

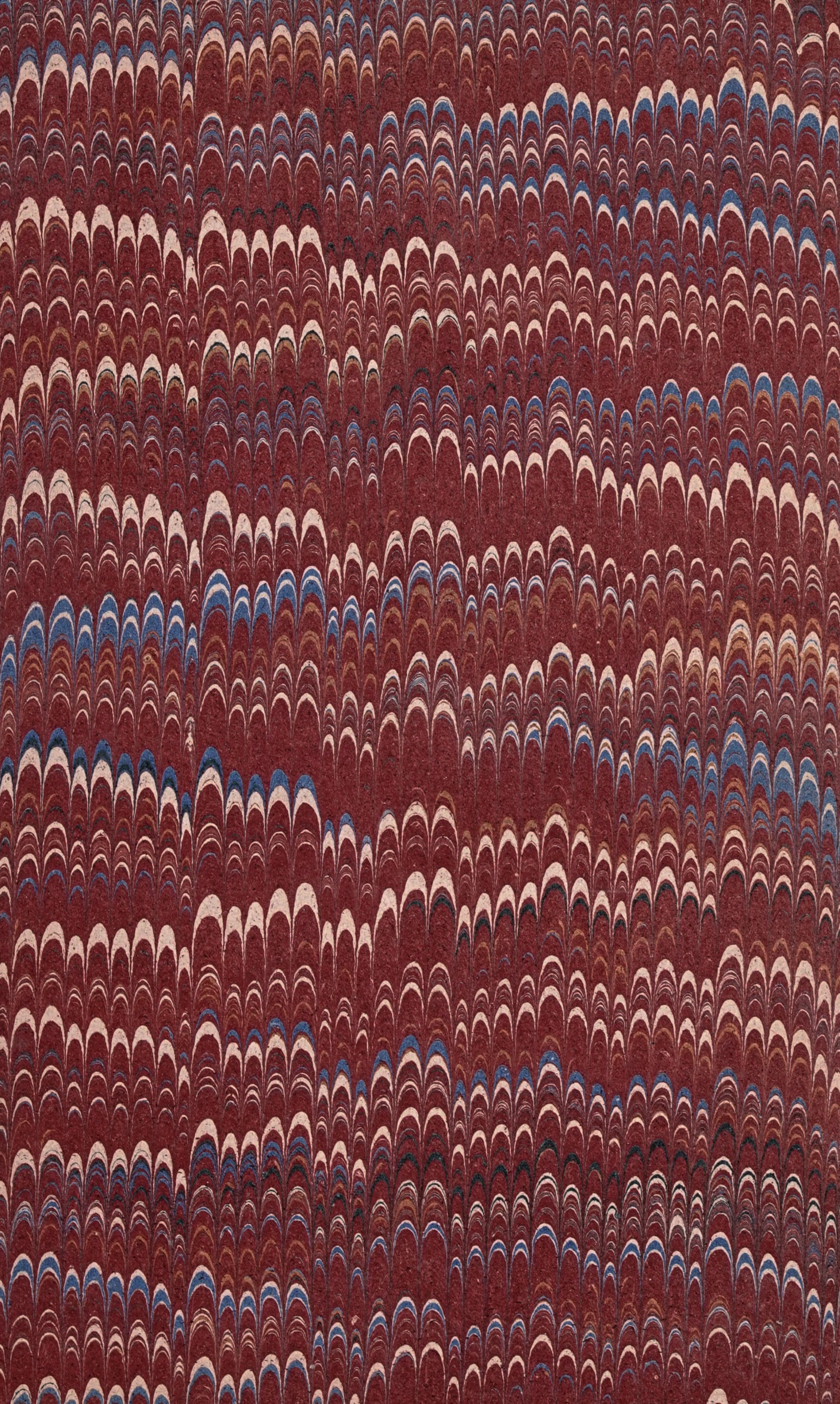


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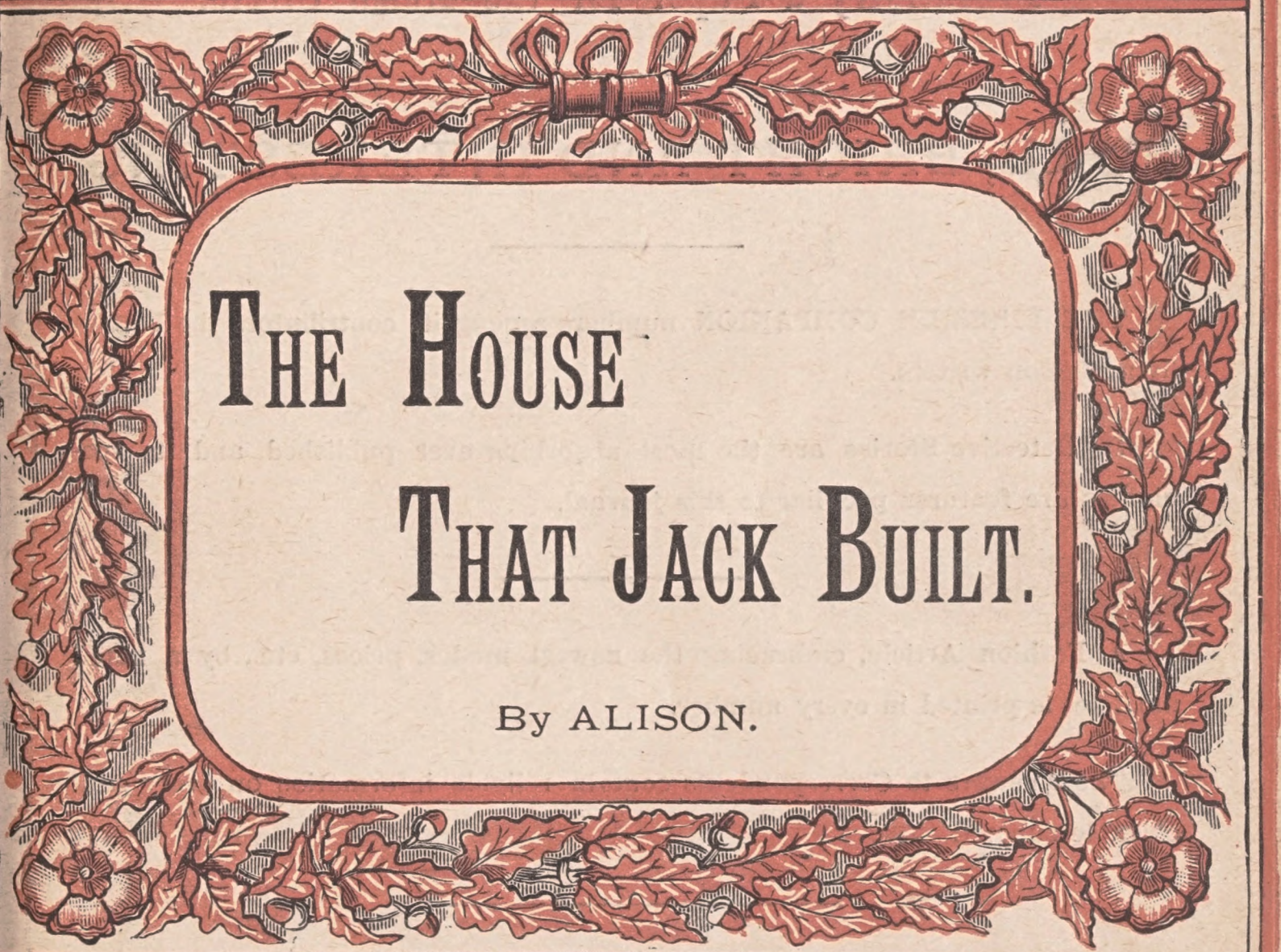
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THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT.

By ALISON.

17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST
"NEW YORK."

George Munro

PUBLISHER

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THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

CHAPTER I

The water is coming down to stay with me. The
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 The Moody Sewing-Party has just risen and begun to
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 and to hunt under tables and forms for missing buttons
 and pieces of cotton; and they are all masterful and
 handled women with the exception of the widow lady
 whom the room more particularly addresses herself.
 "I am so glad," she answers gleefully, as she looks
 at the variety of her contented but first found and
 "I hope you must often have felt lonely at the / water
 house the tables to make a long stay."
 "I had only a few lines from her this morning to say
 that she was coming down by the early train to-morrow.
 I did not even know she was in England. The
 fact I told them that she was staying with my sister
 and I must be curious to see your home and surroundings
 and she says I believe she looks under the / water

THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT.

CHAPTER I.

“MY sister is coming down to stay with me, Mrs. Irving.”

The Rev. Austen Kendal announces the fact rather diffidently, though the Vicarage is his own and he has a perfect right to have his sister staying there as soon and for as long as he pleases. But he is the only man present in the long low school-room, through the open windows of which the June sunshine slants so gloriously. The Monday Sewing-Party has just risen and begun to fold away “blay” calico shirts and blue check pinafores, and to hunt under tables and forms for missing thimbles and reels of cotton; and they are all masterful strong-minded women, with the exception of the widow lady to whom the vicar more particularly addresses himself.

“I am so glad,” she answers pleasantly, as she ties the crape strings of her bonnet under her firm round chin. “I think you must often have felt lonely at the Vicarage. I hope she intends to make a long stay.”

“I had only a few lines from her this morning to say that she was coming down by the early train to-morrow. I did not even know she was in England. The last time I heard from her she was staying with my aunt at Versailles.”

“She must be curious to see your home and surroundings.”

“So she says. I believe she labors under the impres-

sion that I never get a morsel of decently-cooked food, and am in the habit of sewing on my own shirt-buttons with 'housewife' thread. But I rather think I owe the honor of her visit to the fact that Aunt Poigndestre is going to Marienbad, in Bohemia, to drink the waters there; and, as my sister hates Marienbad, it has suddenly dawned upon her that she has an only brother whom she has not seen for two long years."

Mrs. Irving laughs in her pleasant quiet way, preceding him through the school-room door, which he closes and locks behind them. The remainder of the sewing-party have filed out into the road, and are waiting there to wish the vicar good-morning. It is a pretty road, shaded by a double row of elms and chestnuts in full summer foliage. To the left the smoke of the village can be seen rising from the hollow; to the right the small and very ancient church stands close to the roadside, with green graves clustering about it, up the slope of the hill toward Matching Wood.

"Where's Georgie this afternoon?" Mrs. Ryve inquires, as she shakes hands at parting with Mrs. Irving.

"Gone with Jack to make hay."

"Hattie would not come with me to-day because, she says, Georgie never attends the work-parties," Mrs. Ryve says significantly. "I think it is a pity you don't make her come sometimes for the sake of example. You can hardly expect the other girls in the parish to attend if she doesn't."

"I am afraid Georgie would be productive of more idleness than her sewing would be worth," Georgie's mother confesses, shaking her head.

"But you shouldn't let her idle. When a girl is old enough to be engaged to be married, she ought to be old enough to behave herself properly for one hour in the week at least."

"I hope Georgie never behaves improperly," Mrs.

Irving says placidly, the fact embodied in the first part of the sentence accounting very satisfactorily to her mind for the acrimony of the second. "But you must remember she is only seventeen, Mrs. Ryve, and can not be expected to have as much sense as your Sophie and Hattie. It will all come in good time, I hope, but for the present I am satisfied to let the child enjoy herself like the birds and bees."

Mr. Kendal is waiting for her at the gate, and, having delivered this parting shot, she joins him, and they walk away together in the direction of the village. Mr. Kendal always walks home with Mrs. Irving after the sewing-party.

"I think, of all the girls in the parish, Georgie Irving is the least suited to be a clergyman's wife," Mrs. Ryve says to Miss Perrott as they walk up the road. "Such a flighty little thing as she is, and so young too! Fancy the management of the sewing-parties and schools and mothers' meetings in the hands of a child of eighteen!"

"Mrs. Irving is a sensible woman," Miss Perrott answers cautiously. Mrs. Ryve would think nothing of turning round and telling everybody that she, Miss Perrott, had been running down Georgie Irving all the way home from the "sewing-bee." "I am sure Georgie has been well brought up, and, as her mother says, trouble and care will do more to balance her mind by and by than all the lecturing in the world."

"Still I can't think that she is the wife for the vicar," Mrs. Ryve repeats, who has two so much more suitable wives for the vicar at home. "I wonder what this sister of his will be like? Been adopted by an aunt, I believe. I forget where I heard it now, but I did hear the Kendals had been left very badly off when their father died."

"They called it badly off, but perhaps we shouldn't," Miss Perrott observes, dryly. "I dare say Miss Kendal

spends as much in gloves as would dress your Sophie and Hattie all the year round."

"Very likely," Mrs. Ryve allows, who, however, does not exactly like Miss Perrott's tone this afternoon, and supposes it is because she did not send her any strawberries to preserve this year. "Did you hear that all the Dobsons had typhoid fever? I never knew such a family as they are for bringing infection into the parish! I was half afraid to come to the sewing-party to-day; for they say the vicar is with them constantly; and one never knows how a thing spreads."

"But I am sure Mr. Kendal takes every precaution."

"I am sure I hope he does. I don't intend to let my children go to Sunday-school while there is fever about; governess is very well able to teach them—much better than Georgie Irving! I never was more amused than when I heard the vicar had given her a class in Sunday-school!"

Meantime the vicar and Georgie's mother walk down the road into the village, under the green shadow of the wayside elms.

"I am so glad your sister is coming to stay with you, Mr. Kendal."

"I am glad too—for some reasons," the vicar answers, soberly.

"She and Georgie will have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with each other."

"I fancy she is coming down to Matching for no other purpose," he says, smiling. "If it were not that she is naturally anxious to see Georgie, I should be puzzled for a motive for her visit. She is not a girl to bury herself alive in a place like this for nothing."

"I hope she will like Georgie."

"I am not anxious on that score. Nobody could help liking Georgie."

"Is it long since you have seen your sister?"

“It is nearly two years. She was in London when I got my first curacy there. But she has been with my aunt in Holland and at Versailles. Lady Poigndestre is the most fidgety old woman in the world, I think—she never spends more than six months in any one place. I should not be any day surprised to hear that she had taken a summer residence at the North Pole.”

The village lies in a hollow, the road dipping suddenly just at the blacksmith's forge. It is a sleepy old village, picturesque and straggling, with thatched cottages standing for the most part with their gables to the street, and an old gray bridge crossing the river at the bottom of the valley, close to the Somerses' great tall mill.

“Georgie must come to the next work-party,” Mrs. Irving says, as they pass through the sunny village street. “It won't do to have them say she sets a bad example to the other girls in the parish.”

“Let them say what they please,” the vicar answers, warmly—more courageous out of the sewing-party's company than in it. “Georgie shall never be dictated to by any of them.”

“Do you think Miss Kendal will take any interest in parish-work?”

“Lenore?” the vicar says, shrugging his shoulders. “Lenore would feel about as much at home in parish-work as a mermaid in a pair of boots!”

They are crossing the gray bridge now. Mrs. Irving looks down at some women washing clothes in the river, two or three children paddling round them barefoot in the bright, dimpling water. She knows them all by name—for Mrs. Irving is the “notable” woman of the neighborhood; it is to her everybody hurries for a cure for a burn, or a syrup for a cough, or a pattern for a shirt, or an outfit for a girl going to service, or a sheet wherein to bury the dead. She is just thinking now that Mrs. Davy has never come up to the farm for the “sitting” of ducks'

eggs she promised her; but she is too far off to call to her, and the river makes a great noise here over the falls.

“Then I am afraid Miss Kendal will find Matching very dull.”

“I dare say she will—after awhile. But she is coming to Matching of her own free will. If she finds it as dull as ditch-water, she can not turn round and say I invited her down,” the vicar says, shrugging his shoulders.

“We must do our best to prevent such a climax as that! Matching is a pretty place, and in summer the girls always manage to amuse themselves. It was only yesterday I heard Georgie say the days were not half long enough for all the joy she could put into them—if each were three times as long, she could fill them just as full!”

“I hope she will say so always,” Austen Kendal observes, with a tender smile in the deeply-set dark eyes. “Very few can feel like that after their first childhood. But Georgie reminds me of Owen Meredith’s lines—

“ ‘Some happy souls there are that wear their nature lightly; these
rejoice
The world by living, and receive from all men more than what
they give.
One handful of their buoyant chaff exceeds our hoards of care-
ful grain,
Because their love breaks through their laugh, while ours is
fraught with tender pain.
The world that knows itself too sad is proud to keep some nat-
ures glad.’ ”

“And yet I think Georgie is capable of deep feeling,” Georgie’s mother says, not half pleased with the quotation.

“I think so too. She

“ ‘Hath a grace in being gay even mournful souls approve,
For the root of some grave, earnest thought is understruck so
rightly
As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers above.’ ”

“That is more like Georgie,” Mrs. Irving smiles, indulgently. “And here she comes to meet us, with Jack and May Somers! My darling, how she will run when she catches sight of us! There—she sees us now!”

“If I am going to rob you of a daughter, I think Jack has it in his mind to make good the loss,” Kendal observes, looking at the couple coming along sedately in the wake of the flying figure in white.

“Oh, that is a very old story!” Mrs. Irving says, who can see nothing but the nymph-like figure.

“You don’t think it will come to anything?”

“I don’t know,” Mrs. Irving answers gravely—mother-like, she can not bear to think of any other woman taking her place in her son’s heart. “It has been going on since they were children; and I think those childish love-affairs generally die a natural death.”

“You wouldn’t care for the alliance then?”

“Jack might do worse,” Jack’s mother says, though her fair face clouds a little; “May Somers is a dear good girl, and we are all very fond of her. But then I think he might do better. None of the Irvings were ever in trade.”

“I don’t think Jack is ambitious, is he?”

“I am ambitious for him”—with a smiling shake of her head. “May is very pretty and very good; but what mother will ever think any girl quite pretty enough and quite good enough for her only son?”

“I suppose not,” the vicar allows.

But he is not thinking of Jack now. He is looking at a girl with an innocent sweet face, faint surprised eyebrows, and soft eyes of clearest hazel, who has rushed up and seized her mother by both hands, her straw hat awry, her soft hair falling in dusky rings over her temples, the dimples showing in both her rose-flushed cheeks.

“My darling child, why do you run so fast?”

“Because I wanted to reach you as soon as I could!” the young voice pants out gayly.

“But what would Mrs. Ryve say if she could see you?”—with a laughing glance at the vicar.

“She would call me frivolous!” Georgie laughs, shrugging her slim shoulders.

“And with reason, I am afraid.”

“Mother, do you want me to be like Sophie Ryve?”

Mrs. Irving shakes her head reprovably; but she can not say she wishes her little daughter to be like Sophie Ryve. It would be hard to wish that sweet face and nymph-like figure anything but what they are.

“We were making hay, May and I,” Georgie goes on, while her mother sets her hat straight, with a loving look into the clear eyes. “It was glorious in the meadow, and Jack said we made ourselves quite useful; but Rover would scatter the hay as fast as I raked it up.”

“I think you encouraged him, Georgie,” May Somers smiles demurely.

She has come up with her companion, a tall broad-shouldered young man, very like his mother, with the same gray eyes and more than the same look of determination about the mouth and chin.

“Had you a large sewing-party to-day?” Georgie asks, as, Jack taking his mother’s arm, she and the Vicar are left to follow at their own sweet will.

“The usual people, I think.”

“And I suppose they did a great deal of work?”

“I suppose they did the usual amount. I could not judge.”

“Did you want me to go, Austen?” the girl asks, something in his manner making her raise the innocent clear eyes to his face inquiringly.

“Not unless you liked, dear.”

“I suppose I ought to have liked; but they are such a

set of stupid old fogies—except mother; and it was so pleasant out in the meadow in the hay!”

“Much pleasanter than in the school-house, I can very well believe.”

“I will go next Monday, Austen.”

“My dear child, don’t imagine I wish to influence you one way or the other.”

“But, if you could shut yourself up there to read to them, I don’t see why I should not shut myself up to sew.”

“It depends entirely upon how you look at it. I knew it was my duty to be there.”

“I suppose it was mine too”—with a short sigh; “but I don’t care for those missionary books you read; and I hate Mrs. Ryve!”

“My dear Georgie, do you think I particularly affect Mrs. Ryve?”

“But you are so good,” the girl says, not looking at him however, but straight before her at Jack and his mother, walking up the hill with May Somers.

“Good!” Kendal echoes, smiling. “Georgie, I have a piece of news for you.”

“What is it?”

“Guess!” he says, enjoying the puzzled look in the wide hazel eyes.

“Mrs. Ryve is sending away her new governess already.”

“No; guess again. It is nothing about the parish.”

“Then I’ll give it up.”

“My sister is coming down to Matching to-morrow.”

“Not really?”

“Really and truly.”

“I—I wonder what she will think of me, and—and of us all,” Georgie says, gravely, her cheeks losing a shade of their bright color.

“She can think only one thing of you, dear,” the vicar says, with a look which softens the keen, plain, intellectual face almost past recognition.

“But everybody won’t see me with your eyes and mother’s; and I am afraid of Lenore.”

“Do not be afraid of her—that is just what would make you seem stiff and cold, and unlike yourself. You have only to be Georgie, and it will be all right.”

“She is so grand, this sister of yours. But, if you could care for me, Austen—”

“As I do, Georgie, with all my heart and strength.”

“I am glad she is coming for some reasons,” Georgie says, the trouble vanishing in a very full, bright smile. “I have wanted to see her awfully ever since—this long time.”

“And she has wanted to see you. And don’t you think I want to show her my wife?”

Georgie twists the pearl ring on the third finger of her left hand round and round a little nervously.

“She won’t think life at Matching very lively, will she?”

“Oh, Lenore has plenty of resources in herself! She draws and paints, and carves in wood, and she reads a great deal, if she can find a book she likes.”

“Mother will put up the new netted curtains in the parlor now,” Georgie laughs. “She declared yesterday they were for Jack’s house; but I think she’ll have time enough to net another pair before Jack’s house is built.”

“Is Jack going to build a house?”

“Well, you know mother has been mistress at Matching Farm so long, Jack says nobody shall ever turn her out, or be mistress there as long as she lives; but, as the future Mrs. Jack mightn’t like to live there in those circumstances, he is going to build a house for himself somewhere up near the dairy farm. There are very pretty sites for a house there under the wood.”

“And we could get there in five minutes from the Vicarage over the top of Matching Hill.”

“Yes; and mother could still see Jack every day.”

“And when is the new house to be begun?” the vicar asks, smiling at Georgie’s naïve admission.

“As soon as Jack is engaged, I suppose,” Georgie answers, laughing.

“You can laugh at the idea now; but I remember when it used to make you cry to think that Jack should ever be fonder of any girl than he is of you.”

“And how you used to tease me about it! But that was before—”

“You promised to marry me,” Austen Kendal finishes for her. “You could not be such a dog in the manager as to wish to keep Jack a bachelor now!”

“Only for mother’s sake.”

“But you say he will still see her every day.”

“Oh, yes; Jack wouldn’t have it any other way! I never knew a boy so fond of his mother as Jack is—and he admires her so much! He says he never saw a girl whom he could think one-quarter as pretty as mother is now.”

“Not even May Somers?”

“I wish he would marry May,” Georgie says gravely. “I would rather he married her than any girl I know. And I think she cares for him.”

“I never knew you had any match-making propensities before, Miss Irving.”

“Only for Jack,” the girl smiles, looking at the stalwart figure in homespun jacket and knickerbockers, and ribbed stockings of his mother’s knitting. “I don’t think I care very much who marries anybody else.”

They have reached the farm gate by this time, the road always turning round the foot of Matching Hill. The gate is very wide and low, and leads into a broad graveled ride or drive with a double row of great old trees on each side, divided from the drive by a space of smooth green

turf. It is very short, and the house stretches entirely across the upper end, and is plainly visible from the road. It is a mere farm-house of one story, deeply thatched, with windows opening to the ground and a wide cool porch smothered in monthly roses.

“Mrs. Johnstone has made some ‘singing hinnies’ for tea,” Georgie announces, as they all walk abreast up the drive. “Have you ever eaten ‘singing hinnies,’ Austen?”

“Not under that name, certainly.”

“Then I am glad we are to have them this evening. Mrs. Johnstone says they don’t know how to make them anywhere but in the North—she’s North-country, you know. Whenever she wants to bribe me to do anything for her, she promises me ‘singing hinnies’ for tea.”

Mrs. Irving goes away to see her calves fed; and, while the girls get tea ready, the two young men stroll out through the glass door at the back of the wide low shadowy hall into the quaint old-fashioned garden at the back of the house, smoking and talking as they do at least five evenings out of the seven—for Austen Kendal and Jack Irving were friends long before Kendal saw fit to fall in love with Irving’s pretty sister, or Georgie promised to marry him just because Jack would not hear of her refusing his friend.

But she likes Austen Kendal now for his own sake, though Jack is her *beau idéal* of everything handsome and heroic; and nobody could well be more unlike Jack than the sallow student, with his lank limbs and stooping shoulders, closely shaven face, and heavy black hair falling in one great wave across his forehead, and the deep dark eyes which seem all the deeper and darker from the spectacles which he is obliged to wear over them. Jack is like a young Greek athlete, and moves with the easy grace which almost always accompanies great strength; his eyes are gray, his features good, like his mother’s,

and his expression is like hers, frank and winning, and just a shade too resolute—till he smiles.

“So I hear you are going to build a house for yourself, Jack?”

“Who told you that?” Jack asks, laughing. “Georgie, for a ducat!”

“Oh, I heard it! It reminds me of the School Board version of ‘The House that Jack Built.’ ‘This is the domiciliary edifice erected by John——’ Do you remember?”

They are standing near the glass door, waiting for Georgie to call them in to tea. The bees are humming in the mignonette under the parlor window, the air is full of the fragrance of stock and sweet-pea and other sweet old-fashioned flowers. From the farm-yard beyond the garden—the high wall of which is covered with ripening plums and peaches, and a close curtain of scarlet japonica—they can hear the lowing of the cattle and the peaceful clucking of hens and gobble of turkeys, very faint and far off on the calm evening air.

“I wish you would begin building operations at once, Jack. If I have a passion for anything, it is for bricks and mortar. It always had and always will have a curious kind of fascination for me, to see masons and carpenters at work.”

“I must find a mistress for the house first,” Jack says, knocking the ashes out of his pipe; and he begins to hum—

“Where and how shall I earliest meet her?

What are the words that she first will say?

By what name shall I learn to greet her?

I know not now—it will come some day!”

“The mother will ‘grudge you sair’ when that day comes, Jack!”

“It won’t come yet awhile,” Jack says, stroking his

blonde mustache. "I never saw the girl yet I should care to make Mrs. Jack Irving."

Austen Kendal looks at him with the loving admiration at which Georgie often laughs.

"I think you are quite right in your determination never to set any one over her head in the old place," the vicar remarks at last, glancing up at the long, low house with its deep eaves and quaint, deep casement windows.

"I should never do it," Jack answers, gravely. "She came to this house a bride, and her children were born in it, and died in it—two of them. And my father died in it—in that room beside the porch; and she shall die in it—though Heaven grant," he adds, reverently, "that day may be a long way off from us all!"

CHAPTER II.

AT about three o'clock on the following afternoon, Jack Irving rides up to the Vicarage, fastens his bridle to the gate, and walks in. The glass door in the little wainscoted hall stands ajar. Jack pushes it open, and crosses the hall, fully expecting to find the vicar poring over some of his musty books in the sitting-room, since he did not find him delving in the garden among his potatoes and cabbages, or pacing, with head bent and hands behind him, up and down the narrow path between his currant and gooseberry bushes.

But the vicar is not in the sitting-room. Who is in the sitting-room? Jack wonders, pausing at the door astonished. A girl in a white gown, with a few overblown pink roses fastened into it—a girl with long, lithe limbs and a small flaxen head, standing on the hearth-rug with her hands clasped behind her in a simple, unconsidered attitude, apparently studying his own photograph as it hangs over the low, wooden mantel-piece. She had not

turned her head at the sound of his foot in the hall; but, when he comes to a standstill on the threshold, she turns, and, straightening herself, opens her great brown eyes and waits for him to speak.

“I—I beg your pardon,” Jack stammers, snatching off his hat. “I thought I should find Kendal here; but it is no matter. I—I can call again.”

“You need not go away. Mr. Kendal is in the church—I will send for him if you will wait a few minutes.”

“Oh, don’t mind; I will go to him, if you will allow me!” Jack exclaims, wondering at the same time who on earth this girl can be who seems so much at home in Kendal’s house.

“I think you are Mr. Irving?” she says, smiling at his bewilderment. “I should recognize you, I have been studying your photograph so minutely. I am Austen’s sister, and I believe you are one of his greatest friends.”

She holds out her hand with careless gracious courtesy, and Jack takes it, hastily thrusting his riding-whip into his left hand, and thinking all the time what a lucky man Austen is to have such a sister—she seems more like some beautiful young goddess than the sister of any mortal man!

“I wanted to speak to Kendal about those larches,” he says hurriedly. “But, if he is occupied—”

“He has gone out to the church only to practice some new chants.”

“About a hundred of my young larches were blown down in the spring—that gale we had in March, you may remember,” he goes on, in a kind of explanatory way. “They are of no earthly use to me—in fact, they are all lying at this moment just where they fell. But they are going to do something to the roof of the church, and want some scaffolding, and I told Kendal he could have as many of them as he cared to send for; or I’ll have them

sent down, if he can tell me how many he may be likely to want."

"I am going out to the church. If you will come with me, I think we shall be very likely to find him in the organ-loft."

They go out together into the heavenly June atmosphere, and walk side by side between the currant and gooseberry bushes, to the little gate leading into the graveyard at the back of the church.

"Austen never told me you were coming," Jack says, while her white gown brushes the box border, and the sun "doubles his own warmth" against her exquisite face and dainty ruffled golden head.

"He knew it himself only yesterday morning."

"But he was with us yesterday evening. I wonder he never mentioned it then," Jack says, who already thinks the event at least as worthy of announcement as the appearance of the most splendid comet that ever swept across the sky.

"I suppose he spends most of his evenings at Matching Farm?" Miss Kendal says, with just the faintest flicker of a smile on her beautiful mouth.

"Most of them, indeed."

"I am so anxious to see your sister, Mr. Irving."

"And I am sure Georgie will be equally anxious to see you," Jack says, wondering how his simple little sister will bear the crucial test of those calm, cold, perfectly beautiful eyes.

"I feel as if I knew her already," Miss Kendal says, smiling; "Austen has described her to me so often in his letters; and then I have seen her photograph."

"Georgie makes a bad photograph—at least, it is not a bit like herself."

"So I should have fancied. But yours is very good."

Jack makes a good photograph. That one at the Vicarage is particularly good—a full-length cabinet, in rid-

ing-dress, hat and whip in hand. Miss Kendal might easily have recognized the original, since he wears not only the same coat, but the same light cravat and horse-shoe pin.

“But I think Mrs. Irving must be one of the most delightful women in the world,” Miss Kendal goes on, who seems in a mood to be pleased with everything this afternoon. “I think I am quite as anxious to see her as Austen’s *fiancée*. I fancy you must be rather like her, Mr. Irving, from Austen’s description; he has described her to me also, over and over again.”

“You are sure to like my mother—everybody does,” Jack answers, confidently. “I don’t think myself there’s anybody like her; but then I’m prejudiced. The people in the village think more of her opinion about a burn or a scald than the doctor’s—indeed, I believe they would rather have a sermon from her—the sort she preaches—than from Kendal himself!”

“I shouldn’t be surprised. What kind of sermons does Austen preach?”

“Oh, very good sermons! But then my mother’s are very practical, and always wind up with something tangible,” Jack laughs. “Indeed I think she is mother to the whole parish. If I were inclined to be jealous, I shouldn’t like it—but I’m not.”

“Are you not?” Miss Kendal asks, smiling.

But it is scarcely a question, for as she speaks she stops to gather a sprig or two of sweet-pea—a pink-and-white blossom and a purple-and-blue one—without waiting for an answer. And Jack watches her, and wonders at the pleasure it gives him to watch her, and at the curious grace with which she does such a conventional thing as gathering two morsels of sweet-pea.

“I suppose you have not seen much of Matching yet?” he says, at last.

“Nothing but the church and the Vicarage; I arrived only about three hours ago.”

“And what do you think of them?”

“Picturesque,” she says, laughing, “but very small and ancient and musty-smelling, both of them. The one redeeming point of both is the ivy in which they are smothered, though Austen tells me it is the ivy which makes them so damp. It certainly makes them very dark.”

“I was afraid Kendal would find Matching very dull when first he came down,” Jack says, glancing at the little study window close to which they were standing—“a man like him, you know, who goes in for scientific discovery, and all that kind of thing.”

“But that is just it. He can study here as much as he pleases—I am sure he couldn’t have found a better place for undisturbed meditation than this very garden—no faintest echo from the madding crowd could ever reach him here!”

“So he said,” Jack answers, thinking how like her brother she sometimes expresses herself, though so utterly unlike him in face and manner. “And how he does pore over those musty old books! It is sometimes as much as I can do to drag him out into the fields for a breath of fresh air!”

“Now?” Miss Kendal asks, with an indescribable intonation.

“Oh, well, he’s not so bad now!” Jack allows, laughing. “He has come out of his shell a little. I think it was my mother who first succeeded in persuading him that all work and no play would end by making him a very dull boy.”

“I thought it was Georgie!” Miss Kendal says, with an amused look.

“Indeed it was not; he fell in love with my mother

long before he fell in love with Georgie—everybody falls in love with my mother.”

“I can fancy my brother falling in love with Georgie easily enough,” Miss Kendal observes, looking at her sweet-pea; “but that he should take the fancy of a girl like her has puzzled me ever since he told me of his engagement. They seem to be the very opposite of each other in everything.”

“I think the wonder is all the other way!”

“Oh, do you? Of course I know Austen’s good qualities, and all that; but I should never have imagined a pretty young girl would fall in love with him, and still less that he would come down out of the clouds sufficiently to see whether she was pretty or not, and least of all that he would ever screw up his courage to the point of proposing for her!”

“I don’t think you half appreciate your brother!” Jack says, looking at the girl’s exquisite profile as she stands beside him, tall and straight in her long white gown. “It is my opinion that there isn’t a girl in the world good enough for him, and so I tell Georgie every day of her life!”

“Brothers are always surprised when any other man wants to marry their sisters, I think,” Miss Kendal observes calmly. “Is that your horse, Mr. Irving? I am so fond of horses—I must go and speak to him for a minute.”

She leans over the low wooden gate and pats the warm neck, where the veins stand out like net-work under the satiny skin, and praises and strokes him, till Jack almost wishes he could change places with the creature who is so happy as to be caressed by that pearly hand, and to have such delicious flattery poured into his ears by those sweet red lips.

“Do you ride?” he asks, at last.

“Yes—when I can get a mount.”

“Lohengrin has never carried a lady,” Jack says eagerly. “But he could be easily trained to it—I could train him myself in three or four days. Georgie hasn’t nerve enough to ride a donkey, or I should have put her on him long ago; he is just the horse for a lady—plenty of spirit, but as quiet as a lamb.”

“I am not very cowardly on horseback,” Miss Kendal tells him, smiling; “and I should like to ride Lohengrin very much.”

“Then I shall try him with my mother’s old riding-skirt this very evening!” Jack exclaims delightedly. “You won’t be going away for some days, will you? I shouldn’t like to put you on him till he had grown accustomed to the fluttering of the habit—I know it will frighten him a little at first.”

“I shall certainly not be going away for some days,” Miss Kendal says, with an odd smile—“nor for some weeks probably—unless Austen turns me out!”

“I am so glad! But I am afraid you will soon find Matching dull—it is a stupid dead-and-alive old place, unless one has plenty to do.”

“Lohengrin will amuse me,” the girl smiles, stroking the animal’s velvet nose with a fearlessness which takes Jack’s heart by storm.

She does not say that Lohengrin’s handsome master may also help to render the dullness of Matching less intolerable to her, but probably she thinks it as she stands beside him in the June sunshine—sunshine which shows her complexion to be absolutely perfect, which turns her ruffled fair hair to gold, which brings strange golden flashes out of the brown depths of her velvet eyes.

“I suppose you have not many neighbors—except the villagers?” she says, looking down the quiet elm-shaded road, her elbow on the low wooden gate and her chin in her hand.

“None nearer than Peacock Hall.”

“And who lives at Peacock Hall?”

“Old Lady Giles lives there, and her daughters. And we have the Somerses—I forgot them.”

“They are the people who have the mill?”

“Yes.”

“And you know them?”

“We have known them all our lives.”

“I knew Austen was acquainted with them; but then, a clergyman must know all his parishioners. Still I did not suppose Mrs. Irving would care to visit them.”

“Visit them! Why, they are in and out of our house every day, and Georgie spends half her time at the mill!”

“But they are in trade!”

“And we are farmers! There is not much to choose between us!”

“I think there is a great deal to choose. I wonder what Aunt Poigndestre would have said if Austen had written to tell us that he was going to marry a girl whose father owned a woolen mill!”

“What nonsense!” Jack exclaims, bluntly. “As if everybody wasn’t in trade now, directly or indirectly!”

“The Kendals were never in trade. We never even had a doctor in our family,” Miss Kendal says, calmly. “One of the Kendals married a doctor once, but Aunt Poigndestre never called upon her, though they lived for a year in the same square.”

“I can’t understand that kind of pride, I must confess.”

“No, perhaps you can not,” Miss Kendal allows, looking into the green twilight under the road-side elms.

The shadows of the leaves flicker down on to her bare head, on to her white gown, on to the rounded arm from which the sleeve has fallen away as she rests her elbow on the gate. Behind her—every close-fitting leaf shining greenly—rises the ivy-smothered gable of the Vicarage, quaint background, or the exquisite white fig-

ure; the drowsy air is full of the humming of bees and the faint, languid perfume of mignonette.

“Are you very proud, Miss Kendal?”

“Not ‘too proud to care from whence I came,’ Mr. Irving.”

“And you consider it justifiable—that kind of pride?”

“I was reared in that school, you know,” she answers carelessly, raising her right hand to look at her rustic bouquet—she has added a sprig of rosemary to the sweet-pea. “We are very poor, we Kendals—at least, Austen and I are poor. But I should not care to know the Somerses, I fancy, if I met them in Regent Street or in the Row.”

Jack does not quite like Miss Kendal’s tone, though she may intend to convey the fact that neither she nor her people are averse to the present matrimonial arrangement. Still to run down the Irvings’ friends is to run them down indirectly, and Jack is very proud in his own quiet easy-going way.

“Nevertheless the people at the mill are our most intimate friends,” he says sturdily. “Old Somers is as honorable a man and as true a gentleman as any earl in the land, and was my poor father’s stanchest friend, as well as his nearest neighbor; and May is my sister’s ‘chum.’”

“And yours?” Miss Kendal inquires, with a slight scornful raising of her short upper lip.

“I am very fond of May.”

“Very fond?”

“Oh, you won’t catch me out like that!” Jack laughs, shrugging his shoulders.

And Miss Kendal wonders why he colors so ingenuously, or rather does not wonder at it, having already made up her mind that the Kendal alliance is not the only one on the *tapis* in the Irving family.

“Suppose we continue our search for Austen?” she suggests, removing her arm from the gate with some-

thing very like a yawn. If this young man belongs to Miss May Somers, she—Lenore Kendal—is not going to waste her time in flirting with him—that is, if he belongs to her so securely as to make it impossible to shake his allegiance.

“I believe my brother spends hours at the organ sometimes,” she says, as Jack steps forward to open the little iron gate into the church-yard. “And do you know, I fancy the air of this place does not agree with him very well. I thought him looking pale and thin.”

“He works too hard,” Irving answers quickly. “We have all noticed how thin he has grown. Indeed for the last week or two my mother has insisted upon his taking a glass of good port every day.”

“I think she always expects to see a ‘happy lover’ looking particularly hale and hearty,” Miss Kendal observes, in her calm, half-amused, half-scornful way.

“Shakespeare didn’t,” Jack says, laughing.

“Oh, but *nous avons changé tout cela!*” the girl smiles, shrugging her pretty shoulders as she passes before him through the gate.

They walk together slowly up the mossy path between the solemn hillocks, and Lenore Kendal, holding up her white gown from contact with the long damp grasses, looks from one moss-grown headstone to another carelessly, and so makes herself acquainted with at least the two most prevalent names in the parish.

“Are all the living either Davys or Hornes as well as all the dead?” she inquires naïvely. “Austen never mentioned the fact of his having but two families in his parish; but this looks very like it. And I suppose every one of these dead-and-gone Hornes and Davys was born and lived and died at Matching? Fancy what a fate!”

“Most of the Irvings have lived and died at Matching,” Jack answers gravely.

“And been buried here?”

“Yes—in the vault underneath the church.”

“And the whole great beautiful world beyond Matching might as well never have been, so far as they were concerned!”

“Except what they read about it in the daily papers,” Jack confesses.

“And Rome might never have been built, Paris might be at the bottom of the Seine, Venice in the moon, for all they know or cared! History was a sealed book to them; all the literature of the world might as well never have been written! Painting, poetry, sculpture—I suppose such things were a dead letter to them—as utterly unknown as the every-day life of the inhabitants of Sirius is to us denizens of this insignificant orb which we call ‘the world’!”

“I think it is very likely.”

“I would as soon never be born as go through existence like that,” Miss Kendal says, with a very scornful shrug of her graceful square shoulders.

“I don’t know,” Jack says, a little nettled. “They lived good and worthy lives, and died in their beds respectably and piously. And in the long run I doubt if they weren’t just as well off as the greatest travelers and most scientific men that ever overreached themselves in trying to get

“ ‘Down to the depths of the earth or up to the sky.’ ”

“But to them life must have been like a person walking blindfold through the most magnificent scenery in the Alps. There were the blue abysses, the rainbow cataracts, the snow-peaks towering into the sky; but they could not see them—for them they were not—to them

“ ‘The Tweed were as poor as the Amazon,
That for all the years it has rolled
Can tell but how fair was the morning red,
How sweet the morning gold.’ ”

“That may be,” Jack answers bluntly, looking at the old gray church with its mantle of gray-green ivy; “but they were good men and women, and did their duty in the state of life to which it had pleased God to call them. And I doubt if many of your philosophers could say as much as that!”

“I don’t know that I should care particularly to live to a good old age, and die piously and respectably in my bed,” Miss Kendal says musingly. “Does it matter much whether one’s life is long or short, or how one dies, when death must come at last?”

“Not if ended there perhaps.”

“No—not if it ended there.”

They are silent for a moment or two, and then, with one of the sudden changes of mood which have begun to puzzle Jack already, Miss Kendal begins to laugh.

“You almost persuade me that it is folly to be wise, Mr. Irving.”

“If ignorance is bliss, I should say it was.”

“But are you happy in your ignorance?”

“Are you the happier for your knowledge, Miss Kendal?”

“Happy?” she echoes, with an indescribable intonation.

But she does not answer the question further than this, and Jack wonders why this girl fills his mind with a vague unrest even while she charms him as no woman has ever charmed him before—wonders too what has brought her down to this sleepy old village—she who professes to care for nothing but excitement and the hearing or seeing of some new thing. If he had only known what had brought her down, as they walked round in the shadow to the door of the hoary little church! It would not have darkened the glory of the June day to him then, or made the atmosphere less heavenly or the sky less blue; but afterward— Ah, poor Jack!

They find the vicar in the organ-loft, in an ecstasy over

an "Agnus Dei" by some old composer, which he has discovered among the musty manuscript music with which the whole place is strewn "thick as autumn leaves in Val-lambrosa." But they drag him perforce into the outer air, and his sister scolds him laughingly for remaining shut up in those moldy precincts till his face is as white as the face of a ghost.

"I have felt weary all day," he says, walking back with them through the glorious sunshine, which seems to dazzle him a little, "and my head aches. I hope I'm not in for the Dobsons' fever."

But they scout the idea; and when they reach the house Miss Kendal goes to the little store-room inside the parlor, and comes back carrying the glass of wine which Mrs. Irving has prescribed for him "more than three weeks ago."

"We shall have dinner in a few minutes," she says, standing by his side while he drinks it. "Do you know, I think you starve yourself, Austen; Mrs. Dodd tells me you don't eat enough to support a fly!"

"That is only lately," Kendal answers, smiling. "I think the heat of the weather has taken away my appetite. But won't you offer Jack some refreshment too?"

Miss Kendall takes the hint with graceful readiness; and, Lohengrin having been housed in the Vicarage stable, his master finds himself dining on chicken and salad and strawberry tart—they might have been nectar and ambrosia for anything he could tell—in company with a beautiful young goddess in a limp white gown with a few overblown fawn-pink roses drooping at her throat, and a light emanating from her eyes which seems to him to fill the whole tiny, ivy-shadowed room with a kind of lambent glory, soft yet dazzling, like the eyes of some wild creature in the dark.

Lenore Kendal has a dangerous voice, and she knows how to make every intonation of it act like a spell on her

listeners; and to-day she either thinks it incumbent on her, as hostess, to amuse her guest, or else she wishes to make trial of her fascinations on this young man, who adds to his good looks and rather piquant simplicity and independence of character the further recommendation of belonging to another girl, such zest being necessary to give Miss Kendal, already sated by too easy conquests, interest enough in the trial to make it amusing—at least to herself. So she talks and smiles, and even favors them with the cold, sweet music of her laugh; and Jack can scarcely eat his dinner for looking at her, and rises up from the table as much in love as it is possible for a man to be with a girl of whose existence he was scarcely conscious half an hour before.

After dinner he smokes a pipe with the vicar on the old stone bench under the parlor window.

“It must be new life to you to have your sister with you,” he says, a little shyly, for already Jack finds it impossible to speak of Miss Kendal as he might speak of any other girl. “She is so—so lively, and has such lots to say.”

“Don’t you go and fall in love with her, Jack.”

“Am I a fool?” Jack exclaims, hastily, turning away his face.

“I don’t know. But Lenore is not; and she wouldn’t ask better fun than making a fool of you,” Kendal says, with a kind of languid scorn. “She ought to be marked ‘dangerous’; I have told her so a hundred times.”

“Of course she can’t help looking—what she is.”

“Do you admire her?”

“My dear fellow, she has the most perfectly beautiful face I ever saw in my life!”

“I suppose she has,” the vicar says, in the same languid, tired kind of way, leaning his head back against the ivy-covered wall. “I wonder what has brought her down to Matching?”

“To look you up, I suppose.”

“She says so. But I scarcely think it was that. She was quite satisfied to leave me to my own devices for the last two years. And I don't think it was to see Georgie, either, though she professes to be anxious to see her. She has not said a word to me about going to Matching Farm.”

“My mother must come to see her first.”

“Your mother need not stand on ceremony with my sister, Jack. If Lenore wants to see them, she will go over with me this evening. But she shall propose it herself.”

“They don't know she is here, do they?”

“They do—I told them she was coming, yesterday evening.”

“They never told me a word about it!”

“They did not think it such a momentous occurrence as you seem to think it, Jack!” Kendal laughs, turning his head to look at his friend. Then his eyes soften into the old admiring gaze as they rest on the frank, handsome profile with the determined mouth half hidden by the big blonde mustache of which Jack is so secretly proud.

“You must not let Lenore amuse herself at your expense, old boy—remember that!”

“I shall be flattered if she thinks me ‘a foeman worthy of her steel’!” Jack laughs, in such a heart-whole way that Austen Kendal dismisses the subject from his mind with something like a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER III.

MISS KENDAL does propose paying a visit to Matching Farm with her brother that very evening. And she not only goes to the farm, but makes herself so agreeable there that she wins golden opinions from every one, from

Mrs. Irving down to the North-country cook, who promises to make "singing hinnies" every evening she comes there to drink tea. And Miss Kendal professes herself delighted with Matching Farm, and with its pleasant-faced mistress, and above all with Georgie, who has the most charming kitten-face she ever saw in her life, as she tells Austen on their way back to the Vicarage in the soft sweet summer dusk. And they have arranged a picnic to the Broads—a place about a mile from Matching, where the river widens out into a lake under the shadow of the oak woods; and Miss Kendal is to be inducted into the mysteries of brewing and baking and preserving, and Lohengrin is to be induced to carry her as soon as possible, and altogether there seems to be no immediate danger of "the languid light of her proud eyes" wearying of the rolling hours as they succeed each other at Matching, sleepy old out-of-the-world village as it undoubtedly is.

But it is not in the carrying out of any such methods of diversion that Miss Kendal is fated to spend the next three weeks of glorious summer weather. Two days after her arrival the vicar is pronounced by Dr. Flemyng to be suffering from typhoid fever; three days later he is lying in a darkened room, raving of some heavy tombstone he thinks they have laid over him, and which he declares to be crushing his head to powder. And his sister nurses him with a devotion which Dr. Flemyng declares to be beyond all praise—describing it to the people who stop him twenty times a day to inquire for the vicar—with an entire forgetfulness of self which does her the greatest credit, and with an amount of natural talent which makes up for want of previous training, this being her first experience in a sick-room.

It proves to be a very bad type of typhoid, and, as the days go on, each brings some more dangerous symptom or complication of symptoms. Mrs. Irving, who at first

had merely come over every morning to give Miss Kendal an opportunity of taking some hours' rest while she tended the patient, going back to the farm in the evening, takes up her residence at the Vicarage altogether.

Mrs. Irving's mere presence in the house would be in itself a comfort, but she is a born nurse, capable of accomplishing as much in an hour as another would in three, and that in such a quiet knowledgable way that her ministrations soothe the patient rather than irritate him, as some of his sister's best-meant efforts sometimes do. And Lenore hails her coming with great relief and thankfulness, and the two women became better acquainted with each other in those three weeks spent over the sick-bed than they would have become in three years of ordinary intercourse.

Jack, too, often sits up at night with his friend, coming in at nine o'clock or so, and going back to the farm for breakfast. Once or twice, however, Lenore insists upon his breakfasting at the Vicarage, waylaying him as he passes through the hall. And every morning she carries him a cup of coffee, talking to him in a low tone on the landing while he drinks it, for she has grown quite quiet and serious, and seems to have forgotten altogether her intention of shaking Jack's allegiance to May Somers. But this new *rôle* bewilders him even more than the other, and he counts those five minutes spent in whispered talk of pulse and temperature on the close narrow lobby worth all the rest of the long sweet summer day.

Georgie is not allowed to take any part in the nursing, or even to come to the Vicarage at all. She hears about the patient three or four times every day, and Jack tells her all he knows, and her mother pays her a visit now and then; and with this she is obliged to be satisfied, Mrs. Irving not seeing fit to grant her any more. The fever is not of an infectious kind, but Georgie was so delicate as a child as to render her rearing a troublesome business,

and she is still nervous and excitable, and altogether her mother does not choose to have her at the Vicarage; and to both her children Mrs. Irving's wish is unwritten law.

But she has the pleasure of sending strawberries and cherries and flowers and chickens and milk to the patient, and is even commissioned to make bread and pudding and pies for the rest of the party, there being no time to waste in cooking at the Vicarage, and it being a pleasure as well as occupation to Georgie to spend some hours every day in providing for their wants, under Mrs. Johnstone's careful tutelage.

It is the second week in July before Dr. Flemyng pronounces the fever to be abating, and a week later before he will take upon himself to promise that it shall continue to abate. And a few days after this the vicar totters into the room opposite his own, leaning on Jack's strong arm, and has a whole chicken for his dinner—which he thinks little enough—and asks to be allowed to see himself in the looking-glass, which being granted, he laughs at the gaunt bearded face reflected in Lenore's pretty ivory hand-mirror, and gets Jack to cut his hair, and goes back to his room again—in less than the time specified by the doctor—so tired that he sleeps like a child for the rest of the day.

But he begins to mend from this day forward, and Mrs. Irving speaks of going back to the farm for good. And Georgie is to see him in another day or two, and in the meantime Miss Kendal is to spend a long day at the farm, while Mrs. Irving is still in charge at the Vicarage.

Jack comes for her after breakfast in the dog-cart, and they drive back by a long round through hedges gay with dog-roses and honeysuckle, and Lenore breathes in long draughts of the delicious summer air, while Jack drinks long draughts of that still more intoxicating potion called love. For, if Jack was desperately smitten by his friend's sister the first time he ever saw her, he is desperately in love with her now, so much so that Georgie has discovered

it without ever having seen them together, and quizzes her brother unmercifully, in revenge for all the times he quizzed her about Tom Somers, and Nat Flemyng, and all the rest of the village beaus who had admired her before she was engaged to Austen Kendal, as she tells him, laughing, while she packs hampers for the Vicarage; and May Somers stands by, smiling a little constrainedly, Jack sitting on the great kitchen-table swinging his foot backward and forward without one glance at his sister's friend.

But this drive through the mid-summer lanes would compensate for all the quizzing in the world, Jack thinks, as he glances at the exquisite profile of the girl beside him—so much at least of it as is visible under the great Alsatian hat of rough black straw. To be alive on such a day as this would be pleasure, but to sit beside Lenore Kendal, while they bowl along with such a horse as Magpie between the shafts, such sunshine round them, such a blue sky over their heads, is little short of Paradise, or so Jack thinks.

“I wish the brim of your hat turned up on this side, and not on the other,” he says, laughing, as he tries to catch a glimpse of her eyes—from which it is plain that Austen Kendal's sister and his friend have grown very intimate during his illness.

“I am sorry no prevision of such a wish on your part occurred to me while I was fastening the roses into it,” Lenore says soberly. “It would have been as easy to put them at one end as the other then.”

“Can't you take it off and change them now?” Jack suggests.

“I think not,” Lenore says, amused.

“But they are only pinned in.”

“How do you know?”—laughing.

“I saw you putting them in this morning—there was nothing but that lace thing on it before.”

“I had no idea you were so observant, Mr. Irving.”

“I observe everything you do, certainly.”

“How little you must have to occupy your mind!”

“Do you call that little? I call it everything in the world.”

“What is the name of that big blue hill on the other side of the river?”

“That? Oh, that is the Watchhorn! Would you believe it was five miles away?”

“Scarcely. Have you seen the Alps, Mr. Irving?”

“No. The highest mountains I have ever seen were the Barrier range, in Victoria.”

“I did not know you had been in Australia.”

“I went out before my poor father died, just to see what farming was like out there.”

“You came back then?”

“Yes. My mother could not look after the farm. And, besides, she wanted me.”

“Is that very long ago?”

“It is nearly three years ago,” Jack answers, giving Magpie leave to trot down the long slope of hill before them.

“I admire your mother so much. But I think she must have felt your father’s death terribly. I have often watched her, while she thought nobody was looking, and I have seen her face grow so sad, quite suddenly, as if she had remembered something which made her heart bleed.

“I have seen that look on her face too,” Jack answers, gravely. “But it was there before my father died. And I have asked her what she was thinking of once or twice, but she put me off with some excuse or other.”

“It comes sometimes when she is looking at you,” Miss Kendal says, looking at him in her turn.

“Yes—and at Georgie. I often think she fancies she may die and leave us, and that she can’t bear to think of us left alone.”

“It may be that,” Lenore says, musingly.
Then she looks away at the woods, with

“Their leafy tide of greenery still rippling up the wind,”

and Jack forgets his surmises in looking at her, and feels the casual touch of her shoulder send the blood racing through his veins, and wonders if every fellow feels like this when he is in love, and wishes the road to Matching Farm were five times as long, if only he might drive all the way thither with Lenore Kendal beside him, even in that provoking big hat which sometimes leaves nothing but the curve of her cheek and chin visible, and sometimes not even that.

Georgie and May Somers meet them at the gate. It is the first time May has seen Miss Kendal, and she looks at her very curiously as she stands in the porch with Georgie while Jack disposes of his horse and trap. May is rather pretty herself, but beside Miss Kendal she fades into utter insignificance. Her face looks even common beside the perfect beauty of outline and coloring over which the large hat throws such a pearly shadow, while she stands there talking to Austen's little sweetheart and holding her hand in the tender caressing way which has already won Georgie's simple suffrages.

May put on her best dress in anticipation of the Irvings' visitor, and thought she looked very well as she stepped into her pony phaeton to drive over to the farm. But her faith in her own elaborately fringed gray silk is a little shaken by the fit and style of Miss Kendal's chintz gown—a black ground sprinkled with tiny yellow rose-buds—and the inimitable grace with which she wears the large straw hat with its garniture of natural Gloire de Dijon roses. Miss Somers thought nobody with fair hair could wear a hat lined with pale gold color, but Miss Kendal's hat is lined with gold color, and there are knots of gold-colored ribbon down the front of her gown.

“What shall we do first?” Georgie asks, when questions about the convalescent have been put and answered, and the three girls have looked at each other, and Miss Kendal has admired the big Persian cat sunning himself on the sill of the parlor window.

“We are to dine early, and Jack wants you to try Lohengrin after dinner. Shall we go to the garden and eat cherries now, or play tennis, or what?”

“I vote for cherries first and tennis afterward,” Jack says, coming back after the shortest interval Georgie ever remembers him to have spent in the stables. And, as Jack’s vote always carries the day at Matching, they saunter round to the cherry-orchard, “the master” and Miss Kendal leading the way.

“We sha’n’t get many chances of speaking to her!” Georgie says, as she follows with her arm round May’s neck. “You’ll see Jack won’t even go away to watch the colt at the bars to-day, or to see the cattle fed, or the hay, or anything!”

“Do you think he admires her so much?” May asks, wistfully.

“Admires her!” Georgie laughs, shaking her brown head. “He worships the very ground she walks on! I know Jack well enough to be very sure of that.”

“And you think he will marry her?”

“I am sure he will—if she will have him.”

The idea of any one’s refusing Jack would never have occurred to May Somers. She had looked upon him as a kind of hero or demi-god since he was a boy and she a tiny little girl; she does not believe there is a woman in the world who could refuse him if he saw fit to crown her with the rapture and the glory of his love.

Lenore is very fond of white-heart cherries. And it is very pleasant in the old orchard, with the sun slanting down upon them through the mossy branches and lying golden on the short russet grass. But Georgie can not

see what beauty there is in an old cherry-orchard that people should loiter away half the day there; and May Somers can not find any pleasure in watching Jack while he feeds Miss Kendal with cherries, or while she smiles up at him with those strange, dark, velvety-brown eyes. So these two leave them at last to their own devices, and betake themselves to the tennis-courts; and Jack is just as glad. And from the cherry-orchard he takes Miss Kendal into the garden, and from the garden to the old pond where the water-lilies blow; and every moment he is growing more infatuated with this girl with the flaxen head and dark eyes, and more and more inclined to believe that she would not look at him like that unless she liked him just a little, and to wonder what she would say if he asked her to try to like him more.

She seems pleased with everything—the quaint old garden, the deep pond, the young horses in the paddock, the view of Watchhorn from the long meadow, the little stream that runs like liquid gold over its gravelly bed at the bottom of the meadow; even the great sleek cows in the daisy-field come in for a word of praise.

“Yet you say you could not live in the country!” Jack remarks a little wistfully.

“Did I say that?”

“Don’t you remember? The day you first came down to Matching.”

“Ah, that is a long time ago!” she says, smiling as she tenders a cabbage-leaf to the largest and sleekest cow.

“You think you could manage to endure it now?”

“So much depends on one’s company,” she laughs, shaking her head. “I knew nobody at Matching when I said the idea of living and dying here would be horrible to me. It did seem very horrible to me, looking at those green graves!”

“It does not seem so horrible to you now?”

She is looking away from him at the blue outline of

Watchhorn, so faint with heat that it seems to lose its outline in the clouds; but for one moment he sees a curious expression drift over her face—an expression of scorn and loathing and derision, which would have puzzled him more if he could have seen it better, or if it had not vanished as suddenly as it came.

“I can imagine circumstances in which it could be tolerable,” she says, with her sweet cold laugh. “If one could live here in this quaint old farm-house with the person one loved best in the world, for instance, it might even be pleasant. But then one could be happy in Lapland or the interior of Africa under the same conditions; so that is paying no compliment to Matching Farm.”

She moves away from the gate as she speaks, and Jack follows her, forgetting the swift look which had puzzled him in the new delicious hope to which her eyes rather than her words have given birth in his heart. If she had not cared for him a little, she would never have looked at him as she had looked at him all the time she mocked him with that sweet cold laugh of hers. No woman ever looked at a man like that unless she wanted him to believe she was not indifferent to him—at least no woman like Lenore. But then the thought of his own unworthiness overwhelms him. What is he that he should aspire to this beautiful creature, who moves among his people like a being from another sphere?

His heart sinks like lead as he looks at her, walking before him, tall and slender, in her chintz gown, with a bunch of crimson clove carnations in her hand. Lenore Kendal is a wife for an earl, and Jack Irving is a simple yeoman; but then why has she looked at him till he is fain to “trust his modest worth,” and ask her the question which her saucy smile of triumph has almost forestalled?

“We thought you had lost yourselves!” Georgie laughs, as they sit down to dinner in the long low parlor with its

high dark wainscot and the polished floor in which Mrs. Irving takes such pride. But Lenore cares very little for what they think so long as she manages to amuse herself; she never did care much what people thought so long as she pleased Lenore Kendal.

Jack does the honors in a quiet, straightforward, unaffected way, to which even Miss Kendal's nice susceptibilities can take no exception. And he looks very handsome as he sits at the head of his table, his fair head thrown into relief by the dark wood-work, cleverly carving ham and turkey with strong brown hands which have done a good day's work before now, and look as if they could do as much again, though they have held Miss Kendal's slight fingers very tenderly once or twice on the lobby at the Vicarage, when she was more anxious than usual about her brother, and seemed to forget that Jack was holding her hands in her eagerness to hear how things had been going on during the night.

After dinner Lohengrin is brought round with a lady's saddle on, and Miss Kendal is inducted into Mrs. Irving's riding-habit, which fits her tolerably, Mrs. Irving never having worn it since she was quite a young woman and used to ride about with her husband—the handsomest couple in Matching, as everybody said. And Miss Kendal, who is as clever on horseback as she is in most other places, enjoys her canter over the moors at least as much as her loitering in the cherry-orchard, and is flattered into something very like the happiness she professes to despise by the desperate love in the eyes of the young man beside her, who is young enough and handsome enough, and withal brave and good enough, to give her some pride in her conquest, besides the pleasure of taking him away from that demure little blue-eyed girl who has been such a fool as to bestow her affections upon him without being asked.

It is nearly six o'clock when they ride up under the double row of elms to the door of the farm-house again,

Miss Kendal looking exquisitely lovely, with a color like the petal of a wild-rose on her cheeks, and Jack so intensely happy that Georgie laughs up at him, standing by his stirrup; and May runs in hastily "to see if tea is ready," but, instead of going into the parlor, walks up to Georgie's little room under the gable, and, throwing herself upon her knees by the bedside, buries her face in the white counterpane, with a moan like the moan of some small creature in desperate pain.

They have "singing hinnies" for tea, and strawberries and cream, and cherry-tart; and the windows are open toward the garden, and the breath of the mignonette comes in with the sweet languid perfume of the newly-mown hay in the home meadow; and Miss Kendal laughs and talks to Georgie and to May Somers, who takes care to sit with her back to the light; but, though her manner is graceful and even friendly, there is no spontaneity about it—to talk to girls five or six years younger than herself is weariness to her. She is glad when the dusk begins to fall and it is time for her to think of getting home.

Jack has offered to drive her back to the Vicarage, but this Miss Kendal has declined.

She would much rather walk, she said—horses always shied at things in the hedges after dark, and it frightened her; besides, she should enjoy the walk so much more on such an exquisite evening as this.

So they set out together at about half past eight o'clock, the girls coming with them as far as the gate leading into the road—for May Somers is not going home to-night. There is a soft glow of sunset in the west yet; but a young moon floats in the violet ether just over their heads; and, as they turn from the gate to walk up the road, they can hear the cuckoo's "last good-night"

"Float from the hill above the farm."

"You are sure you won't be tired?" Jack says, as they walk side by side, under the elms, the crescent moon send-

ing their shadows faintly before them up the smooth white road.

“Tired!” the girl echoes, dreamily. “As if any one could feel tired on such a night as this!”

“Are you so happy?” Jack inquires, the beating of his heart causing a tremor in his voice, which he would give the world to steady if he could.

“One could almost forget one’s own identity in the light of that lady-moon.”

“I don’t want to forget my own identity. I would not change places with any mortal man at this moment—I doubt if I could even feel so happy in Heaven.”

“Don’t say such things!” the girl says, shivering slightly in the warm night-air.

“But it is not wrong to be happy, is it?”

“Not wrong—no! But, when people feel like that, I think some misfortune is so sure to happen; I have heard it said so often, and always some grief followed. It seems as if perfect happiness were not permitted in this world; if one does come near it for a moment, some shadowy hand is certain to be thrust forward to drag us back again.”

“Have you ever been perfectly happy?” the young man asks a little wistfully.

“I might have been, but for that shadowy hand,” she says, with a half-sad, half-smiling look at the great bunch of carnations in her hand, blood-red in the light of the moon.

“You cared for somebody perhaps?”

“I suppose I thought I cared,” Lenore answers, after a moment’s pause, during which Jack’s jealous eyes devour her face.

“But that is the same as caring, is it not?”

For one moment more the girl pauses, and for that one moment Jack’s fate hangs in the balance. But he does not know it—does not dream that the whole future joy

or misery of his existence is being decided during these few breathless seconds, while the crescent moon looks down upon him through the elm-boughs, and he looks at Lenore Kendal's face with all his heart in his passionate eyes.

“One thinks it is—at the time,” she says at last, slowly and deliberately, and the die of Jack's life is cast.

“But afterward—”

“One learns to know the difference,” she laughs, shrugging her shoulders. “There are ornaments sold which look just like gold, you know—quite as pretty, and just as good a color—better sometimes. But they do not last.”

“Lenore, do you think my love for you will last?”

They have come to a stand-still in the middle of the road, between the sunset and the moonlight, and he has taken both her hands in his, carnations and all, and is looking down into her face with eager questioning eyes.

“Do you love me?” she asks simply, looking up at him. “I did not know.”

“Oh, you must have known!” the young man exclaims passionately. “I think you must have known it from the very first day I saw you, for I believe in my heart I loved you even then!”

“Even then!” she repeats, smiling.

“Lenore, my darling, you would not smile at me like that if you were going to break my heart!”

“I hope I am not going to break your heart.”

“And you will try to care for me a little? Oh, my darling, I think I shall go mad for joy!”

He puts his arms round her, and would have kissed her, but she pushes him away with a smiling glance down the long, shadowy road.

“Forgive me—I don't think I know what I am doing! But, oh, Lenore, tell me you will try to love me! Tell me you will be my wife some day! I have dared so

much already that you see I am fool enough to rush in where an angel might fear to tread! But you would never have let me say so much if you were going to break my heart?"

"But can you care for me, knowing so little about me as you do?"

"Care for you? I love you more than my life!"

"But you know nothing about me!"

"I know that you are the one woman in the world for me."

"I wonder what fate brought me to Matching—if that is indeed the case?"

"My good angel," the young man answers, quickly—"nothing more nor less!"

Lenore Kendal looks at him, and as she looks she smiles very strangely.

"I do not like you to say things like that," she says. "I do not think it is—lucky."

"Don't you?" he laughs, gathering her hands to her breast as he looks down into the beautiful velvety eyes. "Oh, Lenore, my darling, my angel, what have I done that I should deserve such happiness as this?"

"Again!" she exclaims, drawing away her hands, a shadow drifting over her face as if a cloud had suddenly drifted over the moon. "If you talk like that, I shall be angry with you—I shall send you away!"

"I will do anything you like; I will say I am miserable, if that will please you better," Jack says, his glad eyes devouring the perfect beauty of her face, white in the moonlight—"only do not be so cruel as to speak of sending me away!"

"I shall not send you away if you behave like a reasonable mortal."

"Do you think I would go?"—laughing joyously. "Lenore, say you will marry me, and then I will let you go—for the present."

“I suppose I shall marry you”—smiling a little.

“That won’t do.”

“What am I say?”

“Say—‘Jack, I will marry you—soon.’”

“Jack, I will marry you—some day.”

He stoops his head to kiss her, but remembers just in time; and yet there is no one visible along the shadow-flecked road—he might have kissed her twenty times and no one been the wiser. But he can wait for that, he thinks, as they walk through the sleepy old village together, where the lights are beginning to twinkle softly through the summer gloaming, and the young moon throws their shadows distinctly up the hilly street.

“Austen will be so glad,” he says, as they climb the hill together—“and Georgie. And my mother will love you, because you have made me so happy—though indeed I think she loves you already for your own sake.”

“She has been very kind to me,” Lenore answers; but again the shadow flits over her face.

“And you like her, Lenore, don’t you?”

“Nobody could know your mother without liking her.”

“I think so; but then I am her son; and may be slightly prejudiced!” Jack laughs, as they pass the blacksmith’s forge.

The ruddy light streams through the doorway and wraps Lenore from head to foot in a momentary flood of radiance, and there is something weird and ominous in the exquisite face and figure as they appear projected in such lurid relief against the night, made black by that vivid glow of light. She looks like some beautiful destroying angel leading her victim in shadow beside her; but the effect is over almost instantaneously, and there is nothing to be seen but a pair of lovers walking together in the light of a summer moon.

In the Vicarage garden Jack kisses his sweetheart, hold-

ing her to his heart with strong young arms that clasp her as if they never meant to let her go.

“I will tell my mother to-night,” he says, in a voice that trembles with the passionate pleasure that fills his heart almost to pain. “I could not wait till morning to let her know how happy I am. Dear old mother! She will be so glad!”

“Will she?” Lenore asks dreamily.

“And we will tell Austen to-morrow?”

“Yes. And I will write to my aunt to-morrow—I should like her to know.”

“They will wonder in London how you could fancy a simple country fellow like me, won't they?”

“Aunt Poigndestre will wonder,” Lenore answers quietly; and even in the moonlight the old scornful smile curls her sweet lips. But Jack does not see it—they are too near his own.

“She can not wonder more than I do, sweetheart. I am sure I shall wake up to-morrow morning firmly persuaded that all this has been nothing but a wonderful dream.”

“A dream?” she echoed vaguely.

“It seems too good to be true—to me.”

The soft air sighs round them; the moonlight steeps the sleeping garden in a bath of silver; behind them the old house rises up, dark with ivy; in Austen's room a light glimmers through the red blind.

“You must promise me two things, Jack.”

“I will promise you a thousand, darling.”

“You are not to be too happy, and you are not to care for me too much.”

“Two utterly impossible things to promise,” he laughs, still holding her in the circle of his glad young arms. “I think I am too happy already, since you say it is not good to be too happy. But I don't think I could ever care for you too much.”

“Ah, but I think you could!”

“Not if you will care for me a little, Lenore.”

She raises her face to the calm sky, leaning her flaxen head against his shoulder; the deep velvety-brown eyes have no tears in them; no sigh comes from the sweet red lips. And yet she murders him then as surely as if she had raised her hand to strike.

“I love you, Jack,” she whispers softly. “There—now I think you may let me go!”

CHAPTER IV.

MISS KENDAL is standing in the open doorway the next morning when Mrs. Irving comes into the hall. It is an exquisite morning, soft and dewy—the roses in Lenore’s hand are dewy-wet still in their inmost dead-white folds.

“Dear Lenore, I am so glad! I hope Jack will make you as happy as—as you have made him.”

The two women kiss each other, then stand for a moment looking into each other’s face. The mother’s eyes are suspiciously red, but her lips are smiling—Lenore looks just a trifle paler than her wont, or else the faint blue gown makes her look pale.

“And you care for my boy, Lenore?”

“We are engaged,” Lenore answers, smiling.

Mrs. Irving hesitates for a moment, looking out into the garden; then she says, in a voice which trembles a good deal:

“When your brother asked me for Georgie, I told him I had something to say to him which I had rather he heard before I gave him any answer one way or another. I have not the same authority over my son as I have over my daughter; but I wish to tell you what I told Mr. Kendal, and then leave the matter in your own hands, as I left it in his. Will you walk with me as far as the gate, dear? It won’t take three minutes to tell.”

Miss Kendal looks both puzzled and surprised; but she steps out through the doorway without a moment's hesitation, and walks beside Mrs. Irving very slowly down to the garden gate and back again. The elder woman is the first to speak.

“I do not want you to attach more importance to what I am going to tell you than the thing may seem to be worth. I know that my own fears may morbidly exaggerate the danger—so many people have the same and even worse skeletons in their cupboards without in the smallest degree being troubled by their presence. But I think it right to tell you that there have been two instances of insanity in my husband's family; his father died in one of the places where they take charge of such unfortunates, and one of his nephews is a ward in Chancery, who, though he lives in his own house and is not under any kind of physical restraint, is not considered sufficiently sane to be allowed the management of his own affairs.”

“Is that all?” Lenore asks, when Mrs. Irving pauses, her face very white and pained.

“All! My dear child, it has been enough to make my life a very sorrowful one for the last seven-and-twenty years!”

“Does Jack know?”

“He knows about his cousin; but his grandfather was supposed to have got a sunstroke—I believe he really did get a sunstroke when he was a young man. I have never made any secret of either one case or the other—somebody would have been sure to tell if I had, and then Jack would have wondered. But I never let them think I attach any importance to it, and I do not believe it has ever dawned on Jack that his grandfather's misfortune could in any way injure or influence him; and I hope and pray the idea may never come into his head.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Irving, six families out of ten have the same story to tell.”

“I know that very well; but that does not comfort me very much”—smiling sorrowfully.

“And half the people in the world are crazed on some subject or other.”

“So your brother said when I spoke to him about Georgie; and I am more anxious for Georgie than Jack, because she is so much more like her father’s people.”

“You have troubled yourself very much about nothing, I think,” Miss Kendal says, smiling. “I am not surprised that Austen did not allow it to influence him in his choice of a wife!”

“Of course it is only a very remote contingency,” Mrs. Irving goes on, shaking her head; “but still it is a contingency, and I should not think it right to allow my children to marry without telling those whose future would be so closely bound up with theirs that such a terrible scourge as insanity had twice made its appearance in their father’s family.”

“I think you might have saved yourself the trouble and pain,” Miss Kendal says, not unkindly. “Nobody who fell in love with Georgie would hesitate to marry her because her grandfather had died of sunstroke, or she had a cousin who was slightly deranged.”

“And it will not prejudice you against Jack?”

“It certainly will not prejudice me against Jack!”

“Well, I thought it right to tell you,” Jack’s mother says, sighing. “But, of course, you will not breathe a word of it to him, dear. I would not for the world have him think I attached any importance to it.”

“You may trust me,” Lenore answers, smiling.

By this time they have reached the door again, and Lenore kisses her future mother-in-law before they go in.

“Don’t fret about it any more,” she whispers, kindly. “We will all take care of them together now. And I am

very sure you have been disquieting yourself unnecessarily."

Mrs. Irving feels relieved by the coolness, not to say carelessness, with which her son's *fiancée* takes the announcement of a fact which has haunted her like a nightmare for the greater part of her life. It reassures her to see how little this girl seems to dread the danger which menaces them; and yet she wonders at it. If she really cared for Jack, would she not be more anxious, even supposing it to be so unlikely to happen, and an inheritance so universal, as she says? But perhaps she cares so much for Jack that the idea of giving him up for anything of the kind never occurred to her, or perhaps, as Austen Kendal had said when she spoke to him about Georgie, love was too strongly developed now to allow room for any other consideration in her mind.

Well, she has done her duty by the Kendals. If they choose to risk the contingency—which indeed is very remote—they will do it with their eyes open. And perhaps Lenore is right. A great many people might call her anxiety to warn them a mere conscientious scruple, far-stretched and overstrained.

Miss Kendal writes that very afternoon to inform her aunt of her engagement, while Austen is congratulating his friend in his own room, and Mrs. Irving is getting her things ready to go back to the farm. Georgie is to come with her to spend the next day at the Vicarage, to see her lover for the first time since his illness; and, as that promises to be a busy day, Miss Kendal is glad to get her letter written and dispatched during this temporary lull. Not that her aunt can in any way influence her decision, Miss Kendal being entirely her own mistress; but she seems to wish the fact of her engagement to be known as soon as possible to the only relative about whose opinion she seems to care, though at the same time she begs her aunt to keep it a secret for the present, as she

thinks engagements very stupid things herself, and does not care to have her friends hear it till just before the marriage, which she thinks will probably take place very soon.

For many reasons Lady Poigndestre will be glad of her niece's engagement. Mr. Irving may not be in exactly their own rank of life; but he is a perfectly respectable young man, of a good and respectable family, and he is much better off, so far as money goes, than many of the more aristocratic suitors whom she would have been pleased to see Lenore accept, but whom Lenore had seen fit to refuse one after the other with as much *sang-froid* as if she, Lenore, had been an heiress with all the most eligible *partis* in England at her feet. And Lady Poigndestre will have another reason for being glad of her engagement, as Lenore Kendal knows very well; and the knowledge makes her red lip curl as she drops her letter into the post-pillar outside the Vicarage gate and saunters up the narrow walk again, humming two lines of her favorite song—

“ He took her soft hand e'er her mother could bar—

‘ Now tread we a measure!’ said young Lochinvar.”

After dinner Jack, who seems to fly backward and forward, so little time does he lose on the road, rides up to the Vicarage gate, leading Lohengrin, saddled and bridled, and with his mother's riding-habit rolled up like a soldier's knapsack on the pommel. And Lenore wastes no time in getting ready, for twenty minutes later they are riding through the village to the no small admiration of the inhabitants thereof, who are one and all of the opinion that “ Master Jack ” will soon be bringing a young mistress home to the farm.

“ I am taking you to choose the site of our new house, Lenore,” Jack says, as they walk their horses up the hill.

“ Of our new house?”

“Yes. I am not going to take you home to Matching farm-house.”

“The farm-house belongs to your mother?”

“I have given it to my mother. And I am going to build a nest for my bird higher up on the great green hill, nearer the sky.”

“Did you always intend to build a new house for yourself, Jack?”

“Yes, when I brought a new mistress home to Matching Farm.”

She rides beside him in silence for a minute or two, looking straight before her between Lohengrin's small brown ears.

“I would rather you chose the site yourself, Jack; for, after all, it will make very little difference to me,” she says, at last.

“Won't it make any difference to you where you spend the rest of your life, child?”

“Oh, of course! But—but I mean there can't be much variety to choose from on the side of a big green hill.”

“Oh, the views are different all round; and then there will be the wood behind! You were never on the hill itself yet, Lenore—you will be pleased with the picture of the river and the valley lying below us, and Watchhorn in the distance, so grand and blue. And we can even catch a glimpse of the Broad from two or three places, only then we lose sight of the valley and the old gray bridge.”

Lenore listens to him vaguely, something—is it compunction?—overshadowing her lovely eyes.

“We will make a plan of the house afterward,” Jack goes on, in the voice which has such a new ring of gladness in it. “I have an idea of what it ought to be like; but you shall make any improvements you please on my idea. You have better taste than I have, though,” he adds, laughing. “Perhaps that is not so evident, since you

chose only me; but I had the good taste to think you the sweetest and loveliest woman in all the world!"

"You know how to flatter, Mr. Irving."

"What words could one use to flatter you?"

"I not am the sweetest or loveliest woman in all the world."

"But I think you are."

"Jack, some day or other you will think me the cruellest woman that was ever born."

"Shall I?" Jack laughs, incredulous. "Let me know when that day comes, Lenore—I don't think it is very imminent at present. We shall turn in at this gate here—this will be our entrance gate, Lenore, only the gate must match the cottage; and I shall turn the lane into a broad smooth drive."

It is a pretty lane, overshadowed by trees, and it winds up the hill at the back of the farm, mounting very gradually, through green fields and meadows, to the wood which crowns the summit, standing up, cool and shadowy, against the sky.

"It is very pretty here," Lenore says at last.

"The higher one goes the better the views are, and the air. There—that is the village lying below us behind that veil of smoke."

The quaint old houses look picturesque in the distance, with the old gray bridge spanning the silver ribbon of the river.

"Nothing could be prettier than that," Lenore exclaims, shading her eyes with her hand as she looks down.

"Don't be in too great a hurry to come to a conclusion," Jack laughs, turning his horse's head. "We are a long way from the wood yet, and my idea is to have the house close under the wood."

"Yes?" Lenore says half interrogatively, half absently, as she too turns her horse's head and follows him up the green turf slope, always winding round the hill.

“Don’t you think the shelter of the wood would be pleasant in winter? We have a great deal of frost and snow sometimes up here.”

“I suppose so,” Lenore answers, shivering slightly.

“Lenore, do you remember where you said you would rather never have been born than think you would be fated to live and die at Matching?”

Jack is riding a little in advance, and does not turn his head as he puts the question. But Lenore turns away her face as she answers it.

“Of course I remember it. You are always alluding to that unfortunate speech of mine!”

“Do you know, I hated you to say it even then.”

“Yes.”

“That is not five weeks ago yet.”

“No.”

“And now you have promised to live and die at Matching? Girls are inconsistent creatures, aren’t they? But it is lucky for us they don’t always mean exactly what they say.”

He laughs as he says it, leading the way up the hill. And now they have lost sight of the valley and the old gray bridge, and the Peacock Hall woods lie spread out below them, with a wide stretch of blue water shining like a mirror under the sun.

“That is Matching Broad,” Jack says, pointing with the handle of his whip. “Now, Lenore, I have shown you what are considered the finest views on the hill. Which do you like best of the two?”

“This one, I think,” the girl answers, sitting in her saddle, her eyes on the shining water, her hand in her lover’s—for Jack has ridden up close to her—and a curious smile, half sad and half scornful, curling up the corners of her beautiful mouth.

“Then here we shall build our house,” the young man says, looking about him—“here, with its face to the val-

ley and its back to the wood. And it will be only a step to the mother's cottage; there it lies among the trees near the road, almost under our feet. Do you see it?"

Lenore sees it, and nods her head.

"I could run down in three minutes any day," Jack laughs, joyously. "We could have a code of signals, too. If I had our old field-glass now, I dare say I should see my mother feeding her chickens, or Georgie playing tennis, or even old Tam O'Shanter stealing along the garden wall after the young birds!"

"That would be interesting," Lenore smiles, but without any curl of her ripe red lip.

"It would interest me," Jack says, stoutly. "I remember in Australia thinking I would be glad to see even a weasel from the old place, though I waged such war against them when I was at home. Then here we shall pitch our tent, darling. You must let me kiss you; we are too high up to be seen by anybody but the crows."

He bends from his saddle and kisses her, and Lenore submits to the caress. And then they ride down the hill together, in the direction of the farm. The sight they have chosen is about half way up the hill, and is snugly sheltered by a semi-circular curve or indentation in the wood. Through the wood a narrow footpath leads over the top of the hill and down again toward the church and the village, the way by which the vicar had reminded Georgie they two could so easily get to the farm.

At the farm Georgie receives them with open arms. The child seems so happy, what with looking at Jack's happiness, and thinking of the meeting with her own lover in the morning, that Miss Kendal marvels, almost finding it in her heart to love her, though she is such a child, for the very joy and gladness of her countenance, and her sweet unselfish ways. She makes tea for Lenore, and carries cream for her with her own hands out of the dairy, and runs out to get some cherries in a little

willow basket, and a bunch of the roses she knows Lenore likes best.

“Isn't she a darling?” Jack says, smiling as he watches his little sister's flying figure passing in and out among the rose-bushes.

“She certainly is,” Lenore answers, smiling also. “The moment I saw her I ceased to wonder at Austen's infatuation; my only astonishment was that such a Titania should fall in love with an ugly little fellow like him!”

“I think she accepted him first to please me,” Jack laughs; “she knew how much I thought of him, and how fond we were of each other, and how sorry I should be if any grief or pain came to him through a sister of mine. But she cares for him now for his own sake; I know that from what the poor little thing suffered all the time he was ill.”

“Did she feel it so much?”

“Indeed she did! I don't think anybody knew it so well as I; my mother was here so little, you know, and when she was here she was always so busy. But Georgie used to run to me the moment I came back, to know all the news. Sometimes we have sat for an hour over the fire at night talking about him, and I have seen the tears dropping down her cheeks while her head lay on my shoulder. Once or twice, when he was at the worst, I don't think the child slept all night. She used to meet me outside the gate in the road, all white and trembling, and scarcely able to ask me what she had been waiting there perhaps for an hour to hear.”

“They will be happy together, those two,” Lenore says dreamily.

“I think they will—but not happier than we shall be, darling—don't say that.”

“But they love each other so well!”

“And don't we love each other?”—a little jealously.

“Always one loves more than the other,” the girl says, in the same dreamy way—“or, at least, almost always. But I think the love between those two is very equally balanced, or, if Austen loves most now, Georgie will go on loving him more and more every day till her love is at least equal to his.”

“And I shall make you love me, Lenore—not as much as I love you, perhaps, for I don't think that would be possible—but as much as Georgie loves Austen. You won't be able to help yourself, I shall be so desperately fond of you!”

She smiles, looking up into the young man's handsome eager face.

“We Irvings make good wives and husbands,” Jack says, smiling down at her. “They say constancy runs in families; and I am sure it runs in ours.”

“And I believe it runs in ours,” Lenore adds, with a curiously determined flash of her gray eyes. “I never heard of a Kendal yet who allowed the course of his true love to be turned aside by any obstacle whatever.”

“Then what happy couples we shall make!” Jack laughs, unconscious of the real meaning of that obstinate flicker. “We shall be fighting for the Dunmow fitch fifty years hence. I don't think they ever give it twice in the same year.”

Miss Kendal turns away to meet Georgie. The child makes a pretty picture in her pink dress, with her round flushed cheeks and the great bunches of pink roses with which she is literally laden. Lenore quotes Tennyson's lines as she comes up to her—

“ ‘ Rosy is the West,
Rosy is the South,
Rosy are her cheeks,
And a rose her mouth! ’ ”

“They are not all for you,” Georgie smiles. “These are Austen’s favorites—these little Scotch roses and the brier ones. You are to give all these to him.”

“With your love?”

“He has my love,” Georgie says simply, and yet so inimitably that Jack laughs.

“You dear child!” Lenore exclaims, and kisses her, half sadly and half laughingly.

And then they all go in-doors together, and have tea.

That evening Jack and Miss Kendal spend as usual at the Vicarage, in the room upstairs to which Austen moves in every day from his own; but they spend it in making ground-plans and front and back “elevations” on sheets of the vicar’s sermon-paper—at least Jack does—and now and then Lenore bends over the table, laughing, to give her opinion upon them at her lover’s earnest request. Jack has a very good idea of what he wants at all events, but he is merely making rude sketches which the architect will reduce to their proper weights and measurements. The house is to be a cottage in the early English style, with peaked roofs and projecting upper story, and quaint half-timbered porch. The windows are to have stone mullions, and to be casemented, with colored glass set in above. And the rooms are to be wainscoted, and to have polished floors, and mantel-piece of carved wood.

Leaning over Jack, with her hand on the back of his chair, Miss Kendal can not help admiring the neatness and precision he evinces even in trifling details; his house will be simple, but it will be entirely in good taste, from the quaint weather-vane on the gable to the carved wooden seats in the porch, where he declares he will smoke of an evening with Austen, while his wife and Georgie talk over their own affairs in the sitting-room with the carved beams across the ceiling, which is to be furnished with “Early English” furniture—quaint cabinets and tables, and tall, prim, straight-backed chairs.

“And must we all wear doublets and ruffs and farthingales?” Austen inquires lazily, from the depths of his easy-chair in the window.

“Well, no, I won’t insist upon that,” Jack laughs, turning his head a little to kiss Lenore’s hand. “Neither shall I ride about with my wife on a pillion behind me, or use beer as my breakfast beverage.”

The day began at the Vicarage with a confidence, and it seems fated to end with another, for, when Jack gets up to walk home at about nine o’clock, the vicar keeps hold of his hand, and, Lenore being out of the room, tells him he has something to say to him which he would rather say to-night.

“It is something I think you ought to know,” he adds a little feverishly—“something Lenore told me herself a day or two after she came down here.”

“Go on,” Jack merely answers, when he comes to a stand-still.

“Well, you know I used to wonder a little what brought her to such a dull old place as this.”

“Yes; I remember your saying something of the kind.”

“It appears that her aunt—old Lady Poigndestre—sent her down here to be out of the way of a man for whom she thought Lenore cared a little, a scamp and a good-for-nothing fellow, who would have broken her heart before he had been married to her a week.”

“Who was he?” Jack asks, his color changing.

“Her own cousin, Sir Arthur Poigndestre—as great a rascal, I believe, as ever lived.”

“Did Lenore care about him?”

“I fancy she did at first—long ago, when she was a young girl.”

She said something to Jack about caring for worthless people, and finding out one’s mistake afterward. He remembers every word of what she said, and his heart begins to beat freely again.

“I thought it only fair to tell you,” Austen says, relieved by the manner in which Jack takes the intelligence. “You might blame me afterward, if you ever chanced to hear the story.”

“I am glad you told me,” Jack answers gravely. “But I believe in Lenore too entirely to imagine her capable of saying what she did to me yesterday if she had the faintest vestige of regard for any other man.”

“I am sure she wouldn’t. Good-night, old fellow; and give my love to my dear little girl, and tell her I am counting the minutes till I see her—don’t forget.”

Jack walks down the narrow staircase rather soberly. Half way down he meets Lenore coming up.

“Lenore,” he says very tenderly, taking her hands in both his own, “tell me now if there is any just cause or impediment why I should not love you with my whole heart and soul?”

“Cause!” she repeats, looking up as he looks down, the light from the landing falling full on her fair face and flaxen head.

“You are mine, darling, are you not—now and forever?”

And Lenore smiles a little carelessly, and answers “Yes.”

CHAPTER V.

A WEEK later the foundations of Jack’s house are dug, bricks are being drawn, stone is being quarried, carpenters and masons are at work, the green field is spoiled with lime and mortar; but it will grow green again, as Jack tells Georgie when she laments over the burnt-up grass. And a week or two later the pretty Elizabethan structure begins to rise from the ground, higher and higher every day, for the weather is first-rate for building purposes, and Jack will not allow any pause in the work. And he

himself is up long before cockcrow every morning, that he may be able to spend an hour or two watching the builders, or examining the previous day's work, before he is obliged to attend to his own business at the farm. Every afternoon he rides over to the Vicarage to see Lenore.

He is as happy as a king during these long bright August days while his house is building, and every evening which he does not spend at the Vicarage he spends in carving wood for mantel-piece and doorway; for Jack has a taste for wood-carving, and has a carpenter's shop of his own fitted up at the farm, where he has been accustomed to spend the long winter evenings, making or mending, as the case may be. He carves out of hard old English oak quite an imposing mantel-piece for the sitting-room, with the Irving stag's head and motto, "J'ai bonne espérance" across the front, and wonderfully clever scroll-work and panels having stags' heads and game in raised carving; even Miss Kendal is fain to confess that she never saw bolder wood-carving in any house in England or abroad. And when this is finished he begins another for Lenore's room, with flowers, and beautiful angel-heads bending out in high relief from the scroll-work, and birds, and the Irving motto again in the same quaint old-English letters. And nobody can tell which is handsomest when they are finished—and they are soon finished, Jack often spending half the night over his darling task.

Once declared convalescent, the vicar mends very rapidly. Before Jack's walls are a yard high he is able to walk up and have a look at them; before they are six feet from the ground he has undertaken the services in the church again, before the roof is on he is as well as ever he was, and spends all his leisure moments in watching the building, as he said he should. The pretty structure seems to rise almost by magic; so anxious is

Jack to get it finished that the men declare laughingly, "The master won't let the grass grow under our feet anyhow!" And Lenore rides up to see it sometimes with her lover, though not very often, declaring that she has not the same mania for bricks and mortar that Austen has, and that it will impress her much more favorably when it is finished if she does not see it too often in process of erection. But Georgie climbs the hill very often to look at it, either with Austen or her brother, and grows quite excited when they first catch a glimpse of its quaint red gable over the hawthorn thicket which rises between it and the farm.

Georgie and the vicar are very happy during these August and September days. No more contented pair of lovers ever gathered peaches from a sunny wall, or planted out cuttings—to be transplanted to the Vicarage later on—or studied German together, than Georgie and the vicar, though they argue with each other sometimes, and even quarrel occasionally.

The vicar is not demonstrative, and Georgie is scarcely more than a child still, and some people fancy they do not care very much for each other, their wooing is so very matter-of-fact. But these people are mistaken. The vicar may be cold of manner, and Georgie may sometimes be what Mrs. Ryve calls "frivolous," but they suit each other perfectly, and in reality grow more and more in love with each other every day, as Lenore had said they would.

One day, about a week after their engagement, Lenore had shown Jack a letter from her aunt Lady Poigndestre. It was full of congratulations and kind hopes for the future happiness of Lenore and her lover; but Miss Kendal looked scornful as she flung it into the fire when Jack had read it, and said that her aunt might have dissembled a little better her joy at having got her off her hands—did not Jack think she might? But Jack, who knew her

aunt's reason for wishing to see her happily married and out of harm's way, only shook his head, smiling, and said he was glad she had not tried to induce her to change her mind. This letter was written from Marienbad. But on the sixteenth of September Miss Kendal hears again from her aunt, and again shows Jack the letter, as they stand at the end of the Vicarage garden in the soft hazy September sunshine, looking over the low jasmine hedge into the leaf-strewn road.

"She wants me to go up to London for a little while," Lenore says, looking at the fallen leaves.

"So I see."

"She says I shall want to look after my things—"

"'As you are to be married so soon.' Lenore, you did not tell me you would marry me soon!"

He has thrown down the letter and taken her two white hands in his, a laughing light in his gray eyes.

"I don't think I said so to my aunt"—reddening a little. "But I—but no doubt she thinks it will be soon. She knows I always hated the idea of a long engagement."

"What do you call soon, Lenore?"

"Next summer," she answers.

"You think I will wait till next summer! Why, the house will be finished before Christmas!"

"You think of nothing but the house"—pouting a little.

"My darling, I think of it only as a home for you."

"You spend more time there than you do with me!"

"Because I sometimes fancy I bore you, loitering about here when you may want to be busy. Do you think I would willingly spend a moment away from you that I could spend with you? I am often half afraid to come again so soon."

"I was not in earnest," she says, smiling. "I think you are here all the time."

"Why don't you send me away if I bother you?"

“I do send you away sometimes, don't I? But about going to London. I think I must go for a little while. Aunt Poigndestre will be offended with me if I refuse.”

“How soon would you think of going?”

“Well, about the end of the week, perhaps.”

“And this is Tuesday. Lenore, you must promise not to stay too long away.”

“Aunt Poigndestre wants me to stay till—till I am married, evidently.”

“Then you must promise to marry me very soon.”

“I will marry you next June.”

“And you will remain away from this till June!”

“No. I shall probably come back to Matching for Christmas.”

“Lenore, you must marry me at Christmas. I will not allow you to go to London unless you promise me that.”

She hesitates, looking at the blue haze under the trees. A leaf floats down to the ground, and another, and another, wavering slowly, a speck of gold or crimson, through the calm, still air.

“Promise, darling. Christmas is still three months away—you couldn't expect me to wait any longer than that.”

“Very well,” she says at last, “at Christmas be it.”

Jack thanks her rapturously—he would have kissed her if they had not been visible both from the Vicarage windows and from the road, and if Miss Kendal had not objected to kissing, except on very rare occasions.

“But you must not stay away all the time from this till Christmas.”

“I thought that was one of the conditions!”

“Indeed it was not. How could I live so long without seeing you?”

“It is not so long—only three months.”

“May I go to see you, Lenore?”

“Well,” she answers, slowly, looking away at the road

again, "I had as soon you did not. Aunt Poigndestre is very eccentric, and never cares to have strangers come to the house. But you may write."

"Of course I shall write," Jack says, looking disappointed. "But I am no hand at letter-writing. If I may not go to see you, Lenore, you must come down to Matching again very soon."

"I may if I can manage it."

"And you will write to me?"

"Certainly."

"Every day?"

"My dear Jack, how could I possibly fill a letter to you every day?"

"I don't want a long letter. I only want you to tell me you haven't forgotten me among all your aristocratic friends."

She shrugs her shoulders, laughing.

"If you can not trust me—"

"Darling, I do trust you. But don't you know what my life will be to me while you are away?"

"What did you do before I came?"

"I think I merely existed. It is only since I have known you that I have learned to live."

"Couldn't you go back to the old way if—if anything happened to me?"

"Never," he answers, in his curious, passionately determined way. "If anything happened to you, Lenore, I should not care to live."

"My dear Jack, everybody says things like that. But people lose what they love best in the world very often, and don't die—don't even seem to relish their dinner less a day or two afterward."

"I have given you my whole heart," the young man exclaims, his passionate tone in curious contrast to her careless one. "If I lost you, Lenore, I should lose everything, for my whole life and soul are wrapped up in you."

“It is a pity,” she says, speaking more to herself than to him. “It is a great pity.”

“A pity! My darling, would I have it otherwise if I could?”

“Not now perhaps.”

“Not now, or ever! My darling, don't you know that I glory in my love for you?”

For one moment something very like a look of compunction comes into the beautiful velvety eyes. But it is gone again directly, and she is laughing at a little gray rabbit which has come boldly out of the hedge and sits looking at them among the long damp grasses and the fallen red and yellow leaves.

* * * * *

Miss Kendal has gone up to London “to get her trousseau,” the village gossips say, wondering what marvels of dresses and millinery will make their appearance in the little dark church next winter, when “young Mrs. Irving” comes down with her husband on Sunday mornings from the pretty new cottage on the hill. The wedding is to be at Christmas, and Miss Kendal is to be married from the Vicarage, or so at least they suppose. And young Irving is just mad on the subject of that new house of his—if he goes on at this rate, he will have the furniture in it in November. But it must be very damp yet, though the dry season has been most favorable for building, and he was lucky enough to get his walls up before there was any appearance of frost.

It is a very pretty cottage, now that the roof is on and the windows are in, and the quaint carved pillars under the porch. Over this there is a little projecting room which is almost all casement window. This is to be Lenore's own particular sanctum, filled with her favorite books, and with copies of one or two of her favorite pictures on the walls. And the flower-garden in front of the

house is laid out already, and the tennis-ground on the only perfectly level spot on the hill. They have even begun to clear the path through the wood to the Vicarage, and to turn the lane into a drive, with quaint carved wooden entrance gates to match the house, and a tiny lodge, also in the same picturesque old-English style.

Jack writes to his sweetheart every day, and she writes to him once a week. He is forced to be satisfied with this, and carries one letter about in his breast-pocket till he gets another, and wishes Lenore would tell him more about herself when she does write, and less about the entertainments she goes to, and the books she reads, and the great people whose doings may interest her, but about whom Jack cares not at all. But beggars can not be choosers, and Jack is fain to be satisfied with his lady-love's letters, seeing that he can not force her to put more love into them than she thinks meet and proper, or to write one whit oftener than she feels inclined.

About the end of September, however, he gets a letter one morning which raises him at once into the seventh heaven of delight. Lenore wants to see him. She thought that she could do very well without him, she says prettily, but she finds that she has made a mistake. Could he not run up for a day or two? She would not keep him from his beloved house more than a day or two; but see him she must, for she was beginning to feel lonely and *distracte*.

Jack walks over to the Vicarage that same afternoon, with his love's dainty letter in his breast-pocket, and a look of supreme delight on his frank, handsome face.

He finds Austen practicing a solemn fugue in the dim little church, and sits astride the rail listening to him with unusual patience, looking down into the narrow aisle and trying to picture Lenore kneeling there in a white gown before the altar, himself beside her, as they shall kneel some happy day, husband and wife. When

the fugue is ended, he tells Austen that he is going up to London by the 5:40 train that same evening, and asks if he has any message for Lenore.

“She wants to see you?” Kendal repeats, as they walk back to the Vicarage slowly between the grassy graves. “What is she up to now?”

“Up to!” Jack echoes, almost resentfully. “I do not know what you mean, Austen. It is not so very strange that she should want to see me. Georgie would want to see you if you had been three or four weeks away.”

“Oh, Georgie,” the vicar says, in the same doubtful way—“Georgie is not Lenore!”

“I know she isn’t,” Jack retorts, with an emphasis not very flattering to his sister; but Kendal’s manner irritates him. Why should he try to damp the pleasure he has felt all day, remembering one sentence in the pretty gray-and-silver envelope, which is rising and falling now with every beat of his strong heart?

“Lenore is a very self-contained person,” Austen goes on, half conscious of Jack’s displeasure. “She is not given to sudden impulses—I mean, she would not give way to them—for nothing.”

“If she cares for me enough to marry me, I suppose it is nothing very wonderful that she should wish to see me,” Jack rejoins, aggrieved. “And she says her aunt wishes to make my acquaintance—which is very natural if she cares for Lenore.”

“I don’t think she cares very much for Lenore.”

“Not care for Lenore?” the other questions, as if such a thing were barely possible. “She must be a strange being if she does not care for Lenore.”

“My dear fellow, you can not expect the whole world to be as infatuated about her as you are.”

“It is well for me they are not,” Jack laughs, suddenly restored to good-humor by some memory of his own. “I should stand a bad chance if all the eligible

men she meets in London were as mad about her I am, shouldn't I?"

"That is for you to determine. Don't you remember what Lady Geraldine's poet-lover says, 'Behold me, for I love you; I am worthy as a king!'"

"And you have no message?" Jack asks a few minutes later, as they stand together at the Vicarage gate.

"None," Kendal answers, smiling. "Lenore and I never send messages to each other, except on business. I suppose she will certainly be back here before Christmas?"

"She has promised to marry me before Christmas," Jack says, his gray eyes darkening and brightening at the same time. "Austen, I do think I am the very happiest man on the face of the earth!"

"Long may you think so," the vicar answers gravely, looking not at his friend, but up the long gray road, with its double row of autumn-tinted elms and beeches. "I heard a man make that very speech once and only once before in my life."

"And he soon changed his tune, to judge by your face?"

"I don't think that state of bliss ever lasts very long—do you?"

"I don't know," Jack says, with the same dreamy smile. "I think, if I live and if Lenore lives, nothing can ever mar my happiness. It sounds very selfish—doesn't it? But I do think nothing can hurt me if I have her, no man ever loved a woman better than I love her. And to think that she loves me! I often fancy it is almost too good to be true."

"You will be late for the train," Kendal says, looking at his watch. "Well, I shall see you to-morrow night, I suppose—you won't spend another night in town?"

"I don't suppose she will want me hanging about her aunt's house. But of course, if I have a chance of seeing her, I shall stay as long as she lets me. Good-by, old fellow! Mother and Georgie are expecting you to tea."

He runs down the road, and Austen Kendal returns to the church, his hands behind his back and his eyes on the ground. He loves Jack Irving, and he does not trust Lenore. He knows it will go hard with Jack if she throws him over, and yet he dares not mention such a thing to him; and, even if he had dared, it is too late. No warning could save him now; he is utterly wrapped up in her, body and soul. And it may be that Lenore really intends to marry him. What her reasons may be—whether it is pique or that the freshness and unselfishness of his love have touched her heart—he knows not; but, though he doubts her, he can not be sure that she has not made up her mind to marry Jack, and lead a peaceful happy life as his wife, even here in dull sleepy Matching. So, seeing that he might as well speak to the wind as tell Jack that Lenore is not all that he fancies her, he very wisely holds his tongue. But, as he walks round to the church door, his face has a troubled look; and, instead of going back to the organ to finish his fugue, he locks the door and puts the big key in his pocket, and walks away down the road to Matching Farm.

* * * * *

Jack presents himself at the door of Lady Poigndestre's house in Park Lane at an unconscionably early hour the next morning—that is, unconscionable for a visitor in such a locality. But he finds Miss Kendal waiting for him in the great cool drawing-room, clad in a gown of some soft, silky, cream-colored stuff with knots of azure ribbon down the front, and a string of big blue beads round her slim white throat.

“I knew you would come,” she says, submitting to his strong clasp for an instant, and looking up at him with lovely smiling eyes, her cheeks flushed, a happy smile on her sweet lips.

Jack thinks he has never seen her look so beautiful be-

fore, and thinks also, poor wretch, that it is his coming which has made her glad!

“Of course I came,” he answers joyously. “Would I not have come long ago if I thought that you would let me in?”

“I wanted to see you. And it was not that—”

“But that is enough,” Jack interrupts her, bending his head to kiss the scented golden locks on her forehead. “You can not improve on that.”

“I want to show you to Aunt Poignestrelle,” Lenore says, laughing as she disengages herself from his strong, young arms and stands before him, looking up into his dazzled eyes. “I fancy she half believes you are only a myth. She as much as told me so a few days ago, because I—because I—”

“I hope not because you were letting somebody else make love to you?” Jack says, with quick jealousy, and yet only half in earnest, though his eyes devour the fair face eagerly, passionately—the sweet pink cheeks, the lovely laughing eyes.

“Is it very likely I should do such a thing,” Lenore answers, demurely, “when—I love you?”

“I hope not!” Jack exclaims, stretching out his glad arms again; but, Lenore evading them this time, he is obliged to be content with looking at her.

“And how does the house get on?”

“Very well—only not half fast enough. And the *trousseau*?”

“Oh, the *trousseau* will be ready!” she laughs. “Come—there is the luncheon-bell! I must introduce my mythological lover to her ladyship; she will think you substantial enough when she sees you, I hope. She won’t shake hands with you, or I would ask you to give her a squeeze, which would prove to her very unequivocally that you were real flesh and blood—not a mere creature of my

imagination, as she had the impertinence to insinuate the other day."

Laughing, she leads the way down-stairs, and Jack follows her, a little bewildered by the splendor of the house—the deep-piled carpets, the statues in their crimson niches, the carved oak, the pictures, the servants in plush and powder—wondering a little sadly how Lenore will be able to content herself in the nest that he is building for her, which, pretty as it is and will be, is yet so small and simple compared to this house down whose broad staircase and along whose tessellated hall she passes like a princess, too much accustomed to the beauty and the splendor of her surroundings to give them a second thought.

In the dining-room he is introduced to Lady Poignestre, a fat, rather vulgar-looking woman of sixty or thereabouts, with a very red face, dressed in a purple gown and cap-ribbons, and apparently wrapped up in the three little poodles ensconced in her lap and in the folds of her skirt.

With momentary curiosity she puts up her gold-rimmed eyeglass to look at her niece's *fiancé*, but scarcely takes the trouble to be civil to him during the long meal of many courses which is called luncheon in this house. If it had not been that Lenore is sitting opposite to him—beautiful Lenore, with her golden ruffled head and azure ribbons and half-deprecatory, half-comical glances—Jack would have heartily wished himself back at Matching Farm.

After luncheon Lenore grants him one whole hour of her society in the big drawing-room, shows him photographs and all the curiosities they have picked up in their foreign travels, and takes him round to look at the pictures, explaining them to him, naming the painters who have painted them. And, while she talks, Jack looks at her with all his heart in his gray eyes.

She seems so much too good for him, this beautiful princess—she seems so much at home among all these rare and costly things! He would never have had the courage to ask her to be his wife if he had met her first here, he thinks—she had seemed a long way above them all down at Matching; but there she had, with such infinite tact, adapted herself to their simple ways, had made herself so much at home at the Vicarage and even at the farm, had so seldom alluded to the life she led with her aunt, that the young man had been unconsciously led to “trust his modest worth” and to believe that he could make her happy as his wife.

Lenore does not ask him to come again to-morrow—speaks indeed of his seeing Georgie to-night, sending her love to her and to his mother. She does not say much about Christmas—he can not get her to say much about their marriage; but she smiles at him in the old bewildering way, and Jack is obliged to be content.

Just before he leaves—at about four o'clock—the drawing-room door opens suddenly, and Sir Arthur Poigndestre walks into the room. Lenore turns to the new-comer, with a look which rather puzzles Jack, half annoyed, half deprecating; and there is a very bright color in her cheeks as she introduces the young men to each other. Sir Arthur Poigndestre makes himself very agreeable during the few minutes that he remains in the room, talking to Jack about horses and hunting. Jack studies him rather wistfully when, just before he goes, he walks over to the window where his cousin is standing and says a few words to her in a lower tone. Not that he is jealous; but then Lenore had once fancied that she cared for him, and he does not greatly care to remember even that. Poigndestre is a good-looking fellow enough, dark and thin as a Spaniard, with a pair of sleepy black eyes. But he has the look of a man who lives very hard—a worn, supercilious *blasé* look—and Austen Kendal has described

his temper as something fearful. He is well and carefully dressed, and has a peculiarly distinguished look; for the first time in his life Jack is troubled about the fit of his own garments and the style of his cravat, and wishes he had not come up to town in such thick boots.

But Lenore does not seem to have noticed any shortcomings in her lover's dress or manner when she turns to him, smiling, the instant her cousin leaves the room. His confidence in himself returns in a moment—his confidence in her was never shaken for a moment. He finds it very hard to tear himself away when the parting hour comes; but he does tear himself away, and for the next week or two lives on the recollection of those few hours spent in his love's society, recalling again and again her every word and look, and wondering why he had not said more about his own great love—Lenore however would never let him say half he wanted to say on that subject, and he was never particularly clever at putting his feelings into words.

* * * * *

It is about the beginning of October when Lenore mentions in one of her letters that her aunt is ill. Jack would have wished to know whether the cousin of whom Austen had spoken were living in his mother's house or not; but, as Lenore never mentions his name in her letters, he thinks it is not probable, particularly as his mother had not wished him to be with Lenore. Of course her being engaged would make a difference; but still Jack does not think he is in London; in any case he does not care to put the question, since Lenore did not choose to tell him of her own accord. But, now that Lady Poigndestre is ill, he supposes her son is with her, and he begins to wish that Lenore would come back to the Vicarage—not that he distrusts her, but he can not bear to think of her as in the same house with this man, who, if he was once her lover, as Austen had said, must

surely be her lover still. Nobody who had ever loved her could ever grow entirely indifferent to Lenore.

A week after this letter he hears again—the letter is brought up to him with his breakfast to the cottage, where he has been working with the carpenters since daylight.

The deep black border of the envelope prepares him for the news it contains. Lady Poigndestre is dead—has been dead since the day succeeding that on which Lenore wrote announcing her illness—and Lenore is staying with some friends in London until after the funeral. She does not speak of coming back to Matching; but then the letter is very short—only a few lines. Of course she must be coming back to Matching. Her brother's house will be her home now, till that happy day when Jack shall lead her by the hand into a home of her own.

Austen Kendal goes to London for the funeral, but comes back the next day, it being Saturday, and he having made no arrangements about a substitute for the Sunday services. Jack meets him at the railway station, anxious to hear what Lenore has said about coming down. But Lenore has said nothing about coming down; she was staying at the D'Esterres's, and seemed rather cut up about her aunt's death, Austen thought. He did not like to insist upon bringing her down, though he told her the sooner she came the better.

Yes, he has seen Poigndestre. He was at his mother's funeral. No, he did not think he went to the D'Esterres's much. Lenore spoke of him as being about to leave town immediately his mother's affairs were settled. His mother had left everything to him; he had already run through his own fortune, and his mother's money would set him on his legs again. She could have left it all away from him—every penny of it. She had threatened to cut him off with a shilling if he had insisted upon marrying Lenore; but the money is his now, to do what he likes with

it—and pretty “ducks and drakes” he will make of it, Austen adds, who has a very bad opinion of his cousin—everybody says he will have spent every farthing of it before the year is out.

“And she did not say on what day she would come down?” Jack asks wistfully, after a minute or two.

“No. I wanted her to settle a day; but she said she would write.”

“How was she looking? Well?”

“She looked cut up, I thought; but then she has gone through a good deal. My aunt died very suddenly, and Lenore had a great deal of business to transact, people to interview, and letters to write, and all that.”

“I suppose so; but she will soon recover her cheerfulness when she comes down to Matching.”

“So I told her,” Austen Kendal says; but he looks rather grave as he walks beside his friend up the quiet leaf-strewn road.

“And what did she say to that?” Jack inquires, who, lover-like, would like to hear every word she said, if Austen could only remember them.

“Lenore is an odd girl,” the vicar says musingly; “I never understood her, even as a child.”

“If you mean by odd that she is unlike other people, I certainly agree with you,” Jack observes, not half satisfied with his friend’s tone, yet at a loss to understand what it is that makes him dissatisfied. “And I am sure I don’t wish her otherwise. I don’t believe there is another girl in the world half so good, or clever, or beautiful as Lenore.”

“The world is a very wide place, Jack!”

“Oh, you are her brother!” Jack laughs a little uneasily. “You think Georgie prettier, I dare say, though Georgie isn’t fit to hold a candle to her!”

“How is Georgie?” the vicar asks, very willing to change the subject.

“ Oh, she is very well!”

“ And your mother?”

“ My mother is very well. Did Lenore say—”

“ My dear fellow, I don't think I exchanged fifty words with Lenore altogether. You forget that I was only two days in London, and spent most of one of those at a funeral!”

“ I hope she will soon write,” Jack says, sighing, as they reach the Vicarage gate.

“ I hope so,” Austen answers, looking at the cheerful glow of firelight in the parlor window, and picturing Georgie to himself waiting for him there, as she should wait for him in the pleasant autumn evenings when she should be his wife.

But Jack is thinking of Lenore as he saw her first in that very room, in a long white gown, with a bunch of over-blown pink roses at her throat.

Two days pass, three days, and yet there is no letter. Jack begins to feel very anxious, fearing that Lenore may be ill. But Austen reassures him on that point; Lenore seemed in perfect health when he was in London—probably she is having mourning made, or something of the kind. This satisfies Jack for another day or two; but at the end of that time he writes a very urgent letter to Lenore, begging of her to let him know at once how she is, as he is really anxious, and will go up to London immediately if he does not hear.

This brings an answer by return of post, laughing at him for his anxiety, and telling him all the London news—as it interests Miss Kendal—but saying not a word about coming home.

Jack writes again, and at the end of a week receives another letter—exactly the old style of correspondence; but Miss Kendal does not speak of returning to Matching, and systematically ignores all Jack's inquiries on that point, as she ignores his hints that Christmas is not very

far off, and that the house is nearly ready for its mistress. And so the days go on till November—busy days for Jack, what with his farm, and his new house, and his shooting, but not too busy to prevent his longing with a perfect passion of longing to see the girl who has promised to be his wife before the end of the year.

The vicar and Georgie are not to be married till March. Mrs. Irving would not hear of an earlier date being fixed than that, though Austen pleaded hard to be married on the same day as his friend. Georgie will be eighteen in March, and eighteen is early enough to undertake the duties of a wife, and above all of a clergyman's wife—or so Georgie's mother thinks. And the vicar is fain to submit, though the winter evenings that would have passed so delightfully if his pretty little wife had been sitting beside him, as he had sometimes hoped she would, will seem very long to him. Still it is pleasant to see her hemming away industriously at the beautiful damask napery which her mother has given her, and to help her to write labels for the preserves which are to go to the Vicarage by and by. And she is learning to net curtains for the Vicarage windows, her mother having stoutly resisted all her cajolery to induce her to give away some of the pairs she had netted for Jack's house before Jack's house was anything but the "baseless fabric" of a dream.

CHAPTER VI.

ON the third of November, while the vicar is at breakfast, Jack enters with an open letter in his hand.

"Read that," he says, and turns away to the fire, leaning his elbow on the mantel and his head on his hand.

But the vicar thinks very little of the latter, he is so much disturbed by the expression of his friend's face. It looks like the face of a man who has received a bad blow.

“Why, Jack, old fellow,” he exclaims, getting up from the table hurriedly, “what is the matter? You look as if you had seen a ghost! I hope nothing has happened at the farm.”

“Can’t you read?” Jack says, in a changed hoarse voice, and the vicar reads the letter.

“I can’t make head or tail of it!” he says, after a moment’s puzzled pause. “What does she mean?”

“That’s what I want you to tell me. What does she mean?”

“When did you get this?”

“Just now—on my way to the mill.”

The two men looked at each other for a moment or two in absolute silence.

“I can’t make it out,” Austen says at last, turning the paper over in his hand. “Had you any quarrel, or anything?”

“We had no quarrel.”

“When did you hear from her last?”

“About a week ago—a week yesterday.”

“And she wrote just as usual?”

“Just as usual.”

“I can’t make it out,” the vicar repeats, his hand shaking a little as he reads the letter through again from beginning to end, Jack standing by the mantel-piece. “This looks like breaking off the engagement, Jack!” he says at last.

“So I thought,” the other answers, in a dull dazed way.

“My poor fellow,” Austen says, laying his hand on his arm, a great trouble in his own eyes, “if that’s the case, she’s not worth breaking your heart about.”

“I can not believe it,” the other exclaims, in a strange, altered voice—“I can not believe it!”

“I can very well believe it,” says Austen, shaking his head. “I never trusted her.”

“And I trusted her as I trust Heaven!”

“Yes—it was there you made the mistake.”

“She is only trying me!” Jack says a little wildly, walking away from him, up and down the room. “She can’t be in earnest. She just wants to see how I will take it—they like to try their power over a fellow—to-morrow she will write and say it was all a joke.”

“Jack,” the vicar says solemnly, “you are a brave fellow, and you must bear it as well as you can for your mother’s sake and for Georgie’s. But I will not buoy you up with any false hopes. She means every word of this letter I hold in my hand.”

“How do you know?” Jack cries, turning upon him fiercely. “What do you know about it more than I know myself?”

“I know Lenore better than you do, and I tell you I never trusted her one pin’s point.”

“Don’t say a word against her!” the other retorts furiously. “If she chooses to—to throw me over, why—why shouldn’t she do it? I would kill any man who dared to say a word against her to me.”

Austen Kendal takes no notice of his violence, so far as it touches himself. He hears him out, and then he answers him, in a calm, even tone, laying his hand on his sleeve:

“I am not going to utter any platitudes about resignation and all that—no one was ever resigned yet till they had not strength to kick against the pricks any longer. But I am going to remind you that you are a man, Jack, and should bear your sorrow like a man, and not like a child. Would a brave soldier rave and rant like this on the eve of a battle? Not if he knew he was certain to bite the dust the next morning!”

“I am not raving or ranting. But I want to know what she means by that letter. That is what I want to know,” Jack answers, looking him straight in the face.

“Exactly what she says, I expect,” Kendal tells him,

with a great scorn in his deep eyes. "She thinks that she could never make you happy—that you are entirely unsuited to each other—that she was mad and blind not to have seen it long ago, and she asks you to release her from her engagement exactly as she might ask you to release her from an engagement to dine with you, or to dance a galop with you, or any other trifling thing of the kind."

"And yet you are silly enough to fancy she is in earnest!" Jack laughs, his eager, burning eyes fastened on Austen's face.

"She is in earnest—as much in earnest as she ever was in her life."

"But no one but the most utterly worthless woman in the world could turn round and treat a man who loved her like that!"

"And I believe her to be utterly worthless," Kendal says, bitterly. "It is a hard thing to say of a man's own sister, but I believe it to be true. I care for your little finger, Jack, more than I care for her whole body, and I tell you Lenore's heart is as hard and cold as that mantel-piece, and just as likely to feel for your sorrow or for mine."

"I don't believe it!" Jack exclaims, furiously. "If an angel from heaven came and told me she could treat me like that, I wouldn't believe it! Why, hasn't she said she loved me a hundred times over in this very room?"

Kendal is silent for sheer shame and grief and anger that the woman who has done this thing could be anything to him.

"And she does love me!" the poor fellow says, with a sudden, ecstatic smile. "My own beautiful darling—as if I could doubt her just because she chooses to try me with a foolish little joke like that! Wouldn't I be a fool to doubt her, Austen, for a trifling little thing like that?"

The vicar walks away to the window, and stands there looking out.

“Give me back the letter, Austen,” Jack says, after a minute or two. “She would be angry if she thought I left it lying about.”

“It is on the table,” Austen tells him, glancing round at it as he might at some poisonous thing.

Jack picks it up and puts it into its envelope. Then he buttons up his coat.

“Where are you going?” the vicar asks, watching him uneasily.

“I am going up to London. Do you think I could let a day pass without hearing her say that this letter was only a joke?”

“I should write if I were you,” Austen suggests.

“And wait two days for an answer? My dear Austen, is it possible that you can be in love?”

“Then, if you must go, I will go with you.”

“Oh, you need not trouble yourself! I shall not stay more than a day or two in London—I don’t think she would care to have me bothering round there when it isn’t her own house, you know, and I shouldn’t care to be in London if I couldn’t see her. But I am obliged to you all the same for offering to come with me, old boy, particularly as I know you have your sermon to write.”

“But I would rather go with you, Jack, if you don’t mind.”

“What for?” the other asks suspiciously—so suspiciously that Kendal thinks it is better not to insist.

“Very well,” he says a little coldly; but at the same time he makes up his mind to follow him up to London by the next train.

“It is all a mistake,” Jack observes calmly, putting on his hat. “I will call in on my way home the day after to-morrow. Good-by till then.”

Quite stealthily he walks out through the hall into the

garden, opens the gate, and steps out into the road. And Austen Kendal stands staring after him, uncertain whether to risk his anger by following him or to allow him to travel up to London alone in that strange dazed kind of way. But there was a flash in Jack's gray eyes when he offered to go with him which made the vicar hesitate; the memory of it makes him hesitate now till the opportunity is lost. It will take Jack, at his best pace, fully ten minutes to walk to the railway station, and the train will leave in twelve; and the vicar is still in his morning coat and slippers. He will swallow his breakfast, and follow him to town in the 11:30. Jack will scarcely think of going to the D'Esterres's so late in the evening as five, and he will not reach London till ten minutes to five. Kendal knows the hotel he generally puts up at in London, and will be sure to find him there when he arrives in town himself at a quarter past eight.

At exactly a quarter past five that evening Jack knocks at the door of the D'Esterres's house in Berkeley Street. The great splendidly-furnished drawing-rooms seem to him to be packed full of visitors when he is ushered in; but Lenore comes to him immediately, and takes him to Mrs. D'Esterre, to whom she introduces him as "a great friend of my brother Austen's." Mrs. D'Esterre, who has probably never heard of the young man's existence before, is nevertheless pleasantly polite to him; for Jack is a handsome fellow, and can hold his own even in that crowded room.

He supposes Mrs. D'Esterre knows all about him—such a great friend of Lenore's must surely know all about her engagement—but he troubles his head very little as to what she thinks of him, or any of her aristocratic friends think. He sees only one face, hears only one voice, longs only for the moment when he can say to her, "Lenore, you were not in earnest when you wrote that letter."

She seemed a little startled when he first came in; but

her cheeks recovered their color in a moment—very likely she guessed he would come. And she looks very well, he thinks, and moves about among all these people with the same grand air with which she moved among the simple folk at Matching, talking and smiling in the same cold bright way, and looking exquisitely lovely in her long trailing black gown, with a string of black carved beads round her throat. She had met Jack as calmly—after that first startled glance—as if they had parted only yesterday, with a cool friendly clasp of her firm white hand. But she does not seem in any hurry to come back to him; nor do the visitors show any signs of taking their departure, though Mrs. D'Esterre has moved away to some other of the guests, and Jack is left alone.

He bears it for a good while, hoping that Lenore will take pity on him and come to him of her own accord. But the minutes pass by, and still she is engrossed by one old dowager or another, or deep in conversation with some military-looking man with a ribbon in his button-hole, or surrounded by a group of girls. Jack begins to feel hurt at last. He has not spoken three words to her for nearly two months, and she will not trouble herself to make an opportunity of speaking to him now, even for a minute; she will not even look at him, though she must know his eager eyes are all the time devouring her face.

“Lenore,” he says at last, coming behind her as she stands near the door-way, talking and laughing with an æsthetic-looking young man whose superabundant hair may be supposed to make up for the deficiency of nose from which his pallid and thin countenance undoubtedly suffers, “I can’t stand this any longer; I am going.”

“I could see your patience visibly evaporating,” Lenore smiles, opening and shutting her great black fan. “I am only surprised that you managed to breathe such an uncongenial atmosphere for so long.”

Jack can not say what hope has sustained him through

the ordeal, as the æsthetic young man has shown no sign of resigning his place beside Miss Kendal; nor does she seem to have any desire that he should. Jack also feels that he could not in any circumstances say what he wants to say to her here in this crowded room, even if she gave him an opportunity. Even now his voice trembles as he wishes her good-by.

“Are you really going?” she asks, looking up into the young man’s troubled eyes as he looks down.

“Don’t you think it is time?”—smiling a little bitterly.

“Well, very few people care for this sort of thing. I am always glad myself when Mrs. D’Esterres’s ‘Fridays’ are over; but it is ‘part of the serious business of fashionable life,’ as somebody or other says.”

“Good-by,” Irving says, holding out his hand.

“Good-by—if you must go.”

Not a word of coming again! Not a hint of any desire to see him on the morrow. Not a single regret that they have not had an opportunity of saying three words to each other after all these months! Jack’s heart, which has been buoyed up since the morning by his obstinate determination not to take her letter seriously, becomes suddenly as heavy as lead.

“I shall call to-morrow,” he says, with a courage born of that strange pang. Whether she likes it or not, he will call again to-morrow.

“To-morrow?” Miss Kendal repeats musingly. “To-morrow we are going to Lady Maple’s *matinée musicale*.”

“At what hour?”

“Oh, quite early! That kind of entertainment is always fixed for some abominably early hour!”

“Not before twelve o’clock?” Jack inquires, in the same sullen, stubborn way.

“Oh, no—not before twelve!” she allows reluctantly, with a shrug of her slim shoulders.

“Then I shall call at eleven,” Jack says, holding

out his hand again, a very determined light in his gray eyes.

Miss Kendal perhaps thinks that, since an explanation is inevitable—as she must have known all along it would be—the sooner it is over the better, though, like a coward, her first instinct has been to put off the evil day.

“Very well,” she says coldly. “But do not be later than eleven.”

If Jack had not steadfastly determined in his own mind to believe in Lenore until she herself absolutely cut the ground of his belief from under his feet, he would have been ready to shoot himself as he went down the great crimson carpeted staircase, through the lighted hall, and out of the house, into the dull street, damp with November fog. But he trusts her yet—notwithstanding Austen’s bitter words, notwithstanding her own letter, notwithstanding the icy coldness of her manner to him this evening, he trusts her yet.

As a drowning man clings to a straw, he holds on to his faith in her with a despairing determination born of the knowledge that, when he lets her go, all will be lost. If he once allows himself to doubt her, it is all up with him; but, till he hears from her own lips that she was in earnest when she wrote that letter yesterday, he will not doubt her, he will not let so much as a suspicion of treachery enter his mind.

At exactly eleven o’clock the next morning he presents himself again at the door of the house in Berkeley Street, and a few minutes later he is standing with Lenore alone in a prettily furnished room, with a conservatory filled with flowers opening out of it, and a pleasant fire burning brightly on the tiled hearth.

“You are punctual,” she says, as she holds out her hand.

They are both very pale as they stand there looking at

each other, even though the light of the fire is stronger than the light of the dull November morning, and throws a warm glow over their faces and figures as they stand together on the rug. Lenore wears a black gown thick with jet beads, a high black ruffle round her throat, and little black ear-rings in her ears—her shoes even sparkle with jet embroidery; but the unrelieved blackness only enhances the fair paleness of her complexion and the gold of her ruffled blonde head.

“Punctual!” Jack repeats, looking down at her with all his heart in his haggard eyes. “Do you know that I have been counting the very minutes since I saw you last?”

“How foolish!”—with an attempt at a smile. But she looks away from him into the fire.

“Lenore, I can not endure this suspense any longer—it is killing me! You did not mean what you wrote in that letter? It was all a joke, wasn’t it? You just did it to see what I would do?”

His eager eyes are devouring her face—his hand, as it closes feverishly on hers, shakes as if he had the ague. But still he laughs—a strange incoherent laugh.

“I did mean it,” she answers deliberately, but still without meeting his eyes. “It cost me a good deal to write that letter, Jack; but I should never have written it if I had not meant every word.”

He stares at her like a man suddenly bereft of his mind.

“I have felt for a long time that we were entirely unsuited to each other,” Miss Kendal goes on, her voice growing more steady with every word. “We could never make each other happy—we have no tastes in common. The life that seems good and pleasant to you would be intolerable to me; the pursuits that you enjoy would bore me to death.”

He is silent for a moment when she pauses. Then he says quietly enough—

“When did you find out all this?”

“I believe I knew it always. But I forgot it—for awhile.”

“But, if you love me, Lenore, all those things can make no difference to you.”

She winces a little, turning away her head.

“And you said you loved me, you know. You would never have said it if it had not been true.”

“I—I suppose I thought I loved you—”

“Then it was not the real thing this time either?”

“No,” she answers, gathering courage. “The first was the real love, after all.”

“I do not understand you,” he says coldly. “Do you mean to say that, when you told me you loved me, you were telling a downright and deliberate lie?”

“You use very harsh words, Mr. Irving.”

“I use the word which expresses exactly the thing I mean. Were you lying to me when you told me you loved me better than any one else in the world?”

“You—you liked me so much I—I could not help liking you a little.”

“Enough to destroy me?” the young man exclaims, with such a concentration of fury and bitterness that even Lenore Kendal is somewhat terrified.

“Don’t use such terrible expressions,” she says, shivering a little. “I hate tragedy, on or off the stage. I always felt more inclined to laugh at it than anything else.”

“To laugh at it!” he repeats vaguely. Then, with sudden change of look and manner, he falls upon his knees before her and covers her hands with wild kisses, with hot burning tears. “Oh, Lenore, my darling, my own love, tell me that you are only laughing at me, that you are not in earnest, that you told the truth when you said you loved me, on that moonlight night on Matching Hill!”

“It was not the truth,” the girl says, pulling away her

hands from him, wet with his tears. "I never loved you; I told you I loved you only to serve my own purposes. Yes, I want you to hate me—it will be the best thing for you; and you could not hate me more or think worse of me than I deserve."

"I think no evil of you. You are the one woman I love in the world; if an angel from heaven accused you of such wickedness, I would laugh him to scorn!"

"Then you would be wrong," she says coldly and deliberately, "for I made a tool of you to further my own ends."

"What ends?"

"Jack," she says very gravely, looking down at the young man's anguished face with some small shadow of compassion in her lovely eyes, "I have treated you shamefully, abominably; no woman ever treated man worse than I have treated you. But I am going to throw myself on your mercy, to adjure you, by the love I believe you bear for me, to deal with me as I certainly have not dealt with you!"

"Go on—go on!" he exclaims, still kneeling before her, still holding her hands in his, still covering them with passionate kisses. "I forgive you already for any wrong you may have done me; I will not remember anything if you will only tell me that you will not forsake me now."

"But I have forsaken you. Jack, I never loved you, never had any intention of being your wife. I engaged myself to you as a blind, to put them off the scent. It was all a plot, from beginning to end, to make Aunt Poigndestre believe I had forgotten somebody else."

He rises from his knees and stands before her, the dark eyelashes still wet, but the grand gray eyes lurid with passion.

"And you led me on to further such an end as that?"

You made a tool of me, a blind, a cat's-paw—you never loved me at all?"

"How could I love you when I loved—somebody else?"

"You loved him all the time?"

"I think it is the one redeeming point in my character that I am capable of that one unselfish feeling," the girl says, with a strange cold smile. "Yes, I loved him all the time. And yet I believe he is not one-thousandth part as worthy of such great love as you are; he is as full of faults as you are of perfections; and yet I do not care for you, and I love him more than my own soul."

Jack Irving stands staring at her, his arms hanging down by his sides, his face as ashen gray as the face of the dead, and as rigid, except for the tremble of the lip under the drooping fair mustache.

"That is enough," he says at last; "you can not add to that, or take away from it. But let me tell you this—you have done for me as surely as if you had put a knife into my heart."

She looks at him pitifully enough. He is so tall, so straight, so handsome, and his eyes, through all their fury, are so full of despairing love for herself. But his anguish can not move her. How could it, since she loves another man with her whole heart and soul?

"It is not so bad as that, Jack," she says, laying her hand on his arm not unkindly. "You will bless the day yet when I left you free to marry some good girl who will love you as much as you fancy now that you love me."

"Stop!" he exclaims, as if the sound of her voice hurt him; and, as if its light touch scorched him, he shakes her hand from his sleeve. But he stares at her face as if he could never drag his eyes away, hungrily, madly.

“ Oh, woman-eyes that have smiled! Oh, woman-lips that have kissed

The life-blood out of my heart with your ghostly sorceries!”

“ We are only giving ourselves unnecessary pain by all this,” Lenore says, turning away to the mantel-piece.

“ Jack, I must send you away now. And all I can say is that I hope you will feel by and by as if you could forgive me—it will be a long time before I can forgive myself.”

He turns away, without another word. Without another look, he opens the door and, closing it quietly behind him, goes down the grand staircase and through the hall. The footman steps forward to open the door for him, and once more he is out in the dull London street.

Just as he goes down the hall-door steps another man is coming up—a slight man in a light-colored overcoat, with a sallow face like a Spaniard, black eyes, and a small black mustache. For one instant their eyes meet, then Sir Arthur Poigndestre runs up the steps, whistling softly to himself, and stands to look after Jack as he walks down the street. And Jack pulls his hat down over his eyes and thrusts his hands deep into his pockets, and wonders what this strange numb feeling is which has already deadened the deep dull aching at his heart.

At the corner of the street he meets Austen Kendal. There could be no mistaking that stooping figure, nor the gaunt clever face, nor the long hair, nor the spectacles.

“ You in London?”

“ Yes; I came up last night. Called at your hotel this morning, and heard you were out. Guessed where you were, and came on here to look for you. Jack, my poor fellow, tell me how you have fared.”

“ It is all over,” Jack answers quietly, as Kendal takes his arm and peers anxiously into his face. “ We may as

well go home by the next train, Austen—unless you have any business to keep you in town.”

CHAPTER VII.

JACK bears it very well, after all—so well that the vicar begins to think that perhaps it was all for the best Lenore was not the wife for him; if she had married him, in all probability she would not have been happy; nor could she have made him happy when once his mad infatuation for her had cooled down. They had so few tastes in common—Lenore had been brought up to lead such a different kind of life—and he had never liked the engagement, though he had not dared to say as much to Jack; nor had he thought it advisable to say it when once the mischief was done. But all this does not make him better pleased with Lenore. She has acted basely, dishonorably, abominably; he has held no communication with her since, nor does he intend to hold communication with her. She may be his own sister; but it is not her fault that Jack has not been driven beside himself by her horrible treatment. He loves Jack as David loved Jonathan; and the woman who could treat him as Lenore has treated him could not but be abominated by him were she his sister a thousand times over. Sometimes the vicar thinks that he ought to forgive her—that if she writes to ask him to forgive her, he must forgive her trespass as he would be forgiven. But it will go very hard with him. When he thinks of Jack's face as he saw it on that morning when he had come in with the letter—as he saw it at the corner of Berkeley Street on that day when Lenore had given him his *coup de grâce*—he feels as if he could never forgive her as long as he lives.

But Jack is a brave fellow, and he has pulled himself together. The vicar, watching him anxiously day by day,

is unutterably thankful to see that he goes about his business much as usual, attends to the farm, is gentle and affectionate to his mother and Georgie, by and by grows even cheerful—the wound could have been only skin-deep after all. Or else Lenore herself has worked the cure—her cruelty and falsehood healed the wound her grace and beauty inflicted, her base treachery opened his eyes to the value of the thing he prized, and reconciled him to its loss. However that may be, Jack certainly comes and goes about the farm and the village very much as he was wont, attends to his business, rides and shoots, and walks over to the Vicarage for a smoke and a chat in the evening—when the vicar is not at the farm—very much as he did before the star-eyed vicar's sister rose on his horizon, before the day when he walked into the little dark Vicarage parlor and found his fate standing there in a white gown, with a bunch of over-blown pink roses under her chin.

But he never goes near the new house. The work-people have been sent away, the orders for furniture countermanded. Up on the hill-side the pretty red-brick edifice stands deserted; all day long the cool autumnal sunshine falls upon it, all night the frost sparkles upon it, the dead leaves from the wood whisper crisply round the base of it, or fall like sparks of crimson and orange on to the quaint peaked roof. But no human foot goes near it, so far as Kendal knows. He would go to look at it sometimes, if he were not afraid of meeting Jack there; but, to the best of his belief, he never goes near it. Nor does Georgie or his mother ever mention it to him. It can not but remind him of his sorrow more than anything else about the place; it is better he should not go near it, even though it may suffer from the neglect. Of what consequence is the house, or anything else, compared to the restoration of Jack's peace of mind?

The days are bright and still now for November; but at

night there are sharp frosts, and in the morning blue hazy fogs, which sodden the dead leaves lying in such heaps about the woods. If it had not been for Jack, these would have been very happy days for Georgie. As Jack gradually seems to regain his old grave pleasant manner, they do become very happy days, though they are very quiet ones; and Georgie herself seems to grow more tender and sweet and lovable as the weeks go on—so much so that even Mrs. Ryve is fain to confess that she may not make such a bad wife for the vicar after all—this trouble about her brother has made a woman of her, if it has whitened his mother's hair and set a wrinkle or two about her clear calm hazel eyes.

One morning, about a week before Christmas, the vicar receives a letter from his sister by the early post—the first he has received since she threw Jack over. It is very short, and in it there is no single word of regret for what has happened, no plea for forgiveness; it merely informs him, in the coolest and most concise manner possible, that she is to be married to her cousin, Arthur Poigndestre, on the following Tuesday, at a quarter to two o'clock, at a church which she names, and that the wedding is to be quite private because of their mourning, and they are to start directly for Paris. She does not invite her brother to take any part in the ceremony, or even to be present at the wedding, though he is the person who should by rights give her away. But she evidently thinks he has not forgiven her for her conduct to his friend, and she is too proud, and perhaps cares too little whether he is there or not, to lay herself open to a rebuff in the shape of a refusal. She merely, in a cool, business-like way, acquaints him of her intentions, and Austen Kendal is glad of it. He would not have felt at liberty to refuse, if she had asked him to forgive her and to go to her wedding; but he does not care for her, and he dislikes and despises Arthur Poigndestre, and it is a relief to him to know that

Lenore has found a substitute for him—probably old D'Esterre will give her away, as the wedding is to take place from his house in Berkeley Street. Maud D'Esterre is to be the only bride-maid, and Lenore is to be married in her traveling-dress, and go straight from the church to the railway station.

While he is reading the letter, the door opens, and Jack Irving walks in, booted and spurred, and looking very straight and tall and handsome in his hunting "pink," a little thin perhaps, but with the old gay light in his gray eyes, and the old saucy curl to his blonde mustache.

"Going to the meet at Peacock Hall?" the vicar asks, crushing Lenore's letter in his hand as he rises from the table.

"Yes. Fine morning they've got, haven't they? No frost last night, for a wonder, and cloudy enough to please old Dan Webster!"

"I suppose you'll hunt away in that direction altogether to-day?"

"My dear fellow, how can I tell? The fox may come right through your garden, for all I know!"

"Of course he may," the vicar says, slightly confused. "Well, I'll see you at the farm this evening, I suppose, if you don't come to grief in the hunting-field?"

"Austen, have you heard from her?" He puts the question quite calmly, leaning one hand on the mantel-piece as he faces his friend.

"What put that into your head?"

"Well, I've been expecting it, for one thing. When is it to be?"

"On Tuesday," the other answers, surprised at his coolness.

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes—the twentieth."

"And this is Saturday," Irving says, in a curious musing way. "Two whole days and part of two more!

Well, I'm off! I promised to call for May Somers at eleven—her father has put her in my charge for to-day."

"I hope you'll take care of her," the vicar says, conscious of a feeling of intense relief. "It would be a pity if anything happened to May Somers."

"She is a jolly little girl," Jack laughs, brushing a speck of dust off the sleeve of his red coat.

"Do you know what Georgie said to me last night about her?"

"I can guess," Irving says, shrugging his broad shoulders. "Georgie is the most inveterate little match-maker I ever knew in my life!"

"I hope it may be as she wishes, Jack."

"As who wishes?" Jack inquires, audaciously.

"Why, Georgie—and May, too, I suppose! I think she always cared for you."

Jack takes up his cap and whip from the table.

"Well, I'm off! And I hope I won't be carried home on a hurdle—for May's sake!" he laughs, and walks out of the room, the vicar following him, with Lenore's letter still crushed up in his hand.

It is a gray dull morning; but the air is soft and warm, and full of the strange sad sweetness of the dead and dying leaves. A few late roses still linger in the garden, but the mignonette is lying prone on the ground, the sweet-pea is a piteous tangle of dead stalks still clinging to the stakes which supported its summer glory, the clematis hangs from the hedges, ragged and brown.

"I shall be glad when the spring comes," the vicar says, as Jack throws himself into his saddle. "This time of the year always makes me melancholy."

"Melancholy!" Jack repeats, sitting erect in his saddle, his gray eyes on the bare brown woods. "I wonder what you mean by melancholy?"

"Why, sad! Don't you know what it is to be sad?"

“Sad!” Jack echoes again, gathering up his reins.
 “No, I do not know what it is to feel sad.”

“I am glad to hear it,” Austen Kendal laughs, looking up at him with the old admiring gaze. “You don’t look as if you had much to sadden you, dear old boy, and I am thankful for it!”

“Well, I’ll see you this evening,” Jack says, as he turns his horse’s head.

The vicar stands at the gate looking after him till he turns the corner of the road.

“What a fool she was!” he says to himself, as he goes back to his breakfast—first throwing Lenore’s letter into the fire, and with some satisfaction watching it curl into a cinder. “What a fool she was to give up that splendid fellow for a rascal like the other, who will make her about as bad a husband as any man she could have picked out of the three kingdoms! But Jack was too good for her, and I, for one, am glad there was a stop put to it, since it has done him no harm. And I hope he will marry that pretty little May Somers. Georgie would be so delighted, and she would make him a dear, good, loving little wife.”

* * * * *

Jack does not come to grief in the hunting-field; neither does he allow May Somers to break her pretty little neck. He rides back to Matching rather muddy, but otherwise none the worse for his day’s sport, just as the vicar walks up the drive in the twilight, under the bare brown elms.

“Had a good day’s work, Jack?”

“Very good,” the other answers, walking his horse slowly over the fallen leaves.

“Left May at home, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

Georgie meets them in the porch. The narrow entry behind her is filled with a warm cheerful glow of firelight; there is a faint suggestion of good things from the kitchen

regions; the old parlor looks picturesque, with the fire-light dancing on its polished wainscot and on the damask and silver on the table.

Mrs. Irving is in the kitchen, superintending some particularly dainty dish; Jack has ridden round to the stables; the vicar and Georgie are alone in the firelight, Georgie looking pretty in her warm crimson cashmere dress, with dainty white ruffles round the throat and wrists, and her pearl ring on her soft little childish hand.

“My darling,” Austen says softly, as he puts his arm round her, “I have been thinking of this all day!”

“And I,” Georgie smiles, with a very contented look into the fire.

“I think you might give me a kiss; don't you?”

Georgie gives him two very daintily, then looks down into the fire again.

“I heard some news to-day, Georgie. Can you guess what it is?”

She looks up at him quickly, and she is so well able to read his face that she says at once—

“You have heard from Lenore.”

“Yes. She is to be married on Tuesday.”

“Does Jack know?”—with a sudden wistful dimness coming over the bright eyes.

“He does. He came in this morning while I had the letter in my hand.”

“Did he seem to mind very much?”

“No. I was thankful to see that he did not seem to mind it at all.”

“I am so glad!” Georgie says, with a sigh of relief. “I always dreaded the time when—when he should hear that.”

“So did I. But it is over now, darling, and I hope and trust he will soon forget his grief entirely—she was not worthy of it.”

“Perhaps he will marry May?” Georgie says, smiling

as she stands in the firelight with her lover's arm round her.

"I said something about it to him this morning," Austen smiles in answer.

"And what did he say?"—eagerly.

"He did not say much; but I think myself he will marry May yet."

The cup of Georgie's content will be full then. It seems almost full now, as she stands in the pleasant glow and sparkle of the wood-fire, listening to Jack as he hangs up his cap and hunting-whip in the hall, and speaks to old Rover, who has gone out to meet him, in the familiar voice she loves so well. And Austen Kendal looks at her, and thinks what a sweet little wife she will make, and longs for the time when he will be permitted to transplant her to his own fire-side, there to gladden his heart and to be the light of his eyes as long as they both shall live.

* * * * *

The vicar is called to Bournemouth unexpectedly on the following Monday; an old college friend is dying there, and wishes to have Austen Kendal with him when he dies. The summons is very urgent, and Kendal obeys it at once, expecting to be back at Matching on the following evening, and not thinking to leave any message for the farm except that he hopes to see them on Wednesday at the latest. His friend lingers till about nine o'clock on Tuesday morning; but Kendal leaves Bournemouth the same evening, and at about three o'clock on Wednesday afternoon walks over to the farm to report himself, and to find how things have been going on there during his absence of three days.

It is a dull gray afternoon, with a whistling wind whirling the dead leaves about the road-side and sighing among the bare brown twigs overhead. But the vicar walks fast, thinking of the glad eyes and the bright fire that await

him, and of the smoke and chat he will have with Jack afterward—for he seems to have missed Jack even more than the others during these three days.

He finds the old wooden gate open as usual, but he fancies the place has a lonely and deserted air; and all at once a great fear and horror come over him. Could anything have happened to any of them while he was away?

But Georgie meets him in the porch, looking much as usual, May Somers and her brother Tom appearing behind her. Mrs. Irving is gone into the village to visit a poor sick woman. Yes, they are all quite well, Georgie assures him, as the other two fall back a little and presently leave them alone.

“I suppose you were at the wedding?” Georgie asks then, a little wistfully.

“The wedding!” he repeats indignantly. “Indeed I was not at the wedding! I do not know how I shall ever bring myself to forgive her, much less go to her wedding! What put that into your head?”

“Why, we couldn’t think where else you had gone, you know; and, when you said you would not be back before Tuesday evening, we were almost sure.”

“No,” Austen says, gravely; “I was sent for to an old college-chum of mine who was dying, and who could not die without seeing me again.”

“You saw him, I hope?”

“Yes; he died yesterday morning quite peaceful and happy. The telegram had been very urgent; the doctor who sent it did not think he could possibly live till I came; if I had had a moment to spare, I would have written you a line; but I had only just time to catch the early train.”

“We were rather wishing you might have gone to the wedding,” Georgie says, very wistfully and sadly, “because Jack went, and we knew, if you were there, you would have looked after him.”

“Jack went to the wedding!”

“Yes, we suppose so; and yet we think he must have been late for the wedding, for he did not leave this till Tuesday morning; and, when he did go, he did not say a word about it to any one, or where he was going, or anything. He must have walked to the train. But indeed we never missed him till dinner-time, so he may have gone earlier, for all we know.”

“Gone to the wedding!” the vicar repeats, in utter bewilderment. “My dear Georgie, he has never gone to the wedding! Unless I saw him there with my own eyes, I would not believe it!”

“All I know is that we have not seen him since breakfast on Tuesday,” Georgie says, beginning to feel frightened; “but if he is not in London, where can he be, Austen? He would never have gone further than that without telling us.”

Further than that! The vicar’s face has suddenly grown as white as snow.

“Stay here, darling,” he says, hurriedly. “I want to speak to Tom Somers.”

“You are not frightened, Austen?”—clinging to him.

“My dear child, what should frighten me? It is only that an idea has come into my head; but I may be wrong. And I want you to stay just here till I come back. Promise me that.”

She promises, still looking very much frightened. But the vicar sends May to her, and, merely saying to young Somers, “Come with me,” passes out through the glass door into the garden, and from the garden to the lane at the back of the house.

The lane leads up the hill, by a rather steep ascent, to the great furze-covered slope, which in its turn gives place to the kind of green terrace on which Jack’s new house is built. It is a breathless climb, and the vicar is out of breath when he reaches the upper plateau; but he goes

twice as fast as young Somers, though he too has hurried till he is out of breath. The vicar's face is very white, and young Somers has lost a good deal of his healthy color; but neither has spoken a single word since they left the farm, though the same idea must have struck them both, for in the eyes of both there is the same look of speechless horror and dread.

Austen Kendal will never know how he climbed that hill. His limbs seemed to drag like the limbs of a man who would run from some terrible thing in a nightmare, he seemed to himself scarcely to move; and yet, so far as minutes go, the ascent of that hill was never made in so short a time before, and probably never will be again.

His heart beats as if it must burst at every throb, and yet he toils on and on, the cold sweat pouring from his forehead—past the hawthorn brake, up the grassy slope, up to the house, into the little porch, knee-deep with autumn leaves. The door is closed, but not locked; he opens it with a push and goes in, Somers following him into the pretty square hall, which is full of the smell of new paint and plaster and fresh wood.

Their footsteps echo through the empty rooms, but there is no other sound; neither speaks to the other, neither asks the other what he expects to see, as they look into one room after another—only in both their faces there is still the stiff, rigid, horror-stricken look. The sitting-room, the parlor, the little room that was to be the gun-room—there is nothing in them but a rough chair or table, or perhaps a plank or a board or two left there since their inner decoration was finished. Some of the windows are open; a dead leaf has fluttered in here and there, and rustles across the floor when they open the door. But beyond this there is no sound or movement in all the silent house.

At the end of the corridor is the room that was to have been Lenore's. Austen Kendal has left this to the last;

and yet, as he puts out his hand to open the door, a great horror seizes him—here, if anywhere, he will find what he has come to seek.

It is here. At a table in the middle of the floor a figure is sitting, bending forward, the arms crossed on the table and the face buried in them. There is a revolver in the right hand, which is stretched out a little; but there is no sign of any struggle—the whole pose of the figure is one of perfect rest. With a wild cry Austen Kendal springs forward; but young Somers catches him by the arm and holds him back.

“Hush!” he says sharply. “Don’t you see he is quite dead?”

“He is not dead; he has only fallen asleep. Look at him. Could any one look like that, and yet be dead?”

But young Somers is a doctor, and one glance at the face is enough for him.

“He has been dead for more than four-and-twenty hours,” he says gravely.

“I knew it,” Austen Kendal answers, in a voice of the most bitter anguish. “He shot himself on her wedding-day!”

* * * * *

They never tell Georgie how it happened—she thinks he died of heart-disease; and there is no trouble about the funeral, or anything of that kind. The coroner’s verdict is “temporary insanity,” so Jack is not denied a resting-place with his forefathers under the old church, some items of family history going a great way to confirm the coroner’s jury in their opinion. And the thing which has been his mother’s horror and dread of the last seven-and-twenty years has come to be her only consolation in her bitter sorrow—he did not know what he was doing when he rashly took away his life.

Died by his own hand! The words ring in Austen Kendal’s ears, as he looks down at the young face “smil-

ing sternly sweet," at the tall stalwart figure outlined so stiffly under the spotless covering, at the green palm-branches some hand has laid on the pulseless breast.

By his own hand! No—but by the hand of a woman whom he had loved with all the depth and strength of his nature—by the hand of a woman who had kissed him while she killed him! If Lenore Kendal had fired the shot which had deprived him of existence, she could not have more surely murdered him—could not have more surely laid the sin of blood-guiltiness at her door. So Austen Kendal thinks as he looks at him, the tears dropping one by one down his gaunt cheeks. But there are no tears in Jack's eyes; his face is set in that rapt expression, sweeter than any smile, which so often comes to the faces of the dead. And Jack's heart does not ache as his friend's heart is aching. It is all over now—

"The hope and the fear and the longing,

All the dull deep pain, and the constant anguish of patience."

* * * * *

Seven springs have clothed the trees about Matching with tender green leaves, seven summers have bathed them in sunshine, seven autumns have touched them with a decay more glorious than their greenest prime, seven winters have muffled them in downy snow since the tragedy at Matching, which, to all but two or three persons, has come to be nothing more than "a sorrowful tale, long past." And even to these two or three persons the anguish has changed to a softened regret which is not intolerable; the bitter grief of the first few days and weeks has given place to a quiet lifelong but perfectly endurable sorrow, which does not interfere with their everyday occupations and interests and enjoyments, which is indeed never entirely forgotten, but which is remembered without poignant pain. Only Jack's mother has never been quite the same since that December day when they

carried him back to her cold and stark; but then she looks forward to seeing him so soon again that her grief has more of longing in it than of absolute regret.

“Gone for a minute, my son, from this room into the next;
I too shall go in a minute. What time have I to be vexed?”

The old farm looks just as it looked seven years ago; the thatch is scarcely any deeper, the elms do not seem to have grown older, the calves that gambol in the paddock might be the same calves that gambled there seven years ago, the pet lambs about the door might be the same. The green hill-side looks just as it looked any time these twenty years, sloping up to the dusky woods that stand out clearly on its summit against the sky. No human habitation stands between the pasture and the wood, no red-brick cottage raises its quaint gables and peaked roof into the air, no casements glimmer in the sunshine; of the house that Jack built nothing remains but a low green mound like a grave. The grass above it looks as if it had not been disturbed for centuries; the lark builds her nest there, the little gray rabbits scurry over it in the early morning sunshine, or nibble the dewy herbage in the twilight, cloud-shadows drift across it, the wild bee hums over it, the perfume of gorse and heather is wafted about it, the dead leaves lie thickly on it in the autumn, the snow in winter.

“At midnight the moon cometh
And looketh down alone.”

But no human footstep ever disturbs it; as Jack's relatives could not have borne to look at the dumb dwelling that would forever have reminded them of their sorrow, so neither do they go to look at its grave. It had risen like a vision, and like a vision it has vanished, “and left not a wrack behind.”

Neither has the sleepy little village changed much, nor

the old gray church. But the Vicarage has had a new wing added to it over which the ivy is beginning to creep already; and a great many little feet patter about the house and garden which were not known there seven years ago; and the vicar can take no more solitary rambles about his kitchen-garden, nor muse over his next Sunday's sermon while he paces up and down between his gooseberry and currant bushes, unless he can muse with a chattering youngster hanging out of either hand.

They are all pretty children; but the prettiest of all is the little fellow who does not live at the Vicarage, but with his grandmother at the farm. Georgie had not been strong while he was a baby, and he had been so delicate that nobody thought he would live. But Mrs. Irving had taken him to the farm and reared him there; and, now that he has grown into the flower of the flock, they have not the heart to take him away from her. His name also is Jack, so that she seems to have the best right to him; and indeed the Vicarage is full to overflowing—they may very well spare this one little gray-eyed lad to Matching Farm. Georgie and her husband are very happy; and Georgie has developed into quite a notable woman, though she looks as pretty and almost as young as ever, as she walks between her two eldest boys to church. Even Mrs. Ryve can not say that the parish is neglected or that the vicar and his wife, as fond as they are of each other, do not do their utmost both for the souls and bodies of their flock.

* * * * *

At one of the most noted of continental gambling resorts there lives an English lady who is so poor as to be unable to venture out by daylight, but who may sometimes be seen taking a rapid "constitutional" when the twilight will allow the shabbiness of her dress to pass unnoticed. She must have been very beautiful once, and she is still young; but her face is very white and haggard,

and her eyes have a strange despairing look in them which gives those who encounter them the heartache. They say her husband makes his living at the gaming-table; he is a dark, Spanish-looking man, with black eyes and a hard cruel face. Some people assert—but nobody knows whether they have any ground for the assertion or not—that she is madly jealous of her husband; and the same people say that, if she is, it is not without cause. They are never seen together; but he is often seen in the train of a beautiful young Russian lady of questionable antecedents. Rumor will have it that when she leaves the town he will leave it too; and in that case what is to become of unfortunate Lady Poigndestre? Nobody knows, nor indeed does anybody care. Has she ever wished, or will she ever wish, that she had lived and died in peace and happiness in **THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT?**

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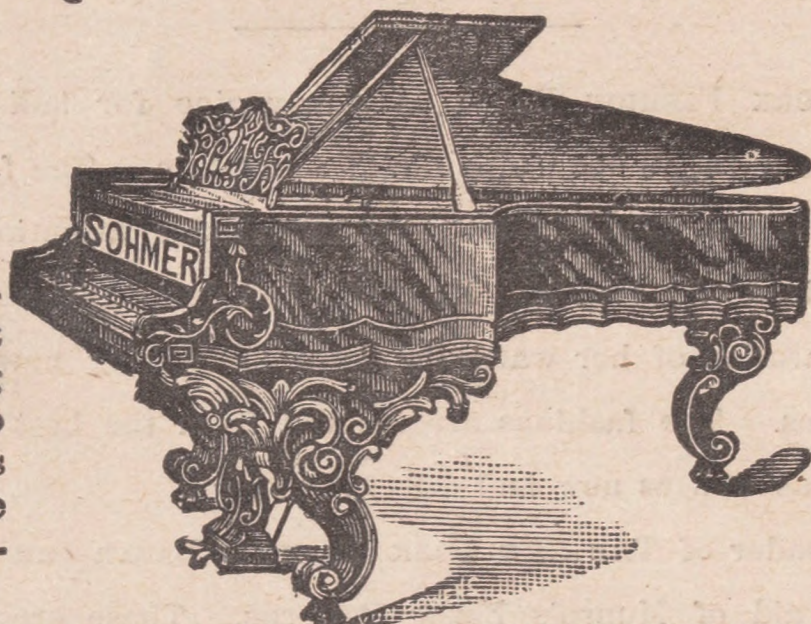
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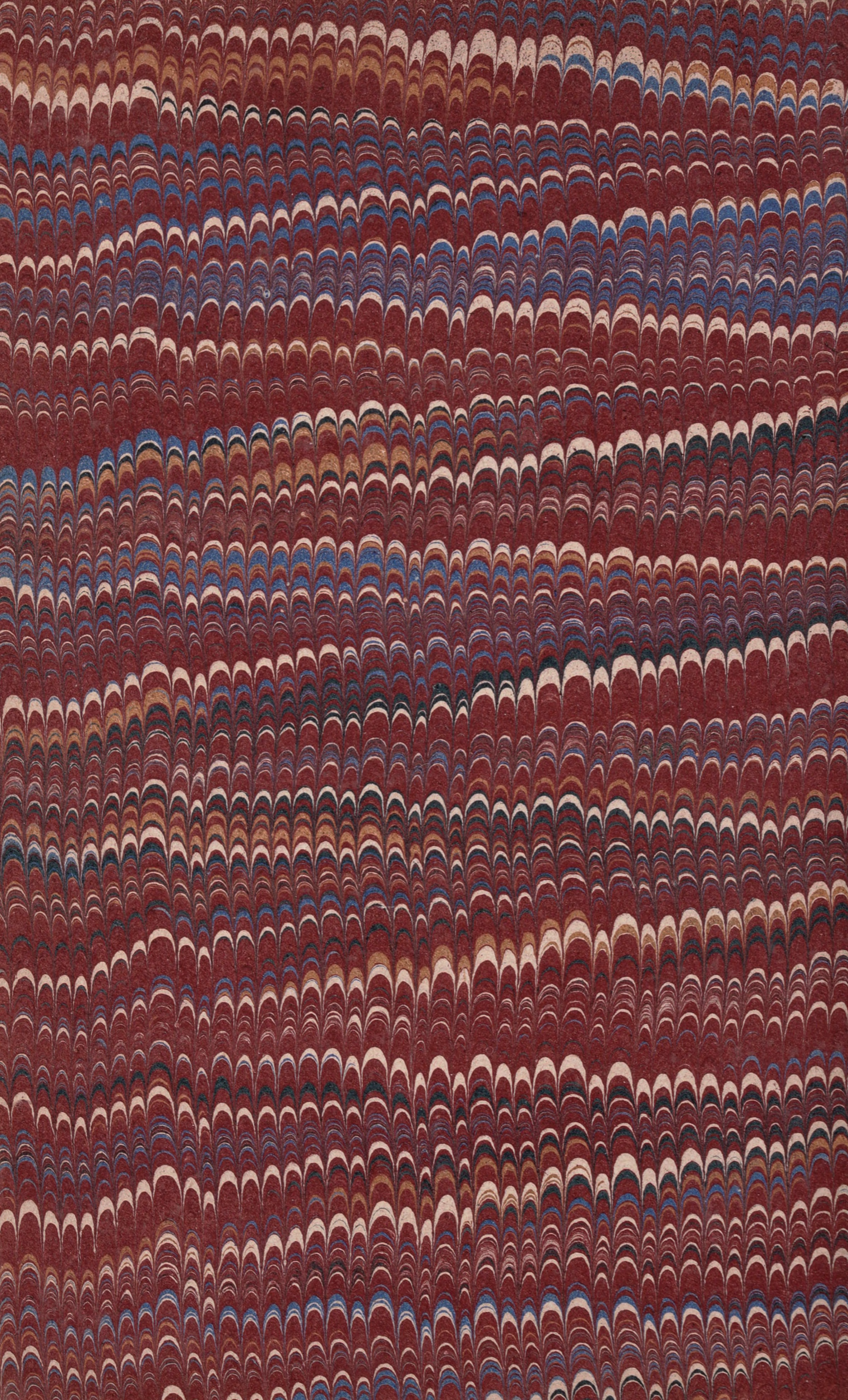
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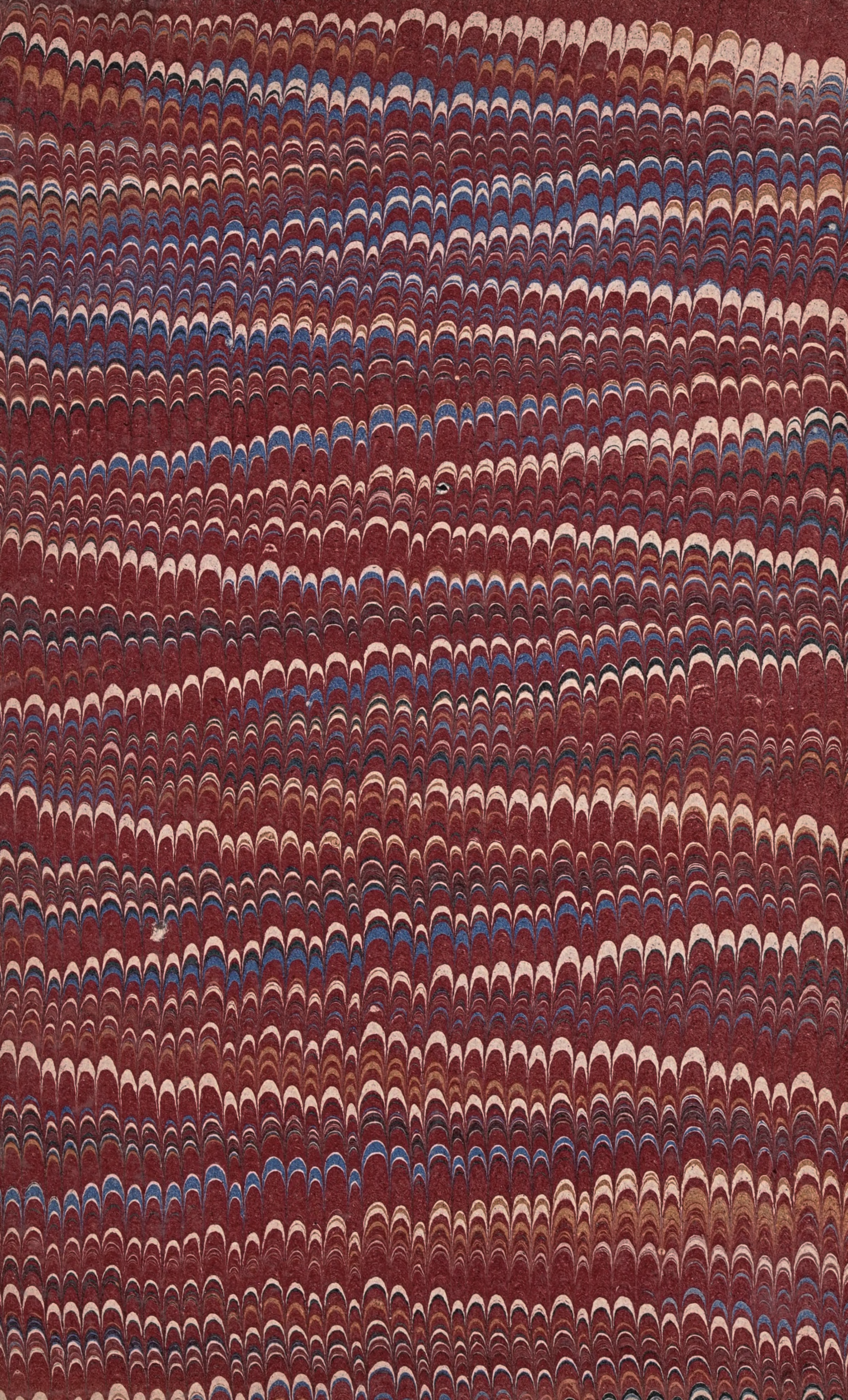
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