart from other men—more thoughtful, and more in earnest ; but I never really knew what he was until we were engaged, and he could speak to me more openly of his feelings. Oh, Gloden, if you only knew the happiness of being able to reverence the man whom one loves !’

‘And yet you could tell me of his faults’—a little drily.

‘Faults !’ and then Violet blushed, and laughed again. ‘Oh, Gloden, you must not think me too silly, but I have not discovered a single fault yet. Felix—he wishes me to call him that—seems simply perfect to me.’ Then she became aware that Gloden’s eyes had widened with excessive surprise.

‘Violet dear, I do not want to be rude, but why do you talk so much about Mr. Hamerton ? You say so much more about him than Mr. Lorimer, and that seems so strange.’

It was Violet’s turn to be amazed now.

‘Strange to talk of the man to whom I am engaged !’ she exclaimed, unable to believe her ears. ‘There is no reason for me to speak of Reginald ; he is nothing to me now.’

Then for one moment Gloden turned so giddy that she could not see Violet’s face ; but the next minute she was speaking almost angrily.

‘What does this absurd misunderstanding mean ? I was told—at least, I understood that you and Mr. Lorimer were engaged. Will you deny this to my face ?’

Then Violet broke into a merry laugh. ‘My dear child, whoever has put such a notion into your head ? Years ago, before Reginald was married, we had a sort of kindness for each other, but on his side it was mere “lad’s love.” No, Gloden dear ; I am engaged to Mr. Hamerton. Have I not just told you that I have found my ideal ?’

‘Oh, Violet, what a mistake ! But’—here the tears rushed so to Gloden’s eyes, and she was so agitated, that she could hardly speak—‘how could I help believing it when your own mother told me ?’ And then she recounted her conversation with Mrs. Winter.

Violet was perplexed, as well as a little shocked. ‘Poor dear mother ! what could she have meant ? I must ask Cousin

Tess when I go home. Perhaps her wish was father to her thought; but it was not like her to say anything that was not strictly true. I can admit now that your mistake was natural. But how we have been playing at cross-purposes for this last half-hour!

‘Please do not speak of this to any one but Miss Wentworth,’ interposed Gloden, hurriedly; ‘I mean I should not like Mr. Hamerton to hear of my stupid mistake.’

‘Very well, then, I will not tell him; but I really cannot keep it from Constance. You will not begrudge us a good laugh over it, Gloden.’

‘I will begrudge you nothing,’ returned Gloden, with deep feeling. Some strange happiness was fluttering at her heart. He was free; it was no longer a sin to think of him; no other woman claimed him. Gloden’s eyes were bright with the kindling of a new hope; what if after all he had really cared for her?

Gloden Carrick’s personality was no longer thrust into the background, to shiver disconsolately like some beggar child at a feast; there was no effort needed now to rejoice with Violet in her new-found happiness.

‘I never dreamt of this,’ she continued; ‘I always imagined that Mr. Hamerton was not a marrying man. But I am sure of one thing—that his wife will be a happy woman.’

Then Violet gave her a grateful kiss. ‘I am almost afraid of my own happiness,’ she said in a low voice. ‘Gloden, there is one thing that pleases me excessively. You know I never cared about being so rich. I was almost sorry when Uncle Rupert left us all that money; but Constance was talking about it yesterday. She said how useful my money would be to Felix, because he would be able to go into Parliament, and she knew how much he desired that. So when we were talking together in the evening, I repeated Constance’s words, and at first he seemed rather taken aback, for he had hardly recognised that I was so rich, and he had forgotten all about Uncle Rupert’s money. I am sure he was not quite pleased at first; and then he looked at me with that quiet humorous smile he has sometimes, and said, “I have always given heiresses a wide berth. I wish you were not quite so heavily weighted, Violet, but I suppose I must take you and your responsibilities together”; and I am quite sure, from his manner, that he did regard my money as an added responsibility. Is that not different from other men?’

'I don't think Mr. Lorimer is mercenary either'—Gloden felt herself constrained to say that.

'Oh dear, no; he would have married Lady Car just the same without her fortune; but, Gloden, I soon talked Felix into a happier state of mind. We have already arranged things. We are to be married in the spring, and the Gate House will be our country house, but we shall have to live the greater part of the year in town. I could not have borne to have parted with the dear old Gate House, but Felix says there is no need to do so, and that no country house could please him half so well. And he says that Cousin Tess is to consider it still as her home; but do you know?'—in rather a sad voice—'I fear she will not be with us long, and for her sake we must not wish to keep her, for the doctor says longer life will only mean increased suffering.'

They talked a little more about Miss Wentworth, and then Gloden gave Violet an account of Winifred's visit; and then it grew dusk, and Mrs. Drake brought in the tea-things and lighted the lamp.

'How deliciously cosy this is!' observed Violet, glancing round the snug little room. Will it not be nice to pay you frequent visits, and take you for drives? and then you will be able to help me with my musical parties. It is so delightful to think I shall have you and Constance near me'; and then she stopped and listened a little breathlessly, as a knock sounded at the street door.

'That must be Mr. Hamerton!' exclaimed Gloden, regretfully, 'and he will take you away.'

But it proved that Mr. Hamerton was in no great hurry; he seemed quite disposed to linger for a chat. Gloden gave him some tea, and he drew his chair beside Violet, and seemed very happy. He questioned Gloden about her work with friendly interest, and by and by, at his entreaty, she took her violin out of her case and played it to them. There was a quiet, satisfied look on Felix's dark face as he listened. Happiness was late in coming to him; he had waited for his good things, but now the hour of his reward had come. What was that solemn dirge-like music that Miss Carrick was playing? Where had he heard it? Oh, he remembered now! It was in the little chapel in the Swiss valley. It was a mass that they played there often; it brought back to his mind another scene.

A little glade with an arch of meeting branches, and, standing

under a ladder of sunbeams, a slim young creature in white, with dark steadfast eyes, and her hands full of flowers.

Another scene rose before him. They were in the corridor now; he could see the rough carving of the balustrades in the moonlight. A young voice was speaking to him. 'I shall pray for monsieur that le bon Dieu may give him his heart's desire.' 'My heart's desire! Oh, Gabrielle, dear angel of purity and gentleness, who would have thought that time could have brought me such consolation?' and then, with sudden impulse, he laid his hand on Violet's.

She turned to him with a loving smile, as though she read his unspoken thought, and he could feel his pressure returned. Later on, as they walked down the quiet street, he said to her—

'Violet, I was thinking of Gabrielle de Brienne just now. The mass that Miss Carrick played I first heard in the little chapel where I so often went in hope of seeing her. Sweet soul! she promised to pray for me that I should have my heart's desire, and, Violet darling, I think le bon Dieu must have answered that prayer.'

CHAPTER L

'SISTER DEATH' COMES AGAIN TO THE GATE HOUSE

'All God's angels come to us disguised,
Sorrow and sickness, poverty and death,
One after another lift their frowning masks,
And we behold the seraph's face beneath,
All radiant with the glory and the calm
Of having looked upon the front of God.'

LOWELL.

FOR some days after Violet's visit Gloden felt tranquil and happy; then came the inevitable reaction.

If it were true that she had no rival in Violet, what was the meaning of the inexplicable change that she had noticed in Mr. Lorimer's manner?

He had parted from her with the close, lingering handclasp that is so mutely eloquent, and with looks that told her all too plainly how hard it was for him to leave her. And yet when they had met again, after an absence of months, he had accosted her with the chill courtesy that one would extend to a mere acquaintance.

True, he had owned to her quite frankly during their walks together that he had been hurt by her want of confidence, but no such slight misunderstanding could account for the invisible yet solid barrier that had been so suddenly built up between them.

She felt, with an unreasoning sense of wretchedness, that something lay at the bottom of this mystery which it was impossible for her to fathom.

Oh, if she could only see him again! He was coming up to London in a week's time, and then perhaps they would meet. As the days went on she found it difficult to control her restlessness. When Sunday arrived, she went as usual to Hyde Park Gate, but to her disappointment she found two of Mr.

Wyndham's sisters were staying in the house, and there was no opportunity for any private chat with Mrs. Wyndham. Gloden longed vainly to hear Mr. Lorimer's name mentioned. For once in her life Constance seemed to have forgotten her brother, but she talked a good deal of Violet. She had been summoned home rather suddenly. There had been a return of Miss Wentworth's malady, and she was in great danger. Mr. Hamerton had taken her down, and had stayed one night at the Hall, and he had gone down again the previous evening.

'Felix is so tender-hearted,' went on Constance, 'he cannot endure the idea of Violet being left alone at such a time. Poor dear Vi! how new it must be for her to be the object of such care and consideration!'

Gloden perplexed herself sorely over Mrs. Wyndham's silence, but she comforted herself with thinking that perhaps Mr. Lorimer had put off his visit. In another three weeks she and Harvey would be at Grantham, and perhaps they would meet then. Harvey would be up at the Hall every day, and she would hear all about their doings.

On the following Sunday, when she went to Hyde Park Gate she found Mrs. Wyndham in the morning room—a small snug apartment leading out of her husband's study. She had taken a severe chill, and was obliged to regard herself as an invalid.

She looked flushed and heavy, and seemed rather out of spirits.

'I am so glad you have come,' she said, holding out a hot, limp hand to Gloden. 'No, don't kiss me; I have such a horrid cold. I caught it waiting outside the Savoy on Thursday; it was a wet night, but Reggie was so anxious that we should see that new piece by Gilbert.'

'Is Mr. Lorimer here?' asked Gloden, in a low voice. Her heart began to beat more quickly.

'No; he left us yesterday. He has been up with us since Tuesday. Poor dear Reg! it is such a shame that people will take advantage of his good-nature. He had made up his mind to stay at home after all, and we had promised to spend Christmas at the Hall, and now Mr. Glenyon has carried him off again.'

'What do you mean?' But Gloden had a sickening pre-
vision of her answer. It needed no words to tell her that he had gone away.

'Don't you know? I thought Violet had told you that

Reginald was gone to Algiers with Herbert Glenyon; they started yesterday. Reggie did not want to go, but poor Mr. Glenyon is so low about himself, and Reg felt it would be cruel to refuse. He is Lady Car's cousin, and he and Reginald are great chums. He has no one belonging to him, and so Reg thought it was his duty to go. Tottie will come to me next week. I tell Reg she is more my child than his.'

'I suppose they will be away all the winter?' How did Gloden manage to speak in that indifferent tone?

'Oh dear, yes; they talk of going on to Cairo. I do hate to part with Reg. He never used to be away like this. But he will never settle down unless he marries again; I am always telling Harcourt that, and, though he says nothing, I know he agrees with me. You will find me a bad companion to-day, Gloden. It always upsets me to say good-bye to Reggie.'

Gloden tried to find a fitting answer to this, but no words came to her; but Mrs. Wyndham took no notice of her silence.

'Harcourt has gone down to see his mother,' she went on, 'so you may guess how glad I am of your company. If it had not been for this tiresome cold I should have gone with him. She is such a dear woman, and I am so fond of her; but then, she always spoils me.'

'Have you heard from the Gate House lately?'

'Oh yes; I hear constantly. Poor Miss Wentworth is growing gradually weaker, and Dr. Parry fears that she will not last long. Felix went down again yesterday. He puts up at the Hall, and it is such a comfort to Violet to have him. She said in her last letter that he is a tower of strength to her, and thinks of everything. There was quite a sensation in Grantham when they appeared at church together. By the by, Gloden, I have never told you how amused I was to hear of your mistake. I quite forgot to tell Reggie. How he would have laughed over it!'

'I am glad you did not tell him. One never cares to have that sort of thing repeated; and, after all, it was a very natural mistake. Have you not told me often how much you wished your brother would fall in love with Violet?'

Then Constance had the grace to blush. 'Yes, I know; but I see now that she and Felix are far more suited to each other. It is a grand match for Felix, for, though he is well off for a bachelor, he would never be able to think of entering Parliament but for Violet's fortune. He had no idea how rich she was; but they will actually be able to keep up two estab-

lishments. Felix wants me to help him in finding a house in town, and I have already been over one in Inverness Terrace that I think will do. It is just the situation that he wants.'

'It is rather sad that Miss Wentworth's illness should be spoiling things just now,' observed Gloden. And to this Constance agreed.

They talked a great deal about Violet's affairs, and Mrs. Wyndham grew quite cheerful as she described the house in Inverness Terrace.

Gloden did not stay late that evening. Mrs. Wyndham was weak and feverish, and retired to bed early; so Gloden went alone to church, and then walked home. The dark wintry sky with its flickering starlight was in harmony with her heavy thoughts. She would hope no longer. Things would never be put right between her and Mr. Lorimer. He had gone away again, and had made no effort to see her, though he had been in town four whole days. He was her friend no longer, since her very existence was a matter of indifference to him.

She went to bed in this proud, hard mood, and woke with a sense of heavy weight, as though some new trouble had come to her. There was a letter from Harvey on the breakfast-table, which she opened eagerly, in the hope that it might contain some message to her from Mr. Lorimer.

'I have such lots to tell you, Glow,' it began, 'but what with football matches and cramming for the exam., I have not had a moment to write. Mr. Lorimer was here on Monday. He got me off work, and we had a jolly day together. He showed me all his old haunts, and gave me a splendid feed at the Falcon. Some of the fellows were so envious when I told them how many courses we had. And then he tipped me two whole sovereigns. What do you think of that? So I am going to give our form a tuck out. And he was as jolly as possible. But, Glow, isn't it beastly luck for us he is going to Algiers for the winter with that invalid cousin—his wife's cousin, I mean—Mr. Herbert Glenyon?

'He was as low about it as possible, and said he did not want to go, but that the poor fellow was so depressed and needed a companion, and there was no one else. He was so down, and so unlike himself, that I felt quite bad; but when he saw that he pretended to cheer up, and told me a lot of things that we are to do together in the Easter holidays.

'But look here, Antelope, I just want to ask you a question. Aren't you and Mr. Lorimer good friends now? For he scarcely spoke of you at all; and when I mentioned you, he was either silent or changed the subject. Just as I was walking with him to the station I asked him if he would see you when he was in town, but he said he thought not, and would I give you his kind regards when I wrote. Somehow his manner bothered me, he spoke so stiffly, and it came into my head

that you are not such good friends as you used to be ; but I should be so awfully sorry to think that, for he is just like a big brother to me. I have promised to write to him, and I am to tell him about everything and everybody. And he says I may ride Brown Peter every day, if I like. Did you ever know any one so awfully kind ?'

And so on.

Harvey's letter brought no comfort to Gloden ; it only strengthened her sad conviction that Mr. Lorimer no longer cared for her. Her weekly letter to Harvey was already written, but she had left it open in case his should require answer. Directly she had finished her breakfast, she added a few words and then closed the envelope.

'I am glad that you and Mr. Lorimer had such a nice day together,' she wrote. 'It was very kind of him to give you such a treat. Don't get things into your head, Harvey dear. Mr. Lorimer and I have not quarrelled, and there is no reason why we should not be good friends ; but I have certainly seen very little of him lately, and it would have been kind of him to have wished me good-bye, but one must not expect too much of one's friends.'

Harvey frowned a good deal over this passage in his sister's letter : boys of fourteen have tolerably keen eyes, and it had not escaped Harvey that Mr. Lorimer had seemed very fond of Gloden. 'He was always watching her and trying to find out how to please her, and if he could only get me to talk of her he looked quite happy,' thought the boy. 'But the other day he was quite different, and I could not make him out at all ; he seemed afraid of my mentioning her name. It is all very well for Glow to talk in that off-hand manner, but I know that something has gone wrong.' And Harvey often puzzled over this problem.

They went down to Grantham on Christmas Eve, and, as the weather was unusually mild, Harvey rode Brown Peter most days of the week ; but to Gloden it was a dreary time. She had taken cold again, and spent most of her time indoors. Winifred was at her Holiday House, and Violet was too much taken up to come to her often. Miss Wentworth was slowly dying, and Violet feared to be absent from the Gate House for more than an hour or two.

Felix always spent part of Sunday with her, returning to town late on Sunday evening, and these few hours of perfect happiness strengthened her for the week's dreariness.

It was a strange dual life she led. Visions of her own future blended with those long hours of watching in the sick-room.

As the end approached, Miss Wentworth seemed unwilling to have her out of her sight. One afternoon, when Violet had walked over to Market Street to see Gloden, and had remained with her an hour, she was told on her return that Miss Wentworth had seemed very restless, and had inquired after her again and again. She hurried up to her room at once.

‘Have you wanted me, dear? Have I been too long away?’ she asked anxiously.

Then a faint smile came over the invalid’s worn face, and she beckoned to the girl to sit down.

‘No, no; it is only my impatience. You must not mind what a fretful old woman says. Isn’t it strange that Amy’s daughter should be my greatest comfort? When I see Amy I mean to tell her so’; and as Violet looked vaguely alarmed at this, thinking that she was wandering, she patted her hand feebly. ‘No, dear; I know what I am saying, and I do not doubt for a moment that your mother will be waiting for me, as she used to be waiting when I had been a long time away. Dear Amy! I can see her smile of welcome now.’ She paused, and then, looking up at Violet with a half-humorous, half-tender smile, she said, ‘Do you ever wonder why I first loved your mother so dearly?’

‘I thought it was because you were so sorry for her when my father died and left her such a young widow.’

‘No, dear Vi; it began long before that. Did you ever hear of your uncle Philip who died in India before you were born?’

‘Yes, of course; he was my mother’s favourite brother.’

‘Yes, and Philip and I were to have been married. Ah! you start; you have never heard that old story. I had just ordered my wedding dress, when the news came that he had died of cholera. The ship in which he had taken his berth came without him. It was Amy who broke the news to me. Oh, how good she was to me! She seemed like a little bit of Philip. It was then I began to love her, and when her own trouble came, I just vowed to devote my life to her.’

‘Poor Cousin Tess! I wish I had known this before’; and Violet looked at her wistfully. The sunken eyes had a tender light in them; the suffering, gray-haired woman was thinking of her young lover.

‘Amy was so like him, she said, as though to herself. ‘Oh, well, we shall soon meet, my Philip and I. Don’t you think the “many mansions” mean that, Violet? that in one of the heavenly homes we shall find our lost ones again?’

Gloden had gone back to her work before the end came. As usual in these cases, it was very sudden.

It was early on Sunday morning that she died—in the chill dark dawn that heralded in the winter day. Violet, who had thought her less well the previous evening, had insisted on taking the night watch, while the nurse slept in the dressing-room, and Miss Wentworth had seemed pleased with this arrangement. More than once in the night she called her Amy, and rambled a little of the time when they were girls together.

‘I must make haste and finish all my work before Philip comes,’ she heard her say once. ‘Philip is so impatient if I do not give him all attention’; and then she went on whispering for a long time, and only stray words reached Violet’s ear.

After this she was quiet for a long time, and Violet thought she was sleeping. She dozed herself a little until some sound seemed to rouse her, and she started up and went to the bedside.

Miss Wentworth was leaning forward a little on her arm, and there was a strange look in her eyes.

As Violet bent over her she drew a heavy breath, and her head fell on Violet’s arm. When the nurse answered her call, and entered the room a moment later, she gently bade Violet lay her down, for only the earthly remains of Theresa Wentworth lay there.

When Felix arrived the next morning, Violet came down to him looking very pale and exhausted with her night’s vigil, and in sad need of comfort.

‘I must tell you what troubles me,’ she said, as he put his arm round her with a quiet word of kindness. ‘It is not so much sorrow that Cousin Tess has left me. I regret that I was not kinder to her. Felix, indeed I was not good to her; I made her feel that she was always in my way, and that I wanted my mother to myself, and it is this that hurts me so now.’

‘Dearest, I quite understand you,’ was his answer. ‘It is the ghost of our old sins, our old repented sins, that haunt us in the time of our trouble, and scourge us with remorse. We are so sadly at the mercy of our harassing thoughts then; we seem too weak to throw them off.’

‘But ought we to try and throw them off?’

‘Yes, Violet, I think we ought, and especially in your case, when you were certainly more sinned against than sinning.’

No one has any right to come between a mother and her only child. You may be sure Miss Wentworth found out long ago that she had made a grievous mistake; that is why she was so grateful to you in her last sickness. She felt that she had not deserved your kindness.'

'But, Felix, I only did my duty.'

'Yes, darling, I know; but it is not always easy to do that, and, as far as I can judge, you did yours nobly to your mother's friend. Did she not tell you what a comfort you were to her? Be content with this, Violet. Do not mar the remembrance of those peaceful months by any sad memories; "Let the dead past bury its dead"; and, as usual, his words comforted her.

The next thing Gloden heard was that Violet was at Hyde Park Gate. She had left the Gate House soon after the funeral, and would only return there a few weeks before her marriage.

There was plenty for her to do in town; the house in Inverness Terrace had been taken, and she and Mrs. Wyndham had to choose furniture and order the trousseau. Constance had entreated that the wedding might be from their house, but Violet preferred to be married quietly from her own home. Mr. Courtenay, as her nearest relative, would give her away, and two of the Courtenay girls and Winifred Logan were to be her bridesmaids; the fourth had not yet been chosen. Violet had begged Gloden to fill the vacancy, but the girl had quietly but firmly refused.

'Dear Violet,' she said at last, when Violet had again made an effort to shake her resolution, 'do not think me unkind; it is no want of affection or interest that makes me refuse your request, but only a sense of fitness. If you had been married in London, I might have held a different opinion; but you know how Grantham people talk, and, though I have not asked her, I am sure Mrs. Wyndham agrees with me that Reuben Carrick's niece ought not to be your bridesmaid.'

'Nonsense, Gloden,' was Violet's resolute answer to this; 'what do I care whose niece you are as long as you are my friend?'

But Gloden remained firm, and as the spring drew on, Violet began to fear that she would have no fourth bridesmaid.

CHAPTER LI

MRS. WYNDHAM SAYS HER LAST WORD

'I cannot tell how the truth may be ;
I say the tale as 'twas said to me.'

SCOTT.

REGINALD LORIMER found his winter abroad pleasanter than he had expected, in spite of his restlessness and dissatisfaction with existing circumstances. He had not willingly exiled himself, but duty cheerfully undertaken and manfully performed brought its own reward.

In the first place, he was honouring his wife's memory by sacrificing himself for her favourite cousin. Nothing had ever pleased Lady Car more than to show kindness to Bertie. Then he had the satisfaction of seeing his charge improve daily in health and spirit.

'Why, you will be as fit as ever, old man,' he had remarked one day, as they sat at the window of their hotel looking out on the motley and picturesque group of kneeling camels and wild brown faces under fez and turban, water-carriers, fruit-sellers, and Arab donkey-boys, bare-legged and strong of lung, jumbled up into a moving mass. And Herbert Glenyon had not contradicted this remark.

Now and then Reginald had a fit of home-sickness and of longing for his sister and Tottie, but he managed to shake off these moods. He and Bertie made plenty of friends. The two young Englishmen were great favourites in the hotel; and Reginald found plenty of amusement organising parties of pleasure and evening entertainments, while the name of a certain Lady Eva Drelincourt, the daughter of the Earl of Leamington, frequently occurred in his letters to Constance.

When Lady Eva's name was mentioned for the third time, Constance looked at her husband with a smile. 'I think

Reggie seems very well amused,' she remarked meaningly; but Mr. Wyndham only responded to this little feeler with an assenting nod.

In her next letter she begged playfully for a description of Lady Eva, and Reginald, after his usual fashion, fell into the trap at once.

'You are very kind to interest yourself so much in our doings,' he wrote. 'We have been having a rare good time lately. You ask me about Lady Eva. She is quite the nicest girl here, and even Bertie pronounces her awfully jolly. She is not exactly handsome, but very pleasing in face and manner, and her singing is not to be described. Even the donkey-boys gather round the window to listen to her. We shall be quite sorry when our time comes for moving on; but I expect we shall meet in Cairo. Lady Eva has younger sisters with her—their mother is dead—but they are not to be compared to her. As Bertie rather profanely says, "There are no more of that pattern to be got."'

But though Reginald wrote so enthusiastically of Lady Eva, he had by no means forgotten Gloden. He could shake off his moods of home-sickness, but he could never efface the pale, persistent image that haunted him perpetually.

Their gay life at Algiers could not shut out her memory, and when they went to Cairo, and he rode out into the desert, the remembrance was with him still, though, except in Harvey's letters, he never saw her name mentioned.

The strength of his attachment to this perverse, cold girl angered him secretly, and sometimes—such is the nature of men—he would have given half his income to be able to shut her out of his thoughts, and to replace her by the dark-eyed, sweet-voiced Lady Eva, but no such transition was possible to him. As far as Lady Eva was concerned, Gloden was still without a rival. Constance's letters were so full of the approaching marriage that she hardly mentioned Gloden. The last that Reginald received before he left Egypt told him that Violet had gone back to the Gate House.

'Winifred Logan is with her,' wrote Constance. 'Felix would not hear of her being alone, and she preferred Winifred to one of the Courtenay girls. Poor Vi will only have three bridesmaids after all, as Gloden Carrick has refused to be one. I daresay it is good taste on her part, as the wedding is to be at Grantham; but Violet seems much put out about it, and declares that there is no one else whom she cares to ask.'

Rather a bitter smile came to Reginald's lip as he read this. 'Of course it was her pride,' he told himself. 'She had shaken off the dust of Grantham, and she would rather disappoint Violet than give way.'

But after all it would be better for him. He had dreaded the idea of seeing her at the wedding.

It was at the beginning of May that Reginald returned to England. By some mistake he had fixed his arrival a day later, and when he drove up to Hyde Park Gate he found he was not expected.

'Mrs. Wyndham was dressing for the evening,' the butler told him. 'They were dining earlier than usual, as she was going to some concert; but his room was all ready.'

'Then I may as well get ready too. You can send up that big brown portmanteau, Marshall.' And Reginald marched up to his room with the air of an old traveller who is used to scant ceremony and hasty toilet, and in an incredibly short time he was down in the drawing-room.

He found Constance awaiting him with loving impatience. She flew into his arms at once.

'Oh, Reg, my darling boy, welcome home.'

Then he laughingly held her out for inspection. 'Upon my word, Constance, I think you have grown lovelier than ever. I suppose Harcourt gave you that grand velvet gown.'

He shook hands with his brother-in-law and kissed his nephews, and then ensued a rapid interchange of question and answer.

Why had he arrived a day too soon? and what had he done with Bertie Glenyon? He had left him in Paris, and come on without him. Well, never mind; it was nicer to have him all to themselves. Was he asking why Constance had got herself up so grandly? Well, it was a grand occasion; he must please remember that a concert at Prince's Hall was by no means a light affair, when it was the *début* of a promising artist. Then a quick change passed over Reginald's face, and there was no fun now in his eyes.

'Of what concert are you speaking?' he said a little gravely, as he adjusted the buttonhole that Constance had just handed him.

'My dear Reg,' returned his sister, 'surely my last letter has not missed you; that would be too provoking.'

But another round of question and answer soon proved that no such letter had reached Reginald, and that Prince's Hall was still a dark mystery to him.

'Well, it is Signor Boski's concert,' explained Mrs. Wyndham, 'and Gloden Carrick's first appearance, and, as Harcourt will bear the brunt of the expense, we are a little anxious that it

should be a success. Most of my friends have taken seats, so that the hall will be pretty full. Harvey is at Regent's Park, and will be Gloden's escort to-night. When I saw her this afternoon, she was quite cool and collected, and laughed at the idea of being nervous. She says she will leave that for us.'

'Miss Carrick is not a nervous person, Constance,' returned Reginald, still busy with his buttonhole.

'You are spoiling that stephanotis, Reggie,' remonstrated his sister. 'Oh, how glad I am you have come to-night! Harcourt is obliged to go down to the House, but now I shall have you to take care of me.'

'What a fool I was to take that boat!' he thought savagely; 'I had no idea that I should be let in for this.' Then, to cover his embarrassment, he asked if Tottie were asleep; and Constance took him up into the nursery, and as he hung over his little girl's cot and kissed the flushed face of the sleeper, he forgot for a few minutes the ordeal that awaited him.

Dinner was a somewhat hurried affair, and in another three-quarters of an hour they were on their way to Prince's Hall.

Under cover of the darkness, Reginald managed to say with tolerable ease, 'Look here, Con, I will take you to your place, but I will find a seat for myself at the back of the hall. It would never do for me to take the front seat; it might startle Miss Carrick to see me there. Such a little thing puts a person out.'

'Oh, do you think so?' returned Mrs. Wyndham, in a tone of regret. 'I don't like parting with you, Reggie, but of course you may be right, and Harvey will be with me.'

'You had better not tell him I am here, either, or he will get a stiff neck with looking round for me'; and, though Constance laughed, she acquiesced.

They were by no means early, and the hall was nearly full; but Reginald found a place at the end of the last row of seats, directly facing the platform.

His feelings were not enviable, and yet he was impatient to see Gloden. The few minutes before the commencement of the concert seemed interminable. He saw Harvey cross the platform and join Constance, and then came the tuning up of instruments, and the opening quartette, in which Signor Boski took a part, but it may be doubted how much he heard of it. He was staring at a few words on his programme, 'A solo on the violin with pianoforte accompaniment, by Miss Gloden Carrick.'

He was so absorbed in his uneasy musings, that he almost

started when the burst of applause marked the end of the quartette. Then he sat bolt upright and pulled his moustache nervously. There was a sickening throb of expectation, a violent clapping of hands, and then the slender figure that he knew so well crossed the platform and stood there gracefully acknowledging the welcome of the audience.

For a moment there was a mist before his eyes; then it cleared, and he saw her plainly. She was in black, and wore no flower or ornament; but the simplicity of her dress became her well. Many beside Reginald admired Gloden that night, and spoke of the stately grace that distinguished her.

Then she began to play, and the audience grew rapt and hushed; and as she played the old brightness came into her eyes and the colour to her face, and he knew that she had never looked so beautiful.

If she had only guessed who was listening to her! But there was a crowd of upturned faces between them. When she ceased playing, she stood still for a moment, while the tumult of applause broke out, and nothing could exceed the quiet grace of her attitude; then she bowed gravely and withdrew, until she was recalled, and then Signor Boski brought her forward again.

There was no doubt of her success after that. She played again and again before the evening was over, and always the same rapturous applause awaited her. Towards the close of the evening Reginald thought she grew a little pale. Once, as she was resting during an interval, he saw her small head drooping as though with weariness. If he had been nearer, he might have wondered at the look of sadness in the gray eyes.

‘What is it worth?’ she was saying to herself. ‘What is anything worth? All is vanity.’ Then, as the prelude was over, she took up her violin again, and the wonderful sad strain floated through the hall.

When the concert was over, Reginald joined his sister.

Harvey uttered an audible cry of delight when he saw him. ‘Mr. Lorimer! Well, this is awfully jolly!’

Reginald gave him a good-natured nod. ‘Wait a moment, old fellow. Mrs. Wyndham wants to speak to me’; for Constance was signalling to him eagerly.

‘Oh, Reg, has it not been a glorious success? Boski is in the seventh heaven of delight, and really Gloden surpassed herself; she played magnificently. And then what nerve! Why, she never looked confused for one moment. Harvey

dear, are you not proud of your sister? Come, we must congratulate her. Reg, you will come with us, of course?’

‘I think Miss Carrick will be too tired; you had better go alone, Constance.’

But Mrs. Wyndham would not hear of this; Reggie was an old friend, and Gloden would be pleased to see him.

Gloden was standing in the middle of a little group when they entered the room, and did not at once see them; but Harvey rushed up to her.

‘Glow,’ he whispered, ‘who do you think is here? No, don’t turn round; I want you to guess.’

But Gloden needed no guessing; some unerring instinct told her who was behind her. She put out her hand quite calmly to Reginald as he came up to her, and if her lips were pale, of course it was the exertion of the evening that made them so.

‘This is quite a surprise, Mr. Lorimer; I had no idea you were in England.’

But here Constance interrupted her. ‘Gloden, my dear, we are all so proud of you. Boski says you have had a splendid ovation, and that he is more than satisfied.’

‘Permit me to add my congratulations, Miss Carrick,’ observed Reginald. ‘You have certainly earned your triumph.’

‘My triumph?’ repeated Gloden drearily; and then she turned to answer some more congratulations.

‘Come away, Reggie!’ exclaimed his sister, in high good humour; ‘Gloden is surrounded by worshippers, and cannot give us more of her attention to-night. Good-night, you bright and particular star’—kissing her affectionately; but Reginald merely bowed from the distance.

Gloden looked after them wistfully. Why had he not shaken hands with her again? Was this their first meeting? A cool pressure, a meaningless word of compliment, and a grave bow. She put up her hand to her white throat, as though something hurt her; but the next minute she was laughing a little shrilly at some joke of Harvey’s.

Constance was in high spirits, and chattered all the way home. She was so full of her delight at Gloden’s success that she failed to notice Reginald’s brief abstracted answers. Coffee was ready for them in the morning room, and Constance, throwing off her cloak, declared it was early enough to have a good long talk. But her thoughts still ran upon Gloden, and, as usual, she talked of the subject that engrossed her at the moment.

'I am really very fond of Gloden,' she began, as she poured out the coffee; 'we see so much of her now. She is one of those people who improve on acquaintance; no one would guess at first how much there is in her. Do you know, Harcourt admires her immensely. He says she is so perfectly graceful, and that her face is so full of intelligence. She is not really pretty, and yet when she plays or gets interested in anything I have seen her look quite handsome.'

'Oh, no doubt.'

'Yes; but I like Violet's face better. By the bye, Reggie, that reminds me of such a strange thing Violet told me the other day. I am not sure she meant me to repeat it, but it can do no harm now. It was Gloden who told her about it.'

'About what? My dear Constance, you are terribly vague'; and Reginald's tone was a trifle impatient. He knew of old how prolix Constance could be.

'Well, you need not be in such a hurry; and after all I am not sure I ought to tell you, only it puzzles me somehow. Do you know that Gloden thought for a long time—oh, ever so long—that you and Violet were engaged.'

'What?' Reginald almost shouted the word.

Constance looked at him in surprise. 'No wonder you are astonished, for you never seriously thought of Vi; but it seems that poor Mrs. Winter told her just before you went to Rome that you and Vi were privately engaged, and that the engagement was not to be made public for some time, and of course Gloden believed her; how could she do otherwise? Dear Reg, what is the matter? Why do you look so strange?' for Reginald was staring at her with a singular expression in his eyes.

'Never mind about me,' he said hoarsely, 'but more depends on this than you know. Tell me exactly, word for word, all that Gloden, I mean Miss Carrick, said to Violet; I must know every word.'

Constance began to feel frightened; Reginald's manner was so extremely odd. What was it to him what Gloden Carrick had said? But she thought it best not to thwart him.

'You must be very careful not to speak of this, for Violet's sake,' she said rather gravely; 'for she is very much perplexed about the whole thing. Do you recollect the day before you went to Rome?—or was it the day before that? I cannot quite remember. Well, Gloden went to the Gate House and found Mrs. Winter alone. She was looking very ill, and seemed in

low spirits, and it was during their conversation that she told Gloden that you and Violet were really engaged.'

'And she believed that lie?' and Reginald's eyes flashed ominously.

'Dear Reg, how could she know that it was not true? And Mrs. Winter bound her over to secrecy; she said it was far too soon after Lady Car's death to make it public. Why did she say it, Reggie? Violet and I are both so puzzled. Violet said she always intended to ask poor Miss Wentworth, but somehow the opportunity never came.'

But Reginald made no attempt to answer this question. Constance's revelation had thrown a new light on Gloden's conduct. Had the news of his supposed engagement anything to do with her abrupt departure from Grantham? Suddenly he remembered how he had waited for her in the avenue a few hours before he started on his journey, and his vague surprise when she came up to him, and he saw the change in her. He had thought then that the alteration he noticed was due to physical causes; she had been suffering from headache the previous day. What—and here an electric shock seemed to pass through him at the suggestion—what if it had been heart-ache, not headache, that had robbed her eyes of their brightness, and filled her voice with sadness?

Constance could bear his troubled silence no longer. She went up to him, and put her arms round his neck.

'Reg, my dear brother, what is it? Why do you look so worried and gloomy?'

Then, as she bent over him, he threw back his head and looked her full in the eyes.

'If Gloden Carrick believed that story,' he said slowly, 'she must have thought me a false-hearted scoundrel to be engaged to one girl while I made love to another.'

Constance owned afterwards that when she heard Reginald say this she felt suddenly numbed, as though she had come in contact with a small electric battery; but, for all that, she did not loosen her arms from his neck.

'Reggie, my darling, be open with me. Do you mean that the girl to whom you made love was Gloden Carrick?'

'Yes,' he said, and there was a sudden gladness in his eyes as he made his confession; 'the girl whom I love, and whom I mean to make my wife if she will have me. Oh, Constance, I see it all now! If I had only known this before!' and then he started up, and began to pace the room with quick, restless

footsteps. 'Ah! no wonder she hated Grantham, for it held her worst enemy; no wonder she was thankful to shake off its dust'; and then he stopped, and his lip trembled under the fair moustache. He had found out now what the uncomplaining sadness in her eyes had meant.

'Oh, my darling, my darling, how we have both suffered!' he said to himself, while Constance sat watching him tearfully; her tender heart was wrung at the idea that he had been unhappy, and that all these months she had known nothing.

'Come and tell me all about it,' she said gently. 'If you loved Gloden, why did you not let her know it?'

But it was soon made plain to her.

'Reggie dear,' she said mournfully, when he had finished, 'you must not be hurt with me if I cannot say that I am glad about this. Gloden is a dear girl, and I love her, but it seems a hard thing to me that my only brother should think of marrying Reuben Carrick's niece.'

'I know all about that, Con.'

'You mean that you have made up your mind, and that no one has the right to interfere. Oh dear! oh dear! what would Car say if she knew this? She was so fond of you, Reggie; she was so devoted to your interests. She told me so often that you had not ambition enough, and that she wanted you to rise in the world.'

'I think it is better to leave all that now; perhaps Car thinks differently now. I do not mind owning to you that I wish Gloden were some one else's niece. But if you think that Reuben Carrick's existence will be an obstacle to our marriage, you are making a great mistake; before twenty-four hours are over, I shall ask Gloden to be my wife.'

Then Constance did a very wise thing. Instead of plunging into endless arguments, which would have been worse than useless, and would only have alienated Reginald or made him angry, she gracefully accepted the inevitable.

'Dear Reggie,' she said, kissing him, and, though her voice was still mournful, it was free from temper, 'if you think it will be for your happiness to marry Gloden, I will not say another word against it.' And, to do her justice, Constance kept her promise nobly.

CHAPTER LII

THE OLD GARDEN

‘Great let me call him, for he conquered me.’

YOUNG, *The Revenge*.

MR. WYNDHAM’S return from Westminster put a stop to any further conversation, and shortly afterwards Reginald bade his sister good-night and retired to his room.

Sleep was out of the question, but he wanted to be alone. If he had only been at Silcote he would have walked off his restlessness, but now he must content himself with pacing his chamber.

Good Heavens! what a fool he had been! a blind fool, too! What must Gloden have thought of him all this time, these miserable fifteen months of misunderstanding and estrangement?

He remembered the sad wistfulness of her eyes, as he had bidden her good-bye that day at Silcote, and the pressure of the little cold hand, and he had flattered himself that it was only the pain of their parting, and all the time she had thought that he had been playing her false.

‘That woman had just told her that Violet and I were engaged,’ he said to himself. ‘No wonder that she shrank from seeing me again, and that the place became hateful to her. She never takes anything easily; she would suffer horribly.’

Reginald’s eyes grew suffused in the darkness. What torture he had unwittingly inflicted on her proud sensitive nature! His anger had widened the breach between them, for he had given her no opportunity of finding out the truth. He remembered their walk together to church. How gentle and humble she had been with him! ‘You are hurt with me, and I cannot bear it’—she had said that to him, and there had been such pain in her voice. ‘Please forgive me. I would

not have hurt you for worlds, only I could not help myself'; and even then she believed him engaged to Violet.

What a horrid tissue of mischief to be evolved from a sick woman's fancy! Doubtless the poor lady had only confused herself as well as Gloden. Very likely she was anxious for him to marry Violet—they were old friends, and he was the best match in the neighbourhood—and in some way her wishes had blinded her.

Well, it was no use tormenting himself with thinking about the past; if only Gloden would forgive him for his doubt of her, he would make up for all these months of misery. And then, as was natural, he fell into a day-dream, and presently grew drowsy over it, and then dreamt again that he and Gloden were in the conservatory at Sileote, and that he had just offered her a red rose. 'Do you know what that means?' he was saying to her; and then a knock at the door woke him, and he found that it was time to get up.

He must not go to her too early, he thought, as he dressed himself; and then he remembered that Harvey would be with her, and that he would find him terribly in the way.

He ruminated over this small difficulty until he went down to breakfast, and during that meal he made up his mind to ask Constance's advice. She might think of something that would help him; but he must get her alone. So he read his paper, or pretended to read it, and then went in search of her.

It was not easy to find the busy house mistress at that hour, but he discovered her at last in Tottie's nursery, lecturing that small damsel rather severely, while Tottie stood hunching her fat shoulders in manifest uneasiness.

'Oh, daddie, we have such a naughty little girl here!' she said, as Reginald appeared on the scene. 'Did you ever hear of any nice little girl hiding her aunt's embroidery scissors and actually cutting off one of her own curls?' and Constance, with sad solemnity, held out a bunch of frizzy brown hair, which no longer grew on Tottie's head.

Reginald broke into one of his boyish laughs, while Tottie, rolling up her arms in her pinafore, peeped at him under her long eyelashes, already comforted in her small soul at the sound of that laugh.

'Come here, you brown-eyed monkey!' exclaimed the stern parent; and as Tottie jumped into his arms, he set discipline and Aunt Constance at defiance by smothering her with kisses. 'Tell me why you cut off your hair, Tottie,' he observed in a

comfortable tone. 'Come, whisper it to dad, and he won't tell Aunt Con.'

'I wanted a curl for my new baby,' returned Tottie, plaintive with injured innocence. 'Ninian had pulled my baby's hair out—he did it 'cos she cried too much—and my curl and my baby's curl are the very same colour. Nurse said so, she did; and I wanted to pin my curl on my baby's head, to look pretty.'

'No—no; it is far too pretty for any doll. Look here, my pet, dad will buy a new baby for his little girl—the prettiest baby that can be got, and Aunt Con shall choose it for us; but Tottie must promise dad first never—never to cut off one of her curls again.'

'No, never—never,' was Tottie's solemn rejoinder; and then she held up her face to be kissed. 'Shall we go and buy it now, daddie dear?'

But Reginald shook his head. 'By and by, darling. Now trot along; I want to speak to auntie.'

But at his first word Constance wrinkled her brow as though something troubled her.

'Oh dear, Reggie, I am so sorry, but I have just remembered that Harvey told me that they were going somewhere to-day, but I cannot recollect exactly what he did say. Was it Richmond, or Bushey Park, or the Zoological Gardens? I really think it must be the Zoological Gardens, because Harvey is so crazy about animals, and there is a new baboon. Perhaps Mrs. Drake will know.'

'But they may not have started yet,' returned Reginald. He looked so business-like and alert that Constance sighed gently to think this prince of brothers had set his wilful heart on Reuben Carrick's niece. 'Come, wish me good luck, sister mine,' he said, rallying her.

And then the ready tears sprang to her eyes. If you could have all the good I wish for you, you would be a rich man, Reg'; and then she sealed her words with a quiet kiss. 'Bring her back to me, Reggie; do not leave me out in the cold.'

And then he promised that, if Gloden would consent to come, he would bring her. 'But we must not be too confident, Constance,' he added sadly; 'in this world there is many a slip between the cup and the lip.'

Reginald was in the right mood for an unaccepted lover, but deep down in his inner consciousness a voice whispered that

Gloden already loved him. He would have enjoyed a walk, but a hansom would take him quicker. But when he drove up to the little house in Regent's Park, he had the mortification of hearing that they had gone out half an hour ago.

'They had an early luncheon,' Mrs. Drake informed him, 'and expected to be back to a late tea.' Did she know where they had gone? To be sure she did. They had gone to Chelsea Hospital to see her old father. He and Master Harvey were fine friends, and it had been a promise of long standing that Master Harvey should see his medals, and be shown over the hospital. 'Miss Carrick was as tired as possible with being up so late playing,' added Mrs. Drake, 'but she could never bear to disappoint Master Harvey'; and she had eaten next to nothing for lunch, so she made up her mind that the poor young lady would come back with a bad head.

Reginald swallowed his disappointment as well as he could, and then he asked if he might go into Miss Carrick's sitting-room for a minute; and Mrs. Drake, naturally supposing that he wanted to write a note, left him there, and went down to her kitchen.

But Reginald had no note to write; he only wanted to see the room where Gloden had spent so many months of solitary work. The place that she had hallowed with her daily presence was a sacred spot to him.

He would have known it for her room at once; the impress of her refinement and culture was stamped on it. Those were her books—her favourite, well-worn books; and there was her violin-case, and he laid his hand tenderly on it as he passed, as though it were a living sentient being. The little work-basket he knew so well was open on the table, with the ivory yard-measure that he remembered, which had pleased him with its elasticity. He peeped into the basket in search of his old friend, and then he drew back, and a flush came to his brow. What could have brought it there? Simply this. He had seen a soiled label directed in his handwriting with his initials in one corner—the label that came with the flowers, and it was pinned carefully, very carefully, against the quilted silk lining of the basket. But Reginald had blushed hotly, as though he had intruded on some sacred privacy. But his eyes were bright, and he held his head high as he walked down Baker Street, and more than one fair passer-by looked at him approvingly. He was in no hurry now, for he had his afternoon before him. He had a modest lunch at a restaurant, and then he took a

hansom again, and had himself driven to Sloane Square. Then he got down and paid the man after his usual liberal fashion, and strolled along King's Road, and then turned down a side street which he knew would lead to the hospital.

It was one of those delicious May afternoons when the air seemed steeped in fragrance, and the golden sunlight filtered through the tender green leaves which had clothed the trees with their spring beauty. The blue sky, the budding foliage, and the sweet perfume of lilacs and hawthorn seemed to whisper to Reginald that the spring of his life had come also. As he turned out of King's Road, a band of the Duke of York's boys suddenly began to play. A little crowd had collected as usual, and one or two old pensioners had stopped to listen. The red coats of the boys' brigade made a brilliant spot of colour in the distance. In front of him was the long sombre façade of the hospital. As he crossed the road he saw the avenue was full of children with their nursemaids; the sound of their young voices seemed everywhere. Some of the old pensioners were sunning themselves on the long benches, while here and there a crippled veteran hobbled slowly past him. Under other circumstances he would have stood still to admire the shifting, picturesque groups and the dim harmonious tints of the old grey building before him, but he was looking too eagerly for a certain slim young figure to give more than a passing notice. Would they be in the recreation-room or the chapel? He stood for a moment hesitating where he should go next, when he suddenly heard his name uttered in a tone of intense surprise, and Harvey came racing down the stone staircase to meet him.

'Well, this is jolly!' was his first remark. 'Who would have thought of seeing you here? Did you ever see such a stunning place? Look at that dear old chap,' as a tall, white-headed old man passed them, with his coat-sleeve pinned to his breast. 'That is Mrs. Drake's father, Corporal Williams. He lost his arm at Inkermann. He has been telling me about it upstairs. Have you been into the recreation-room and seen the medals and tattered flags? The corporal has been taking us everywhere, but I don't mind going again if you like'; and Harvey linked his arm in Reginald's in his usual confiding way.

'I don't care about seeing things to-day, thank you. What have you done with your sister?'

'Oh, she is out there'—pointing vaguely in the direction of the old Ranelagh Gardens. 'She said she was tired, and that the air would do her good. I think the corporal made her

head ache. He is so deaf, you see. Do you know, he got the Victoria Cross, and——'

'You shall tell me all about that presently,' returned Reginald. 'Look here, Harvey, I must take you into my confidence. I have come over here because I wished to speak to your sister very particularly, and I want you to make yourself scarce for a while. Do you understand me, old man?'

Harvey grew suddenly very red; then he nodded, and was about to turn on his heel, but Reginald caught hold of him.

'But you must show me exactly where she is first, or I shall lose no end of time.'

And then Harvey in solemn silence led the way down the steps in the direction of the avenue. He seemed assailed by a sudden shyness, and never once spoke during the course of their brief walk. Presently he came to a standstill.

'You will find her in there,' he said quickly; 'that bit of grey stuff by the wall is her dress. I shall be in the recreation-room when you want me'; and Harvey fairly bolted. Certainly a hint was not lost on him.

Harvey was right in telling Reginald that Gloden was tired. The old corporal's garrulity and Harvey's boyish chatter had utterly wearied her. The excitement and strain of the previous night were telling upon her, and she was thankful to be left to herself.

She had chosen a sheltered corner overlooking the pensioners' gardens. It was very quiet here; only two or three of the old men were working in their little plots, and she watched them with dreamy interest.

How still and restful it was in the sunny, walled-in garden! What a peaceful life it must be after all the turmoil and struggle! Those old men delving so happily among their currant bushes and gay spring flowers had each one looked death in the face. Ah! it was over now, the smoke and the din of battle, the marches under burning suns, the wounds and weariness. 'No more of leaguered camps, or fear of night-alarms.' The sword lies harmlessly in its scabbard, and the tired old soldier has earned his rest.

Gloden felt as though she envied the old men stooping and pottering in the sunshine. She was still in the storm and stress of the battle. And then again, for the twentieth time, she lived over the events of the previous night. The crowded hall, the upturned earnest faces, the sudden tumultuous applause

—what had she cared for it? Her success had been as apples of Sodom to her; mere dust and bitterness.

The sound of a footstep on the gravelled path made her raise her head; and then she gave a great start, and her heart beat faster. Surely she knew that fair-haired man with the light moustache who was coming towards her; it was Mr Lorimer. And then for a moment she thought she was dreaming, for he was standing before her, holding out both his hands, and the old bright smile was on his face.

‘Have I startled you, Miss Carrick? How surprised you look! But of course you could not expect to see me here. Harvey told me where I should find you. What a pleasant old nook you have chosen! May I sit down beside you?’ But he did not wait for permission.

Reginald was talking in this off-hand manner to give Gloden time to recover herself, for she had turned very pale at the sight of him, and he could see that her lips were trembling. The kind look, the old friendly tone, had moved her too greatly.

Reginald was quite content to sit and look at her for a little. How well the grey gown, and the little hat with its knot of golden buttercups, became her. She looked as fresh and spring-like as the day, only she was far too pale. He must speak to her, if only to bring the colour to her cheeks. But at that moment she addressed him.

‘It was foolish of me to be so startled, but I was thinking, and then you stood before me so suddenly.’ She laughed a little nervously. ‘What have you done with Harvey, Mr. Lorimer?’

‘Oh, we shall find him in the recreation-room when we want him,’ he returned coolly. ‘Harvey is a sensible boy; he can take a hint. I told him that I wanted to speak to you particularly, and he made tracks at once.’

‘It must be getting late,’ murmured Gloden, a little incoherently, for the idea that he had followed her here took away her breath. ‘We ought to be going.’ And she was rising from her seat, when a hand quietly compelled her to reseat herself.

‘Why are you so unkind?’ he asked reproachfully. ‘Have I not just said that I wanted to speak to you particularly? Surely you are not afraid of your old friend?’ and he laid his hand on hers. What did it matter that two or three old men were pottering about their gooseberry bushes? They had been young once. ‘Do you know what it is that I have to say to you, Gloden?’

If her life had depended on it she could not have answered him, with that pent-up sob in her voice. She was only conscious of the warm handclasp, and that he was close, very close, to her; but Reginald did not misinterpret her silence.

‘I have followed you here to ask you to forgive me all these long months of misunderstanding. Darling, you will forgive me, will you not? For even when I doubted you I never ceased to love you. I have been loving you all this time.’

She was trembling from head to foot, but he heard her whisper that she had not known it; that she could not believe it.

‘I will make you believe it presently,’ was his answer. ‘Dearest, we will talk of this later on; but there is one thing you must tell me first—that you will forgive me, and that you can love me well enough to be my wife.’

The tears were falling fast now; the revulsion was too great. She had been so broken-hearted, so utterly desolate, and all the time, though she had not known it, the blessing of his love had been hers.

‘Gloden, just one word, one little word of three letters, and I shall be satisfied. Do not keep me in suspense, dear.’

Then she tried to master her strong emotion, and to answer him.

‘I thought you cared for Violet, and not for me,’ she stammered. How was I to know? and you were so strange and different. I am glad you have told me this, because it will make it easier to bear things.’ She stopped, and then continued hurriedly, ‘Mr. Lorimer, you know I ought not to marry you.’

‘And why not, dear? because you do not love me well enough?’ But her agitation left him in no doubt of her answer.

‘Oh no; I do not mean that. But it cannot be right for me to do so. Your position and mine are so different, and’—her voice shaking—‘I am thinking of you more than myself.’

‘Thank you, darling. That is just what I wanted to know.’ And then, as the last old man pattered slowly away, he raised the little gloved hand to his lips. ‘So that is settled.’

Then as she looked up, startled at his triumphant tone, she saw that he was regarding her with a smile.

‘Yes, dear, I quite understand you. You think it is your duty to refuse me for my good; but, happily, I am of a different opinion. I think that the man whom you honour with your love is the only man who ought to be your husband, and as you are the only girl in the world whom I would consent to marry,

we must just take each other and make the best of our circumstances, unless'—and here his voice was a little serious—'you tell me that in marrying me you will spoil your life.'

'Oh no. How can you think that?' And then as she looked up at him, she said quite simply, in her old candid way, 'All this time I have been so dreadfully unhappy. I could not bear the idea that I had lost your friendship. I could not care about anything, not even about my work; and last night it seemed all so paltry and miserable. I never want to play again in public.'

'Gloden, are you sure of that? It will make me so happy if you can tell me that you will not really regret that.'

'I shall regret nothing, now things are right between us,' was the low-toned answer; but he heard every word.

'You shall never repent this concession,' he said quickly. 'You shall have all that I can give you. Gloden, do you remember the music-room? Don't you think the violin will sound grandly there when a certain young lady plays to me in the evening?'

The blush rose to her cheek, and she gave him a quick, shy look. Was it true, was it really true, that her life was to be spent at Silcote? that one day she would be Reginald's wife? He had chosen her with all her faults and unworthiness, and had given her his faithful heart. In those first sweet moments of her happiness, Gloden registered a reverent vow that, God helping, he should never repent his choice, and that no wife should be more to her husband than she would strive to be, and in future years Gloden nobly redeemed her promise.

'Mr. Lorimer,' she said, suddenly starting up, 'it is growing late, and poor Harvey will be so tired of wandering about.'

But as Reginald rose he looked at her with a whimsical smile. 'Suppose we leave Mr. Lorimer behind us'; and then he continued, 'I am going to run off with you and Harvey. I told Constance that if you accepted me, I should bring my sweetheart back to her. You and Constance must be dear friends; I have set my heart on that.'

'I have always loved her,' was Gloden's answer; and then they went in search of Harvey.

Harvey was getting immensely bored. He was staring hard at the case of medals with his hands in his pockets, when he felt himself suddenly wheeled round.

'Oh, you are there at last,' he muttered in rather a grumpy voice, for he was feeling tired and hungry.

'Look here, old man,' observed Reginald, brightly, 'we have always been good friends, haven't we? Well, I am going to be your great big brother now, so just mind how you behave, youngster.'

For one moment Harvey got red to the ears; then he gave Reginald a prodigious wink. 'Tell that to the marines,' he said, and marched off at such a pace that Reginald could not catch him up.

Gloden was standing just inside the chapel, lost in a happy dream, when two arms nearly squeezed the breath out of her. 'Tell me quick, Antelope, before he comes,' panted Harvey, 'is it only chaff, or is something really up between you and Mr. Lorimer? I thought he was humbugging me, the old rascal.'

Gloden turned round and looked tenderly at the flushed young face.

'Darling, are you pleased? I have promised to marry him; he is so dear, Harvey, and he would not let me refuse. Tell me that you do not mind.'

'Mind!' observed Harvey, scornfully; 'it is a tipping bit of news. Come out of the chapel, Glow; I want to throw up my cap and hurrah. You never did a better day's work than when you said yes to that fellow'; and then, with a knowing smile, 'Didn't I tell you there was no one like him? and I am not a bit surprised. I always knew he was foud of you; but somehow, when he said that about being my brother, you know. I just thought it was too good to be true.'

CHAPTER LIII

VIOLET HAS HER FOURTH BRIDESMAID

'The swallow follows not summer more
Willingly than we your lordship.'

Timon of Athens.

AND so the light of a great and unexpected happiness had come to Gloden, and flooded her woman's kingdom with glory. The grey 'winter of her discontent' had fled away before the dawn of a new spring.

True woman even in her faultiness, the old, old story had sounded sweeter in her ear than all the plaudits of an admiring audience, and Reginald Lorimer's love dearer even than the art she had prized so much.

When the first overwhelming moments had passed, Gloden took her happiness almost as simply as a child who, sitting by the wayside expecting nothing, suddenly finds her lap full of royal largesse, and binds her treasure up in the wallet where she had stored her dry crusts. Gloden longed to be alone with her new joy, but Reginald's will was already law to her. 'Constance is expecting us,' he had said, as they walked down the avenue, and she had offered no objection.

But one thing she did say as they drove back. They were alone, for Harvey, with a discretion far beyond his years, had announced his desire of talking to the cabby.

'There is so much that I want to know,' she had said to him, 'and that you have not told me. Last night you were so different, and yet to-day——'

Then Reginald laughed and pressed her hand. 'I don't wonder you are puzzled, darling; but we must go into that another time. Look here, I was never very clear about the beauties of Regent's Park. Supposing you undertake to point them out to me to-morrow, we will send off Harvey to the Zoo, and have a long talk. Will that suit you?'

And Gloden gave a satisfied assent.

Reginald always said afterwards that one of the proudest moments of his life was when he put Gloden's hand in his sister's. 'I want you two to be good friends,' he said simply; and then he had stepped back and watched them.

Constance was quite equal to the occasion. As usual, her behaviour was beyond all praise. It was the perfection of art, because it was thoroughly natural, and yet she said the strangest thing possible to Gloden. For before she kissed her, she put her hands lightly on her shoulders, and looked into the girl's eyes.

'Gloden, dear,' she said gently, 'you know I have never wished this, but Reggie has proved to me that I am wrong. If you will only make him happy, as happy as he deserves to be, I will love you as a sister ought to be loved'; and then she pressed her in her arms, and kissed her warmly.

'Upon my word, Con,' observed Reginald, 'I really do not see what Gloden is to make of that very Irish speech; it seems somehow mixed, don't you know?'

'No; I quite understand her,' returned Gloden, 'and I think it is so nice of her to say just what she thinks'; and then she blushed, and looked at him very sweetly. 'For of course your sister could not possibly have wished this to happen; she knows, and every one knows, you could have done so much better.'

But at this deprecatory speech Reginald suddenly waxed dangerous.

'Gloden,' he said, with assumed sternness, 'we have been engaged exactly an hour and a quarter'—and here he looked at his watch—'therefore I have a right to give you this hint: that if you ever say or imply a word against my future wife, I shall resent it as a personal insult. No one, not even Constance, shall say in my hearing that my sweetheart is not perfect.'

And after this embarrassing speech, Constance, in pity for Gloden, took her away.

But when they were safely shut up in Mrs. Wyndham's room, Gloden looked at her a little pathetically.

'You know I could not help it,' she said pleadingly; 'he would not let me refuse him. But of course I am not the right person for him to marry; do you think I do not know that?' and then her eyes filled with tears. 'You are his sister, and will understand. How is any girl to help loving him, when he is so good?'

‘Dear Gloden, I like to hear you say that about my Reggie.’

‘Why should I not say it when he has given me his love, and is sacrificing his worldly interest for my sake? But he is too noble to care for such things. Do you know what he said to me just now?—that I was the only girl in the world he would consent to marry; and after that there was nothing to be said.’

‘No, of course not.’

‘That was what I felt. He was so above all these petty considerations that one lost sight of them too, and only the real thing remained. Everything was quite simple then’; and Gloden turned to Mrs. Wyndham.

At that moment Constance felt that her brother’s choice was justified. ‘I am sure that Reg was right, dear, and that you will make him very happy,’ she said, kissing the glowing cheek; and then, after a little more talk, she left Gloden and went in search of Reginald.

He was walking rather restlessly up and down the long drawing-room, looking eagerly at the door. When he saw Constance he stopped.

‘Where is Gloden?’ he asked. ‘I have scarcely seen her.’

Then Mrs. Wyndham smiled at his impatient tone. This was not the first time he had been engaged, but she had never seen him quite under this aspect before.

‘I will send her down to you directly; but she begged me to leave her alone for a few minutes.’

And then she came closer to him. ‘Reg, she is charming; I am not a bit sorry now, and she loves you dearly.’

‘I think she does, Con,’ he said simply; and then he added, as though by an afterthought, ‘she can’t help it, you see, when I have been caring for her all this time.’

‘Yes, Reg, dear, I see all that now, and you must both forgive me for not being glad at first’; and then she looked up laughingly at him. ‘She will not mind being a stepmother, Reggie?’

‘I don’t believe we either of us thought of Tottie,’ he returned, rather conscience-stricken. ‘You shall bring her down presently, but I must have Gloden to myself a little.’

And at this strong hint, Constance with much tact withdrew, and the next minute Gloden entered.

As he went towards her she involuntarily paused; the thought of their last meeting in this room came suddenly to her mind, and as she looked at him there was a shadow in the deep grey eyes.

He saw it at once, and with a movement of sudden tenderness he took her face between his hands and looked at it a moment. 'Darling,' he said, 'I can read your thoughts. You will never be able to hide anything from me again; I have the right key now'; and he kissed her.

A few minutes later, as they were standing together by the window, he said to her—

'Gloden, do you know I had quite forgotten Tottie, and Constance reminded me. Should you like to see her, dear?'

'Oh yes!' she exclaimed eagerly. 'Tottie is such a darling, and I have always been so fond of her, but she will be all the dearer to me now.'

The last words were spoken in a very low tone, but he heard them, and pressed her closer to him.

'Thank you, dearest; I know how good you will be to her'; and he was about to ring the bell, when Tottie peeped at them between the curtains with a roguish smile.

'Nursey told me Miss Carrick was here,' she began, in her small voice; and then she bounded across the room and flung herself with friendly force against Gloden.

Reginald thought the pale pink smock and dark rippling curls looked well against the grey dress. There were tears in Gloden's eyes as she lifted the child on her lap, and kissed the firm round cheek.

'Tottie, dear, we must love each other very much,' she whispered in the child's ear.

Tottie put her head on one side and reflected, like a bright-eyed bird waiting for crumbs.

'I love you very much, I do,' she said at last, 'cos you are pretty. Does dad think you pretty?' she continued calmly.

At this embarrassing question, Gloden looked somewhat taken aback; but Reginald was quite ready with his answer.

'Yes, Tottie, he does; he thinks it the best and the sweetest face in the world. And now listen to me a moment, my pet. How would you like your dear Miss Carrick to live with us, and take care of dad and Tottie?'

'Will she come soon, very, very soon?' and Tottie squeezed Gloden's neck with much affection.

'Yes, Tottie, I think she will'—rather gravely—'for she knows how much we both want her, and you must be very good to her.'

'Please do not tell her any more,' implored Gloden, whose cheeks were burning; 'she is too young to understand.'

But Tottie was tolerably sharp-witted. 'If you live with us, you will ask dad to buy my new baby, won't you?' she urged, and she enforced this observation by taking Gloden's chin in her chubby hand. 'Dad did say he would buy a new baby, but he forgot, he did'; and this babyish appeal went straight to Gloden's heart.

'Did he forget? Never mind, my darling. You shall have your new baby to-morrow. Will you let me choose it for her?'

And as he heard this, Reginald's eyes brightened. 'We will choose it together, dear,' he said, stooping over her, and his lips touched the soft brown hair. Car might be quite happy about her little girl, he thought. Gloden would be a loving step-mother. And Constance, who entered that moment with Harvey, felt infinitely touched at the little tableau.

'It looked so sweet,' she said to her husband afterwards. 'Tottie was nestling with her curls against Gloden's cheek, and Reggie was leaning over them both and looking so happy. But I could not help crying a little when I thought of dear Car.'

But Mr. Wyndham wisely made no response to this. Lady Car's successor would be a far happier woman, he thought. Reginald had chosen his second wife by the laws of natural selection, simply because he loved her, and no painstaking and affectionate sister had made or marred the match. The young Squire of Silcote had broken through the prejudices of his narrow little world when he offered his hand and heart to Reuben Carrick's niece, but he always spoke of it as the most sensible thing he ever did in his life.

'Now I shall have my fourth bridesmaid,' were Violet's first words when Felix Hamerton brought down the news of the engagement to the Gate House. 'Felix, are you pleased about this? I always knew that Reginald cared for her, only they would go on making each other miserable, after the approved three-volume fashion.'

But she need hardly have asked the question, for there was an expression of quiet satisfaction on Felix's face.

'I am very glad. I think Reg will be almost as happy as we shall be, Violet, and I need say no more than that.' For not even to Violet would Felix hint his profound conviction that Reginald was in love for the first time in his life.

'So you are to be the Squire's lady, my lass?' was Reuben Carrick's first speech to Gloden, when she came down to Grantham with her bridesmaid's finery in her trunk on the eve of the wedding.

The Wyndhams and Felix and his best man were all at the Hall, and Harvey, who had an exeat, was with them; but Gloden, by her own choice, had gone to Market Street.

Reuben Carrick's face was beaming as he put his hands on his niece's shoulders, but his voice shook with suppressed emotion. 'Ay, but Nat would have been fine and proud to have seen this day.'

'Maybe he sees it, Reuben,' returned Clemency, in her quiet voice. But she said no more until she and Gloden were alone together.

'Dear Aunt Clemency, are you really glad about this?' asked Gloden, as she knelt down beside Clemency's chair, and looked at the mild, motherly face.

'Ay, that I am, dearie. The Squire is an honest man, and he has a big heart. That is what I look at more than at the fine house and the land that your uncle thinks so much of. He is quite uplifted about your marriage, Gloden. He was as pleased as a child when your letter came. "Nat's girl is to be the Squire's lady! What do you think of that, Clem?" and he brought down his hand like a sledge-hammer on the table, and made Griff bark. "She will live at the Hall, and you may be sure that Harvey will live there too.'"

'Shall you mind that very much, Aunt Clemency? Reginald is so good; he said at once that it should be Harvey's home too. But somehow, when we talked it over together, Harvey and I, we felt we should be treating you and Uncle Reuben so badly. You have been so dear and kind to us both.'

Then Clemency straightened herself in her chair, and a little flush came to her face.

'Now, don't you be taking notions in your head, Gloden, and spoiling things. Reuben and I are sensible people, and we never imagined we should get the moon by howling at it, after some folks' fashion. Old people ought not to be like fractious children. Harvey is our boy, and he will be our boy still, whether he lives at the Hall or bides with us in Market Street, and he will always be as welcome to us as flowers in spring; but your uncle and I will part with him gladly for his own good.'

'Oh, Aunt Clemency, do you really mean it?' and Gloden drew a long breath of relief. Her one anxiety would be set at rest.

'Yes, I mean it; and Reuben means it too. Shall I tell you what he said to me only last night? "We shall have to

let the lad go, Clem ; but I doubt you will have a bit of fretting after him. He is a cut above Market Street. His mother was an aristocrat, and the children take after her ; they hold their heads high. Harvey will live at the Hall with his sister, and he will ride the Squire's horses, and go to Oxford, and be as happy as a king ; but he won't change to us—he will never forget the Aunt Clem who nursed him like a mother, and maybe saved his life." These were your uncle's words, though I don't hold with them myself.'

'But I do ; and Uncle Reuben is right. Dear, dear Aunt Clemency, do you think we shall ever forget your goodness to us ?' and Gloden threw her arms round the thin little figure. 'Harvey says he will be your own boy always ; and as for me, do I not owe my happiness to you ? If you had not taken us in when father died, I should never have seen my Reginald.'

'Maybe that is true,' returned Clemency, wiping her eyes, for her tender heart was much moved by this speech. 'But Gloden my dear, here we are chattering on, and I have never asked you when the wedding is to be.'

'Not until the end of August, Aunt Clem ; but it is June now, and it is to be from Hyde Park Gate. Mrs. Wyndham is so kind. I am to give up my rooms and go to her at once, because she says Reginald will be able to see me more easily. Oh, she is so good, so dear and loving. She will choose all my things for me, because she says she knows Reginald's taste ; and when I told her what Uncle Reuben had promised me for my outfit, she was quite delighted with his generosity. And oh, Aunt Clem'—and here Gloden's voice was a little breathless—'can you guess what Reginald has promised for his wedding present ?

'I doubt it will be diamonds, Gloden my dear'—in a voice full of awe.

'Diamonds ? Oh no'—a little disdainfully—'but I am to have some of Lady Car's jewels, I believe. No ; it is a real Stradivarius violin.' As Clemency looked perplexed, 'It is worth more than a thousand pounds, and he has had it ever so long, and it is being polished up, and I am to play it first to him on my wedding day. Isn't that glorious, Aunt Clemency ?'

But Clemency, in her inmost thoughts, would have preferred diamonds.

'Aunt Clemency was not a bit enthusiastic about my Stradivarius,' she said the next evening, as she and Reginald were walking across Silcote Park.

She was still in her bridesmaid's dress, a pale pink that exactly suited her complexion, and Reginald had refused to allow her to change it. Mr. and Mrs. Hamerton had just driven away from the Gate House ; and Reginald, after flinging the inevitable old shoe after them, had coaxed Gloden to go for a walk with him.

'Of course not, you silly child,' was Reginald's teasing response to this ; 'who except you and your friend Boski would care for an old violin that belonged to my grandfather? Gloden,' he went on, linking his arm in hers as they strolled across a little sunny glade, 'I want you to come up to-morrow and see the things I am putting aside for Tottie—Sybil, as we ought to call her. Constance and I have been making a division, and Mrs. Lorimer will have her share.'

'Oh no ; let Tottie have them all,' she pleaded in rather a distressed voice.

But he shook his head obstinately. 'There is plenty for both. My wife must not disgrace me at the county balls, and you have no idea what a blaze some of our grande dames make on these occasions. My Gloden must queen it with them. Why do you look so grave, sweetheart? Don't you know yet that I love to give you things?'

'You are giving me everything,' she returned in a low voice, 'and it is too much ; it almost overwhelms me. Reginald, I want you to forget what I once said in my old rebellious days, that I cared for luxury and all that. I want nothing. I shall never want anything but your love, yours and Tottie's.'

There was a passionate insistence in her voice, as though she were appealing against his lavish generosity, and her agitation and excitement lent a new beauty to her face.

'Darling,' he said quietly, 'I know what you mean, but you must not deprive me of my greatest pleasure ; and remember that you are giving me a priceless gift, yourself. Now, come and play to me ; no one will hear us, not even the servants ; and Constance will not be back for half an hour.'

And as usual he had his way ; and presently through the long music-room there floated the sweet plaintive notes of the violin, and Reginald, leaning against the farthest window, gave himself up to the entrancing melody.

And Gloden played as she had never played in her life before ; and beyond her lay the green park in the evening sunshine, and before her the glorious room that had been Lady Car's creation.

And she was to be mistress of it all, and these lordly

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