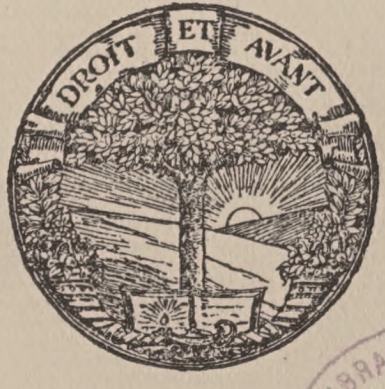
The Coming of Chloe

By

Mrs. Hungerford

("The Duchess")

Author of "A Lonely Maid," "Molly Darling," "The Hoyden," "Peter's Wife," "A Point of Conscience," etc.



Philadelphia

J. B. Lippincott Company

1897

Electrotyped and Printed by J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, U.S.A.

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CHAPTER I.

Assemble all ye maidens at the door.

"WHAT an extraordinary thing!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald looks up from the letter she has been reading, her still young and charming face filled with a sort of excited amazement.

They are at breakfast, she and her two pretty girls, and as this little remark—that is almost more an exclamation than a remark—breaks from her, the girls lift their heads and look at her eagerly, expectantly. *Any* news in this little cast-away corner of the universe—this tiny Irish village—would be welcomed with open arms; but news that comes under the head of "extraordinary"——

The four lovely eyes—two blue, two hazel—search their mother's eyes (that are hazel too, like Olivia's) across the tablecloth, a tablecloth very delicately, if very sparsely, laid. There are on it four little bowls full of this sweet May's roses, and some china and silver that is old and quaint and exquisite. There is napery that is old too—old and fine to a point; a vanishing point now, I grieve to say—the darns in it being many and various, but so beautifully

worked that Tom Lloyd, when his cousin Cecily one day, with a sigh, indicated them with a slim forefinger, said it was quite a pleasure to look at them.

Besides the roses, there are only some new-laid eggs upon the table, a mere suspicion of jam in a little glass dish, some fresh rolls, and a few pats of delicious-looking butter. A frugal meal, but a very dainty one. Mrs. Fitzgerald has forgotten in her excitement to pour out the tea.

"What is it, mama?" Olivia is the first to speak.

"A letter from Maud Gilbert—a cousin of ours, you know, on your poor father's side."

The girls nod their heads.

"Well! She says, she—— Really, it is the most unheard-of thing—a little impertinent of Maud, I think—but she wants me to take in a young lady for some months as a—a——"

"Paying guest?" puts in Olivia quickly.

"That sounds better, of course"—discontentedly—"but it is in reality only a modern term for that most dreadful of all things, a lodger. I need hardly say I shall not dream of it—not for a moment! She"—glancing at the letter—"says the girl has not a near relation in the world, but that there was a distant cousinship between her and *Mr.* Gilbert. He died, as you know, some years ago."

"I think I saw her once in Dublin," says Olivia.

"Yes—when you were quite a child."

"I thought her horrid!"

"Yes; horrid! *Very*"—regretfully—"horrid! But people think a great deal of her. She has money, and is a niece of Lord Montober's, and

perhaps might be of use to you girls in the future. She says something here about presenting Olivia next year. I should not, of course, like to quarrel with her, but" — with immense determination— "nothing would *induce* me to think of her proposition!"

On this a silence follows. A bee, drowsy with sunshine and all the sweets of the old-fashioned garden outside, lumbers heavily into the room through the eastern window, and, buzzing across it, bangs himself stupidly against the panes of the other window. Why he should have come in, when his only desire is to go out again, occurs vaguely to Cecily as a question difficult of answer—and when, too, he had all the heavenly delights outside, amongst which he could wander free. Here her thoughts lose themselves again in this wonderful suggestion of the "horrid" Mrs. Gilbert. But the bee, seeing freedom denied him, turns his attentions to her, to find them very badly received. Making an impatient gesture towards the buzzing thing, she breaks the train of her thoughts, and the silence too.

"Does Mrs. Gilbert say what she—the—her cousin —would——?"

Cecily breaks down, colouring warmly at her own words.

"Maud seems uncertain how long she would stay, but certainly for six months; and even if she didn't stay for quite that time she would—pay two hundred pounds. The"—nervously—"payment to be made *at once!*"

Another pause.

"Two hundred pounds!" It is Olivia who says this, in a very low tone. "We could get rid of those bills, mama."

"Yes—yes, I know"—hurriedly—"but to have what you call a guest in one's house, and take *money* from her! Guest! what an absurd title under the circumstances! No, no; let us be honest; lodger *is* the word." She rises abruptly, as if, indeed, the word is too much for her. "No, I shall not even think of it."

"Sit down, and I'll pour out the tea," says Olivia, pushing her gently into her own seat. The mother and the two girls are more like sisters than anything else, and the very closest and dearest friends. Cecily leans over the table towards her mother.

"Why *not* think of it, mama?" says she very softly.

"Are you mad, darling? Think of what your poor father would have said!—what your uncle, Sir Hardress, would be *sure* to say!"

"Oh! Uncle Hardress!" says Cecily, with a little saucy uplifting of one shoulder. Sir Hardress Lloyd is not really their uncle, being connected with them merely through his marriage with their mother's sister, so that the little touch of irreverence can be understood.

"And as for papa," says Olivia, "that is so long ago, isn't it? We don't even remember him! You know, Cissy was only a year old when he died, and I was two. Why, it must be quite seventeen years ago, mama, and things have changed so much."

"True," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, with a sigh. They have all three so often talked of the death of the father that it comes in quite simply now, with no element of hardness or unkindness about it. "Still——"

"After all, it would be for our good," says Cecily. "Mrs. Gilbert would not ask you to take in anyone who would be—well——"

"Horrid—like herself," interrupts Olivia.

"And," goes on Cecily, "so many people do that sort of thing now. Even *good* people—good families, I mean. And we are so poor; and this old house, with all its rooms—she might have quite a suite to herself. We need never see her, except at dinner and that."

"Yes," says Mrs. Fitzgerald faintly. She had told herself she would never give in, has not given in yet, but she knows now that she is wavering; and it is bitter to her, this idea of seeking to augment her all too slender income by taking a stranger into her house. And yet, to *refuse* this chance of getting out of her difficulties—her bills—that of late, since the girls have grown up, and want extra fripperies, have swollen to enormous proportions—of paying the many "small and early" household debts, that all the care in the world has not prevented from mounting up almost to the horizon of her outview! Mrs. Gilbert is scarcely a woman after her own heart, but she is a connection, and certainly to be depended upon in certain ways. And *two* hundred pounds!

"What does Mrs. Gilbert say about her?" asks Olivia.

"Not so very much. She vouches for her respectability, of course. Says that in a short time she will be her own mistress—whatever *that* may mean. She says, too, that she is twenty, and more, but not twenty-one."

"Ah! that means that at twenty-one she will come into something—a property or something."

"It might mean anything in the world," says her mother. "What I don't like is this: Maud *insists* that we are not to question her about her former life. We are to take her for granted, as it were. We must not ask where she came from, or who she is, or—anything."

"Oh, poor girl! I'm sure she has run away from an unhappy home," says Cecily.

"Unhappy—when she has no relations!" Olivia shakes her head.

Cecily makes a little *moue*.

"One for you and me, mammy!"

"Oh——" Olivia laughs. "You know what I mean, and I stick to what I say. Besides, she can have no home at all, when she has no one belonging to her."

"She has a guardian, I can see from the letter," says Mrs. Fitzgerald. "But if she has one, I can't understand Maud's interfering with him. She is the last person in the world to do anything for charity's sake—to do anything that would prejudice her own set against her—to take up a crusade that would not have fashion as its leader. She has asked me to take this girl on trust, but I don't like this touch of secrecy in her letter." Here she takes the letter

up. "'A girl—young—just twenty. Charming—of good family'"—she reads in little jerks—"'to come in for an enormous fortune within the year—unless the most unforeseen thing happens"'—this is *dashed!* "'Not a chance to be thrown away; and I know you, dearest Dora, are not *too* well gifted with this world's goods, so I offer it to you above all others. It is really a good thing, or I should not, of course, write to you about it. It is, indeed, a chance you may never get again.'" Mrs. Fitzgerald, as if annoyed by something in this remark, grows a little more jerky—more nervous. "'She cannot endure her present home, and wishes to escape from it to a more congenial one. It would, therefore, be a real charity on your part to take her in.'"

Here the reader pauses as if going to say something; then checks herself and goes on. The letter seems lengthy.

"'Of course, all this sounds a little risky, and with your girls you must, of course, be careful; but I assure you, dear Dora, you need have no fears. She is quite all right, in *every* way. I can vouch for her. You understand, however, that no questions are to be asked. I know all about her and her people; they (the people) are dead, all except her guardian, who is unhappily alive, and who is only a connection. Him I have known for many years. He is a perfect *brute*.'"

"Oh! poor thing!" cries Cissy.

"It certainly sounds dreadful!" says her mother, and goes on with the letter.

"'He kept her short of money—indeed, actually *without* money—for *years*, although he was allowed a very respectable sum from the Court of Chancery for her education, maintenance, &c., since she was three years of age. Her education, considering she was an heiress, was disgraceful; in fact, he pocketed the money meant to be spent on her! And that is not all, either. There is worse—*far* worse behind! I wish I could speak, but, any way, it was a clear swindle, and in my opinion he ought to be in Newgate, or in the Old Bailey, or somewhere'—with delightful impartiality—'instead of being in the midst of luxury; but the law blinks its eyes at many things nowadays. And, in fact, he could not be accused formally of any crime towards her, a clause in the will of her most mistaken father giving him the right to use at his own discretion that six hundred a year the courts allowed him for her upbringing. You can see the father was an idiot! The guardian is a truly detestable man, but highly respectable, in *his* world. No means of shewing him up, though I should dearly like to do it, and perhaps shall *yet!* But the society of to-day sickens me more and more as I live in it. My dear little friend of whom I write is, however, charming—undeniably charming—and, by the bye, her name is Chloe—Chloe Jones.'"

"Jones!" says Cissy.

"*Chloe* Jones!" Olivia looks amazement. "A curious combination."

"Well, it doesn't really matter what her name is, as we are not going to have her." Mrs. Fitzgerald takes hope again, and resumes the reading of the

letter abruptly. "'And though a great unhappiness has clouded her life, *all* brought about by the wicked malevolence and cupidity of this infamous guardian (I wish, dear Dora, I could give you his name, so that you might find him out and execrate him as I do; but——'")

"He must be a perfect Bluebeard!" puts in Olivia breathlessly.

"'I know'"—reading again—"'you will be delighted with her—if you will only have her. I am *nothing* if not frank and open, and I tell you plainly she is running away from a most miserable home, where she has been illtreated, abused, *betrayed!*'"

"That must be the guardian's home."

"But the unhappiness! She seems to hint at something more than ordinarily unpleasant. I really think"—Mrs. Fitzgerald grows sympathetic—"he must have thwarted her in some love affair."

"Oh, of course!" cries Cissy eagerly. "Mama, you have guessed it too. *I* guessed it long ago!"

"But she speaks of cupidity!" says Olivia.

"Well, can't you see? The poor lover was not rich enough," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, who is quite delighted with the touch of romance.

"Oh!" Cissy grows thoughtful. "If she came here," she says presently, her eyes widening with delightful anticipation, "the lover might come *too*, and you, mama—*you* might settle it all!"

"Still," says Olivia, "Mrs. Gilbert might do that. And"—as a little thoughtful silence falls on them all—"it would be a far easier thing to do than helping her to escape and sending her here."

"True," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, her face, still so young and beautiful, shewing a shade of disappointment; perhaps she would have liked to succour these poor lovers. "However, let us hear the rest of it. 'But she'"—reading again—"'is the *dearest* girl, and if she does not run to you, she will certainly run to someone else. And—for your own sake, Dora, I cannot refrain from putting before you the fact that two hundred pounds is *something* in these hard days. And such a dear girl! *No* trouble. And if you only knew——'"

"Knew what, mama?"

"I can't tell you, darling. There is a great blot just here. If I only knew who she *was*, I suppose she means. Of course, if I did know it would be far more satisfactory; it would, indeed, make all the difference—that is"—hastily—"if I were going to receive her. But——"

"Yes, yes," says Olivia hurriedly. Then: "Why doesn't Mrs. Gilbert receive her?"

"Ah—that comes in now!" Mrs. Fitzgerald consults the letter again. "'I would take her in myself *gladly*, but I am too well known to——'"

Mrs. Fitzgerald pores over the letter.

"To whom?" Olivia is leaning forward too.

"I can't read it. It is so blotted. *All* her letter is blotted in parts, I can't think why. She used to be very methodical. However, I think I see a capital B——"—reading again—"'am too well known to——'" She stops. "No; I can't make it out."

"A capital B; that stands for Brute," says Cissy, with a touch of genius. "Of course, she means the

guardian. She is very well known to him, without doubt."

"Perhaps. And yet"—scrutinising the letter carefully—"it looks like the beginning of a name. A capital B—with a u, or an r, or both, written after it, and then scratched out."

"Well,"—triumphantly—"don't those letters go to make up a brute?"

"I think," says Olivia, "the r comes *after* the u; don't you, mama?"

"A mere slip of the pen." Cissy is determined not to let her honours be taken from her. "And seeing she had made a mull of the whole word, she very naturally scratched it all out. What comes after 'I am too well known to'?"

"'Her many friends, who would naturally betray her; friends always do.' What a cynical remark!"

"It is all very strange," says Olivia. "But I do so pity that poor girl; don't you, mama?"

"She goes on to say," exclaims Mrs. Fitzgerald, hurriedly taking refuge in the letter, "'that not only will my receiving this young lady into my house be an act of charity towards her, but the means of circumventing the plot of a villain. She will in *all human probability*'—she dashes this; indeed, she dashes *everything*—'be her own mistress, and one of the wealthiest people in England, in a very short time! And of immense use to your girls when *all is over!*'"

"'All is over!' What an extraordinary remark! It sounds"—Olivia shivers—"like the death of someone."

"The whole thing is beyond our understanding;

and I shall have nothing to do with it, though I do sincerely pity the poor girl!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald, who has been moved almost to tears by her cousin's letter—a letter that to her seems to teem with gracious kindliness towards the unknown Chloe. She has failed through the honesty of her own tenderness (that has no pretence about it) to notice the undercurrent of rage and revenge that speaks through the angry tirade.

"Oh, but, mama, why not?" says Cissy. "Two hundred pounds would clear you of all your debts, and, we need not say anything about it—the arrangement, I mean. If she is a cousin of Mrs. Gilbert's she is in a way a cousin of ours, and so——"

"I don't think I could keep up a deceit like that," says Mrs. Fitzgerald regretfully. "I should be sure to tell somebody."

"Oh, well, of course we should tell *somebody*," says Olivia. "Sir Hardress, I *think*"—doubtfully—"had better be told, and Laurence, and—and Tom—though Tom is sure to be a bore over it—and——"

"The Major," says her mother.

"Now, why Major O'Hara?" Olivia turns a little angry glance upon her mother. "*He* is not connected with us in any way. He is an old friend of yours—a"—with a little sound of annoyance—"*very old* friend; not belonging to us, like Tom, and Laurence, and Sir Hardress—though I hate the last."

Mrs. Fitzgerald grows silent—singularly silent. Major O'Hara is indeed an old friend of hers—had been an old friend of hers even before her marriage,

and a very devoted lover into the bargain. But now, on his return to this little Irish village, after wanderings of ten years and more, he has devoted himself (as everyone in the neighbourhood has seen) to Olivia, who is indeed the image of what her mother was at her age, if not quite so handsome. Major O'Hara is a rich man, if not inordinately so, and at all events the best match in the county, so Olivia, amongst her set, is considered distinctly lucky; tremendously lucky if he had been a young man, but lucky all the same, considering his age. And, indeed, the genial Major hardly comes under Olivia's title of *very* old.

"Major O'Hara is a person to be depended upon," says Mrs. Fitzgerald in a low tone. "You are a little ungrateful about him, Olivia darling—especially as—— And you know, dearest, that if you could bring yourself to accept that good and true man it" —she hesitates and looks down; then looking nervously up again she finds Olivia frowning—"it," she continues hurriedly, "would make me very happy."

The "happy" is emphasised.

"It is manners," says Olivia curtly, "to wait to be asked." She rises from the table. Her mother rises too.

"No! don't go like that!" cries she, running to the girl and slipping an arm around her. "You shan't marry anyone you don't like, my dear, *dear* girl; but what I dread is—your being poor; poor *always*, as you are now; as you have ever been."

"I shouldn't mind that," says Olivia, who has accepted the gentle caress at once.

"Ah! but I should for you. When one is pretty, one should—*have* things," says her mother, tears flooding her eyes.

She had never regretted her own marriage, which, indeed, had been a happy, if a short-lived, one; but she had been far prettier than Olivia, and *she* had never had things! She had always been at her wit's end for a little ready money. Parisian frocks, and diamonds; little trips in the spring and autumn, had not been for *her!* But why should they not be for Olivia?

CHAPTER II.

"Youth that knows no dread
Of any horrors lurking far ahead
Across the sunny flowered fields of life."

THE Fitzgeralds are undoubtedly very pretty girls. Not beautiful; with no classical features; with nothing splendid about them, or Greek, or intense, or heroic; merely ordinary refined and happy-minded girls, sadly deficient in the New Woman business.

The elder, Olivia, is, as I think has been said, extremely like her mother; so like her, indeed, as to make strangers remark on the wonderful resemblance. It would be impossible, however, not to see that Mrs. Fitzgerald, when at Olivia's age, must have been far the more beautiful of the two. There are one or two who think her more beautiful even now.

Mrs. Fitzgerald is forty-two, and tall and slender

—almost as slender as her girls—and with much of the vivid air of youth still about her, she looks singularly young for her years. There was, indeed, quite a delightful little sensation in Aughribeg about three years ago, when one of the men stationed at Clonbree (a dapper little captain in the 97th) had fallen headlong in love with her, and had actually, in spite of the fact that she was ten years older than he was, and in spite, too, of a far greater difficulty—her horrified coldness at his advances—insisted on proposing to her.

She was immensely ashamed of it—stricken with shame, indeed; and for twelve long months afterwards would not invite any of the men stationed at Clonbree inside her doors, doors that, in spite of the fact that she could not give them champagne or truffles, were the most popular in the county. However, Olivia's coming out had very naturally changed all that, and now once again the Hermitage, old ramshackle place as it is, is the pleasantest rendezvous of all for the young men and maidens of the neighbourhood.

Olivia, though singularly like her mother, is still unlike her. Their eyes have the same deep, dark, velvety hue, but in Olivia's case there is much more of earnestness; Olivia's face all through, indeed, is a little grave; whereas Mrs. Fitzgerald's, in spite of her many griefs and trials, has retained that delightfully dancing light in it that belongs especially to her country people, and leaves her charming to the last. Though there may be this difference in their eyes, their gracious mouths at least are twins; so

good to look at, either when serious or sympathetic, or when, as is more frequent, they are parted in pretty smiles.

As for Cissy, thoughts tragic or melancholy seldom trouble her. She looks out with eyes of brilliant blue upon this uncertain world of ours with a mixture of audacity and curiosity greatly to be envied. Cissy is "her father's daughter," as they say in Aughribeg; taking things as they come, lightly, carelessly, and with "no thought for the morrow," beyond this—that if to-day is bad, to-morrow may be better. Happy Cissy!

Twenty years ago their mother—then Dora Fleming, and one of the loveliest girls in Ireland—had thrown away many a good match to marry her particular Prince Charming. George Fitzgerald, the young master of the Hermitage, was very little older than herself at that time; was handsome, gallant, desperately in love, and quite as desperately in debt. He did not conceal that fact from her; he was quite honest and open about it; but he certainly did not try to dissuade her from a marriage that must only bring her trouble and discomfort in the very near future. All her friends and relatives were, of course, against such an ill-advised start in life; but beautiful Dora, very much in love, and full of that most melancholy of all beliefs—that of "something turning up"—carried her point and married her George, and for the five years she lived with him was as happy a creature, in spite of duns and worries of many sorts, as could be found in this sorrowful world. But poor George broke his neck out hunt-

ing one cold January morning, to leave "his lovely girl," as he used to call her, with two small girls of her own, to break her heart over his loss.

Once the great *stun*, the great horror, was over, she took up the threads of her life very bravely, and fought hard for the means to bring up her pretty little children. Something was saved out of what once had been so good a rent-roll. The old house she could have, and a certain yearly sum. A bare pittance to one who had been brought up as she had been—a mere two hundred a year, in fact. But she put her shoulder to the wheel, and saved, and retrenched, and sent away all the servants except one girl and old Feeney, who had been her own nurse, and afterwards her children's, and who was a "power in the land."

Mrs. Feeney had seen her through all her joys and all her griefs; and had strongly disapproved of her marriage with "poor Masther George"—Mrs. Feeney, having been born in Aughribeg, of course knew all the young members of all the best families round, and called them by their Christian names, with just the Miss or the Master before them. She would have liked Miss Dora to marry Mr. O'Hara, the only child and heir of the O'Haras, of The Glen, then a young lieutenant in the Hussars; but Dora, as has been said, would look at no one but George Fitzgerald. O'Hara had gone away before the wedding (broken-hearted, people said), had exchanged into a regiment going to India, and had been lost sight of for many a day (by the inhabitants of Aughribeg, at all events) until a year ago, when he came home un-

expectedly, took up once again his residence at The Glen, as a traveller and very distinguished soldier—a major now—and had promptly, as everyone could see, fallen in love with Olivia Fitzgerald.

Olivia, being the very image of what her mother *had* been—hardly so beautiful—old memories (whispered the gossips) had undoubtedly waked this fresh admiration within him. And Major O'Hara had come home, as he had gone, a bachelor.

Sir Hardress Lloyd, of Castle Lloyd, a really lovely old place, about two miles from the Hermitage, had been the first to hear of Major O'Hara's infatuation for Olivia, and had been at pains to impress the importance of it on Olivia's mother. The Major was one of the richest men in the neighbourhood. *He* had no expenses, by Jove! No wives (Sir Hardress had had two), no children to bring up. He had more money than he knew what to do with. Olivia would be *mad* to refuse such an offer—and so on, and on, and *on.*

Sir Hardress was Mrs. Fitzgerald's brother-in-law, and naturally she listened to him. Indeed, there was no reason why she should not in this instance, Major O'Hara having all the advantages he had named, and, indeed, a great many more; a truly kind and loving disposition for one thing, and a heart that had kept ever young for another. But then, Olivia was young without having to keep herself so; and besides——

However, she listened, as was natural, to her brother-in-law, who was not only that, but the most influential person, the largest land-holder, and most

undoubtedly the best disliked man in the country round.

He had married first, in his younger days (though Cissy always stoutly maintained he *never* had younger days, and was born in a tall hat and a frock coat), the daughter of a mere nobody, who had been lucky enough to make a fortune out of buttons. Buttons, of all things! Even Stout would have been more spirited. But buttons have little heart in them, and this she proved, because almost directly after the birth of her son Tom, she had meekly lain down upon her bed, and refusing, like Mrs. Dombey, "to make an effort," had died.

Three years after her death Sir Hardress had married again—Lydia Fleming, Dora's elder sister; a very pretty and sprightly girl, with no money, but a long pedigree. She, too, died six months after the birth of a son, called Laurence, and Sir Hardress had made no further venture in the matrimonial line. Strange to say—considering his extraordinary pride and haughty dislike to those of low birth, a dislike that led him to treat his first wife's people with abominable want of respect or kindness—he had still loved that first wife—a cold, dark, silent, plain little thing—far better than he had treated pretty Lydia Fleming, who had really cared for him in her own fanciful way. The other had defied and scorned him to the last hour of her life, yet he had sorrowed for her, more than any man knew; and though he had replaced her soon (*too* soon, said all the matrons whose daughters were waiting for him to ask them to take her place), still he never forgot her, and on

the death of Lydia, who was really a most brilliant creature, betrayed a grief *so* frugal that her sister Dora never forgave him for it.

To the sons of the two marriages Sir Hardress had shewn, from the very beginning, different degrees of affection—if affection, in anyone so cold and repellent, it could be called. To Tom, the elder son, and his heir, a young man of twenty-eight, tall, dark, good-looking, and a little cynical, he is as agreeable as his nature will permit him to be. To Laurence, born of the second marriage, who is twenty-four, he is cold and stern; scarcely just. He would perhaps be even more unjust, but that Tom, between whom and Laurence a strong and abiding love exists, steps in now and then to prevent it. A great deal of his mother's strong but quiet obstinacy is in Tom's nature, and at times Sir Hardress to his own heart confesses he is a little afraid of the son he has preferred.

Both the young men call Mrs. Fitzgerald "aunt" —though they very seldom use that most hideous of all terms—but as a fact, as you can see, Tom Lloyd cannot claim that relationship. He is, however, so fond of her that he likes to think he belongs to her in some way; and being such a little fellow when Laurence was born, and taking to mind the fact that *he*, Laurence, called her "Dody," Tom had called her "Dody" too, and as Dody she had continued to be until quite a few years ago, when it had occurred to "the boys" (as she even now calls them) to make it "Dora." *Never* aunt, or even auntie! It seemed absurd to call this pretty and still so young-looking

woman by such an aged title. No; they would none of it. Why, it would raise derision in the neighbourhood!

"It's disgraceful of you!" said Tom, arguing it out with her one day, "but, you know, you do look just as young as I do; not a day older anyway." Tom had a way of posing as quite elderly. "I don't ask how it is managed, but I feel you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Nobody else can do it; and I shall certainly decline to call you 'auntie' under the circumstances. As a fact, I believe you are really much younger than I am, and that you ought to call me '*uncle*'!"

At that Mrs. Fitzgerald had laughed, and made a pretence of boxing his ears. The tenderest pretence. He had then turned somewhat abruptly to Olivia.

"Well, what do you think? I look older—eh?"

"Not *older!*"

Her glance was a little aggressive.

"That's a compliment. I *feel* old, however. Older"—looking at her with such a fixed regard that she *had* to return it—"than even Major O'Hara."

Olivia, thus compelled to look back, had kept her temper admirably.

"As for that, Major O'Hara is not a Methuselah!" she said.

And indeed he was not. He was a handsome, well-preserved man, a splendid shot, a straight goer to hounds, and, according to old Feeney, "as smart on his pins, God bless us! as iver he was." But Tom Lloyd, for some unaccountable reason, did not care for the Major (who, on the contrary, seemed quite

anxious to be friendly and hospitable with him), and had a little way of jeering at the Major and his admiration for Olivia no one could explain. But then, as Cissy said, "Tom and Olivia were always on the war-path."

* * * * * * * *

The state of Mrs. Fitzgerald's finances being at so low an ebb had made that strange suggestion of Mrs. Gilbert's a thing of considerable importance to her. A guest—a paying guest—who was willing to give two hundred pounds down for a tenancy of six months only was not a chance to be lightly thrown on one side. The sum this strange tenant offered for *half* the year was as much as she and her girls had to live on for the *whole* year! The girls had pressed the matter on her, had argued night and day as girls will, until at last she had consented to Mrs. Gilbert's plan, and had written (under Cissy's supervision) to say they should expect Miss Chloe Jones on the 29th.

Up to the last Mrs. Fitzgerald had not had the courage to tell anyone. She had, indeed, said she expected a friend—a cousin of *her* cousin, Mrs. Gilbert—to come and stay with her for a time; but beyond that she could not go, except to Sir Hardress, whose mean soul she knew would be delighted at the idea of her making money out of anyone. In him she confided, and he encouraged her most nobly to receive the unknown person, who, for all he knew or cared, might turn her home from a very happy one into a scene of misery and disorder. Yet, though she fully understood and scorned him, it was a relief

to her to have told someone. Major O'Hara she would have liked to take into her confidence too, but somehow she shrank from telling him and "the boys" what she had done until secrecy was no longer possible. To-day is the 28th, and to-morrow she will be here, this unknown and greatly-dreaded guest; and finding the Major and Tom and Laurence all together in her garden, it suddenly occurs to her that she must speak *before* the coming of Chloe; and so, taking her courage in her two hands (she never afterwards remembered how the courage came), she speaks.

"James," says she, addressing the Major, who is talking to Olivia—she always calls him by his Christian name, being such very old friends with him, as we know, and, in fact, having grown up with him—"I am going to take in a—a lodger to-morrow."

If she had exploded a little bomb in their midst, she could hardly have created a greater sensation.

CHAPTER III.

"For still th' anticipation of the strife
Is than the strife more dreadful."

THE Major springs to his feet. So does Laurence. Tom turns and looks at Olivia somewhat deliberately.

"What!" cries Major O'Hara. "Good heavens! Dora! have you gone mad?"

"I wish you wouldn't say a *lodger*, mama," puts in Cissy anxiously. "A paying guest is what you are going to——"

"To what? To put up I suppose you mean," cries the Major indignantly. "To put up *with* would be nearer the mark; and as for the difference in the name of the article—pshaw!"

The Major waves his hand tragically. Tom Lloyd laughs—an annoyed laugh.

"I wish you would listen," says Cissy petulantly, "I hadn't finished my sentence. I was going to say that——"

"*Who* could listen?" cries the Major indignantly, his handsome face growing crimson. "To-morrow! Oh! it must be stopped! Must be put an end to. God bless me, Dora! have you thought what it will mean to you? An old fogey of—of——"—he was going to say fifty, but suddenly recollecting that he himself is forty-nine, he backs water somewhat smartly—"of sixty, very likely, and——"

"It is not a man, it is a woman—a lady!" interrupts Mrs. Fitzgerald eagerly. "As if"—reproachfully—I would take a *man* into my house! But this is a —oh, yes, Cissy, I know—*a guest* recommended to me by Maud Gilbert, and she says she is desirable in every way, and——"

And then she gives them the story, or at least the best half of it, not denying even that the money part of it—two hundred pounds for six months—had led her to the acceptance of Mrs. Gilbert's strange offer. "It was wanted," she says, so very gently, so very sadly, that Major O'Hara grinds his heel into the

ground, and Laurence looks distinctly unhappy, "and really, as Maud had written so satisfactory a letter about her, she thought it would be no harm to take in the lady in question, for a little time—only six months. Of *course* she would not stay longer. Anyone so well off would hardly endure the quietude of this place for longer than that!"

"Where does she come from? Who *is* she?" asks the Major, a martial air about him.

"Well, that's where the real difficulty comes in," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, trying to assume a very casual manner, whilst sinking inwardly. "Maud says that no questions are to be asked. We are to take her on trust. She guarantees that we will not suffer through her, but rather benefit; and——"

But here a regular turmoil arises. An angry clamour on the part of the men, that culminates in Major O'Hara catching Mrs. Fitzgerald's arm and leading her in a very magisterial fashion to a garden chair lower down.

"You must excuse me, my dear Dora; but 'pon my conscience such madness I never yet knew! You're not fit to conduct your own affairs; you're not, indeed; you should have someone to look after you. But I can see"—angrily—"that you are obstinately bent on going your own way, without asking anyone—even a friend—an *old* friend—your"—warmly—"*oldest* friend, to have a look in. Have you thought of your girls? Are you going to bring in a woman of whom you know nothing, to live and associate with your daughters?"

Instinctively he looks at Cissy and Olivia, who

are evidently, in the near distance, having a very bad time with Tom and Laurence; but Mrs. Fitzgerald can see that his glance lingers longer on Olivia.

"Certainly I know nothing of her," she says, a little coldly; "but you forget she has been recommended to me by Maud Gilbert. You knew her, I think?"

"Oh! I remember her"—impatiently—"a society fool married to a rather decent sort of fellow, who died some years ago—of *her*, they all said. At all events, there was no special disease. She was a friend of Burlingham's. Ever met *him?*—the notorious Marquis? Married only a little time ago, and now, they say, off to Italy with—well, *not* with his wife—happy woman! However, that's got nothing to do with it. Now, *why*, on anyone's recommendation, should you upset your whole household like this?"

"I've told you," says she, in rather a sad tone.

"Well, confound it all, Dora!" says the Major, "I think you might have consulted someone first before——"

"I did!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald. "I told Hardress. He knows all about it."

Major O'Hara suppresses a rather strong exclamation.

"He knew, and——"

"He advised me to do it. My dear James, think! Where is the harm in it? He was very wise, I suppose; and the girls think as he does; and——"

"I'd like to kick him!" says the Major, in slow and solemn tones. "D'ye mean to tell me he didn't offer to *help* you?"

"No. But——"

"Did you tell him"—indignantly—"that you were taking in this unknown person just because you wanted two hundred pounds?"

"I didn't exactly say that."

"Then why didn't you? How wrong you are all through, Dora! If he knew *that*, he would of course have given you a cheque, and an end to all this would have——"

"It is you who are wrong," says she in a stifled tone, stopping him with an almost passionate gesture. "Once"—painfully—"I asked him for fifty pounds; it is quite five years ago. He refused. Do you think I would ask him again?"

"What a cur!" says the Major. "Not him again, certainly. But—from—an old friend, Dora——"

"Oh, how silly you are!" cries Mrs. Fitzgerald, with a little tremulous laugh. And then: "I know —I know *indeed*"—she lowers her eyes; tears are lying beneath her lashes; how fond he is of Olivia!— "I know you would do a great deal for—us, but— I could not accept money from you, or—any friend."

"A time might come"—Major O'Hara's face turns a shade paler—"when—circumstances might make me—more than—er—a friend."

"As to that"—Mrs. Fitzgerald grows extremely nervous—"I don't see how that could be." *Is* it a proposal for Olivia? Her face takes a deeper dye. Olivia! And he is—he *must* be—close on the fifties! She checks a sigh. Yes, of course; this is a hint about Olivia—about his desire to marry her. Poor darling Olivia, who naturally shrinks from the

thought; though, after all, why should she? The Major is young still, and rich, and—and what man alive could make any woman so happy! She does not raise her eyes to look at the Major, but she can see him for all that, as he now sits beside her; a tall, good-looking man, wearing his forty-nine years bravely, and with the very kindest expression on his face that ever man yet wore. A little full in figure, perhaps, but not so much so as to draw attention to it.

A distinguished-looking man; not an elderly Adonis, by any means, but a delightful, healthy, cheerful fellow, with a temper as excellent as his appetite. His career, too, has been quite as distinguished as his appearance might lead one to expect. He could show you his Victoria Cross if he chose; but he never does choose; and it is with a very reluctant and almost shy air he produces it when to refuse seems churlish.

There is certainly nothing of the military martinet about him. Major Jim had been adored by all his corps. There was a story of how a most unmitigated ruffian, being enrolled in his regiment, the Major—then Captain O'Hara—had taken him in hand, had treated him (as, perhaps, for the first time in his life he ever had been treated) as a human being, and had made a very splendid and heroic soldier of him in the long run. No; there is nothing repellent about the Major. He is only a kindly, friendly, upright gentleman, simple in his desires and liberal with his purse (which providentially is a comfortably long one) to a rather quixotic extent.

To the extent, indeed, of being sometimes a little *done*. But to "the Major," as he is always affectionately called in Aughribeg, it is a very difficult matter to say "no."

"Anyway," says Mrs. Fitzgerald quickly, "the girl is coming. She will be here to-morrow by the first train."

"And you know nothing about her?"

"I have told you that Maud made it part of the bond that we were to ask no questions. I know it is extraordinary; I know very few women would take in a girl on those terms; but I am quite sure Maud—poor dear George's cousin—would not——"

"Let you in for something unpleasant?" The Major grows contemplative. "Well, 'pon my word, I don't know! I shouldn't like to bet my last penny on Mrs. Gilbert's innate honesty. You know she is a little notorious nowadays. All her own set are laughing at her. She had made up her mind to marry Burlingham—that fellow I was telling you about a few moments ago—but he—well, at any rate, he gave her the go-by, and married a very young girl. I know some of her connections——"

The Major hesitates here. "'Pon my word!" goes on he with charming chivalry, "it's hardly fit to talk to you about, but—well, Mrs. Gilbert had a very good riddance of him, as he gave the go-by to his wife six months after his marriage, and went off to Italy with somebody else. However, Mrs. Gilbert was greatly cut up over it. She had made up her mind to be a Marchioness, you see, and declared she could have put up with his defection afterwards."

"She was always very ambitious," says Mrs. Fitzgerald reluctantly.

"And—an accomplished liar," says Major O'Hara. "Oh, I *beg* your pardon. She is a sort of cousin of yours, you tell me, though how she *can* be——"

"Of poor George's!" kindly.

"Ah!" He had never felt much sympathy for "poor George." "However, all this has little to do with what we were talking about. Must this thing be, Dora? *Must* you take in a—a——"

"Paying guest?" with rather a pale smile.

"Yes. *Must* you? You ought to be careful. Mrs. Gilbert as a referee—forgive me again, Dora—would, in my opinion, be rather a—er—an insufficient one," coldly.

"I don't think George's cousin would betray me in any way."

"I daresay not; but——"

"You were always unjust to George," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, rising. "But to be unjust to George's *cousin!*—that——"

CHAPTER IV.

"O that this calculating soul would cease
To forecast accidents, time's limping errors,
And take the present with the present's peace,
Instead of filling life's poor days with terrors."

SHE seems quite unequal to explaining the iniquity of the "that," and turning, goes back to the others, Major O'Hara, with rather a crushed air, bringing up her train.

Tom Lloyd, letting his somewhat searching eyes rest upon them as they come, says to himself: "The old fellow has been proposing for—or at all events betraying his admiration for—Olivia, and Dody is nervous. And well she may be. To marry a girl of twenty to an old man like that!" Tom's upper lip takes a most unrighteous curve.

He walks straight across the grass to Olivia, who is standing near a little bed of flowers, plucking away the few dead or dying leaves from the now richly flowering plants. He and she had had a little dispute a moment ago—one out of the many thousands that scarcely disturb their lives. *This* dispute had been about the coming guest; and Olivia, angry, had left him, giving him to understand by a little eloquent gesture that she was going simply to avoid him—to get rid of him, as, indeed, so she had told herself. She and Tom are always at war more or less, therefore this little skirmish of to-day is of small account. But apparently the skirmish, small as it is, is not over yet.

"What's the good of your marching off like that?" asks he. "Haven't you the heart to finish out the argument? Those plants will do uncommonly well without being picked to pieces by your fingers, whereas I——"

She turns suddenly, and looks at him with straight and very angry eyes.

"Oh, I know," continues he, laughing; "you would like to pick me to bits too; but you can't, you know; and I feel I must have this thing out with you."

"It seems to me thoroughly threshed already!" A frown has gathered on her low, broad brow.

"Not so far as the bringing of it home directly to *you*. Now, I am convinced"—he regards her steadily—"that the coming of this objectionable person——"

"Why objectionable?"

"Never mind. That is a mere detail. The coming of this—well, person, is a little of *your* work."

"I didn't propose it, anyway."

"But you grasped at it when proposed. What a practical girl you are, Olivia!" He looks at her with a curious smile, that has wonder and something else in it. "The most practical for your age that I know. I appreciate your desire for—well, the good things of this life; but, I confess I don't follow you in your latest scheme. If, as seems very probable, you are going to marry the worthy, if slightly obese, Major, who is a sort of second-class millionaire, why let your mother in for the worry of this impromptu guest? Surely O'Hara, if properly appealed to by *you*, would——"

"What was that word you used a few moments ago, Tom? Objectionable? Does it ever occur to you that it might be applied to *you?* You don't know how you appear to others, I am sure"—very sweetly—"or you would try to change yourself. To be distinctly vulgar is, of course, the last thing of all; and you——"

She hesitates, as if unwilling to go on—to point more clearly his iniquities.

"Yes—well?" Tom's tone is as mild as ever.

"Leave me at that—the greatest brute you ever knew—but answer me. *Did* you encourage your mother to take in this—er—guest into your house?"

"I encouraged her largely." Olivia's eyes meet his unflinchingly. "We are very poor, as you know; and she seems to be rich. She can therefore help us. And I think it more honourable to make money by fair means, even at a loss to one's pride, than to owe money that we cannot pay."

His brows contract.

"So bad as that?"

"Quite as bad. We owe a good deal for *us*. No doubt a trifle to another."

"But I—we—a trifle, and *we* were there! You might have asked us—have told——"

"Oh! To *tell!*" She tilts her charming chin. "We'll tell when hope is ours again."

"Not otherwise?"

"No, no!" She makes an attempt to edge away from him, to go back to the others, but he catches her by her arm, and by sheer force compels her to stand still.

"You mean that if you were dying you would not ask help from my father, or from——"

She checks him by a nod—a very sharp, deliberate one.

"Of course not! Help from Sir Hardress—*no!*"

"You speak for yourself, or for your mother?"

"For both"—quite calmly—"and if my mother were never here, for myself!"

He lets her go. His eyes, half-closed, look at her shrewdly.

"That confirms my opinion of you. You are a cold, unscrupulous, ungenerous girl, and worldly to your heart's core. You believe in nothing: in the goodness of no one; only in the power of money. And for money you are willing to sell yourself. No doubt you are right. Let me congratulate you; and let us return to the others, who seem to be eagerly discussing the new-comer."

"We shall no doubt discuss our new-comer from this until to-morrow morning," says Olivia, shrugging her shoulders indifferently, though her lips have grown a little white, "when we expect to see her."

"I hope you will like her when you do," says Tom; "but I think it probable she will sink you all in a Slough of Despond. Fancy taking anyone into your house without knowing who she was, or what she was, or——"

"Yes, that's what I have been just saying!" exclaims Laurence, somewhat hotly, who has caught Tom's last words. (They have now reached the others.) "A woman utterly unknown! Have you girls"—glancing from Cissy to Olivia—"ever thought what a life she is going to lead you?"

"Now, what do you mean by that, Laurence?" asks Mrs. Fitzgerald nervously.

"Mean? Why—that I expect she's ninety if a minute, with a red nose, and a temper to match, and——"

"Bad guess," says Cecily, with a contemptuous shrug. "She's barely twenty, and charming; and if you fall in love with her and she rejects you, it will

be a just punishment for your suspicions. Don't expect *me* to pity you, that's all."

"Only twenty!" Tom is speaking now. "Good heavens! Only twenty, and no questions to be asked! What"—turning to Mrs. Fitzgerald—"what has she done?"

"*Done?*"

"Of course! You don't suppose a young person of means (isn't that how your cousin puts it?) has come down here to bury herself alive, without having a very special reason for wishing herself forgotten by her own world—wherever that may be! Mark my words! you'll have trouble with your new importation."

"What a raven you are, Tom!" cries Cissy, throwing a rose against his mouth with very accurate aim, as if to stop him. "A bird of ill-omen."

"Call me any names you like now. It will be my glorious privilege to call you names shortly—and also to bring you to witness that my words have come true, and that you have lived to rue the day you ever let a '*suspect*' inside your doors. What will it be, I wonder?" continues Tom meditatively, with a little glance at Olivia, who is looking somewhat cold and apart. "Petty larceny—burglary with violence—slow poisoning—bigamy?" He pauses; and then, as one convinced: "Bigamy for choice!"

"Bigamy!"—Olivia tilts her charming chin—"and she is only twenty!"

"*Because* of that! The world runs on greased wheels now; and at twenty—if one can't do something smart at *twenty*, one will find oneself left be-

hind. Why, she might be a trigam . . . Oh, well, never mind; we won't make her *too* conceited. But unfortunately, my dear Dora, some of the smartest people on record have brought their people to sorry passes, and I foresee the day"—looking with deep feeling at Mrs. Fitzgerald—"when you and yours will be lagged, and brought before our beak down here, as an accessory after the fact! No one will believe you did not give her hiding-room on purpose. If it is burglary with violence, they will believe you have half of the swag. I'm not very much up in low slang, but that's all right, isn't it, Major? and I shouldn't wonder, Dody—*poor* Dody!—if they made it a life sentence!"

"The whole thing is abominable!" says Laurence, impatiently—"that you should take in a girl like this——"

"Dody is not going to do that," Tom interrupts him carefully. "It is the girl who is going to take *her* in."

"It is beyond a joke." Laurence is still frowning. There is a touch of anger in his dark eyes. He is of quicker emotions than his step-brother—at all events, outwardly. He is also much handsomer than Tom Lloyd, though there is a distinct resemblance between them, but both are of a most excellent height. "Why"—turning now to his aunt—"should there be such a vital necessity for this thing? Even if you *are* a little hard up, we could all have helped you, couldn't we?" Here the Major taps his foot unconsciously, but earnestly, upon the gravel path. "Come, now, Dody, why didn't you speak to

us first, before bringing down this indignity upon you?"

"It is *not* an indignity!" says Olivia, breaking in with a sort of suppressed violence. "Why can't we do as all the world is doing? Why must we be at a standstill in this small, wretched, forgotten place? Is it because we are at a standstill that we *are* forgotten? Other people do things to augment their incomes; why should not we do it? You call this an indignity, but it is *not!*"

"It is, however, though you may not see it. You girls, of course, cannot understand what it may—probably will—mean to you later on. But *you*, Dody!"—with a reproachful glance at Mrs. Fitzgerald—"a stranger brought into your midst, without even the vaguest knowledge of who she is—with no one to——"

"How stupid you are, Laurence!" Olivia, seeing her mother's face a little sad and pained, and very nervous, breaks in vehemently. "As if mama would have anyone here of whom she knew nothing! Surely you have heard her say that her cousin, Mrs. Gilbert, has given her word for Miss Jones—for the girl who is coming here to-morrow!"

"Mrs. Gilbert?" says Tom, turning to the Major and speaking in a low tone. "I've met her. Last season she was considerably *en évidence* as an aspirant to the honour of Lord Burlingham's title. She failed, I remember. A bit of froth on life's ocean."

"Yes, yes, yes!" says the Major in a hurried whisper. "But no more, my dear boy. A cousin of Dora's—of your—your aunt's, you know."

"Why not wire to her that you can't have her?" Laurence is still expostulating in a clear and rather angry tone. "I can tell you that if you let it go further, you will repent the day you ever let this adventuress into your house."

Cissy lifts her voice.

"That is too strong a term!" cries she indignantly. "When we do not know her—have not even *seen* her!"

"For all that, adventuress is the word. A girl who comes here refusing to have questions asked about her—how *can* she be regarded but as an adventuress? Of course, there may be arguments, but——"

His arguments, at all events, come at this moment to an untimely end. Something in the stricken air and attitudes of those around him, the knowledge, more than anything else, that they are *not* listening to him, brings him to a dead stop, and a glance in the direction that all theirs have taken.

He looks towards the western gate that leads into the garden—a garden filled with roses—and looks to his undoing.

Chloe has come!

CHAPTER V.

"And young and old
Extol her grace and say of her—
She's made of sunbeams and of flowers
And dews and dawns and happy hours,
And music breathed in Eden's bowers
When angels play the dulcimer."

THE "adventuress" is walking towards them; so close is the little wicket-gate by which she has entered to where they are all standing that she is amongst them before they are aware, and must inevitably have heard the last sentence, if not more. If Laurence had a single doubt still remaining on this awful head, she dissipates it at once. Having given a charming smile to Mrs. Fitzgerald, who, like all the others, has been struck dumb by her sudden appearance and the guilty uncertainty as to what she has or has not heard, she lets her eyes turn lightly to where Laurence is standing. There they rest a moment, and—is it anger or amusement that warms their depths?

"I am afraid," says she in the very sweetest way, "that I have come a *little* too soon."

Laurence almost groans aloud. Of course she has heard! There is something almost diabolical, if also suggestive of mirth, in the slight emphasis on the "little." Like his luck all through, he tells himself.

"Oh, no, no; not at all!" Mrs. Fitzgerald is say-

ing, in an eager, if rather jerky, sort of way. Everyone knows instinctively that it is Miss Jones. "Of course it was to-morrow we expected you, but we are very pleased to see you a day sooner; very—er—*very* pleased!" This is pitiable, and Olivia, having recovered, comes to her mother's rescue.

"You are Miss Jones, of course," she says, with a friendly little glance and smile. Olivia, in the clear, swift way of young people, has come to the conclusion already that she likes her. Miss Jones looks back at her for a moment—for a mere fraction of time—as if not quite understanding, and then says with a delightful air:

"Yes, I am Miss Jones, of course. But—I hope you won't *call* me that—it is rather a horrid name, don't you think? As I have come to stay, if"—with a little frank and open look at Mrs. Fitzgerald—"you will have me, I should like you all to begin by calling me Chloe."

"Does that invitation go round?" asks the Major, who really ought to be ashamed of himself, but, as he explained afterwards at much length to Olivia (who didn't care), he had quite gone down before this little stranger who had just stepped upon their stage.

It may as well be said at once that they all go down before her. It is a case of love at first sight. From Mrs. Fitzgerald and the girls to the miserable Laurence, who is still praying for the earth to swallow him up quick, she captivates them all.

She is a small, slim, exquisite creature, filled with the gaiety of youth, with eyes like dewy violets, and

soft and loose brown hair that lies in little ripples on her dainty head, and with that dainty head held delicately poised, as those women hold them who feel the world beneath their feet.

She is explaining to Mrs. Fitzgerald. Her smile, as she speaks, is quite sweet and friendly now, and without a suspicion of affront or malice. In that sudden glance she had given Laurence there had certainly been a little gleam of mischievous amusement, but now there is nothing in her face but well-bred contrition; and, indeed, her whole air is gently self-accusative, in that she has obtruded herself upon them a day in advance of that agreed upon. But circumstances had arisen, and she had told herself they would perhaps forgive her, and so on. They all at once forgive her. Even Tom Lloyd, who is a trifle hard-hearted; but then he finds it easy, because, looking at her, at her little society air, her little fashionable gestures, her Parisian garments, he says to himself:

"I give her one fortnight here, and then, *hey presto!*—for the world of Paris or London again! But what the deuce did she mean by getting Mrs. Gilbert to send her *here?*"

Of course, it is all right, he tells himself. All right in the most important sense of the word. The girl is so very young, so very distinguished-looking, in spite of the irrepressible gaiety of her air, and, more than all that (which really might amount to nothing), there is something about this extraordinary Chloe that positively *forbids* a single unpleasant thought about her.

And now she is being introduced to everybody, and has given her hand very prettily to them all: with special friendliness, indeed, to Laurence, who is still a dark and very uncomfortable red, a fact that delights them, assuring them that she has not heard his unhappy remark just at her entrance; assuring them all, except the culprit himself. He had not mistaken that first flash in her eyes—that touch of exaggerated friendliness in her cool little grasp.

Half an hour goes by. The girls had been going to see the finals played at a small local tournament at five o'clock, and had ordered tea somewhat earlier in consequence, but now feel themselves bound, of course, to stay at home. Somewhat of a disappointment to them, but to desert mama on this trying occasion not to be thought of. Miss Jones, however, gets them out of their difficulty. She is now talking to Mrs. Fitzgerald.

No; she is not at all tired, she assures her; and these delicious cakes and this nice *creamy* tea have quite refreshed her. No, she had not walked from the station, though if she had known The Hermitage was so near, . . . she had found an outside car. Oh, yes! she quite liked outside cars. She had once lived for a whole month in Dublin ("and hadn't died of it:" Tom thought she wanted to add this), and had there learnt how to sit on them. She thought them lovely. She thought a little view of the valley just below The Hermitage very lovely, too. Could she—might she go and see it now? She had heard that Olivia—"*May I* call you Olivia and Cissy?" (another pretty little questioning smile) were going

to an "at home" of some sort, or was it a tournament? No, *no!* they must go; it will make her wretched if they deny themselves this pleasure because of her coming; and perhaps—— She looks prettily at Mrs. Fitzgerald, and then at Laurence very directly, and finishes her sentence to *him*. "Are *you* too going to this tournament?" asks she.

As it happens, Laurence is not.

"No," returns he promptly. The worst has already come; he now feels brave as a lion. That she is bent on carrying him off and having it out with him is his distinct conviction, which proves him a cleverer man than he had ever before believed himself.

"Then perhaps you will take me to see this lovely view?"

He hails the thought with joy. This walk will give him the opportunity of explaining—though explanation can scarcely help him, and will probably redound to his great discredit; but at all events it will knock the bottom out of this abominable situation.

Mrs. Fitzgerald is quite pleased.

"The prettiest view, Laurence, is from the hill; will you take Miss Jones——"

"*Chloe!*" says Miss Jones with charming entreaty.

"Well"—smiling—"take Miss *Chloe*, then, to the upper hill. The view is better from there."

Mrs. Fitzgerald, dear and hospitable woman as she is, is undoubtedly secretly charmed at getting rid of this so little expected guest for an hour or so. There are a few preliminaries to be gone through

still—such as the final arrangement of rooms, the airing of sheets and blankets, the putting of a few flowers in the guest chambers—that are still undone. To-morrow they would all have been finished, but the guest had come before to-morrow was born. So with a relieved heart Mrs. Fitzgerald gladly speeds Laurence and this wonderful new Chloe to the upper hill.

And so they go, Laurence and the wonderful new Chloe, through fields of growing grasses, and by streams bright with summer's coming glories, by tall flags and floating lilies, to where the winds of heaven have fuller play.

Up here a sweet and playful breeze, glad with the perfumes of the scented May, is filling all the land with happy sighs. Each bush, each tree, has life in it—a life apart from its own strenuous throb—branch and twig and monster stem is being crowded by tiny living things; and here is the stately elm, and here the homely laurel, and here, a little further up the hill, the whitethorn, now in its glory;

> "And in it
> Is lilting the linnet,
> Unstayed, unafraid."

Indeed, this evening, spring, that is so often gay, and sometimes so very sad, but never, *never* old, has put on its brightest colours, and looks beautiful exceedingly. To Laurence, in spite of the horrors of an hour ago, it seems fuller of life and hope, of fresh verdure, of splendid lights on hill and valley, than ever it has been before.

The buoyant steps—buoyant and so untiring—of the so evidently town-bred girl beside him fill him with surprise. She has sprung up the rising ground with a glad vitality that gives him little chance of helping her over the innumerable boulders, the many awkward stiles, that lie in their way.

Perhaps these difficulties, or the beauty of the dying day, have kept them silent—or is it their strangeness to each other? But, at all events, not until the "upper hill" is reached, and all the vast grandeur of the land below lies stretched before them, with the ocean gleaming dully in the fading light far, far away, does any word, beyond a bare fragmentary one here and there, break from them.

It is *he*, strangely enough, who speaks first. The ascent had been at the last a little steep—nay, *very* steep—yet she had disdained his assistance, springing like a little sure-footed goat from rise to rise.

"I must congratulate you!" He turns to look at her. "For a young lady who has lived in town a great deal, as you have done, such a mountain walk must be considered quite a feat."

"Yes." She lets her voice die down, and looks deliberately on the splendid view before her. "But you see I have not always lived in town. I have lived in London—it is London I suppose you mean?—for six months only. You jump a little at conclusions, don't you?"

It is the simplest little remark. It may, indeed, mean anything or nothing; but it makes Laurence's blood run cold. He is wondering how he is to make his apology, when she goes on again.

"As a fact, I have lived all my life in the country, so, you see, I know as much about climbing as most people. Now I have answered your question. It"—with a little glance—"*was* a question?"

"I don't think I meant it as such," returns he quickly. "At all events, I meant nothing that could annoy you."

"Oh! why should it annoy me?" Then all at once she changes her manner so completely that he would scarcely have known the little half-amused person of a second ago.

"Whether or not you meant it, it *was* a question!" Her tone is imperious.

"I can see how it seems to you. And though, as I have explained, I did not . . ."—stammering—"I apologise for it."

"You admit it was a question?"

"Certainly."

"Then"—triumphantly—"it is *my* turn to ask you one now." She lifts her face, and all at once he sees what a reckless, saucy, adorable thing it is. "And as I have answered you, so you must answer me. That is, candidly, and to the point. You promise?"

"Yes, of course." He knows he is saying something, but in reality he is thinking of her, not of her words.

"Honest Indian?"

He laughs. "Honest Indian."

"Well"—her smile now is a little malicious—"when, a little while ago, I arrived in Mrs. Fitzgerald's garden, what were you saying about me? No denials!" shaking her head virtuously. "It *was*

me of whom you were speaking. And what of me?"

There is a lengthened silence; Laurence has grown a dark red. So she *had* heard, then!

"Well, honest Indian, what?" Her tone is lightly mocking. "Are you afraid to give it words? 'An adventuress,' was it not? And why, O King! must all people be regarded as lost beyond redemption just because they do not wish every vulgar detail of their lives to be known? The Roman Catholics go into retreat at times, and no interviewers follow them. *I* am going into retreat now." She steps back a little, defying him in a light way, and with that first touch of amusement on her lips. "Are you to follow me with note-book and pencil?"

"This is a little ungenerous, surely?" says Laurence quickly. "Of course, I quite understand that you heard what I said on your coming, and that you have remembered it against me. You should, I think, however, in common fairness, remember, *too*, that when I spoke I had not seen you."

"And having seen me?"

"I"—eagerly—"of course believe in you. For all that, I know to my sorrow that you will hate me from the hour of our first meeting to your dying one."

"You think that?" Chloe gives him a swift little glance; then looks down. Not a word from her, however; and so they go on a little further up the hill, and over a stile somewhat entangled in a flowering briar. Chloe springs to the ground; and then, as if something in the pretty first finger of her right

hand is troubling her, she lifts it to her lips. Indeed, it must greatly trouble her, because, as it reaches her lips, she says "Ah!" quite audibly, if very softly.

"You have hurt yourself with one of those briars!" Laurence, as if seriously hurt himself, takes a step nearer to her.

"Oh, no, no! No, really it is nothing."

"But why are you——" She is still pressing the little slender finger against her mouth, as if in sorrow for it. And all at once Laurence finds himself wishing that *he* was that finger. And of course, after *that*, . . . descent to the lowest depths is easy. "There must be a thorn in it."

"I don't think so, and it doesn't hurt *much*," says Chloe sweetly; "not so much as *other* things. Your disbelief in me, for one. But now you say you do believe in me; still—how can I trust you? And—and at all events you owe me something."

"I owe you an apology."

"It shall be more than that."

"Yes; anything!"

"Ah! what a splendid promise! But"—with pretty playfulness—"how if I ask too much? How if I ask you to be my friend—my *real* friend here?"

"That is reward!"

"I am not fond of punishment," says she wistfully. "I have had too much of it myself, perhaps. Well," holding out to him a small, cool hand, "you *will*, then?"

"If you will let me." He is holding the little hand now in a warmer grasp than he knows. However, *she* does. He is pledging himself—to what? He

knows nothing of that either; nor does he care; the path before him seems so open, so free, so flower-filled, so easy of treading, whatever the end of it may be. "I don't deserve it," he goes on hurriedly. "But—if you would let me explain to you, Miss Jones——"

"No, no! *Not* Jones!" interrupts she, eagerly, impetuously, and with a quick frown. "It is an odious name. I wonder I ever—— Call me anything but that; even"—she looks at him carelessly, but very fair in the eyes, for all that, her charming mouth widening in laughter—"Chloe!"

"I shouldn't dare," returns he, laughing too, as though caught by the infection of her mirth.

"No? not so much courage? Well, as you will. And so you are my friend. But I won't have any questions asked, remember. I hate them; they are so rude. Come"—turning smartly and picking up the end of her gown—"I'll race you back to the house!"

She makes a most unfair start, being round the corner almost before the words are out of her lips, and over that thorny stile: was her finger so much hurt, after all? as he follows he wonders at her. First a very dignified little lady; then a coquette of the first water—he is quite wise enough to have recognised her as that—and now a born tomboy. What will be the next change?

The next change, indeed, finds her a most ordinary, happy, light-hearted girl, with whom Olivia and Cissy find it possible to be friends at once—a fact that takes a considerable amount of care off Mrs. Fitzgerald's shoulders. After all, Maud *had* done her a

good turn. This bright, pretty creature—a little versatile, perhaps, but good (so evidently good to the heart's core)—will be a real boon; and her pretty society manners (Mrs. Fitzgerald had not seen that race with Laurence down the hill) will no doubt give a little touch to the girls, who have rather (well, very naturally, too)—rather countrified manners. And, of course, all that Tom had said this afternoon was nonsense. She remembers how he had insisted on bigamy. At this she laughs. She had twitted him with his fears afterwards, and he had given in; had even acknowledged the paying guest to be incapable of *that*, at all events! "She was too young," he said; he would not admit more than that; but dear Tom was always a little pessimistic in his views of life, and people generally.

Mrs. Fitzgerald, indeed, is delighted with Chloe. They have all called her Chloe from the first, as she wished; and, indeed, none of them care for her more formal title. She herself evidently does not like it, and no wonder.

"And indeed, any name so utterly inappropriate ——" begins Mrs. Fitzgerald, sitting in the girls' room whilst they are brushing their hair, to discuss this new situation, as she always discusses everything, with them. Most girls go to their mother's room on these occasions, but Mrs. Fitzgerald as often as not goes to theirs. There is no point laid down about it. It is a matter of chance in which room the little gossip is carried on. There is a fine spirit of *camaraderie* between this mother and her girls that keeps their hearts very close together.

"It's absurd!" says Cissy. "Jones! The very *last* name I should have given her."

"It is impossible even to think of her as Jones. Of course there are good Joneses and bad, but the name always reminds me of green grocers." Olivia has begun to pull the hairpins out of her mother's head now, her own hair being brushed. "Come and sit over here, mama, and I'll make you shine like satin. What lovely hair you have! even more than Cissy. Do you know, I have been thinking; and—and certainly a great many people of good family marry beneath them. Perhaps her mother——"

"Yes; perhaps. And for money," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, a little dreamily. *She* had married for love, and where had it landed her? She could have done the girls so much more good if she had married—well, someone who wasn't poor George. And it wouldn't have been marrying beneath her, either. But then another thought comes to her, and she brightens under it. After all, if she had, they wouldn't be *quite* the same girls, and *could* there be others so dear, so good?

"Anyway," says Olivia, "*she* is not going to marry for money. Mama, I am sure that what we said was true. She is running away from home to avoid marrying someone she hates."

"And quite right, too," says Cissy fervently. "If it was my case, I'd run away like anything!"

"It is possible," says Mrs. Fitzgerald thoughtfully. "But I hope not; I think not. Maud is a very careful woman. She would not let herself in for anything that might be scandalous." She pauses, dwelling on her

thoughts, and then: "I think I will go to bed now, girls."

Olivia has ceased to brush her hair, and has gathered the splendid mass, that even now has not a grey thread in it, into a loose and glistening knot.

"Oh, no, mama! not for a little while; we have got such a lot of things to say." Evidently mama is the most interesting person to say them to; and so she stays until Cissy suddenly falls asleep, and has to be waked up again; and then both girls conduct their mother to her room, poke up her fire, which always burns there, because nights in May are chilly, and then leave her, after a good hug.

They are all indeed specially happy to-night. They had dreaded the coming of Chloe, but now that she is among them they can look back on their fears with pleasure. Even old Feeney has accepted her—a great matter in the Fitzgerald household. Feeney, indeed, had "tuk to her," as she herself said, after the new-comer had been introduced to her in the schoolroom.

"'Tis all right she is!" said Feeney to her mistress later on. "A raal lady! Faith, 'twas ag'inst her comin' I was at fust, as ye know, ma'am. But, Miss Dora me dear, there's blood in her! Arrah! *no*, ma'am! No Joneses for me! An' the purty face of her; an' the smile at ye; an' the clothes on her back! Glory!"

CHAPTER VI.

"Nor less I deem that there are powers
Which of themselves our minds impress."

THE sun is glinting hotly on the stone benches in the garden, and widening the hearts of the roses. May is no more; her hour had come,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

and lo! June in the morn lay smiling in her stead—a blissful babe.

It is languorously warm. The butterflies floating in mid-air seem drowsy on their fragile wings; the flowers are drooping; the clean and shaven grass looks dry and parched; the white lines on the tennis-courts are almost hurtful to the eye. From the many borders the warm perfume of mignonette, mingled with sweet pea, makes the air heavy.

To-day Major O'Hara is "at home." Always "on hospitable thoughts intent," he has hailed the knowledge that this is the birthday of *both* Mrs. Fitzgerald's girls (curiously enough, the third of June, with two years between each third, had seen Cissy and Olivia come into the world) to give a rather special entertainment for their delight. For *Olivia's* delight, says the neighbourhood.

Indeed, everyone is here. Lady Matilda Morne, tall and masculine; Mr. Morne, small and ladylike; Sir John and Lady Swinton, he, pale as a lemon,

with queer-cut eyes, a good deal of greyish fairish hair, and a strong resemblance to the solemn goat; she, dark, swarthy, and with her hair always at sixes and sevens; the Hargreaves, the Blakes: Sir Hardress, of course—and, in fact, all the people round, including even the new-comers who have just settled down at The Villa, Mrs. Longton and her daughter Cynthia—the latter as unlike what a Cynthia *ought* to be as one can possibly imagine.

Mrs. Longton, who is a little effusive in manner, has come up to her host, seeing him standing somewhat idly apart, with Sir Hardress and Mrs. Fitzgerald beside him.

"Dear Major O'Hara," says she, with the smile that she always believes in—as "winning." "How delightful of you to give us such a charming afternoon!" She speaks quite as if Major O'Hara has had the ordering of the weather, and is to be thanked for the shining of the sun; and as she smiles at him, she smiles at Sir Hardress too. She—although her daughter Cynthia is—well, never mind what age Cynthia is—has still hopes of a second union. There have been little unpleasant suggestions brought to her about Major O'Hara, of his going to destroy his life by marrying that silly girl; but Sir Hardress—ah! *he* is free as air, at all events.

"Well, you see," says the Major, in his friendliest way, "this is an occasion on which I thought I ought to do something for——"

He looks at Mrs. Fitzgerald, who smiles back at him. "For Olivia," he was evidently going to say, she tells herself.

"You see"—Mrs. Fitzgerald nods gaily at Mrs. Longton; her gaiety is perhaps a little forced; if he wants to marry Olivia, and if Olivia will not have him!—"you see"—with a somewhat strange smile—"to-day is the birthday of both Cissy and Olivia, and Major O'Hara has been so good as to give this charming party in their honour."

"Ah, the birthday of your daughter Olivia!" says Mrs. Longton.

"The birthday of Cissy too!" puts in Mrs. Fitzgerald, a little quickly—a little sharply, indeed. Mrs. Longton laughs inwardly. Trying to keep it dark, she tells herself, until it is *un fait accompli;* clever woman and one who has been—well, *might* have been—good-looking once.

"Ah—twins?" remarks she leisurely.

"No, no!" smiling. "Olivia is the elder by two years. But both were born on the third of June."

"Very sensible of them; and decidedly economical!" says Sir Hardress, in his cold, unpleasant way. He is a tall, gaunt man of about sixty-five, with an expression as chilling as his tones. A hard-looking man, if handsome, with a perpetually sneering mouth. "One birthday party does for both. Hope they'll get married on the same day too. Save expense."

The delightful sentiment conveyed in these words is met by a discreet silence by those around him, save on the part of Mrs. Longton.

"*Dear* Sir Hardress! What a naughty speech! But I can see you say it just for effect. *Too* bad of you, really! But we can read you"—shaking a coquettish forefinger at him—"*we* can read you!

Now, what"—gushingly—"can be more delightful than spending money on those we love?"

"Quite so," says Sir Hardress, glaring at the forefinger. "I'm with you there. I love myself. I spend all the money I have on that estimable person!"

"O cynic!" cries Mrs. Longton in a girlish way—she has not yet learned, as has been said, to regard herself as on the shelf—"how you pose! Don't —*don't* pretend to *me!* *I* can see through you! And so it is the birthday of both your girls, Mrs. Fitzgerald? How interesting! Sweet of you, dear Major O'Hara, to inaugurate this little *fête* for them! But for old friends one would do much. So curious, both the dear girls' birthdays coming together. But it is not without precedent. There was an amusing little coincidence in my own family. In fact"—smiling broadly round her—"I was born on my parents' wedding day!"

"Bless my soul!" says the Major involuntarily. The decidedly *risqué* announcement has very naturally startled him.

Mrs. Longton draws herself up.

"*Two years later!*" declares she, with much dignity, and a crushing glance.

"Oh, of course, of course!" says the Major, who has grown a brilliant crimson. He is so confused, indeed, that he fails to see that the effect of his last words is but to increase the difficulty of the situation.

"I think, Sir Hardress, I should like to see what my dear girl is doing," says Mrs. Longton; whereon Sir Hardress, with a sour visage, conducts her across the lawn.

The poor Major, stricken with a sense of his criminality, hardly dares to look at Mrs. Fitzgerald as they depart. What a deucedly unlucky exclamation of his! And if he had only thought for a moment. But, by Jove! it sounded so odd! and—well, he had been coarse, by Jove!—indelicate, they'd call him; and Dora——

A little stifled sound from Dora brings his eyes on her. She is laughing—nay, I regret to say, she is convulsed with laughter.

"You have done it this time!" cries she. "Come and sit here"—patting the stone bench on which she is sitting—"and recover yourself. She'll never forgive you, James. You have made an enemy for life of the lovely Longton. Come"—patting the stone afresh—"and receive my commiserations."

"Oh, I say! you know," says the Major, quite bashfully, "I didn't think. And honestly, Dora, 'twas a confoun—er—funny thing to say, eh? And she——"

"Neither it nor she are worth a second thought. Don't give them one."

"Do you know," says Major O'Hara, with a sigh of relief, seating himself beside her, "you are the most comfortable person I know!"

"Comforting, I hope you mean," says she; and then they both laugh. *Dear* Olivia, what a kind, good-tempered husband she will have, thinks Mrs. Fitzgerald, if only she will have him.

The Major has seated himself on the stone bench as desired; he had done it gladly, poor man, with a view to coolness on this broiling day, only to find

out his mistake a little later on. The cool stone bench is a delusion and a snare; it is, indeed, as hot as a fiery sun can make it. But, he tells himself, if Dora can bear it, *he* can; and besides, she is the pleasantest woman he knows. During a little pause in their talk Chloe happens to cross the ground beneath them—Chloe, in a little simple Parisian garment, that had cost a good deal more than anyone here to-day could know. A little delicate confection of muslin and lace, girlish—almost childish, indeed—and with a big hat of the same simple kind upon her head. The hat alone had cost five guineas. Laurence is on her right side; the curate, Mr. Gossler, on her left.

"Oh, there is Chloe!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald. "How *dear* she is! Have you noticed her little pretty ways—her deprecating air—the desire to be nice to everyone?"

"I have," says Major O'Hara. "I'm afraid—I hope you won't be angry with me, Dora—but I'm afraid she's a little *too* nice to the curate!"

"Oh, no! really, she hardly looks at him. What I am afraid is that Laurence . . . he seems very—very—well, almost devoted, don't you think? and, as I told you, we have every reason to believe that she has left a most cruel guardian, who wanted her to marry a man for his money——" She stops, as if struck by some sudden, conflicting thought.

"That would be bad," says the Major genially. "To marry for money *only*—that would be a great mistake."

"Well"—Mrs. Fitzgerald's throat feels a little dry

—if Olivia consents to marry *him!*—"well, you see, we don't know everything; but it certainly *seems* as if she was being forced into a most undesired marriage before she came here, when all the time she was in love with someone else. She hasn't *said* a word; in fact, she declines to speak; and who would wish to break through such a reserve as that? But I am sure she is in love with someone *far* away from this; someone who is not the curate—poor Mr. Gossler!—or Laurence—or—*anyone* here. I quite believe in her; I do really; though of course we don't at all know who she is—or what."

She certainly does *not* know. Even now—*now*, when Chloe has been with her for quite a month. The charming guest had been introduced to all the neighbourhood as a cousin of Mrs. Gilbert's, and thus, in a way, a cousin of Mrs. Fitzgerald's, and had been accepted with effusion. Mrs. Fitzgerald had given in very unwillingly to this direction of Mrs. Gilbert's to receive Chloe as her cousin, but she *had* given in, and the cousin thus introduced had proved an overwhelming success. Even the women like her, and as for the men——

Laurence Lloyd, amongst these last, is considered by the men most confoundedly lucky. Miss Jones has shewn a decided preference for him as a partner for tennis or for lawn golf beyond all others.

"Ah! she's told you nothing yet, then?" says the Major.

"Not a word. But somehow I'm sure she's all right. Look at her now, down there." In the tennis-court below, Chloe, with Laurence alone be-

side her now, is about to begin a game. "Is she not pretty? She is going to play against Tom and Olivia."

"I suppose so. But I wish I knew who she really is. And for the matter of that, Olivia is quite as pretty as ever she was."

"Oh, Olivia—a little country girl!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald hurriedly. Is he going to speak? "But Chloe—I can't help thinking she has come to us from far more fashionable circles than we shall ever see. Have you noticed her pretty little phrases—the delicate turns of her speech?"

"Yes, yes," says the Major abstractedly. He is looking at this idealised Chloe down there on the tennis-ground. "Who the deuce," says he, all at once, "does she remind me of?" He leans forward, scrutinising Miss Jones from afar, and wrinkling up his brows as if in deep thought. "Who *is* she like, eh?"

"Like?"

"Yes. Someone, someone; but I can't place her. And yet she does remind me of——"

"She has a little look of Bessie Moore, hasn't she?"

"May have"—courteously. "But it is not Bessie Moore I mean. It's something about the mouth. Now, who on earth is it?"

"So many people nowadays are so like somebody else," says Mrs. Fitzgerald carelessly.

"It's some *man*, I think, whom she resembles."

"Oh, my dear James! a less masculine-looking girl I never saw."

"Certainly, certainly!" says the Major vaguely. He is still searching his memory.

"She is very delightful to live with," Mrs. Fitzgerald goes on, "and so cheerful in the house. We all like her more than I can say, and she seems to have settled down very contentedly in our dull midst, though from certain signs I am sure she has lived in far gayer circles. Her clothes point to a very fashionable existence."

"And you know nothing of her, you tell me?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald shakes her head, blushing faintly. "I don't really; and I don't seek to know. I have taken her on Maud Gilbert's word, and I am sure Maud would not give me away."

"Rash—decidedly rash," says the Major. "To take anyone's word for anything at this time of day is sheer madness." He says this with what he fondly believes to be a distinctly worldly sort of air, though as a matter of fact he himself believes blindly in everybody. "I declare, Dora, you want somebody to look after you—badly!"

She laughs.

"Well, I've got Miss Jones now. Perhaps she will look after me."

"Take my advice, and look after her."

"Oh, come now, James, this is a little too much. You, who have been so charming to her ever since she came!"

"Oh, she's a very nice little girl, beyond doubt—so far as one knows." Here the Major grows careful. "But I can't help looking after my old friends. Now, for example, what have you to shew that she

is not a first-class adventuress—that she will ever pay you a penny of the money promised?"

"James! There you wrong her indeed. She has paid me. She insisted on paying the first quarter in advance. And of course the money was very welcome. It arranged the rent and other things. You see"—colouring warmly—"I speak to you as a friend."

"No, you don't," says the Major irately. "If *I* were a fellow's friend I'd tell him when I was bothered about a few trifling things, a few absurd debts. But you——"

"Well, I have told you now."

"Yes, *now*. But you might have told me sooner!" with a touch of kindly reproach.

"No, no. That would be worse."

"Worse? To be under a slight compliment to me?"

"To anyone. Better endure a shock to one's pride than——"

"Than take a little help from the oldest friend you have. You call that pride; I call it incivility. I do, on my honour, Dora."

"Well"—laughing—"don't let us quarrel about it. What do you think of her?"

"Pretty girl, certainly; but, as I have already told you, not so much to my taste as—as"—quickly—"Olivia."

"Yes?" Mrs. Fitzgerald's heart is beating rapidly. As Olivia! And if Olivia refuses him, will there be a breach between her (Olivia's) mother and this old friend for ever?

"But certainly pretty, and with charming manners.

Can be even civil to an old buffer like me. Now" —again catching sight of Chloe, who is coming towards them with some of the others—"who *is* she like? By George, I have it! A little girl I used to know—ten—twelve years ago—oh! somewhere in the Dark Ages. There is something about the mouth—that little girl married. Well, I've caught the resemblance; I hope when Miss Chloe marries she will do better."

"The other?"

"Married very badly, in a *sense*. She—— Oh! here you are, Miss Chloe!" The Major always calls her "Miss Chloe." "Come and sit down and rest yourself after your late fatigues. I saw you fighting most gallantly. Laurence and you won, I think?"

"Yes, she beat us," says Olivia. "We hadn't a chance."

"Not a look in!" says Tom. They have all come up.

"No, no, thank you, I shan't sit down," says Chloe, whose blue eyes are now almost black with the excitement of the game. "I am not fatigued. I have won; I feel fresh and strong." The light of battle is indeed still shining in those splendid eyes. She is holding her racquet in both hands, and her whole pose is charming; Laurence, a little away from her, is studying her with a gaze that is ardent.

"I have heard some news, mama," says Olivia, turning to her mother. "Mrs. Longton has just told me. You know the old shooting lodge at Carrig—it has been taken by some Englishman, and

he is coming here; in fact, he has come. He came last night."

"But, my dear, for what?—with no shooting until August."

"Fishing, I believe. You know the Carrig river is splendid for salmon; and later on there will be very good shooting too. He has taken all the Carrig mountains, and all the lower lands besides."

"What an excitement!" says Chloe, laughing.

"Well, it is!" Olivia laughs too. "A stranger—a stranger is the thing. See what an excitement *you* were when you first came!"

"A transient one."

"Far from that," says Tom. "Don't decry yourself. Transitory glory is a poor thing. Now *me* you strike as an excitement likely to be eternal! That is a compliment, I assure you!"

"I don't think I want to be an immortal," says Chloe, with a little shrug. "They must have been so frightfully bored, poor things!—the same scenes over and over again."

"What is the name of the new tenant for The Lodge?" Mrs. Fitzgerald is asking Olivia. "And is he going to have it done up? It is habitable, of course, but greatly in disrepair."

"It will be a godsend to the idle workmen in the village," says the Major. "They have been out of employment for some time, many of them. The Lodge is bigger than its name, and there is certainly a good deal of painting and papering to be done, if nothing else."

"Well, but what is his name?" asks Tom idly,

who had heard Mrs. Fitzgerald's question of a moment ago.

"Something beginning with C," says Laurence. "Caxton was it, Olivia?"

"No. Carlton—Granby Carlton."

There is a little crash, a little subdued cry; Miss Jones' racquet has fallen to the ground. She is now bending down to pick it up, and Tom and Laurence have come to her help. Presently she lifts her head and smiles at Tom in her usual pretty, airy fashion.

"I am afraid I must have gone to sleep!" says she gaily. "It slipped out of my fingers. Ah! this is what comes of being inactive on a warm day. Sluggard!"—turning a reproachful gaze on Laurence—"you too are half asleep! Wake from thy slumbers, and come and have a round of golf with me."

"Asleep! Is thy servant a dog?" cries Laurence, and together they disappear into the cool hall outside to get their sticks.

"This new neighbour," asks Chloe, as they are selecting their clubs from the stand—"he will be amusing, perhaps. Where is this Lodge they speak of—near this?"

"No; much nearer The Hermitage," says Laurence. "*Too* near The Hermitage"—laughing, but watching her very anxiously all the time—"for my taste."

"Why?" Chloe lifts her eyes for a second—a second only—from the golf stick she is examining, as has been said. "What are you afraid of?" Her eyes have gone back to the stick, but they have left

their work behind them. Laurence lays his hand on hers.

"Of you." His tone is quick, eager, impassioned.

"That is so stupid," says she calmly. With perfect calmness, too, she shakes his hand from hers. "Let us be rational. And so The Lodge is near us?"

"About a mile and a half away." His tone now is cold and resentful. "You saw it the other day when coming from the Castle."

"That old place?" thoughtfully; and then: "Quite a journey! and yet"—with a swift glance at him—a saucy, provocative glance—"too near for your taste, it seems. Would you put one, then, in a donjon keep, like the tyrants of old?"

"I would put you in my heart," says he lightly; but surely there is a terrible longing behind that lightness.

"You would? Does that mean that you *haven't?* Oh, Laurence! No, no; not a step nearer—not one! Have you got your putter? Yes? Then come on."

CHAPTER VII.

"The weariness, the fever, and the fret."

"DON'T go for a moment or two," whispers Major O'Hara in a hurried aside to Mrs. Fitzgerald, as he is speeding the last of his guests. It is consider-

ably later, and, indeed, quite six o'clock; although the sun is not flaunting so gaily up above as it did an hour ago, still, the splendid heat remains, and the gardens are in a glow.

"I've got a little present for the girls," says the Major presently, leading her back to the library, where Olivia and Cissy, with Tom and Laurence Lloyd, are chatting over the day. Chloe had somehow contracted a bad headache earlier, and had gone home in Mrs. Longton's carriage without disturbing anybody. She had, indeed, begged Mrs. Fitzgerald to say nothing. "Just a little trifle, you know, to remember the day by."

The little trifles resolve themselves into a charming gold butterfly for Cissy's hair and a still more charming jewelled bangle for Olivia. It is impossible not to see that Olivia's present is, if not the prettier, the more expensive of the two. Mrs. Fitzgerald at all events sees it, and her expression grows grave. It is really serious, then. This bangle is a distinct leading up to the final issue.

Cissy, like the child she is, is openly enchanted with her pretty new possession. She runs up to Major O'Hara, who is beaming in his kindly way upon her.

"Oh! how good—how lovely of you!" She hesitates for a second; then, encouraged by the pleased light in his eyes, she suddenly slips an arm round his neck, pulls down his head, and gives him a most honest kiss. The Major returns it affectionately.

"Well now, 'pon my word," says he, "I'm glad

you like it!" They can all see that he is indeed most genuinely gratified. "And you, Olivia?" turning to her genially. Mrs. Fitzgerald's face pales. What will Olivia do? Will *she*——?

Evidently Olivia will. Olivia, indeed, goes forward at once, and lifts a calm, a cold, if beautiful face to the Major's caress—to her mother's intense surprise—to, perhaps, her mother's regret. For though Mrs. Fitzgerald has always told herself that she is willing, indeed anxious, that Olivia should accept Major O'Hara, should he propose to her (as there seems little doubt that he will do), still she feels her heart sink within her as Olivia lifts her face to his. Is her pretty girl being forced in spite of herself to do some little act that will implicate her—*compel* her later on to marry a man she does not love?

She takes comfort in the thought that after all Olivia is only doing what Cissy has already done. A little formal kiss like that commits one to nothing. And she had watched, and certainly the kiss that James had given Olivia was in no wise warmer than that he had given to Cissy. This fact, in some strange way, lightens her heart and takes the pressure off it. However desirous a mother may be of marrying her daughter well, at certain moments she has qualms about uniting her to a man, if that man happens to be twice her daughter's age, and a little bit over. Still, in spite of that feeling of renewed lightness, Mrs. Fitzgerald is conscious of a touch of anger towards Olivia. Why—if, as Olivia has always insisted, she is unwilling to marry Major

O'Hara—why did she take such a forward step as to let him kiss her cheek?

As a fact, Olivia under the circumstances *might* have distinctly refused—in a laughing, courteous fashion, of course—to let the Major kiss her cheek; but her glance at the moment happened to light on Tom, and rest there. Tom's face—his whole air, indeed—was eloquent. The queer mocking light in his eyes that of late had so enraged her was in full blaze then, and there was a half-smile upon his mouth that seemed to say:

"Go on. Don't hesitate; he's got lots of money."

That drove her angrily forward to an open defiance of his sneering thoughts. And—well—the little scene is all over now.

Mrs. Fitzgerald has been thanking the Major, in her gentle way, for his kindness to her girls. Such charming gifts! such kind thoughts! and—— "Yes; we must go now, really."

"Not so soon. What a hurry you are in!" says the hospitable Major. "I wish you would all stay and dine with me. Bachelor establishment, unfortunately." He looks straight at Mrs. Fitzgerald, who colours and laughs, feeling as if already she is receiving a proposal for Olivia's hand. "But I daresay the cook—No? No, you won't really? Won't take pity on me? At all events, let me shew you my new tea roses before you go."

Cissy, with Laurence, has gone out to the avenue to wait for Mrs. Fitzgerald's old pony and very old phaeton, and Olivia, seeing her mother disappear with Major O'Hara into the conservatory, turns to Tom.

"What did you mean," asks she imperiously, "a moment ago?"

"Mean?" says Tom with abominable coolness; "I don't follow you. Did I really mean something? I'm awfully sorry, I'm sure."

"Don't look at me like that, Tom; you know very well you meant something."

"You flatter me greatly!" He regards her with unmistakable gratitude. "As a rule I find myself regarded by my friends as an utterly meaningless person."

"Oh! if you are ashamed of it!"

"Of what, my dear girl? You leave me so entirely in the dark that——"

"You think I am mercenary!" says she, flashing a glance of passionate anger at him, that leaves him unmoved.

"Well?"

"You don't deny it, then? You don't even deny it? You really think me that? You think—that I——" She breaks away from her vehement beginning. "I don't care"—superbly—"*what* you think!"

"Quite so," says Tom agreeably. "I always understood that."

"Oh!" cries Olivia, with unutterable scorn, stamping her pretty foot upon the carpet. Then, facing him with a sudden change of air: "Cissy kissed him too!"

"I'm sure I never said she didn't," says Tom, drawing up his brows.

"I know what you think," pursues Olivia, still in

a white heat of wrath. "You think he has money, and that I want to marry him for that."

"My dear girl, you wrong my naturally extremely good powers of observation. I don't think for a moment you *want* to marry the admirable, if slightly elderly, Major, but I think you are going to do it all the same—and for his money, as you suggest."

Miss Fitzgerald seats herself on a low chair, and casts a look at him meant to wither. She tells herself she is perfectly calm, perfectly indifferent, and that it would be absurd of her to feel any sort of anger towards a person of Tom's hateful temperament. And indeed, beyond the fact that the one pretty foot she has crossed over the other is beating a somewhat alarming tattoo upon the floor, she *is* quite calm—outwardly.

"I understand you so well, Tom," says she. "Your odious nature is quite clear to me. You hoped to put me in a rage with your detestable insinuations, but after all it is *you* who are in a rage. You fancy you are concealing it—and, indeed, you might conceal it from anyone else—but I know you, and all your horrid ways, and I can read quite plainly in your ill-natured eyes this moment, that you are consumed by anger."

This awful tirade, delivered in the lowest, the sweetest of voices, is received by Tom unflinchingly.

"So I am," returns he with noble honesty. "And no wonder too. You are right, Olivia; I believe you are the only person on earth who can read me as I am. It's so awfully clever of you, too, because I'm deep—profoundly deep."

"Oh! you can laugh it off if you like!" says Miss Fitzgerald contemptuously. "But you *are* in a bad temper for all that."

"I have acknowledged it; what more do you want? As to laughing anything off, I'm not in the humour for it. Honestly, Olivia"—here he approaches her with a somewhat magisterial air—"I feel I have a grievance—a grievance against you."

"Against *me?*"

"Certainly against you. What I object to is your injustice, your different ways of treating your different friends."

"What are you talking about, Tom?"

"Well, look here. This is your birthday. I sent you a little present this morning; the elderly Major gave you a present just now. The *Major's* reward for his gift was immensely in excess of the gift itself; *mine* was a severe lecture. I call that unfair. If we are both your friends, you should be equally kind to both. If you kiss the Major, I don't really see why you should not kiss me." He stops.

Miss Fitzgerald rises.

"There was one thing, Tom, I *did* acquit you of," says she, moving with dignity to the door.

"One—*one* vice. You have let me off *one!*" says Tom, following her. "Oh, Olivia!" catching her hand as she is opening the door, and holding it, "*don't* go before you tell me its name. Believe me, I shall try to be a better man; I shall reform; I shall attend the Rector's night classes; I shall even go in for the sewing guild if only you will tell me the name of the one vice from which you deem me free."

Olivia drags her hand out of his.

She says in a low tone, and with sharp contraction of her brows, "How can you go on like that? If you will know, I have found out that you can be vulgar! I"—coldly—"have found out something else too, and *quite* lately! that I—*hate* you!"

"And I?" says Tom. He is holding the door.

"Oh, you!" She shrugs her shoulders. "I have known for a long time that you hate me."

"Ah!" Tom's eyes meet hers. "That ends the matter, of course. As you say, you are the one person in the world who thoroughly understands me."

All the way home Olivia, in spite of the fact that she has so successfully routed Tom, is very silent. So, indeed, is Mrs. Fitzgerald. The two little scenes in the library have disturbed them both to their hearts' cores.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despair."

Olivia, once at home and in her own room, gives way to thoughts many and depressing. To her, as to some others, it now seems quite clear that the terror she had regarded as far off is very close at hand. Major O'Hara is certainly going to ask her to be his wife, and she—what answer will she give?

In any other circumstances she would have laughed

away the Major's pretensions; have treated them with a light heart, and in a very kindly fashion, because she is extremely fond of him, as a friend, an old friend, a—with emphasis—*very* old friend. But now, sunk as she and her sister and her mother are in absolute poverty (genteel poverty, that worst of all hardships), how can she bring herself to refuse an offer that will mean joy and comfort to the two who are so dear to her? Oh! she must—she *must* accept him! And yet——

Of course, it isn't as if she disliked him; she is, indeed, quite fond of Major O'Hara. Everyone is fond of him, for the matter of that. She tries to get up her courage on this point, but fails. To be fond of a man old enough to be your father is one thing, to marry him another—another against which her young soul revolts.

She honestly does like Major O'Hara—could like him very much better, she tells herself, but for the wretched fact that he is in love with her. An old man's darling! The words are often in Olivia's mouth now, and always fill her with a sort of suppressed but raging anger, against herself—against the whole wide world—her own small world. If they had not been so poor, who would have dreamt of her marrying this middle-aged man—this kind, delightful, and very desirable middle-aged man, considering his position, and his place, and his rent-roll, and all the rest of it—but an elderly man, for all that? Put the whole thing together, and it seems to Olivia a small gain—put against her youth and her hitherto happy, careless existence.

Yet to live your life, and die always, always poor, is dreadful too. And a very sturdy factor for the Major lies in the knowledge that marriage with him will mean rest from all her troubles for her mother—the dear, *dear* mother who is as much a friend and sister to her as a parent.

* * * * * * * *

It is later, and Cissy has come in now, and is talking it over. Cissy is delightful; so earnest, so sympathetic.

"I don't think mama would wish anything that would make you unhappy," she is saying, when "mama's" step is heard in the corridor outside.

Olivia herself runs to the door and throws it open.

"Oh, mama! there you are! Come in, *come!*" pulling her mother into the room and closing the door behind her. "I'm afraid, I'm really afraid, mama, that what you have been saying about Major O'Hara is coming true. I'm *sure* now he really wants to marry me, and—and—I don't know what to do. Of course—we are so poor that—I know what I *ought* to do; but what do you think, mama?"

"Oh, darling, what a hard question!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald. She has grown very pale. Her heart seems torn to pieces. "I wouldn't coerce you; you know that, don't you? But he is so well off, and a good man, Olivia! A really good man, and so kind, so generous, if a little old for you. And besides"—a heavy sigh breaks from her—"dearest, you know what poverty means."

"Oh, yes, I know," says Olivia impatiently. Then,

suddenly: "I wish I liked him as well as you do, mama."

Mrs. Fitzgerald's charming face grows pink.

"Of course I like him. He is a dear friend. And what I think is that I could trust your happiness to him, if—if you thought you could—could——"

"He's so old," says Cissy blankly.

"Old—no!" says her mother. "Not really old. A very handsome man still. Old to a child like you, perhaps, but a man in the prime of life, and very handsome, as I have said."

"Handsome!"

"Extremely so, I think,"

A little silence, which Olivia breaks.

"I wish," says she with a sigh, "that he wanted to marry you, mama. You seem to see his points."

"Me!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald; "an old woman like me!" She colours, and a slight frown settles on her forehead. Really, this is a little rude of Olivia. "What nonsense! I put marriage out of my head—marriage with anyone—long years ago."

"Somebody's loss," says Cissy sweetly, slipping her arm round her mother's neck.

"I don't know. Marriage is such a lottery; you never can tell what you may draw. But"—a little sadly—"for all that, I have sometimes thought that I made a mistake in remaining single. Looking back on the years ever since you were born, I can count many a good marriage I could have made and did not. Perhaps I was wrong. I should have considered you two more than I did."

"You couldn't have done that!" breaks in Olivia vehemently.

"I am not sure." Olivia's mother looks like Olivia's sister now, as she lets her mind wander into the sweet and pleasant paths of the past. "I had several very good offers, when"—laughing somewhat tearfully—"I was younger and lovelier, but——"

"Why didn't you accept them?" Cissy grows curious.

"Well, there was the memory of your poor father for one thing."

She stops, and some emotion, born of the happy past, floods her beautiful eyes. "But do you know, I sometimes think now that he would have *wished* me to marry again—to make a more comfortable home for his two pretty girls." She smiles at them through her tears.

"Mama, what nonsense!" cries Cissy sturdily. "The home here that we have with you is the most comfortable, the happiest one in the world."

"*Too* happy," says Olivia with a sigh that is almost a groan. To leave it, with all its love and content, to gain even the Major's undoubted wealth, seems a very poor exchange indeed.

"Well, all that is over and done with," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, thinking of her bygone chances. "I am quite an old lady now."

"You look a great deal younger than Mrs. Morland, who is only just married," says Cissy, with a sort of loving indignation.

"Oh, well, perhaps"—smiling—"I don't look exactly an octogenarian, but I'm forty-two, anyway,

and that is as much as one wants to be. However, that's enough of *me*. Olivia darling, can you not see your way to this?"

Olivia remains silent.

"Say no at once," entreats her mother earnestly. But Olivia says nothing.

"Why don't you speak, Olivia?" cries Cissy. "He *is* an old man; you know he is. I can't see why you hesitate."

"Certainly not an *old* man," repeats her mother, now in her gentle way a little excited. "You girls think everyone over twenty-five perfect Methuselahs! Major O'Hara isn't so very old, if it comes to that. A *little* older than me, perhaps, but——"

"Oh, mama!" There is a little burst of derisive affectionate laughter. Cissy falls back in her chair, cocks up one charming foot, and gives way to untimely mirth. "You—you to tell such a story!"

"It's true, though!" declares Mrs. Fitzgerald eagerly. "He and I were boy and girl together."

"Girl and very old boy, you mean!" Cissy is revelling in the situation.

"No, not at all! I am forty-two, as you know, and he——"

"Is ninety—in comparison."

"Forty-nine!" with decision. "A very slight difference, as you can see. And of course, a man in the forties, whatever a woman may be, is not old."

How she defends his age! how she wishes me to marry him! thinks Olivia. Darling mama! it is only because she wishes to see me happy—as if riches

make happiness! . . . Rebellion, however, is rife within her, in spite of these tender thoughts.

"Forty-nine sounds well enough," says she gloomily; "but another year, or perhaps a few months, and it will be fifty!"

"Yes, yes; I see your argument." Mrs. Fitzgerald's tone is very sad. She pauses. "If there was another chance for you I would say nothing. Believe that, Olivia. But in this dull neighbourhood—oh! if I had money I could take you into the world, and there"—fondly—"you might both have had your choice. But as it is—well, as it is, I can do nothing. You"—dejectedly—"must forgive me that."

"Oh, come now, mama!" says Cissy. "That's ungrateful of you, if you like, to pretend to misunderstand in that silly way!" She catches her pretty mother and pulls her round smartly, and makes a little gesture, as if to threaten her with untold punishments for her bad behaviour.

Mrs. Fitzgerald laughs; her ill-humours are ever but shadows of the real thing.

"That's all very well," says she, "but with regard to Major O'Hara——"

"We know it all," interrupts Olivia, who too is now laughing. "He is the handsomest man in the world, and the youngest—and he is about your own age, and looks . . . like your grandfather!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald, in spite of the issue at stake, is undoubtedly pleased at this compliment.

"Oh! Grandfather!" protests she.

"Well, an exaggeration, perhaps. But you say you grew up with him, mama. I find it hard to

believe it; but if that is true, I don't think I want to marry a man who is old enough to be my father!"

A soft flush rises to Mrs. Fitzgerald's face; she hardly understands why it rises.

"I know, I know," she answers hurriedly. "And you must not think of it, dearest, if it distresses you. The only thing is that he is kind and good, and"—with a sigh—"we are so poor; and when I die——"

"Good gracious, mama!" cries Cissy almost furiously, "what is the good of talking like that?"

The pretty, girlish face is frowning, and behind the frown lies pain. "Why, you are as young as either of us! When you die"—with a rather nervous little laugh—"we shall die too, and go with you wherever you go. We couldn't live without you!"

"Dear idiot!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald, her tone a warm caress.

"I suppose," says Olivia dismally, "that in the long run I *shall* marry him." Her face has grown quite miserable.

"Olivia! I won't *let* you look like that!" cries Mrs. Fitzgerald quickly. She goes to the girl and draws her to a seat beside her. "Put it all out of your head, my sweetheart. I am a wretched, worldly old mother, and think of nothing but the future for my girl. No, no; there are better things than money. And you are right. Major O'Hara is a great deal too old for you."

"Still," says Olivia, moving a little restlessly beneath her mother's gentle hold, "I don't want to be poor always. One must live; and if one can't have

love"—she stops abruptly; her eyes grow large and introspective—"one may as well have——"

"Not money only—no!" interrupts Mrs. Fitzgerald quickly. "I can't bear to think I have taught you that lesson, Olivia. What I thought—what I meant was, that when there was no one else, and he was so generous, so desirable—indeed, so charming—in many ways—that perhaps you might bring yourself in time to love him. It is not so very impossible. Look at Lady Dovedale; she is quite twenty years her husband's junior, and was there ever so happy a pair? But that is nothing! Give up all thought of him, dearest. Shew him what you mean. Be cold to him."

"Oh, I *have* been cold. But it doesn't seem to do any good."

"That shews how very much in love he is with you," says her mother thoughtfully. She sits silent for a moment or two, staring before her.

"Well"—with a sharp sigh—"is it not well to have a good man's whole love, be he young or old?"

She had had her husband's entire affection, and he was young. But then he had died young, and his life, if short, had perhaps been the happier for that. He was so careless, so light-hearted, so—well, inconsequent. Cissy is like him; not Olivia. Who is Olivia like? Not like her father; not like *her*. But Cissy—so careless, too; so entirely for the moment. God grant her feet may run upon a golden road, or else . . . But . . . but—poor Olivia!

The girls have not answered her last question; and, indeed, they are all sunk in the depths of gloom,

when a little tripping step upon the corridor outside, and a vigorous knock upon the door, and then a sudden, sharp opening of it, without waiting for permission to enter, brings them all back to every-day life.

Chloe, in the prettiest, if simplest, little dinner frock, is standing on the threshold.

"What! Oh, lazy ones!" pointing the finger of scorn at Olivia and Cissy. "Not ready yet?"

"We are certainly disgracefully late!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald, rising from her seat in the corner. Chloe is instantly delightfully penitent.

"Mrs. Fitzgerald, you—how rude you must think me! Fancy lecturing you! I didn't see you."

"No, Chloe; no, of course." Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice is a little sad. "We were talking, you see, and —there, stay with the girls; I shan't be a moment changing my dress." She slips past her.

"How gloomy you look!" says Chloe, advancing into the room. "Like two guilty ghouls! What's it all about? The Major, for a bet! Don't marry him, Olivia, even if he *is* hung round about with gems and 'jools.' Feeney, who insisted on dressing me just now, says he's got lots of 'jools.' What are they? Good to eat? Feeney says they will be bad for *you*, anyway, Olivia; that they will disagree with you. Feeney, dear old thing, is so fearfully strong that I was afraid to disagree with her, so in the long run she converted me to her opinion. And I should not swallow those fatal 'jools' if I were you. *Don't* marry him, Olivia!" A strangely stern note has crept into the merry young voice that is as

mocking as it is merry. "Die first! *Never* marry a man so very much older than yourself. Never marry anyone unless you like him; the doing of it spells ruin."

"What a wiseacre!" says Olivia, who has pulled herself together. She even laughs; and, indeed, Chloe, with her little oval, childish face, framed with its still more childish chestnut locks, presents a picture of the "guide, philosopher and friend" provocative of mirth. "Now, what *can* you know about it?"

Chloe half closes her lids—a little trick with her.

"Why, nothing—nothing! How should I?" Her shoulders go up. It is the daintiest little shrug.

CHAPTER IX.

"Be bolde, be bolde, and everywhere
Be bolde."

JUST at the close of dinner Chloe rises, and going to Mrs. Fitzgerald, presses her lips first to her hostess's cheeks, and then to her ear.

"I know you want to talk things over. I shall go for a run. But *don't* let her marry the Major!"

She gives her another caress, and in a moment has disappeared through the window on to the gravel path outside, and so to the garden, all flooded with silver light.

Having gained it (the garden is well out of sight of the dining-room windows), she turns and runs swiftly down a side path that winds to the wood beyond, and from that to another pathway that leads to Carrig Lodge.

It is exquisitely warm. Night is falling softly, delicately; the air is like a velvet covering, and the little wind coming from the south is filled with all the perfumes of the sleeping hedgerows. The firs on her right hand, with all their silver fingers outheld as if to catch the moonlight, are sparkling brilliantly; and wild roses, red and white, nod their heads at her as she goes by, whispering to her that she, like they, should be abed. But Chloe runs ever onwards, quickly, feverishly, and yet undoubtedly with a touch of reckless amusement in her eyes.

"Thick strewn with silver stars"

the heavens lie above her, and for a moment she stops to gaze at them, drawn by their beauty. And then on again, until suddenly rounding a corner, she comes face to face with a young man in a light tweed suit, a cap, and a gun.

Both he and she come to a standstill. Indeed, *he* looks as if he can hardly believe his senses.

"Chloe! You here!"

"Even I." She has naturally been the first to recover from their mutual astonishment, having known of his possible presence here some hours ago.

"You—really you!" He has come closer, as if to see—to make sure of her—in this dim light.

"Unbeliever!" cries she gaily. She has recovered

herself, as has been said, and is now, indeed, in almost mad spirits. "Well! Can't you see? Can't you feel?"

She lays her hand lightly on his. "I was going up to The Lodge to find you, to tell you. I heard of your coming this afternoon, and I was afraid you might spoil my little arrangement here"—she shakes her head at him saucily—"so I ran up—see?"

"See? No, I don't! And at this hour! Good heavens, Chloe! what does it all mean? With what sort of people have you come in contact?"

"The kindest, the very best!"

"It looks like it!"—scornfully. "This utter recklessness on your part proves——"

"Oh, don't *begin* by being rude!" cries she, with a wonderfully upraised chin and a disdainful curl of her lip. "You're sure to be so later on. Reserve yourself."

"I have no desire whatever"—angrily—"to be rude, but—I insist on knowing all about this! How have you come here? and who are you staying with? My position towards you would alone authorise me to demand an answer to these questions; but I hope"—he hesitates—"there—there *has* been a little friendship between us, Chloe?"

"Are you speaking of friendship? Oh! I like you so much better that way!" says Chloe.

"You mustn't think I'm giving in," Carlton warns her firmly, though she can see it is with a struggle he maintains his stern attitude.

"Of course not. And I'm not going to give in either. I"—taking a distinctly saucy air—"*insist* on

knowing what you are doing at this hour of the night in a tweed suit! You should have dined by this time, and you—the immaculate!—have you dined in tweed?"

"This is nonsense!"—coldly; yet he condescends to explain. "I have been out all day, and have not dined yet——"

"Not yet? Ah! that accounts for it."

"For what?"

She makes a little gesture.

"Your abominable temper!"

"My temper"—calmly—"is of little consequence. What I wish to know is, how you came here, and with whom you are living."

"You were always a lovely old dullard. Do you think," with distinct audacity, "if I haven't told anyone else how I came here, I am going to tell *you*, Gigi?"

Carlton, at the mention of this old name of his, changes colour. She used to call him that before —*before* . . . but not often—*afterwards*. There was so little time!

"Very good," he says coldly; "I shall find out for myself later on."

"Are you so sure?" mockingly.

"As a rule"—quietly—"I always get my own way."

"If you had your own way now, you would send me packing back to—England, eh? But, you see, you can't!"

Something in her manner incenses him.

"Tell me at once with whom you are living, and

where?" says he, taking no notice of her frivolity, and assuming an air of authority that half frightens, half amuses her.

"Surely, I *have* told you!" with a little grimace. "At The Hermitage, with the kindest and, what to your Puritanical Majesty will sound even better, the very best people . . . in every sense of that elastic word." Here she gives him a little sketch of Mrs. Fitzgerald and her daughters.

"Excellent people, no doubt!" says he satirically, when she has finished. "And Israelites without guile, seeing they let you wander all over the country at this hour, unprotected——"

"Nonsense!"—angrily. "They have nothing to do with my being here; they don't even know I *am* here. In fact, they know nothing about me at all —positively nothing! You must *see* they are not to blame."

"I see this," says Carlton grimly, "that you must be mad to persist in your present course. At all events"—deliberately, and looking her fair in the eyes—"I shall take care that the people you are staying with shall know who you are and——"

"Oh, no! You can't do that! You *can't* give me away! What a *beast* you are, Granby! And when I have confided in you, too! Oh, Granby, don't! *Don't* say a word. It is *my* affair, after all."

"Scarcely that."

"It is, however; and it must be. Gigi, swear to me you will not betray me?"

"But these people with whom you are living?"

"What harm shall I do them?"

"Ah! that remains to be seen. No actual harm, perhaps, but——" He stops, and then says grimly: "Any son of the house?"

"Not one." Chloe shakes her head seriously. "Only two girls." Then all at once she breaks into an irrepressible, an almost wild, burst of laughter. "Oh, Gigi! must there always be a man?"

"Where *you* are!" Carlton has not been led away by that little mad outburst. "So there are no men at The Hermitage; but there are men in the neighbourhood, I think?"

"A few, a few!"—mockingly. "But, Circe as you deem me (and, believe me, I regard it as an immense compliment), I assure you they are safe from me."

"I don't care about them"—roughly—"I think of you—of your reputation."

"Ah!" She looks unspeakably amused. "If that was all!"

"It is enough, surely! In your position, you——"

She lifts her hand and lays it lightly on his lips.

"No, no, no! We won't go into that. My position!—what is it? All I want, really, Granby, is safety, secrecy—for a time."

He looks at her.

"You are counting on——?"

"Yes, I am counting on *that*." He grows silent for quite a minute or two.

"I don't like to think of you as quite without feeling."

"*I* don't like to think of you as altogether a fool!" Chloe's little laughing mouth has lost its mirth, and

has grown stern. "Where should the feeling come in, in my case? Oh!" with a little violent gesture—a little throwing away, as it were, of something, "don't let us be always pretending. You know nearly as much as I do, though not all——" She draws a swift, cruel breath that seems to shake her. "*Not all.*"

"I know very little," says Carlton. "But——"

"Enough, surely!" with angry haste, "not to betray me, here, where I am so happy and contented."

"Do you ever think"—angrily—"that you have duties, responsibilities?"

"Never!" promptly. "The very word duty annoys me. But why talk of silly things like that? Come, now, Gigi; you have always liked me, haven't you?" She pauses, raises her pretty eyes to his, and so becomes gradually aware that his own return gaze is slightly different from the usually speculative one to which she has grown accustomed. What is there in it now? Is it anger? or surprise? or——? "And I have always liked *you.* We have been such good friends—for how long?" She pauses, and seems to count out time on her fingers. "For six months before, and six months after," she says presently. "Quite a whole long year. That makes us very great chums, in my opinion. And so you will be good to me about this, won't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so," says Carlton impatiently, his eyes on the ground. "But I warn you of this: If I see you begin a single flirtation with any man in this place, I shall at once speak. I owe that to—my people, *our* people!"

"You are very unlikely to see one," cries Chloe gaily. "Why will you pose as the stupidest person on record? Haven't you looked around you? But I forget; you don't know this garden of Eden as yet. It is lovely, but unfortunately I came into it after Adam had been driven forth. For all amusing purposes there is no man left in it. I'll give you the *carte du pays* of the country when next we meet—haven't time now. Well, it's a promise, then, that you won't—that is, that you will"—spreading her hands abroad—"leave me as I am?"

"Yes"—coldly—"I have said so."

"You're a perfect darling!" with enthusiasm. "Gigi," with sudden solemnity, "stoop down. Prepare for cavalry! I'm going to kiss you!" She pulls down his somewhat unwilling head, and gives him a light little kiss on his cheek. "You're to be an old friend, you know," educating him carefully, with a finger uplifted to emphasise every direction. "Unfortunately, when first I heard your name mentioned I forgot to say I knew you, so you are to be very, *very* surprised when we first meet. By the bye, *my* names is Jones. See? And you're my cousin; that will allow for our being friendly together."

"It will allow for a good deal of pumping from my neighbours."

"Oh, you must parry all that; and besides, let us be truthful." Her air is righteous.

"Good heavens!" says Carlton.

"What do you mean, Granby? You *are* my cousin. Well, a *sort* of a cousin. And I'm your cousin too, in the same way."

"Yes, a *sort* of a cousin," with a touch of satire.

"Oh, there! go home! You are in one of your nasty tempers," says Chloe, with a little pout. "*I* wouldn't speak to you like that, anyway. I've always treated you as a friend."

"To the extent of even concealing your present address from me."

Chloe, whose moods never last long—a fact that perhaps adds another enchantment to her—now breaks into a merry laugh.

"Ah! I often thought of how you were angry with me; of how you were swearing at me. I have even imagined you as believing me dead, and being quite concerned about me in your lovely old solemn fashion. *Did* you ever think of me as dead?"

Carlton's face has darkened as she speaks.

"No, I never thought of you as dead. A butterfly like you, who feels nothing, cares for nothing but the sunshine and the glow—why should you ever die?"

"A bad simile," returns she quickly. "Butterflies die the earliest of all. It is the others, who have souls, that live."

"Have *you* one?" His tone is extremely bitter.

"Oh, there! That's horrid of you, Gigi!" She makes a little gesture, as if pushing his words aside. "Of course, I know you despise me; but I think"—with a wonderful softening of the careless little face—"that you love me all the same. And you are, anyway, my very good friend."

"I am afraid *you* are my very bad little friend,"

says he. But all rancour has gone from him, charmed away by that magic softening of her eyes.

"No, no; I shall be good to you."

"Well, remember"—hardening again—"I shall keep my eye on you. And now come home; which is your way?"

"I have told you I am staying at a place called The Hermitage, with the dearest of people—the Fitzgeralds. They have no clothes, but delightful manners. I'm afraid they are very poor."

"Well, you had better return to them; I'll take you; though really your description of them rather staggers one. Delightful manners associated with *no* clothes! It is hardly the preconceived idea of how things should be."

"You are growing quite smart!" says Chloe, with a shrug. "Who's been coaching you? That little Danvers girl? She hasn't got a sound tooth in her head! No, no; you shan't come one step with me. Just fancy if any of those ultra-respectable people round here were to meet us! How awful the consequences would be! Go your way, Granby, and I'll go mine."

"At this hour! Certainly not!"

"How omnipotent is the voice of man!" cries Miss Jones in a tone of subdued awe. In another second she has picked up her Parisian-born skirts, and is out of sight before he has realised her intention; and, indeed, to follow her in this darkness, and through these unknown woods, would be a hopeless task. After an angry reflection or two he acknowledges this, and gives up the pursuit.

Almost as Chloe, in her swift, birdlike flight, reaches the gates of The Hermitage, she comes face to face with a tall young man, who stops.

"How d'ye do, Miss Jones? Out for a stroll? Lovely night."

"The loveliest!" says Chloe, giving her hand very pleasantly to Tom Lloyd. "You too have felt its influence?"

"Couldn't keep indoors," says Tom. "Just"—with a calm gaze at her—"like yourself."

"I love the moonlight at this time of year," says Chloe sentimentally. "To come out and study it, and to watch the quiet, patient stars, is a very joy to me!"

Tom laughs.

"Do you always run when you study?" says he. His laugh is so real and so good-natured that she cannot find fault with it; and yet—he is a very keen observer.

"Oh, no, no!" gaily. "I was running because it was so late. It *is* late, isn't it? Too late for"—with a swift little glance at him that is full of meaning—"visiting, let us say."

"Much too late!" agreeably.

"Yes? I quite thought you were coming in. *Not* a visit, then? Is it to be a serenade, perhaps? . . . beneath the windows of Olivia?"

The little shaft goes home, but he shews no sign of it.

"Alas! I have forgotten my guitar," says he.

She nods, and runs away down the avenue. Tom looks after her. He has grown thoughtful.

"I wonder who the deuce she is?" he says presently. "A trifle too clever for my fancy, anyway."

CHAPTER X.

"He went, like one that hath been stunn'd
And is of sense forlorn."

THE little church in the village is unusually full, considering the mad heat of the day. All the windows are open, and both the doors, with a view to prevent apoplexy. And through them the sun is pouring its parching rays. Mrs. Longton has fallen into a graceful slumber; Cynthia is blinking; even Mrs. Fitzgerald is feeling a little drowsy. Chloe, however, is wide awake; she always is; and Olivia and Cissy are studying Lady Matilda's last new bonnet. Lady Matilda has a house-party of twelve or so, and has invited the Fitzgeralds, Mr. Carlton, the Castle Lloyd people, and, of course, the Major, who is a great favourite with her, to luncheon after church.

In spite of a few defections, the larger part of the congregation to-day is more alert than usual—far less drowsy, at all events—the strangers' pew having a tenant in it. Carlton, though quite unconscious of the fact, is indeed the cynosure of all eyes. Who is he? What is he? Rich, of course. And Carlton—a rather good name. What Carlton? And so on. Chloe could have enlightened them, and so could the Fitzgeralds, Chloe having taken advantage of a chance meeting with him in the village yesterday to

greet him, not exactly effusively, but in very friendly guise, and as "a sort of cousin."

"Fancy *your* being the Mr. Carlton who was coming to The Lodge!" She had blushed, certainly, as she said that; and Cissy, who is extremely romantic, had let her thoughts run wild into delightful ways. Can this be——?

"Granby is a cousin of mine, dear Mrs. Fitzgerald," Chloe had said, later on, turning to Carlton, and had very charmingly introduced him to her hostess. "A distant one, but—— I hope, Granby, you will spare a little time from your fishing to come and see us now and then?"

Carlton had muttered something to the effect that if Mrs. Fitzgerald would be so good as to receive him he would be very glad to call; whereon Mrs. Fitzgerald, who is hospitality itself, and with whom Carlton had at once fallen in love, had said in her pretty, friendly Irish way that whenever he came he should be welcome. The blush had faded from Chloe's face by this, and her farewell to Carlton had been so indifferent that the romantic dreams in Cissy's mind faded—to be revived later on.

The afternoon grows hotter and hotter. The rector has been droning away at the prayers, the bees have been droning away at the windows, and now the curate, Mr. Gossler, has got up to read the First Lesson. It is the third chapter of Genesis.

Unfortunately, Mr. Gossler has fallen a victim to Chloe's lovely eyes; and seeing those lovely eyes just now fixed on his, he grows confused and, indeed, distinctly ashamed both of Adam and Eve.

He falters, stammers, under the fire of those merciless eyes that are always on him, and once or twice loses his place. That he disapproves of Adam and Eve is, of course, quite bad enough; but to inform his congregation that he does not regard fig-leaves, however enormously grown, to be of much use in the way of garments shews him as a young man far more advanced in biblical views (if wanting in modern ones) than one, to look at him, would have believed.

At all events, this is how he puts it. It is an entirely new rendering of Genesis, but new renderings now are very popular.

"Adam sewed fig-trees together to make themselves aprons."

Adam must have found it a tough job.

There is a little stir. Some of the congregation bury their faces behind their books. Many smile inwardly.

"Leaves!" stammers the curate, correcting himself frantically. "They sewed fig-*leaves* together." It is all in vain. Everyone is too delighted to even desire a right rendering. Indeed, Lady Matilda's nephew, a sprightly youth of twenty, who knows considerably more than he ought to know, and who has been apparently asleep up to this, rouses himself enough to give his aunt a severe dig in the ribs, that nearly upsets that masculine dame. Lady Matilda turns a frowning glance upon him, which he disdains to see. He has, perhaps (to give him a chance), hardly *time* to see it, as he is now himself occupied in casting frowning glances, of the virtuously

indignant order, on the occupants of the pew in which Cissy sits—Cissy, who is (to his apparent regret) convulsed with silent laughter.

However, it is all over presently. The service has survived the curate's mistake, and again the rector is droning, droning; eyelids are dropping, dropping. But now the sound of pennies falling into the plate at the lower end of the church, where the farmers sit, wakes the universal slumber. Everyone grows alert as the plate is being handed round. Everyone, that is, except three indomitable old ladies, farmers' wives, whose snores increase to such an alarming extent as the churchwarden approaches them that the poor man hurries past them as if sleuth-hounds were after him.

Everyone up here at the top of the church is growing quite lively too. Sleep flies from their eyelids. What will Sir Hardress put in to-day—a halfpenny or a penny? He had been known to put in a penny *once!*—perhaps, who can say, he may do it again. Expectation is at its topmost height.

The betting, however, according to Mr. Bethune (Lady Matilda's nephew), is on the halfpenny. Mrs. Fitzgerald and her party do not join in this excitement, principally, no doubt, because they know their Sir Hardress, and are entirely sure of what he will do. But Lady Matilda, who, in her manly way, would go far for the chance of a laugh (for a "guffaw," according to her undutiful nephew, who terms thus her bursts of mirth), and a great many of the other people who ought to know better, are leaning forward and looking quite curious. It is one of the

weekly excitements in Aughribeg, and, after all, one should not be too hard on the dwellers in this dull spot. There is so little to do in a secluded country place that one falls back upon the smallest, the most trivial, the most contemptible bit of gossip, in the hope of turning it into a subject for mirth. For mirth is hard of reach when there are so few people to supply it.

The game is rendered even more enthralling by the fact that it is almost impossible—at all events very difficult—to see what coin Sir Hardress puts in, on account of the way he lays it on the plate. He is wonderfully ingenious about it. He covers the coin (whatever it is) with his hand, until it is mingled unrecognisably with the others. This action of his is worthy of the most advanced thimble-rigger, and would throw credit on a diplomatist. Still, to the adroit watcher all things are possible, and to-day the churchwarden—who happens to be the local baker, and at open war with Sir Hardress over the matter of sixpence three farthings in his last bill—aids and abets Mr. Bethune in his winning of quite a handsome sum (" ten bob," as the latter calls it) from his aunt. The irate baker, filled with a fine sense of vengeance, gives the plate a shove to the right just as Sir Hardress is about to put down his muffled coin; his hand slips, his grasp relaxes, and the coin rolls openly into the plate. It *is* a halfpenny!

A feeling of intense gratification fills the audience. If it had been a penny it would have been disappointing; if a threepenny-bit an overwhelming misfortune. But a *halfpenny* is quite as it should be—unless,

indeed, the baker's manœuvre had made plain a farthing. That would have raised joy unspeakable. For, indeed, Sir Hardress has gained most unfavourable notoriety in the neighbourhood as a miser of the first water, and not altogether without cause. He is one of those men who are careful never to have small change about them, and who, after a sojourn of a week or so in a friend's house (the house of an acquaintance, rather; he has no friends), has an unpleasant way of saying good-bye to his host overnight, starting next morning by the earliest train *on foot*, and leaving his luggage to be sent after him, thus avoiding largesse to the servants of the house. Of course, this side move does not always come off, and there have been bitter moments when the man having brought down his portmanteau, in sight of the hostess (who is always in the most extraordinary spirits at speeding him), he has had to give him something. It is on these occasions, however, that he excels himself, pressing into the willing palm of the domestic—with such an effusive air as conveys the idea of half-a-guinea at least—the simple sixpence.

The service has come to an end now, and the congregation, hot, tired, and a good deal out of sorts, streams out into the splendid sunshine, bearable because of the light and pleasant breeze that rushes through it. The Fitzgeralds, the Castle Lloyd people, and others who, as it has been said, are bound for Lady Matilda's house for luncheon, turn to the little stile that leads for barely half a mile through the smiling meadows to her beautiful home.

Tom Lloyd, who has been delayed, and is hurrying forward, finds himself picked up by the Major.

"Going on to lunch at Morne Hall?" says Major O'Hara genially. "And kept back by those beastly vestry people? Yes? So was I. That baker fellow is a bore, but amusing, very amusing!" with a kindly chuckle, remembering the halfpenny. "We are a bit late, but we can catch them up if we make haste."

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to go with you—thanks," says Tom, in a rather nasty, drawly way. "I've got to see to something over there," pointing vaguely to a farm behind him, rising in its trees from amongst the hills.

He turns deliberately, steps over the stile, and disappears. The Major looks after him, and gives way to thought. "Now, as if he could have business at that farm *to-day*—to-day of all days! And if he had, what the deuce did he mean by coming this way? Why, he——" The Major stops suddenly, as if forgetting the end of his sentence. "He was certainly coming this way—my way—then sees me, and—— D—n impertinence!" says the kindest man on earth to himself, with a quite royal assumption of rage. "But what has changed him? What have I done to him, anyway? Who the deuce has pulled his leg? He used to be one of the nicest fellows I know, but now—— What the divil have I done to him, anyway?" The Major has fallen into his Irish eccentricities of speech, as his distress grows upon him, for to be "wroth with those he loves" —and he has quite a keen fancy for Tom—makes

the tender-hearted man wretched. "I must have offended him in some way. But how?"

He grows thoughtful, puzzling his brain to no effect whatever. And no wonder! for who did Major O'Hara ever offend, by word or deed, during the whole course of his happy and honourable life?

The affair is quite a puzzle to him, even when presently he comes up with the guests bound for Lady Matilda's hospitable house.

Lady Matilda, with Mrs. Fitzgerald and Sir Hardress, are far ahead, but here, in the midst of the green and growing leaves of the wood, the others are loitering. Laurence Lloyd and Carlton, with Chloe, are together. Olivia is here too, with Mr. Bethune; but the discontented look on her face seems to the Major to shew that she is not altogether happy, and so he steps quickly to her side.

As his footsteps reach her ears she turns, a quick, strange light—that the Major never yet had seen—within her eyes. But, seeing him, it fades. However, there is no doubt but that she welcomes the Major very kindly, and rather shelves Mr. Bethune in his favour.

The two last parties seem now to melt into one; and some talk about current topics, about the woes of the Armenians especially, brings Cissy to quite a white heat of indignation. But Miss Jones interposes.

"Oh, don't talk of horrid things like that!" cries she, with a little indescribable gesture full of horror and disgust.

"Still, if one has a heart——" says Cissy.

"Oh, hearts!" Chloe casts a swift glance at Laurence. "Hearts are a mistake, aren't they? I"—gaily—"have no heart!"

("Poor thing!" thinks Cissy, "she has suffered for hers *so* much that she now almost believes she hasn't one!")

"My cousin," says Chloe, catching Carlton's eye, "will assure you of it." Her tone is quite clear, if a little derisive, yet Laurence, standing near, feels a touch of anger in it.

"*I* believe in your heart," says he in a low voice. It catches *her* ear only. There is an extraordinary force in it, and a love and longing that startles even her.

"Stupid!" whispers she back; and then aloud: "No one has a heart nowadays. We know better. Hearts have gone out of fashion. They are obsolete—like the big sleeves. No doubt they will come in again later—much later—and we shall be all sweetness and light again."

"You ought to give us a lead, Miss Jones," says Mr. Bethune tenderly. He is always remarkably suave.

"Delighted!" says Chloe, with a charming smile. "But one must wait, you see."

"Wait for a turn of the tide? That shews such want of *go*. I don't want to wait," says he.

"The young man in a hurry is always a failure," says Miss Jones sweetly.

"Look here, Bethune," says the Major, who has just now come up with them, "Miss Chloe doesn't strike me as a girl fit to pose as a coward. I think

you do her injustice there. Eh, Carlton?" The Major's kind and cheery voice rings out clearly. "You're her cousin, you know, and should stand sponsor for her."

He waits, but Carlton remains silent for quite a moment. Then:

"One doesn't always understand one's cousins," replies he slowly, turning away. The Major looks after him. "A deuced poor sort," thinks he indignantly. "Why, hang it all, understand her or *not*, he might have said a good word for her! The devil carry off all these young men of to-day!"

They have now left the wood and entered the village, to cross which will bring them to the gates of Morne. The village street is comparatively deserted; only a few children playing about in the sideways are to be seen.

"You see," says Chloe, nodding her charming head, "even my own cousin won't vouch for me. And quite right, too! I tell you, feelings and hearts are foolish things; one gains nothing by them. Why trouble oneself about anything or anybody?"

"I cannot think of you as uncharitable," says Laurence, in a low, adoring tone.

"No?" She beams upon him, and he, alas! is only too ready to be beamed upon by her. "But you must not let your charity run away with you. I still think that the unhappy creature who has a heart, and who can feel for anything but herself"—with the happiest smile at the Major, who is shaking his head at her—"is a perfect idiot! Why, if you

consider—— Oh!" She has turned her head; something beyond—on the road—catches her attention. Her eyes dilate. "Oh, oh! see! Oh! My God!" Her face grows livid.

CHAPTER XI.

"Every man has in himself a continent of undiscovered character."

It takes only a moment, after all. A swift rush across the street; a little child dragged from under the wheels of a passing cart—the driver of which is unmistakably drowsy with drink—having been up at a wake all last night, and just now coming home from the funeral. The shaft of the cart catches Chloe's shoulder as she grasps the child—swinging her rudely to the right, where she is prevented from falling by Laurence Lloyd, whose face is even whiter than hers. She, indeed, is taking things delightfully, whilst rubbing her shoulder. "It is quite all right, really! No harm done. Naught never comes to harm, you know."

They are all very much distressed and, indeed, alarmed. Laurence, as we have already said, had shewn actual fear. Carlton alone stands aloof. There is no doubt about his being distinctly angry. He has marched up to the man in the cart, who has come to a standstill, his legs hanging over the shaft, his eyes vacant.

"What the d—l do you mean by driving over

people like that——" he is beginning furiously, when Chloe breaks in.

"Don't frighten the poor man with your terrible expletives," she says. "Let him go home, and to bed. Anyone can see it is the best place for him. As for this little urchin——" looking down at the boy with an amused smile. The nervous clutch of her hand on his has never relaxed.

"I shall report you to the police," says Carlton to the man, slowly, with decision. He takes no notice of her interposition. The man nods heavily, and goes on. It is evident that he has understood nothing. "As for that troublesome brat"—turning now with a frown to the child—"he ought to get——"

"Half-a-crown!" says Chloe gaily. "Here it is." She presses it into the baby's hand, a little, forlorn, crying thing of four or so. "After all, Granby, we have changed places; I have all the feeling now, and you all the stoicism. Come, do you understand me *now?*"

"Less than ever!" curtly. "You had better go on and let someone see to your shoulder." He releases her hand from the child's, and gives the latter to its slattern of a mother (a good, honest and affectionate soul, as most Irish mothers are, in spite of her rags), who is now pouring forth untold blessings on Chloe's head. She is, indeed, dissolved in tears, and having got back her child, is embracing it with a wild affection, the tears streaming down her cheeks. And Carlton, with an Englishman's horror of sentiment, having seen that all his companions have gone

several yards on their original way, and that they cannot see what he is doing, adds half-a-sovereign to Chloe's half-crown, and then follows them.

Chloe really had not been much injured (a mere bruise that disappeared in a day or two); and finding that the idea of making her a heroine hurt her very considerably more than the shaft of the cart, the subject was dropped, and not renewed again, even when Lady Matilda's house is reached, and they are all sitting round the hospitable luncheon table, where Lady Matilda, more horsey even than usual, is declaiming about all things, stabley and otherwise. She is particularly effusive about her horses to Carlton, who, though she does not know from Adam what Carltons he belongs to (and has not even had the curiosity to inquire), has caught her fancy as a man to whom horses appeal. Not exactly a racing man, but a man, she has discovered, who has won a renowned race or two. That he is Miss Jones' cousin has been made known to her, as to most of the inhabitants of Aughribeg. But Carlton, when questioned, had been singularly lackadaisical in his answering. "Yes—a cousin—a very remote cousin, he believed." Indeed, Jones not being an altogether aristocratic surname, Aughribeg in a body had decided that he was ashamed of Miss Jones as a relative, and with remarkably good taste had refrained from further cross-examination. Aughribeg, indeed, was a little cold to Miss Jones after his arrival, until her lovely costumes, and her even more lovely manners, melted its heart once more; but during her probation (it really only lasted a

few days, coming to a most timely end when she gave a cheque for twenty pounds to the county hospital) Carlton was sufficiently angry to expostulate with her about it. To tell her she ought to fully explain who she was and all about it; but *she* told him to "sit tight"; "to pile it up as hard as he could"; "to give everyone to understand he was *thoroughly* ashamed of her"; "as he was, wasn't he? and, anyway, she was going to be Miss Jones to the end of the chapter! To the end of her time at Aughribeg, anyway! so he might do as he liked. See?"

"Awfully funny curate you've got," says Mr. Bethune, addressing his aunt at luncheon. "Did you hear him to-day?"

"Sh! Naughty boy!" says Lady Matilda, in a tone so carefully moral as to attract the attention of everybody. Lady Matilda is fond of "interludes," and as a rule encourages her nephew as hard as ever she can.

"Why should I 'sh'?" demands he. "There is nothing to 'sh' about. He alluded to a little garment—the merest little airy garment. Why should anyone 'sh' a garment like that?"

"Look here"—begins Lady Matilda threateningly. Then: "George"—to her husband—"stop him!" But everybody now is laughing, and Mr. Morne, good man though he be, is quite incapable of stopping anybody, on whatever career he may have started.

"I don't see why I should be stopped," says Mr. Bethune, with indignation. "Surely that First Lesson had something irregular in it, something

that led me to think that the curate's ideas about our forefathers were vague to a degree? Fig-*trees*, you know!" He peers at his aunt through his glasses; he is rather short-sighted.

"Really, my *dear* Digby!" Lady Matilda makes passes in the air.

"Rather uncomfortable sort of an apron!" says Mr. Bethune, unabashed, addressing himself now to Mrs. Fitzgerald, who, I regret to say, is laughing softly.

"I don't see how you could have heard anything," says Tom Lloyd, who had come in late, after that very unnecessary détour; "you go to sleep during the entire service as a rule, and yet to-day——"

"Yes, to-day," says Lady Matilda. "That's what I complain of. He must needs be wide awake to-day, just when that poor little man——"

"Was in such a blue funk he couldn't give out the Scriptures as they *are*. I think he ought to be taken up—fined for contempt!" Mr. Bethune looks magisterial. "However, I shan't be the one to bring him to justice. On the contrary, I shall cherish his memory for ever. He has cleared my character, and exposed all the vile scandal that, according to Lloyd, seems to be flying round these parts, associating me with irreverence in church."

"Oh, no, Digby!"

"Well, sleepiness in church. That's worse in the clerical eye. Everyone now, I hope"—glancing round him—"is witness that such a disgraceful libel has no cause."

"I'll not be witness to that!" cries his masculine aunt. "In my opinion it was the barest fluke your being awake at that moment."

"Was it? Oh, Auntie!" Mr. Bethune bends a reproachful eye upon her. "How you misjudge me! And why should I be the only scapegoat? Was nobody else asleep? Miss Fitzgerald"—to Olivia—"do you ever sleep?"

This question is far-reaching.

"Every night," says Olivia.

"But in church?"

"No, no—at least"—colouring a little—"I don't think so."

"Miss Fitzgerald, pray be careful! Much to me depends upon your answer. A companion in crime is always a comfort to one, and I should love *you* for a companion. Were you, or were you not, asleep to-day?"

"Certainly I was not!" indignantly.

"No?" in a momentous tone. "Then will you mind telling all these people here what the text was?"

"The text?"

"Of the sermon," severely.

"Oh, the text!" Poor Olivia! She searches her inmost memory, but cannot remember it. How dreadful of her! She glances at Tom, but either he does not know, or will not help her out of her difficulty. "Just like him," she tells herself. She *would* not look at the Major, who would have been delighted to look at her, and has, indeed, the text pursed on his lips. So, failing outside support, she falls back on herself.

"Do you mean that you have forgotten it?" asks she, smiling at Bethune in a little pretty shocked way. "And that you want me to remind you of it? No"—shaking her head—"you have been condemned by your tribunal, and——"

"I'm ashamed of you," says Bethune; "I am indeed! Such terrible prevarication in one so young and so—— I don't believe you could tell us that text if your life depended on it."

"I'm sure she could if she would," says the Major suddenly, his kindly handsome face beaming on her. "Don't give in, Olivia."

Olivia smiles very reluctantly back at him, then turns away. There is distinct ingratitude in her air.

"I should never do that," says she, with a little curl of her lip.

Everyone begins now to talk at once, and presently luncheon is over, and they have all sauntered into the library—a grand old room, from one of the windows of which the broad lake, decorated here and there along its banks by water-lilies, can be seen, and beyond it a view of the far mountains—the eternal hills.

Mr. Bethune is still talking. He never stops, indeed.

"I'm going to give the curate a five-pound note because of his kindness towards me; for in spite of you, Miss Fitzgerald," looking at Olivia, "he has proved that I was manfully awake during his ministrations. As for you—well—the truth has not transpired yet."

"I'll believe in that five-pound note when I see it," says Lady Matilda.

"*You* won't see it; he will. I shall give it to him for his old man's fund; sure to have got a fund of that sort."

"Far surer to have got a young maid's fund," says Sir Hardress, with his usual evil grunt, from the background. "I hate those sanctimonious fellows."

He is evidently in an extraordinarily bad temper. As a rule he always is, but to-day he is excelling himself. He comes over to Mrs. Fitzgerald.

"What about that girl of yours and O'Hara?" asks he. "Is it settled? Has he come to the point, eh?"

"Not yet."

"I'd advise you to hurry him up. He may change his mind. Very likely to, though he *is* a fool. What he can see in a girl like that—— I suppose the fact that he was in love with *you* once induces him in his Indian summer"—with a most disagreeable laugh—"to turn to *her*. Ten thousand a year if a penny. Get that girl married to him, Dora."

At this detestable moment the Major comes bustling up.

"I'm making up a dinner for Friday next," says he. "An old—well, I suppose I ought to say—friend of mine, but between ourselves a bit of a—well, well, let that go. Anyway, he is coming to stay with me from Friday to Sunday. Always travels on Sunday to save time, he says (old heathen!). Well, will you all come? You, Lady Matilda, and you, Morne? And——" He gives the kindest invitation to all present; and all accept it very gladly. Indeed, there are few people who would decline any invitation to The Glen.

"Your friend's name?" asks Lady Matilda in her strident tones. "You have given such a thrilling description of him that I quite burn to know it. Is it Bluebeard? and from where does he come?—from the Arctic or the Torrid Zone? You whet my curiosity. Give us his name."

"Scarcely a friend, you know," says the Major. "An acquaintance of long standing. We were at Eton together. Blakeney is his name."

"Ah, good name enough," says Lady Matilda. "I know some Blakeneys in Kerry—any relation?"

"I fancy not. My Blakeney is English."

Almost immediately the party breaks up, and the members of it go their separate ways. The Fitzgeralds are walking, and Carlton, whose road home marches with theirs, goes with them. He is compelled to this, indeed, by a mute but eloquent command from Chloe's eyes. Laurence had expressed a wish to accompany her, also, but the same eloquent command had condemned him to the companionship of Cissy. By degrees Carlton and Chloe drop behind the others, and presently a little turn in the wooded pathway leaves them free from the inspection of those who are before them.

"What—*what* brings him here?" cries Chloe in a low tone, stopping short, and looking as people should look when they are popularly supposed to be wringing their hands.

"I don't know. Fate, let us say, and be done with it."

"Oh, nonsense! as if it were so easy to be done with it as all that—to get rid of *any* difficulty. I

wish—I wish," a little wildly, "I had my way for once, and I would be rid of him this very moment for ever! Just fancy, Gigi—fancy that viper coming here!"

"The world is small. I don't suppose"—coldly—"but that even in your wildest dreams you must have known that one day you would be found out."

"*He* shan't find me out, anyway."

"If not he—the other."

"Oh, the other!"—she shrugs her shoulders contemptuously—"he is of no account. And besides"—with a scornful laugh—"too fully occupied."

"I wish to heaven," says Carlton angrily, "you would give up this masquerading! He may or may not find you out; but the talk, the scandal about you that is going on in town would—or at all events *ought* to—frighten you. Nobody can disappear, as you have done, without very disagreeable things being said about them. And you know you left yourself open to unpleasant comments."

"There are always fools in the world," says Chloe philosophically.

"And wise men too. Even fools, however, can be troublesome."

"For the moment—like gnats. Do you know, Granby"—with a charming defiance that is not in the least put on—"I don't care a fig what any one of those Alger people say. And it *is* the Alger people you are alluding to. They were madly jealous of me because—oh, idiot that I am!"—flinging out her hands—"because I got what they could not get, and what, after all—when I had it—I loathed."

"Then why did you take it——" he begins; then checks himself. The answer is so simple. "It is not only the Alger people, however. There are others. You know how you flirted——"

"Industriously!" unabashed.

"With every man you met."

"Better than flirting altogether with *one* man, as some of our friends do."

"Argument is nothing in a case like this," says Carlton hotly. "You know right well I am telling you the truth. And I tell you, too, that you ought to go back to your home."

"Which home—Brayle or——"

"The other, of course."

"Well, I shall not, now or ever. Gossips may waste their happy hours on me, but I shall stay here till time sets me free—or you betray me."

"I shan't do that," says he, always, however, with a disapproving air. "And as for time—are you building on that?"

"Why not? Every criminal clings to the chance of a reprieve."

"It is hateful"—frowning—"and unwomanly."

"It is just," steadily. She flings up her charming head. "And it is honest. Why make sickening pretences at grief, or fear, or regret, when one's whole soul is pulsing the other way?"

He looks at her as she stands before him—a charming, lovely picture—and remembering all the bitterness that has brought this girl, who ought still to be a happy child, to her present state of mind, he feels a rush of rage against those responsible for her

cruel progression, and in his heart condones and forgives her. "It is true you have cause. I can scarcely blame you. However," he continues presently, "I am sure in the long run you will have to give up this ridiculous position. Blakeney's coming should give you pause; and *he* may not be the only one. I myself dropped in here, you see, by chance."

"*Was* it chance, Gigi?" She asks this saucily. Gigi is a family name with him, and Chloe had learnt it, and liked it. His face changes.

"Enough of this nonsense," he says coldly. "Take my advice and dine at the Major's on Friday. See Blakeney face to face, and put an end to all this outrageous and most undesirable nonsense."

"A truly tragical ending to a most farcical beginning. No, I thank you, my lord." She shrugs her shoulders.

"As you will," sternly. "But I tell you this, Chloe, that——"

She waves him aside.

"*Pouf!*" cries she. "A fig for your telling! I shall not go to Major O'Hara's dinner, though I should dearly like to, and I shall stay here a free and happy person until, for me, the skies fall."

"Well, it is your own lookout," says Carlton drily.

CHAPTER XII.

"The bitter sweet, the honey blent with gall."

It is quite impossible for anyone who loves her not to see that the radiant Chloe is to-day—Friday, the Friday of Major O'Hara's dinner-party—very much depressed, and that she has been so ever since that luncheon at Lady Matilda's. Certainly, at intervals, she had been as gay as a lark (or herself), but every now and then gloom had caught her. And to-day she has broken down altogether. A dreadful headache has taken possession of her—is quite crushing her, she tells them. She could not possibly go to Major O'Hara's dinner. No, she would be but a wet blanket at his charming entertainment, and would probably have to leave early, and so spoil the happiness of the girls, who will, of course, be enjoying themselves immensely, and——

("I shan't," Olivia had said very sharply at that moment, but Chloe had refused to listen to her.) At all events, she is not going. She has just written a little note to the dear Major to say so. Are not headaches horrid? and so on. She will go into the garden and see if the air will do her any good.

The garden—a very wilderness of sweets—seems, indeed, to do her an infinity of good, and with almost extraordinary speed, too. Her languor drops from her on finding herself alone—the girls are busy with

their dinner-gowns—and she uplifts her voice, sweeter than any bird, and from pure lightness of her heart —born of a great relief—sings to herself aloud.

She has arranged it, though she had feared for their suspicions; and, after all, they have suspected nothing. And on Sunday he will be gone. Fancy his dining at The Glen to-night! Old wretch! Well, better he than the other. How she would like to see him—after all these months!—She falls a-thinking. The Glen, when one comes to think of distance, is only a mile or so from this, and through the woods——

Filled with her new design, she has seated herself in the little summer-house—a nest of roses and earwigs—and again is smiling softly to herself over some secret thought, when a shadow, marring the sunshine at her feet, brings her back to the present, and the fact that Laurence Lloyd is beside her. All at once she remembers her headache, and puts on a heart-broken air.

Laurence, tall, handsome, stands looking at her for a moment, then, a distressed look dawning in his eyes, sits down beside her.

"You are unhappy," says he very gently. "One can see it. *I* can. Something is troubling you."

"Yes, yes. I am worried," confesses she. Laurence is delightful; a perfect rest. She can depend on him, and can therefore say what she likes to him. That's the best of men, Chloe has often told herself. They never want to give you away, whereas women quite hanker after it.

She slips her pretty fingers through her hair, as if

distracted. Here is a new amusement ready to her hand. She has run him through all the gamut of her gay moods. How will he be in her sad ones? It is a charming, a delightful experiment. How funny that she had never thought of it before! "I am very unhappy," she says, in a tone that would have moved Saint Anthony. She looks indeed a lovely living image of despair.

"Tell me about it?" There is infinite tenderness in his tone.

"I have a headache."

"But that isn't all. Tell me."

"Oh, I can't. I wish I could."

"Is—is it about your former life? Your—your guardian?"

This is far too near the mark to be pleasant. Chloe shakes her head sadly but vigorously.

"I thought, perhaps," his eyes growing brighter, happier, as though a weight has been lifted, "that your people might have heard of your being here, and were coming to take you away, and——"

"No, no!" She interrupts him with a shudder; the shudder is, at all events, quite genuine. "That is not it. Of course, you have guessed that I have come here to escape—well—persecution. But I am safe still. It is not that. As for my people—that is"—she grows a little more evasive—"my actual relations, they are but *one*. And"—with a shrug—"quite enough, too. One too many, if it comes to that."

It is the nearest approach she has ever made to a communication about herself; and Laurence flushes, and draws closer to her.

"You see, I know you have a *guardian*," begins he.

Chloe looks mournfully before her, her hands clasped across her knees, her eyes fixed and desolate. She is secretly wondering how she is doing it—well or ill?

"I have a *beast!*" returns she, in low and musical accents.

"Oh, so bad as that? Fancy"—his young face growing crimson with rage and disgust—"fancy his daring to treat you—*you*—— But what is it now, Chloe? There is something fresh. What has happened lately? You have heard something about him, have you not? Or—is it that you want money? If so"—eagerly—"let me help you. I have two or three hundred pounds lying idle; let me."

"So much?" says Chloe. She seems struck with the liveliest amazement; then, rising suddenly, goes to a flower-bed near her. When he cannot see her face, it changes. First it is filled with amusement; then slowly a kindlier light grows on it.

"Oh, it is a mere nothing," says Laurence, half ashamed. "And I don't want it. I beg you to take it. It occurred to me that perhaps——"

"Oh, Laurence!" She has turned, and all the amusement has gone from her face. Impetuously she lays her hands upon his arms. "I don't think," says she, with a little curious smile in her eyes, "that anyone was ever so kind to me before."

"What a horrible thing for *you* to have to say!" There is anguish in his tone. "What can they have been like—those people amongst whom you have

lived? Oh, Chloe! my poor little girl! I am afraid, from all I have heard, that you have been very unhappy."

"Very, very." Her eyes are full of tears now. "My poor little girl!" What a sweet, sweet boy! Nobody had ever spoken to her quite like that before.

"Well, you shan't be unhappy any more. And you will take this money, Chloe, won't you? I don't want it, I swear. You know I am agent to Lord Daintree, and have five hundred a year—a lot more than I use, so you need have no scruples. Chloe"—he changes colour suddenly, paling, whilst his eyes burn, and his grasp on her hand unconsciously tightens to an almost painful point—"would you marry a man who had only five hundred a year?"

Chloe, as if struck dumb, says nothing, but her eyes are so eloquent that he goes on hurriedly.

"No—listen. My father hates—er—does not care for me, as of course you have heard; but after his death—that's beastly of me, isn't it?—well, however, I shall have something more then, and—and we——"

"Don't—don't!" She wrenches her hands from his, and covers her face with them. Is it to hide a suspicion of shame in it? If so, the shame is a very transient emotion, as a second later she looks up at him through the fingers that are now creating little bars across her face, and through which her eyes are shining. "Look here," says she with a little touch of audacious authority, "I want to tell

you something. I cannot—that is—I mean—I don't want to marry anyone—*ever*."

Her manner is so emphatic, in spite of its extraordinary frivolity, that his heart sinks.

"You are engaged?"

"Engaged——" She pauses: "No, no; I am not engaged."

"There is hope for me still, then." His young and handsome face, if a little sad, a little cast down, has yet a gleam of happiness in it.

"No; you must not build on that. I refuse"—with a slight touch of *hauteur*—"to let you build on that."

It is the very slightest touch, and scarcely serves to stem the torrent of his eager passion. But he is very young, and his "ladye's will" being the first thing with him, he gives way so far as to be silent for a moment or two. And, indeed, perhaps, in this haven of rest, with the beloved beside him, he might have been silent for ever, in spite of this grief at his heart, but that a tall figure appearing upon the threshold of their ideal shelter changes at once the current of their thoughts. Chloe, who perhaps is accustomed to surprises, says nothing, and does nothing (if a quite friendly smile to the intruder be omitted), but Laurence rises slowly.

"Dear Granby—so glad," says Chloe, giving him two fingers, "though I have such a shocking headache. Come and sit here, near Mr. Lloyd; *I*"—with a pretty smile at Laurence—"as a rule call him Laurence. Don't I, Laurence? This is the sweetest place in the world—if one forgets the earwigs.

I carried home ten in my petticoat the last time I came. But *you're* not afraid of earwigs, Laurence?" as she sees Lloyd get up. "Are you? No? Then why are you going? Must you?" Lloyd is looking murderous. "If so—well, good-bye."

"I shall see you to-night?" In spite of his rage at the advent of Carlton—about whom little hints are being issued in the neighbourhood with regard to Miss Jones—he still believes in her as a true lover should—especially a young lover.

"Oh, I'm afraid not." Chloe looks sadly at him. "I am not very happy, and my head is aching so. But you must think of me and pity me when you are enjoying yourself." She dismisses him with the sweetest, the most melancholy, the most alluring smile.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Impenitent I turn to you."

"WHAT are you doing with that boy?" asks Carlton sternly.

Chloe, conscious of having subjected the "boy" to certain experiments, that, if not so stringent or so searching as Röntgen's rays, are still quite sufficiently strong to bring to light his secret feelings, grows a charming pink.

"I don't see why you should constitute yourself my keeper," says she, with a little touch of *hauteur*. "You are not my brother."

"I should be extremely sorry to be your brother," returns Carlton calmly. "In the meantime I am compelled to consider other things. One's name has a charm for one."

"And you think"—angrily—"that I——?"

"I really am not prepared to go into that," coldly. "But if you—— Well, you don't suppose, really, that you can stay here for ever?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? Good heavens, do you ever think? Did you ever think in your life? For example, have you thought what you will do when your ready money is at an end?"

"Of course I have!" nodding her head saucily. "I said to myself long ago that when I was hard up I'd write to Gigi—*he* will look after me. Though you would so hate to be my brother, Gigi, still I depend upon you. I know you will always help me; and I have arranged with myself to write to you for more money whenever I may want it."

"And if I should refuse?"

"Nonsense! As if I didn't know very well you would never refuse me a few shillings!"

"Shillings?" He looks at her.

"Well, pounds—hundreds of pounds." She laughs, with a little grimace. "How well you know me! There! you're a friend, aren't you?—to say nothing of being a cousin. And I'd do just the same for you, let me tell you, if you were in a hole."

"I shouldn't ask you."

"That's very nasty of you," says she—quite gaily, however. "But I've got no pride, thank goodness—

not with you, anyway. How you do waste yourself over trifles!"

"A truce to this!" says Carlton quickly. "You are playing with that absurd boy. And knowing all that I know, I scarcely feel justified in holding my tongue any longer about——"

He pauses.

"Me? And no wonder! However, remember you gave me your word to say nothing."

"I know; but——"

"All the 'buts' in the world, Granby, will not redeem you of your promise."

"I made a reservation with regard to a flirtation," sternly. "To aid and abet you there would be——"

"Another pair of shoes," with a saucy laugh. "Yes; but there is nothing in this one; I swear it to you. A silly boy like that!" She glances at him. "Don't betray me yet, Granby; give me time. This state of things will soon be over."

He looks at her frowningly; that brilliant, half-wild, half-angry, yet wholly beautiful light now shining in her quick dark eyes, what does it mean? He has seen it before. What is she thinking of now?—of death?—of *whose* death?

"Chloe, don't look like that!" he says sharply. "Don't tell me you are longing—waiting for his death!"

"I am waiting and longing for it always," returns she quite calmly. "I have nothing else to wait for or long for. Think me dreadful if you will—you always *do*, don't you? so it will be no trouble to

you. But I do hope for it. Still—let me do myself one small justice—I don't so much long for *his* death as for *my* liberty. Oh, Granby! death is the end of all things; liberty is the beginning. I want to begin —now—now—soon—before death takes me too."

"Chloe!" He feels aghast at this odd new passionate mood of hers—of her who has up to this been only all wilfulness and frivolity.

"Yes. Don't you see liberty means life, joy, and all the rest of it? I *will* be free before I die."

"You wish him dead, then?"

"With all my heart and soul." She stretches out her arms. "If without losing hope of Heaven I could compass his death, I would do it."

"I hate," frowningly, "to hear you talk like that. I often"—he pauses to look at her, to study her beautiful face—"wonder whether you have any feeling."

"None!" returns she. "*None!* Don't waste time over your analysis of me. I'm not worth it." She clenches her little white teeth sharply, and then, with a sudden flash, turns upon him. "Feeling—in *me?* Why, where should I have got it? Beneath my good guardian's care—as a baby—as a child—as a girl? or beneath the care of my other good angel later on? *They* did not sow such silly seeds as feeling in my heart. Too expensive! What does one give for the ordinary packet of sweet-smelling flowers from Daniels' or Carter's—half-a-crown, isn't it? But feeling!—consider, dear Granby—feeling is a priceless seed to sow. Some stupid, extravagant people grow it, I am told. These foolish Fitzgeralds, for example; and——"

"Laurence Lloyd," suggests Carlton, watching her. Has she a heart, after all? Or is it——

"Perhaps so," coldly. "He is of their generous kind. He, I think, would possibly be recklessly extravagant in the matter."

"Would ruin himself over it?"

"*I* shall not ruin him"—coldly—"if that is what you are hinting at. As for the want of feeling of which you accuse me"—her face changes from its late chilly expression to one resembling a small thundercloud—"why, in this particular instance, should I shew feeling? Does one feel for the hand that slays one? And if, as I have said, I often long and pray for a death that"—she hesitates, and a queer expression darkens her eyes; is it malice? or is it only misery?—"that will give me life and freedom, what Pharisee amongst you all shall dare to rise up and condemn me?"

He shakes his head, but there is no doubt that he gives way a little beneath the impetuosity of her attack.

"Not I," says he at last, "and yet I entreat you to throw up this farce and come home."

"You have said that before. To which home? Both are mine, I believe, and both equally detested."

"The Court, of course, or even to the other——"

"To neither," shortly.

"Is it *quite* useless to argue this matter with you? I have told you that your reputation——"

"And *his* reputation?" She interrupts him almost fiercely.

"How can blackening his name make yours

better? Of course I know, and so do a hundred others, that you would be the last person in the world to—to go too far; but your name has been connected with Fitzwalter's, and—Wyndham's, and —people want to know where you *are!* I am offending you; I"—furiously—"am making myself damnable in your sight; but I risk that—for you. And you know you laid yourself open to scandal. Come home, Chloe—do, I beseech you."

"Never! Neither to my guardian's home—which by-the-bye, is mine now—or to that—that other guardian's home."

"You have quite decided?"

"Quite."

"Well"—he shrugs his shoulders—"so be it. Of course"—he is very pale—"I shall keep to my word and not betray you, unless—you know my conditions."

"Your conditions!" Chloe laughs angrily. "There is nothing in them—no meaning even."

"No? There is this, my dear Chloe—that if a woman can deceive one man, she can deceive a second."

"Deceive?" She turns a vehement little face upon him. "What do you mean? Take care, Granby——" She stops, drawing in her breath in a sharp, sobbing sort of way.

"I know perfectly well what I mean," says Carlton calmly. "To deceive him (in the worldly acceptation of the term) is, of course, out of the question, and you know right well I never meant to insinuate it."

"If you did——" stormily.

"Well"—deliberately—"I didn't."

"He"—the storm is rising—"deceived *me*, if you like—your hateful, abominable uncle. I wonder, knowing him as you do, you have the audacity to stand there and scold me about my little peccadilloes. Do you know, sometimes—often"—with dreadful vindictiveness—"I hate you because you are his nephew!"

"His cousin, I think," says Carlton.

"Oh!"—with proud indifference—"it is all the same. He's old enough to be your grandfather."

"I object to that," says Carlton; "I cling to the further relationship. But to hate me just because I am a connection of his—that's extremely stupid of you."

"You talk to me as if I were a silly child!" frowning.

"Well, that is what you really are."

"I'm not!" stamping her foot upon the ground, and now growing even more angry. "I am sufficiently grown up to *know*. And I will not permit you to treat me as if I were someone of no importance."

"You wrong me there," says Carlton. "It is because I know you to be of great importance that I——"

"Well?"

"That I ventured to speak to you about that boy just now."

"About Laurence Lloyd?"

"Yes."

"'That boy,' as you call him"—her voice grows low and very sad—"was kinder to me to-day than ever any creature was before. I told him so. I suppose"—defiantly—"you think that wrong too—to shew him my gratitude?"

"But gratitude—for what?"

"You will be unjust to him to the end, of course; but he thought, poor boy, I wanted money, and he offered me not only the half, but the whole of his kingdom."

"*His* kingdom!" says Carlton. Afterwards he is honestly ashamed of this. "I could have done that for you, and I am your cousin, whereas he——"

"Oh! a *sort* of cousin!"

"Still"—obstinately—"a cousin."

"Of a *sort!*" as obstinately as himself. "Only a little while ago you questioned the desirability of giving me money if I wanted it. He—dear old Laurence—never questioned it at all."

Carlton turns on his heel and walks away: a violent word breaks from him.

It was not meant to be heard, but perhaps she hears it for all that, and draws conclusions from it. Women, as a rule, are great at conclusions. Anyway, she stands still upon the garden path, clasps her hands before her, puts on an aggrieved expression, and says, very low, "Gigi!"

He turns. She *knew* he would, being always such a good old friend of hers; and with the help of a small beckoning finger she finds him in another moment beside her once again.

"Don't be unkind to me, Gigi," says she sweetly.

"Wait a little; I've got such lots of things to say to you. And you know you are the only person I am able to open my mind to. Tell me—is *he* going away on Sunday?"

"So the Major says."

"Very like him to stay longer, however, just because he isn't wanted," says she disconsolately. "To stay for Wednesday, for example; the night of Lady Matilda's dance."

"Well?"

"I want to go there."

"You mean to tell me"—there is a touch of amusement in his tone—"you are desirous of going to a mere country dance?"

"Tut, Gigi! How can you ask such a silly question? I'm *dying* to go. A dance in a place like this is worth a thousand in other places, where dances are held *ad nauseam*."

There is a little silence. Then:

"It seems to me," says Carlton slowly, "as if I were seeing you for the first time. When I think of you as you were in town—in Paris—and now to think of you as contented here——"

"Ah! dwell on me as that," says she, "as being quite contented here! I believe I was country born in my soul, though the event came off in Park Lane. You wonder at me; and I often wonder at myself too—this staying here; but it is rest, Gigi"—a little sadness enters her eyes—"perfect rest after that turmoil. And I have been so tired often."

"I know what you mean. But why take this form of disapproval? Why not go in for a——"

"No, no!" hurriedly. "Never! I have had that advice before, but—I *couldn't.* I can, however"—the horrified eyes growing cold again—"wait." She draws a deep breath and laughs. "That sounds ghoulish, doesn't it? You think it more dreadful than the other alternative? But really it is more decent—in my eyes, anyway. There, there, Granby; let us be done with it. The past is past—and for the present, I really want to go to Lady Matilda's dance. What a blessing, by the way, it is that she never goes to town—in the season!" She laughs, and then, with a sudden frown: "You are sure he is going away on Sunday?"

"By the afternoon train."

"Afternoon?" disconsolately. "I shan't be able to go to church, then."

"You"—sarcastically—"will feel that!" She glances at him lightly.

"I shall indeed. I hate being unkind to anyone. And the curate—the poor curate"—she shakes her head sadly, if maliciously—"*how* he will suffer!"

"Gossler? I do hope, Chloe"—sharply—"that you have not been tampering with him."

"Tampering—tampering! what an extraordinary word! What's the English for it?" asks Chloe. "*I* don't know. Do you? Anyway, I'm sure Mr. Gossler will be very sorry if I don't go to church on Sunday. Perhaps he regards me as you do—a perfect heathen! If you are both bent on my conversion, I should think I'll be a lamb presently. In the meantime Mr. Gossler"—with a little *moue* so irresistible and charming that he would dearly like to

shake her for it, but only laughs at her instead, though sorely against his will—"after looking forward to seeing me for six *country* days (you know how long they are) will endure abject misery when I do not appear on the seventh."

"Vanity, thy name is woman."

"Not a bit of it. What woman on earth, even the ugliest, could not by flattery lead that silly curate astray?"

"Then why use *your* spear?"

She shrugs her shoulders.

"One must amuse oneself."

"It is to be hoped that, as you won't be in church next Sunday, the curate will make fewer mistakes in the prayers and Lessons."

"I expect he will make more!" says Chloe. "With one eye on the church door, he will have only one left for his book; so you see what you may expect. There, now go! Go away at once; I am tired of you. You're about as stupid a person as I know—and that is saying a good deal, as I know Mr. Gossler. But after all I think I like you, Gigi; I do indeed. And—and—— There, do go away!" She dismisses him with a nod.

"I shall see you at Lady Matilda's?"

"Or sooner." She nods her head. "To tell you the truth, Gigi, I'm dying to see *him!* I think I'll run up to-night when you are all at dinner, and get a peep someway."

"By yourself! at that hour! I hope"—sternly—"you are jesting. Now, once for all, Chloe, I shan't allow it! I am in a measure responsible for you.

Such an escapade would be disgraceful! Look here"—angrily—"I insist upon your obeying me in this matter."

"Enough! enough!" tragically. "As if I should dare to disobey you!" She turns, waves a kissing hand at him, and disappears.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Oh! The little more, and how much it is."

THE night is full of brilliance. Above, the stars are blazing merrily; beneath, the whole wide land seems clad in a silvery garment; even the pathway through the woods (dense though the leafy boughs now make that sylvan way) is clear to the eyes of the culprit running over it—great patches of gleaming light rushing down here and there at odd intervals, where the branches fail to interlace.

Free of the wood, and high up here on the hill that runs down to The Glen, and commands a view of the sea lying over there so calm and placid twenty miles away, Chloe, the culprit, pauses a moment. The scene is beyond description fair. It is only half-past nine, and as yet the night is scarcely at its full strength, although the moon is slowly mounting the heavens, and all the stars are awake; for low down upon the ocean's rim the sun is still dying—reluctantly, angrily—burning himself out like a great fire-opal. The waves beneath shine like a crimson flood, and all the great round of the sea is filled with

wonderful lights—here pure white, and there foam green, and there, beyond, the yellow of a clear fire; and through all these lesser rays shines the glory of a red flame that sends palpitating flashes upwards to the sky.

It is a glorious sight, and adds to the courage of the girl looking at it, who, to do her justice, is but little deficient in that splendid virtue.

How small, how paltry, how contemptible, are all our little doubts and fears, she tells herself, before the majesty of such a spectacle as this!

* * * * * * * *

But down here, in Major O'Hara's garden, all is different. Here the scene is like fairyland, it is so still, so breathless; and yet with a little under-murmur of life, as though of elves pattering, running, calling, beneath the sleeping leaves. Is it a tiny wind, or the sighs of the sleeping flowers, or the coming to life of many buds, that are always born in the sweet and holy dark?

Mingled with the perfume of the small and now called "old-fashioned" white pinks—since Mrs. Sinkin made her charming appearance—that are just uplifting their dear little heads in the borders is that of the stocks and the delicate mignonette. The roses are sound asleep, and refuse to add to the sweetness of the night, perhaps hypnotised by the gaudy poppies that are growing so close to them.

Through the windows of the dining and drawing-rooms, that are flung wide open, the lamps are throwing their soft rays upon the gravelled paths and pleasant greenways outside. Chloe, moving

daintily beyond these betraying lights, steps into the shadow of a huge barberry, that, standing at the left-hand side of one of the dining-room windows, is already making a yellow carpet of its blossoms at her feet. From this post of vantage she can see quite clearly into the room, commanding a full view of those within.

She laughs to herself lightly as she loosens the silken wrappings round her head. This is an adventure after her own heart. And to see *him*—that hateful, *hateful* creature who had induced her to—well, to ruin her whole life—to see him again, has a fascination for her not to be controlled.

Through the open window the sounds of voices are coming to her. She sees from where she is standing that it is the precious after-dinner hour for the men, when the women have gone to the drawing-room, and they can converse with each other as delicately or as broadly as they will. The hand of conventionality has been removed.

Some of the men have risen from the table, and have carried their cigars and drinks to the open windows. Two men have stepped out right on to the verandah that runs very near the spot where Chloe is standing.

One is Carlton; the other a short, stout, self-assertive, most detestable sort of man, with a puritanical brow and a cruel lip. A gentleman, however.

On this man Chloe's eyes rest, and as they rest they grow like living coals. A mad desire to come forward and confront the enemy is making her heart beat. Almost she takes one step—then stops.

Carlton breaks the silence.

"Got a light?"

"Yes, thanks. But with regard to what we were saying." The old, well-remembered grating tones strike chill to the heart of the girl hidden behind the barberry. "I think she has behaved as no decent woman would."

"I can't agree with you there." Carlton's voice is very cold. He leans back in his wicker chair, his elbow on the little table near him, a cigarette between his lips, and looks with a distinct scorn at his companion. The listening girl below can see all this.

"As his cousin," says the stout man, "you must!" He leans forward, frowning.

"And you?"

"And I, as her uncle and guardian, well—I too protest against this outrageous behaviour on her part."

"Ah! you take that line." Carlton regards his cigarette reflectively. "Have you ever taken into consideration the extent of the provocation? For myself"—deliberately—"I have gone into it, and I tell you plainly, I hold her as quite justified in what she has done. Very many women in her place would have behaved *not* as she has, but infinitely worse. There was that affair of the Reynolds'. Was *she* not justified?"

"What do I care about the Reynolds'? I think only of this," says Mr. Blakeney, flinging off the Reynolds', who are indeed nothing to him, with a nasty, obstinate sort of smile, "that my niece has laid herself open to the voice of scandal. I married her well——"

"You married her—damnably!"

Carlton's manner, usually so calm and so indifferent, now so violent, gives Mr. Blakeney pause. But as he gazes at him with keen, half-shut eyes, waiting, as it were, for the end of the explosion, the sudden storm subsides, and he finds Carlton leaning back, indifferent as before, gazing idly at the cigarette between his fingers.

"I hardly understand you, Carlton. Of course you can regard my conduct"—loftily—"in whatever light you like, but I assure you I did the best I could for her according to my lights. I don't know where she is now, and I hardly care to know; but I repeat that she has left herself open to the voice of scandal. And as her uncle, her only actual relation, I feel it, I *feel* it, Carlton. I have been her guardian for so many years that I naturally resent such action on her part. See how it will reflect on *me!*"

"A selfish view."

"Oh, my dear fellow, if you are going in for the high morality business——! To be entirely unselfish, my good Granby, is to die in a garret. I don't want to die in a garret; and I'm cocksure *she* won't, wherever she is. If a man doesn't look after himself, who the deuce is going to do it for him? And as a ward she was uncomfortable, to say the least of it. Of course, I hardly expected sympathy from *you.* Yet you knew her for quite six months before—eh? and afterwards too, I think."

"What has that got to do with it?" Carlton's voice is a little dangerous.

"Nothing, nothing! But you did meet her, eh?"

"Once or twice"—stiffly—"before, and frequently afterwards. Before she struck me as being a child—a mere wild, unthinking child."

"Ah! just so," with a shrug of his fat, comfortable, abominable shoulders. He pauses; takes a sip from the glass beside him, and goes on. "You can afford to moralise, my dear Carlton—'The subsequent proceedings can trouble *you* no more' (Bret Harte, isn't it?). You have no interest in her, you see, but I——"

"Exactly so," says Carlton, rising; his face has a suspicion of disgust in it.

"Don't go yet," says Mr. Blakeney hurriedly. "After all, you see (as I have been trying to explain), you have an interest in it—you, as heir to the property and title, ought to keep your eye open as to her movements. Heaven alone knows what she is doing, or who she is with, and——"

"Well, sir?" furiously.

"I don't think"—in an aggrieved voice—"you ought to take that tone with me, Carlton. It won't pay. It won't really. I can befriend you more than any man living; in fact, I alone can tell you that——" He pauses.

"Well"—impatiently—"what?"

Mr. Blakeney leans across the table.

"I've had a telegram this morning. He's deuced bad, I can tell you. A question of weeks, or, by Jove, *days!* Heart." He taps his own breast, which is as sound as a bell. "Heart always a bit shaky, you know."

A little rustling down amongst the tall shrubs outside goes by them.

Carlton has grown very pale.

"You are sure?"

"Positive! See, here is the telegram!"

A long silence. Then:

"Unsound?" says Carlton. "Even . . . when——?"

"Oh, yes, *then!* That was why I encouraged the match. He was so much older, you see; and—the money is immense! He is the richest man in England, I think. Of course, I can see how it seems to you—you being the heir. But you can't bear malice now. There being no child of the marriage, it leaves you——"

Carlton's face is livid.

"Stop!" commands he between his teeth.

"Still on the moral tack?" says Blakeney; a little nervously, however. He shrinks back in his chair as he says it. There is something dangerous in the other's eyes. "Yet, what better"—there is distinct apology in his tone now—"do you think I could have done for her? I can tell you, if I——"

Carlton makes a sharp movement of his hand that reduces the other to silence. "I know only too well what you did for her. You must be mad to desire discussion. Answer me this, however: *Is* he dying? The truth, now!"

"Well"—slowly, taking very carefully no heed of the insult conveyed in Carlton's last words—"touch and go, I hear. I've had a line from his solicitor, who, it appears, had a letter from his valet."

"His valet—Browne? Pah! What back-door business! Was there no one else to write?"

"Well, you know, after all he had the best right. She,—Lottie Contralto (Jenkins is her real name, I'm told)—she would be hardly likely to, eh?"

"Hardly."

"It seems that she—that woman. . . . Awfully pretty woman—seen her?"

"Go on." Carlton's eyes are blazing.

"Well, it seems she—she found somebody more to her fancy. After all, Burlingham had seen his best days, and—and, in fact——"

"Why the deuce don't you go on? She's left him, eh? and with——?"

"Well, the valet—Browne, you know."

"By Jove! And *he* telegraphed! And . . . *poor* fool!"

"Oh, Burlingham is well out of it! She was a regular harpy, handsome as she was."

"I was thinking of the valet," says Carlton. Then suddenly: "And so it has come to that at the last with Burlingham, that his very servants play him false. He could not make a friend even amongst them. Yet you sold that girl to him—that young, fresh life! My God!" He turns away and strides up and down the verandah for a minute or two, then comes back. "I wonder," says he hoarsely, "if you knew what you were doing. If you *did*"—with ill-suppressed passion—"you must be a devil incarnate!"

"Look here, Carlton, this news has been too much for you. To find yourself so near the title—— Well,

well, well! I forgive your absurd outburst. I, her uncle, did for my niece only what forty mothers were prepared to do for their *daughters!* However, we won't go into society secrets. And besides, he's dying now, poor chap, according to that telegram. However, Montgomery—he's over there—in Naples, you know, with him, or near him, any way—same hotel, I think—wired this afternoon, in return to a wire of mine: 'Some exaggeration.'"

"Ah!"

"But I don't believe it. He's bound to be in a bad way. By Jove, Carlton"—with a disgusting leer—"it would be a devilish good thing for you if he *did* go under, eh?"

Carlton has risen finally, now with the open view of putting an end to the conversation. He turns and looks down on the little fat man, whose would-be smile has become vindictive.

"What do you mean?" demands he imperiously.

"Oh, by Jove!" says Blakeney, with a derisive laugh. "The airs of the coming Earl already! You should give yourself space. He's not dead *yet*, you know!"

Carlton's nostrils dilate.

"Get out of my way!" says he in a low tone, as he brushes by him.

* * * * * * * *

All this has been heard by Chloe, standing beneath the barberry-tree. She had begun by being interested in a humoursome sort of way; it had seemed a play to her—a little delicious scene out of a comic opera—as she ran up through the wood and

saw that grand scene on the glowing sea; but as she listened (not caring to listen in the beginning—only curious to see her guardian once again), and as certain words were spoken—certain news declared—all her lightheartedness fell from her, and trembling, eager, longing, yet fearing, she drank in every word.

Only now, as Carlton, with contempt and fury in his eyes, passes Blakeney on his way into the gardens, does she so far recover herself as to slip further backwards within the shadow of the barberry, and even further still, until Carlton's form has passed out of sight.

Then she too moves away, slowly, as if tired and worn and faint, until, reaching a rustic seat beneath a tree, she sinks thankfully on to it, and letting her face fall forward into her hands, gives herself up to thought.

"He is dying! Dying! *Dying*, he said!"

CHAPTER XV.

"And the little less, and what worlds away."

A SLIGHTLY unpleasant affair between Tom Lloyd and his host had occurred directly after dinner. Tom, whose seat was near the door, had risen to open it for Lady Matilda, and the Major, in his genial way, when the door had closed on Cissy, had moved up into the vacant seat next to Tom. But Tom, returning from his little expedition, having seen the Major's friendly

intention, instead of returning to his own seat had deliberately walked across to the other side of the table, where were two vacant places.

He *meant* this—though he tried to pass it off to himself as being an objection to talk to an old bore about nothing for ten minutes—he knew in the depths of his heart that he meant this as an insult to the Major; but that sound man and perfect gentleman never saw insults where insults should not be, and putting Tom's action down to a mere blunder, and having something to say to Tom that he thought should be said at once, rose and followed him.

"Look here, Tom," said he, slipping into the place beside him, "I want a word with you."

There was a pause, short but eloquent, during which Tom regarded with unusual devotion the geraniums in the vases before him. Then, a little insolently, he looked at the Major.

"Do you?" said he. In some words there is nothing at all to offend—but in the *tone*. . . .

"Yes, yes, my dear boy." The Major had heard nothing to offend. "See here—it's about Olivia."

Tom's fingers tightened a little on the wineglass he was holding. His eyes were carefully lowered. He drew in his breath sharply, but inaudibly. A very little more pressure of those long firm fingers round that delicate glass, and the stem would surely have gone. His voice, however, when he spoke, was perfectly indifferent.

"Discussions bore me," said he.

"Don't take it like that, my dear fellow. You know, Tom, I am a friend of yours, as well as of hers.

As for her—well, you know there are reasons for my being such a friend of *hers*."

Here Tom providentially pushed the unoffending glass from him, and put back his chair preparatory to rising. This hideous drivel! Was he to listen to more of it?

"What I want to say, Tom, is that—er—well—I *am* an old friend, you know——"

"Yes, old——" Tom's voice was hardly his own; it was, indeed, with difficulty he restrained himself from repeating the word old, with an objectionable adjective before it, but he did.

"Quite so; an old—a real friend," said the Major; "and I have seen of late, Tom—indeed, for a considerable time—that you regard Olivia with——"

He hesitated. Perhaps the younger man's eyes did not encourage him to proceed.

"Well?" Tom's tone was still low; but his nose and lips were white, and his eyes were flashing.

"With the eyes of affection. And I wanted to say——"

Tom got slowly to his feet, turning his back to the table and leaning against it, so that the other men could not see his face. He spoke.

"What do you mean?" he said, his voice thick with grief and passion. "Do you think I want to be pitied by *you?* See what you like, and *think* what you like. Think me an *ass* if you like; but"—with a bitter laugh—"I'm not a d——d old fool, anyway!"

This was awful, unpardonable! The Major, when he was gone, sat like one who had been struck for a minute or two, then strolled to the window.

"He must be mad!" he said, trying to console himself. "I've winged my man for less than that in my young days. What does the fellow mean? Lately I have noticed acts of incivility on his part towards me; but *this!*—and to me, an old friend! Oh!" as if struck again. "*Old!* Deuce take me if I don't cut him next time I see him! Impudent puppy! A mere boy—and to so insult me! 'Old fool,' by Jove! And all because I said something about—— Ah!" The Major drew a long breath, and suddenly saw visions. "So that was it! Poor dear chap! All a mere outburst of misery. Takes it worse than I'd have thought, though. Seemed to me an imperturbable sort of fellow. But—— And of late, certainly, I have seen that Olivia has been—well—a little disagreeable to him; a little stand-off, as it were. In fact, cold to him. No need for that, surely! And in a girl with a disposition so charming—to have mercenary thoughts! Ah, well, well! I shouldn't have spoken on the subject, I suppose. 'Old fool,' he called me. Right, quite right, I daresay. But it is high time that an end should be put to all this."

Meantime Tom, who is still in such a state of mind as prevents him from feeling in the least ashamed of himself (and, indeed, to whose spirits this last unpleasant *quart d'heure* with the Major has seemed to give a fillip), has made straight for the balcony, evading the blandishments of the sirens in the drawing-room on his way thither.

Yes; there is Olivia at the very end of it—he felt she would be there—sitting on a low seat, that has,

however, an empty one beside it. Is she keeping it for that old idiot inside? No matter. He suddenly determines it shall be for *him*—for a moment or two, at all events—and for no one else. After that he must leave—immediately.

To-morrow, of course—with a shrug of his shoulders—he will write the Major an apology, and, quite as of course, he will not accept it. He will probably decline his acquaintance for the future. Well, so far, so good. So much the better, indeed!

Whether Olivia, just at first, had seen him coming or not, must for ever remain a mystery. At all events, she does not turn her head now at his near approach, being seemingly engrossed with the manifold beauties of the night. However, these last, though exquisite, may not be altogether the reason of her strange abstraction. The fact that she and Tom have not been on speaking terms for quite twenty-four hours (a by no means unusual thing) may have had a little to do with it. There had, indeed, been a row royal between them only yesterday, that left them at daggers drawn; at all events, she now sits the picture of immobility, until he is so close to her that pretence is no longer possible. Then she turns her head slightly, glances at him, and without further notice goes back to her rapturous gazing at the moon.

"Lovely night," says Tom cheerfully.

Silence.

"I have seldom," says Tom with ecstatic fervour, "seen the chaste Diana so liberal of her charms."

Deeper silence.

"You don't speak!" says Tom reproachfully, dragging his chair closer to hers. "Haven't you seen my classical allusion? Diana—moon, you know. But of course you know. She was represented as a lady 'mit nodings on' except a kilt and a bow, and a spear with which she stabbed her quarry right and left; she was specially dangerous to the *old* game, who couldn't run away."

Silence still, but an ominous rustle and a slight movement of the hand. "Looking for her dagger," says Tom to himself. He could have enjoyed the situation but for his rage against her.

Presently he gets up, and stands right before her, thus rather obstructing her worship of the moon.

"I fear, Miss Fitzgerald, you have quite forgotten me. Pardon my seeming vanity." His tone is scoffing now, and ill warranted to do him good in her sight; it is the tone of one who, having just returned from a voyage of five years or so, is a little bit put out at finding himself forgotten. "My name is Lloyd —Tom Lloyd. And I think I had the pleasure of meeting you once, in the Dark Ages, at a dinner given by our mutual elderly friend, Major O'Hara."

Olivia turns at last.

"I suppose," she says witheringly, "you think yourself amusing."

"Ah! don't be unkinder than you can help," says he.

"At first"—quickly—"when I looked at you, I thought you were Laurence."

"Is that how you always look at Laurence?" he pauses. "*How* you must love him!"

"Where is he?"

"Still mourning over his Burgundy — the little attraction, you see, is not here to-night—and listening to the Major's maunderings."

"I have never heard the Major maunder."

"You will, however. You will."

"Major O'Hara, however *you* may regard him, is a very kind and charming man."

"The salt of the earth."

"At all events"—with extraordinary emphasis—"he does not speak ill of his friends."

"Is that a mark of worth? I shall go up one, then. Neither do I."

"Oh—you! And what have you been saying of him this moment?"

"My good child, Major O'Hara is not my friend. I should choose someone younger as a friend, when I was about it." He is looking straight at her. "Our poor dear Major," continues he reflectively, "is not —well—exactly my contemporary, eh?"

"He is above petty spite, anyway! And—he always speaks kindly and nicely of you."

"Does he? How amiable of him! To be talked of 'kindly,' and especially 'nicely,' is about as much as one person could endure at a time without dying."

"If you will persist in misjudging him——"

"My *dear* girl——"

"Don't, Tom!"

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure. Well, my——"

"Don't be vulgar, Tom."

"I think this is a little hard," says Lloyd. "I do really. And especially when all I wanted was to

please you. What I desired to say (when you so—er—delightfully interrupted me) was that I think the Major is——"

"I won't"—angrily—"have a word said against him!"

"Why should you presuppose I wanted to say a word against him?" He looks at her. "A word against *him*, when, you may remember, I spoke of pleasing *you*. A word against the immaculate one! What do you take me for? I know that to even breathe a suspicion against him would be to forfeit your good opinion for ever."

"You are quite right," says Olivia valiantly. There is no doubt that her present anger against Tom lends strength to her valour. "I regard him as——"

"I know. Spare yourself. He is in your eyes the noblest, the sweetest, the *oldest*—— Oh! er—I *beg* your pardon. No, no; don't stir; it's all right, really. A little slip—a very little one. And he is certainly, as you say, charming. Such profound knowledge of human nature. He has gathered it up. He has had plenty of time given him, you see, to gather up most things. He has even gathered up you. No—don't stir. It was another slip; the *smallest*. And I really do want to talk to you about him. He is such a dear! Don't you think so? Not a friend, exactly, as I have explained to you, but a perfect Dear—with a capital. Girls like Dears—when their homes are gilded. No"—forcibly holding her—"sit down, and let's have a nice *long* talk."

Olivia flings his hand from her.

"I shall not stay another moment!"

"No? In such hot haste to go to him? But he is still enamoured of his Burgundy (which I confess is beyond reproach); and when I promise, too, to talk of him, and of him only! . . . By the bye, I have just had a conversation with him."

"With—Major O'Hara?" Olivia sits down again almost unconsciously.

"Actually—with that great and good man! whose virtues even excel his beauty! Yes—quite a nice little talk; and so up to date that I could hardly tear myself away from it, even to come—here!"

Olivia makes another attempt to rise; checking it almost at its birth, however. But Tom Lloyd, noticing it, with a curious and very bitter smile, goes on.

"It was, in fact, all about——"

"About——?"

"You."

Olivia's face, that up to this has been only angry and defiant, now grows agitated, and all at once she forgets many things—her contempt for Tom, for one thing.

"Oh, Tom, *no?*" says she, in a low, frightened sort of way. It is a question.

"Of you alone—I give you my honour! And why not? The topic was so enthralling that I found a difficulty in leaving his portly side."

Whether it is the "portly side" that does it, or an hysterical desire for laughter that has been asserting itself for the last ten minutes, who can say? but certainly at this moment Olivia gives way to a low, if irrepressible, burst of mirth. Conquering it sharply,

she now looks at him again with eyes that fondly believe they are as rancourous as of old—but are not.

"I don't care," says she, little ripples of laughter still running through a tone that is meant to be annihilating. "I shall never forgive you; you need not think it."

"But forgive *what?*"

"Oh, you know. You know very well. You think that because I *laughed* it is all at an end!"

"An end—between us?"

"Yes."

"But, my dear girl, I am to conclude, then, that there was a beginning?"

"You know perfectly well," with a stamp of her foot, "what I mean! Do you think I have forgotten all you said yesterday?"

"Oh, yesterday! But that is such a long time ago."

"Long or short, there is an end to all friendship between us. That is over, Tom, for ever."

"After friendship comes——"

Olivia, with much dignity, now rises finally.

"Don't go," says Tom. "It isn't worth your while. *I'm* going at once. Haven't, indeed, a moment to spare."

She stops and looks at him in some amazement.

"Going now? So soon?"

"Just now," glancing at his watch.

"But Major O'Hara——"

"That's why I'm going. I really could not, after my last enthralling interview with him, break the spell of its charm by chancing another! No, no;

never, my dear Olivia, risk a joy like that, by making it too familiar. When you marry the Major, confine yourself to one conversation a month with him; you will, I am convinced, find it all-sufficient."

"I wish you would not speak like that!" cries she passionately. "It is as though you thought the Major and—and—I were——"

She stumbles here; Tom laughs. Olivia's face flushes angrily.

"You are in excellent spirits to-night."

"True! To-night my spirits are fairly running away with me," says Tom. "I told you the Burgundy was excellent. I say, Olivia, let us cry pax, and come down to the garden with me. The garden is on my way home."

"Very well," listlessly. "I daresay I shall find Cissy there, and——"

"Bethune?"

"No, Laurence."

"I doubt if he has come out yet."

But below they do meet Laurence and Cissy; and joining them, go through the dewy, scented gardens towards the shrubberies. Tom, happening to glance back, sees the Major and Mrs. Fitzgerald on the balcony, sitting in the very two seats he and Olivia have just vacated. "Completing the bargain," he tells himself bitterly. "By Jove! I shouldn't have thought it of old Dody." Dody, as has been said, is the Lloyds' pet name for Mrs. Fitzgerald.

CHAPTER XVI.

"My heart is sad and heavy,
In this merry month of May."

"DORA," begins the Major somewhat abruptly, "this has been going on a long time."

"A long time?"

"Yes—too long. I suppose you have noticed it?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald leans back where the light cannot play upon her face.

"Yes, yes," she says, a little breathlessly. At last it is coming! He is going to propose for——

"I want to talk to you about Olivia."

"Yes," faintly. She feels herself incapable of anything more than this. One stupid little monosyllable. It *is* coming; and—and what will Olivia say?

"She is now over twenty, I think?" says the Major, in his thoughtful way.

"A month."

"High time for her to think of marriage."

"Oh, surely"—with a little nervous catch in her throat—"it is a little soon to marry?"

"Not a bit of it! The sooner the better. Good for the girl—good for her husband. Marriage keeps a young man straight—out of mischief, you know."

Mrs. Fitzgerald casts a curious glance at him. "A *young* man!" Does he—— Oh, how absurd!

A *young* man! James, of all people, to prove himself a fool of that order!

"No doubt," she says, a little drily.

"Olivia, as your daughter, has my—well, I may say, my honest affection," says Major O'Hara. "You know, in the old days we were—well, friends, anyway, Dora; and—and when the past comes back to me—as it often: indeed"—with simple earnestness —"as it *always* does—I——"

"Yes, I know," breaking in nervously. "I quite understand. And Olivia—— James, I want to say that—that you are making no mistake about *her*. . . . She is the very dearest girl! . . ."

She breaks off, stricken by a sudden thought. If Olivia could have heard her thus sounding her praises to this man, of all men, what would she say? How would she take it? Badly—very badly. Still, Olivia must be shielded at all hazards from the world's rough blasts. And what a position it will be for her pretty darling! Ten thousand a year! And not only position, but the honest love and protection of the kindest-hearted man in the world.

"And a beautiful one," says the Major smiling—*rapturously*—as it seems to Mrs. Fitzgerald. "She has one of the few beautiful faces I have seen in my lifetime." He pauses. Then: "She is the image of you!" says he bluntly.

Mrs. Fitzgerald frowns.

"Nonsense, James!"

"She is indeed! The born image of you! Each moment I see her, I mark the likeness."

"As I was twenty years ago, perhaps."

"*Is* it twenty years ago? Good heavens! how time flies! Well, she's the image of you, anyway; and—and that's why I'm so fond of her."

Mrs. Fitzgerald draws a little further back. She stifles a sigh. To remind her so abruptly of those old days! If he *is* going to propose for Olivia, why doesn't he do it? It can't be modesty! A man who at—well, close on fifty can describe himself as *young* can have few modest scruples left in him.

"She ought to make a good marriage," says the Major, after a pause—a little absently, it seems to her—and then suddenly: "You know I am your friend, Dora."

"My friend? Of course I know that, James. Have you not been my friend all my life?"

"A friend—yes. But—— Look here, Dora; I would be more than that now."

Mrs. Fitzgerald shrinks back into the darkness of the shadows behind her. Her son-in-law, he means.

"You can hardly be more," she says in a voice that has become a mere whisper.

"I could—if you would say one word."

"My dear James! Consider!"

She has taken courage from the shadows. "A word of that sort between you and me——" She stops. How stupid to go on, as if she would deny her girl to this best and handsomest of men!

"Well, it only wants one word between you and me—to—to—— And why not between you and me? Have I not waited long enough?" He hesi-

tates; then, anxiously—*so* anxiously that her many fears of the last few months about his having a sufficiently deep affection for Olivia are completely set at rest: "Shall I say it now, Dora?"

"Not now," she cries in a suffocating tone. "Not to-night. Not—so soon."

"Soon?"

"Oh, I know—I know. To you naturally it seems a long time since you thought of it; but——"

"You are always putting me off," says the Major; and now his voice sounds sad. "However, that you permit me to speak of it *at all* counts for something. It gives me hope."

"Ah, not *too* much!" entreatingly.

"No." The Major has grown grave. "Not too much. Hope with me has been deferred for so long that I doubt if I shall ever have what I want."

CHAPTER XVII.

"The sky is changed! And such a change! O night,
And storm, and darkness."

CARLTON had been more disturbed by the news given him by Blakeney than he cared to let the latter see. Given a chance a few minutes afterwards of escaping from him and the others, he took it, and walking swiftly through the gardens, gained a spot amongst the laurels, usually iso-

lated, and now almost sure to be devoid of human presence.

Having reached it, he strolls slowly up and down, thinking deeply—*so* deeply that every now and then he stops, as though frowning over some difficulty, then strolls on again; always frowning, however. For himself, the situation is simple—— "The heir," as that coarse old brute had reminded him—— But for Chloe——!

Well, it should be simple for her too, and certainly a solid way out of her difficulties. But the will! There is almost nothing he could not leave away from her, so little care for her interests had been taken at the time.

There are, besides, certain provisos possible that might make that document a scourge to her, and Burlingham is quite capable of being as unpleasant as possible. And then—the world; her world and his! Already, according to Blakeney, it seems it is gossiping unpleasantly about her, and, . . . of course very naturally, too. She has laid herself open to that. He himself had heard many things said—things that in spite of his efforts, which were really heroic, he could not put to silence. He must speak to her again—insist upon her listening—and tell her that if she will not agree to——

"She," touching him upon the arm at this moment, brings him back to the present with a violent start. The little graceful figure has crept out of the darkness and joined him before he is conscious of its presence.

"Good heavens, Chloe! How are you here—at

this hour?" It occurs to him suddenly that this is how he had addressed her on his first meeting with her in this part of the world. Is she always to present herself to him as a thing of surprises? And —is that her charm?

"Never mind that," in a low, breathless tone. "Is it true, Granby?—is it true?"

"You—heard, then?"

"Yes; I was outside the window when you were talking to him. I could not resist the desire to run up and see the old monster—but, Granby, *speak!*" with a sudden touch of passion. "*Is* it true?"

"You heard all that I heard."

"And you?"

"I believe it. I have known for a long time that —that there was something wrong with his heart."

"But what do you believe?"

"That he is in bad health; in a very bad way, in fact."

"But does that mean that you think he—is—— Why *don't* you go on?" stamping her foot. "You know what I want to hear. Answer me. *Is* he——"

"Do you know what you are saying?" coldly.

"Oh, if you compel me"—passionately—"is he *dying*, then?"

"At this present moment?" with increasing coldness. "I can't say."

"But you don't think so?" watching his face closely, fearfully. "You—you doubt it?"

"Certainly I shall doubt it—until I hear further news."

"Ah!" It is a sigh, long drawn out. Is it one

of relief or disappointment? Carlton, watching her sharply, cannot be quite sure; and with a strong desire to make the best of her comes, too, the decision that no doubt the news has upset her, and that she is really anxious and—well, *sorry*—in a degree.

"How could he die of heart disease?" asks she after a moment, slowly.

"Many men do."

"Ah! But *he?* You know," looking at Carlton, "he hadn't one. One can't die of a thing one hasn't. I"—with sudden vehemence—"don't believe a word of it. It is only another, and nastier lie, of Uncle John's."

"I don't think so; I don't really, Chloe."

He has now almost persuaded himself that she is genuinely desirous of believing the best instead of the worst. "I expect he is as bad as he can be. For years, you know, people have been expecting that he—— Don't buoy yourself up with the hope of his recovery, because——"

The remainder of his sentence comes to an untimely end. A sharp, cruel indrawing of her breath, a little suppressed but violent exclamation has killed it.

A cloud has rushed across the moon, and in the darkness he can hardly see her; but now the cloud, that is evidently in a violent hurry, has raced on again, and Carlton is once more looking at the charming, changeable, *insouciant* little face. Her eyes are resting steadily on his. They seem, indeed, as if they have been resting there for quite a long

time. Is she like a little, soft, pretty cat? Can she see in the dark? The eyes, at all events, are full of fire—of anger—of disbelief. So great is this change in them, and so great is the silence too—for where Chloe is there is never silence—that Carlton, catching her arm, shakes her slightly.

"Are you awake?" asks he.

She frees herself violently.

"Don't touch me!" She pushes him from her. "Hypocrite!" cries she.

Hypocrite! What can he have done to merit such an unpleasant title.

"What on earth do you mean?" demands he, both aggrieved and disconcerted.

"You know very well. 'Hope,' you said."

"'Hope' I said beyond question. Well, and——"

"Not another word!" She makes an imperious gesture. "You despise me, I know. You think me beneath notice——"

"I beg your pardon. I——"

"*Not* another word! You have for years——"

"A year and a half——"

"Held me in contumely. But I defy you to call *me* a hypocrite. And that term, in my opinion, is the worst in the English language—the worst in the world!"

"It is to be regretted," says Carlton with a shrug. "Perhaps in the next, however, you may find even a harder word to hurl at my devoted head."

"I doubt it. Oh, you can smile if you like. Somebody says that people can smile and smile and—— You will *end* by being a villain, Granby;

I can see you will. However, all that has got nothing to do with this matter."

"I was thinking that," says Carlton calmly. Then: "Why am I a hypocrite?"

"Because you said 'hope.' Do you—*can* you—knowing everything as you do, imagine for one moment that I should hope for his recovery? I tell you plainly that the news of his death would be the best tidings that any living soul could bring me."

"Chloe! Have you no pity, no regret?"

"None, none! There!" stamping her foot on the ground with extraordinary passion. "Don't pursue the subject. Do you want me to tell you how I hate and loathe him, or why? If I told you *why*—— But no! He is your kinsman—*not* mine, thank God!—and so—to you I would spare him. Only, don't force me to speak. Ah! if I did speak——" She pales. Even in the inconstant light of the moon he can see that she not only pales but shrinks at memories known to her alone.

"Do you think it would have been nothing to me, if I were a happy woman, to give up life, real life, and come down here to this little silly place? It would have been a great deal, I can tell you—*if* I had been happy; but as it was—well, I thank Mrs. Gilbert every day of my life for the advice she gave me."

"I am sorry"—hotly—"you ever met Mrs. Gilbert! She is the very last woman in the world that anyone who cared for you would see you intimate with."

"Yet she is the one woman in the world to whom

I can be truly grateful. She has given me a fresh and happy feeling. She sent me here."

"To flirt"—contemptuously—"with Laurence Lloyd!"

"How rude you are, Gigi! And what a prig! Why shouldn't I flirt with someone if I like? Is it a mortal sin?"

"Sometimes; because someone may suffer."

"At *my* hands?" She laughs and holds up the offending members, with the slender fingers spread wide open, close to his eyes. "They are too small," says she. "And so am I, in every sense of the word. But never mind that. It is too stupid for discussion. What I want to tell you is that I am happy, quite happy here, with Mrs. Fitzgerald and her girls. I love them—I do really, Gigi—though I daresay you won't believe me. You have always said you didn't believe I could love anything or anybody. But I do love the Fitzgeralds. If ever—by-and-bye, you know—I—well—have things in my own hands, I shall try and return them some of the kindness they have shown me."

Her beautiful face is now soft and sweet as an angel's. Her eyes are pensive—filled with a gentle longing. Carlton, looking at her, wonders what sort of girl she would have been if in her earlier days she had been thrown into different hands.

"What a puzzle you are!" he says, in a slightly impatient tone. "Are you ever quite honest? Is this only another pose, or do you really enjoy this dull, humdrum existence after all the past excitements?"

"Ah! *Because* of them. Though, if you come to think of it, this present dull existence—as you call it—is only another excitement—something quite new. Perhaps you are right, Gigi, and I am nothing but a bit of artificiality—a *poseuse*—a Dresden figure—always posturing. But then"—defiantly—"has it ever occurred to you that I never had a home—that I never knew what home life *was* until now—and that people with no homes always pose—more or less?"

Is it defiance or misery that dominates her voice? Carlton, who has studied her almost exhaustively during his brief knowledge of her, cannot be quite sure. That he is now regarding her with too speculative an eye she makes known to him with disdainful brusqueness.

"Trying to read me? Well—am I saint or sinner? An object for pity or a hardened offender? Give it up, Gigi, and learn the truth—I am nothing at all. If I myself had to swear to myself, I don't believe I could give a satisfactory answer. I should be hopelessly fogged. Plenty of *me*, however, for the moment, eh? Not"—saucily—"a pleasant subject, am I? Let us, then, as the parsons say, pass on to the next head. Is that bad old man, who calls himself my uncle, really going on Sunday?"

"He is going to-morrow."

"*What!*"

"To-morrow."

"No!"

"It seems," says Carlton, "that he is running over to Naples at once. Starts to-morrow. He would

not have come here at all if he had heard of this fresh attack; but the telegram was sent on to him here."

"And only for the telegram he would have stayed until Sunday. One should be grateful for small mercies."

"You forget"—with extreme disapproval—"what the telegram contained."

"I"—airily—"don't indeed."

"You must"—with decision—"or you would not so speak about it. Oh, come! Think, Chloe! The fact that Mr. Blakeney feels it incumbent on him to go to Naples *at once*, proves how serious he considers the case."

"Serious? As I tell you, I never believe in Uncle John's statements. The one thing is that he is really going to-morrow. To-morrow! Fancy! so *delightfully* soon!" There is open joyousness in her whole air. "You are *sure?*"

"I have said so. Don't expect me to approve of your manner of taking this matter, Chloe. I think it abominable. And I confess I am very uncomfortable about the whole affair; you know that I am your——"

"You are a death's head," interrupts Chloe irreverently. "I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself, going moping round like that. So the beloved uncle is actually going to-morrow—and straight away to Naples? I hope the cooking will make him ill. He is sure to put up at the very cheapest places; but there——" She pauses, and then gives way to a burst of low but irrepressible laughter. "I wonder

what reception '*madam*' will give him, and how his morality will stand her atmosphere. A hundred in the shade, isn't it?"

"Look here, Chloe——"

"I saw her once, do you know."

"You saw her?"

"Yes; I told Charlie Blount I *should* see her, and he arranged it. It was at the Savoy one evening. I dined there with him on purpose."

"Alone?" There is extreme disapprobation in his tone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"'Tis woman that seduces all mankind,
By her we first were taught the wheedling arts."

"QUITE alone. What's the matter now? My dear Gigi, what a bad mind you have! For goodness' sake, don't put on that shocked air, it is so silly. There's a good deal said about Charlie, I can tell you, that isn't true of *him*, but is altogether true of many another man posing as ultra-good. Anyway, I have always found Charlie a very pleasant companion, and nothing more; and one should praise the bridge as one goes over it. If it drowns the next passer-by—why, then she was a fool to go over it. However, that's nothing. And besides, I had a thick veil on. I tell you, I wanted to see my rival—a rival after five months of marriage." She laughs very bitterly. "And—do you know?—I used to quite *fancy*

myself!—little fool! Well, I saw her! Such a beautiful rival! Not so very much painted—not half as much as many of—er—even *your* friends—*our* friends in society—my immaculate Gigi!—and with a little nose and chin that should—that must—carry all before them. Pity"—she pauses, and perhaps there is not as much regret in her tone as she means to throw into it—"pity that there is such a thing as time! She ought to last for ever. Do you know, I almost forgave him when I saw her. She was like a little ripe peach—or a red, red rose. I couldn't eat my dinner for very love of looking at her, and I didn't go till she did. He fumbled very much over the fastening of her cloak—his hands are always so unsteady, you know. I thought her such a *fool* for looking at him."

"Why"—hotly—"think of her at all?"

"Why not? She too is an excitement, and"—mischievously—"you tell me I am fond of that sort of thing. Gigi"—with another little laugh that almost shakes her slender frame—"I am thinking now of her meeting with Uncle John! Can't you see it? *I* can. Uncle John, at first with a stiff back and a proud stomach and an *air*"—drawing herself up in a pompous manner—"and then half an hour of the siren, who after that orders in brandy-and-soda, which Uncle John thinks he had better accept, as shewing a Christian and tolerant spirit; and she, wishing to be tolerant with regard to him (poor thing, I pity her there!) takes a B.-and-S. with him, just for the sake of tolerancy and hospitality, you know—and *the rest.* And after that there is a relax-

ing of Uncle John's back, and finally a *tableau* that shews Uncle John all smirks and smiles and madam triumphant! Charming *tableau*, eh?"

"I don't care for *tableaux* of that sort, and you could hardly have heard all that was said, or you would know that—the woman you speak of has—left him."

"Oh, what a pity! I had such a vivid picture of her and Uncle John. How disappointing you always are, Gigi! And so even *she* has left him! I'm sure I'm not surprised. Who was the other man?"

"It scarcely matters, I should think. You had better come back at once, without risking the chance of people finding you here."

"I have risked that already. I like risks. I shall go back presently, when——"

"You will come back now"—sharply—"with me."

"Indeed I shall not!" emphatically. "I shall go as I came—by myself. Not with you, for anything. I'm tired of you and your scoldings. I'm tired of everybody, if it comes to that; and besides, I want to be alone—to look things over."

"You shall certainly not go home by yourself at this late hour."

"Why not? I can run all the way through the woods, and you know in Ireland one is so safe. The genuine tramp is unknown. Now, be reasonable for once in your life."

"I shall see you home."

"Obstinate pig!" says Chloe, with a stamp of her foot. "How I hate you, when you take that tone!

And yet"—with a swift and most exquisite change of manner and a softening of her lovely eyes—"I don't, Granby. How could I, when I remember how you defended me to *him* just now? Yes, yes, I heard that too. You would not have a word said against me. You are very kind to me after all, Granby; and sometimes"—leaning forward and laying the tips of her fingers a little nervously upon his arm—"sometimes I think you are—*almost*—fond of me."

Carlton lays his hand deliberately on hers, and raising it from his sleeve, lets it fall. The fact that in doing so he has hurt her—has crushed the slender fingers between his with a strength, a passion, of which in his present mood he is unconscious—is not known to him, for Chloe makes no sign. But her mood changes, and she grows hard and indifferent again.

"All that is beside the question," says he, coldly. "The thing is to get you back to The Hermitage without being found here."

"I"—almost violently—"don't care where I am found."

"I can quite believe it"—drily—"but *I* do. If you dislike this surveillance, thank yourself for leaving your proper position in society and coming to this place."

"Oh, as for that"—with a shrug—"I have your own words for it that I was justified in my action—'*quite* justified' was what you said. And I fully and freely agree with you there, for the first, and probably the last, time in my life."

"Are you ready?" asks he immovably.

"No, I am not!" She defies him passionately. "I *won't* go with you. And I am sorry—I'm sorry from my heart—that I said just now I didn't hate you. It was a lie! I *do* hate you. See?"

"I have seen it always." The iciness, the extreme dulness, of his tone reduces her anger somewhat. She looks at him.

"You have *not!*" retorts she. "Because I *don't* hate you; I said that only to vex you. You aren't *worth* my hatred. Of course I can't bear you, but I don't *hate* you. And now go away."

"I am waiting to take *you* away."

"Granby, don't be a fool!" cries she suddenly. "Can't you see that if you persist in this they will miss you, and I shall certainly be found out, and Uncle John will learn who I am, and—— *Do* let me go back as I came, Gigi; do now"—coaxingly—"dear Gigi." She has come closer to him. In her anxiety she has forgotten all about her late repulse, and has laid her hand upon his arm anxiously, eagerly. She is going, perhaps, to add to her entreaties when suddenly she steps back, her face changing first to a rose red, then to an extreme pallor.

Four figures have just stepped into the little deserted spot where she and Carlton are standing. They must have seen her late attitude, a pose that the moonlight made romantic; her uplifted face, her hand upon his arm. They must, too, have heard her last words, "*Dear Gigi.*" Yes, it is impossible to ignore them, or to be ignored. Indeed, one of

the advancing four seems to see no necessity for concealment.

"Ah, Chloe!" cries Cissy, "I knew you would be lonely at home without us. You should have let me stay with you. Did you run here for want of something to do? Why don't you come in? Major O'Hara would be so glad. Laurence, will you tell him." She looks round, but Laurence, who had been at her elbow a moment ago, is now gone. "Why, where is Laurence?"

"I frightened him away," says Chloe with the utmost calm. "He thought I was my own spook, perhaps. Oh, I had such a delicious run all through the woods and under the moonlight! Do you know, it has quite taken away the last vestiges of my headache. I felt so bored when you were gone that I decided on coming up here to try and get a glimpse of you amidst all your wild dissipations—thinking not to be seen, you will understand. But this tiresome Granby——!" She shrugs her shoulders, glancing expressively at Carlton.

If she had expected Granby to back her up, she is mistaken.

"Your bed would have been a far better place for you at this hour than wandering about here," says he angrily.

"I am certain you were born with advice on your tongue," says Chloe with immense disdain. "But we can't all be prosaic, dear Granby, can we? What do you think, Mr. Lloyd?" to Tom, who has not spoken, but who is looking at her with an expression she divines perfectly. "Or is it"—as if reflecting—

"that you are prosaic also? Do you too, then, think this little escapade of mine a crime? By the way, this is the second time you have found me out." She pauses. Carlton's eyes turn upon her as if startled —a fact that does not go unobserved by Olivia or Cissy, who look distinctly curious; as for Olivia, she is looking at Tom.

"Found you out?" It is Carlton who has echoed her words. Chloe, delighted with the small sensation she has created, breaks into a merry laugh.

"Twice, Granby; and always in the evening—in the treacherous dusk! Not in any dreadful peccadillo, however, or hitherto unheard-of crime. Eh, Mr. Lloyd? You remember the first time, don't you?—just outside the gates of The Hermitage?"

"Perfectly!" Both Tom's tone and expression are stolid. Who is this beautiful and fantastic thing? From where has she come? To where is she going? And will she break the heart of that silly fool Laurence before she goes?

"I am afraid you have little reservations in your mind about me," goes on Chloe, still addressing Tom; she takes a step nearer to him; a gay, coquettish, defying smile is lighting her too-alluring face. Her eyes challenge him, and, indeed, they get the victory, for Tom, looking into them, feels all at once that the fire of his suspicions about her is dying away into mere ashes; and he feels too that some man—*any* man—might be forgiven for thinking her adorable.

Chloe, reading him like an open book, lets him go. Another small victory to her, for the moment; and

to him no harm. A perfectly bloodless victory. It is possible that she cannot help these desires, that the thirst for conquest is in her blood. But she knows well that the conquest of to-night will be undone to-morrow. That to-morrow, when the glamour of her presence is not on him, Tom Lloyd will be as prejudiced against her as ever.

"Why not come in, Chloe?" asks Olivia quickly. If Tom had meant to reply to Chloe's remark, she does not give him time.

"In this frock?" Chloe holds out the hem of her pretty morning gown with a tragic gesture. "Would you have me spoil the dear Major's evening? No! And, Olivia, you won't say anything about my being here when you go in, will you? or you, Cissy? I know"—with a glance at Tom—"that Mr. Lloyd is a model of reticence. It sounds so silly of me, running up here, doesn't it? but I felt lonely really, and—— Will you take me home now, Granby?" to Carlton, who, though he does not shew it, is conscious of extreme surprise at her sudden change of mind. Only a moment ago he should *not* take her home; now she asks him to go with her.

"Certainly."

"You will have plenty of time to do that and get back again to say good-night to Major O'Hara; won't he, Cissy? Well, good-night—for a little while." She kisses her pretty hand to them, and disappears with Carlton amongst the bushes.

"Do you know," says Cissy, as she and Olivia and Tom stand looking after them, "I think I have guessed the whole truth about her?"

"If you have, you may pose at once as a nineteenth-century sibyl," says Tom, who has already (Chloe had not counted on so speedy a recovery) got from under her spell.

"Yes; I see it. Her dreadful old guardian persecuted her to marry one man, when she had her own" (she refrains with difficulty from saying "true") "lover close at hand." And, indeed, she speaks in a clear and most off-hand way of the deepest mystery on earth—of love—of the heart of the man—the heart of the woman—with all the extraordinary carelessness of a young girl who as yet has not even tasted the well of life. "Can't you see it, Olivia? Mr. Carlton is the lover. And, like a *true* lover"—she has brought the necessary word in here very successfully—"he has defied the guardian and followed her."

"Nonsense!" says Olivia. "Why should her guardian object to Mr. Carlton? He is of good family, I hear, and very rich."

Cissy glances at her.

"How you think of money!" says she, not contemptuously, but only as if Olivia were a little stupid. But Olivia flushes hotly under her words and—Tom's eyes! "There might be some other reason for her guardian's disapproval. Another man, for instance"—brightening under the conviction—"with a great deal *more* money, or a title, or something. Don't you think with me, Tom? Isn't it quite plain? Don't you see it, Tom?"

"See what?"

"That he is in love with her."

"What should I know of love?"

"And she?" Olivia asks this question; it is addressed to him.

"Miss Jones is a woman," coolly. "Most women are mercenary. If he is rich, be he old or young, handsome or hideous, I daresay she will manage to fall in love with him. But really I know nothing about it, as I have already said." He looks at her deliberately. "Love has passed me by," says he.

"You are right," says Olivia in a clear, cold voice. "You know nothing of love, or women."

"I shall speak to her to-night," cries Cissy eagerly. "I shall indeed. You two may say what you like, but I'm sure he is the hero of her story."

"I shouldn't speak to her if I were you," says Olivia.

"Why not? I should think she'd like sympathy. And I'm sure Mr. Carlton is the man she loves. Anyway, I'll ask Chloe to-night."

And so she does.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Now, all good that comes or goes is—
Is as the smell of last year's roses."

"GOT it badly, old man?" asks Tom. He has broken somewhat suddenly the silence born of his tranquil smoke, and Laurence, lounging half in and half out of the window, starts slightly, as if from

thoughts not altogether happy. It is Sunday afternoon, and as "stilly" as that "night" we are always singing about.

"Got what badly?" The tone is distinctly aggressive.

"It. The inevitable *it*."

"I don't understand you."

"Not you! You've got Miss Jones upon the brain, and you *know* it. That's your disease, eh?"

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

"My dear fellow! surely a very rude word to use in connection with her! For it is of Miss Jones we speak."

"Don't be an ass!" Laurence's face is furious as he turns it on the other.

Tom laughs.

"Worse than I thought, even," says he. "Too late to chuck it, I suppose?"

"You think"—Laurence is now very angry—"that I am in love with—with——"

"The irresistible Chloe. Well, so I *do* think. But I think too that——" Tom pauses here. It is a nasty thing to say, but to say it seems imperative—"She is not for you, Laurence. She is 'for your masters.'"

"D—n it, man, can't you speak out? What *do* you mean?"

"Well, I will speak out if you like," says Tom. "Can't you see that her name was never Jones, and that she's a stranger to country life, and that——?"

"That——? Go on, can't you?"

"That Carlton is a very rich man, so far as I can see. You"—he looks at the other very kindly and sadly—"would have small chance against him."

"You mean that she——"

"No, indeed! I mean that *he*—— Take a run over to Canada, Laurence, and free yourself from this disastrous affair."

"I don't believe a word of it!" says Laurence fiercely. "Not one. Just because last night you saw her go home with Carlton, you judge her with this infernal unfairness. You think because of that, that she——"

"My dear fellow, I don't judge her at all. I shouldn't presume to do so."

"You do, for all that. You make her out unworthy, disreputable."

"I don't, indeed." He remembers that moment last night when her beautiful compelling eyes were on him, and how he went down before them—to the extent, at all events, of believing in her as being human; and—well—he is true still to what he thought of her then. A brilliant, destructive little creature, perhaps, but with great good in her, and much charity—and charity covers such a multitude of sins; and surely her sins are light. Almost he is on the point of sounding her praises to Laurence, when he pulls himself up. "I think only that we know nothing of her, and that—she strikes me as being a somewhat tricky sort of young woman."

Laurence bursts into a rather wild, disagreeable laugh.

"What *do* you know about her?" says he.

"Nothing, as I have said. And you—what do you know?"

"I can see——"

"Can you? Have you applied the Röntgen rays to search the depths of her soul?"

Laurence with a very white face turns upon him.

"Sneer away," says he. "As for me——"

"Was there a sneer?" says Tom quickly. "You rush the question, don't you? No; I have no desire to sneer, but I tell you, this girl who calls herself Miss Jones——"

"If"—passionately—"she *calls* herself Miss Jones, she *is* Miss Jones!"

Tom's eyebrows go up a bit, but he makes no reply. He smokes diligently for a little while, then:

"Go for a trip," says he; "if not to Canada, well, then to Africa, or—Australia. I'll square the governor over the money."

"Why should I go?" says Laurence, his face dark and angry. "One would think I was a fool, or a baby!"

Tom laughs.

"Not a baby."

"A fool, then."

"My dear boy, you describe every man in your state to a nicety."

"I like"—angrily—"to hear you talk—you, who have never been in love with anyone! Why, what do you know about it?"

"Lookers-on see most of the game."

"After they have learnt it."

There is a little pause, and then Laurence, moving

towards the door, says, still with a frowning brow and angry air:

"I am *nothing* to her, and she is nothing to me."

His hand is on the door.

Tom looks back at him.

"Is that why you are going to her now?" asks he.

Laurence, not vouchsafing a reply (had he one?), slams the door behind him, and Tom, still leaning against the chimney-piece, falls into thought.

"Both in the same boat," thinks he. "Poor old Laurence! Couldn't fancy me in love. Well"—rousing himself with a short and disagreeable gesture—"I don't fancy *myself* when in it, if it comes to that. Pshaw! What asses we both are! And with all my eloquence I haven't given my brother so much as one shove up on the right road."

CHAPTER XX.

"Oh! all fair lovers about the world,
There is none of you, none, that shall comfort me."

CHLOE had not gone to church in the morning, although Carlton had assured her that Mr. Blakeney would leave Aughribeg on Saturday. She had not been able to hear of his actual going, and she thought it better to have another headache rather than risk the chance of meeting him. And now, though it is drawing towards six o'clock, she still keeps herself a martyr to neuralgia, refusing to go out with

the girls and Mrs. Fitzgerald for the walk they usually take on Sunday evenings.

There is a huge white rug in one of the pretty old-world windows of The Hermitage, and on this, with the help of a cushion or two, she has ensconced herself, a book (presumably for reading purposes) upon her knees, but her eyes are fixed not on it, but on the lovely world outside, where she can see far off the silvery firs silhouetted clearly against the fleecy sky, and here, just below her, the flowers flaunting their many hues, their exquisite breaths. Over there is a vision of

"Brooks that sing by brambly ways,"

and here, close to her, in the dear old shrubbery on her left, a thrush on a bough is singing pæans to the heavens above with all his might and main.

She settles herself more cosily into her self-made nest, and lazily lets thought run riot. The hour, the intense stillness—all tend to drowsiness; the very perfumes from the garden go that way; indeed,

"The gentle air, sae ladylike,
Has on a scented gown,"

and over everything a little mist of warmth, of sleep, is lying.

But Chloe, amidst her pillows, is wide awake. Her lovely eyes, always a splendid violet, though at times of anger or emotion almost black, are looking over the hills and beyond them—in search of what? Her lips are closely pressed together.

Suddenly, as if some thread in her thoughts has snapped, and having gone to pieces has made room for another—a merrier quip—she laughs aloud, and throwing up the hands that had been so firmly, almost cruelly, clasped upon her knee, flings them above her head and behind it. The little scene of last night between her and "the girls," as she always calls them, comes back to her.

They had been so *sure;* they had quite arranged it, indeed. She could see that Olivia, at first, had been somewhat uncertain, but that Cissy, later on, had converted her to her own belief.

"We know it all now, Chloe. We have guessed it," Cissy had said; and then she had told Chloe what she had guessed about her and Carlton. A most romantic tale. Chloe had covered her face with her hands. Overcome by emotion, Cissy said afterwards. Olivia, however, had not been so positive. But neither of them had guessed that Chloe, beneath the veil of her hands, had been convulsed with laughter. She had conquered that irrepressible burst of mirth sufficiently to be able to raise her face presently and tell them "that they had promised before she came not to ask questions; not to——"

"No, no, no! Of course they would say nothing."

"Not even to Tom or——"

"Not even to Tom or Laurence."

She, however, had not mentioned Laurence.

Here now, lounging amongst her cushions, she laughs afresh over that silly scene. Fancy their thinking her in love with Gigi! It is even funnier to think that they believe Gigi to be in love with *her!*

That dreadful old Gigi! who regards her as a mere peg on which to hang his hateful scoldings! Anyway, she has put them "off the scent," as hunting men say; and that is a point gained. It seems specially worth gaining, now that Mr. Blakeney has been so near, and yet, thank heaven, is now so far! Once let everyone get their minds on to the fact that she is in love with Granby, or he with her—it really doesn't matter a little bit which—and the real truth will be thrust into the background, until——

Oh, that's all nonsense! Heart, indeed! *Pouf!* Pity to waste a thought over it!

And so they think she is in love with Granby! How comic! However, it will be just as well that they shall not declare their thought to anyone. She has put them on their honour. She has specially mentioned for silence Tom and Laurence. Poor old Laurence! She laughs again here, as if——

Her laughter is still upon her lips as Laurence, who has entered by the lower window, strides up to her.

His face is very white; his eyes seem to burn into hers as she looks back at him from her little snow-white nest amongst her cushions. "What an awful temper he has!" she says to herself, as she looks up at him, blandly, sweetly, in no wise put out by his blazing eyes.

"Is it true?" asks he hoarsely. It is not a question; it is a demand.

"Is what true?" She smiles up at him. A little, slender, defenceless creature, with only her eyes and her mouth and her whole personality to ward off the

angry wrath of an almost murderous man. "The Armenian question? The Cuban absurdity? The Venezuelan riddle? The Soudan?—we must wait awhile for the last, but it will be a triumph at the end. Don't you think so? Ah! you are not English. Still——"

She has warded it off very brilliantly so far, but after all one can only go "so far" and no farther, when the tide is sweeping down upon one.

"Listen to me," interrupts he. His tone seems to break away for ever her petty attempts at stemming the rush of his rage. "I have one thing to ask you —only one. Is there anything between you and Carlton?"

Chloe, lifting her brows, seems to be lost in speculation.

"Now, who has suggested that to you?" asks she, after a little while, and with an air of the deepest interest.

"Answer me!" returns he hoarsely—roughly, indeed.

"Under what penalty?" She smiles up at him with slow defiance from her rug and her cushions. What a fool he is, after all, to think of bringing *her* to book like this! "How you look!" with a saucy glance at him. "Your money or your life sort of business."

"Answer me," says he again.

"I shall answer you when I like, and when I understand. How uncomfortable you are, Laurence! Standing in this hot weather is always so sure to—— Well, you know, it is so bad for the

temper—though your temper is always beautiful. Now, do take a chair—this one, this one near to me—and tell me all about it. By the bye"—very anxiously—"have you had tea? No? You won't have any, really? Well, if you *won't*——"

"Is there," repeats he doggedly, "anything between you and Carlton?"

"The same question!" She smiles again. "And what if I refuse to answer it?"

"I shall know that there is."

"Yes? Well, I refuse."

"Chloe!"

At this her smile broadens into a laugh.

"Is that going too far? At all events, I shall not answer your question until you have answered mine." She leans forward. "Who put this idea into your head? Who"—slowly—"told you?"

"Ah!" with a quick anguish. "It is true, then?"

"I haven't said so. Who told you?—Cissy?—Olivia?"

"No."

"Mr. Lloyd?"

He hesitates.

"Ah! Mr. Lloyd." She is silent. Her mind has run off to Tom—to that last meeting with him. He had not been, then, so enslaved as she had imagined. Ah! One for Tom as soon as possible.

"Mr. Lloyd, one can see, is always right. Of *course* there is something between us. Granby is my cousin, you see, and a cousinship, however distant, counts for something; but——"

"This is prevarication!" cries Laurence, fiercely,

and then goes off at a tangent. His misery has reached the furious stage. She has admitted that, if not actually engaged to Carlton, there is, at all events, something between them, and this, clashing with the memory of how he had offered her that paltry sum of money, believing honestly that she was in need of it, cuts him to his heart's core. He stands looking down on her, pale, wretched, his face all too eloquent, a storm of passionate reproach upon his tongue. His words seem to burn themselves into her brain. So then she had known when listening to his silly offers of help that help was at her hand. She had even pretended to be deeply grateful for the stupid offer; and all the time—all the time—(choking) she had known she had only to say one word to the man she was virtually engaged to to get all she wanted—if, indeed, she ever wanted anything. No doubt she and Carlton had laughed secretly over his presumption, his——

But now Chloe has sprung to her feet.

"How dare you talk to me like that!" She turns her flashing eyes on his, and all at once it seems to him that the Chloe of a moment ago—the Chloe he has always known—has disappeared, and in her place is a small, imperious, haughty creature, who has been accustomed to find her lightest word a command, her very glance of immense importance.

A second, and it is over; her eyes are again smiling, indifferent, and she has again dropped with a soft, amused laugh to her rug, curling herself up there like a little white kitten—a kitten with claws.

"What is it all about?" asks she, looking up at him sweetly. "You are angry with me because you found me with Granby in Major O'Hara's garden the other night? Well, why shouldn't I be there—with him, or anyone else for that matter? What is it to *you?*"

"*Don't!*" says he, as if she had stabbed him.

"Oh, nonsense!" airily. "How can any act of mine touch you? Just consider." She leans towards him, and raising her eyes, that are now filled with a mocking light, fixes them on his. "Only think of the category under which you have placed me from the beginning. You come here to-day to accuse me of double-dealing, of deceit, of all sorts of horrible things; but you should remember that you *expected* all this."

"*Expected?*"

"Why, yes!" arching her brows. "Can't you see you are only being true to your first instincts, your first thoughts of me? 'An adventuress' was what you called me, as I came towards you on the afternoon of my arrival. Surely that was the pretty title you gave me. It was a new one (I have had many), but it was *so* new, *so* full of promise, that I assure you I was unable to forget it."

"This is ungenerous!" He has coloured a dark red, but he does not attempt to deny her accusation. "I had not seen you when I said that."

"Surely, therefore"—lightly—"the ungenerosity lies with you! Not having seen me, you still condemned. However"—rising gracefully—"it doesn't matter at all. Nothing ever matters really, if one

could only try and believe it." She moves towards a writing-table. "I don't like to seem rude; but—you can't want to stay here any longer, and I have a few letters to get off before to-morrow's early post."

"Is that a dismissal?" The misery in his tone, if still curbed by a touch of anger, is quite open to her. Hesitating, she lifts the pen she has taken up (with a rather cruel intimation to him that he had better go away), and nibbling the feathers, glances at him over it.

"Aren't you a silly boy?" says she.

"I don't know about that," gloomily. "I feel a mad fool, anyway."

She looks amused.

"So good of you to put the 'mad' like that, and not the other way round. 'D-a-m' is a horrid word. Shews such nice feeling. Nicer feeling than I have shown, eh?"

This little bit of *persiflage* he lets go by him. One thought alone is in his mind, and again he gives voice to it, in different language.

"You called him Gigi."

"Did I? How remiss of me! it is very naughty to call one's cousin by a nickname, isn't it?"

"Chloe, *tell* me! Don't"—vehemently—"send me away like this." He is now bending over her, as she sits with her pen straggling uselessly, objectlessly, over the paper beneath it. "Don't trifle with me. *Are* you engaged to Carlton?"

Something in this question seems to strike Chloe as curious. She colours swiftly, vividly, and the

look of one who has just listened to a most amazing and absurd suggestion expresses itself on her mobile face.

"What!" Her tone is so full of this new extreme surprise that for a moment he takes courage. As for Chloe, now that her astonishment is at an end, a sense of the ludicrous comes to her. That he should be jealous of Granby, should even go so far as to believe her capable of having a tenderness for him, was quite possible, and, indeed, natural, considering all the silly circumstances that have surrounded them since Carlton's coming; but that he should think of Granby as caring for her, as engaged to her —to her!

She leans back and laughs until her slender frame literally trembles with mirth. Oh, if Granby could only hear!

Olivia and Cissy had hinted at an understanding between her and Gigi; but to hear the word "engagement"! Are they all mad together? Can't they see? Why, he despises her, thinks her frivolous, heartless. Only the other day he had condemned her for her want of feeling. Does he ever lose an opportunity of scolding her? And as for loving her—why, to-night when she had said to him that—that she thought he *might* be fond of her, he had thrust her aside! . . . Her laughter comes to a sharp ending.

"Well—are you?" says he doggedly.

"Nonsense!" She has picked up her pen again, and has gone back to her scribbling of her own name: "Chloe." She is thinking not of what she is writing,

but of this stupid mistake of his and of the Fitzgeralds, and keeps on scribbling "Chloe" idly.

"Why," cries he — passionately — "can't you speak?"

"A sceptic to the end!" She looks up for a moment, and, as if impelled to mischief by a sight of his anxious face, goes on very slowly and impressively: "Must I answer? *Will* you hear it, then? Yes? Then brace yourself. You are sure you would not like to wait until to-morrow? No? Well, your blood be upon your own head!"

"Go on," hoarsely.

"If you *will* have it——"

She breaks off with an apparently heavy sigh, as if fearful for his sake of giving the final word.

"It is 'Yes'," says he, his face very white.

"A bad guess," she laughs. "My dear Laurence, it is 'No.'"

He draws a long breath. He would perhaps have clasped her hand, but that it is still moving carelessly over the paper beneath her, and because too, perhaps, of something in her calm and indifferent pose that forbids ecstatics. Then all at once his high exaltation dies away, and he finds himself once more thrall to suspicion.

"Is that true?"

She stops her scribbling for a moment to give him a curious glance.

"I am sure you don't quite know how rude you are. You must believe me or not as you will."

She is a little angry now, and her pen begins to write faster and faster, yet only "Chloe." Nothing

more seems to occur to her, though as a fact she is thinking of herself at this moment far less than of anything else in the world. She is not thinking of Laurence either, or of anyone, for the matter of that; only of that ridiculous idea of her being engaged to Gigi. Gigi, who has always——

A hand laid suddenly on hers, holding it down upon the paper, brings her back to the present. The pressure of Laurence's hand is unhurtful, but distinctly masterful.

"What is the truth *now?*" His voice, low, passionate, is at her ear. Involuntarily, after the first swift, unavoidable glance upwards of angry inquiry, her eyes go back to the page before her—the page on which her hand is being held. And there she reads "Chloe Carlton."

CHAPTER XXI.

"I thought as much. This comes, you see,
Of sentiment and Arcady."

It appears, indeed, as if she had condemned herself. How could she have written that? C. B. is her usual signature; and yet *Carlton*—— It must be confessed that at the first moment she is a little taken aback at her own stupidity, and for an infinitesimal space of time is silent. Then she looks up at him with a smile, that is amused if anything.

"I feel like one of those delightfully interesting

people who in the Dark Ages were found out cheating at cards, and had a dagger stuck through their hands to—fix the crime, was it? There, take away your hand, Laurence; it hurts me."

He withdraws his hand at once. His eyes, however, he does not withdraw.

She springs to her feet.

"Well, well, well!"—impatiently — "what does your face mean? What a look!—as if I were the most advanced criminal of my year, and that you——"

"Carlton! Is that your name?"

"My name is Jones!" with distinct defiance.

"Is that true too?" asks he cynically. His eyes are burning into hers. Is it contempt that lies in them? Alas! if it is, it is not the contempt to save him. "Do you think"—in a low tone—"that you can deceive me still? Tell me the truth, *now*. Is Carlton your real name? Are you married to him?"

Chloe frowns, and again that swift flush dyes her face. Good heavens! What fools there are in this lovely world! Married to Gigi! The thought has never so much as presented itself to her before, and now—now—— She turns to Laurence, her face very cold and unkind.

"I think you hardly know what you are saying."

"I do, however!" violently. "And you *shall* answer me! Are you married to Carlton?"

"My word seems to be of such small account to you that——"

"Speak!"

"Well, then"—with an imperious glance—"no."

"Or engaged to him?"

"Not even so much."

He comes closer to her.

"How can I believe you? A last word—a last, Chloe. Are you engaged to anyone?"

She takes a moment to answer this. Her thoughts have flown backwards. Is she engaged in any sense?

"No"—calmly—"I am not engaged to anyone."

"I wish I dared believe you," says he under his breath. She hears him, however.

"I think you dare a great deal!" Her eyes are now flashing. "You have dared more than most. What do you mean, Laurence? Do you desire a quarrel with me?"

She is facing him, her beautiful head thrown up, her eyes on his.

"Not that. I would only know the truth——"

The truth! After what she had told him! Does he still doubt?

"You get singularly near the quarrel," says she coldly, drawing back. She seems suddenly to have grown into quite a tall Chloe—a Chloe with frowning eyes and a hard mouth. The touch of *hauteur* that had so surprised him a while ago returns again. It no longer surprises, it only maddens him and serves to heighten the passion of rage and jealousy that is consuming him. At once, and disastrously, he loses his entire self-control.

"Better to quarrel with you than be your *dupe!*"

The words and tone are insolent. She can see that he is almost beside himself with grief and fear. But to her—to speak to *her* like that!

"My dupe!" She repeats the word very slowly and delicately. *His* insolence had been blunt; *hers* cuts to the very heart. It sounds as though she considers it unparalleled impertinence on his part to think he could ever be so much to her as even her dupe.

Then her mood changes. They are swift in changing. Always a capricious creature, without training of any sort, or else bad training, she has ever let herself go as the fancy took her, and is merry or melancholy, charming or insolent, tender or unsympathetic, within the hour, just as the hour suits. A moment ago it suited her to be angry, and now the weariness of all things comes to her.

Why be angry? Is anything worth so deep an emotion? Give him a little stab and let him go. He is only one fool amongst the many.

"Dear Laurence"—smiling faintly, and with distinct boredom—"you are in a frightful temper. That you admit, of course. But perhaps you don't know the reason why. Shall I tell it to you?"

"Why should you trouble yourself?"

"It is no trouble," sweetly. "If, however, you are afraid to hear it——"

"I don't think so," coldly.

"No? Well, hear it, then." She has clasped her hands on the frame of the chair behind her, and now leaning back against it, surveys him with an amused air. "You are in a bad temper, and you are angry with me, not because you think me deceitful, or untruthful, or fast, or dreadful in any way, but just because you think you are in love with me."

He takes a step towards her, but she waves him back with one hand, laughing lightly, and without for a second disturbing her somewhat insolent pose. "Now, now—deny it if you can. If"—throwing her head still further back, and glancing at him through half-closed lids—"if you *dare!*"

Her whole air is taunting, cruel. As he turns to leave her she laughs again, not loudly, but in a low, satisfied fashion. Yet even before the door has quite closed on him a reaction has set in. Once again her mood changes.

Oh! she has been bad to him, poor boy! Only a boy after all, if a very rude one. She must make amends before he is quite gone. All night, perhaps, he may be thinking—— Oh, no! she will not resist this impulse to try and smooth away the troubled waves of her own making—to restore him to a happier frame of mind.

The impulse to restore herself to the old place in his heart is perhaps a deeper feeling still, and nearer the truth, but she does not acknowledge that.

Running to the window at the lower end of the room—the window that overlooks the avenue—she throws it up and waits.

Laurence must go by the rhododendrons over there. Ah! there he is! As he reaches the bend in the avenue on which her eyes are fixed, she leans forward and calls to him in a clear, sweet voice.

"Laurence!"

He turns. His face is white and wrathful, and older, surely, than it ought to be. It strikes even her unrighteous soul with some sort of pity. It

strikes her too, however, as being comical, which rather spoils the first effect.

She cranes her pretty neck a little further out, and some of her body with it, and waves him a little kiss with her right hand.

"Didn't I tell you you were a silly boy?" cries she gaily, and waits for a reply.

But no reply comes. After that first involuntary movement in her direction he had turned on his heel and gone on his homeward way. Had he even waited to hear what she had said?

Chloe frowns. What a temper! Not even a backward glance! He had gone away as if capable of forgetting her—of throwing her out of his life for ever—of—even disapproving of her, like Gigi!

Gigi! How curiously his name had come in to-day! Engaged to him! Married to him! Fancy being married to Gigi! Good heavens! what a life he would lead her!—or is it that she would lead him? Gigi, who has always been so horrid—so preachy—so——

"Oh, well"—with a little stamp—"all men are horrid!" She tries to take great courage from this thought. Yet it is with a little beaten feeling she turns to leave the room, and as she walks into the hall she finds old Feeney looking through one of the windows with a deeply sorrowful expression in her dark Irish eyes. Had she been watching the going of Laurence? The old woman is so engrossed, either with what she has seen or the thoughts arising from it, that she hardly hears Chloe's footsteps until the girl is at her elbow.

"What, Feeney!" cries she gaily. "Watching a young man!—and on a Sunday afternoon, too, when you ought to be telling your beads. Oh, Feeney!"

Feeney bends a reproving eye upon her.

"'Twas lookin' afther him I was surely," says she, "an' divil a throt I could see in the walk of him. 'Tis like an ould man he wint."

"Tired, perhaps," suggests Chloe sympathetically.

"Aye; dead tired, heart an' sowl, poor boy! Faix, 'tis well ye know it; an' why for no, since 'tis yer own doin'."

"Nonsense, Feeney! Come and sit down here and talk to me," pulling the old woman on to a big oak settle in the hall. "I suppose"—audaciously—"you think you are angry with me?"

"Faith, there'd be a dale o' good in bein' angry wid ye! Wouldn't there, now?" says Feeney, with immense irony.

"There would. There would, really. I'd like you to say right out what you think of me."

"Would ye, now?" says Feeney.

"Oh, I know what you mean—that I don't like unkind things to be said to me. Well, nobody does, you know, Feeney. But—I can't bear you to be vexed with me."

"Arrah, get out wid ye, Miss Chloe, an' yer slutherin' tongue. 'Tisn't coaxin' one o' the young men ye are now. Wisha! what d'ye mean at all, by talkin' to an ould woman like this?"

"It is because you are cross with me, Feeney," says the coaxer, rather dismally. "Everyone is

cross with me now, I think. And I hate it. I want everyone to love me, Feeney."

"Divil a doubt, I doubt ye," mutters Feeney. "Worse luck for some I could name."

"I don't think," says Chloe, who is in one of her miserable moods now, and who feels forsaken and forlorn, "I could live, Feeney, if people weren't fond of me."

"Couldn't ye?" says Feeney with a sniff. "Masther Laurence thrown in as wan o' thim, perhaps?"

"Oh, Master Laurence," says Chloe indifferently. "As for him—you saw yourself, Feeney (you were watching him out of the window, were you not?), how he went away without even responding to my—my good-bye. So rude! Wasn't it, now?"

"Rude, me dear, perhaps. But faix, 'twas cute!" says Feeney, rubbing her mouth. "I niver thought 'twas in him."

"What do you mean, Feeney? How unkind you are to me! You have sympathy for everyone but me. Why shouldn't he have said—well—said that good-bye to me? Do you think I could harm him, that you speak like that?"

"I'll tell ye one thing I think," says Feeney solemnly, "that there'll be war shortly."

"War!"

"Aye, fegs! Bloody war, an' battle, an' murther! —unless ye pull yerself in a bit."

"Feeney!"

"'Tisn't Feeney at all, 'tis yerself ye ought to be addressin'. 'Tis right well ye know what I mane. I'm not so far gone on the road to glory as not to

see how ye're carryin' on. Not alone wid Masther Laurence, but wid Misther Carlton as well."

Chloe stares at her for a moment, then bursts out laughing.

"The same old story!" cries she.

"Aye, laugh," says the old woman. "'Tis good ye're at it. An' I'm not sayin', too, but it becomes ye," with the irrepressible admiration for beauty that lies deep in the Irish breast. "But why spoil the laugh in another? Can't ye lave Masther Laurence alone, miss? Do, *do* now, miss dear. Sure ye know very well that he's not for the likes o' you."

Chloe looks at her with a little sudden start. This wonderful old woman—what does she know? What does she *not* know?

"No? Then who is for 'the likes o' me?'" asks she lightly.

"If ye don't know it," says the old woman cautiously, reading the girl's features as she speaks, "ye ought."

"Feeney"—gaily—"out of your own mouth I condemn you! The fact that I ought to do anything is surely sufficient reason for you to know that I am not likely to do it. Tell me the lucky one who is for 'the likes o' me.' Sir Hardress, perhaps?"

"God forbid, me dear, that ye'd marry that ould skinflint!"

"The gallant Major, then?"

"Ah, no, miss. I wish"—sighing—"it was so. 'Twould save Miss Olivia a power o' throuble."

"Selfish creature! Well, who then?"

"Sure 'tis you that know it yourself, miss. But

since ye want it said, why, 'tis Misther Carlton—an' a nice gintleman too, Miss Chloe, if a thrifle starchy here an' there. Faith an' all, miss dear, ye might do worse!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"My lyre I tune, my voice I raise,
But with my numbers mix my sighs."

CHLOE, in her soft primrose-coloured frock and big flower hat, makes a charming picture, standing over there with her putter in her hand, in the midst of the warm and joyous sunshine. So young a thing she looks, such a mere girl—a child almost, one would say, hearing her clear and ringing laughter rush through the ambient air!

"Nothing is more pleasant to the eye," says Lord Bacon, "than green grass nicely shorn," and here to-day, in Mrs. Longton's grounds, the grasses are very "nicely shorn." She has asked as many of her friends as are near neighbours to come and take tea with her and talk over the probabilities of Lady Matilda's dance to-morrow night.

The afternoon is exquisite; warm, languorous, rich in beauty. Soft clouds rest upon the tops of the hills; and on the lower heights delicate diaphanous glories, born of mist, deepen into a glowing pink as the day dies down. A little bird has now uplifted its song, singing as it soars towards the keen heavens. Its

farewell note seems to strike to the hearts of those below.

It strikes to the heart of Olivia, who is looking a little pensive—a little sad, indeed. O bird, to soar like you—out of the earth's troubles, out of earth's complications, to glorious heights beyond!

But the bird, deaf to such foolish longings, flies until its tiny form is lost in the blue distance. It is gone, still singing; and far in the west the

> "plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hillside; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley glades."

Olivia sighs.

"Anything wrong?" asks Tom, dropping into the seat beside her.

"Wrong?"

"Worse than usual, I mean."

"*You* may know what you mean," says Olivia, "but"—impatiently—"really I don't."

"No?"

"No."

"I suppose"—tentatively—"it would be an act of impertinence on my part to ask you for the first waltz to-morrow evening?"

"It would be more—an act of stupidity!"

"Good heavens! is he so monstrous jealous as all that? He says 'monstrous,' and 'vastly,' and 'obleeged,' doesn't he? Gentlemen of the Early Victorian period used to, I think."

"Used they? I have never met any of them."

Tom looks at her, and then laughs. The little touch of rancorous wit has come home to him. Olivia in her moods is charming. Pity she should be such a fool in other ways! As if money—the mines of Golconda, all the wealth of Rhodesia—could make up for—well, for certain other commodities, that are, however, beyond question, of no marketable value!

"Your ignorance is deplorable," says he. "But what about that waltz?"

"Why should you ask me for a dance when you know you don't want one?" asks she, turning upon him quickly. "I suppose"—looking at him—"I can say what I like to you, Tom, without being thought—without"—slowly—"being considered——" She pauses again.

"I always consider you," says Tom, filling up the blank.

"That's kind," with a sort of cold acknowledgment of his words. "You will, then, not think of me as—as——"

"I shall think of you always," says Tom with decision.

"That"—stiffly—"is the last thing I should desire."

"Still, I *shall*. As the greatest——" He leans towards her in a confidential sort of way.

"*Tom!*"

"The *greatest* amongst the very few mercenary women I have ever met in my life." The conversation comes to an abrupt end.

Miss Fitzgerald is now crossing the bank on the

side of one of the tennis-courts, on her way to the house. Half way there she meets Bethune, who stops her.

"Going on to the garden?" asks he.

"No; I am going to the library to look for a book."

"Literary tastes," says Mr. Bethune, regarding her with extreme admiration. "My tastes are floral. Can't I convert you? I'm going to the garden; won't you come?"

She laughs, a little forlornly it occurs to him afterwards, and continues her way to the house.

Mr. Bethune continues *his way* to the garden, with a view to revelling in its delights, as he has told everybody, with a charming smile; with a view to rifling the strawberries in the orchard beyond, in reality.

However, in the garden proper—that is, the flower-garden near the house—he sees something that bids him beat a hasty retreat.

"Oh, hang it all!" says he to himself as he retires. "They might ring a bell or something, to give a fellow a chance."

But Chloe (it was Chloe he had seen) has no desire to ring a bell, as, stealing on tiptoe across the balcony, she leans over it to look down on Laurence, sitting on the bench below, lost in a melancholy reverie. Chloe's most mischievous smile is warming her parted lips; she seems to find a fund of intense amusement in the dejection of the figure beneath her.

"Fancy anyone caring so much about anything!"

She leans still farther over the railing, and lifting

both her hands, filled with crushed rose-leaves, lets the scented shower drop softly on the bent and joyless head.

Laurence, starting to his feet, looks upwards, then pales perceptibly. The girl is gazing down at him, her brilliant dark-blue eyes gleaming with a touch of amused triumph — a suspicion of power; of audacity. There is a sweetness indescribable in her pose; and the soft chestnut locks lying on her delicate low brow, being slightly ruffled by the passing breeze, give her an air of freshness, of youth incarnate. And yet, with all its gay *abandon*, it is a strong young face—the face of one wild, undisciplined, but full of courage and generosity.

Opening her little palms to their widest, she lets the last of the rose petals drift down upon his face, and, always smiling, whispers to him cajolingly:

"*Still* angry with me, dear Romeo?"

So sweet, so near, so dear! Laurence's pulses begin to beat tumultuously. He makes a movement as if to go to her, but she checks it.

"No!" with quite a repentant air; "I am coming down to you. I—I want you to forgive me."

"Oh, Chloe!" in a heartbroken way.

"Yes," with a sigh that puts his to shame. "It's dreadful to be fighting with the people whom one —well"—with a little glance from under her long lashes—"*likes*. You haven't been happy, have you, since that awful—it *was* an awful evening, wasn't it?"

"I have felt half mad."

"Yes," nodding dolefully; "I know it."

"It has seemed a *month* since then."

"Oh!"—reproachfully—"*I* thought it was a *year!*"

"No, you didn't," says Laurence with sorrowful conviction. "I don't suppose you thought of it at all—or even if you did, with very different feelings from mine. How strangely you spoke, you looked! I scarcely knew you. To-day you are the same Chloe I have always known; but then—what made that change in you?"

"I don't know." Then, thoughtfully: "What sort of dress was I wearing? My moods change so with my frocks. Now, a dark frock makes me—oh, well, murderous! *Do* you remember the colour?"

"No."

"Not remember the gown I was wearing?"

"I can't, indeed."

"After *that!*—I don't think really, Laurence——A friend who can't even remember the colour of one's gown——"

"I could see only the colour of your eyes—they were dark and angry."

"And it was you who made them so! How"—thoughtfully—"do they look when they are dark and angry?"

"Chloe," demands he suddenly, "why did you call him Gigi?"

She breaks into a gay little laugh.

"Now, I *knew* that was the whole heart of the matter. Well, have I not told you? It is a pet name for Granby." Here, as if something wonderfully comic strikes her, her laugh widens into one of uncon-

trollable heartiness. "Fancy a *pet* name for Granby! He doesn't lend himself to the idea, does he? No; Gigi is his right title—his real name after all. He was christened 'Granby Gigi (and the rest) Carlton.' It seems he had some foreign ancestor, somewhere in the days of the Ark—some Italian, I should imagine. Were there any Italians then? And his mother, who I think must have been a little off her—eh?—well, gave him that idiotic name amongst the others. He has half a dozen others. I found it out one day, and was so tickled by it—I thought it so funny, you see, as applied to *Granby*—so altogether unsuited to him—that I instantly decided on making him Gigi to the end of the chapter. He didn't like it at first, I think; but now——"

"Now?" Laurence's tone is mechanical. He hardly knows he is replying. His apathy is seen by her.

"*Now*"—with a little amused shrug—"he endures it."

"Ah!"

"How stupid you are! You"—angrily—"must see for yourself how unsuited it is to him."

"I have not thought of it."

"No? But you must have noticed his grandiose air; his manner of swooping down upon the unwary and convicting them of their misdemeanours on the spot; his amiable, if mistaken, desire to set the whole world straight."

"Are *you* his whole world?"

She stares.

"You mean that he lectures only me. Ah!"—

flushing—"there you are mistaken; although"—flushing even deeper—"I confess I come in for a good share of his attention in that way. But"—impatiently—"you haven't answered me. Have you noticed the extreme gravity of his manner—his magisterial air?" She pauses again, as if again wondering at the inattention of her audience, and then says sharply, suddenly: "*Have* you?"

"No."

"No? You"—politely—"*must* be a fool! That is why I call him Gigi. This frivolous name, as attached to him, seems to me delicious. So you have not noticed how he can march down upon the sinner with bayonet fixed? *I* have. I've had opportunities."

"You"—he looks at her—"you mean——?"

"I do indeed," solemnly shaking her head. "Why—*how* could you care about my calling him *anything?* Don't you know that he disapproves of me—is very often rude to me? Sometimes"—she turns her brilliant eyes on Laurence—"sometimes it has occurred to me that he—hates me. Have you"—she leans eagerly towards him—"noticed *that?*"

"Hate you? No. But"—as if searching his memory honestly for some evidence he would like to produce—"I have often thought that he——"

"Yes, yes; go on. How slow you are!"

"That he didn't quite appreciate you."

A pause.

"You mean—that he doesn't like me?"

"Oh, no! Far from that. *Not* to like a person gets perilously close to *dis*like. And to dislike

you—— What I think is"—he pauses, stammers—"I think he is unworthy of you," says he at last.

It is not what he was going to say, however.

She makes an impatient gesture.

"That is an absurd idea. Unworthy of me! I have as little to do with him as he with me," slowly. "Why should I care whether he was worthy or not? Come, I will tell you something. He despises me. He thinks me very wrong in coming here at all. Of course, you can see—you *know* through Mrs. Gilbert—that I am here in rather a false position. But to be here, safe, away from all the winds of evil—— Ah, I am glad to be here! But Granby says I am doing wrong—that I am acting deceitfully; that I should go back to misery, just because it is my duty. Well, I shan't go back. And he may despise me as much as ever he likes. *I* don't care."

"Yes; I understood you had run away from your guardian. I don't see how anyone could blame you there—if he was unkind."

She nods her charming head.

"He *was*, and so I left him. I confess it was not the orthodox thing to do. There were other ways—very unpleasant ways—of freeing oneself for ever; but strong as I am (and I *have* courage), I draw the line at publicity—the prying eyes, the cruel tongues. Well"—airily—"never mind all that. Anyway, I decided to come here, and——"

"There is this," says Laurence. "What have you let your guardian think?"

"My guardian?" She stares for a moment,

then goes on hurriedly: "Oh, yes, I see. Well, I have let him think anything he likes—except"—with a quite malicious but delightful smile—"*the truth*."

A silence falls between them. Then he turns to her.

"Has it ever occurred to you"—quietly—"that if you could deceive one man, you could deceive another?"

She frowns, giving her shoulders a pretty little hitch. Granby had said that too—once; but then Granby is always so detestable.

"I know quite well I could," she tells him with charming candour, her clear eyes, no whit ashamed, well fixed on his, "if"—a saving clause—"I hated him."

"Ah! You might not confine yourself to those you *hate*."

His tone has infinite sadness in it. It reaches and touches her.

"Why, of course I should, you little stupid Laurence!" cries she with a mimic frown, regardless of the fact that her graceful head barely reaches his shoulder. "Why should I tell a tarradiddle to one who—*liked* me—and whom *I*," with emphasis on the milder term, "liked?"

"Will you swear," demands he suddenly, apropos of nothing going before as it seems, "that you have had no love passages with Carlton?"

"A thousand swears!" She lays her hands on his shoulders and gives him a good shake. "What! don't you understand yet? Why, he thinks me quite shocking. He would as soon have love pas-

sages with a Fiji miss, or ma'am (oh, not with a *ma'am!*—he is immensely proper), as with me. I am a cousin of his—nothing more, I assure you; and"—slowly—"never shall be! Why do you look at me like that? Don't you believe?"

"Yes, of course"—anxiously—"only——"

"Only—you don't?"

"No. But——"

"Laurence," making a little pass with her white fingers before the eyes that are so intently gazing into hers, "if you are trying to plumb the depths of my soul, you are wasting your time. I have *no* soul, so there are *no* depths. Take me as I am, and——"

"Ah! If I could!"

"Well, so you can," promptly evading by a dexterous move the more dangerous train of thought. "I'm dying for some tea. You can take me . . . to the tea-room. But before we go"—making quite a determined start herself, as if to put an end to argument—"let us be friends. I can't *bear* feeling 'wroth with those I'—*care* for," hurriedly. The little quotation had been a mistake.

"Chloe, let me say a word."

"Let *me*"—with an imperative gesture—"say it for you. You want to say that all our desperate quarrel"—with a beaming smile—"is at an end. Isn't that it? You see, I know exactly how it is with you, how really unbearable it is to feel, well—you know—horrid towards one's friends. And we have been good friends, Laurence, haven't we? *Such* good friends! There is nothing like friendship, is there?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me."

CHLOE'S game—parlour golf, putting, or whatever you like to call that play upon the real good and splendid game—had ended most victoriously for her. Her eye and aim are sharp as needles, and she had only once miscalculated her distance. After that she had been lost to Mrs. Longton's party for a considerable time. Where had she been? It occurs now to somebody to make an inquiry, and Olivia very lightly follows it up. "Yes; where is Chloe?" asks she; indifferently, however; she is not one of the "high morality" order, rather of those who would give a chance to a poor criminal. She looks at Carlton involuntarily. There is no purpose in her look.

"I don't know," returns he calmly. *Coldly*, she tells herself. Is Cissy's theory wrong, after all? Is he not the lover denied her?

"Are you wondering where Miss Jones is?" asks Bethune, looking up from where he had been telling dreadful lies to Cissy for the past ten minutes, with the air of a child of three. "Have you lost her? Don't drag the river just yet, Carlton. I think I can give you a clue that may restore her to you in the near future. I may say at once (are you sure no representative of the Press is about?) that I saw her just now in the garden over there, showering caresses (oh, I beg pardon—what a shocking mistake!)

—*rose-leaves* on the happy head of Laurence Lloyd. My goodness!" turning to Olivia and trying to look ashamed, without the smallest chance of success, "what a dreadful slip!"

"In the garden?" says Olivia, glancing at Carlton, who is entirely unmoved. "After all, no one need have been so anxious about her, as here she is."

Chloe, indeed, can now be seen coming across the grass to them, with no suspicion of a single *arrière pensée* upon her charming face. She looks only singularly young and happy, like one wrapped in the *insouciance* of youth.

She goes straight to Carlton, and seats herself comfortably on the bench beside him.

"Here I am," says she.

"So I see." Carlton's voice is not pleasant.

The others have all drifted away, some to the putting game again, some to tennis or the croquet ground.

Carlton, making way for her on the garden seat beside him, says slowly, perhaps a little unpleasantly:

"Where have you left Laurence Lloyd?"

"Oh, how persistent you are!" returns she, arranging her skirts to an artistic fold. "I thought we had threshed all that out long ago!"

"So we have. And we have threshed out, too, that if you transgress a certain rule, you are liable for the penalty."

"Can't I even speak to people, then?"

"To as many people as you like within the bounds.

Lloyd seems to me to have got outside them. I warned you, you know, that I should not allow anything of this sort—that *I* should make a move if *you* forgot—how you are situated. I tell you again, I will not have Lloyd made miserable to give you a Roman holiday."

"You are tremendously classic," says she, "but scarcely coherent. And besides, you are altogether in the wrong. You think"—defiantly—"that he has been making love to me."

"It is as probable a thing as I know."

"You"—triumphantly—"are wrong, then. He has been trying to convince me for the last half-hour that *you* are in love with me. Come, now, where are all your theories? Vanished! Exploded! Oh, Gigi, I *often* told you you were a fool; *now* you must know it."

"He has been——"

"Yes; it is the funniest story. The day before yesterday—or was it yesterday?—he came to see me, and treated me to a perfect tirade about the impropriety of my being found in the Major's garden with you at eleven o'clock at night. Do you know, when he took that tone he reminded me of you? Yes, really! Of course, he was very stupid over the morality point, and lost his thread here and there. That also reminded me of you. Anyway, he gave me a fearful scolding."

"If you had any sense of dignity you would not have allowed him to——"

"Don't interrupt me. I want to tell you things. In the midst of his tirade I sat down to write an

imaginary letter, with a view to getting rid of him. You see——"

She pauses.

"Oh, I see," drily.

"And he was very confusing; and very *near;* and—he was looking over my shoulder, I *suppose* to see what I was scribbling; and what *do* you think it was?"

"'Chloe'!" cynically.

"What a beast you are, Granby! I'm not *always* thinking of myself! Well, you are right. It *was* Chloe—but 'Chloe *Carlton*'! There! what do you think of that?"

"I never think—where you are concerned. It would be a mere waste of time. What did *he* think?"

"Oh, that! He was wild! He was, indeed, extremely rude. But can't you see the joke? He had been bothering me about you, and then I wrote Chloe Carlton just as if it were my usual signature!"

"Well"—indifferently—"so it ought to be."

"So it *isn't,* however. Society has its own laws. 'C. B.' I always sign myself. I can't see how I put in that Carlton. You know it is your name too, and he—— How shall I explain it to you, Gigi? Well"—with a little mischievous laugh—"he thought we were not only engaged but—*married!* It *is* quite too funny, isn't it?"

"As you know, I am too dull to see jokes," says Carlton coldly; "and for the rest—I shouldn't be surprised at anything he might think."

"What an aspersion on his powers of observation!"

"All this is as nothing." Carlton is now frowning. "You may deceive *him,* Chloe; you can never deceive

me. I have watched you with young Lloyd, and I know that you are grossly misleading him."

"I am not, indeed. I assure you I am not. Why on earth should you get that into your head? Only this moment I told him I was his friend—his friend only. I impressed that on him——"

"With a shower of rose-leaves!"

"*Who* told you that?"

"Never mind; somebody who called them caresses."

"Oh! what a pretty simile!" She looks quite delighted at this flight on the part of the unknown somebody. "*Tell* me his name!"

"Why should it not be *her* name?"

"Granby! As if I were not equal to the unravelling of my own sex! Is there a woman born who would have said anything so sweet about another woman? Oh, I know my own sex."

"And mine?"

"Ah! Yours is so difficult!" She tries to look regretful, but there is a touch of mirth in her half-lowered eyes that gives him to know she thinks the knowledge of his sex a far easier matter to overcome than that of hers. "But"—echoing him audaciously—"all this is as nothing. I wanted to tell you, when you so rudely interrupted me, that I had told Laurence I was his friend, and that only. Now it stands to reason that the very fact of being a *friend* puts one outside the pale of love. Indeed, as far as I have been able to judge, a friend means an object of downright dislike—concealed, of course, but——"

"Nonsense!" He makes a gesture as if to sweep

away *her* nonsense. "Do you think I can't see through you? And what on earth do you want with that too affectionate boy? You stand on the edge of a volcano; and when it bursts——"

"Oh, that's all in the vague! I am calm here, and happy, Gigi. Don't spoil my one perfect hour out of my twenty years of—*first* neglect, and *then* misery."

"It *has* been hard for you." He admits it slowly —with the slowness of one keeping himself well in check. "But it is not all so in the vague as you imagine. I have had a letter from Blakeney to-day."

"Good news"—flippantly—"I trust?" but she pales as she speaks.

"Yes," gravely; "he is better. And—asking for you. He has taken it into his head that you——" He hesitates.

"Let me fill up the blank. That I—ran away with one of the many idiots that hovered around me last season. (Idiots thrown in my path by *him* —I never forget that.) Such a thought has arisen from his own diseased nature; from nothing else. Even you"—flashing her great violet eyes on him with the air of an offended queen—"*you* who hold me in such low esteem—dare not think otherwise. Well"—with a little movement of her hand that seems to brush away all nauseous thoughts—"it is nothing to me. Nothing, really. Why should I be vexed? A mind as vile as his——"

"It *is* something to you, however. Blakeney says that if he is not—well—*reassured* about you, he will alter his will, and leave you nothing."

"So much the better for *you!*"

"Good heavens, Chloe! Can't you be serious for once? Do you understand that you are by this insane hiding away doing yourself out of about a hundred and sixty thousand pounds? That is what the loose personalties come to."

"I shall be quite well off enough in October. I shall have my *own* money then, and—the settlements. He can't take *them* away."

"Still, to deliberately fling away a hundred and sixty thousand pounds!"

"Well lost—with the loss of him! Besides—I don't believe in his loss *yet.* Bad halfpennies always return, as curses do to roost. He is *my* curse, and will be, I am convinced, for many a year. But he shall never return to me or I to him. Put that out of your head, Granby. I would sacrifice not only the sum you speak of, but every penny I have in the world, rather than see him again."

There is such vehemence in her tone as renders him silent for a moment. She *must* have suffered at his hands! Suffered!—great heavens, *what* had she suffered to bring her to this state of mind?

"Still," begins he, struggling in battle with his grief for her and his desire to do the best he can for her future, "however much you may dislike him—whatever grudge you may bear him—there is decency to be considered. If you go to this dance to-morrow night, for instance, and he hears of it——"

"Do you know"—calmly—"I do so *hope* he will! It would be a little balm to my wounds." Her lips,

so usually given to smiles, are now pale, defiant. Her eyes are blazing.

"You *will* go to the dance, then?"

"Certainly!"

"Chloe! Have you thought? His life hangs on a thread. He might even be lying dead whilst you were dancing!"

"And if so, why should I stop my dancing? Do you think he would refrain from dancing if *I* were dead?—from one single pleasure? Yet *I* have done *him* no injury. And as for his being dead—— Don't be melodramatic, Gigi; the *rôle* doesn't suit you. Scold me if you will. And you will, eh? *That rôle* suits you down to the ground, practice having made you perfect; but don't go in for the heavier business. He won't be dead for quite a long time yet. *I* know him. You dwell on his heart. *I* am quite positive he hasn't got one; therefore, like the eternal 'Jew' of the Frenchman and 'the brook' of the Englishman, he will 'go on for ever'—to my grief and dismay."

"Don't talk like that! It is abominable!—and at such a moment!"

"*What* moment? He is not dead. He is even better, you say. He is, in my opinion, never likely to die—if his heart has anything to do with it. He may be ill, off and on, for years, and I—am I to stay lamenting all my life just because——"

"It can't be for long."

"The lamenting? No indeed!" cheerfully.

"Chloe! You can't *wish* him dead!"

"My dear Granby, of course not! When one

thinks of the wretched consequences—— I am still a Christian woman, I hope, though you may not be disposed to believe it. The poor man has had such good times on earth that he is bound to pay for it—later on."

"He has had no good times. A bad soul has no good times anywhere."

"Ah!" lightly. "You admit, then, that he is—*was* (no more scope now, you know)—not the altogether desirable person he should have been?"

"That does not in the least exonerate you from your duties."

"I have none. She—Mademoiselle Contralto—took them up, you know."

"You will be sorry afterwards—when it is too late, Chloe."

"When it is 'too late,' as you call it, I shall be glad. And look now, Granby, how you contradict yourself! That little speech quite upsets your whole theory of me—goes altogether against your foregone beliefs. Do you dream me capable of remorse—an ephemeral thing like me—a soulless fool? You *know* your opinion of me."

"I don't indeed," gravely, "if that is it."

"Oh, well, never mind. *You* have a soul. Don't perjure it for me. And besides, providentially, there is no necessity for remorse in this case. I have been most villainously used, as you *know*, Granby"—turning upon him with a little touch of fire—"though all your sympathy is for this sick wretch, and not an atom for his victim."

"'Victim' is an absurd word. And it is impos-

sible not to see that my sympathy is entirely on your side. If he dies without hearing from you or seeing you——"

"I'm afraid he will have to die without the latter." It is the calmest, the most charming of faces that looks at him as this distinctly cruel fiat leaves her lips. "Whenever that hideous fact comes off, *I* shall not be there to see."

"You will not go to him, then?"

She turns upon him a face flushed with indignant astonishment.

"How stupid of you!"

"He is alone. He wants someone."

"No doubt he will find someone."

"It is your place."

"Is it? I shan't fill it."

"Chloe, look at the purely human side of it!"

"It is at that I am looking; though 'pure' is an ill-advised word when *his* name comes in. The purely human side means my positive refusal to again associate myself with your cousin. Oh, there! You can shrug your shoulders and look unfathomable disgust at me if you like, but—I am purely human all the same! The thing hurt is the thing enraged. And I assure you his death would not move me to a single tear. Why should it? I detested him living—I shall detest him dead." She pauses. "That shocks you, of course. But you must remember that I don't believe in the nearness of that very-much-to-be-desired affair so deeply as you do, though it means to me quite as much, if not more."

"More?"

"Dear me, yes, Granby! Can't you see? His death to you will mean a great deal, perhaps; to me —*everything!*"

He looks at her silently.

"How you hate him!"

She looks back at him, silently too.

"Yes, that is *how* I hate him," says she at last. Her face has grown strangely white; her lips are firmly pressed together. What is she thinking of?

"But why? Chloe, he surely——" He stops as if choked by some hideous thought.

"I talk a great deal sometimes, don't I?" says she, with a little sudden return to her every-day air. "But then sometimes"—with a little curious gesture—"I don't talk at all! See?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Let us go hence and rest; she will not love.
She shall not hear us if we sing hereof."

LADY MATILDA'S dance, even at quite an early hour, shews signs of being an immense success. Everyone has come! That means victory assured! As a rule, in small country places, where distances mean many miles, disappointments from the *best* people often arise; whereas, no matter what the distance, the people one doesn't care twopence about always arrive. But to-night all that is changed.

The county, to a man—and woman (which is

more important)—is present, and gaiety is the order of the hour.

Chloe, always so exquisitely *coiffée*, has surpassed herself now. Her frock is a very marvel of beauty—white, glittering. There is a little row of diamonds round her neck that gives pause to Lady Matilda. "Bless my soul! Who *is* this girl? Where did Dora Fitzgerald find her?"

Chloe—regardless of comment, radiant, gracious, reckless—has given herself up to the moment as one might, perhaps, who has dreams of hope near at hand, when a weight, hitherto intolerable, may soon be lifted.

"Good heavens!" thinks Carlton watching her with a frowning brow as she glides past him in the arms of Laurence. "Does she ever remember? Does she ever think? He may be dying at this moment, and yet"—following her open and, as he calls it, disgraceful encouragement of young Lloyd —"she is enticing that silly boy into a sillier entanglement."

Indeed, Chloe lends herself to this idea. Dance after dance she has given to Laurence. And even when dancing with some other man (and there are very many other men who would have danced all night with her, if such was her royal will), still, the dance with him coming to an end, she has smiled joyous pleasure to Laurence as he approached, his face illuminated, to claim her for the next.

"A d——d coquette!" says Carlton. It seems a final decision. He feels for a telegram in his pocket, a telegram he had received just five minutes

before his coming here. It must have been delayed in some way. But to speak of it now—here—with her whole soul—no (contemptuously), not *soul!* —her whole *nature* so saturated with the absurd pleasure of this idiotic dance! No! Impossible! He turns upon his heel. Dancing has no charms for him to-night, with this sad message in his pocket. He had come here simply to see her—to tell her.

And so the night grows and dies; and Fate plays its impish tricks with many.

The Major, looking a very handsome man, and trim and smart in his evening clothes, has come up to Olivia, who seems to him rather neglected, as no man is beside her. The man who should be beside her has just gone to get her an ice, but the Major could not know that.

"I suppose," says he, smiling, "an old fellow like me would hardly have the chance of a waltz with you?"

"I won't let you call yourself such bad names as that," says Olivia very prettily. She looks charming, but singularly pale, and with quite a new line around her lips. It speaks of determination.

A little cloud, indeed, had arisen before dressing for this dance. It had come by the evening post to Mrs. Fitzgerald—an extra bill, forgotten for six months, but now brought home to her—in a blue envelope. It was impossible to conceal it, as the girls read all her letters, and she reads all theirs; but it occurred to her, seeing their saddened faces, that it would be a dreadful thing if they did not enjoy themselves at this dance. She had tried to make

the best of it, therefore; had made splendid efforts at laughing it off. "It would be all right," she said; "something was sure to turn up, and new times were coming," and so on; but she failed to blind Olivia to the fact that she was wretched, very sore at heart, and embarrassed in many ways. And for whom?—not for herself, Olivia knew. Poor mama, who grudged herself a single gown, yet who could grudge them nothing! And "new times coming." What had she meant by that?

Olivia's heart sank. But she knew or thought she knew. And—well—when nobody loved her (this was unkind to the Major, but she was not thinking of him), she might as well marry for money and help poor darling mother, as stay an old maid for ever. Thus prepared she came to the dance, fully determined to say "yes" to Major O'Hara if he should ask her to marry him.

"Old?" She smiles at him again. "No! that is not the word for you. And besides, you know, you have a reputation as a waltzer."

"Oh! come now!" says the Major, his kindly face aglow. "Who told you that, eh?"

"Why, mama, of course!" with a most deadly attempt at liveliness.

"Ah!" says the Major. He pulls himself up, draws a quick breath, and altogether seems to have gained in a moment even a great accession of courage.

This courage frightens Olivia.

"*She* thinks you"—stammering—"good at everything!" She has determined to put it on mama.

"Does she?" The Major grows even more animated, more courageous.

"Yes, indeed!" Olivia is losing her head. "She thinks you are invincible!"

She is now quite piling it up on mama.

"Invincible! Good heavens, Olivia! Do you know what you are saying? Invincible with—with whom?"

"Oh"—hurriedly—"anybody!"

"If"—excitedly—"your mother really thinks *that*——"

Olivia tells herself she is going to faint. Oh, what has she said? What awful encouragement has she given him? The fact that she has given him encouragement should not have alarmed her, as she certainly meant to give it to *him* when she started for this dance; but to *mean* to do a thing and to *do* it are such very different things.

"What I mean is that mother thinks you are a *good* man——" She breaks off. Oh, this is worse than useless; it is only aggravating the first offence. And to call anyone a "good" man! How dreadfully offensive! He will be annoyed—and no wonder. "Oh, not a good man!" says she. "Anything but that. Not a *bad* one, you know; only——"

She stops dead short. He has caught her hand.

"Not a bad one, I hope," says he very kindly. "I know what you mean, however. And I will be good to your mother, and to you too, Olivia, if——"

"Oh, I know!" She interrupts him with a little frantic gesture. What is she looking at, down there

on the terrace? "I can't dance this—I can't indeed. I — don't feel very well." There is a touch of anguish in her voice. "Oh, Major O'Hara, you can see——"

"I can—I can! Not another word, my dear girl. Of course I can see," says the gentle Major. What he really does see is Tom Lloyd on the terrace outside. Was that what she saw too? "A little turn," says he tenderly, "in the cool night air will set you up again." He has brought her across the room whilst saying this, and up to the open window. "Look here," says he, calling to Tom, who is still standing on the stone flags, cold and insolent, "Olivia is not feeling quite up to the mark. The rooms are warm, you know. Mrs. Longton unfortunately wants me just now—saw her beckoning to me a moment ago." (This is a really tremendous lie for the Major.) "So if you will go with Tom, my dear, into the gardens for a bit, you will, I'm sure, be the better for it."

The Major, with a tender squeeze of Olivia's hand, thus resigns her to Tom, who accepts the gift with a cynical air, and prepares to lead her to the grounds below, a little uncertain as to the Major's mood. Is this revenge on his part—this giving of his intended bride into his care, to wander with him, in moonlit depths, in dewy pleasaunces, for the hour? He frowns.

Olivia's charming brow is conscious of a very distinct frown too, as, the Major having left them, she turns abruptly to Tom.

"This is none of my doing."

"Of course not. I could see you were tremendously upset by Major O'Hara's abrupt departure."

"It was not that."

"No? Really? I quite thought it was. I confess, I think it was a somewhat unloverlike act of his; just as he had brought you to this romantic spot, with as sentimental a moon over his head as if he had ordered it, he calmly hands you over to an uninteresting fellow like me."

"The fact"—demurely, deliberately—"that you were *so* uninteresting no doubt enabled him to obey Mrs. Longton's signal with a quiet mind. What an exquisite night it is!"

Tom feels a little stung. To call oneself by contemptuous terms is one thing; to hear the girl you are walking with calling you by them is quite another. He laughs, however, very successfully.

"No fear of jealousy, you mean?"

"Hardly that. I could not imagine Major O'Hara guilty of pettiness of any sort."

"Dear old gentleman!"

"Not so *very* old!" Her temper is getting a little beyond her control now. Her eyes are flashing, though her voice is still low and apparently unconcerned.

"There are older, certainly. There was once a person called Methuselah, I am told. He was quite a young thing at three hundred or so. Now, the Major must still be something off the hundred, eh? And a nice, fresh, crispy old bachelor he is, too; well calculated to make any girl happy."

"He has, at all events, very much better manners than some of the young men I know."

"Meaning me?" says Tom equably. "No need to crush me like that. Do you think I don't *know* it? Haven't I read all about it? Why, everyone is aware that people born in the last century were possessed of refinements that we poor nineteenth-century folk can but dream of—not dare to emulate. *Whose* miserable youth has not been poisoned by tales of the Grandisonian bow, the letters of Lord Chesterfield? My one regret is"—here he looks at her very hard—"that I was not born when the Major was."

"You might certainly"—with a carefully cutting air—"have gained something."

"True," says Tom sweetly. "Age for one thing."

"I'm afraid I meant something else."

"Ah, well"—briskly—"we won't go into it. And you need not be so down upon me, Olivia. I'm agreeing with you straight through; I'm applauding your appreciation of our ancient friend. Old gentlemen are ever so much more desirable than boys. Boys, as a rule, pall. Are not these your own sentiments? I can hear you say: 'Give me a nice, kind, lively old person of seventy or thereabouts (one should be charitable where age is concerned), and I ask nothing more.' But I forget. No need for you to ask; you've got one."

"Do you know," says Olivia, "I think the person who perpetually sneers at others is the most fatiguing of all companions. 'Not to admire was all the art he knew.' Did you ever read that line?"

"If it suggests the idea that I don't admire your

fiancé I am afraid I must come to the humiliating belief that you have not been listening to me for the last ten minutes. But of course, with your ears strained to hear the first returning footstep of your Romeo, you——"

"Major O'Hara is not affianced to me!"

"No? Not yet? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot? However, you have made up your mind, eh?"

"I"—firmly—"shall marry Major O'Hara *if* he asks me! Perhaps, however"—with a sudden strange gleaming in her eyes that he sees, but fails to read in his present passion of disgust—"he won't."

"Ah! don't be *too* modest." He rises to his feet. "If he asks you, you *will* marry him, then?"

She nods her head. She could not have spoken to save her life.

"Couldn't do better!" says he, almost brutally.

CHAPTER XXV.

"'Tis better not to be, than be unhappy."

If Olivia has been going through an experience, so has her mother. The Major having triumphantly (as he believes—kindly, honest gentleman as he is) left Olivia in the hands of a friend, has come back —*not* to Mrs. Longton, who, indeed, never wanted him, but to Mrs. Fitzgerald, who, sitting on the balcony outside the dancing-room, receives him from

the distance with a somewhat forced smile. She had seen his "invitation to the dance," as addressed to Olivia, some time ago, and had wondered how things were going with her and him. The Major's look of delight as he sees her now gives her the impression that Olivia had at least not been unkind. Could she have accepted him? That child! If she had—well—of course, if she *had*—— Mrs. Fitzgerald's veins seem to run icy cold for a moment. A child like that to marry a man old enough to be her——

"Well, I am fortunate in finding you here, out of this dreadful turmoil," says the Major genially, slipping into the seat beside her. "I've been looking for you, but somehow you have eluded me all the night up to this."

"Not on purpose." Her smile is a little wanting.

"No, no. But, Dora, I have been—well, well——" The Major grows embarrassed.

"You have been——"

"Anxious to speak to you on a certain subject; you can guess, Dora, eh?"

"I have guessed it," says Mrs. Fitzgerald faintly. Her charming and very lovable face has grown pale to a quite alarming degree.

"And—and—Dora, do you mean that I may speak?" The Major has grown extremely nervous.

"I mean it—yes." Her voice is low, almost inaudible. "I know no man I so respect, so look up to as—you."

Now, surely the Major might be supposed to make some handsome acknowledgment of these tributes

to his charms, but he seems, on the contrary, quite put out by them, and draws back. Presently, however, he leans towards her.

"I don't so much want to be respected by the woman I love," says he, "as to be loved by her."

"I think any woman, knowing you, would not only respect, but love you," returns Mrs. Fitzgerald.

"Ah!" The Major looks at her. "*You* say that?" He had got up a moment ago, and now takes a step nearer to her. "This is more than I hoped for. Let me speak now, Dora—*now!*"

"No, no!" She makes a sharp protest with her hand. "I am tired—I am overdone. I cannot listen. Perhaps to-morrow——"

"I see. I beg your pardon. Don't mind me, Dora. Don't rise!—sit there and rest yourself." He presses her back into the chair from which she has risen in her agitation, with the very gentlest hand. "I have been too precipitate. But—to-morrow—you said to-morrow, Dora. May I come then?"

"Yes." Her voice is hardly audible now. "To-morrow."

The Major, taking her hand, lifts it and presses it to his lips with a sort of rapture.

"God bless you, Dora!"

Oh! how fond he is of her! thinks Mrs. Fitzgerald. She sighs softly; her face has lost all its brightness, however. How fond of Olivia! But Olivia—what will *she* say—to-morrow?

The Major is still holding her hand. She had turned her face slightly aside, and probably he had seen symptoms of bad luck in this alien attitude.

"Why don't you look at me?" he asks her, with some reproach, but in his very kindest tone—and, indeed, all his tones are kind. "Would you wish me *not* to come to-morrow? Is it too sudden? You know I have considered your wishes all my life, and if you think it would make you happier—my staying away—a little longer, I——"

"No, no." She rises. "Why should you stay away? James"—very earnestly—"you know what I think of you, how I regard you, don't you?"

"I hope so, Dora."

"Then come to-morrow."

She gives him her hand again, with open friendship and full trust.

"You *ask* me to come?" His manner is agitated; but the reason for this, she tells herself with a faint smile, is easily accounted for.

"I do—I do indeed!" There is actual warmth in her voice. After all, her girl (whose heart is perfectly free), however great the disparity in their ages, can find nothing but happiness in a union with this kind and handsome gentleman.

At her request he leaves her; and sinking back into her seat, she breaks all at once into a passion of tears. What—what has she done? How strange—how terrible a thing is life! And Olivia will not understand him. Poor Olivia! he is too old for her, of course; but——

Well, well, well! breaking off her thoughts impatiently; she is getting the best man on earth for her husband. Many a girl has done far worse. She stops again, and sighs again. Few girls have done better.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Mine be the heart that can itself defend."

CARLTON—gloomy, indignant—has been walking for the past hour beneath the Chinese lanterns hung so artistically in the gardens, with very poor results as to the state of his mind. He is still moody and—more than that—uncertain, which is the worst of all moods, because of the wear and tear that belongs to it. Now he comes suddenly upon a quiet little spot, very carefully *not* moonlit, from which retreat voices reach him.

"More of those confounded idiots!" says he, stopping short. He has no sympathy with lovers to-night. To go back is the only thing. But a word or two—and one voice especially—brings him to a standstill; it brings his face, too, to an expression as hard as stone.

"I would believe your lightest word."

"The more fool you." There is no mistaking that laughing tone. He can almost see the pretty face, and the little seductive wrinkling up of the soft cheeks to the eyes (it is hardly a grimace) that means so much to the man she is looking at—and so little all the same.

"No, Chloe. I must have been mad when I doubted you—when I thought you engaged to Carlton."

She laughs.

"You were at your maddest then, certainly. He detests me."

"But now"—eagerly—"I believe in you as"—vehemently—"I believe in heaven!"

She makes a little gesture. Is it one of distress?

"Oh, no! I shouldn't do that if I were you!"

"I shall, however!"

"A rash promise," says a voice coming from the depths of the shrubberies. The owner of it steps into their vision.

"I'm afraid," says Carlton calmly, "I have interrupted you; and the third person, I know, is always very unwelcome. Yet I have to risk it, Lloyd, as I have news for my cousin that may probably have some interest for her." He had sworn to himself in the beginning of the evening that he would not disclose the contents of the new telegram to her. But now—now—well, it seems imperative now. "I am sure"—with a cursory glance at Laurence—"you will excuse her."

"What is it?" cries Chloe eagerly, abruptly. To Laurence it seems quite plain that there is something of fear in her tone. He follows her as she moves towards Carlton.

"Chloe, let me take you back to the house," says he, "if you don't wish to stay here—if——"

"No, no, no!" Chloe puts up two little impatient, imperious hands. "*Do* go away, and let me hear what Granby has to say."

Laurence turns aside as if shot. He disappears in the darkness; and Chloe, already forgetful of his ever having been here, cries quickly:

"Now what is it? He—he——"

"Yes—he is worse."

"Ah!" If he had looked for grief in the small ejaculation, he does not find it. He finds rather relief. She is glad, then, that he is worse.

"I have had a telegram," says Carlton. "He is distinctly worse. Your guardian—your step-uncle—Blakeney—sent it. It is very bad news indeed. He says he can't live beyond a few days. In fact, Chloe, he is dying."

Chloe looks at him.

"You call that bad news?" says she.

"*Chloe!*"

"*I* don't!"—with distinct meaning—"I call it good news. I'll be free, you know. One likes to be free. Of course, I'm shocking you, Granby, but as I am always doing that, it doesn't count. And so he is dying?"

"Great heavens! you must feel it in some way!"

"I don't indeed. I feel nothing—except"—slowly—"that what you tell me is too good to be true." Suddenly she turns to him. "*Is* it true? Tell me." Her voice has changed—has grown a little wild. "*Tell* me—is it true?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

"Chloe, listen to me."

"No." She puts out her hands as if to thrust him from her, and faces him defiantly.

Such a pale, beautiful thing she looks, with her slender frame shaken by passion—by that great storm

of rage that springs alone from a sense of injustice. And surely injustice is of all senses the strongest.

"It is you who shall listen to me now," she says in a low, concentrated voice. "You have made me out frivolous, heartless, worthless; but there is one thing, Granby, you will never make me out, in spite" —bitterly—"of all your efforts; and that is a hypocrite! You think I ought to wear sackcloth and ashes because this man is dying. Why? Because he illtreated me, betrayed me, insulted me, during the few short months I lived with him? Are you" —her nostrils dilating—"a *fool*, when you talk to me like that—when you expect grief from me at his impending death? I tell you"—flinging up her head—"that night and morn I long to hear of that death! That *death*," drawing a long breath, "that will mean life to me."

She pauses. Her nature—so strange, so complex, so careless, so almost cruelly cynical, and yet so tender *au fond*—seems now to have come to a crossroad. Which way will she turn?

Carlton, unfortunately, gives her a wrong lead.

"Have you *no* sense of decency?" demands he sternly. He might not have been so harsh with her, perhaps, but for that little scene he had just witnessed. His tone decides her.

"None!" cries she.

"He dying, and you dancing!"

She laughs.

"It sounds like a play, doesn't it? But don't waste your dramatic lectures over me, Granby. Time

should have taught you the inutility of it. I'm a pagan. You called me that once, long ago—last season, wasn't it?—in Lady Mary's boudoir. And I told you then that I didn't know whether I was a pagan, or a Goth, or an infidel, but that I should certainly always do just as I liked, because——" She stops here, and a terribly forlorn expression grows on her young and lovely face. "Because there was no one on earth who cared whether I was bad or good—whether I lived or died. And I tell you it is the same now! I am my own mistress."

"To an extent." Carlton's face is whiter than hers; it is full of pain.

"To an *extent!*" She frowns defiance at him. "I defy you—I defy the world!"

"Your defiance will not prevent me doing what I can for you," says Carlton coldly, who has dragged himself back from that strange agitation of a moment ago to his normal mood. "Some time ago I warned you I should tell the entire truth about you if—I saw a necessity for it—if, in fact, I saw you compromising yourself in any way."

"Well?"

"I think this affair with young Lloyd——"

"Oh, my *dear* Granby!"

"I am to understand by that, I suppose, that I am incapable of seeing your meaning? You underrate me there. I never supposed you *did* mean anything with Lloyd. But that *he* means something is only too plain; and there shall be an end to it. This is Wednesday; I give you till Friday to tell the truth to him yourself. If you refuse, *I* shall."

"Final?" She lifts her shoulders with a charming air.

"Quite final." Then: "Chloe"—turning quietly to her with quite a different tone—"take my advice—the advice of an old friend—and go straight to Italy—to the dying bed of the man——"

"Whom I detest most on earth. No, thank you!"

"Have you *no* heart?"

"For him?—no."

"No charity?"

"For him?—no."

"I believe in my soul," cries he furiously, "you have neither heart nor charity for any man!"

He strides away from her into the darkness.

And she? She stands for a moment, the slightly insolent smile still upon her lips, her fingers still playing with the white feathers of her fan.

"How stupid!" she says presently, with fine disgust, "and how rude! He grows almost vulgar. To leave me here alone! I used to think he was—— But I was mistaken. He is worse—even worse—than the others. Oh! how I *hate* him—with his moralities, and his duties, and his—— Well, he is the biggest fool in the world, anyway! And——" Here she comes to a full stop. Tears are falling from her pretty eyes, are racing down to her still prettier lips, where she receives them with amazement.

"Ah!" cries she whimsically, even between her sobs, "he is not the biggest, after all; I've beaten him for once in his life!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"No one is a hero to his valet."

MRS. FITZGERALD during her drive home with the girls is singularly silent. This is, of course, scarcely remarked, because of the incessant flow of Cissy's light-hearted observations on the men and their manners who had been her partners during the past delightful evening.

When they are in the hall, however, Mrs. Fitzgerald, who is looking a little pale and unhappy, lays her hand on Olivia's arm.

"A moment, darling. Major O'Hara—— He spoke, Olivia—of coming here to-morrow——"

The terror in her mother's eyes stills the girl. She feels mama would not wish her to marry an old man like that; but—if a young man does not want her——

"I know, mama. Don't look so—so sorry. *I* am not sorry. Let him come."

She goes up the stairs and straight to her room. There is a little dressing-room off it, and into this she creeps, languidly, miserably, dragging each step after the other, and in the blessed darkness and silence of it falls upon her knees.

Sobs seem to rend her.

"Miss Olivia, darlin'! What is it all about?" says a loving and familiar voice. "What is it at all, me dear? What ails ye like that, to be cryin' yer purty

eyes out? Come an' tell yer ould Feeney all about it."

"It is nothing, Feeney, nothing. Nothing, really. I am crying—only—because——"

"Because," says the shrewd old nurse, who adores her, "ye're dreamin' o' marryin' a man ould enough to be yer father. Bad cess to the ould fool! What does he mane at all at all, by wishin' to dhrag a young Christian crathure like you into a situation of that sort? Arrah! Miss Olivia, are ye *mad* to give in to him?"

"He has money, Feeney." The girl's face is wretched.

"Hell's full o' money," says the old woman sententiously.

"Oh! Feeney."

"Yes, yes; I know, me dear; I'm not sayin' bad things about the Major. To my sight he seems a good man—real good, Miss Olivia, but"—with extraordinary force—"*ould!*"

Olivia has subsided into a chair; her pretty chin has fallen into her palms. She looks forlorn.

"Everyone tells me he is so young," says she.

"Everyone's a fool!" says the old nurse calmly. "Haven't ye noticed that, miss? But, God forgive me, of course ye're too young to notice anything. Well, 'tis this way now"—in an explanatory fashion—"he's wan o' thim ould young men that go on bein' young until ye wondher if they haven't forgotten whin they were created. But don't ye be taken in by Major O'Hara, miss. He's got a

fresh colour, an' a bright eye—I grant ye that. Faith, he's as everlastin' as the hills, in my opinion; but he's ould for all that—an' *very* ould too; an' I'd give him the go-by if I was you."

"Oh, I can't, Feeney." Olivia turns aside. She pretends to trifle with the ornaments on her table, but the old woman, sad and distressed for her, can see that the tears are again running fast and furious down her cheeks.

"Oh, Miss Olivia——"

She would have gone to her—have consoled her—but now a soft voice comes to them along the corridor.

"Feeney, Feeney! Come to me, Feeney."

It is a voice that is even dearer to her than Olivia's. The voice of Dora; the voice of the baby she had nursed so many years ago, and around whom her heart-strings have been tied ever since.

"Mama wants you," says Olivia gently. "You know she likes you to brush her hair. Go to her. And—and don't say a word of what you have said to me, Feeney. She would be distressed; and—she has nothing to do with it—nothing, really; and besides—I have made up my mind."

"As if a child like you had any mind!" says Feeney (beneath her breath, however), as she closes the door behind her.

A moment later she has crossed the corridor and is in Mrs. Fitzgerald's room, and has marched straight up to her mistress, who is sitting in an attitude descriptive of the most extreme depression on a chair very far away from the looking-glass.

"You have come, Feeney?" in a low and melancholy tone.

"I have, Miss Dora. I beg your pardon—ma'am. Yes, I've come, Miss Dora. Is it in a plait ye'll want it to-night, ma'am?"

"Oh, never mind my hair," with a touch of impatience. "As if it mattered — as if anything mattered, except——" She pauses.

"Miss Olivia?" suggests Feeney, but not sympathetically.

"Yes"—eagerly—"yes, Miss Olivia. It is about *her*, Feeney. Major O'Hara has admired her for quite a long time, as you know; but to-night—to-night, Feeney, he told me he was coming to-morrow to propose for her formally."

"And 'formally,' whatever that may mane, he ought to be ashamed of himself for even *thinkin'* of it," says Feeney in a fury. "An' faith, Miss Dora, 'tis yerself ought to be ashamed of it too!—to think o' marryin' a child like that to an ould fellow like him!"

"Feeney!"

"Arrah! Don't be talkin'! Don't be thryin' to stop me. *Isn't* he ould for her? Doesn't it seem like yestherday whin he come courtin' yerself? An' Masther George—God rest his sowl"—crossing herself devoutly—"used to be watchin' him like a bear wid a sore head. Often I thought to see murther done between thim two boys, an' yerself lookin' on and not carin' a thrawneen whether there'd be bloody wars or not."

"Feeney, I——"

"Faix, I can see, me dear!" says the old woman,

waving the protestation aside. "'Tis as plain to me now as if it was goin' on this minute. 'Twas a dozen o' thim ye had at yer heels, but only the masther an' the Major had a chance at all! 'Twas a fine play-boy ye were then, Miss Dora; an' 'twasn't *ould* gintlemen ye wanted, ayther."

"Feeney! You forget yourself!" Mrs. Fitzgerald draws back frowning, angry.

"Forget! Faith, that's the last thing wid me," says Feeney. "Me memory is the only thing (God help us!) that remains to me."

Her memory! Feeney's memory! "God help us indeed!" should cry all Feeney's friends every now and then. "An' what I remimber best, Miss Dora, is that whin ye were Miss Olivia's age 'tisn't a man as ould as yer own grandfather ye'd be plasin' yerself wid."

"Major O'Hara," says Mrs. Fitzgerald sharply, "is not old enough to be Miss Olivia's grandfather!"

"Well"—placing her hands upon her ample hips—"answer me this, Miss Dora. Is he, or is he not, ould enough to be her father? Fegs! I well remimber the time whin, at all events, he *wanted* to be her father!"

"Really, Feeney!" with indignation.

"Oh! 'Tis vexed ye are now, ma'am, by what I'm sayin'. An' sorry it is I am to have to vex you—who is the very sowl o' me; ye know that, darlin', don't ye? But Miss Dora, ma'am, I never could abide the marryin' of the young to the ould. An' ould he is, for Miss Olivia, beyant all sayin'—though I'm not denyin' him his good looks, miss—an' his good

heart, ma'am. But he is—— Well, faith, Miss Dora, 'tis too young for him you look *yerself*, this blessed minit!" Mrs. Fitzgerald grows suddenly crimson—so crimson that the old woman regards her sharply for a second—the mere fraction of a second, indeed—then drops her eyes. But Feeney has wonderful eyes; and what she doesn't see—according to her cronies—isn't worth seeing.

"You seem to blame *me* in some way for this affair," says Mrs. Fitzgerald—"this affair between Olivia and Major O'Hara." Then, with sudden anger: "Sit down, Feeney, *do!* and don't stand there as if you wanted to pose as an accusing angel! One would imagine by your air that I—*I* had compelled Miss Olivia to accept him! For the matter of that, I don't know whether she will accept him or not; and I declare most solemnly to you that I never once said to her: '*Do* accept him.' I left it entirely to herself."

"That's wan way o' doin' it—of makin it *sure!*" says Feeney, unmoved.

"Oh, you are most unjust—unjust!" cries her mistress. "Feeney! to misjudge *me* like that!—*you*, who have always loved me!"

"Well, Miss Dora," says the old woman slowly, "I must say as I think. Would you have me lie to you at this time o' day? What you *didn't* say to her, ma'am, is of no good at all. What *did* ye say to her? That's what I'd like to hear. Did ye say: '*Don't* marry him, darlin'?' Ah, I'm afraid ye didn't say that, ma'am."

"No." Mrs. Fitzgerald looks now very pale and

haggard. Why had she so held back? Was it altogether a desire for her daughter's marriage with this rich man that had tied her tongue? Or was there something further—something that told her she would be so glad if the girl refused him that she hardly dared to press her to the doing of it?

"We are very poor, Feeney," she says in a low voice; "and—and the children don't like poverty. They don't seem to understand it. And you know I have been pinched all my life; and—*I* didn't like it either. I should like Olivia to rescue herself from this Slough of Despond if—if—she can. And we want money rather badly just now."

"But I thought Miss Chloe's comin'——"

"Yes, I know," sighing. "But, you see, I *owed* the two hundred she paid me, and—her very coming has helped us to get into debt again."

"Why don't ye spake to Sir Hardress, darlin'? Who has a betther right to help ye than he has—yer own sisther's husband?"

"I couldn't, Feeney. I"—in a low tone, and with her pretty face lowered, and dyed with shame—"I once asked him to lend me—some money—and he —refused."

"Oh, the naygur!" cries Feeney in a fury. "May all the saints ov Heaven refuse *him* whin—— But there! what's the good o' talkin'? Oh, murther! What an ould skin-flint! Faith, I won't be able to die till I tell him what I think of him!"

"Never mind that," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, wiping her eyes. "I am thinking of Miss Olivia now. You are right, Feeney. It would be an unnatural mar-

riage. And I daresay we shall be able to pull through after all, especially if Miss Jones stays on with us; and she seems very happy and contented here, dear little girl. I shall go to Olivia now and tell her she shall not marry Major O'Hara; I——"

"No, mama!" The door is open; Olivia is standing just inside it. "You shall not tell me that! I have quite made up my mind—*quite!* Major O'Hara is the only man on earth who wishes to marry me—who cares for me. Why should I refuse him? Feeney! I told you not to speak to mama, but I *felt* you were going to do it. When Major O'Hara comes to-morrow, mama, I shall say 'yes' to him."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"And the nights shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs
And as silently steal away."

"GIRLS," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, in a low and tragic tone, "he is coming! Yes—up the avenue. I saw his hat between the rhododendrons."

It is the next day, and, standing just inside the sitting-room that contains the two girls, she looks at Olivia. Olivia, however, refuses to look at her.

"What a hurry he is in!" cries Cissy, with a little anger. "Why, it is only eleven! Could he not have waited——"

"I suppose not," returns her mother, the lines

about her mouth deepening. "Olivia"—nervously—"had you not better change your frock? That one is a little shabby."

"Am I, then, to deck myself for the sacrifice?" Olivia rises with a rather reckless laugh, and moves towards the door.

"*Why* do you speak to me like that?" cries her mother, with a sudden and, for her, most unusual burst of anger. "No, *don't* go! Stay here, Olivia. *I* shall go—and tell Major O'Hara you have made up your mind; that you have decided on *not* accepting him. And you are right—quite right. It is wrong—horrible—that at your age you should marry a man so much older than yourself. I will not let you speak to me as if I were driving you into such a marriage. I could not *live* under such a thought."

"You have not driven me to it," says Olivia. "You have never so much as asked me to do it. Put that thought away, mama. I am doing this thing of my own free will, because I am mercenary, perhaps; or perhaps—because——"

"Yes—go on," says Cissy. "Because——"

"Because"—indifferently—"I daresay I shall be quite happy with him."

"Oh, no; that's not it," says Cissy. "If one could get the *real* answer out of you, one would know a good deal. Well"—with a sigh—"come with me and change your dress."

"No, no!" cries Mrs. Fitzgerald, pale and trembling. But Olivia stops her.

"I am sorry I made that stupid remark," says she very gently; and very tenderly, too, she slips her

arms round her mother's neck and kisses her. "Oh, mama! as if *you* could try to make anyone unhappy! You—who are the very dearest and sweetest. No, no; I am doing this, really, *really*—and only—because I *wish* to do it."

"But think, my darling!" holding her with both hands as the girl tries to escape.

"I have thought," smiling bravely. She has indeed thought, poor child, of the blessing it will be—this dreaded marriage of hers—to her mother and her sister.

"You"—earnestly—"have *quite* made up your mind, Olivia? Remember, it is the last moment."

"Quite," steadily, yet always with that somewhat fixed smile.

* * * * * * * *

"You are a little early, James," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, as she crosses the cool, somewhat shabby old drawing-room to receive the Major. "We—I—hardly expected you so soon."

"Is it early?" asks the Major, who looks decidedly nervous. "It seems a deuce of a time since breakfast. Of course"—twisting his hat about—"if I am *too* soon——"

"Oh, no, no. What a tone to take with an old friend!"

"Ah, yes; we are old friends, aren't we, Dora? Once"—with a distinct increase of his awkwardness—"we were—that is—er—*I* was something more."

What a thing to say just now! Mrs. Fitzgerald's face shews a touch of displeasure. She makes no

reply, and this, coupled with the gravity of her face, gives the Major pause, of a somewhat disagreeable kind.

"You said last night," says he, leaning a little towards her, "that to-day I might speak. You remember?"

"Yes."

"You *meant* it, Dora?"

"Yes, yes; of course," a little faintly.

"Does that mean——" The Major seems uncontrollably anxious, and stops short. "Do you remember too how, twenty years ago, I asked you a certain question, and that your answer was—unfavourable?"

"I remember"—growing very pale—"that too. But this is quite different." She knows he his alluding to that silly time when he had believed himself in love with her, and had proposed to her, and had taken his dismissal somewhat badly. Olivia being so like her in face and form, he no doubt dreads a similar repulse from the daughter.

"There will be no unfavourable answer this time," she says, quite distinctly, though her heart is dying within her. Olivia certainly had (only a moment ago, as it were) declared her determination of accepting Major O'Hara's hand—— But who on this earth is clever enough to know what a young girl *really* means, and what she will do at the last moment? And even if she did do it—the "it" is not particularly defined—she—her mother—would not be the one to blame her.

"Dora!" says the Major. He has risen. He

looks pale, even through the tan of his skin, but as triumphant as if he had taken a fort, single-handed.

"A moment—a moment," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, raising her hand with some agitation. "Before you—— *Do* let me say something, James, as an old, old friend. I am glad, naturally, that you are so happy about it. But—there are things to be considered—to be thought of—and one thing there is certainly, for which we must be prepared to make allowances." Her beautiful eyes fill with tears, as she thinks of Olivia. "I mean the difference of age. You must not be angry with me, James, but there is a great disparity."

The Major stares at her for a moment, then drops his eyes. He is silent. Well, hang it all! Dora is going a *little* far. He is not such an old dodderer as all that comes to! Nor is she so—so violently young as she seems to think. But here he stops. Hang it all, again! She *is* young—confoundedly young—next to *him*—though there are only a few years between them. She looks, indeed, as she used to look in those sweet dead days when first he met her. Her dear and pretty face has known but little change since then—now nearly twenty years ago.

Such is the blindness of the honest lover. Though it must be confessed that in the "dear and pretty face" there are excuses for Major O'Hara's infatuation.

"Not so *very* great a disparity after all, Dora," he ventures to say—in a rather stammering tone certainly, and with his eyes still lowered. He coughs, and looks distinctly confused, if not, indeed, alto-

gether ashamed of himself. A lady's age, the Major tells himself, is sacred; and if Dora, who really only looks thirty or so, wishes to *think* herself that, who the deuce is he to step forward and remind her of her real age, which is——

"Oh, James!" Mrs. Fitzgerald flushes hotly—a touch of nature that reduces her age at once to twenty-nine. Has he gone mad? "Not so *very* great!" Good gracious, who would have thought James so absurdly blind to his age! "Surely you must see it yourself," she says gently. "Not that I think it need for a moment interfere with your happiness. But—well, you——" she hesitates; she knows he is forty-nine, but says: "You are well over forty, you know, and——"

"And you," says the Major involuntarily, "are well over thirty, Dora."

When these awful words have passed his lips the Major grows apoplectic. A full-blown peony would hardly describe him. That Dora will never again so much as *see* him, occurs to him as a certainty—and yet a fight for it was inevitable.

To his immense astonishment, he hears Dora laugh. It is quite an irrepressible little laugh, and there is no venom in it.

"Well over *thirty!*" laughing still. "What a courtier you are, James! But why drag my years into the discussion? What have I got to do with it? Olivia's age"—she grows very grave again—"Olivia is not yet, James—not yet quite twenty."

"Olivia!" The Major stares, then springs to his feet. "Olivia! What has *she* got to do with

it?" Has some glimmer of the truth come to him?

It is now Mrs. Fitzgerald's turn to stare, and it must be said she does it handsomely.

"Do you mean to tell me," she exclaims at last, "that you have not come here to-day to propose for Olivia? That you are not in love with her?"

"With Olivia!—with that child! God bless me, Dora! are you mad?"

"Then"—faintly—"what brought you here to-day?"

"Why, you!" cries the Major in a loud, clear tone. "Did you think I could ever look at another woman while you were alive? I loved you twenty years ago, Dora, and I've loved you every year since that, and —I love you now. Don't tell me"—with a step towards her, and an appealing yet stern air—"that all the encouragement you gave me last night meant nothing; that it was only meant for Olivia; that you will now undo—destroy—all the happiness on which I have been living for these few past interminable hours."

Mrs. Fitzgerald, who has grown very white, says nothing.

"Speak, Dora. Are you going to send me about my business?"

"No, James, no; I shall not do that." Her voice is very low. "But——"

"Well"—still a little sternly—"are you going to tell me I am too old a fellow to dream of love? I'm *not*, anyway!" this with considerable defiance. "I dream of you from morning till night, and back

again. No"—indignantly—"you need not look at me like that. I am not one bit ashamed of being as much in love with you now as I was when a boy, so many years ago. Refuse me again if you like——"

"James!" She holds out her hands to him. She is smiling, but her eyes are full of tears. "I shall not refuse you."

* * * * * * * *

"What an absurd misunderstanding!" the Major is saying five minutes later. "Do you know, even last night, when you told me I might come to-day, I had still some misgivings. That touch about 'respect'—you remember you said you 'respected me'—seemed to strike cold. Odious word, respect, eh?"

"Yes, isn't it?" says Mrs. Fitzgerald, who has always been so circumspect. "But I'll never use it again. It—it isn't respect I feel for you, James."

"Oh, come now, Dora!"

"No it isn't," laughing. "It is—you'll be horrified, I know; and at my age, too; but—I must confess to you the fact that I love you. Yes, I do indeed."

"Dora!"

"And that"—laughing very merrily now—"I have been in love with you for twelve long months."

The Major regards her with severity.

"Oh, Dora!" says he, regarding her with as near an attempt at reproach as he can reach, "why on earth, my love, didn't you say so before?"

"Why indeed! For one thing—because I thought you were in love with Olivia."

"What awful rot!" says the Major. "As if, when

you were there——" and so on. Then after a while, and somewhat shamefacedly: "I'm afraid I was very rude to you a while ago—about the disparity of our ages, you know."

"Yes," slowly, as if rather trying to remember. "Oh! Did you think, then, I was speaking of your and my age? That when I spoke of disparity—— Oh, James, what must you have thought of me!"

"My goodness, Dora, it is what did you think of me! I said, you know, 'not so great a disparity'—eh? Beastly rude you know; what?"

Here there is a little pause; and then, each catching the other's eye, they laugh until they nearly cry.

* * * * * * * *

"Oh, mama!" It is Cissy who speaks. "Here you are at last. We thought you would never come. Is—is——"

"Yes, am I to go down now?" breaks in Olivia in a low and frightened tone. All her courage of a while ago has deserted her in a most unfriendly fashion. She looks pale; there is terror in her large and lovely eyes—her eyes so like her mother's.

If Olivia looks frightened, Mrs. Fitzgerald undoubtedly looks dreadfully ashamed of herself.

"No, not yet. Don't go down yet," she stammers.

"Mama, what is it—what has happened?" cries Cissy. "Something has happened."

"Yes—something. But—— Oh, girls"—now half laughing and half crying—"I don't know how to tell you." She stops. The girls can see she is blushing, and that she is happy—and looking *so* young. "We were all wrong, it seems," she says

with an effort, her eyes wet, but a smile upon her pretty face. "It—it isn't Olivia he wants, after all."

"Good heavens! I hope it isn't me!" says Cissy with consternation.

"No, no." The girls stare at her. Mama is looking quite confused. "The fact is—I"—growing even more nervous beneath the gaze of those four young eyes—"I hardly quite know how to say it, but he—it's absurd, I know, only——"

"Oh, *do* go on, mama."

"Well—it is perfectly ridiculous, of course; and besides—— Now, *don't* laugh, girls." Neither of the girls is in the least inclined for mirth. "Oh, well"—desperately—"it's *me* he wants to marry!"

A long and impressive silence. Then suddenly Olivia begins to laugh—uncertainly, almost feverishly—and as suddenly as she began she stops.

"Mama," cries she, "you shan't do it! It is for us! But we won't let you! Cissy—speak to her."

"It is out of the question!" declares Cissy instantly. "As if we would consent to your making yourself miserable—a perfect *martyr*—for our sakes!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald has paled, and reddened, and paled again, beneath this fire of tenderness.

"But—you don't understand," she breathes faintly. "If—if you wouldn't mind, children, I think I—should *like* to marry Major O'Hara."

She buries her face in her hands. The murder is out. How—*how* will they take it?

The sound as if of someone convulsed or choking now moves the quiet air. Mrs. Fitzgerald starts. Good heavens! which of them is taking it so badly

as this? She glances hurriedly up, to find both girls sunk deep into one huge armchair, their handkerchiefs pressed to their faces, and as near apoplexy as young girls can get, through their efforts to suppress their uncontrollable mirth.

"Well, really, girls!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald, perhaps just a little offended.

"Oh, mamy darling, don't mind us. It's—it's *joy!*" cries Cissy, getting up and running to her. "Isn't it splendid! Oh, that dear, dear Major! I have always loved him."

"Yes; and so have I," cries Olivia. "And he *is* young, mama. Very *nearly*—young enough for you, anyway. I—where is he?—is he down-stairs still?"

"Yes." Mrs. Fitzgerald is now radiant. "He—he says he should like to spend the day here. There are things to be talked over, you know. He'll stay for lunch certainly. Cissy"—anxiously—"what is there?"

"It's all right. Cutlets and tomatoes and a pie that will do your heart good. *I* made it."

"I'm going down to see him!" cries Olivia excitedly. "I *must* tell him how I love him!" With this astounding remark she slips out of the room (quite a new Olivia already) and tumbles down the staircase into the drawing-room, and straight into the Major's arms, who is looking as proud as Punch.

"Oh," cries Olivia penitently, "I have been horrid to you sometimes, haven't I? but I didn't mean it. I loved you all the time, really; only——"

"Only you loved Tom more?"

"Tom!" She colours violently, "Oh, no, no; only I thought you wanted to marry *me!*"

The Major roars in the fulness of his joy, and gives her a hearty hug.

"Come here and sit down, and let us talk of Dora —of your mother. I've no one else to talk to about her. I've tried *her*, indeed; but she only laughs at me. It sounds queer to you, this new arrangement, doesn't it, eh? I'm close on fifty, you know, but for twenty-nine years I've loved your mother and her only. Not another soul. I like to tell you that, Olivia. I like you to know, to understand, what a sweet creature she is. Do you know, Olivia, I don't regret now those sad years when I was without her; not now, when she is going to have me after all. And I'm glad I'll be able to do so much for her, and to look after you all, and to give her everything, and— and what would she like for a present just at once, Olivia, eh? Do you know any fancy of hers, eh?" He stops suddenly, seeing the girl's eyes fixed on his. "I suppose," says he, a little shamefacedly, "you think I am an old fool!"

"I think you are a darling!" says Olivia, solemnly and most sincerely.

It is now a little later, and Chloe has been found— has been brought in from her favourite walk in the garden to hear the delightful news, to congratulate the Major and Mrs. Fitzgerald. Chloe is most openly and charmingly delighted. She had always been a little indignant with Olivia for dreaming of marrying a man so much older than herself; had counselled her very wisely about it, and argued with her so

cleverly on the subject that "Faith," as Feeney had said in her secret wisdom, "wan would think she'd had exparience of it, an' had been through it her own self."

By-and-bye, as the morning wears on, Tom and Laurence drop in, to be surprised, and pleased—and, in one case at all events, to be astounded—at this strange engagement. It had been broken to them by the Major himself in the happiest fashion, and with a distinct touch of friendliness towards Tom. But Tom had not dared to respond to the friendliness. He had coloured a dark red to his very temples, muttered something presumably suitable—but unheard—and turned away. And turning, he had wished to goodness he had not been such a brute to the Major at that dinner a few days ago.

Now they are all, on this sultry, delicious afternoon, sitting or standing, as the fancy takes them, in the drawing-room of The Hermitage, or on the verandah that opens out of it. The Major, catching sight of a morning paper lying on a small table at his left, leans lazily towards it, and picks it up.

"Give you my word," says he, "I never thought of the morning news until this minute."

Everyone laughs.

"Oh, Major!" cries Chloe playfully, adjuring him with a little uplifted forefinger, "you are giving yourself away!"

The Major accepts this sally very cheerfully, indeed, with marked pleasure, and unfolds the paper. *He* considers he has given himself away to the very dearest woman in all the world, and what can a

man want more than that? His eyes skim over the pages. It can hardly be called reading; his mind is too full of events near at hand to feel much interest in the Transvaal, or Buluwayo, or that troublesome person Oom Paul. But in spite of his pleasant *dilettante* mood, his eyes catch and rest on one sentence, and he stops—startled, arrested.

"By Jove!" says he in a loud, surprised tone.

They all look up.

"Krüger gone wrong again?" asks Laurence idly. He had read the morning papers, and had seen nothing fresh about the Transvaal.

"Nothing of that. But I see here that Lord Burlingham is dead! A good riddance, too, of bad rubbish. Dropped down suddenly, it seems, and——"

As the words are on his lips the door is opened with extraordinary vehemence by Carlton, who strides up the room, his eyes not for his hostess, but for the window beyond, where Chloe, ghastly now, and with dilated eyes and parted lips, is standing.

As Carlton advances towards her, so she advances towards him, and her face, set like marble, her tragic air, tell him everything.

"You have heard?" cries he. She holds out her arms and sways forward. He catches her.

"Is it true?" she gasps.

"Quite true," slowly. She breathes heavily. Mrs. Fitzgerald runs to her.

"Oh! what is this, Chloe? Oh, Chloe"—an awful doubt assails her gentle soul—"what was this man to you?"

"Speak, Chloe!" whispers Carlton eagerly. Chloe lifts her white face, but in doing so her eyes have met those of Laurence. There is such a wealth of *expectant* misery in his, of immediate scorn and contempt, that, perhaps for the first time in all her young and most unhappy life, she loses courage. She falters, hesitates.

"Speak now," says Carlton, who is still holding her, and is a little afraid for her. "For God's sake, Chloe, tell the truth yourself!"

"Oh! the truth!" She pushes him from her, and turns to Mrs. Fitzgerald. "Lord Burlingham was——" Again the dreadful hesitation.

"Was——?" Mrs. Fitzgerald's tone is full of poignant anxiety.

"*My husband!*"

As Chloe says this, dead to all the consternation, the surprised horror around her, she looks, with a dull smile, at Carlton: "You said you would give me—till Friday—before you betrayed me; you see" —swaying again—"you have not had—to wait—so long."

She falls forward in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"There is no accounting for the difference of minds or inclinations."

"I THINK it was an extremely treacherous act on your part!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald is looking quite seriously angry, for her—the angrier, perhaps, in that all her anger seems to fall against a solid rock, in the form of the person she is addressing.

Mrs. Gilbert, indeed, had come down post haste; had travelled straight through from London, and had arrived in Aughribeg early this afternoon. It is now the second afternoon since the extraordinary news of Lord Burlingham's death and his relationship to Chloe had been made public; and Major O'Hara's strange fancy on first seeing her, that her face was familiar to him, became quite clear. He had, indeed, seen her years before at her guardian's house (*her* house, rather) when she was a mere child. Chloe had recovered very quickly from her fainting attack, and ever since had shewn the most open callousness as to her loss. She had, however, so far conceded to the laws of conventionality as not to appear to anyone except those in the house; but beyond that she had refused to go.

To Mrs. Fitzgerald this seems a little dreadful, but through it all she feels that there is a sort of queer honesty about this strange girl—this bride of six months—who had been *bought* from her guardian before she knew what the world meant, and who had

been cast aside before half of her first year's wifehood had gone by. Chloe, however, it seems, had been an apt pupil. Those six months of the world had taught her a good deal.

"My dearest Dora! What a curious way of putting it!" Mrs. Gilbert, a small, fair woman with wonderfully yellow hair (is it honestly yellow?) spreads her hands abroad.

"Curious!" Mrs. Fitzgerald's tone now grows actually stern. "The most curious thing about this whole dreadful affair is the impression conveyed in your letters to me. They seem to have been fabrications from the first. You gave me the distinct impression that she was a young girl, escaping, under your advice, from a tyrannical guardian. Now, there was no guardian to speak of, and you did not mention the husband."

"I certainly mentioned that someone had caused her great unhappiness."

"Yes; but that applied to the guardian. You let me think she was escaping from *him;* whereas she was running away from her husband."

"And very justly, too. But if I had told you that—— My dearest Dora, can't you see that if I had told you that, I should have told you everything—and secrecy was imperative?"

"You led me to think she was a *girl,* at all events."

"Well"—triumphantly—"isn't she a girl? And I think I mentioned that she was to come in for a fortune shortly. I'm bound to confess I telegraphed to the trustees about the will before I crossed last

night, and it is all right! She *has* come in for a fortune. Not the houses, you understand, or the lands. They are all entailed on Granby Carlton; but a very handsome sum, to be paid down. It seems that that other dreadful creature—unspeakable, dearest Dora, but a very dream of beauty, I have *heard*—was a little stupid about matters of settlement. That sort of person always lives in the moment!—*so* wanting, you know. And therefore, in spite of Burlingham's unhappy *penchant* for her, our sweet Chloe comes in for quite a handsome sum. Not that she wants it—beyond the fact that we all want everything—because she has quite a fortune of her own, and a charming place, in which Mr. Blakeney—the guardian, you know—has resided up to this. I do hope she will turn him out now. But Chloe, to tell the truth, is a little—a *very* little—uncertain, eh?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald reflects somewhat sadly. Chloe has been a disappointment to her. She had believed in the pretty, merry girl—but——

"We have all grown very fond of her," she says in a low tone.

"So clever of you!" Mrs. Gilbert speaks with effusion. "I'm tremendously fond of her myself" (considerably fonder of her since yesterday, she ought to have said, but refrains).

"I wish she had not come here," says Mrs. Fitzgerald. "I wish you had been open with me. You know you distinctly gave the impression that she was——"

"Going to be one of the richest women in Eng-

land. Well, so she was; and so she *is*—now. Burlingham, when she married him, was, as *I* knew, and as Mr. Blakeney knew too, very far gone in consumption. He hadn't a lung to stand on. That was why I wrote to you. And surely, my dear Dora, I predicted very cleverly. He has died *within* the six months I prophesied, and she has come in for—if not an immense fortune, at all events a very desirable one. Besides which, she is free—and a very good thing, too. He was thoroughly impossible. Disreputable is a rude word for one who is dead, but I'm afraid I must use it. And she is now Lady Burlingham — rich, unattached, and a cousin of whom I feel very justly proud."

"Proud?"

"Certainly. A young creature like that, beautiful and rich, can't you imagine how well she will marry next time? There are several young Dukes in the market just now."

"You thought her late husband disreputable?" Mrs. Fitzgerald regards her earnestly.

"He had a reputation that—— Well, dearest, I think we had better not go into it. But with all that, he had a face like a seraph, and manners that were enviable."

"He was elderly?"

"Old—positively old!—and abominable! But rich and charming, as I have said. And the poor child (Chloe was really only a little hoyden of a thing when Burlingham saw her and fancied her) was *sold* to him by that terrible old Mr. Blakeney for twenty thousand pounds."

"Oh, *no!*" Mrs. Fitzgerald rises, as if in uncontrollable horror.

Her cousin sighs prettily.

"I knew you would be shocked, dear Dora, when you heard about it, and would see how justified I was in sending her to you. Now"—sweetly—"you know all."

"Very little." There is a touch of repulsion in Mrs. Fitzgerald's tone. "For one thing, you confess you thought him disreputable; yet I have heard that you too, Maud, wanted to marry him!"

If she had thought to see her enemy overthrown by this accusation, she finds herself mistaken. Mrs. Gilbert regards her with an unbroken front.

"This comes of living in a little village for a century," she says. "My good Dora, we *all* wanted to marry him. And that, that child—that mere baby——"

"I don't care about the others." Mrs. Fitzgerald interrupts her brusquely. "*You* are my cousin in a way, and you knew him to be unworthy—horrible——"

"But the richest man in England!"

"And at the point of death!"

"Ah"—simply—"there you have it! The very keynote!" She makes a charming little pass with her hands. "One could regard the money and the freedom as so *near*, you see."

Mrs. Fitzgerald pales. Such people—such thoughts—have rarely come within the circle of her gentle, kindly, uneventful life. And that Chloe—that child—to Mrs. Fitzgerald Chloe has seemed little more

than a child—that she should have been *sold* into such an atmosphere——

"It is terrible!" she cries suddenly, pressing her fingers to her eyes, as if to shut out something.

"About our dear Chloe! Yes, I knew you would see it, and do me justice at last. The dear girl, if unbearably miserable with her wretched guardian, was even more so with Burlingham, and when she consulted me with regard to getting rid of him in a decent way (after his flight to Egypt—I mean Italy of course—with that shocking person), I looked round me, and thought of you."

"I wish"—coldly—"you hadn't."

"How ungrateful, Dora! You know very well that at the time you were glad enough to get that two hundred pounds."

"I cannot permit you to speak to me like that," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, who is now very pale. "You know as well as I do that if I had known then what I know now, for no consideration on earth would I have taken her into my house."

"Well, well; I daresay not. My good-nature often leads me astray," says Mrs. Gilbert, who thinks it well to temporise—to humour her. The young and rich and widowed Lady Burlingham will be a feature in next year's season, and Mrs. Fitzgerald has enough relatives in town to make Mrs. Gilbert's part in the story of Chloe's running away look very ugly for the latter. The society papers, for one thing, are, as her American friends say, "so glad to get the laugh on you" at any moment, that she thinks it wise to conciliate even so mild an enemy as Mrs. Fitz-

gerald. "And of course, I know, Dora, that you would be the last to connive at anything. I feel sorry now I wrote to you about it; but I only thought of doing you, and her, a good turn; she was so young; and you so sweet, so motherly."

"You forget the scandal in which it might have launched me and my girls. In which"—slowly—"it is sure to launch us—even now."

"Oh, Dora, dearest! Really, you are terribly behind the times. Why, it will be an *advertisement* for your dear girls!"

"God forbid!" says Dora solemnly.

"This is folly!" severely. "I assure you she will be most useful to you later on—to your girls, I mean—so bound to you as she must be by the kindly ties of hospitality. She will take them out—will marry them well—will—— I am quite positive that when her mourning is over—when she has thrown aside her weeds—horrid word!—she——"

"She is not going into mourning!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald suddenly.

"What!" Mrs. Gilbert looks horrified.

"No. I have reasoned with her, but she will not order any black clothes."

"How disgraceful!" Mrs. Gilbert seems really scandalised. "Not to put on crape—even for a month or two! To run away from her husband, that was nothing—a little freak, an eccentricity—and to be eccentric nowadays is so fashionable—but not to put on *mourning* for him——!"

"She says"—Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice is depressed—"she feels no grief!"

"What on earth has that got to do with it? You know, my dear Dora, how I *loathed* poor Paul—and for that very reason I doubled my crape; put on five extra flounces—flounces were worn then—and kept it up for fully a year and a half! Mourning"—reflectively—"suits my complexion."

Mrs. Fitzgerald's eyes fill with tears.

"You *must* feel sometimes!" she says, with almost a touch of despair in her tone.

"Feel! I'm *all* feeling!" cries Mrs. Gilbert tragically. "But I daren't let it be seen. It gets into my nose. I assure you, my dear Dora, once I give way to sentiment I am a wreck—an object! I can't afford it! Now, you—how happy you are,—you can give your heart full sway. Feeling is becoming to you; it suits you; it gives you points. I have always wondered how you did it. Long ago, when first we met, I remarked about it to poor Paul, and he, for once, agreed with me. I remember it because I think it was the only time he ever *did* agree with me. And in spite of it all, how well you look! Quite young—and one of the very prettiest women I know."

Dora tells herself this is not to be believed for a moment, but she softens towards her cousin, for all that.

"And so she has refused to wear mourning of any sort?" Mrs. Gilbert goes on after a moment. "Well, after all I'm not sure that isn't clever. Certainly it's a *touch*. To make people talk is so essential now. I wonder she didn't think of white—white only, you know—for the year; or yellow, like the Chinese; or red—who are the people who wear red when their

people make themselves scarce? But really, to refuse to wear *any* mourning is perhaps quite as effective. So original! Still, if I could see her!—will she be down soon? Ah!"—as the door opens—"here she is!"

It is indeed Chloe.

"My dearest, sweetest Chloe!" Mrs. Gilbert is rustling towards her, both hands extended. "Such a bless—er—such a sudden affair! Only heard of it *late* yesterday, and literally *rushed* to you!"

"So good of you," says Chloe indifferently. She is dressed in pale pink crépon, and seems in excellent health. "Fancy your coming off like that—and without the invaluable Philips, too! Why?"

"My dearest! to see you, of course. I felt that under the circumstances—and your being amongst strangers——"

"Mrs. Fitzgerald is not a stranger," says Chloe, seating herself beside Mrs. Fitzgerald—almost tight up to her, indeed—and patting the pretty white hands of that charming lady with a gentle and very tender air. "I've behaved dreadfully to her, but she has forgiven me; and she has been my very best friend. She thinks I made a mistake, however."

"Ah"—triumphantly—"I told you so. You should have divorced him at once. It would have made you quite the fashion!"

"I am sure that Chloe," Mrs. Fitzgerald breaks in indignantly, "would shrink from such an act as that!"

"I shouldn't," returns Chloe tranquilly. "You mustn't idealise me. It wasn't that at all. It only

occurred to me that it would be more amusing for him to find me gone when he came back from his little trip in Italy. He always hated surprises."

"It was all very wrong, Chloe dear."

"Was it? Why? I detested him."

"With reason—and such a successful divorce case as it would have been!" declares Mrs. Gilbert regretfully. "You know I quite thought she would bring it, Dora, when I wrote to you. You may remember I said she would be her own mistress in six months; that sentence applied as much to her getting rid of Burlingham as to her coming in for her own money, or his—by his death. By the bye, Chloe, you will be twenty-one in November. I do hope you will give that old monster, your guardian, his deserts, and turn him out of your house. It will be *your* house then. And you cannot forget that he sold you—positively sold you, my dear—to that reprobate for twenty thousand pounds."

"You are bitter," says Chloe, who has, however, turned very white. Mrs. Fitzgerald clasps the small hand lying in hers with an almost painful grip. Poor, *poor* child!

"How you always hated him! But you need not have reminded me. I never forget. I have written to Mr. Blakeney to say I shall want Brayle on my twenty-first birthday. For one thing, I must have it, as the Court is no longer mine. Dear old Court! It was the only thing in my short married life that I ever loved."

"It goes, of course, to Granby Carlton now?"

"Yes. Mrs. Fitzgerald," turning to Dora, "may

I stay here with you until Brayle is mine indeed?"

"Of course, Chloe; of course, my poor child." It is quite plain that Mrs. Fitzgerald has not yet fathomed the fact that Chloe is quite a person in the eyes of the world. Not only a Marchioness, but one widowed at twenty, and with great wealth. To her she is now even more to be pitied than when she came to her—a little girl supposed to be running away from an unkind guardian.

Mrs. Gilbert, however, is regarding Dora with admiration. "Good heavens! If I could only do it as well as that," thinks she, "I should be a made woman for life. Dora might give *me* lessons. And living down here, too, all her days, in a little forgotten village. How *does* she do it? In my opinion, to make a success on any stage, one should breathe, from one's earliest years, the simple country air."

CHAPTER XXX.

"Humanity is never so beautiful as when praying for forgiveness, or else forgiving another."

"MAJOR!"

Major O'Hara, walking gaily along the road to his home, after spending a very happy afternoon with his Dora, pauses as the sound of his name comes to him. He looks round. Tom Lloyd, with a gun over his shoulder and a distinctly embarrassed

expression on his face, is only a few paces behind.

"I—I want to speak to you," says Tom.

"Certainly, my dear fellow. Anything I can do for you?"

"There is one thing you can do for me," says Tom, who is now a dark red. "If you will—if you can—*forgive me*, Major."

"Oh, come now, Tom; 'pon my word——" It is the Major who is embarrassed.

"I've behaved like a brute to you," Tom goes on, almost violently. "When I think of that night when I dined with you—and in your own house, too—accepting your hospitality——"

"My dear boy—not another word! Not one, now, Tom. Good heavens! as if a fellow can't have a bit of a temper if he likes; and such provocation, too! I've found it all out by myself, mind you, since; not a word from *her;* and even *then* I had a suspicion."

"I wish *I* had," says Tom with a groan. This kind and perfect gentleman! how he had insulted him—not once, but many times!

"You have spoken to her?" The Major looks full of interest.

"No."

"Not yet? Tom, look here; a word of advice. *I* dillied and dallied, like an ass, till I nearly lost Dora—your aunt, you know; and therefore, 'quick march' is my motto for the future. Ask her at once, Tom."

"I felt I couldn't until all this was made clear

between you and me," says Tom, whose old cynical air has entirely left him. How could he ever have felt cynical towards the Major!

"You're a good sort, Tom," says the Major gently. "Well, go and tell her now—and tell her at the same time that I think she is getting as straight and honourable a fellow as the world contains."

"It would take a hero like you," says Tom, with a flicker of a smile, "to give voice to such a message as that." He alludes to the Major's Victoria Cross and other small details in the life of as brave a soldier as ever lived, and as modest. "And besides, I'm not so sure that she will have me."

The Major laughs.

"I wouldn't have too many qualms about that if I were you," says he, looking quite a sage about the arts of love—he, who had been so nearly undone over his own love affair. "If her heart is for any man, it is for you, Tom. I saw that many a day ago, but never dreamt that *I* was the interferer."

"You really think——?"

"I really do." It is noticeable that no name has been mentioned. Both men seem to understand of whom they are speaking.

"Well, I'll risk it," says Tom. "I—— Do you know, Major, I *have* sometimes thought that if—— But"—with a sudden crash of his hopes again—"I'm no better off now, in one sense, than I was yesterday. The governor allows me so much a year for looking after the estate, as you know. But probably he will stop that, if——"

"You think that girl is mercenary. *I* don't," says the Major. "Ask her, Tom, and see. As for your present income, I spoke to your father yesterday, and—well—if she will accept you, your income will certainly be continued."

A silence, full of eloquence, follows.

"He will consent?" Tom at last speaks; his voice is a little broken. "It is impossible to thank you," says he. "How am I to do it? But—— I'm sorry from my soul that I ever harboured an uncivil thought of you—— And——" He now has tears in his eyes.

"Look here," says the Major, catching him by the shoulder and turning him round, "don't waste your oratory on me. Go straight to the girl you love, sir, and tell *her* what is in your heart. No doubt she's been wondering why you haven't done it long ago."

Thus admonished, Tom takes his way to The Hermitage, a little unstrung by his interview. If only Olivia will listen!—Olivia, whose name had not been mentioned from first to last in his strange talk with the kindly Major. Olivia is in the garden, as he comes up, watering the flower-beds, and greets him with a calm that borders on severity. She seems, however, to find herself at a loss for conversation. Indeed, having said: "How d'ye do, Tom?" she comes to a standstill. And then, nervously, makes the extremely superfluous remark:

"I'm watering the flowers."

"So I see," says Tom, which is, of course, the one thing he shouldn't have said. "May I help you?"

"No—no, thank you. And *do* stand aside a little bit, Tom, or you will get wet."

"I have stood aside a long time," says he, with meaning not to be misunderstood.

"A long time? Why, you have only just come!" says Olivia, but falteringly; and catching his eye, she colours violently.

"I have wanted to come, however, only—there was somebody in the way. He's gone now, Olivia, isn't he?"

"Someone?"

"Oh, I say," says Tom, "you might help a fellow out! I've always wanted to ask you to—— But I thought the Major—— Olivia, as you can't have him, will you—*have me?*"

Olivia looks at him, her pretty face as white as a sheet of paper.

"You—I——" she stammers. "You—you don't mean this?"

"You *won't* have me, then?" says Tom, whose face is now as white as her own, and who, with all a true lover's ignorance, thinks her hesitation a dismissal.

"Tom!"

Does *she* rush into his arms first, or *he* into hers? It is a question not yet decided between them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Were your inward soul laid bare,
What should we discover under
That seductive mask, I wonder,
Beauty Clare."

It is barely five o'clock, and warm and tranquil, on this exquisite August evening. The birds are still singing, as though loth to go to rest, and still the sun is shining—"shining with all its might." Some late cocks of hay are being carted across the meadows, and here and there a yellowing leaf speaks of darkness to come, in the dull dreariness of the arriving winter; but to-day all is light and brightness. Through the tall bracken, now turning from its sombre green to a still more sombre brown, the twinkling of running rabbits may be seen, and from the sedges that surround the pools, now and again the rising of a stately heron.

"Earth putteth on the borrow'd robes of Heaven,
And sitteth in a sabbath of still rest;
And silence swells into a dreamy sound
That sinks again to silence."

Carlton (he is scarcely yet able to think of himself as Lord Burlingham), walking slowly through the wood that lies between his lodge and The Hermitage, is a prey to many, and for the most part very unpleasant, thoughts.

Since that day when the tidings of her husband's

death had reached her and she had fainted in his arms, he had not seen Chloe. He had called again —not once, but many times—before his departure for town to attend the funeral, but she had — without rhyme or reason, as it seemed to him—refused to see him. She certainly was not in the slightest grief— that he felt sure of. And even if he had a doubt, ample opportunities were given him of learning the truth. Mrs. Fitzgerald, indeed, when pressed by him, had reluctantly confessed that Chloe was "very much the same as usual;" but Mrs. Gilbert had gone further, and had described Lady Burlingham in glowing terms as "charmingly modern; and not even a pretence at desolation! *So* unique!"

Yet she had refused to see *him*. She had, indeed, refused to see anybody except Major O'Hara—and the Castle Lloyd people — a touch that enraged Carlton. He, a sort of relation, to be put in the background, when she would see the Castle Lloyd people. Was there something more than he had imagined between her and that fool Laurence? And why would she not see him? Because he had come in for her late husband's title and estates? It seemed so unworthy of her. And that she should think of that confounded young fool!

Later on he learnt that there had been a stormy scene between Chloe and one of the Castle Lloyd people—the *one* was easily to be guessed—that had for its termination the reduction of that household to two. It was a stormy scene on one side, certainly. Laurence, it seems, had been unpardonably rude to Chloe—to Lady Burlingham—had cast all sorts of

terrible accusations in her pretty teeth, and had, indeed, been so abominably wanting in courtesy of any sort as to call her conduct towards him that of a heartless coquette! This she told Cissy afterwards, who tried to defend him—to no purpose.

After that, Laurence had disappeared from the neighbourhood—gone to India, said some; to America, others; to a far worse place, said the rest. As a fact he had taken the Major's advice and Tom's, and sailed for South Africa, with a view to getting up to Buluwayo, and seeing life of a stormy kind.

* * * * * * * *

Will she see him to-day? Carlton is asking himself this question as he walks towards The Hermitage. It is quite a month since he left Aughribeg, and most of that time had been spent in London, with lawyers and notaries and such folk. Quite a month! When he left, she had denied him her presence. Now——

Now it seems her capricious majesty will be pleased to accord him an audience. The trim little maid at Mrs. Fitzgerald's doorway tells him her ladyship has given orders that when he comes he is to be admitted. "Evidently," thinks he, "she thought I would come." But this thought only angers him—and at once he is ushered into the cool, dim, shabby old drawing-room, sweet with its perfumes of mignonette and carnations—sweet, too, with its memories.

How long she is in coming! Perhaps after all she has changed that uncertain mind of hers, and will not come at all. Perhaps——

The door is slowly opened—very slowly—certainly there is no great rush of cordiality in the way it is opened, and a reluctant—almost offended—if altogether radiant and slender little figure, "clad all in white," like spring itself, comes demurely into the room.

"I suppose, if I must see you, I must," says she, most ungraciously, and with a would-be bored air, yet with, too, a little glance from under her long lashes, as if to see how he is taking it, that somewhat belies her cruelty.

"I think it would have been much more sensible," says Carlton calmly, "if you had seen me sooner. There are many things that must be discussed between us. You knew that; and therefore why this senseless refusal to see me?"

"Dear me!" murmurs she, with a long and heavy, but by no means sorrowful, sigh. "More scoldings —even *now*, when I am quite out of your hands?"

"You are my late cousin's wife; and being the most irresponsible person I ever met in my life, I still feel it my duty to look after you," says Carlton with undiminished severity. "But to come to business. Where are you going? You can't stay here for ever. And now that the neighbourhood is shorn of its chief attraction—I hear he has gone to South Africa—I think you had better go back to your own house."

"Well, I *am* going, when it is empty." She has taken no notice of "the chief attraction."

"I'm glad of that. I'll telegraph, then, to say you will be at the Court on—what day?"

"The Court! I was not thinking of the Court. My *own* house I said—Brayle. I have written to Mr. Blakeney."

"To your uncle?"

"My uncle if you will—my enemy beyond doubt. He has usurped my kingdom long enough. *I* am now in a position to dictate terms, and—Brayle is to be vacant for me next week."

"It will be in terrible disrepair, I fancy. You know Blakeney——"

"Saved every penny he could, and let even the roof fall through. I know that, and I don't care. There must be one wing—the western one—that will shelter me."

"It would be uncomfortable, however. Why go there at all, or"—hastily—"for the present at all events? The Court——"

"The Court! I shall never enter that house again."

"The more fool you!" equably.

She turns a very angry face upon him.

"Why should I go there?"

"Why not? It is yours until——"

"Until you marry and turn me out. No, thank you."

"When I marry——" He pauses. Then: "I don't see why you and my wife should not live there together."

"Oh! your wife!" cries she. "I can see her—a big, tall, puritanical creature, who keeps all the Commandments in words and loses them in the spirit—especially the Ninth. A creature with a long

red nose and chronic indigestion—but immensely discreet. A woman whom all respect, whom all abhor, and who never, *never* flirts!"

"That last certainly"—quite unmoved—"I hope for."

"Do you know why?" glancing at him. "Because you know she will never have the chance."

"I'm not so sure of that. But"—slowly—"I sincerely hope not."

Chloe breaks into a little irrepressible laugh, that certainly has something of malice in it.

"I'd give sixpence if she did!" says she, "if only to see your face when your puritanical miss—or is it missis?—betrays herself."

"Why do you talk like that?" with sudden anger.

"I don't see why, really," relapsing into a dismal air. "I don't see why I should talk about your possible wife at all, when my own affairs are at such sixes and sevens."

"You need scarcely take that tone," with a touch of annoyance. "There are very few people in the world so rich as you are."

"So rich, yes. And—so poor," gloomily. "You see, I have my drawbacks."

"Drawbacks! Name *one*."

"*One!*" with an annihilating glance at him. "As if you didn't know the very principal one!"

"I don't, indeed."

"*How* can you pretend like that, Granby? Right well you know what I am now." Here she covers her eyes with her hands.

"Good heavens! what, Chloe?"

"A Dowager!" whispers she, in the voice of one *in extremis.*

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Time shall die, and love shall be
Lord, as time was, over death."

THIS astounding grievance gives Carlton pause.

"Not necessarily," says he at last, very coldly, but with a quick glance at her. "There is a way out of even that hideous situation."

"If there is"—shrugging her shoulders discontentedly—"I don't know it."

"Think."

"Oh, think, think—you are always telling me to think! As if I ever thought! Thoughts mean wrinkles. And even if I did think, what would it all amount to? Even if I married anybody, I shall still be the Dowager. Hateful word!"

"If you married *anybody*—yes. But——"

"But what? What are you hesitating about? Go on, Granby, can't you? Speak! If there is one thing on earth I hate—and you know it—it is being kept waiting. Tell me your 'but' at once."

"Shall I?" He hesitates a moment. "Well, you might marry *me!*"

She stares at him. Her lovely eyes expand. Granby!—who has always scolded, despised, scorned her!

"You?" She takes a step towards him, as if to more closely examine his features—to make more sure of whether he has, or has not, gone suddenly mad.

"Even I!" Granby looks back at her, a little paler, perhaps, but unmoved.

"Oh, Granby, what nonsense!"

"What is nonsense?"

"Do you mean to say you think you are—in love—with *me?*"

"I don't mean to say anything," says he deliberately. "I would only suggest to you that you can escape the obloquy of Dowagerhood by marrying me."

"Thank you very much," says she. "I should not like to put you to so much inconvenience."

"It would not inconvenience me at all, I assure you. Will you"—in a low tone—"try to believe that I really *am* in love with you?"

Her charming face is now a picture of amazement.

"Good gracious, Gigi! Are you in your right mind? What *can* you mean by this?"

"Exactly what I say. You may not be prepared to give your answer now. I know only too well that you do not care for me. But I can wait—and in the meantime will you think of it?"

"Oh, think of it!" with a shrug. "I don't believe a word about your being in love—with *me*, at all events. I expect you care as little for me as——" She does not finish the obvious sentence. "Why, you know very well, Granby"—with a sharp gesture of her hands—"that you entirely disapprove of me.

That's the proper expression, isn't it?" with a brilliantly saucy glance.

"Even if I did"—stolidly—"that would have nothing in the world to do with it."

"To do with what?"

"The fact that I am in love with you."

"You still persist in that pretty fiction?"

"It is not fiction."

"No?" A frown of perplexity settles on her brow. She pauses.

"What are you thinking of now?" asks he.

"Of why you want to marry me."

"I have told you."

"Yes, I know. It's very rude of me, Gigi, but I really don't believe you. I don't indeed. You have always been so—so *cross* to me."

"Have I?" A sudden rush of colour dyes his face—that should have warned her of the storm of passion within him. "Even *that* has nothing to do with it."

"Oh, hasn't it? Oh, I see!"

"What do you see?" with suppressed vehemence.

"That to be thoroughly in love one must begin by thoroughly disapproving of the beloved object. My dear Gigi"—airily—"you have got a bilious attack, or a touch of gout, or something. Go away and take some waters, and come back sane, and marry a woman you *do* approve of—a woman who is not already sick of marriage. Go and marry Cissy, for example. The most censorious could approve of her."

"Unfortunately, I don't admire Miss Cissy."

"No?" indignantly. "Just shews your want of taste. Why, *I* think her one of the prettiest girls I ever saw in my life."

"I prefer to marry *the* prettiest girl I ever saw in my life."

"Oh!" She shrugs her shoulders, whilst a little unwilling smile parts her lips; and then, naïvely: "I'm not a girl; I'm only an old, married widow."

At this, in spite of himself, Burlingham laughs aloud.

"Old, or married, or widow," declares he, very quietly, restraining himself to the last, though the extreme pallor of his face somewhat betrays him, "I am at your feet."

"Hardly."

"Do you *want* me to kneel to you? I would if I thought—— Well, Chloe, how is it to be? Will you—or will you not?"

She has turned aside, and now begins to finger nervously the cord of the window-blind.

"I am afraid it must be 'not.'"

"Your last word?"

Something in his tone may have caught her, for she turns.

"Not by many, I hope! Do you want me to die and be buried, just because I won't marry you? What awful vengeance! I'm not like you, Gigi; I bear no grudge. I am very sorry I can't accept your proposal, because, you see"—maliciously—"I *don't* disapprove of you."

"That's something gained," says Burlingham calmly. But all at once this calm deserts him, and

he strides across the room, and, taking the window-cord with which she has been trifling from her fingers, says coldly:

"It is that fellow Lloyd, I suppose?"

"Nonsense! How stupid you are, Granby! Why, he has gone!"

"To return?"

"No, no. He"—she breaks into a slight, but evidently irrepressible, burst of laughter—"he, like you, disapproves of me. *He*"—still laughing—"with a *vengeance!* I'm not such a Circe, after all, as you imagined me, am I? The moment he found out that I was not the little persecuted maiden of the Dark Ages he had believed in, he laid down——"

"His heart?"

"Not a bit of it! *That* he has carried safely off to South Africa. But it seems he could not forgive the fact that I was Lady Burlingham."

"Faint heart! Idiot! Well, he being so far out of the way, will you not——"

"Think of you?" She looks steadily at him. "Granby, tell me what you mean."

"Can't you believe? Have you never *seen?*" He has thrown off all restraint now. His voice is passionate, almost rough. "I love you. For God's sake, Chloe, put an end to this thing, one way or the other."

"You have said that before." Her face has grown as white as a Niphetos rose. "*You* to love *me!* Oh, no, Gigi!"

"Believe me or not, as you will"—he has caught

her hands and drawn her towards him—"but—marry me."

"I can't," cries she in a little troubled way that goes to his very heart. "I should be afraid. I have been *so* unhappy. But, Gigi, if I don't marry you, I—I shan't marry anyone else, anyway."

"That won't do," steadily. "I shall not let you treat me as you have treated others. You shall either swear here to-day — this very hour — this moment—to marry me, or—let me go."

His grasp has tightened upon hers, and something in his tone, masterful as that grasp, has angered her.

"Then go!" she cries.

He holds her all the more firmly, his eyes resting upon hers, compelling, controlling.

"You don't mean that." His voice is low.

She hesitates; then all at once gives in.

"No, I don't!" she cries, with a vehement burst of wrath. "But I hate you for making me say it! Oh, how *horrid* you are, Gigi!"

"I don't care how horrid I am, if you will only love me."

"That's nothing—nothing at all!" stamping her foot. "And I'll pay you out for this some day—mind that!"

"A *near* day, I trust," laughing. "It will be a delightful experience, let me tell you. Very few of my friends ever pay me anything. And you *are* my friend, Chloe; my *friend!*" All at once passion breaks through his marvellous reserve, and catching her in his arms he strains her to him. "My darling!

My beloved! My own, *own* Chloe! Tell me—tell me, Chloe, that you are at least—my friend."

He had expected a repulse, I think; but, to his everlasting amazement and delight, he feels her slender hands steal round his neck, and sees the dear capricious face grow white, whilst the dark blue eyes lose their mocking light in a drowning rush of tears.

"Oh, Gigi! why did you not say all this before?"

"What time had I?" drawing the pretty clinging arms still closer.

"Ah, not now—not during these past months—but *before* my marriage."

"I would to God I had," says he with emotion. "But how could I dare think then that you cared for me? And—Blakeney had affianced you to—*him*. And besides—you remember how you treated me."

"Ah, yes. But"—with a sigh and a little half-malicious smile—"that was because I loved you."

"Loved me! Loved me *then?*"

"Yes, indeed. Even then!"

THE END.