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THE FLOWER OF DOOM

AND

OTHER STORIES

BY M. BETHAM-EDWARDS
AUTHOR OF "KITTY" "PEARLA" "DISARMED" ETC., ETC.

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THE FLOWER OF DOOM;

Or, THE CONSPIRATOR.

A Story of To-day.

Chapter I.

THE ATELIER.

Why did the great Shakespeare put joyous thoughts into Romeo's breast on the eve of doom? Do ecstatic moods indeed visit mortals when nearing, unawares, the verge of dread catastrophe?

If disaster sends a herald in disguise, doth happier fortune treat us after the same fashion? Are such inner promptings hearkened to or distrusted ever?

These questions must occur to most of us at some time or other, since certain it is that dark presagement does not always betoken evil hap, nor will unwonted exuberance of spirits be surely followed by substantial joy. We feel more assurance about the connection between an unusual frame of mind and rare events. The common day is not begun with trumpetlike wakenings to destiny—thoughts like wings, to lift above grosser air.

"I am far from being an unhappy woman," mused Bernarda Burke, as she prepared for her busy day. "If Fortune has no more golden gifts in store, she has surely no bad, either. Away, then, ye siren voices—ye stern forebodings! To work—to work! Therein lies sure healing for the bruised heart—redemption for all!"

The vast city might be searched from one end to the other for a brighter, more poetic, spectacle than Bernarda's atelier presented an hour later. As if by magic, the bare, cold, London room was transformed into a garden within garden, parterre within parterre. The blonde, rosy-cheeked maidens now seated in rows before their embroidery frames, and models of fresh flowers of richest hue, seemed to mock the place and season, turning town October into June. The air was fragrant with scents, while bright and virginal as these living roses and lilies, and the ideal posies in silk and filoselle, were the golden braids, coral lips, and blue eyes of these English girls.

The mistress sat at the upper end of the lofty workroom, on an estrade raised above the rows of fair heads, flowers, and embroidery-frames, thus commanding the whole animated scene. But not by position only. Look, carriage, even dress, inspired authority. While her apprentices, whose ages varied from fifteen to twenty, wore colors such as the young love and choose by happy instinct, Bernarda was soberly, although beautifully, dressed in black, relieved by a magnificent gold-and-brown pansy, worn on her breast just above the region of the heart.

The girls often wondered at their mistress's devotion to this especial flower. She never wore any other, and generally contrived to obtain splendid specimens that brightened her dress as a jewel. She was a tall, handsome woman, about thirty-two, with the dark hair, dark-blue eyes, and long silken lashes of a race famous for its beauty; also with a certain piquancy of contour and expression which made her very fascinating, especially to the blonde. Hardly one of the fair, rosy, light-haired Saxons but envied their teacher's raven hair, pearly skin, and dark eyebrows. Yet Bernarda could have no longer seemed young in their eyes. There must, then, have been some hidden charm of manner, some influence due to character, as well as looks, that subdued these careless young things, and made her task of keeping order, and getting through a proper amount of work, easy.

As Bernarda's stately figure moved backwards and forwards

amid these avenues of bright girls, silken blossoms, and their living prototypes, there was no diminution of the girlish chatter and laughter, well held in check. The empty-headed idler was expelled; but, so long as her pupils were sedulous, the mistress encouraged them to talk to each other in undertone. The perpetual chirping, as of so many birds, was a relief, and enabled her to think.

One or two rules, of course, had to be rigidly enforced. Bernarda's handsome brows knit darkly if any new-comer forgot the observance of these, and ventured on a suggestion regarding the daily task, or, what the teacher resented much more, any personal remark directed to herself. On this especial morning, however, the entire school sinned in company, and had to be forgiven. As Bernarda sat alone on her raised platform above the rest, the sun, that had hitherto been obscured all the morning, suddenly disentangled itself from clouds—not sufficiently so as to flood the whole room, but just enough to envelop the one black-robed figure and the white lilies she was busied upon in warm, golden light. The effect was strange and beautiful, and no wonder the young embroiderers seized upon it as an opportunity for unburdening themselves. For a moment every needle rested. Then one sentimentalist, more venturesome than the rest, cried out,

"Please forgive us! We must look at you while you sit like a saint in your aureole."

Bernarda smiled impatiently, and continued her own work, as if determined for once to be indulgent. Truth to tell, she was herself conscious of a desire to break through routine, to burst this freezing silence.

Calm and dignified although she found her present mode of life, congenial as it was to one enamoured of natural beauty, there were yet moments when she longed to close her atelier and begin life anew.

The incident of the golden ray, now blinding her, and wrapping her round as a vesture, was a vexation, since it made her realize how much she had in common with these careless, rest-

less girls. Was she not also ready to catch at any excuse for wearying of duty, letting thought stray beyond the limit of actuality? Yes, she acknowledged that it was so. Life must have more to give than a daily portion of restful toil.

In a moment the sunlight cloud was gone, and another exclamation went the round of the room. On the track of that warm effulgence now came an almost phenomenal gloom, which, like the glory, fastened upon Bernarda where she sat, hemming her round about with subtile cloud as she had before been enthroned in dazzling brightness.

"We cannot see you. Speak to us!" cried the girl who had before been spokeswoman of the rest. "Oh, Miss Burke, good and evil luck will sure visit you to-day."

"Foolish children! I will then hand over the good luck to you!" Bernarda replied, with one of her quietly sarcastic smiles. "Go home, all of you, and make what holiday you may in the fog."

The place rang with a merry cheer, and in a few minutes the embroidery-frames were covered up, the baskets, piled with gorgeous silks and flosses, put away, the flowers carried off to the conservatory; Bernarda found herself alone in the bare, silent, unpictorial room; no blotch of color left but that brilliant flower of hers, and, like a gem, a butterfly, a humming-bird, it now pierced the leaden London atmosphere, shining amid the gloom.

She glanced down at her heart's-ease as she now passed out of the deserted atelier, and readjusted it tenderly. This fairy thing was the only companion of her solitude, ever fresh and perpetually beauteous, renewed day by day as if by magic. Was it not like some undisclosed memories that accompany us wherever we go, perchance saddening, but yet beautifying, the common ways of life?

And once again she checked the disturbing thoughts that had come unbidden a few hours before.

"What have I to do any more with joys or terrors, prognostics of evil or blissful harbingers? To work, to work! Therein lies healing for the bruised heart, redemption for all!"

Chapter II.

THE CONSPIRATOR.

The gloaming had come, a time Bernarda devoted on fine days to such business as lay out of doors. To-day, however, the heavy cloak of fog that enveloped the streets kept her indoors. It was a pleasant place to walk and think in, this airy, spacious workroom, dimly lighted from above, and Bernarda's calling gave her much to think about. To-day, as she walked up and down the silent atelier, she was contriving a set of arras destined to carry the fame of her little school across the wide Atlantic. She soon became so absorbed in the pleasing task that she did not hear a gentle tap at the door. Then her young maid-servant intruded, with a card in her hand, saying that the bearer awaited an interview.

"Light the lamp in my sitting-room. I will follow at once," Bernarda said, carelessly. She was subject to interruptions at this hour, and cards were matters of daily occurrence also. Rich people would call, to order or inspect embroidery, modest parents to apprentice their children, young girls in search of employment, unknown artists to proffer designs. No day without its visitants.

Still dwelling on her arras, and without looking at the card, she went down-stairs to the little parlor set aside for her own exclusive use. What a contrast it presented to the spacious, chilly workroom she had just quitted! All here was warm, rich, pictorial. And amid these belongings, which seemed part of herself—the little piano, handsel of her toil, the books, pictures, and works of art bought with her earnings—she dared to be herself. The black, abbess-like gown, with its plain folds, was discarded as soon as her day's work had come to an end,

and her pansy now rested on a background as brilliant as itself.

A fire burned brightly in the clean porcelain stove, and the lamp shed abundant light as she entered the room where her visitor waited alone. He stood conspicuous on the hearthrug, with his bared head turned towards the door.

Quick as lightning all things became clear to her—those undefined misgivings, those promptings of hope, the golden cloud, the shadow unutterable!

"Edgeworth!" she cried, and that was all.

She was a very proud woman, and accustomed to exercise self-control. When, without a word more, he bent forward and kissed her on the brow, she still remained calm and collected, though frozen into haughty silence.

The man's composure also seemed for a moment to desert him.

"You had my card? I did not intend to startle you," he said, apologetically.

She dropped into a chair, and the unheeded card fell from her passive hand. He stooped down, picked it up, and coolly replaced it in his pocketbook. Then, depositing hat and stick on the table, by a matter-of-fact speech he broke the ice.

"Can we talk undisturbed for an hour?" he asked. "I have something to say to you."

"Certainly," Bernarda made reply, almost carelessly, as she handed him a chair. "Pray be easy," she added, as she saw him glance at the door; "the only creature in the house is my little maid. You can hear her singing in her kitchen downstairs. If any one should call the door-bell will give due warning, and I have but to deny admittance."

He did not look entirely reassured.

"You must still remember our mother-tongue," he said. "Suppose—"

She broke in impatiently, even scornfully,

"No need to use outlandish jargon within these incurious walls. We are perfectly secure from eavesdroppers, I assure you."

The first part of her speech evidently disconcerted him, and before opening his lips again he perused her steadily. For a brief spell they sat looking at each other.

He was, like herself, strikingly handsome, and the thought must have occurred to others, if it had never struck themselves, how strong the likeness between the pair. It was a semblance due to race rather than kinship. Hid, like hers, those temples of his by raven curls; shaded the dark-blue eyes, also, with long silken lashes; his the self-same rich, tawny skin, fine features, and kindling, yet disdainful, smile. There was, however, a difference no less marked. While Bernarda, although perfectly dignified and self-possessed, was not without a certain proud timidity and almost girlish shyness—due, perhaps, to her solitary life—one saw at a glance that he was something more than a mere man of the world. Speech, demeanor, nay, his very dress, indicated the cosmopolitan, and, if not the courtier, at least one familiar with all conditions of society, perhaps the humblest, certainly not the least elevated.

Such things betray themselves in a man's most insignificant action, also in that easy self-adaptation, versatility, amiableness, roughly summed up under the head of good manners, but which really mean much more than outward politeness. An adequate share in the world's graver concerns, the give and take required in the management of public business or the leadership of masses, the necessity men of action are under of keeping their impulses well under control, naturally give them an advantage over those who move in small, circumscribed spheres.

Bernarda realized all this in a moment, and the conviction helped to make her self-reliant. He would not add to her embarrassment. Whatever he had to say would be said kindly, delicately, and with due regard for her feelings. He began with a question, smilingly put.

"Why did you use that expression just now?" he asked. "'Outlandish jargon!' Is it thus you speak of the tongue of your fathers? Have you, then, abjured your country?"

"Oh," she cried, looking ready to burst into tears, "our un-

happy country! must we talk of our country? Yet, of course, I know all. Your *rôle* is no secret."

"Why should it be a secret?" he said; then looked at her as if to read her inmost thoughts. He added, in a voice that changed to gentle insinuation, "First, we have to talk of ourselves. You are well and prosperous, I see"—and he glanced round the warm-tinted, elegant little room approvingly—"but hardly satisfied with such a lot, I feel sure—hardly happy?"

Bernarda's frank, impetuous nature rose up in rebellion against the irony of this speech—an irony that was not intended, she felt sure of that, but that galled nevertheless. Memories fresh and sweet as the flower she wore on her breast lived once more. The youthfulness and fervid hope of a vanished yestreen came back. One day of life, its best and brightest, seemed to revive.

"Why have you come after all these years?" she cried, passionately. "What can it matter to you whether I am happy or no? Speak out. Make known your errand, then go away, and let me be."

Her distress evidently troubled him, and, rising a second time, he kissed her on the forehead. That kiss, so respectfully, dispassionately, accorded, yet evidently intended both as a sign of reconcilement and apology, did not comfort, but at least tended to calm her. It served, moreover, to bring with sudden force the difference between his condition of mind and her own. They had loved each other passionately once, and now met suddenly, after fateful years. Yet while the very sound of his voice, calling her by name, the touch of his hand, could bring back the past that had been his and her own, could make this estrangement seem unreal and impossible, he remained calm and almost indifferent. The conviction forced her back on her womanly pride. She determined, no matter at what present cost to herself, to appear calm and indifferent too.

"I will tell you why I have come," he began, stooping to pick up the light shawl she had thrown round her shoulders,

adjusting it with prompt care for her comfort, yet without the slightest trace of tenderness in the act. He saw that, in spite of the warmth of the room, his sudden apparition had made her tremble—that was all. "Years ago I did you a great wrong," he went on, fixing his dark, penetrating eyes upon her. "Poor, obscure, and friendless, I then promised to marry you, and broke my troth. Rich, famous"—here he smiled an odd, yet winning, smile—"abounding in friends and followers, I am here to redeem it. My errand to-day is to offer you my fortunes and my name."

She was too much overtaken by surprise to make any answer. He went on in the same prosaic, straightforward, friendly way, no vestige of lover-like enthusiasm or demonstrativeness in voice, look, or manner, yet a keen desire to gain his point evidently actuating each syllable.

"You protested at one time that you fully and freely forgave me. A proud, high-spirited woman could not feel otherwise. But, in spite of these silent years, I have never forgotten the past, and never forgiven myself. Pray believe that."

"It was a wild dream. Let us forget it," Bernarda said, stirred to hidden depths by his strange indifference, still stranger fervor. Since it was plain that his love for her was a forgotten thing, no joy, certes, hardly a memory any longer, why then had he come with this word "marriage" on his lips?

They sat looking at each other, these two who had once been lovers, hardly, as they once fancied in their fond, foolish exaltation, any secrets between them, any separate interests possible, no matter in what remote future; and now, after ten brief years, utter strangers could hardly be so wide apart. But the saddest experience of all was the conviction that this blank, awful separation, this wall of granite, which seemed to crush the very breath of life out of her, was scarcely perceptible to him. He was self-controlled, pleasant, persuasive, without an effort, without, apparently, an emotion.

"There will be time enough to talk over the past, ample leisure for explanation on both sides," he said, smiling—and there

was wonderful fascination in the smile that lit up his dark physiognomy—"if you will only marry me. Give your assent, then, Bernarda; throw in your lot with that of the conspirator."

Chapter III.

APPEAL AND COUNTER-APPEAL.

That word brought home to her mind with fresh and still more painful force the barrier separating her from her former lover. She crimsoned, indignant light flashed in her eyes, passionate words were on the point of rising to her lips; but the impulse was checked. By what right should she remonstrate with him on the part he was playing, discommend the line of conduct he had laid down, asperse his convictions? With visible effort she controlled herself.

"Concerning the future, also, we shall have abundant opportunity for discourse; for you will be generous. You will repay injury by benefit," he urged, still wearing that ingratiating—perhaps, under other circumstances, irresistible — smile. The smile, coupled as it was with such careless, almost self-complacent, words, stung Bernarda, and forced from her reluctant lips the question she had been burning to ask.

"Be open," she said; "why do you come to-day to ask me to be your wife? There is a hidden motive"—she did not dare to add—"since your affection for me is dead." He looked hardly taken aback by the question, only as if it were put too soon.

"You are right. There are other motives besides the desire to repair an injury." Then he added, as he scanned her narrowly, "I hardly think you are in a frame of mind to do justice to them as yet; you must give me leave to come often; we will discuss the matters which, of course, lie nearest your heart as they do to mine, in spite of that aghast look at the word I used just now. Why that look? Is not my country yours?"

Bernarda listened, with lips unsealed.

"Is not my cause your own, also?" he exclaimed, rising from his chair, as if on the point of lashing himself into a fury of expostulation. Suddenly recalled to his position, he reseated himself, and resumed his former manner. "No word more from me on that subject, unless I obtain the promise I came in quest of, and then we must arrange our interviews with due circumspection, with absolute security from eavesdroppers. You understand?"

Bernarda held up her finger, and a girl's sweet voice sounded from below.

"My little maid belongs to an amateur choir, and she always sings thus while sewing. Yet one precaution more, for your satisfaction."

For her own also! She had something secret, urgent, to say to this man, whose influence was already reasserting itself over her. And although, perhaps, in her inmost heart she felt that her fate was already sealed, yet it seemed impossible to her to become the wife of one who loved her not—who was a conspirator! Thus she swayed between two volitions, two assurances. All her future belonged to him. If she did not speak out now her one opportunity might be lost. She rang the bell then, and her visitor heard her say to the singing-girl,

"Marion, please go at once and match those silks I spoke to you about this morning. Meantime, should any one call, I will answer the door."

Two minutes later the gate clanged, a light step passed down the street. Bernarda re-entered the little parlor, and closed the door, with beating heart. They were alone.

"Edgeworth," she began, her voice now freighted with feeling and emotion as before it had been impersonal and even, "I had also a word to say to you. Many and many a time I have half resolved to seek you out. Your ways are dark, but not unknown of men. I may, then, judge of them as any other. Could I marry you with this abhorrence of your conduct in my soul, this condemnation of a part on which you pride yourself?

Oh, will nothing bend your awful purpose—nothing turn you from ways of blood and crime? Listen. We were young together. You loved me once. You are bound to hear me."

She was sitting beside him, her clasped hands resting on his passive arm, her face raised to his.

"For think of your conspicuousness, the prestige of your name, the influence of your fortune! A common man could not do so much harm. You are the evil inspiration of thousands!"

He smiled down upon her now, not sadly, not contemptuously, but with an unmistakable imperturbability, almost indifference. She hardly felt sure that he was listening to her till he spoke.

"Say anything that you have to say. You are a grand woman," he said.

"But my words have no power to move you. You are stone-deaf, blind, insensible here. Yet you were humane once," she went on; "you could not bear to see any living creature suffer; and now"—she rose, and, leaning on the mantelpiece, added, with hardly restrained tears and passionate, interjectional utterances—"you must see that, in a righteous cause, you are sinning against righteousness! Is there not misery enough in the world, that you must heap up the sum? And, in these black complots and fiendish intrigues, it is ever the innocent who suffer for the guilty. You strike in the dark, and hit, perhaps, their blind ministers—our foes, never. For," she cried, unable any longer to restrain herself, sinking to a low stool at his feet, and clasping his knees, "I cannot pollute my soul in a sacred cause; but I love my country, Edgeworth, as well as you. My country—my poor country!"

That self-constrained, quietly determined mood of his was not in the least touched by anything she could say. So much was evident to herself, but his eye rested admiringly on the beautiful head, now bowed low in anguish. She had surprised and impressed him. He was, perhaps, wondering to find that years had heightened instead of detracting from her beauty.

"You will marry me?" he now said, in a low voice.

"For my country's sake!" she exclaimed, bitterly, and rising, no longer a suppliant, but proud and defiant, met his glances; "you would use me for your crooked purposes? Bend me also to work evil that good may come? These are the hidden motives you hinted at just now."

"There shall be no secrets between us by and by," he said, rising also and standing beside her. "You will learn to see things in a very different light when we have had more time together; at least, I am sure of one thing—we respect each other's opinions. We will each listen in turn, willing to be convinced."

Again an irony that stung and galled. But Bernarda would not show any resentment of the speech. While realizing, moreover, the implacable nature of his resolve and the cruel sarcasm implied in his words, a new light was breaking on her mind. As his wife, she might influence him in spite of himself. This marriage, impossible as it seemed, might wear the aspect of a duty.

"I cannot begin my vindication now. It would take too long. Give me leave to come on Sunday afternoon," he said, pleasantly, in the friendliest voice; "you are probably at leisure then, as well as I."

She stood irresolute.

"You will, at least, grant me one interview more. I shall come next Sunday, then, to have my answer. Meantime, I take this token."

He bent forward, and very deftly, but without a trace of sentimentality, removed the pansy she wore, in order to place it in his button-hole. The flower-head was securely fastened. The task occupied him several seconds, during which his face all but touched her own; but he seemed wholly unconscious of the contact, only gratified to have his way.

"You shall have a rose, when I come next time, in exchange for your heart's-ease. And what a heart's-ease!" he exclaimed, as he held up the blossom and looked at it admiringly. "Where do you get these floral paragons, Erna?"

The symbolic flower in his hand, the name none else had called her by on his lips! Bernarda felt on the point of bursting into tears, like any love-sick schoolgirl. His sang-froid helped her to restrain herself.

"My business is with flowers," she said, watching him as he readjusted the pansy, wondering if he understood why she should ever wear one above her heart. "I am an artificer of flowers in silk. Did you not know it?"

"Yes, indeed," and his face for the first time showed real feeling. "My poor girl, life has indeed been hard to you, and all through fault of mine. But time presses to-day." Here he glanced at his watch, and took up hat and stick. "Adieu till the day after to-morrow. No hurry then, remember. Keep out intruders; let us have plenty of time for quiet talk."

Then he made haste to go, leaving Bernarda to those sunny, deceptive paths, those dark tracks of remembered sorrow, in which she moved alone. For the isolating brightness and gloom of a few hours before—did they not symbolize her life, alike as much of it as was past, and whatever portion remained in store?

Alone! Could any spell now break the solitude wrapping her round like a garment?

He had sought her out at last, and for the purpose of asking her to become his wife, and marry him, without affection in his heart, without as much as a memory of what that affection had been. She recalled every look, word, and act of their unexpected interview, to her so fraught with passionate memories, to him so transparently unemotional, and could not discover any trace of the old love in the least little particular. He had certainly shown concern when reminded of the necessity she was under of earning her bread; but it was of the purely benevolent kind. The pinched look of a beggar-woman might have called forth the same expression of sympathy. And he had carried off her flower—a transaction that should have been lover-like. Had he asked her for a lucifer-match in order to light his cigar, he could not have put less sentiment into the act.

Then she reviewed his looks, one by one—the expression with which he had first greeted her, the smile accompanying this speech or that, the lingering farewell glance. No indication of deep, hidden feeling here; only the measured, dispassionate interest of an old acquaintance. And those cold, careless, peace-making kisses! He, her regressive lover—in the eyes of the world, her faithless bridegroom—coming, as he did, on an errand of atonement and reconciliation, might well be excused for proffering the kiss of peace. But could there be such a pact between them without love? Was he cold to her simply because his heart was now shut to human affection, or had the pardoned lapse, the forfeited word, the broken troth, been followed by another kind of disloyalty, harder still to forgive?

She sat lost in reverie till her little damsel's ring at the front door recalled the world of actualities. Only two days before she should see him again—before her yea or nay must be accorded. Heaven be praised! they were common days, dedicated to congenial toil and the daily task that seemed in itself a benediction.

Chapter IV.

THE SUNDAY WITHOUT FLOWERS.

Bernarda's Sabbaths were flower-festivals all the year round, given up after prayers in church to the artless worship of flowers.

As soon as the bright days began she would send her singing-girl home, put the house-key into her pocket, and, betaking herself by rail or boat into the country, remain abroad till nightfall.

Rich-hued flowers of stately shape pleased her fancy best—the daffodil of river-holms, the marsh-marigold bordering dusk pool, circlet of bright gold set about a black pearl, the wild rhododendron, crimson flakes of bygone sunsets lingering in the copse. She could do anything she would with such flow-

ers as these, or with the ox-eye daisy and the foxglove, rivals of the summer, twin glories of meadow and hedgerow.

Her favorites among flowers were ever those that asserted themselves, held their court in the floral world; and although not a petal created by the great Flower-lover but was dear to her, the meek, creeping, pathetic things, that seem ever on the lookout for sympathy and caresses, delighted her least. The petunia was one of her darlings, that superb blotch of color—for it is nothing more—so fragile, evanescent, and airy that even as we gaze we expect it to take wing like a butterfly. Of the pomegranate-flower, also, she never tired, here brilliance and solidity reaching their acme. She often found herself longing to take part in grand ceremonials on purpose to wear in her dark hair these florets cut out of solid coral. But no more festivals were in store for her. The flowers were hers to work for, to rejoice in, to wear for a lost love's sake. That was all. Much as she delighted in the country, therefore, her love of flowers was best satisfied in winter-gardens, those collections of tropical plants under glass, maintained at such lavish expense and with such learned care, which can in a moment transport us to another clime. She could not visit the great national hothouses on a Sunday, it is true, but a dozen tropical lounges on a smaller scale were open to her. She was on the friendliest terms with the great gardeners round about London, and to their conservatories she paid long visits, inspecting fresh arrivals, choosing new models for her atelier, carrying away a pansy for her breast-knot. And sometimes—for she had awakened sympathies among her young embroiderers, if she had avoided friendships—there would be a bridal bouquet to select, or perchance a funeral wreath. One girl was about to become a wife; another was made an orphan.

She encouraged her apprentices to talk to her about their homes, joys, and sorrows, even love-affairs, and any unusual event was celebrated with flowers. She never gave anything else by way of a friendly token, hoping and believing that such little things affect even the most careless, and that one and all

of her girls would be better in after-life for this flower-apprenticeship.

It suddenly and painfully dawned upon her mind, when the next Sunday came round, that it was to be a day without flowers! She shuddered as she glanced fearfully towards the hidden future, wondering what lay concealed behind that darkness—what lay behind for her and for him?

As the meeting drew near she went through a phase of feeling which many of us must have experienced, and none, surely, are able to forget.

We have had a dim conception all our lives of the abysses of crime and anguish, and unfathomable depths of sin and misery that lie outside ordinary existence, and are happily escaped by the vast proportion of humanity. On a sudden, without the slightest warning, without any participatory guilt or suffering, we are brought into contact with evil, wearing its most awful shape, and are made to pass under that dread shadow, to touch that dark vesture-hem.

The partition-wall that separated us from horror or misery incarnate is broken down. We hide our faces, hasten on, and try to shut out the vision; but ever and anon it comes back.

Thus was it with Bernarda now. Edgeworth's dark secrets might never, perhaps, so much as be whispered in her ear. From his fierce deeds she should always stand aloof. To-day, even, might be one of final valediction. Yet, because she had seen him and spoken to him, life would never be the same. Evil seemed so much nearer—righteousness so much farther off!

They might to-day bid each other a last farewell; but henceforth, on her part, at any rate, indifference would be feigned. She should follow his career with keener, more painful, interest than before. His wrongdoing would inflict a deeper wound. She could never save him, but she should suffer for him all the more acutely.

The sound of his ring came as an absolute relief to unhappy, aimless thoughts. She did not in the least feel sure how their

interview would end; but she longed to get it over—only to get it over!

He came in, wearing an ingratiating, animated smile, no cloud on his brow, the frankest, friendliest words on his lips.

"How cheerful and pleasant is this room of yours!" he said, glancing round. "A place inviting to confidential talk! And I see your pansy has renewed itself, like a phœnix. Well, do with these roses as you will."

The bouquet of magnificent crimson roses so carelessly proffered was undemonstratively received. Bernarda merely thanked him, then placed the flowers in a little silver épergne on the table.

"I am not in your way, I hope?" he said deferentially; "I hinder no engagements, keep away no visitors?"

"My Sundays are my own," Bernarda answered.

"You are happy to be able thus to keep one day in the week without a mortgage on it," he said, still gay and pleasant. "Ah, if I could always do that! But we have so much to say! We had better begin at once."

The afternoon was bright, but cold, and Bernarda's fire wore a tempting look. He drew his chair nearer, and invited her to do the same. They sat opposite to each other, divided by the fireplace. Matter-of-fact, almost cold and business-like, as was his behavior to her, he yet seemed alive to the undefined graces of this little room, the nameless charm imparted to her surroundings by a feminine presence. The elegances here were not those of an expensive woman, only the indications of a richly endowed, dignified, independent nature. Its owner had given an atmosphere to the place, set upon it the seal of a strongly marked individuality. To the conspirator this soothing woman's room, with its glowing hearth, its low easy-chairs enticing to intimate talk, its seclusion from the turmoil of London, seemed already a harbor of refuge, a sanctuary in which his uneasy spirit might find rest and refreshment. He was, perhaps, thinking, in that momentary silence before their confidences began, that, come what might, he must have Ber-

narda's friendship. She would surely not deny him that. He began, at last, abruptly, no circumlocution or preamble, the very heart of the matter plucked at and held up to the light.

"You threw out a hint, or, rather, I should say, you put a question to me the other day concerning the hidden motives of my conduct. Why have I come now to ask you to marry me? You shall know. Fear no concealments or mysteries here. In the first place, then, while ready to pledge myself to desperate courses for my country's sake, I cannot support the notion of having behaved badly to a woman. There you have the homely, unvarnished truth."

"I released you from your promise. We were both to blame," Bernarda said, simply. "It pained me to think you had never cared for me. That was all."

Edgeworth looked at her narrowly, curiously. He leaned forward. A hasty word seemed on his lips; then the impulse was checked, and he went on with his palinode:

"The world blamed you. I am thinking of your fortunes, my poor Erna! When I persuaded you into that wild flight with me you were innocent of harm as you had been in your cradle; there was no thought dishonoring to either of us in my heart; all things were arranged for our marriage; yet, because we rashly travelled two hundred miles in each other's company, your good name was forfeited—"

"For a time only," Bernarda replied, with a look of pain. "You see that I have righted myself in the world's esteem long ago. Let the past be forgotten."

"I have not forgotten it, anyhow," he said coolly. "Your worldly prospects were ruined, you had to earn a livelihood under difficult circumstances. Your family cast you off; and all this happened through fault of mine. I now want you to share the good things of life with me. It is the only atonement I can ever make."

There was nothing to read in her face, and he went on in the same brief, undemonstrative manner:

"Now you have one motive laid bare, and you cannot say

that it is unworthy. Hearken to another; and that should not discommend me to your mind, either. Even I, the arch conspirator, cannot live alone. We dynamiters, as they call us, need sympathy as well as ordinary men. I have neither mother, sister, nor kinswoman. Who should share my home, the life of my fireside, but yourself?"

Once more he glanced penetratingly at her, and again, without being able to discover whether his words weighed or no, he continued:

"Not only the life of my fireside, Erna—mark that—also the life I am compelled to lead in and before the world."

He smiled as he surveyed her from head to foot, taking in each beautiful detail of the picture—the well-shaped head, with its dark, glossy braids, the statuesque figure, the close-fitting winter gown of deepest, richest crimson, with the usual pansy, to-day amethyst and gold, worn by way of ornament.

"You are fitted to be the mistress of a house like mine—no mansion, certainly, yet no semi-detached villa, either, much less a sordid, gloomy lodging. All ugliness kept in the background, you should be in your element there."

Again that searching look on his part, that enigmatic silence on hers.

"Another and yet another reason," he went on, almost gayly; "as I said before, in all matters that concern our two selves only I will be quite open with you; you are no common woman; your spirit is high; no ordinary nobleness is yours. When"—here he watched the effect of his words, evidently prepared for a protest—"when I have won you over to my way of thinking, you might render glorious service to your people, your religion, your country."

Her passiveness was at an end now. She bent forward, and, no longer able to control herself, caught one of his hands in hers in an agony of entreaty and remonstrance.

"Not a word more," she cried. "If you ever loved this poor Erna at all, not a word more!"

Chapter V.

THE LIFTED MASK.

He raised that fair, slender hand to his lips with a cold, passionless kindness, in striking contrast to her own fervor and agitation.

A stranger, stopping to caress some little tearful waif in the streets, would have shown as much feeling. Not that Bernarda was in tears. The mood to which he had brought her was of protest rather than yielding. She did not, perhaps, conceal that she loved him still, but another passion dominated her just then. Her whole nature rose up in revolt against that dark career, those tortuous ways, those creeds to be writ with human blood, in which he gloried.

Both were silent for a brief space. A certain lazy mood seemed to possess him. The Sabbath stillness of that retired street, the pleasant, subdued cheerfulness of her little room, the unwonted enjoyment of a personal talk — all these considerations made him evidently disinclined to approach dreadful themes. He wanted to talk quietly, practically, and unemotionally, about the future, in so far as it immediately concerned Bernarda and himself. As she now glanced at him, stemming the tide of passionate words for a while, hearkening for what he should say next, it struck her painfully what a noble creature this Edgeworth might be, but for the ugly way in which he chose to transform himself. Where would one find a manlier presence, a better-favored physiognomy, a more kindling smile, a sweeter voice? And there had never been any shifting or meanness about him. Looking back calmly on the past, Bernarda hardly blamed his conduct towards herself now. Without prospects, without a calling, unsettled of purpose, a

poor dependent of the rich house in which she lived a governess, he had won her girlish love, and had induced her to fly secretly with him, as they hoped, to find an El Dorado in the far West. When, on the eve of their marriage, he allowed himself to be overruled by his kinsfolk, and to start for the New World alone, she admitted that he acted under very strong pressure, and, perhaps, realized that he was persuaded into giving her up as much in her worldly interests as his own. The real grief to her had been those long, unexplained years of silence and neglect. She had released him from his word. Nothing was whispered of the future in that hurried, passionate leave-taking. Why had he never so much as given a sign of his existence until now? Therein lay the mystery that touched her most nearly. Yet, as she now scanned the face of her former lover, she failed to read anything there to disconcert her. His mind might be filled with fearful thoughts—he had thrown in his lot with that of desperate men—yet it was clear to her that, personally, he had not degraded himself. But for the deadly part he chose to play—which, however, the uninitiated would never suspect—no one's outward appearance could be more calculated to inspire trust and liking.

"You bid me not speak, Erna, but with what a look! I know all that is passing in your mind. Hear me out, then deny me justice if you can or dare! 'If you ever loved me,' you said just now—we will go back to that text presently. I want you not to think of Edgeworth, the individual personally known to you and mixed up with your own past life. Bend your mind to a portrait in the abstract, an anonymous personage, type, if you will, that of the lover of justice, the patriot, the champion of our afflicted race."

She had removed her chair a little farther under the shadow of the window-curtain, and, with head bowed down and face averted, listened for what he should say. She was bound to hear him, and in silence. It had become plain to her that remonstrance was futile, words ineffectual, as children's dams raised to keep back the tide. He was unreachable, unanswerable.

"You approve our ends—at least, I take it for granted that you have not so far forsworn your country," he began; "but you abhor our means. That I take to be your position. Do you, then, expect miracles in these days—angelic battalions, Heaven-sent, to smite the oppressor, plagues to strike terror into the minds of the multitude, horrible natural phenomena, to bring all on their knees? No, my poor girl; you and I, and every man, woman, and child of our unhappy race, must at last recognize one fact—deliverance can only come from ourselves. We have no hope but in the hate born of deadliest wrong, and the resistance engendered of despair. Union first, force afterwards; these are the only weapons that we can wield to any purpose. You do not pretend to deny it."

"But the snares laid in the dark, the fatal traps set so stealthily! It is a perpetual nightmare to me," cried Bernarda; "you are not at warfare with fiends, but human beings. Be merciful! Keep your hands from shedding blood."

He smiled grimly.

"Was the French Revolution merciful? Did not the innocent suffer for the guilty then? Understand me, Erna, I am a humane man, a lover of peace; the bare notion of shedding human blood is odious to me; yet were I called upon, in this sacred, this awful cause, to connive at the destruction of an entire city—ay, were it London itself—I should say, not the vindictiveness of man, but the indignation of Heaven has spoken!"

Horror-stricken, fascinated, electrified by the fervor of his utterances, she looked up now and saw that, at last, he was allowing passion to have its way. His voice gathered in volume and emphasis, his well-proportioned figure seemed to take larger dimensions, his dark eyes flashed fierce, scornful light.

"You shrink back appalled. I am at this moment loathsome to you; yet hear me out. We revolutionists, called upon to redress wrongs that outrage humanity, have no resource but so to unman ourselves. We must close our hearts to pity, strip off the last vestige of weakness, ere we are fit for our work. But there is self-abnegation here, and self-abnegation

is ever a kind of nobleness! I have allowed myself to grow dark, desperate, reckless of consequences. Do I better my own case by so doing? Am I happier? Should I, from choice, think you, league myself with midnight assassins and contrivers of wholesale murder? join the fellowship of bravadoes who would give me my death-stab to-morrow if I betrayed them? These necessities, I admit, are frightful, and, up to a certain point, demoralizing; yet they have another side. Here is a man—I may aver so much of myself—naturally of humane instincts, sensitive as to right and wrong, fastidious in his dealings with others, whom injustice has turned, if not into a monster or a blackguard, at least into a desperado. Mark you, my good girl, I am conscious of the transformation, although I no longer rebel against it; you, for one, will believe that I have hearkened, not to inclination, but to sternest duty. Think how much I give up, all that men most prize—peaceful years, the respect of others, a stainless memory—and in exchange for what? Maybe exile, imprisonment, or something worse and better."

A strange expression, made up of scorn, exaltation, and defiance, caused Bernarda to turn tremblingly towards him, awaiting the climax in undefined dread and horror. It came like a thunder-clap. For a moment she felt awed, shamed out of personal feeling, drawn towards him by an impulse she could not explain.

"You must know what I mean. This name, so honorable hitherto, that I bear, may, in my own person, be befouled by a felon's end. Yet"—here he spoke with overmastering passion—"do not think for a moment that the disgrace would be felt as such by me. Thus ignominiously to die for our people were, in my eyes, a holy martyrdom. You are no longer my countrywoman if you are not ready to share such glory—such shame!"

There was contagion in his enthusiasm—even sublimity in the storm of patriotic ardor to which he had surrendered himself. But although her feelings were worked upon, she did

not give way. His utterances lifted her out of the common, harmless world, not into his own. She was as far as ever from sympathizing with his means, however she might approve his ends. He had, moreover, recalled those martyrdoms, as he designated them, of less heroic souls, so familiar in these days. Ghastly visions flitted before her mind's eye of the sad processions that issue at dawn from prison-walls—the condemned, shorn and shriven, supported by the priest, the automatic ministers of justice, the horrid paraphernalia, the brutality with which all ends. How much more pitiable the fate of these blind instruments and obscure tools than that of their haughty leaders! Her opinions were like Edgeworth's—immovable. Nothing he could say would alter her abhorrence of his theories; but the man himself, the conspirator, inspired a feeling akin to admiration. There came in a moment—no Heaven-sent inspiration, no illuminating flash of genius, swifter, less expected—a thought to guide her out of her dilemma, as far as her former lover was concerned. She had let him come today, and without having herself arrived at any decision. Every word he had spoken during the last half-hour but strengthened an instinctive conviction that this interview would be their last, and that she could not, because she dared not, ally herself with Edgeworth's destiny. But, on a sudden, and without any warning, she saw herself brought to the very conclusion that had lately seemed impossible. No middle way remained.

Friendship was possible with him—the easy intercourse of two exiles, two early friends; there were many ways in which, as an outsider, she might brighten his daily existence—perhaps, in some slight degree, influence and guide him. But only as his wife could she share those dark and stormy fortunes. Only as his wife could she hope to bend that iron purpose, save him, and, perhaps, how many others, from impending doom! Afterwards, when she had laid down for herself a definite line of action, and was able to account for every one of her motives in dealing with Edgeworth, she wondered at the promptitude with which she had answered him.

Light had flashed upon the dark path she was to follow, but it only made the darkness more inscrutable and portentous. An inner voice had spoken, not siren-sweet, but direful and foreboding.

"I am ready," she said, controlling her emotion, "not to share your guilt, Edgeworth — never ask that, only the rest. Will you make such a pact with me? Will you bind yourself to respect my convictions, as I will promise to respect yours?"

He rose, and, standing before her, looked down into her face, smiling contentedly, perhaps a little ironically.

"Nay, Erna, I never asked you to share my guilt, as you put it. One life I have to lead, apart even from a wife. Then all is settled so far; so take this, and this."

So saying, he dropped once more a careless kiss on her forehead, and, drawing from his purse a little gold ring, set with a shamrock in fine emeralds, on which were dropped a pearl or two—dew-drops—placed it on the fourth finger of her left hand.

"There is yet something I have to say," he said; "and when I have said it, suppose — suppose —" He wiped the sweat from his handsome brow, leaned back in his arm-chair with a sense of relief. "I can never talk calmly of these matters," he said. "We will keep them in the background for the future—at least, from an argumentative point of view. No purpose is served by thus agitating ourselves, and talking in such high-pitched strain parches the throat—makes one thirsty."

He glanced archly at a little silver kettle on the buffet, and added,

"Suppose, my dear, you make me a cup of tea?"

Chapter VI.

ONE CONFIDENCE MORE.

Bernarda lighted the spirit-lamp under her silver kettle, and, drawing out a tiny table, set the tea-things. This prosaic

yet graceful task was welcome after the excitement she had just gone through, and seeing Edgeworth thus able to talk smoothly and unemotionally of their own affairs, she determined to betray no more feeling throughout the remainder of their interview. Collectedness should be met by collectedness, indifference by indifference.

"It pained you to think I had never cared for you, you said just now," he began, as, with his limbs drawn out in an attitude of repose, his hands in his pockets, he contentedly watched her make the tea. "Well, I certainly never cared for you as you deserved, but I never became the slave of any other woman, either. I am bound to tell you that. Not that a pretty face has never lightly beguiled my fancy here and there. I am an adorer of your sex. Since our parting I have fallen in love, as the saying goes, and"—here he laughed grimly—"been fallen in love with, but without any thought of marriage—on my word, without any thought of marriage. Why, then, you will ask, this silence, this apparent forgetfulness?"

He shook off his lazy mood, raised himself in his chair, and again became alert and emphatic.

"Why, indeed! My career is the best answer. What business had I, the rover, the penniless adventurer, the conspirator, with a wife? For, hardly had I reached the other side of the Atlantic when I wildly took up those ideas which have since shaped my career. I purposely avoided correspondence with you. I said to myself, 'She will forget me; I shall forget her. Let it be.' You see, men in my case belong to their causes, their leaders, or instruments—not to themselves at all; and in those first reckless, exciting, American years marriage was out of the question. Things, however, altered. I inherited money, an estate, as you do not, perhaps, know. The course of events called me to Europe. The rest you know."

He now produced a little card, on which was printed:

"*Bernarda Burke, Artist in Flower Embroidery, Holly House, Chelsea.*"

"At an exhibition held in New York two or three years ago,

I came upon a little stand devoted to your handiwork, and the stall-keeper gave me this. I made up my mind then that, if ever my fortunes mended, I would ask you to forget and forgive, and marry me."

She made no reply. What reply, indeed, was there to make? Assent was evidently all he needed, and that she had given. The ring, with its shamrock impearled, glittered on her finger. The fragile china cup she now handed to him had a shamrock too.

"How pleasant to pledge each other in a cup of tea!" he said; "and you are a mistress in the art of making it, Erna. Come, now, every Sunday you will invite me at this hour, won't you—every Sunday till—you understand?"

"Would not a stroll out of doors be better on fine days? I could meet you in the park," Bernarda made reply. "Do not accuse me of inhospitality—I delight in receiving my friends—but your visits might be remarked."

"What if they are, since in a few weeks we shall be married? And do shut up your workroom, my dear girl. Why toil and moil any longer? I have enough and to spare for both of us."

"Shut up my workroom!" Bernarda cried, aghast. "Not till the very last moment, Edgeworth. You do not know what happy hours I spend there."

"As you please, of course. But those fine days you hinted at just now—will you guarantee them, balmy reminders of an Indian summer, in November? No, my dear; a fireside talk is much more seductive, and these symbolic little cups make the thing very complete. I hope you keep them for true patriots like myself?"

"They would not often be called into requisition if I did," Bernarda said, with a caustic smile. "And what would my habitual guests say if they knew who was drinking out of one at this very moment?"

He laughed frankly and heartily.

"Who are your habitual guests? Describe them categorically. It interests me," he said. "Then in turn I will tell you

some of the adventures that have befallen me since we met last. We have plenty to talk about. By the way—"

Here he set down his teacup, rose, and, bending down, examined the pansy so beautifully adorning her fichu of old Irish lace.

"Do you never change your flower? Is it because we pledged each other with a pansy—exchanged a flower because we had no money for rings on our betrothal day?"

Bernarda was unready with her response, and, meantime, he coolly, as before, removed the blossom from its resting-place, and examined it minutely, holding it in various positions.

"Has it never struck you that there is a death's-head in this flower? Eye those dark spots as I hold it thus. Nothing was ever better defined. Throw the evil augury away, and wear my rose instead. 'Tis of happier omen than a death's-head."

"If it were so ordained that those who willed it might live forever!" Bernarda said again, with one of her sarcastic smiles. She let him, however, unceremoniously replace the pansy by a magnificent Gloire de Dijon from the silver épergne. Then he passed on to other topics, never reverting to his unanswered question.

"I have not said half that I had to say," he said, as he stood on the hearthrug, hat and stick in hand, ready to go. "There is one thing." After a moment's hesitation he added: "Let us have no delays. Let the thing be done at once. You know what I mean."

"Impossible!" she cried, aghast. "There is my work to think of—my apprentices. I must have time to find a successor, to finish all commissions, and put things in order."

"Surely a month would enable you to do all this?"

"Indeed, no," she said, still painfully eager. "My poor girls must not be thrown out of employment. I cannot leave my handiwork to be finished by others. It would be dishonorable thus to break my engagements."

He acquiesced at last with a bad grace.

"We will say three months hence then? You cannot say no to that proposition. I can make no further compromises. One

word more. My life is, as you must know, exposed to daily hazards. Will you get two of your apprentices—not minors—to witness a deed for me. I want to leave the bulk of my property to you."

"Why should you do that?" she asked, demurely.

"Because I have no one else in the world to leave it to. There, you have the unvarnished truth."

"The intention is kind," she got out at last.

"My dear girl, we conspirators do not deal in intentions, but in deeds. The document is already drawn up. I will bring it for signature and attestation to-morrow. Not to stay, not to hinder you," he added; "just to get the thing done and off my mind."

A friendly "Good-bye, then, till to-morrow," on both sides, and then they parted. No lingering look, no last, fond whispered word, no loverlike adieu.

Bernarda stood for some minutes lost in thought, and, knowing well that none could witness or record them, shed a few last proud tears.

Chapter VII.

THE FLOWER OF DESTINY AND A DISCOURSE ON A PASTY.

How was the tenor of Bernarda's daily existence changed by those Sunday visits! Edgeworth came regularly, and although their talk was for the most part of a harmless, personal kind, the door would be occasionally thrown wide upon a black, unconscionable world. Bernarda realized that the even, guileless life with flowers was over; vanished the eager quest in flowery dingles and sun-bright fields; gone, never to return, the rapturous hours amid tropic splendors; and, ere long, would be ended, too, the days sweetened and subdued by congenial toil, the companionship of her innocent, sportive, flower-wearing girls, and the task of beautifying thousands of unknown dwell-

ings with imperishable flowers. It seemed to Bernarda that in parting with this familiar calling she was bidding farewell, not only to her best friend, but to a kind of talisman. The necessity of earning daily bread, and the privilege of earning it in a manner positively fascinating to one of her especial turn of mind, had, perhaps, staved off mental shipwreck. She had said this to herself again and again, as she recalled the past, and lived once more the shock that Edgeworth's conduct had given her moral nature. Desertion she would not call it. He had given her up in a moment of desperate fortunes. To have kept to his word would have seemed doing her wrong. The pansy she wore recalled that later and far less pardonable dereliction, the unbroken silence of ten long years. Her betrothal flower, worn so constantly, symbolized many things; but, above all, the injustice at the root of such unfaithfulness. She wore it as a reminder to be just to a hair's-breadth in her dealings with others, especially where their affections were concerned. She would never, for instance, encourage the sentimental clinging of any of her girls, or seem to care for them in the least degree more than was the case. She was ever on her guard against receiving or according hasty affection.

In a certain fanciful sense she regarded her pansy as a flower of destiny, and not even Edgeworth's railleries about the death's-head could now make her exchange it for any other. Why should she forget the sweetest, sternest lesson of her life?

In her wild, girlish days she had passionately loved the man she was now going to marry without any love on her side or his own. But the secret she had ever kept, and even Edgeworth would never know it now. A vindictive or less generous woman would have regarded such a position very differently. Bernarda put personal motives aside, and only welcomed her lover's tardy reparation as a chance of moral rescue for himself. Her love for him was dead. For all that she might win him back, and stop him midway in his career!

As yet her conduct was undefined, and all the future lay veiled in uncertainty. But one thing was clear. If these fre-

quent visits of Edgeworth's changed the tenor of Bernarda's life, they were certainly not without influence on his own. The oftener he came the oftener he wanted to come. The more he confided in her the more it seemed that he must confide. In spite, moreover, of an evident desire to be circumspect, he would sometimes manifest the incaution that seems part of a conspirator's character. A thousand circumstances, mere bagatelles in themselves, showed Bernarda whither she was drifting. The pleasant sense of freedom and safeness, born of obscurity, could be hers no longer. Already she had linked her fate with Edgeworth's. To herself she belonged not now.

Winter set in early that year, November snows covering October roses, but the more inclement and boisterous the weather, the more alertly he came.

Bernarda's pretty room, with its close-drawn curtains and blazing logs, seemed to exercise a kind of glamour over him. The long, if not confidential, yet unconstrained, talks, the solicitude, and, in a certain sense, protectiveness found by a man at a woman's fireside, the feeling of fellowship evoked by the fragrant tea, sipped from her shamrock cups—these things soon became matters of habit, all the more agreeable because they were a relief to the life he led outside Bernarda's doors. Their relations remained apparently the same, not a trace of awakening passion on his side or revived affection on hers. But without being young and romantic, an affianced bride and bridegroom may find much to say to each other. She could show that concern for his health becoming a woman about to exchange the name of friend for that of wife. He would find himself criticising her dress or consulting her taste as to the matter of a new fur-bordered coat.

One evening, after a longer and livelier visit than usual, he begged Bernarda's permission to remain to supper.

"Anyhow, do not drive me out for another hour," he said, drawing aside the curtain an inch, and pointing to the snowflakes that fell thick and fast. "I know what your modest little seven-o'clock suppers are, my dear; I have encountered the

singing-girl with her tray before now. Well, share your glass of milk and sandwich with me for once—just once! Then I shall have nothing to do but to find my way home, and go to bed."

Bernarda let him have his way. Certainly, she reasoned with herself, her company was the best, or, at least, the safest, for him just now. His very gayety and *entrain* frightened her. She felt sure that he was standing on the edge of a precipice; was, perhaps, lending himself to some plot more dreadful than any with which such conspiracies had as yet terrified the world. But she could not, dared not, question him, or even lead him into confidences. Her little piano stood open, and, uninvited, she sat down to play and sing to him. It was impossible that there should be any longer a vestige of ceremoniousness between two friends about to seal their friendship by marriage in a few weeks. Bernarda, moreover, was deliberately laying herself out to please. No woman could be less of a coquette than she. But, without trying to captivate his fancy, she might regain her empire over his affections, and every hour of easy fireside intercourse made the task easier.

"Ah, a song or two before we sup and say good-night," he said, with a smile of satisfaction; "a song of our youth—a song of our country—eh, Erna?"

She began a pathetic little ballad, and, lazily, from his arm-chair he joined in the refrain. The very freedom of this intercourse constituted its chief charm in his mind. Had he felt compelled to stand by the piano, deferentially turning over the leaves, even Bernarda's music would have been no longer a refreshment.

So effortless, almost mechanical, sounded that rich, sweet voice of his on Bernarda's ears that she hardly felt sure if he were listening at all.

He seemed to be almost unconsciously repeating words and melody familiar to him from childhood.

Nor did she ever choose her songs with any set purpose. She would not point a moral at him in this way. The moral

must come of itself, just as some especial butterfly, cloud, or field-flower strikes the careless eye, and preaches to the unexpectant mind. Thus an hour passed, and the singing-girl appeared with the supper-tray. But Bernarda had given a stealthy order, and the meal was suited to a hungry man. The ruddy wine of happy France was there, just as it came from a French cellar. There was a meat pasty, hot from an Italian oven close by, and something to fall back upon in the shape of that dainty of all dainties—a Suffolk ham sweetened in old harvest-beer, and lastly, for grace, rather than gross appetite, the lighter cates that women love—a cake, a pear, and a little lump of vermilion-colored jelly, clear as a sea-anemone.

"On my word," he said, "you feast me as if I were a prince! Although why princes should ever be feasted I cannot conceive, seeing that they are so surfeited with good things, prison-fare is the only change one could think of as affording a possible treat to them. Was ever a woman like you? Nothing whatever seems a trouble!"

"You must have consorted with dolts and brainless idiots all these years," Bernarda replied, quietly satiric. "Is it such a stroke of genius to send for a pasty when your next-door neighbor happens to be a confectioner?"

"The matter is much more complicated than you think," he said, as he refected with admirable relish, soon, uninvited, replenishing her plate and his own. "In the first place, there is to think of the pasty; in the second, to have tested the excellency of the pasty beforehand; in the third, to be perfectly sure that the said pasty will come steaming hot to table; in the fourth, to be equally certain that your guest's especial digestion is adapted to a ticklish thing like a pasty; in the fifth, to exercise mathematical reasoning concerning the pasty; if too small, your visitor is afraid to eat his fill; if too large, appetite is surfeited in advance; sixthly—"

"My dear Edgeworth," Bernarda broke in, merrily, laying a long; slender, beautiful hand on his arm, "in Heaven's name finish your tirade! There is the ham to moralize upon, and

when was ever all said that can possibly be said about so suggestive a thing as a ham?"

"You don't suppose I am going to take the ham in hand to-day?" he said, becoming sportive as herself. "My dear girl, I forbid you to touch it either; you shall see me do justice to the ham, both as an eater and a rhetorician, to-morrow, and how many to-morrows! You will never finish it without me. That is quite certain!"

Chapter VIII.

THE VOICE FATILOQUENT.

That genial, almost happy, evening ended early. Ten of the clock had not yet chimed from the thousand city churches when the lights were put out in Bernarda's house, and she was making ready for rest, with a smile on her lips. Edgeworth's wit and high spirits were irresistible, and his kind, almost affectionate, leave-taking touched her. He was over-grateful for such little services, she thought; a song, a glowing hearth, a meal—these were all she had given him, yet he had lingered on the threshold to thank her again and again.

Since their first interview he had never kissed her. She shrank from anything like a lover-like demonstration, and he saw it. Why should there be any semblance between them of a feeling that did not exist? her face said always. So they invariably met and parted after the manner of mere friends, although, in a certain prosaic, wholesome sense, every hour of intercourse brought them nearer together.

The smile lingered on Bernarda's face to-night as, wrapped in a fleecy white dressing-gown, and leaning back in a fauteuil, she abandoned herself to the pleasant task of combing her long black hair. For a moment she allowed her mind to indulge in a strange, a comfortable, delusion. This Edgeworth could never become a man of crime and villainy after all. From un-

der the upas-tree of evil he would, perchance, slowly, but surely, pass. Not love, but something purer, more lasting, better, would, step by step, entice him into ways of righteousness and peace. By friendship should the man she had once adored be rescued from perdition now.

On a sudden she was aroused from these pleasant dreams by a painful apparition—reality it hardly seemed to her, in that first moment of shocked surprise.

There stood her bright, sportive Marion, a girl almost Undine-like in her incapacity to grasp the serious side of things—there stood the ever-radiant, ever-singing Marion, white and trembling, a prey to abject terror.

"Mistress!" cried the girl, coming to Bernarda's side and hiding her face in the folds of her white dressing-gown—"mistress, I dare not sleep alone to-night. We are watched. The wicked have designs against us."

"Foolish child!" Bernarda said, as she gently shook off the timid, clinging thing, and rose with a look of determination; "sleep alone you shall not, if you dread trolls and wraiths. There is my sofa for you. But come, show me where lurk these would-be thieves, and assassins of two harmless women, for there is no money in the house, my Marion. You must be dreaming."

"You will find no one," said the girl, putting back her curls, with a childish effort to be self-controlled; "it is the mystery that frightens me. These dark, peering faces come and go like shadows. The stealthy footsteps are here one moment, gone the next. And at night I hear voices, horrid whispers close by, yet never a creature is to be seen."

Light was breaking on Bernarda's mind now, but for a moment she clutched at another interpretation. She scrutinized her little maiden as a physician inspects a patient.

"You are ailing, perhaps? I must send you home for a change."

"No; I am as well as can be. I do not wish to leave you," the girl said, fondly taking one of her mistress's white hands, and stroking her own cheek with it.

"Then," Bernarda answered, smiling down indulgently on the pale, pretty, weeping child—"then we must have the lame sister to keep you company till you get rid of these foolish fancies. And now I will go and look round the house, then to bed."

"Mistress," Marion burst out at last, unable any longer to keep back her dreadful revelation, forced by pure terror into confronting Bernarda's displeasure, "I must speak out. The house has been watched from the first day Mr. Edgeworth set foot in it."

Bernarda turned as pale then as her little serving-maid. There had spoken no child's fantasy, but a voice fatiloquent, a voice of doom! She controlled herself, however; not for worlds should any one, much less a sixteen-year-old girl, know what was passing in her mind, or have any share in her affairs. Very kindly she put Marion away, and reiterated her commands.

"To bed—to bed; away with such fancies!" she cried; "to-night on my sofa, and to-morrow the lame sister comes to keep foolish Marion company."

It was characteristic of both mistress and maid that Bernarda felt under no necessity to hold up a warning finger and whisper the word "Beware!" in Marion's ear now. Even in a crisis like this she could entirely trust the girl's sense of honor. Not even the lame sister would know of the connection in Marion's mind between Edgeworth's visits and the mysterious signs, should they be repeated. Bernarda's affairs were sacred. Alone she now set out on the nightly round of inspection, hitherto carelessly made. It behooved her, as mistress of the house, to see that keys were turned, shutters closed, and bars drawn, but the fear of marauders had never so much as crossed her mind. There was no gold in the house, nor treasure either, and what else could such gentry seek? Nor had it occurred to her that Edgeworth's visits might prove a source of danger to herself. But was it so?

An unexpected conviction now flashed across her mind. Towards Edgeworth the portent was surely directed.

Over his head was hung the sword of Damocles. The embroidery mistress and her singing-girl were as safe as if the conspirator had never crossed their path; but the ministers of the law were keeping closest watch over him. Perhaps already he had forfeited the citizen's right to be at large. Any day, any hour, he might find himself within prison walls, duress, suffering, and ignominy his portion for the remainder of his days.

To what horrid deed might he not have given his adherence? To what death-warrant universal set his sign-manual?

He should be forthwith warned of his peril, and then it would rest with him to contrive his own safety. She determined to think no more that night, but to see to her bolts and bars, and then go to sleep as if nothing had happened.

To Bernarda, as to many other women in the flower of life and gifted with a splendid *physique*, bodily fear was unknown. She was quite ready to encounter midnight prowlers, should any lurk within her precincts.

The day had been one of snow-storm, with driving gusts, but the night was starlit and calm. Bernarda, with a fur cloak thrown over her *négligée*, proceeded to inspect the house from top to bottom. It was no showy, semi-detached villa, run up within recent years by contract, but a solid piece of red-brick masonry, perhaps two hundred years old. There are few such houses nowadays, and every one, as it falls to the hammer, is snapped up by an artist. From an artist, indeed, Bernarda leased her own, turning the studio to good account as a workroom, and utilizing other nooks and corners not found in brand-new constructions. There was a small garden at the back; and who can keep thieves or spies out of a house with a garden, or, indeed, any house at all? mused Bernarda, smiling ruefully. The only way to be free from anxiety on this score is to have nothing worth stealing or watching. She gave up the task as hopeless, and went back to her warm chamber. The gas was turned down and the fire burned low, but Marion's golden hair seemed to light up the place. She wore one of those simple, childish nightgowns, gathered round the throat

by a white ribbon, and over the plain folds fell her short, bright curls, as a seraph's in an old picture. The hair was not encumberingly long, no mere silken yellow veil, rather a little rippling cloud of shifting gold, and no picture could be fairer than the purely outlined face thus encircled. A tear still lingered on the rosy cheek, but there was no other sign of dismay. Marion slumbered as if she had been carolling all day long. Strange that Bernarda should never have noticed such sudden dumbness of her singing-bird! The child's sweet, hitherto irrepressible, contralto had stopped on a sudden, leaving her part of the house mute as an uninhabited place, and Bernarda had taken no heed. As she now, however, bent over the guileless sleeper, tears of shame, anguish, and remorse rose to her eyes. Not that she especially cared for her blonde, trilling, caressing Marion; she knew that the girl would attach herself as fondly to any other employer in a week. A feeling, deeper, intenser far than mere liking caused those rare tears to flow. It was her passionate sense of justice that had been here outraged. In Marion she already saw a victim of that unholy league of which Edgeworth boasted himself the moving spirit. By what right had he and his associates thus to rob such innocent lives of peace and confidingness? For the young are very impressionable, and Marion might be far more terrified than she had ventured to avow. Perhaps years would elapse ere her mind recovered its equipoise, and a girl once as fearless as any in London would venture to sit alone on a winter evening.

Marion should be sent away next day, Bernarda said. If Edgeworth's presence brought peril with it, then the hazard should be her own only. Again and again, and even with more distinctness now, that warning voice reached her from afar; she was beginning to realize, although, as yet, but in a dim and undefined way, that she and peace of mind had parted company. Waking or sleeping, busy or idle, there was no more security for her, no sweet inner sense of safety and repose. It was not very likely that she could do Edgeworth much good. He had

sought her out too late, as far as his own redemption was concerned. But if she could not bend the course of his existence, how was he already shaping hers? She shuddered as she looked into the future, or even glanced so far ahead as the morrow. To what dark fate had she surrendered herself in promising to marry this man? Already that flower of hers, worn as a token of lost love, seemed no longer a flower of destiny, but of doom. The death's-head that Edgeworth's fancy had discerned on its petals recurred to her. Was not this flower symbolic, fit love-token for such hands to gather? But no guilt had stained them when, years ago, he plucked a pansy for his love, and if she kept painful vigils now, it was not for the grief he had caused her or the dangers that beset her own path, but for the degradation of that generous nature, the perversion of that once candid soul.

Chapter IX.

THE SHADOW DEEPENS.

Cheery sunshine, and the bustle of the day, quite restored Marion's spirits, and she begged Bernarda, with tears in her eyes, not to send her away.

"Let Kitty come for a day or two," she entreated. "I am so much alone in the evenings now. You used to have me up for a little singing every night, till"— she stopped short, withholding the remainder of the sentence on her lips—"till Mr. Edgeworth began to come"—"till winter set in," she got out at last.

Bernarda frowned, understanding her meaning full well, and, after a moment's thought, consented. Marion was not the only person she had to consider. Her school must be cared for. For the sake of her apprentices, one and all, the compromising fact of Edgeworth's presence must be got rid of. She would tell him to come no more.

When alone, she took out her pocket-diary, and was shocked to find how often she had allowed him to come of late. Two months had elapsed since that first intrusion on her solitude, and now she noted, as she conned her journal, that for exactly four weeks he had kept to the allotted day and hour. During the fifth week he had come twice—for half an hour's chat only, it was true, yet he had come. During the sixth, he had dropped in, as he called it, every other day. Within the last eight days his visits numbered seven.

Bernarda had not a particle of feminine vanity in her composition. Setting sentiment entirely on one side, she could easily understand the recreation such intercourse afforded a man in Edgeworth's position. Any other agreeable, sympathetic woman living alone, and thus able to devote her leisure to his confidences, would have attracted him in the same way. Men, no more than women, can exist without homely humdrum friendships, a domestic audience, a fireside oracle. She did not, therefore, plume herself upon gaining any extraordinary influence over him from day to day. To do him some good was within the limits of rational hope. To become his conscience she dared not aspire. Crimsoning with vexation as the telltale diary was put back in its place, she could hardly understand her imprudence in the matter of these visits. The head of an accredited school, the mistress of a score and odd girl-apprentices, was bound to show more circumspection. That day, indeed, he did not come, but on the next he presented himself earlier than usual. The street-door had hardly closed upon the last apprentice, and Bernarda was closeted with a client when he arrived. Ten minutes elapsed before she could join him. He put down his hat at the sight of her, with an air of relief.

"At last!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "I thought your æsthetic patron would never take his departure. And I am pushed for time to-day," he added, jealously, and with a touch of ill-humor.

"Why did you come, then?" asked Bernarda, coolly.

She had entered with a handful of papers, and was now putting them away.

"Why did I come?" he reiterated, in a tart voice, and with meeting brows. "Why should I come except to see you?"

She had spoken without looking up. She was a very orderly person, and could not sit down now comfortably to talk to him till she had disposed of her papers—a check to be put in one drawer of her escritoire, a list of instructions in another, a receipt in a third, and so on. She did not pay any attention to his rebuke, but, when her task was done, quitted her desk, and sat down beside him.

"I am glad you did come to-day," she began. Then glancing up, not feeling sure if her moment were opportune, yet determined to get out at once a piece of intelligence so obnoxious to him, she added: "And it is not because I have pleasant news for you. Alas! quite the contrary. My dear Edgeworth, you must leave off coming to see me; your movements are dogged. There are spies set upon this house." She then repeated, word for word, Marion's statement, emphasizing her own implicit reliance on the girl's good faith. The singing-bird belonged to the category of women who scream. A mouse scared her. She was brimful of girlish fancifulness, sentiment, and romance. But she invariably spoke the truth, or what she believed to be the truth. And she was no mystic or visionary; her mind, as much as she had of mind, was sane and poised.

Then, having delivered herself of her disagreeable duty, Bernarda studied Edgeworth's face—handsome as it was, no delightful subject for contemplation just then. Dark passions betrayed themselves in every line, yet she felt that something darker lay behind. His silence, moreover, seemed ominous. He was wont to speak out promptly, impetuously, only too ready with thoughts and words always, often pulling himself up only just in time on the brink of some imprudent disclosure. He now sat like a man fairly checkmated, turning from red to pale, with never a syllable at command.

Bernarda felt sorry for him just then. She had no clew to

those angry, disturbing thoughts, but he had evidently received a check, and, in the moment of his discomfiture, might be more open to impressions. She was moved to utter a tender word, to try to get near that lonely, close-shut heart.

"Dear," she said, and for a moment she let her hand rest on his arm, "you are troubled, and I may not know the reason why. Oh, it is hard to live thus near, yet so wide apart."

The speech, simple although it was, seemed to electrify him. The deadly pallor of a minute before changed to deep red. He was overmastered by some new, strong passion other than hate and vengeance. Was it pity for the woman he was drawing within the toils of his own horrid fate? Could it be remorse for worse crimes, overtaking him too late, or yearning for the chances of quiet happiness thrown away?

"Do you care for me at all, then, my poor Erna?" he asked, in a strangely measured, reined-in voice, while his eyes rested on the beautiful woman whose image had now become a part of his daily life.

For the first time since their coming together Bernarda determined to show him a little kindness. Up till the present moment she had been friendly, sisterly, womanly, but not a reminder of the old clinging fondness had ever betrayed itself in look, word, or deed.

She spoke calmly enough, yet there was something in both words and voice that affected Edgeworth strangely—a personality, a suggestion of intimacy, an affectionateness, hitherto kept in the background. By tacit consent they had avoided two topics. The old love-story was never touched upon, and with regard to his secret career inviolate silence was ever maintained. Of other incidents, adventures, and experiences they talked freely enough. But as friends, not lovers; lovers of home and country, not conspirators. He evidently found intense relief in pouring out his grievances—their grievances, as he ever put it—to her. The means to be taken in order to redress them were discreetly and rigidly ignored. Thus they led double lives. She kept to herself all that abhorrence of his convictions—those wild

yet ardent hopes of shaking them. Edgeworth exercised equal self-control, delicately ignoring the very words that might shock or horrify her. Except for these reservations their intercourse had been open and confidential enough. They both read certain books, took keen interest in many topics, had musical and dramatic tastes in common. Here, then, was plenty of scope for the fireside talk of two.

"Do I care for you?" Bernarda now said, very gently. "What a question!" Then, with a low, sad laugh: "Women may care for the men they marry in so many different ways. We were young together—that is a tie always; and we love the same things—that is a still stronger tie." She added, with a look almost of tenderness, "I am alone in the world, and so are you. We should both be good to each other, I am sure."

Did her words move him at all? She hardly hoped it, yet he looked subdued and crestfallen. She knew not how it was; she did not in the least intend to break her compact. A word of protest would out.

"We must remain in one sense strangers to each other; but I cannot help hoping—maybe against hope—that some day you will think as I do. Oh!" cried she, surrendering herself to a moment of noble enthusiasm, "if I could win you even for an hour from this dreadful fellowship—"

"You would be ready to pay the penalty? To fall a martyr in our sacred cause, too?" he broke in, greatly excited. "My poor girl, have done! Do you know that your life would not be safe for a moment if you were suspected of exercising a counter-influence upon me? Listen, then. I am bound to tell you the truth. If I am espied upon here, it is not by the enemy, but my friends. The foe dreaded here is yourself!"

Light flashed upon her mind now; she understood everything—Marion's terror, his own consternation.

"There is but one thing to do," he said, fiercely vindictive. "We go our ways as if no lurking villains crawled the earth. By Heaven, if so much as a hair of your head were injured, the tables might be turned with a vengeance! I am no milksop, to

be trifled with; that I can tell them. But," here his voice changed from stentorian menace to mild suasion, "do, my dear Erna, get this flowery concern off your hands; bid your giglets pack. To the—to the North Pole with your æsthetic patrons, and let us be married forthwith. What difference can a few weeks sooner or later make to you?"

Bernarda had not yet recovered from her surprise. The revelation Edgeworth's words had been to her wrapped the future in still deeper gloom, and lent this coming marriage an awful aspect.

"Everything will be altered then," he went on, growing more and more persuasive; "as my wife, you will cease to be an object of suspicion. You need not fear for your personal safety in the future."

"Am I so craven-spirited as to think of myself?" broke in Bernarda, with proud scorn. To Edgeworth's thinking, she had never looked so superb. "No, indeed; personal safety, as you call it, is the last guarantee I should ask," she went on quickly and agitatedly, unable to bear this scene any longer. "Have everything your own way. The holidays begin in three weeks. Only stay away till then and all else shall be as you wish."

"Will you really marry me this day three weeks?" he said, with an exultation in his voice Bernarda was too agitated to notice.

"Have I not said it, dear Edgeworth?" she said, almost petulantly; "only leave me now. Send me a line. I will meet you on Sunday afternoon in the park, or anywhere. Make your rendezvous, only begone now."

But the more anxious she was to have him gone the less inclined he seemed to take his departure. His almost lover-like eagerness seemed a cruel irony of fate in her eyes. Why this veneer of tenderness, this simulation of deeper feeling than any that existed?

"Well," he said, rising at last, "since you drive me from your doors, go I must. This day three weeks, remember. Good-bye, then!"

He advanced as if to kiss her, but Bernarda affected not to perceive the movement. She could bear his indifference, his familiarity no longer shocked her, his easy unreserve had become a matter of course; but the slightest approach to fondness, the merest term of endearment, the least little reminder of the lover of old days, seemed to freeze her into marble. Her first impulse was to ignore Edgeworth's initiative and let him go away, as usual, with an ordinary hand-clasp. Then, mindful of her intention to be kind to him, to win him if she could, suddenly overwhelmed by the stern necessity she was under of not consulting her own feelings at all, only thinking of him, and how she might best gain what affection he had to give, she moved a step forward and gave the kiss he had just now solicited in vain.

"We will, at least, try to care for each other," he murmured, and, without a word more, hurried away, as discomposed and ill at ease as herself.

"We will try to care for each other!" The speech kept ringing in Bernarda's ears with the bitter irony of many another. Edgeworth had no intention to wound; she felt sure, on the contrary, that he was always trying to soothe and gratify her. But it was just such utterances as these that made her realize her position. He had never really cared for her, but she had accorded him the one passionate love of a life, and just because he could not understand the nature of deep, abiding affection at all, he was perpetually wounding her susceptibilities now.

All this she must bear, and she was schooling herself every day into fitness for the future she had accepted. She had said to herself, when accepting it, that if Edgeworth's love for her had been a delusion, her own was dead. But was it so?

Chapter X.

REVELATIONS.

But Edgeworth came as usual, and Bernarda in turn grew reckless. A kind of blind fatalism took possession of her. Instead of trying to reason him out of his bravado, she seemed bent on playing into his hands and those of his associates. The lame girl had been sent for to keep Marion company; the apprentices informed that the school would close when the Christmas holidays began; Marion, to her great joy, was to remain with her mistress, and although the discreet little maiden never opened her lips on the subject, she felt sure of what was going to happen. Her mistress was about to marry Mr. Edgeworth. Bernarda shuddered as she saw herself forced to believe that some fearful climax in his career must be at hand. Such close watch set on Edgeworth's movements could only mean one thing. Even Edgeworth, the lavish, the audacious, the unscrupulous Edgeworth, whose life, fortune, and good report were freely staked on this desperate game, even he had become a possible renegade in the eyes of his associates. There are limits to fanaticism, and before a catastrophe without precedent Edgeworth himself might quail.

She could but suspect then, that unwelcomely, although inevitably, the period fixed upon for their marriage just tallied with an important stage in his career of conspirator. For other reasons he had hurried on events, and now stood, not only on the point of marriage, but the brink of crime. His followers feared to lose him when he was most needed. Apprehensions were evidently entertained that this lady he visited so often might seduce him from his principles. His restlessness, his unreasonableness in coming too often, and his craving for her

company she could only interpret this way. Matters had come to a climax since their meeting. "Ah," thought Bernarda, "had she not deceived herself from the beginning, and taken refuge in an illusory indifference, things would have been much easier now." Without love there is no pain. The horrible suspicions in her mind made her shrink appalled at the step she was about to take, and then came a voluntary surrendering to a wild hope, almost akin to despair. She would marry him, and try to save him, even if her own life paid the forfeit. What value had life for her now?

He came as usual, and she set herself deliberately to the task of reaching that apparently cold heart, and influencing, no matter how slightly, that impulsive, yet, as it seemed, implacable nature; anyhow, harm she could never do him. The three weeks were diminished by one, when Edgeworth made a second and most unlooked-for visit on the same afternoon.

They had already taken tea together out of the shamrock cups, chatting after the prosaic yet intimate fashion of two friends about to set up a fireside partnership. Cooks, cuisine, and china—how often have not such topics formed the pleasantest part of courtship! For even in the heyday of romance, lovemaking in itself very soon comes to an end. The tune will be repeated to-morrow and to-morrow; familiarity with every note makes it come to an end so much quicker than at first. The variations are gradually left out.

What was her astonishment to hear Edgeworth's ring an hour or two after the animated tea they had just taken together. She had sent her two maidens to a penny-reading close by, and, when she heard a disturbing ring at the front door, no more expected him than if he had been on the other side of the Atlantic. Truth to tell, she wanted no visitors just then. She was as busy as any other woman before transporting her wardrobe to a man's domicile, and was counting her silk stockings!

"Let me in, please. For five minutes—no more," looking the reverse of sentimental or ingratiating. "Don't keep the door open an inch, as if I were a wild beast."

Bernarda laughed good-humoredly and let him in, gently closing the door after her intruder. She was accustomed to hear him use strong language. It amused her, when he touched no patriotic theme.

"My dearest Edgeworth," she cried, as soon as they were in her little parlor, "what is the matter?"

She perceived now that it was no time for persiflage or genial talk. His face was that of a close-driven, all but desperate, man. He put down hat and stick, flung aside cloak and muffler, and burst forth in an aggressive voice:

"Do not say a word, Erna. Let me tell you that beforehand. I can listen to no objections or demurs. We must be married a week sooner than I said."

He looked at her almost as if he invited the remonstrance just now forbidden. Her passiveness offered no target for his weapons. It was evident that the handful of arrows must be spent, however aimlessly.

"You ask a dozen questions without once opening your lips," he went on. "Why this danger? why any hurry? why this? why that? your face says. You are thinking of your schoolgirls, your patrons, and all the rest of it—what does it all signify a straw? But our marriage is serious."

Bernarda tried to soothe him, and smile away his irritation.

"Of course it is serious," she said. "In the matter of a date I will not gainsay you. Have everything your own way." She looked at him fondly, archly, insinuatingly. "Only I must say, dear, that you disarrange me not a little. I have all kinds of business to settle. Was ever a woman married except in the best gown she could afford? Mine I have yet to buy. Now, a week sooner or later, what conceivable difference can it make to you?"

Her playfulness did not soothe him this time.

"I knew what you would say," he answered, with extreme moroseness. "But I tell you"—here he fixed on her a look so full of dark significance that her animation vanished in a moment; she divined what was coming, and awaited it, trem-

bling with apprehension—"a week sooner or later may make all the difference in the world to me." He added, grimly ironic, "Do insurance companies grant policies on such lives as mine? Answer that question."

Her expression had changed from dreadful suspense to horrid certitude. She knew what he meant right well. It was no moment for veiled speeches and random words, for common kindness or meaningless endearment. The fearful thought flashed across her mind that this misguided, adored Edgeworth might be hers for a brief space only. Perhaps already he was a doomed man.

Shaken with emotion, no longer thinking of herself at all, or of her womanly pride, thinking only of him and of the twofold peril he was evidently in — peril of life and limb, peril of iniquity past human, perhaps Divine, forgiveness — she now gathered him for a moment to her arms, her cheek, her lips.

"Oh," she cried, "I love you, Edgeworth! Will you break my heart, and leave me desolate?"

His acerbity and vindictiveness were gone now. Bernarda was not astonished at thus far being able to soften him. But he was stirred by some new, unaccountable emotion. There were tears on his cheek and in his voice as he next spoke.

"I ought not to sacrifice you," he began. "But, my Erna, my love, I cannot give you up. I never cared for you in the old days. You were a careless girl, and I a wild, roaming lad. Things are altered with us now. You are the first woman I could become a coward for. Don't contradict. It is cowardly to drag you down with me."

Bernarda had sunk to a low stool at his side, and, kneeling on it, clasped both hands about his arm.

No need for her to speak; her secret was out already, and in that first trembling surprise following his it seemed to her as if there was nothing more left for either to say at all. And what else was left but love and pain—a fleeting joy and unending retributive misery? But the joy made itself felt in both hearts, nevertheless.

"Why were we both so blind? Or, perhaps, like myself, you found this out on a sudden," he said, compelling her for a moment to look at him. After that long, long look, he went on, in rapid, painfully eager accents, as if, perhaps, even this brief interview might be suddenly cut short, and his last chance of speaking out gone forever: "A week, sweetheart, will make you as much my wife as a golden jubilee. You will bear my name—be in a position to vindicate it, if needs be. All that I have will be yours. No one then can contest my will," with a sardonic laugh, "on the plea that I am a madman!"

Then, like herself, swayed by overmastering passion, for one intense moment alive to nothing else but the conviction that he was hers as much as any human being can be another's by virtue of instinctive attraction, closest sympathy, affection, love—call it what we will—he added wildly:

"One kiss from you, my dear—a wife's kiss, you know—and come dark doom when it will! Erna, Erna, you cannot save me! You cannot follow me on my dark way! For a week, a day, an hour we may belong to each other. Perhaps no more. Only love me, then, this little while!"

Chapter XI.

WEDDED.

It never occurred to Bernarda that, because her marriage was to take place under extraordinary circumstances, and because she was no longer in the rosebud stage of existence, she should discard the beautiful and symbolic dress expected of brides. She was about to give herself, in all her whiteness of soul, to the man she adored, and to celebrate an act is solemn and fateful always, but doubly, trebly so in her own case. She trembled as she glanced towards the future. Into the depths of Edgeworth's soul she dared not look. But he loved her; he was going to become her husband. Mixed with the wild exultation

his confession had brought her, a ray of hope, therefore, gilded her marriage-day. So she dressed herself in the most perfect and appropriate gown to be had, and marvellously did it heighten her mature, stately beauty. She felt half inclined to lay aside the flower she had worn all these years; the pansy could no longer have the same significance, she said, since Edgeworth loved her. As far as his affection was concerned, he had made reparation, and healed the wounds made long years ago; yet, partly from habit and partly from a strange feeling that now possessed her — a conviction, presentiment, she knew not by what name to call it—that his favorite flower was still connected, in some occult way, with her destiny, she decided to wear it still. There were magnificent roses of her bridegroom's sending, and a myrtle-wreath for her dark hair, but discarded heart's-ease was finally fastened to the corsage of her white satin dress. A striking ornament it made there, looking more like a jewelled flower than a blossom destined to fade in an hour. It was one of those large, gorgeous heart's-ease, of deepest, ruddiest crimson, with deeper markings still of purple-black; and, the flower fastened, her toilet was done. What a bride to dazzle the eyes of expectant bridegroom! Bernarda now dismissed Marion and the lame girl, and awaited Edgeworth's coming, alone. She clasped her hands, and breathed a long, silent prayer, that shaped itself into a vow. Come what might, dark days of shame, misery, and separation; let even the anguish of estrangement do its worst; she would never surrender conscience to her husband's guidance. If she could not rescue him, at least he should never drag her down to perdition.

But could she not now save him? He loved her. What influence, as a wife, might she not exercise now? In spite of himself he might be rescued from the last infamy.

On a sudden she heard his voice, and, gathering up gloves and roses, met him in the outer room.

In the first moment of charmed surprise Edgeworth did not so much as open his lips, but never eloquence expressed so much.

He was dumfounded, dazzled, by her superb appearance, and she saw it. Such silence was sweetest flattery.

"Was ever any mortal satisfied?" he said at last. "You have dressed for me, and I would not for worlds have it otherwise. Yet I am dissatisfied because I cannot parade you before all the world."

His face beamed as he added, in an undertone,

"Ah! if those dreams come true you will never lend ear to! It might bring about right. There would be found parts for such women as you to play, my queen."

Bernarda smiled at him, for the life of her unable to resist a sarcasm.

"And for men like you. But I would rather be your wife than your subject, my poor, wrong-headed Edgeworth."

"And I would rather be your husband than my country's king," he added.

Then came the singing-girl, to say that Bernarda's witnesses —a favorite pupil and her father—had arrived, and the *tête-à-tête* was interrupted for an hour or two, till all was over, and Edgeworth Edgeworth and Bernarda Burke had been declared husband and wife in due form.

"A week! a week! why must we go back at the end of a week?" Bernarda said, playfully, after two or three days' honeymoon in a quiet spot by the sea. "Is it worth while to be married for so short a holiday as that?"

Edgeworth retorted in the same sportive vein, although she saw that such questions disturbed him.

"Must, then, a premium be put upon marriage? I always thought the contrary, and that when folks were in love they would go to the galleys for the sake of being united to each other!"

He did not, however, hold out any prospect of extending the allotted seven days, and Bernarda forbore to ask questions. She saw that he had made up his mind to live desperately, feverishly, in the present moment, not daring to look a single hour beyond.

Chapter XII.

HEART TO HEART LAID BARE.

Five days glided by uneventfully, but on the sixth the crisis came. Bernarda had retired to rest early, leaving Edgeworth busy with letter-writing.

"You need rest, I am sure," he said, as, coming behind him, she dropped a kiss on his shaggy poll and murmured a sleepy good-night. "Sleep away, then, and to-morrow one more gallop across the downs."

There was nothing unusual about his look or manner as he said this, and nothing had occurred during the day to give her any fresh uneasiness. They were walking on the edge of a precipice. She knew that well enough, but familiarity with the position made it seem less terrible.

What was her astonishment, then, on waking long after midnight, to find that Edgeworth had never gone to bed at all! It was just this sort of catastrophe she most dreaded. Some day or other, without warning, her husband would mysteriously disappear, and the end would be bitterest sorrow and ignominy, her portion to bear alone. Throwing on a crimson dressing-gown, warmly wadded, she stole noiselessly towards the inner room, where she had left him a few hours before, and, gently opening the folding doors, looked in. The fire was out, and the gas turned down, but a wax-light, low in the socket, sufficiently lighted up Edgeworth's dejected figure. He was not writing, only thinking, and the nature of his thoughts betokened itself in his attitude. He looked like a man whose moral and physical forces are spent, and who, for a moment, yields himself unresisting to the grip of evil fortune. No remorse did the shrinking Bernarda read in his pale, rigid features; only

misery and despair. She had left a night-light burning in their bedchamber, but the feeble flame did not disturb him, neither did her entrance. As she now stood by the partially opened folding-door she hesitated whether to speak to him or no. For the first time she saw an expression in his countenance that inspired a feeling worse than fear. It was a face she did not know! To the wife, adoring and adored, the husband's look had become on a sudden as that of a stranger.

Had he noticed her intrusion? Was her presence unbearable to him? As she stood thus debating within herself she caught sight of his travelling-valise and other preparations for a journey. In a moment light flashed upon her mind, and she understood full well what these secret preparations for departure must mean. He had all along pledged himself to take part in some dreadful deed, and was now finally called upon to fulfil his word. Or perhaps some horrid sortition had fallen to his name, and he was singled out by chance, of all his confederates, to be the perpetrator of some unparalleled crime.

The sense of horror and the presentiment of approaching separation, separation of a nature too awful to dwell upon, was more than she could bear. Now, if ever, heart must be laid bare to heart. Now, or perhaps never, so long as they both should live, they must get to the very depths of each other's nature. Friendship, with its pleasant converse; love, with its sweet, inevitable familiarity, had brought them very near together. As yet soul had not spoken to soul. Each had kept back one self from the other. There was a side of her character he did not know, while, in a certain sense, even the adoring husband was a stranger to her.

"You would, then, leave me without a word? Is your wife such a coward that she could not bear a last farewell?"

She put her arms about him now, and added, in accents more pathetic and penetrating still,

"For a farewell is in store for us, I am sure. Oh, speak to me! Your face is turned to stone; yet it is the same Edgeworth, my Edgeworth, and I am innocent of blame."

He smiled as he accepted the caress, but what a smile! Her heart sank within her, yet she remained mistress of herself.

"You innocent!" he murmured, in a low, crushed voice. "What are you dreaming of? Have you not made me fond of you?"

"I have never forfeited my word," Bernarda answered, grown suddenly as white and rigid as himself. "My heart is yours—to break if you will."

"You have hoped, all the same, to win me and retain me. You poor, good woman," he said. "Why did I marry you?"

Bernarda was kneeling now beside him. She fancied he was weeping, and in the feeling of helpless, almost childish, despair that came over her, only one desperate hope seemed there to clutch at.

"There is the sea," she whispered. As she spoke she held up one hand, and motioned to him to hearken to the waves beating against the shore.

"Beyond it, somewhere in the wide world, we might surely find a home," she went on, whispering eagerly in his ear. "There is no device I would not stoop to, to free you from these toils—disguise, anything. You are rich, and money can do so much! A tiny boat would take us across this narrow strait. You have friends in happy France and so have I. Let us go, and let us live harmlessly for each other there."

She clung to his knees, the proud woman for once pleading for herself. It was him, her love, her husband, above all, she fain would save now. She had not realized before what a necessity his presence and his affection had become to her. Only to have him always! That low, agonized prayer, in whispers, told Edgeworth all.

There was not a vestige of hopefulness in the voice with which he answered her. He spoke calmly, but it was evident that his collectedness was costing him a tremendous effort.

"I cannot hide myself if I would. No loophole of escape anywhere, and now I cling to life and liberty because I love you. God in heaven, how happy we might have been! And

I am no villain born. I have a heart for natural affection and innocent pleasure, like other men. A fireside with you, a child to call after its mother—"

He paused for a moment, as if to dwell on the indescribably sweet, unreachable picture. Then, wholly unmanned, he went on rapidly, as if he must make an end.

"These things make a man babyish — satanic; look you, they put a demon or a poltroon into him. I was about to steal away because I dared not bid you farewell, and because—because—but no matter. Listen, wife; you will know nothing of my doings for some days, perhaps weeks, to come. Go back to your own home till I give you a sign. For indeed and indeed, you must let me go," he added, gently, as he sought to put her away from him. "Were I to turn renegade now we should hardly be any more sure of happiness. Too late, love! love, too late!"

The word renegade had fallen from his lips, not her own. Bernarda shook off the lethargy of despair and sprang to her feet. He had thrown down the gauntlet; it was for her to accept the challenge.

"Happiness!" she cried. "Do we, then, so little understand each other still? Is it for the sake of mere happiness I would have you break your word? Oh, Edgeworth, pardon, if for one wild moment I counselled flight. The thought of separation was more than I could bear. But now, when you are leaving me, and your looks, words, and some dim foreboding within tell me it is forever, I cannot think of ourselves or happiness at all. I think of your honor, the crimes with which you are about to pollute your soul, the stain, never to be washed out, with which you are about to sully your name. Do I not bear that name? May there not be— But I will not think of the future, only of yourself. Is there not something that should stand before love, before country? You cannot disarm conscience. And you are one of the leaders. Your defection on moral grounds would be as an inner voice speaking to many."

She stood confronting him in her august appeal; no tears in the beautiful eyes now, no fond tremblings of the sweet voice, no feminine beatings of the heart. It was not the woman appealing to the beloved, not the wife trying blandishments with her husband, but one human heart laid bare to another, soul speaking to soul.

He answered, in a cowed, almost sullen, voice,

"You speak as if you knew all!"

Those little words filled Bernarda's mind with fresh and more terrible apprehension. No amount of details or explanation could have made her realize so fully the awfulness of his position, and it was the awfulness from a moral point of view she only thought of now. On the consequences of his deeds to herself and to him she did not dwell, only on their intrinsic blackness and the misery they would entail on others.

"Oh!" she said, throwing all her passion and nearly spent forces into one agonized supplication more, reckless now of nothing but the chance of rescuing him from the last infamy, "we are at the close of the year, the year that has brought us together. At least let this one end without crime."

He laughed bitterly.

"A week or two of delay. What good could come of it? But harm might—to ourselves, I mean."

"Do not let us think of ourselves," Bernarda said, clinging to him, no longer a monitor, a conscience, but his love, his own fond wife, for one moment more. "Think of the effect your hesitation might have on others. You draw back appalled, you who are ready to lay down your life for this cause. Would not others stop short in horror? and you would have averted crime and misery. Your memory would be perpetually sweet to me, if I survive you, and if not, you would at least feel that you had not broken my heart," she said, still clinging to him in an abandonment of love and despair. "I feel as if, however these things turn out, we are not to be together long. It is this that makes it horrible to me to lose you now, bent on what fearful deed I dare not ask, leaving me

already widowed. For wickedness drives out love. I should learn, perhaps, to loathe you, against my will. The Edgeworth I loved would seem dead; the Edgeworth stained with crime —how could I let him come near me? Is it not something, then, to keep you, if only for a little week, seven whole days? You love me! You consent!"

"To what?" said Edgeworth, hoarsely, and no longer master of himself. "Yet," he murmured, as he held her in his arms, speaking not to her, but to himself, "I am too powerful, too much of a force, too rich! None of them would dare to raise a finger against me or mine. And a man has surely a right to two weeks' truce after his wedding! I was against this time, too, from the first. My demur now will not occasion surprise. Why disturb the world's peace at Christmas—"

Bernarda listened, in a tumult of wild hopes, yet with a reined-in abhorrence. Black and frightful the chasm that Edgeworth's words had opened to her.

"We are rich," he went on, gloating over the thought with almost savage exultation. "How good to have money, my Erna! Money may purchase this reprieve. But go back to bed now and try to sleep. There are things not to be put into a letter, parleyings not to be intrusted to the post, you understand. I must therefore make this journey all the same."

"But not alone," replied Bernarda.

Chapter XIII.

THE DEATH'S HEAD IN THE FLOWER.

It was Bernarda's first night under her husband's roof. They had not gone straight home; hardly fair to the servants thus to take them by surprise, he said, and he wished her impression to be a pleasant one. So they put up at an inn for two days, on the third going to Edgeworth's house, to find servants smiling a welcome, lights blazing, flowers in profusion,

all things wearing a gala look, in honor of the bride. During the last two days the pair had seen very little of each other, Edgeworth only once alluding to the business in hand.

"The black flag has been hauled down for a while," was all he said, and he said it with an evident desire not to be questioned.

Bernarda was undressing, then, on that first night in her new home, when her attention was suddenly arrested by an object, curious, even phenomenal, that must have been placed by unknown hands on her dressing-table during dinner-time.

It was an artificial flower, a magnificent pansy, in the little crystal vase that had held the flower she now wore. At first the uncommon size and splendor of the heart's-ease excited admiration only, and she bent over it with a cry of delight and amazement. But as she gazed and gazed, fascinated, yet repelled, by something abnormal in its appearance she could not explain, rapture was turned to dismay, till she drew back, horror-stricken! It was no flower at all that she gazed on, but a death's-head in miniature. The imitation was, indeed, a miracle of the artificer's skill in wax; most ingeniously had the flower-head been copied, yet so far modified both in form and color as nicely to represent, on a reduced scale, a human skull. The petals were of grayish white, and the markings, representing the hollows, in dark brown, the whole at first sight looking a mere scientific toy, in its exquisite modelling and accurately laid-on tints. But it became a ghastly emblem in Bernarda's eyes as she turned to it again and again. The most innocent things may become horrible when turned into symbols, and this mimic death's-head in wax—a child might have unconsciously toyed with—gradually shut out every cheerful image from her mind. She soon saw nothing else in the room! This symbolic flower, surreptitiously placed in the chamber of Edgeworth's bride on her home-coming, did make her cheeks blanch and her limbs tremble.

What else could it be but a warning? and in those first moments of alarm and foreboding she thought only of her husband. It was his safety, his life, she now saw threat-

ened. The defaulter, the waverer, the recalcitrant, was already a doomed man!

When she could collect her thoughts a little the omen wore a wholly different aspect, and she could but feel convinced that it was placed there as a threat to herself. Edgeworth might be regarded as a possible renegade by his followers, but on whom would their vengeance naturally fall? Not on the leader, rather on the wife, who was the cause of his apostasy. Renegade he was not yet, perhaps he might never be. Bernarda dared not count upon her power over him so far. Nevertheless he had already drawn back once, and the threat was meant in this wise: she must cease to influence her husband, or she would be called upon to pay the last forfeit. Misinterpretation of the fact was impossible. There, symbolized, it was true, by a flower, yet evidently intended to symbolize, the price to be paid for her husband's redemption. She might save him or try to save him, if she would, but her own life must be yielded in exchange. Her first impulse was to carry the hideous travesty to Edgeworth and tell him all. But she hesitated, in painful conflict. She could not thus bear to overshadow his joy in this home-coming; for joy it evidently was to him, in spite of the dark, troubled thoughts that ever and anon came to cloud it. There was something odious, moreover, in the notion of having to confess to a feeling of insecurity under his roof. She dreaded the storm of vindictive passion such a revelation would be sure to call forth.

Yet she hesitated. What if any harm should happen to her, Edgeworth being unwarned? Would he ever forgive her? Would she be able to forgive herself? On a sudden she heard his footstep on the stairs, and seizing the hateful thing, buried it, shattered to twenty fragments, under the smouldering ashes.

"You look ruffled," Edgeworth said, coming in. "Has anything vexed you?"

She bent low over the tiny vase in which she was now placing the flower she had worn at dinner, a gorgeous heart's-ease of velvety purple starred with deep gold.

"Your own imagination is to blame," she said, with forced gayety. "Why did you ever make me see a death's-head in my favorite flower? Just before you came in I could see one distinctly. The illusion is gone now."

Edgeworth frowned; the thought struck him that some inattention on the part of his household might have annoyed her. The fire had been allowed to burn low; he stooped to make it up.

"Marion should be here, anyhow," he said, without a suspicion of the truth. The notion, it was clear, had never occurred to him that anything of this kind could have happened in his house.

"I did not want Marion. It is good to be alone sometimes," Bernarda answered, not having yet recovered herself. "Go down-stairs and smoke your cigar, dear Edgeworth. Indeed, I do not want you now."

He had come to search for cigars in the adjoining room, and now left her, to reopen the door a moment after. Stealing up to the white-draped, dreamy figure by the fireplace, he bent down and whispered,

"You have no regrets?"

"Oh, leave me, dear," she cried. "Regrets, regrets! Turn blackguard, drink yourself into a sot, kill me with ill-usage, and I should have no regrets. Only leave me now."

A word as passionate he had also to say.

"The very walls must not hear me," he said, speaking under his breath. "Yet I must speak. Listen, love. You will never change me. But a taste of happiness has made me greedy. This settling down is a mere blind, a pretence. Hold yourself therefore in readiness for a sudden start. Three months of my life at least you shall have, you who are my life indeed." He vanished, and with these terribly vehement words the scales fell from the wife's eyes. Now, for the first time, she read her husband's inmost soul.

A wild clutching after happiness and a desire to soothe her so far as to make such compromise possible, these, then, were the

reasons that actuated him now, rather than any hesitation on moral grounds. He could exult in the thought of a delicious holiday with her in some sweet southern land, a honeymoon indefinitely prolonged, while deliberately resolved to return to his former career, and in one sense—that the deepest—live apart from her forever. This respite was to be a respite from deeds of violence and crime, a mere *trève de Dieu* he was willing to sign for her sake. She could deceive herself no longer. Their love for each other could never save him, but in one way. What if the overmastering joy were to be turned to bitterest anguish? What if the next victim singled out by the dark Vehmgericht to which he belonged should be his love, his wife? Would he not quail then? Would he not refuse to move another step in the path he had hitherto followed so relentlessly? Awful as were these thoughts — Edgeworth desolate, Edgeworth frenzied with grief—they were far more endurable to her than those suggested by his tumultuously joyous words—happiness, sunshine, sweetest companionship—while conscience slept. No! welcome, a thousand times welcome, the death's-head, with its moral pointed at her, thought the pale, haughty Bernarda, as she braced herself up to tremendous self-control and a silence nothing should permit her to break.

Edgeworth, blindly clutching after careless love and joy, should be allowed to go his own way. She would never point out the hidden danger. He should never know that this temporary lapse, this apparent dereliction, on his part was to be avenged in the person of his wife. Death, for Bernarda, had few terrors; life, fewer seductions still. While a vestige of hope had remained to her of checking her husband's awful career, life was very precious to her for his sake. When it became plain past doubt that love to her meant one thing, to him another; that the affection he had to give her had no soul in it at all, since he thought to love and be loved, yet could live unworthily, then she had no refuge to fly to but the desperate hope of saving him through suffering.

Marion's presence came as a relief to these agonized thoughts.

The singing-girl soon appeared, beaming with happiness; no daintier, fairer Abigail imaginable than the blonde, rosy Marion, in her new pink gown and coquettish white muslin apron.

"Shall you be happy, think you?" asked her mistress. "Are your fellow-servants good people?"

"So good," said the girl, kissing a fold of Bernarda's dressing-gown. "We have had quite a party down-stairs in honor of your return. Each of us had leave to invite a friend, that made eight, and what with the champagne and the singing, my head goes round."

"And who was your friend?" asked Bernarda.

"My tenor, of course," replied the little maiden, blushing to her pretty ears.

"Well, Marion must take care of her old mistress," Bernarda said, sadly, and under one pretext and another she retained the girl near her till she heard Edgeworth moving in the next room. Much as she needed solitude, it seemed unendurable to her in the house which was now her home.

Chapter XIV.

REDEEMED.

No more eager or confident figure than Edgeworth's, as he threaded the London streets on New Year's day. So far everything had prospered according to his wishes. He had never for a moment hoped to manipulate affairs with such success. His absence for a time seemed now comparatively easy, and even departure need not be precipitate and secret; only that he preferred ever to act precipitately and secretly. In the least little thing he preferred not to take the world into his confidence. None of his household therefore, not even Marion, knew that the master and mistress were to start for a foreign trip next day. Bernarda did not know it as yet, and the extravagantly buoyant Edgeworth was hastening home to tell her.

He pictured her joy at the news. To be free to live for each other for twelve long weeks, three whole months—would not Bernarda be almost satisfied then? Loving him as she did, she must be ready to accept such a full measure of happiness, and leave the rest for a time.

To his extreme disconcertion Bernarda was absent with Marion, and no one knew anything of her movements. Edgeworth's nature was one that resented checks. He liked, moreover, with all a lover's jealous fondness, to be informed of his wife's movements beforehand. It piqued him that she should not tell him exactly where she was to be found, and after what manner occupied, at any hour of the day.

Something, moreover, in her demeanor of late had troubled him—a dreaminess, a disposition to brood, a habit she had contracted of seeming aloof from him when they were together. He tried to account for this change in a natural feeling of strangeness that might overtake her on first coming to his home. Perhaps, although she was far too brave and too proud to give utterance to such a sentiment, she felt a certain insecurity under his roof. Well, then, for both to get away for a time.

It was highly characteristic of him that he could thus shake off the trammels of self-enforced duty. So much the better, or the worse, for his cause, he said, recklessly. Without any apparent effort, he could thus make a compromise with gravest issues, purchasing a brief spell of happiness, perhaps, from his own point of view, at the price of disaster to his country or his party's collapse.

Only to be free with Bernarda! To live lazily in some sweet place with her for a little while! Then they might bid him commit what deeds they would. But why this prolonged absence from home?

After fuming and fretting for an hour, at last it occurred to him that, of course, Bernarda had gone to her old home. This forthcoming journey had been mooted. She knew that departure, when it came, would be hurried. She had, of course, gone to the school to fetch things she had not brought away

with her as yet. Or, perhaps, she had made an appointment with her successor there. For the embroidery school was to be carried on as before, and Bernarda's successor was to take possession after the holidays.

Feeling that it must be so, yet not quite easy in his mind, he waited a little, then determined to go after her at once. The way was short, and he knew it so well! How often, oh, how often, he had made it with wild hopes in his heart Bernarda never guessed. Strange, this story of theirs! To meet after such an absence, to come together again after such a separation.

As he hastened up the well-known street his heart bounded at the thought of seeing her. She would come out to meet him, scold him, satirize him, as of old. They would live over again that playful, earnest moment when existence to two beings is made up half of understanding, half of expectation.

"Erna, Erna," he said, as he let himself in with the latch-key, "what are you hiding yourself for?"

Silence reigned throughout the place, but it was plain that Bernarda and Marion had been there. On the hall table stood the little basket and umbrella of the singing-girl. She had evidently come in with some shopping and gone out again. Two or three packages were also heaped together by the door, ready for removal. The pair had been packing up some things Bernarda wished to take to her new home, and had now gone out for a fly. That was all the mystery. Bernarda had most likely overtired herself, and was drowsing on the sofa. Why, then, should he feel discomposure, much less consternation? A house could hardly be alive with noise if only one person were quietly resting in it! Yet why should Marion thus leave her mistress alone in this big, empty, dreary house? Why did Bernarda go there without consulting him?

"Do, my love, wake up. Come, we will have tea out of the shamrock cups," he cried, when, opening the door of the little sitting-room, he found all as he had said.

She had overtired herself with this final settling up of affairs

in her old home, and was merely resting on the sofa till Marion came.

Yet she was not wont to look so pale, and that crimson flower worn on her heart had a strange aspect in his eyes. He was accustomed to her fancy for wearing a pansy, and on first entering the dimly lighted room took the bright blotch of purple to be a heart's-ease of unusual brilliance, nothing more. Why, then, should it strike sudden terror into his soul?

He stood for a moment without the power to speak or move. Then he rushed forward and fell kneeling by the side of the couch, with a horrible imprecation that died away in a despairing appeal.

No natural pallor was that blanching Bernarda's cheeks. No pansy she wore on her bosom now. Her flower of predilection was indeed a flower of doom, the crimson stain was a stain of blood, and the hushed sleep was that from which there is no awaking.

Only one consolatory thought visited the frenzied Edgeworth now, as, kneeling by her side, he called upon his dead love again and again. In those first moments of crazy grief and blank despair he yet noted, with something akin to fierce exultation, that the blow had been swiftly, surely dealt. No flitting of the spirit from its mortal part could be fleeter than such a death. Bernarda had died for him—he understood it all—but without suffering or struggle. Never nobler heart struck at with less erring aim; never stainless soul liberated from its clayey envelope more instantaneously.

Conclusion.

All night long, before the bearing to the tomb, Edgeworth kept lonely watch by his wife's side. They had laid her with a certain state in the loftly and spacious workroom over which she had presided so long, but what a contrast did it now present to the atelier of former days! Instead of avenues of brilliant

exotics and rosy, fair-haired maidens gracefully grouped about their embroidery-frames, the place was turned into a black-draped mortuary chamber, with one sombre, death-still figure kneeling by the coffin.

On the estrade, Bernarda's place, a temporary altar had been erected, on which wax lights were kept perpetually burning. Well did the prostrate Edgeworth harmonize with these funereal surroundings. He wore a long mourning cloak wrapped round his limbs, and the intense pallor of his complexion served to heighten the jetty blackness of his hair and beard.

How those awful hours passed he knew not. All too short were they to the distracted man, who felt, somehow, that Bernarda had not, as yet, wholly left him. While he could passionately kiss the cold outside of her coffin, he seemed to be near her—in mysterious communication with her. But when that last desperate consolation was gone—ah! what would become of him then? There would only be one way of living and bearing his solitude. He could love no more, but he could hate, indeed! Here, and here only, he saw a harbor of refuge. What religion, what conviction, what duty, could not do, fierce hatred might accomplish. For the sake of avenging Bernarda's death he might find life endurable.

From these fearful thoughts he was aroused, soon after the dawning of the cold, gray, wintry day, by strange, sweet sounds, as of girls singing. Almost unearthly sweet fell their strains on Edgeworth's ears, and soon he was to know whence they came. Softly the door of the atelier opened, and there appeared all Bernarda's flower maidens, led by Marion, in solemn procession. They were dressed in black-and-white, and carried garlands of white flowers, which each singer deposited on the coffin as they slowly filed by. Then, when the last wreath was placed, making a pyramidal heap of white azalea, tuberose, stephanotis, pelargonium, jasmine, and camellia, the plaintive, wailing melody with which they had been marshalled round the room ceased, and full-throated, clear, and rich was the chant of these girl-choristers as they stood in a semicircle around their dead mistress.

Edgeworth never changed his kneeling attitude by the coffin. He did not weep, or show by the moving of a muscle that the singing touched him; immovable as a statue he remained, while these young, fair girls, having poured out their grief in a passionate threnody, now broke into exultant strains over the joys of the beautiful soul, set free from its earthly toils. At first, indeed, in the fierce jealousy of his grief, he had felt inclined to resent this initiative on Marion's part, yet the guileless voices and looks of the girls disarmed his vindictive mood. They had also their little right to love Bernarda too! The last strain ended, all became still, except the low, hushed sobbing of the girls as they looked their last adieu before passing out of the room.

Not yet did Edgeworth weep, albeit the music had touched him. It seemed a reproach to his own evil mood. He felt at last as if the angels had gone, leaving only a demon wearing human shape to keep watch by Bernarda's bier. The dark man trembled before the self-evoked image. How could he stay in this august presence, how could he leave it forever, with these awful curses on his lips and in his heart?

"Erna, love, wife!" he cried at last, as his soul was poured out in passionate tears; "for thy sake, the wild joy of revenge I had counted on shall never be. Unstained with blood this hand I lay upon thy bier. Unstained with blood—I swear it—this hand shall ever place immortelles on thy tomb!"

From that day Edgeworth, the anarchist, the dynamiter, the revolutionary, disappeared from the scenes in which he had moved a familiar figure, as completely as if he also had been struck down by some dark hand. All kinds of surmises and rumors got abroad concerning him. Report said that in a certain Continental monastery still left undisturbed, one of a cowled brotherhood, wedded to perpetual austerities, answered to the description of the well-known conspirator. Travellers brought word of a physiognomy and accent not to be mistaken they had accidentally met with when inspecting one of the celebrated monastic foundations of France. Edgeworth yet lived,

but a life that was a living death. The fanaticism characterizing the conspirator now found vent in dire macerations and self-inflicted tortures, recalling the flagellants of the middle ages. His fierce, agonized soul sought to forget itself or purge itself in bodily suffering. So, at least, asserted some who had known the Edgeworth of other days, and declared now that they had recognized his living phantom in monkish guise.

Others would have it that he had purchased a vast ranch in the wilds of America, and was trying to put out his wild energies and splendid physical powers into the adventurous career of a ranchman. Here, again, the alleged testimony of eye-witnesses was forthcoming. Extraordinary stories were recounted of his exploits and prowess. The fiercest suns, the most incredible hardships, could not daunt him. He seemed to enjoy a charmed life, and to revel in the daily perils to which he exposed it.

Yet a third surmise gained wider acceptance still. It was affirmed that the conspirator had never quitted his old haunts in Europe at all, but that under various names and disguises he contrived to elude alike friend and enemy, and to play a desperate part. No one had been able to identify him in any of the European capitals. No one could give a clew to his whereabouts.

That he lived and was close at hand many were ready to swear. And if no blood-guiltiness could be attributed to him, the part with which he was accredited was yet dark. The plotter now plotted against his followers, his former creed. Whenever some revolutionary enterprise miscarried, or some deep-laid scheme was revealed, he was said to be at the bottom of the disclosure. The arch-conspirator of former days now lived but to frustrate conspiracies! For the sake of his murdered wife, who had endeavored to change his purpose, he had become the deadliest enemy of his old associates.

One vague rumor more. Bernarda had been laid to rest, not in one of the great cemeteries of the world, but in a quiet graveyard far away from London. She was buried near that old-world town, so sweet, so rustic, by the sea, to which he had

taken her a bride. Certain of the fisher-folk declared that there was one night of the year on which a dark figure kept watch from sunset till dawn by the grave perpetually planted with heart's-ease—the grave of the stranger lady whose remains had been brought thither not long before.

True enough, on one grave dotting that green burial-ground above the sea bloomed ever Bernarda's pansy, the Flower of Doom!

LOVE AND MANUSCRIPT.

A STORY IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

Chapter I.

Of manuscript the unfortunate Mr. Beauregard had already enough and to spare; but with love, as yet, his business as editor seemed to have nought to do. Hate, rather than love, was the passion now raging within the breast of this once kindly scholar and courteous gentleman, this affable man of the world, and chivalrous, though cautious, admirer of beauty and feminine *esprit*. Mr. Beauregard sometimes asked himself, indeed, if he were not losing mental balance, so apparent was the change even to one not given overmuch to introspection, so terrible the fits of irritability and depression to which he was alternately subject. Yes, he mused, the profession he had undertaken with such heedless alacrity was a maddening one. There could be no other designation for it, and he turned grimly and ruefully from the manuscripts piled on the table towards the looking-glass. He was not only losing his senses, he was growing prematurely old. What had a man under fifty, and a bachelor, forsooth, to do with lines of care and silvered locks? A year ago Palliser Beauregard would have been assuredly regarded in his prime. Manuscript had outwardly aged him by a decade.

It was early in the day—that is to say, the London day—and he eyed the heavily laden table with a desperate resolve to disencumber it before nightfall. At any rate, some order should

be put into chaos, the utterly hopeless contributions returned to their owners, the more promising set aside for further inspection, the acceptable consigned to the printer. He could no longer live in this dire confusion, and trembling on the verge of precipices. For to his somewhat sensitive and foreboding mind every unopened manuscript contained a viper. He had already annoyed, even affronted, so many worthy men, so many delightful women, by refusing their manuscripts, that he had made more than one deadly enemy and scores of antagonists; so, at least, he fancied; and if things went on as they had begun, another year of manuscript would find him absolutely without a friend! Mr. Beauregard was not only chary of his friendships, he was tender of heart. It pained him deeply to have to pen those ingratiating little notes of refusal, especially if his unknown correspondent happened to be a woman. He could not endure the thought of the disillusion such missives would cause, not only to the timid aspirant after fame and fortune, but to happy and innocent homes.

Most of all, the numerous packets bearing country postmarks had a pathetic interest for him. Those pretty feminine notes accompanying the papers, too, so naïvely confidential, so appealing, yet so expostulatory, he could never read without a pang. Why did not women occupy their thoughts with love rather than manuscript? Why this infatuation for publicity, this inordinate craving for paper and ink? The overwrought editor felt at times as if his adoration for the other sex were turning to positive loathing. The most fascinating, agreeable, and friendly women he knew, women he declared himself ready to fall in love with at a moment's notice, might to-morrow send him a manuscript. The very postman's knock made him tremble from head to foot. Formerly the least nervous man in all London, he was becoming a slave to eau-de-cologne, sal volatile, and the smelling-bottle.

He had just snatched a brief holiday in the country, thinking to come home braced up for impending trials. But no such thing. On the contrary, affairs wore a more overwhelm-

ing aspect after this spell of ease, this temporary casting off of harness. As the valiant soul of Hector was cowed by the sudden reappearance of Achilles after his eclipse, so Mr. Beauregard, who had boasted to himself of his heroic temper an hour or two before, quailed as he came once more face to face with the enemy—manuscript.

The consciousness of a day's undisturbed leisure before him, however, and the comfort imparted by smoking-gown and slippers, alleviated in some degree the trying nature of his position. So, after a desperate running of his fingers, on which sparkled a magnificent diamond ring, through his hair, he set courageously to work.

Mr. Beauregard was not an orderly man; disorder, indeed, must be set down as one of the permissible luxuries of bachelorhood; nor was he free from a certain absent-mindedness, which, perhaps, more than any other circumstance, made the business of an editor so irksome to him. He was prone to forget appointments, worse still, to mislay the manuscripts intrusted to his care, and thus—with the best intentions in the world—to get himself into dilemmas often embarrassing in the extreme.

To-day, for instance, a methodical man would have attended to certain little matters of more pressing necessity than the heap of packets before him. As he now opened one after another with marvellous alacrity, branding the greater portion with the editorial D after a glance at the opening pages, he quite forgot one or two disagreeable circumstances that had been uppermost in his mind before his flight from town. The nature of his task, too, was very absorbing. Nothing exhilarates more than the consciousness of weeding out, sifting, winnowing. At the end of an hour the stack of rejected manuscripts had reached gigantic proportions, and Mr. Beauregard was positively enjoying himself. If matters progressed at this rate, he should have a clear table in no time. It was now twelve of the clock, midday, but the solemn chiming of the hour from a neighboring church did not disturb the editor's

serenity. He forgot to make up his fire, he forgot the biscuit and glass of light Greek wine that did duty for luncheon at this hour, he forgot obligations of a more imperious nature, letters that pressed for a reply, appointments that should be kept without delay. In fact, he was now as completely isolated from the world of actualities as Sir Isaac Newton, when, in the search after gravity, he forgot his dinner. The twelfth hour had hardly been struck by the according bells of all the churches in London, when a light tap at the door announced the parlor-maid, a middle-aged, ladylike person, whose appearance spoke volumes for the character of the bachelor's household.

"Really, Benson," said the ruffled Mr. Beauregard, looking up with an expression of indescribable annoyance, "to break in upon me after my repeated injunctions! I did not expect it of you."

"Please look at the card, sir," was the unflinching reply. "This lady comes by appointment, by special appointment."

That quiet reproof—for such indeed it was—pleasantly indicated the position of things between master and servant. Only a man of the most fastidious exactitude in his social relations could have permitted himself to be thus rebuked by a domestic. Only a perfectly well-bred servant could have expostulated after so becoming a fashion with her employer.

"When was an appointment with a woman *not* special?" murmured the still discomposed editor, exasperated almost beyond endurance, yet perforce resigning himself to duty and the inevitable.

"I will tell you what a pass matters have come to, my good Benson," he added, in a milder tone. "I make a new rule. From this moment no appointments are special. Henceforth I see nobody. I am invisible every forenoon from Monday till Saturday, from the first of January till the thirty-first of December. Now hand me the card," he said, looking more cheerful. The maid did as she was bidden, and gently withdrew. She was out of the room and out of hearing when Mr. Beauregard, starting to his feet, uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Benson, stay a moment. Five minutes; I must have five minutes in which to collect my thoughts. Do you hear, Benson?" he cried, in a voice of entreaty.

But it was too late. Already his visitor was on the stairs. In another moment he should have to confront her. There was no possibility of collecting those confused thoughts of his, no escape that he could see from a painful, an odious, an abject dilemma. The unfortunate Mr. Beauregard looked the veriest culprit alive when the door opened and a young lady appeared on the threshold. For the first time in his existence, the finished scholar, fastidious gentleman, and consummate man of the world had not so much as a word at his command. Under any other circumstances he would have been shocked at the notion of receiving a lady in his smoking-gown, elegant and becoming though it might be. The little irregularity never once occurred to him. He might have been in a much less presentable costume, for aught he knew or cared at that moment. Not only his senses, his very instincts of propriety had deserted him. But there was no escape. The horrible ordeal must be gone through.

Chapter II.

There entered, with a sweet, hopeful smile, one of those parsonage-bred girls that may almost be called survivals in these days of new feminine types and fresh ideals of womankind. This girl of twenty-five—so much you saw at a glance—was a stranger as yet to the revolutionary ideas traversing the civilized world concerning her sex, although quite fitted by natural endowments to realize them if they should come in her way. Hardly beauty was hers, but something rarer and more winning, a wonderful brightness and expansiveness, the curious, eager inquiry of a child combined with the keen sympathies and quick, intellectual perceptions of a full-grown, noble hu-

man being. All this was written in her face, which might almost be called beautiful as it was now turned eagerly and timidly towards the editor. Its expression was sunny, too. If thought or sorrow had sobered this hopeful girlish nature, it was evident that nothing could shake her trustingness and looking forward. She was dressed in deep mourning, and well did the sombre frame become the bright picture; the prettiest brown hair, a fine brow, and that matchless complexion town beauties court in vain—these were hers. Mr. Beauregard placed a chair for his guest and bowed low, without a word.

"You were my father's friend," said the girl, holding out her hand, while tears rose to her sweet eyes.

"True, true. How absent I am. I had forgotten the very name of my visitor. My dear young lady—little Lucy you were to me when I saw you last—I was indeed grieved to hear of your good father's death. But"—here he glanced towards the table piled with manuscripts, and smiled drearily—"this terrible business of editor demoralizes me. An editor has no friends. An editor ceases to be a feeling, a responsible human being. For instance, I had quite forgotten my appointment with you to-day. I had quite forgotten—" He rose from his chair, and, standing with his back to the fire, looked her through and through. Then, as if lacking courage as yet to say what was on his lips, he reseated himself, utterly self-conscious and ill at ease.

"I have come at an inopportune moment, I see; you are preoccupied, engrossed in other matters," said the girl, with a shade of disappointment. "I will not keep you, then."

"On the contrary, I shall be very glad to have a little talk with you," said Mr. Beauregard, brightening. "Let us consider this a friendly visit, and you shall come to me another day upon editorial business. Tell me of your little brothers and sisters; your prospects."

"You have not, of course, had time to read my manuscript?" Lucy asked. Then, as if realizing the kindly intention of his speech, and the bad taste of insisting on a topic evidently so

distasteful to him just then, she resumed: "It is very good of you to interest yourself in us all. We are now orphans, and I am the head of the family. This is one reason why I am so anxious as to the fate of my manuscript." The allusion had come unawares. She smiled sadly and proudly, and a beautiful blush overspread her features as she went on. "It is, perhaps, a foolish ambition, and too much happiness to hope for. For I had hoped, not only that I have some small literary gifts, but also that I might help to maintain my younger brothers and sisters by my pen, and I was ambitious for myself also. But I feel sure from your looks that there is disappointment in store for me. You think meanly of my performance, and you hesitate to break the unwelcome tidings."

"Truth to tell," Mr. Beauregard said, with nervous muscular contraction, "I have not read a line of your manuscript. Alas!" and once more he seemed on the verge of making another confession.

"Ah!" said the girl, growing once more animated, "I may still cherish hope then; for, of course, what you have not read you cannot condemn! But you begged me to leave the matter to-day, and I will therefore come again, if I may, and if you will fix an hour." She half rose, as if bound not to encroach upon his precious time, but he motioned her to reseat herself. A great weight seemed lifted from his mind. He became quite suddenly his old, genial, delightful self.

"So long as you do not talk of manuscripts, my dear Miss Lucy—"

"Please call me Lucy, as in the old days at home," the girl said, with a grateful smile.

The editor smiled also; only, however, half pleased.

"It shall be so then, Lucy. Of course I appear quite an old fogy to you. Provided, however, you do not talk of manuscript, I am delighted to listen to you as long as you care to stay. Before going into particulars of your family history answer me one question."

He gazed penetratingly upon the eager, beautiful face—for

beautiful it seemed to him in its freshness and candor—and asked: "How came you to write a novel, at your age, with, as I imagine, but limited experiences of life? What put it into your head? What made you think you could do it with fair chances of success?"

His visitor blushed and paused. After a minute's reflection she made reply, speaking slowly and steadily, with ingenuousness, yet with indications of the self-confidence that must ever accompany worthy achievement.

"You are thinking of the secluded rustic village in which my life has been passed. But is not human nature to be studied everywhere? Even in my father's little parish there was romance and tragedy, moving incidents of real life, such as should make the stuff of novels. At least, so it seemed to me."

"I looked for a novice, I find a critic," Mr. Beauregard said. "I will not interrupt you any more. All that you say interests me extremely. Pray go on."

"I was then led to write my novel," the young lady continued, "by the keen interest I took in the joys and sorrows of those about me, and also by my enthusiasm for the country generally. As you know well, my native Suffolk has beauties of its own. I but attempted to describe what I best knew and best loved."

"On my word, you make me quite eager to read your manuscript," again broke in the editor; then, with a sudden falling back into his old, uneasy mood, he added:

"I am all attention. Proceed."

"I have very little more to say. I may perhaps exaggerate my sources of inspiration. I suppose few people are without a certain partiality to their native place," Lucy went on. "But I must tell you that the incidents of my story are not all Arcadian. The little pictures of village life, the flower-gathering in spring, the harvest supper, the autumn nutting in the woods—all these must have a human interest. And"—here she glanced at him and smiled—"the human interest brings in elements of good and evil."

"Love and hate," the editor rejoined. "It is no indiscretion, I hope, to assume that the theme of your story is the former passion?"

"You must read the manuscript," said Lucy, looking on the ground, with heightened color, saying to herself that this man of the world, in spite of his kindness and affability, was a satirist and a despiser of feminine intellect. The thought was, doubtless, uppermost in his mind, what may a country curate's daughter, shut up in a country village, know of love?

It was fortunate that Lucy Carruthers's eyes did, in a transitory fit of shyness, study the carpet, or the same expression of painful embarrassment in Mr. Beauregard's face must have attracted her notice. He leaned forward, and was about to say something that cost a tremendous effort, when he was confronted by Lucy, smiling at him with almost mischievous archness.

"You are wrong. There is very little of the love-story about my novel. Why may not certain stories, like certain episodes in real life, be deeply interesting, yet have nothing to do with love?"

"My dear Miss Carruthers; pardon me, my dear little friend Lucy," said Mr. Beauregard, once more himself again. "I am astonished at evidence of so much thought in a young girl. I begin to believe there is stuff in you, that for the first time in my life I have discovered talent, perhaps genius."

"Then," Lucy retorted, still in the same gay, arch humor, "you will assuredly read my manuscript."

"Ah!" the editor said, "first manuscript, like first love, is but a Dead Sea apple. Build no hopes, dear Miss Lucy, on this youthful attempt of yours. Excellence in literature, like steadfastness in love, is the gift of that great god whose name is Time. If, as I believe, you are really conscious of a hidden gift, are really possessed of a worthy ambition to make the most of that gift, come to me, not to-morrow, not in a twelvemonth, but years hence with a manuscript."

The speech, so serious in itself, was yet spoken jestingly, and as a jest Lucy evidently preferred to regard it.

"Oh," she said, eagerly, almost passionately, "you would not say this if you had read my story. It is a part of my life, of myself, and nothing else I shall ever write will be in the least like it. Surely," she added, as if anxious to qualify what might appear overweening self-assertion, "intensity of feeling, which has so little to do with wisdom or experience, may be adequately expressed without these. Is there not force in the very freshness of our earliest impressions? I am sure I shall never realize any incident so intensely as that which I have attempted to describe."

Mr. Beauregard's powers of self-containment seemed at an end. He turned red and pale. He made an effort to speak, and found himself without power of utterance. He started from his chair, and reseated himself. The country girl could but interpret such strange behavior after one fashion. In spite of the kind reception accorded by her father's old friend; in spite of his friendly, nay, affectionate, interest in her welfare, he was keenly, desperately anxious to be rid of her all the while. Some far more urgent matter pressed. The visit of a far more important personage was one. She rose to go.

"When may I come again to learn the fate of my story?" she said, once more recurring to the forbidden subject without apology.

After all, this was the business that had brought her hither. The topic, however ungrateful, could not be ignored.

"To-morrow—a week hence—at your own time," was the enigmatic answer; at least, so it sounded in Lucy's ears; for how could a busy editor get through a manuscript of six hundred pages in a day?

"It had better, perhaps, be a week hence," she said. "I do not wish to hurry or to trouble you."

"Not at all. The sooner we get over the matter the better; at least for me," added Mr. Beauregard, with a faint attempt at a smile. "For pity's sake, let it be to-morrow!"

The girl's candid eyes perused her interlocutor inquiringly, and she offered no further remonstrance. Truth to tell, the

eccentricity of Mr. Beauregard's manner was really perplexing her as much as his friendliness had charmed her a quarter of an hour before. She made her adieus somewhat pensively, feeling sure that, after all, something was wrong, and that to-morrow would bring no felicitous news about her manuscript.

Chapter III.

If the young aspirant after literary honors went away crest-fallen, in much worse case was the accomplished man of letters, her editor. Work was now wholly out of the question. Not another manuscript would be consigned to purgatory, paradise, or perdition that day. An unpropitious incident had wrecked it. Like so many of its fellows, it had opened promisingly, to end in collapse. The day was spoiled, as ninety-nine days out of a hundred are spoiled, and there was an end to the matter. Mr. Beauregard lighted a cigarette, and, while he smoked it, held in one hand Lucy's little card, which he contemplated from time to time.

What an attractive girl! What a charming incident, this visit of hers, but for the unlucky spectre of the lost manuscript, he mused. The more he dwelt upon Lucy's looks and speeches the more he felt drawn towards her and interested in her future. Yes, a girl of this pattern was no mere sentimentalist, anxious to be listened to; no self-deluded competitor after honors to which she had not a tittle of claim. This maiden's written as well as her spoken thoughts must be worth something. No flimsiness, emptiness, incoherence here. It was a mind not only gifted with insight, but expression; and when, in the case of a young writer, you have said so much, mused Mr. Beauregard, you have said all. Who could tell? This country parson's daughter might turn out to be something more than a clever exponent of original thought and subtile or vivid impressions. Common her achievement could hardly be,

nor dull, he felt sure, while of sentimentality or extravagance he could not discover a trace. She must, too, have reached an age when the mind of man or woman, if not ripe, is mature. Twenty-four years he felt bound to assign her, and others have won laurels before attaining so many. The conviction he gradually arrived at was exasperating, maddening.

This lost manuscript of Lucy Carruthers might be a gem, a masterpiece, a second "Northanger Abbey" or "Villette." It occurred to the distracted editor, as he sat thus, contemplating Lucy's little card, that he would forthwith write to her and explain the disastrous affair by letter. Such a course, savoring as it did of cowardice, was odious to him; but the thought of witnessing her distress was more than odious, it was simply intolerable. The kind-hearted, chivalrous, impulsive Mr. Beauregard was a sybarite in one respect. He could not inflict pain upon any human being, or, indeed, any living creature. Even when moral duty pointed the other way, he must be considerate, consolatory, kind. How, then, could he deliberately break to the hoping, expectant, ardent girl the tidings that her labor, nay, her very inspiration, was as if it had not been; that those bright, buoyant hours of creation were as bubbles that had burst? How could he reveal his own unmitigated, criminal carelessness? Had the manuscript belonged to any one else but his old friend's daughter apology and compensation would have been almost easy. Had it come from some poor, painstaking nonentity, moved to write for daily bread, a check would have ended the dilemma satisfactorily to both parties. He knew exactly with whom he had to deal here.

This girl had not put pen to paper with a view to gain. She had written her story because she could not help writing it, and compensation was wholly out of the question. No. Alike excuse and atonement in this case were beyond his reach. He must tell her the truth, nothing but the truth, and throw himself on her generosity to forgive. Women were very forgiving, reasoned Mr. Beauregard, trying to reassure himself. They could forgive and again receive into favor the peccant lover,

the recalcitrant husband. What offence, indeed, will not a magnanimous woman overlook? But literature has no sex. The woman becomes merged in the author, and that author must be superhuman who should forgive the loss of a manuscript. How had he contrived such a piece of folly? A manuscript is no easy thing to lose. Fire, in spite of popular superstition to the contrary, doth not readily consume it. Water will not engulf it. Earth refuses to make dust of it. Air, instead of corroding, cherishes it. Nor doth the cupidity of man lust after it. To sum up the whole matter, nothing in the world possesses so tough an existence as a ream of paper covered with handwriting. Such, at least, had hitherto been the experience of Mr. Beauregard till this unlucky misadventure. He had ever found in his editorial capacity that the conservation of manuscript was the easiest thing in the world. But the getting rid of it! There was the pinching of the shoe, the thorn in the flesh! Some manuscripts, indeed, seemed endowed with immortality as to their material part, whatever their destiny as spiritual ministers of humanity might be. How, then, had it come about that of the scores and hundreds of manuscripts he could not have lost, had he set himself the task, that special one should slip through his fingers? It might, perhaps, savor of imprudence to transact editorial business in the open air; but, if an editor did not get through a good deal of work in the summer holidays, where would he find himself at the end of the year? And he had done the same thing—slipped a manuscript into his luncheon basket when boating on the Thames—not once, but a dozen times, without any accident. Boating, indeed, was one of the few recreations Mr. Beauregard really cared about. It would be hard if he were driven to give it up simply because a punt was not quite a safe place in which to read a manuscript! He remembered quite well every circumstance regarding the loss: the careful bestowal of Lucy's packet in the basket containing his loaf and cold partridge, and the leaving of the punt in its usual moorings while he scrambled up the bank; the delightful

noonday ramble, the return, a couple of hours later, to find alike luncheon and manuscript gone. All this was clearly impressed on his memory. Not a vestige of either to be espied anywhere, not a creature in sight to afford a clew.

The affair was very mysterious certainly, but had not worn a very grave aspect at first. Some hungry wayfarer must have appropriated the cold partridge and roll, and, as a second snowy napkin enveloped all three, had gone off with the manuscript into the bargain! But it was sure to be discarded by the marauder ere he had gone many paces. A small reward offered to the village lads, and the missing packet would be found and promptly restored to him. Rewards, however, and the most stringent search alike proved ineffectual. The police were set to work, the river was dragged near the scene of the disaster. Mr. Beauregard had spent twenty pounds in his attempt to recover the missing treasure, and nothing had come of it. He had then reluctantly arrived at the conclusion that a stray dog must be the culprit. The partridge had been accidentally sniffed, the corner of the outer napkin tugged at, the heavy bundle at last dragged to the surface, and plump! all had vanished in a twinkling. Its weight had foiled the designs of the thief, and at the bottom of the Thames now lay poor Lucy's novel.

Again and again he had been on the point of breaking the intelligence to his unknown correspondent; so, in his absent-mindedness, he supposed her to be, having forgotten the very name of Lucy Carruthers. But again and again the sorry business was deferred. The manuscript might be unearthed, after all. Miracles might happen. So the evil day had been put off.

The moments glided by now as he sat alone and unoccupied, till he could bear these self-reproaches no longer, and betook himself to his club, to chat, look at the papers, and get rid of a pricking conscience, at least for an hour or two. Then he strolled into the Winter exhibitions, not because he felt in the humor for enjoying pictures, but simply from the necessity he

was under of seeking distraction. And wherever he went a spectre followed him; he fancied he saw Lucy's eager face; he heard her ask, in those fresh, girlish tones, whose music haunted his ears still, "When may I learn the fate of my manuscript?"

Of course a man of Mr. Beauregard's position could not take two turns in a picture-gallery without meeting half a dozen acquaintances. On this especial day, as he sauntered from one canvas to another with a blank face, his unwonted appearance called forth not a little comment among his friends. One thought he had suddenly experienced heavy money losses, another suggested that he had fallen in love, a third was of opinion that some dire illness was coming upon him. That something very serious was the matter none doubted for a moment.

"I don't like the look of Beauregard," said one common acquaintance to another. "Do look him up to-morrow; for I shall be out of town myself. My notion is he is in for brain-fever."

"Typhoid, most likely; he told me he had just returned from the banks of the Thames," was the reply. "I have no confidence myself in the Thames valley in autumn."

There are, indeed, certain frames of mind to which quite sane people are liable, that yet savor strangely to the world, and even to themselves, of madness. Mr. Beauregard's oversensitive nature was wrought up to this pitch. He reasoned with himself in vain. He said that a frank, hearty apology would make peace between himself and Lucy. A well-bred, generous girl could but accept his excuses, and forgive the unintentional wrong he had done her. Once this unhappy *imbroglio* cleared up, and Lucy's disappointment well over, their relations might become not only easy, but delightful. He wanted a new interest in life; craved for a fresher, less worldly atmosphere than he had breathed so long. If, as he was ready to believe, this sweet country maiden possessed something more than talent, how interesting the task of leading and aiding her, proving alike helper, critic, friend. Coward that

he was, this enticing future lay near, yet he could not summon courage to make it his own, to bridge over the gulf between suspense and security by a word. Surely such behavior was not that of a responsible human being, much less of a man of the world.

Mr. Beauregard was as well aware as could be of his weakness and inconsistency in thus acting. But for the first time in life he found himself shrinking from duty and shirking moral obligation. For the first time he was aware of encouraging a morbid fancy. That the lost manuscript was a work of genius, that in losing Lucy's novel he had not only robbed a richly endowed mind of the recognition that was its due, but the world of a *chef d'œuvre*, was sheer assumption on his part. Yet he would have it so, and hugged the very chimera that tormented him. He saw himself the worst enemy of the woman whom, above all others, he was bound to befriend. For Lucy Carruthers had come to him no stranger. She was the daughter of his earliest friend, the boon companion of his school and college days. "Poor Carruthers!" sighed the kind-hearted Beauregard. "Poor Charley! A better fellow never walked the earth; and how hardly the fates dealt with him! Twenty years of a struggling curate's life, and then to die in his prime." How sad was all this; and somehow he had not realized all this before. "An editor's career robs us of natural affection, manuscript turns us into stone," mused Mr. Beauregard. "Lucy Carruthers, an orphan, unendowed of fortune, the head of a helpless young family! Good heavens, what a position! And what have I not done to add to its bitterness?"

The editor, it will be seen, had brought back his uneasy thoughts from the club and the picture-galleries; nor did they quit his hitherto careless pillow. He could not remember, throughout his whole life, spending a more wretched night. Lucy's lost story was the phantom that troubled his overwrought brains, manuscript the nightmare that sat like lead upon his spirit, turning sleep into mockery, dreams into unrest. Thus the first hours of the night passed.

PART II.

Chapter IV.

There are certain phases of sleeplessness which may be cured by a good resolution, and Mr. Beauregard, having tried one soporific after another, now resorted to this. He could see only one way of compensating poor Charley Carruthers' orphan for the wrong he had unintentionally done her. He would adopt Lucy Carruthers. The solution seemed so happy that he could not in the least understand why it should have occurred so late. Of course, his interpretation of the word adoption was his own. He had no idea of taking the young lady into his house, much less of asking her to call him by the endearing name of father. Remoter still from his mind were all thoughts of undertaking the direction of Lucy's life. What he meant by adoption was this: As one of her father's earliest friends, as godfather of his eldest boy ("Of course, I cannot be mistaken; I did stand for Charley's first-born," mused the distracted editor), moreover, as a very distant relation to Lucy on the maternal side, he must press upon her such offers of service as even a proud girl could not refuse. He would act as guardian till her younger brothers and sisters should be grown up, would get the boys into the Blue-coat school, the girls into the home for the daughters of the clergy, and would insist upon providing for their wants till they could earn a livelihood for themselves. As to Lucy herself, literary occupation should be found for her. He would introduce her to the world of art and letters, make her not only his pet, but his *protégée*, and she should have little reason to regret the loss of her manuscript. These soothing thoughts did at last have the desired effect. The feverish mood was shaken off. Nature reasserted itself,

and as the work-a-day world of London was waking up, Mr. Beauregard fell asleep, this time to sleep indeed.

It was late when the editor went down-stairs, and so many engrossing, and, for the most part, agreeable little incidents occurred between breakfast and luncheon that Lucy and her manuscript well-nigh escaped his memory.

"Good heavens!" had been his first thought on opening the study door, "to-day; yes, she is coming this very day."

Then he had turned to his letters and telegrams, and so absorbing were they that the unlucky affair was for a while completely lost sight of. His daily life was very interesting. What editor's existence of such standing could be otherwise? His correspondence deserved the name of international, so widespread his relations with foreign men and women of letters, and although a scholar and a critic beyond all things, he by no means held aloof from politics.

On this especial morning the post and the telegraphic wires, the hansom cab also, brought several pieces of intelligence of a gratifying, even exhilarating, nature. Agreeable news, to use a French expression, seemed in the wind. But, indeed, for the little matter of Lucy's coming and her errand, Mr. Beauregard's horizon would have been cloudless. More than one distinguished visitor, in spite of his resolve of the day before, the editor received that morning, and nothing is more engrossing than conversation of a certain kind. Not, to-day, wearing smoking-gown and slippers, but dressed with care, as befitted the occasion, Mr. Beauregard gave an editorial audience to one or two illustrious personages whom even manuscript could not make odious. No sooner were his visitors gone than two or three letters had to be written, requiring close attention. So the hours speeded on, bringing nearer and nearer the Nemesis that seemed dreadful yesterday, but was now, for the nonce, veiled from sight. Mr. Beauregard was impulsive, as well as absent-minded, a man of inconstant mood and elastic humor, apt to be easily depressed and as easily moved to exuberant spirits. He was also given to an excellent mental habit. He threw his whole faculties into

the immediate business on hand, and as the immediate business of to-day was not Lucy's story, for a brief space it concerned him not at all.

If the editor's appearance had been ingratiating and agreeable yesterday, in spite of *déshabille* and embarrassment, how much more was it calculated to inspire liking and confidence now? As he sat sipping his early afternoon coffee, in that handsome, well-appointed study of his, musing pleasantly on the occurrences of the morning, a more agreeable portrait of the nineteenth century man of letters were hard to find.

He was perfectly dressed; his scholarly features bore no trace of last night's conflict; he looked what indeed he was, one of the kindliest critics, one of the most generous-hearted men you might meet on a summer day. But the touch of caprice, the unsteadiness of will, the impulsive, almost flighty purpose, might also be traced on that ingratiating countenance. It was highly characteristic of him that, for the second time, the announcement of Lucy's visit should come as a kind of surprise.

"To-day, Benson! Did I really say to-day? You put my brain in a whirl," he said, when the parlor-maid, implacable as before, again performed her disagreeable duty. "True, true! You are right. That Utopian theory of having no appointment has already vanished into thin air. But show the young lady up."

In the transient interval between Benson's going and Lucy's coming Mr. Beauregard's mind was busy. He did not lose countenance, as he had done before. It was only natural that the morbid frame of yesterday should be followed by a reaction. Fresh news from the outer world, an agreeable circumstance or two, had acted as a tonic in restoring him to himself.

When the gentle intruder entered she was received with such encouraging looks and ready words of welcome that the poor girl's heart leaped. She could but interpret his reception as a good augury.

"Take this chair opposite to me, my dear Miss Carruthers—Lucy, I should say, since I knew you as a baby," the editor said,

with one of his charming smiles. "And you must not refuse a cup of my perfect Moorish coffee. We will confabulate quite at our ease."

With irresistible grace he handed her the tiny cup in its silver filigree stand; then, refilling his own, went on:

"It is very spirited of you, a country-bred girl, I must say, to find your way about this wilderness of London alone, and look up grim editors in their dingy dens."

Lucy smiled, thinking his appearance anything but grim, while nothing could be less like a den than this spacious, elegant library, her face said.

A bright fire burned in the handsome fireplace; the carved oak shelves showed books fastidiously bound; half a dozen good pictures adorned the walls, and rich Oriental carpets and curtains lent warmth and color. She thought she had never seen so attractive a room. The experience in itself, too, pleased her. To hold converse with an eminent man of letters, to be privileged with a long *tête-à-tête*, breathe the very atmosphere of criticism—all these things seemed the beginning of that literary life she had dreamed of in her country home.

In spite of her impatience and suspense, therefore, she caught her host's animated mood.

"I was just thinking the very reverse," she said gayly. "An editor must be an enviable person, manuscript a delightful calling; so it seems to me."

He looked at her with some surprise. This *naïve* parson's daughter possessed, then, a vein of satire as well as of inventive power. And hers undoubtedly was the gift of beauty, too, he now said to himself, as he glanced at his visitor. Not only youth, with all its freshness, adorned his study, not only sparkling vivacity and unstudied grace, but—there could be only one opinion on the matter—as lovely a pair of eyes as maiden was ever dowered with.

"Ah, manuscript, manuscript, little friend Lucy!" he answered, with a deprecatory look. "You are young. Time and experience may be left to disenchant you on that score.

But, before anything, let us renew the thread of our discourse, snapped so rudely yesterday. You went away, leaving me as ignorant of your circumstances as you came. Confide in your father's old friend. Do not misinterpret my inquisitiveness. Am I right in supposing that you were left unprovided for?"

"There is a small, a very small income, that was my mother's. That is all," Lucy said, promptly and gratefully. "Just a hundred pounds between us, and we are five."

"Good God!" Mr. Beauregard ejaculated, under his breath. Then he asked, still somewhat despondent:

"And is your pen to be the mainstay of five?"

"No, indeed," Lucy replied, growing more and more confidential. "Charley has got a scholarship at Cambridge, and already earns money as a private tutor. Willy is gone to sea. Only little Tom and Bertha are quite helpless."

"Come; that is no desperate state of affairs," Mr. Beauregard said, with a more cheerful look. "So you intend to seek fame and fortune in London?"

Lucy blushed. He had hit the mark; but she feared that her self-confidence might appear overweening.

"I have decided to make the experiment, partly on account of cheapness of education for the children," she said, and hesitated.

"And partly on your own. Listen to me. Be guided by me, one of your father's oldest friends," he said, looking at her half playfully, yet with a touch of real feeling. "I am alone in the world, and, thank God, I have prospered far above my deserts. Whom should I befriend if not Charley Carruthers' children? Take me into your confidence, then. Unburden yourself to me."

"You are more than kind," Lucy replied, deeply touched.

"In a word," Mr. Beauregard added, bending forward and speaking eagerly, in an undertone, "your dear father's prolonged illness, the breaking up of your home, the moving to London — all these things involve outlay. You must need money. Your brother's godfather may surely share your re-

sponsibilities. I shall feel quite hurt if you do not let me help you."

"Oh!" Lucy cried, "help me to find some work. Show me how I may earn a small income. Then you will prove our benefactor indeed."

Mr. Beauregard looked far from satisfied.

"You must think the matter over. Look well into your affairs, and let me know exactly how you stand. Come, I must insist on this point. Let me"—here he winced—"let me act a fatherly part towards you all."

"There were no debts, and we are used to humble living," Lucy said. "All that I want is work."

"We will return to this matter, then, another time. On the score of earning money have no fears," the editor said. "It happens—indeed, it most fortuitously happens—that I can at once put you in the way of making a little money. And by your pen."

She glanced at him with a radiant smile. Had he, then, really found time to look at her manuscript? Was he about to break encouraging news to her concerning it? The illusion was instantaneously dispelled.

"A literary colleague wants the kind of help you are, I feel sure, quite able to give, in preparing for the press some works for the young," added the editor, smiling pleasantly. "I will see him at once, and arrange matters."

Then, on a sudden, realizing her thoughts, he deftly gave the conversation a new turn. "Be guided by me. Betake yourself for the time rather to actualities, leaving dreams of fame and fortune for the future. You have worthy aims; you believe in yourself. Let such a conviction preserve you from the rocks and shoals of self-delusion. Look well around you. Study not only the great books of the world, but men and manners. Enrich yourself with experience. Then if, at some unlooked-for moment, the voice of inspiration makes itself heard within, follow its guidance whithersoever it may lead, neither turning to the right nor to the left, hearkening not at all either to the

world or the critics. Be yourself; and, sooner or later, if that self is a robust one, if indeed it is your mission to instruct or enchant the world, you shall have a goodly following."

Lucy listened with almost breathless attention. She could but find it flattering to be thus addressed by such a man. But sad misgivings were in her mind as to her story. Every utterance as yet had reference to the future.

"And if," pursued the monitor, "if no voice of inspiration ever makes itself heard, your duty is no less clear. Leave literature to the geniuses and the drudges—those who reign on Olympus and those who sweep its golden floors. Turn your face from the Will-o'-the-wisp that has befooled so many enthusiasts, the mendacious oracle that has betrayed so many votaries. Remember that only one expression of life is thus denied you. Seek another no less worthy of your powers and ambitions."

"Then," said Lucy, artlessly, and with a foolish tear that, for the life of her, she could not restrain, "then you have not looked at my manuscript after all?"

Chapter V.

What has not the tear of a beautiful woman achieved ere now? Lucy's had arisen unbidden, and, with a blush of shame at such weakness, she now dashed it away. There was nothing of the coquette about this ingenuous, yet dignified, country maiden. She was as little given to unreasonable expressions of feeling as any woman could be, and was already rebuking herself severely. What ground had she, moreover, for tears, seeing that, if the manuscript remained unread, it could not be condemned?

But the tear unmanned Mr. Beauregard completely. It let him into the secret of that sweet, earnest young life, whose arbiter he was called upon to be, its dreams, its aspirations, its

seriousness. No shallow, versatile character had he here to deal with, rather with one of those strong, sensitive, gifted natures, to whom expansion is as necessary as air to the life material. Lovely as Lucy Carruthers had seemed to him before, the pathos of the situation made her positively adorable in his eyes now. For Mr. Beauregard, although a man of the world, was no worldling. His fine taste and really generous disposition made him cling to naturalness whenever it came in his way, although artificiality was not wholly to be shunned. Never, throughout his career, had he found himself in a position so distracting, yet, he felt bound to admit it, so delicious! Lucy's spontaneous tear accomplished what dazzling fascination and finished coquetry had hitherto failed to bring about. Its mute appeal, its trustingness, went straight to his heart. For the first time in his life he was wholly at the mercy of a sentiment, caught in the toils of romantic feeling.

"Manuscript, manuscript!" he exclaimed, with one of those not ungraceful gestures of impatience habitual to him. "Is, then, your mind already the bond-servant of paper and ink? Can you, a woman, were your gifts equal to those of the divine Shakespeare himself, shut your heart to sympathy and affection? Listen, Lucy, I have something to say which will cause you surprise." He put in, parenthetically and brusquely, "I have not read your manuscript. How trivial an affair must be alike a first literary attempt or the criticism it calls forth! But the close personal life each must lead by the fireside! Ah! that concerns us more nearly than empty achievement and hollow praise. You are young. While it is yet time, ere the world has spoiled you, be ruled by me. Turn your thoughts from manuscript to love."

Lucy smiled now. That inconsequent tear was already forgotten, and she was schooling herself into a tractable spirit. She felt bound to listen respectfully to whatever her father's old friend had to say to her, although this sudden change of topic and medley of sarcasm, worldly wisdom, and kindliest interest in herself puzzled her not a little. His last word did

not make her blush; but she looked at him curiously, wondering what advice would fall from his lips next. Nothing he could say must affront her, was the thought uppermost in her mind. Mr. Beauregard was certainly not old; his appearance she thought particularly prepossessing; but he called her by her Christian name; he had known her in the cradle. He was, therefore, privileged to say what he pleased.

"You are young," repeated the editor. "I am almost double your years. But let me out with the truth at once. You have awakened in my heart such an interest as I never felt for any woman before." Then, indeed, Lucy's consternated blushes came, and her eyes sought the carpet. He seized his advantage, and went on.

"That interest was aroused when you opened your mind to me yesterday. I said to myself how happy I should be to have you near me always, to aid you, perhaps, to realize your fondest wishes. And my brotherly relations with your good father, my deep interest in his orphan children, my own happier fortunes, all of these circumstances seemed to make such a consummation possible. 'Why should I not adopt Charley Carruthers' daughter?' I said to myself, when you were gone."

"The thought was kind," poor Lucy said, still perplexed, but beginning to feel more at her ease.

"I was disinterested in theory, I admit," Mr. Beauregard went on, with one of his charming smiles, ingratiating, yet half self-condemnatory. "We are all free enough from egotism till it comes to deeds. The scheme is impossible. My own vanity and selfishness, your pride and sense of independence, would have stood in the way. No, Lucy, away with chimeras and delusions. Let us look at the truth in the broad light of day. I ask you, then, not to become my *protégée*, much less adopted daughter, but my wife."

Nothing could have been manlier, franker, or more calculated to inspire confidence than such a speech; and Lucy, while resenting the suddenness of the proposal, felt really touched and grateful. His sincerity and plain-speaking, so unlike the love-

making she had dreamed of, went to her heart. She could but feel flattered also at this tribute, coming from such a man. And although all thoughts of love were far, very far, from her mind just then, she was conscious of a real liking for her father's old friend.

"I have taken you by surprise," Mr. Beauregard said, very kindly. There was another tear glistening on the long, dark eyelashes. "You came to me this afternoon ill-prepared for such an avowal."

Lucy smiled at him through her tears, and, not finding a word to say, rose to go. How could she answer such a question then? No other alternative occurred to her.

"I will write to you," she stammered out at last, as she looked about for her reticule and umbrella.

"A moment; reseat yourself just for one moment, to oblige me," Mr. Beauregard said. "I am in earnest; you must be in earnest, too. If you think you can give me your best affection, if"—here he smiled half sarcastically—"you can put love first, and relegate manuscript to a secondary place in your heart, then I will not only devote myself to you, I will be the protector of your helpless brothers and sisters."

If Lucy had felt drawn towards him by grateful sentiment before, much more was she touched by his last words. For the first time she realized that Mr. Beauregard, in spite of his sarcasms and worldliness, had the tenderest heart.

"You have perhaps been led away by a generous impulse; my misfortunes have interested you," she said, with great sweetness and dignity. "You should surely have time; and, for myself, what can I say to you now?"

"We will see each other again, then; but that right soon. How soon?" he asked, lover-like, yet editorial. "A week hence—in three days' time—to-morrow? We will say to-morrow." Lucy looked irresolute. "To-morrow," repeated the inflexible editor, holding one of her little hands in his.

"I will write to you first. For now, of course, I must not come to see you any more," Lucy said, playfully and patheti-

cally, glancing round the den, as he had called it, with a regretful look. How sorry she felt that, whatever else might happen, these editorial interviews and literary confabulations were over.

"Yes; that is the best plan. Write to me," here he looked at her penetratingly, and with true lover-like insinuation. "Mind that the letter be favorable. Editors, no more than authors, relish a refusal."

Lucy's eyes, so tearful and downcast before, now brimmed over with sudden mischievousness. She could not help feeling that however devoted and chivalrous Mr. Beauregard's personal conduct might be, in his editorial capacity he had treated her, if not with contempt, at least with offhandedness. The man, the friend, the lover, she found agreeable enough. But the editor! What an objectionable personage was that! He had made his proposal in the most delicate and flattering manner; so much she was bound to admit. His homage was paid to the woman, not to the author, an invidious distinction now for the first time forcing itself on her mind. She had sought Mr. Beauregard on other quest. Manuscript, not love, should have been the theme of their discourse.

"And, if I write to you to-morrow, will you write to me soon also—about my story," she asked, as she turned from her lover.

Chapter VI.

He let her go away unanswered. But the door had no sooner closed upon that vision of candor and girlish loveliness than overmastering self-reproach took possession of him. He was really—so, at least, he persuaded himself—as much in love as it was possible for a man to be. How unworthy, how dastardly, was his conduct in thus withholding the fate of her manuscript, thus trying to occupy her mind with love rather than literary ambition; turning her, perhaps, from the recognition, even distinction, that was her due! Very possibly Lucy might be de-

ceiving herself, and might mistake a certain power of expression and quickness in reading character for the higher gifts of the imagination. It was his business to have found this out, and to have rigidly performed his duty as editor before breathing a word of love in her ears. He saw, moreover, in this clinging to her first effort and this evident belief in it ill augury for the future. Had he told her the truth at first she must have forgiven him readily; perhaps would have courageously sat down to rewrite the lost story. At any rate, he ought to have acquainted her with her loss, and imposed the task.

The young authoress's probation over, the editorial verdict awarded, he could have asked her to become his wife without wrong to her or shame to himself. He knew that in the *rôle* of Lucy's suitor he had done nothing whatever to be ashamed of. He was ready to abide by his words, to devote himself to her, to act a fatherly part towards her little brother and sister. Of capricious temper and changeful purpose, he yet invariably kept his promise. If Lucy accepted him, she should never have cause to regret a decision thus precipitately forced upon her.

Certainly, his proposal had been made upon impulse, with almost reckless disregard of consequences. That he admitted. Her ingenuousness, her vivacity, also—she was right there—her circumstances, had interested him beyond measure. And there was that wretched business of the manuscript, the unintentional wrong he had done her. Would any man have acted differently? But the word was spoken. The pledge was given. He had sufficient youthfulness of feeling left to sympathize with a girl of her stamp, and, as he hoped and believed, to render her happy.

If, therefore, he had been over-hasty in making this declaration, at least he came to the conclusion that there was no self-deception in store for either.

The little brother and sister, without a doubt, were a stumbling-block. He adored quiet. He was not used to children in real life. He preferred them in art and poetry. Still, children go to school, and Lucy, he felt sure, had far too much

good sense and good feeling to victimize a husband with her little family. Pshaw! 'Twas a *bagatelle*, making mountains of mole-hills, to dwell on the matter for a second. But the catastrophe of the manuscript!

In what mood would she listen when the critic, not the lover, should plead his cause? Would she not turn from him in scorn? Would she not be ready to dislike the very man who was willing to make such sacrifices for her, such amends for his wrong-doing?

Nightfall began with a gloomy fog and persistent downpour; but not an earthquake would have kept Mr. Beauregard at home that evening. He must see Lucy at once, and unburden himself of his odious, his contemptible, his ridiculous secret. The bare notion of receiving a letter from her before this explanation should be made was intolerable. Yes, he would set off that very moment.

The night could hardly have been more unpropitious; and Mr. Beauregard disliked bad weather extremely. He had also many other important pieces of business to transact; but, fortunately, no engagement to dinner. He was, therefore, free to find Lucy out in her suburban lodging, and dine afterwards when and where he pleased.

Into the rain and fog, therefore, plunged the irritated critic and discomposed lover, thinking that, at least, by means of a hansom, his errand might be fulfilled without excessive personal discomfort. Are we not all addicted to well-being, when no longer in the heyday of youth? Mr. Beauregard was no sybarite, but he objected to muddy boots, rain-bespattered garments, and dripping umbrellas. He liked to feel dry, warm, and presentable. That was all.

There are certain new suburban quarters that almost defy discovery, and, after a wasted hour amid small, semi-detached villas of precisely the same pattern, the hansom was dismissed in despair, and the search pursued on foot; and, at last, after many inquiries, he did succeed in his object, reaching Lucy's door in that very condition of amphibiousness so distasteful to

him. But no sooner was he in her presence than he forgot the rain and the fog without, and all the depressing circumstances of that long drive and bespattered walk. As long as he lived Mr. Beauregard would never forget the sweetness of the picture that met his eyes then. The little lodging-house maid had merely indicated the door from below, leaving the visitor to find his way up-stairs and introduce himself. He stepped up-stairs lightly, and, finding the door ajar, and catching sight of Lucy reading by the table, alone, entered the tiny drawing-room without announcing himself.

So absorbed was she in her task that she did not notice the intrusion. Shading her eyes with one hand, with the other holding a letter, she went on reading, evidently fascinated by the page, utterly oblivious to the outer world. Never, Mr. Beauregard thought, had he seen a more exquisite impersonation of intellectual girlhood. For no mere beauty of the rose-bud type was Lucy Carruthers, no mere excellent specimen of the fresh, intelligent, candid English girl. It was now rather the critic who gazed than the lover, and he said to himself that much more than sweetness and sprightliness were here. That beautifully shaped head, so studiously bent over the page, that fine brow, those contemplative lips, bespoke character and mental gifts of no ordinary type. She was a girl as yet; but of such girls are perfect women made. In the silhouette he discerned a picture. He noted, also, with those fastidious eyes of his, the unpretendingness, yet charm, of her appearance; the dress so becoming, yet unaffected, the beautiful arrangement of hair, the easy grace of the whole. She might that very moment have sat for her portrait. All these particulars were taken in at a glance. He gave himself no time for more. Not unmindful, in spite of his enthusiasm, of the errand on which he had come, at last determined to cast off his burden, he moved a step forward, and called her by name.

"Lucy," he said, softly, "Lucy, I have come to you to make a confession. That manuscript of yours"— and there he stopped. He could not get out a word more.

Chapter VII.

Little explanation was, however, needed on his part. It was Lucy herself who had, evidently, an eager story to tell. Before her on the table lay a packet that bore a strangely familiar look to his bewildered eyes. Was, then, the manuscript found that had caused him so many self-reproaches, and led to such desperate dilemmas?

"My poor story; what strange adventures it has gone through!" Lucy cried, too happy and too much occupied to dwell now upon the part he had played in its history. "But I am full of hope about it. Do read this letter," she added, glancing at him with an expression of mingled reproach and playfulness. "You could not, then, bear to break to me the news that the packet was lost? But you must have told me sooner or later. And I should never have forgiven you; never, never, of course," she said, laughingly.

The editor dropped at the nearest chair, with a sigh of relief. He was quite overwhelmed.

"Heaven be praised!" he said. "Lucy, you little dream of the nightmare that innocent creation of your fancy has been to me, depriving me of peace of mind, a proper sense of moral obligation, and really, I am almost tempted to believe, sanity. I would have given five hundred pounds to recover it. After our first interview, too, I felt convinced that the work had merits of no common order. That made matters ten times worse. I was well-nigh distracted."

Lucy's clear eyes sought his own for a moment with an arch scrutiny that made him wince. Hardly mistrust was to be read in that swift, searching gaze, but a newly awakened feeling of sympathetic understanding, perhaps humorous inquiry, almost of compassion.

Mr. Beauregard's interpretation of it was ready to go further. He thought that this gentle girl read his mind as an open book, and that she was willing to forgive not only the wrong he had unintentionally done her, but the steps he had taken towards making atonement. For, sincerely as he believed himself to be in love with Lucy Carruthers, he did not hesitate to attribute his precipitate love-making to a motive with which love had nothing to do; and, with her quick woman's insight into character, she would see it all and despise him for the very disinterestedness of his conduct. The man of the world, the highly esteemed editor, the much-dreaded critic, saw himself unflatteringly judged by a little country maiden, whose acquaintance he had made in the cradle.

These unpalatable convictions were followed by one more, equally so. As she now eagerly reverted to the recovery of her story, he felt that, much as he might have interested her a few hours ago, her first literary attempt interested her far more. Love, as yet, had fewer charms for her than manuscript. The last assurance, although humiliating in the extreme, was not devoid of comfort; a final understanding would be comparatively easy under the circumstances, and to a man of Mr. Beauregard's order of mind anything was preferable to complications and half measures. Whatever else might happen, his relations with Lucy would now be made clear and definite.

"Was ever anything lost, and found so fortunately?" she began, gayly, unable to resist the humorous side of the incident. "But is it not rather hazardous to read manuscripts in a boat? Might you not very probably lose much more valuable works than mine in that way?"

"Do not spare your castigations. I own myself to be a fit subject for rebuke," replied Mr. Beauregard, comfortably, from his arm-chair by the fire. He was gradually recovering composure and self-confidence. He had rid himself of his damp overcoat and dripping umbrella, and the warmth of this little room, the brightness of Lucy's presence, above all, the feeling of a liberated conscience, were very soothing.

"You know how the packet was lost," Lucy said, placing the letter in his hand; "the finding of it was more extraordinary, as you will discover."

He drew his chair nearer to the lamp, and glanced first at the superscription, then at the contents, with increasing amazement.

"Vere Fortescue! What an odd coincidence! We were at Cambridge together. So he also has taken to editorship! Humph! I dare say he is more fitted for the business than myself. 'Happening to find the manuscript by the river-side at Wargrave'—how did it get there? What about the boat? but let me read on—'and having no time to look after the owner—I was going off to Switzerland that very day—I carried it with me to read on the road.' My dear Lucy, you must take manuscript to be a very demoralizing profession, editors a most unprincipled set of men. What business had I to lose your story, and what business had he to carry it off, I wonder? However, we will go on. 'And, my absence from England being unexpectedly prolonged, I have only now the opportunity of returning your story, and telling you with what sincere pleasure I have read it'— My dear child, I congratulate you. Fortescue is a man of taste, and has written some charming things himself. But let me finish his letter—'and how glad I shall be to further your wishes regarding it, unless I am forestalling some reckless editor or publisher who left your packet among the reeds by the river.' A quotation from Mr. Browning, that! But, on my word of honor, Lucy, the manuscript was left not among the reeds by the river, but in the bottom of the boat—a safe place enough for anything, one would think—the loaf and the partridge tied up with it. Does he mention them? No, not a word. 'You will do better; your work has the exaggerations, permit me to say, the crudities, of inexperience. But it has a power'—on my word—'of a quiet kind, but power, nevertheless'—I assure you, Lucy, I felt it to be so—'and a sense of proportion, insight, and humor. Believe me to be, my dear madam, etc., etc.' You have my

sincere felicitations," Mr. Beauregard said, now fairly overcome; and, rising from his chair, he took her hand in his, and looked ready to press a fatherly or lover-like kiss on her brow.

"It is very kind of you. I am, indeed, too happy!" she cried. "Yet," she added, with shy, proud glances at her packet, "I must not allow my mind to dwell too much on these praises. I must try to do better. Ah! how happy I am."

"I fear, with your happiness just now I have little enough to do," Mr. Beauregard said, with a crestfallen air. "You forgive me, I see. The editor is dismissed without rancor, perhaps with the scorn he deserves. But the man, Lucy, the suitor for your hand. What have you to say to him?" Lucy stood by the table, between her lover and her manuscript, one hand still in his, the other resting on her packet. She was evidently striving to be just to him, and to think kindly of his motives; above all, to be perfectly open and candid. But how to speak exactly the thought of her mind without giving pain? After a pause, she said, with great sweetness and dignity,

"Will it not be better to wait a little while, till we know each other better? You may have been more sorry for me than you thought, more interested in my fortunes than you knew," she said hesitatingly, yet perfectly self-possessed. "And you had lost my manuscript; you had done me, as you thought, an irreparable injury. All these motives may have actuated you in speaking to me as you did this afternoon. For you can hardly care very much for me after so short an acquaintance."

Once more she looked wistfully at the packet and open letter lying on her table, and added: "And this new life of literature may absorb me. You might, perhaps, not approve—"

Mr. Beauregard came to her aid.

"Most beautifully have you put our case, and I will abide by your decision," he said, greatly touched. "You shall write to me, therefore, not to-morrow, but in a week, or a fortnight, if you will."

Lucy looked unconvinced.

"Would it not be wiser to say a year?" she said naïvely.

"A year! Twelve months! Four seasons! Is not that rather a long period out of one's life, at least, of mine? You are younger, and have more time to spare. No. The probation must be shorter. Curtail it, I entreat you."

"But," Lucy went on, as determined as himself upon coming to a clear understanding, "why should there be any probation at all? Why should we not remain friends, and nothing more for the present, indefinitely?"

He did not respond. The farther this sweet illusion drifted from him the more ardently he endeavored to grasp it. At that moment Lucy was positively adorable in his eyes. "You will have friends in plenty. I would fain be the foremost!" he said, pleading his cause bold and lover-like. "Will you not try, then, to care more for me than the rest—for the sake of the lost manuscript, and all I have suffered on its behalf," he urged, quite serious all the time, yet not without a sense of the whimsicality of the plea.

"There seems on a sudden too much for me to care about. I feel bewildered," Lucy answered.

"Ah!" he cried, gathering hat, cloak, and umbrella to go. "You are bent upon fame! Your head is already turned by visions of fortune. Were I an utter egotist I could hope for the day of disenchantment, could even wish for the time when, turning from the world to the fireside, you should be ready to exchange manuscript for love. But, no; I will not be selfish. Keep your generous illusions and bright dreams. I, for one, will not question the wisdom of your decision, although it goes against my dearest wishes. Be true to yourself, dear child, and Heaven's choicest blessings rest upon you."

He bent forward, and Lucy, deeply moved, did not resent the kiss he now pressed upon her brow. Tears filled her eyes, and they said what she could not say for herself. Truest, kindliest feeling, gratitude, she was ready to accord him, but of the future, of a deeper feeling, as yet she knew nothing.

So once more Mr. Beauregard plunged into the fog and the rain; this time with what altered mood! Manuscript, indeed, no longer weighed upon his conscience, but love had taken prisoner his heart.

Whether for good or for evil, time would show.

A GROUP OF IMMORTALS.

Chapter I.

THE TABLEAU.

What celibate has not, at some time or other, come upon an irresistible domestic picture that has made him ready straightway to forswear his bachelorhood?

What rover amid the pleasant byways of the world but has caught sight of a resting-place that seemed made for him? For one brief moment of indecision he halts, spell-bound, the toils of welcome Fate are drawn about him; then, as if frightened by the very image of happiness invoked just before, he frees himself and hurries away. Life is long. Love hath no age. Why in such haste to make the choice irrevocable—clip for once and for all the wings of freedom?

Twenty years ago I happened to be spending what I chose to call a holiday at an attractive English watering-place I need not name. The only excuse I can make for my laziness is the fact that I never undertook to do anything without discovering others could do it much better. And I had just enough to live upon. Why do misguided relations ever leave a young fellow just enough to live upon? Better knock him on the head at once, and have done with it.

At this stage of what, for want of a better word, I must, however, call my career, I was verging on thirty, but, as far as I can remember, hardly younger in feeling and views of life generally than I am now. I took, I confess it, somewhat airy,

I might almost say contemptuous, views of fireside existence at that time. I had not the remotest conception of what falling in love could mean, and I prided myself upon a fancied superiority to other men in the matter of sentiment. I had made up my mind long ago that destiny—if, indeed, I was to have a destiny—would not wear the guise of a woman's smile. Nevertheless, no one more enjoyed the society of a sparkling, beautiful girl than myself, and no one was at more pains to please the sex I affected to despise.

I am, if not wiser, at least more humble-minded than I was then, and if I have never lost my dilettante, vagrant habits—the habits of an amateur in art, and many other things besides—at least I recognize now the more serious aspect of life that must be confronted steadily by those who would fain live indeed.

At this juncture in my affairs, then, the following romantic incident happened to me.

I was staying, as I have just before mentioned, at a seductive spot on the south coast, and, as I rode leisurely along a pretty road that wound upwards from the town into the bright, green country, my eyes were riveted by an engaging family group in a garden close by. Garden, did I say? I should rather apply the word pleasure-ground to the vast enclosure before me; its undulating swards and flower-beds, alleys and winding walks extending over several acres, all in perfect order, and in the full glory of midsummer. The wall was so low, and the ascent of the road so steep, that I commanded the entire scene, although my glance was immediately fascinated by the group in the foreground. The little picture was simply perfection. Crawling along at a snail's pace, I gazed my fill. Just at this bend of the road the garden sloped upwards to a fair and conspicuous terrace in front of the mansion, and here were four figures, so harmoniously and exquisitely grouped that they looked more as if they belonged to a picture or graceful melodrama than to real life.

On the velvety stretch of turf in front of the handsome stone

terrace a girl and youth, evidently brother and sister, were playing battledore and shuttlecock. Never was dainty game more daintily played. As long as I live those figures live too —immortal by reason of naïve graces, youthfulness, and beauty.

The girl was one of those delicate, slender types we are more accustomed to look for among American beauties than our own more robust Saxons, every line, every curve, of that fair face and perfect figure being purely cut. Or, perhaps, there was Parisian ancestry here, since, in the Parisienne of pure race you find just the same consummate finish, if I may so express myself, of feature and limb, combined with a vivacity and grace as little to be described as they are to be imitated. Her dress was white, as befitted the season; and about her dress, too, so simple, so perfect, something reminded you of the Frenchwoman. Ornaments she wore none, except a crimson flower-head, carelessly fastened to the bosom of the dress, and something gold that glittered at her throat. Her beautiful hair was worn so as to display its abundance to perfection; more, indeed, in the style of the great ladies of the olden time than now, when many women might, for all we know, be close shorn as nuns and Jewish matrons, for all they show of their tresses.

This dainty apparition had a not unworthy counterpart in the youthful Antinous, her brother. He was a handsome, beardless stripling, about eighteen, and well did the easy undress permissible in out-door sports become him. He wore, indeed, a kind of cricketing costume of sky-blue flannel—no better set-off imaginable for a youth with auburn curls, violet eyes, and the pink-and-white complexion of a girl. There was the promise, however, of a stalwart man about him, and his looks were hardly less ingratiating than those of his sister. How beautifully they played their game! How deliciously she scolded and made fun of him! How musical the sound of their mingled laughter! Their names, too, caught my enraptured ear, and they, also, seemed enchanting.

"Lionelle, Lionelle!"

Lionelle, this, Lionelle, that. I heard the pretty half-English, half-French name a dozen times from the youth's lips, while, in silvery accents that haunt me still, the maiden made me equally familiar with her brother's.

"Julian, Julian!" she cried again and again, as she chided him for his careless play. Lionelle — Julian — rare names! euphonious names! Surely the parentage of this uncommon pair must be wholly out of the ordinary way. Glancing towards the terrace, I now saw that the two figures seated on the rustic bench in no degree resembled the stereotyped nineteenth century papa and mamma.

The man was evidently one of those much-travelled, accommodating, cosmopolitan English gentlemen, who have long ago ceased to plume themselves upon their nationality. His dress, his looks, proclaimed the citizen of the world; his speech, also —for, as I slowly crawled the hillside along, I heard him address the young couple on the lawn in the purest English, just flavored with French. A sweet Italian word, too, came in most appropriately, yet unawares. There are certain foreign expressions for which we have no precise equivalent, and we who have broken bread half a lifetime with foreigners cannot resist the contagion of words.

The head of my unknown family was a man still in his prime. The handsome face was not without lines of care, but the pleasant smile, the cheery voice, the faultless, although careless, dress, betokened easy circumstances. He held in his hand a newspaper, but let it fall on his knees while he watched the game.

"Those children of yours—those children of yours, mamma! Look at them!" he said laughingly; "they have been playing for an hour, and quarrelling all the time."

"They want some one else to play with; that is all," replied the lady seated beside him. "What can young people do but quarrel—or make love?"

I glanced at the speaker with an interest that suddenly deepened. She had been in her youth a strikingly handsome—nay,

a sumptuous—woman; a woman, moreover, accustomed to a certain kind of state. The costly Indian shawl thrown round her shoulders, the priceless bit of lace forming her head-dress, the aigrette in old Auvergnat jewelry fastening her collar, even the old-fashioned blue-white silk stocking, and slippers adorned with paste buckles in monogram, betokened circumstances that once, at least, had been out of the common way. No mere humdrum matron would possess such ornaments or wear them every day. Lines of care were written on this face, too, as well as on that of her companion. She might, perhaps, have been older than her husband; and in her case, also, age was softened and beautified, not only by uncommon fastidiousness in dress, but by a look of urbanity quite as rare.

The group was, altogether, so charming, and the background of June flowers and foliage so becoming, that I reluctantly lost sight of it by the bending of the road. What was my surprise and delight, when I came to the side-entrance of the mansion, to find in the porch a handsome colored lamp bearing this inscription: "Hydropathic Establishment."

The outer doors were flung invitingly open; the spacious entrance-hall, brightened with tropic plants, enticed the passer-by. I was free to follow the caprice of the moment, so I straightway alighted, flung the reins on my horse's head, and rang the bell.

Chapter II.

AMARANTH.

Never fairyland more accessible. The vast congeries of buildings, with its pleasure-ground, was only just opened as a hydropathic establishment. I was as yet the only visitor besides the family group on the lawn. A dozen chambers were submitted to my choice. Everything I asked for was promised without a demur. If any place in the world could spoil a grown-up human child it promised to be this.

A sojourn of this kind suited my tastes very well. In these charming make-believes, something between a country-house, a hotel, and a cosey family-circle, a bachelor may take his fill of flirtation and fare none the worse. He may for the nonce hang up his hat on the cloak-pin, and feel at home; is free to-morrow to break this flowery chain if domesticities weary; may lose his heart, sure to find it next day.

And there were other reasons for testing the merits of a new hydropathic establishment so conveniently placed. How pleasant to be able to recommend a summer holiday resort to my tired American friends and other wandering acquaintance, in search of repose after long spells of travel! Not only inclination, therefore, but duty, made me ring the bell.

"What a sweet spot! What delightful hosts! But the place wants peopling. It needs life, intrigue, romance."

I had engaged my room, paid my bill at the hotel, fetched my portmanteau from the town, and there I was, seated by Lionelle's father on the terrace, already a member of the irresistible family group that had fascinated me an hour or two before.

I answered my agreeable interlocutor absently, for just then the graceful figure of Lionelle appeared at the bay-window. It seemed to me that all the romance the world could boast was there.

She had dressed for dinner; in other words, exchanged one beautiful white gown for another. This time she wore no artless cambric, such as schoolgirls wear on prize-days, but a close-fitting, elaborate dress of rich white satin, its whiteness not of snow, rather of the lily, its texture of the softest imaginable. I noticed that she still wore a splendid flower-head of deep crimson flower of amaranth on her bosom, and the ornaments—in old-gold and enamel—around her slender throat and wrists showed the same quaint device of a serpent with its tail in its mouth.

"My daughter Lionelle—our new fellow-guest, Mr. Gerald Archer," said my companion, by way of introduction; himself he had already introduced.

She descended the steps airily, and, having inclined her head to me with a friendly smile, bent low and kissed her father on the forehead. Holding one of his hands in her own, she sat down beside him.

"My Lionelle," Mr. Bolingbroke began, looking at her fondly and admiringly, "persuade Mr. Archer to entice his sister here, if he have one. We want, as I have just observed to our guest-friend, more human intercourse, more of a little world in this big house and solitary pleasance."

"Alas! I have no sister," I made reply.

"And if you had," Lionelle answered, "before she got here the spell might be broken, the world might have invaded us. But why desire it? You speak of the world, papa, as if it were otherwise than hateful."

"You are young—in the age of dreams; you need no little distractions, no chit-chat, no gossip, no adventures," Mr. Bolingbroke said. "We older folks, having played out the game of life ourselves, like to watch others staking their throws."

"Then, papa," Lionelle made answer, a smile following the shade that had passed over her exquisitely outlined, sensitive face, "wish again and again and again; you sighed at breakfast, 'If only some one would come.' Already the wished-for some one is here!"

"This daughter of mine cannot understand me," Mr. Bolingbroke said, after having smilingly shaken his head at her. "My career, Mr. Archer, has not always been the smooth running on wheels that it is now. Like other men, I have had to contend with—well, with antagonisms of various kinds. Is it not natural that, when I have nothing to do but sit and bask in the sun, I should relish a little amusement? And what so amusing as human nature?"

"I should have said, what so dull?—with exceptions," I replied laughingly.

At that moment Mrs. Bolingbroke appeared, having one hand in Julian's arm. The same little ceremony gone through, and we were all the best friends in the world.

"Being the first-comers, you will permit us to welcome you," said the lady, pressing my hand with a look of almost maternal interest. "It is pleasant, too, to find others possessed of as much confidence and hopefulness as ourselves. This place was only opened last week."

"We have a passion for new places and new physiognomies," put in Julian.

"That is not quite the way to put it, dearest boy," Mrs. Bolingbroke said. "We are not rich enough to set up housekeeping in this ruinous England, Mr. Archer, and we cannot do without society and an agreeable mode of living."

It was impossible to be stiff under such circumstances, and before dinner was half over we had become as genial as if our acquaintance was of long standing. There are certain much-travelled English folks possessed of a charming adaptability of character, acquired rather than inherent, it may be, yet most agreeable, nevertheless, and strikingly in contrast with the demeanor of insulars generally. This unique family combined French amenity and sparkle with native staidness and reserve. I could not put the question, and no one volunteered to enlighten me on the subject of family history. But I felt little doubt that a French element had come into play. All four spoke correct English, yet I was ready to swear that either Mr. or Mrs. Bolingbroke, or both, were of French extraction. *Esprit* and gayety were there in abundance. I never remember having taken part in a merrier little banquet. Yet the cloud of care that occasionally passed over the faces of both husband and wife made me understand why the company of a stranger should be so welcome. Some affliction, some anxiety, made long-continued solitude unendurable. There was a shadow that even the bright presence of Lionelle and Julian could not dispel.

The dinner was very good, and prettily served.

"But we should fare twice as well did we number fifty," grumbled poor Mr. Bolingbroke, with the sigh of the gastronome, as he glanced at the bill of fare. "Lionelle, love, do think of

it, and write to-morrow to Mrs. Arbuthnot and persuade her to come here. And those nice Lavenhams we met at Nice. Make them join us. Let us get together a perfect little party."

According to my own notion the party was perfect already, but I felt obliged to say that I, in my turn, would recommend the place.

"A good hand at chess, a whist-player, Mr. Archer—eh?" Mr. Bolingbroke added, insinuatingly. "Find me one of these, and I shall be perpetually grateful to you."

When we went to the drawing-room a dozen agreeable alternatives, without being proposed, suggested themselves to me. Alike billiards, cigars, chess, and bézique, light literature, and the piano invited.

There was no officious amiability, no invitation to amuse myself in any especial line. The Bolingbrokes were not only the most delightful people in the world, but exceptionally well versed in human nature. Instead of making diversion hateful by choosing for me, all went their own way.

Mr. Bolingbroke took up an evening paper in the drawing-room. The brother and sister trifled with the billiard-balls. I strolled into the shrubbery and smoked my cigar alone, and neither the young man nor the elder intruded on my solitude while it lasted. It was one of those almost phenomenal June evenings in England, when rose-scents, wafted through open casements, and jasmine alleys, lighted up by the glow-worm, have almost Southern deliciousness.

Soon the sounds of a waltz—softly rather than brilliantly played—reached me from the terrace. Some happy inspiration led Mrs. Bolingbroke to the piano, and there—no dancers ever more beautifully matched — whirled Lionelle and her brother on the sward, set round with white standard roses. I was no passionate dancer myself, and perhaps I had hardly danced at a dozen balls in my life, but I did long to be in Julian's place now. Not that I could hope to equal the performance of Lionelle's partner. The waltzing of both was so finished, yet so easy, that I had never seen anything at all like it,

except, indeed, at the opera. And the two harmonized so well together—the sister's lissome form, the brother's tall, symmetrical limbs—altogether it was quite a spectacle. The thought occurred to me, as I watched them, that those who would waltz well should never waltz except with their brothers and sisters, in order to have no romance about the occasion, and to be able to throw heart and soul into their performance, and make it a work of art.

The dance over, Julian came up to me, laughingly fanning himself with his mother's fan, an exquisite little Louis Seize.

"My sister and I find waltzing dull work. We cannot get up a quarrel over it, do what we will," he said; "whereas I am as much ahead of her at lawn-tennis as she is of me at battledore and shuttlecock. It is a perpetual wrangle then."

"I am a poor dancer—that is to say, by comparison. Will Miss Bolingbroke waltz with me, do you think?" I replied.

How could any girl, under the circumstances, refuse? I waltzed once, twice, three times with Lionelle, and she certainly did not compliment me on my skill. The piquant part of the dance, indeed, lay in her openly expressed dissatisfaction with myself. Apparently quite indifferent to my admiration of her own dancing, she forthwith set herself to improve mine, as if the waltz were an all-important part of human life. There was, moreover, in every word, look, and action, as far as I was concerned, a self-abnegation, an impersonality, that puzzled me greatly. Why such keen interest in a stranger unless the lovely Lionelle, like every ninety-ninth daughter of Eve out of a hundred, was a consummate coquette?

But this curious contradiction—on the one hand, alertness to be kind, sisterly, serviceable; on the other, reluctance to be feminine, freakish, bewitching—made her, in my eyes, a thousand times more adorable. Sportive she was enough, now singing snatches of French or Italian song, now ecstatically placing a glow-worm in the heart of a white rose and contemplating it, now trying to imitate the notes of a nightingale in the copse hard by; and in all that she did was a seeking after effect that

I set down to a nature artistically endowed and cultivated beyond most. She did not seem content to realize the sensuous beauty around her, but must ever look for ulterior results, must ever be throwing herself into the imagination of others. The lazy, languid talk of two, so called forth, as I deemed, by the circumstances, was evidently not to her taste. What so easy as to get up a little playful sentiment amid the starlit rose-alleys, within sight and sound of a placid, rippling sea?

I could not suppose that coquetry was foreign to her nature, and the thought that her heart already belonged to another was not to be entertained for a moment. I set down, therefore, the unusual indifference of her behavior, for I knew not by what other name to call it, to seriousness of character. This singular girl, without being, as far as I could discover, in the least learned or serious, was yet given to pondering on the subtiler aspects of nature and life. It might be also that untoward family circumstances had sobered her temperament in early youth.

"Flower of amaranth, serpent self-entwined," I cried, picking up the flower and the bracelet she had let fall in our dancing-lesson. "Why these emblems of immortality, Miss Bolingbroke? Are you, then, exempt from the ordinary lot of humanity? Can you, then, afford to laugh at Time himself's furrowing care, both so portentous to the rest of us?"

I spoke jestingly, as I proffered the rich crimson blossom, and begged permission to adjust the bracelet.

Evidently gratified at having mystified me, and accepting my imputation as sweetest flattery, she answered in low, insinuating, suggestive tones:

"And why not? Though do not make light of the happiest, the saddest dower that can befall a human being! The dower of those who can never die!"

I was about to ask the meaning of such Sphinx-like response, when the silvery, anxious voice of Mrs. Bolingbroke sounded from within.

"Lionelle, my child, the night grows chilly. Come in, I implore you!"

Chapter III.

"I CANNOT DIE."

The Mrs. Arbuthnot spoken of did not come, nor the Lavenhams either, but before a week was out we numbered a large company, partly, I feel bound to admit, owing to my own officiousness.

Truth to tell, poor Mr. Bolingbroke grew so pensive for want of a little society, and talked so incessantly of carrying Lionelle away, that I grew desperate. I wrote to this friend and that, extolling the delightfulness of the place; I even went so far as to invite a former tutor—a curate with seven children—for a few days. The poor fellow needed rest, and loved chess and croquet to distraction.

It was the very thing for him, and Mr. Bolingbroke rubbed his hands in high spirits.

"A cassock, a clerical grace before meat, a black coat and white stock on the lawn! My dear sir," he said, turning to the proprietor of the new hydropathic establishment, "from the day that a clergyman clears his throat at your dinner-table the fortunes of this house are made!"

True enough. No sooner was the Rev. Archibald Craken's name published in the visitors'-list than public confidence strengthened wonderfully. A stranger from some remote planet must have supposed the mild-looking Mr. Craken to be a talismanic presence warding off all evils flesh is heir to.

Not a day now but brought its contingent of valetudinarians.

First came a pretty American matron with a bevy of equally pretty daughters and nieces, needing rest after the tour of Europe. In their wake followed two handsome, pure-blooded

young Hindoos, students in law, anxious to see a little more of English life and manners before returning to their own country. Then we had, of course, two or three elderly bachelors of both sexes, who wanted some one to chat with—one of the paramount needs of human existence—and, lastly, I mention a pair of acquaintances of my own—a cheery married couple, with hardly a more serious avocation in life than to make themselves agreeable, and who had come simply because I asked them.

Within a week, therefore, our numbers had quadrupled, to the intense satisfaction of all concerned except myself. There are manifold reasons why the members of an artificially composed family should thus rejoice at any addition. To the materialist a well-patronized hotel means a handsome dinner. To the whimsical, the possibility of a sympathetic ear. The story-teller is sure of an audience, the dawdler of finding his fellow, the male coquette, at least the pair of bright eyes, and the bored hopes against hope that at last some remedy shall turn up for his boredom.

But my own case was wholly different. I did not care a straw about the bills of fare Mr. Bolingbroke studied with such minute care from day to day. Lazy as I was, I hated alike telling stories or having to listen to them. I needed not the society of other good-for-nothings like myself to get through the day. And I had never gone a step out of my way for a pair of beautiful eyes till I gazed for the first time on Lionelle's.

Lionelle—Lionelle! The very name haunted me from morning till night, as if it belonged to some being inhabiting a world of fantasy and dreams, while Lionelle herself seemed, as far as I was concerned, to recede further and further from the life of every day, in so far as it concerned myself. I could not blame the girl's conduct in the least little thing. It was not her fault that during those first days after my arrival we were thrown a good deal together, and that such a condition of things could not continue.

Without putting herself at all forward, Lionelle was now the very life and soul of the little society, and she bore her popularity with a suavity and naturalness that must have disarmed envy, if, indeed, any feminine detractors had found their way into our Arcadia by the sea. But as yet we were the most good-natured set of people that chance could well have assembled together.

The astounding part of it all was that, while as much of a favorite with her own sex as with mine, she received the homage of both almost indifferently. Kind, warm-hearted, even to affectionateness, sympathetic to a marvellous degree, she yet gave the impression of being cut off by some strange fate from the ordinary lot of mortals. With all her confidingness and power of eliciting response, she remained in a certain sense aloof from every one of us. Even her gayety, to my thinking, had a touch of unreality and hollowness about it.

No one seemed to notice this except myself; perhaps because no one else studied her so closely and with such growing interest.

My friend's wife, Etta Molyneux, once said to her husband carelessly, in my hearing:

"That pretty Lionelle! Do you know, Edmund, I feel confident she has been desperately in love, and has lost her lover. Was ever flirtation so perfect and so finished as hers? No girl with a heart to lose could flirt in that manner. Or perhaps the poor child is consumptive, and feels intuitively that she cannot live long."

These disconcerting suggestions made me watch Lionelle more narrowly than ever, but I could never discover the slightest foundation for either. I never caught her in a dreamy, despondent mood—the mood of a girl who fancies she has nothing to live for. Still less could I discern any sign of that dread disease which is a Moloch devouring maidens. No excitement brought a hectic flush to that softly outlined cheek. Airy, sprite-like, dainty creature that she was, she yet broke her fast heartily with the rest of us. And when our fellowship num-

bered half a dozen children, she would run races with the fleetest of them.

Those terrible children! I positively hated the place as soon as it became invaded by a host of turbulent youngsters. Lionelle was the most wonderful child-charmer I ever knew. No wonder that I now felt ready to die of envy. She did not neglect any of us, delighting the Hindoo brothers still with an occasional *tête-à-tête* in French, waltzing with me at night amid the glow-worms and the white roses, playing and singing to the elderly folks in the drawing-room, getting up little excursions with the Americans and the curates, of whom we now numbered five. In fact, she was as much the life of the party as ever. But, above all, she devoted herself to the children, and, of course, the happier she made them, the faster they came.

And again Mr. Bolingbroke rubbed his hands.

"A little heaven upon earth—eh, Mr. Archer? What place is like home without children? Rosy, cherubic faces, little pattering footsteps, innocent prattle; who can live a really human life without such sweet influences?"

I must say that the poor gentleman looked a little undone with the noise and bustle at times, and seemed to get out of the way of the cherubic faces and pattering feet whenever he decently could. As to Julian, his amiability even exceeded his sister's. Lazy and purposeless although he appeared to be, he had the happiest knack in the world of being busily idle. From morning till night he did absolutely nothing, and, nevertheless, I would almost as soon have been at the treadmill. The poor young fellow, simply because he was good-natured and versatile, became at everybody's beck and call. I have seen him drop into a garden-chair and steal five minutes' sleep in the middle of the day, utterly worn out by interminable croquet, lawn-tennis, or hide-and-seek. It was Mr. Julian this, Mr. Julian that, all day long.

"What would you have?" he used to say to me in his easy, elegant French, when I expressed my astonishment at such powers of endurance. "Like father, like son. My father, as

you see, is an incorrigible idler. He has brought me up to his favorite profession—that is all."

"An amiable one, on my word," I made reply. "Heaven help the dull were it not for the more lightsome spirits that condescend to consort with them."

I could get nothing more definite out of the handsome, accomplished Julian, and whenever I tried to draw Lionelle into a personal talk she was even more vague and discursive than her brother.

The vagueness about everything connected with this strange family struck me more, if possible, than their versatility and unexampled sociableness. They seemed to have no past, much less did they appear to have a future.

One day I said, in the midst of a flirtation more serious than usual,

"Where shall I find you next year, when I make ready to set out on the search?"

She made sportive evasion:

"As if life could be resolved into a when and a where! And do not human beings change? Would the Lionelle you find next year be the Lionelle you know now?"

"You are no feminine Proteus, anyhow; you cannot wholly change yourself outwardly," I said.

"Discover that, if you can and will," was the Sphinx-like answer, with a charming smile.

"But, at least, give me a clew," I entreated. "You say you are all wanderers—here to-day, gone to-morrow; as much at home at Chicago as in the Champs Élysées; you gather violets one Christmas Day in Algeria, and another finds you sledging towards your plum-pudding at Quebec. For Heaven's sake, then, at least incline your head towards one point of the compass—east, west, north, south—all the same to me; I follow you."

She laughed, slightly scornful.

"How easy thus to traverse the globe in imagination! But even the crossing of the Channel, the getting from London

to Paris—who ever did as much as that from mere sentiment?"

"Scores of lovers as desperate as myself, I will answer for it," I said, boldly.

"Find me one," laughed Lionelle. Then, as if feeling bound to apologize for the turn she had involuntarily given to the conversation, she added, in the directest manner: "You forget that I am not my own mistress. Who can answer for such wanderers as my parents?"

"They cannot fetter your will," I retorted.

The more sibylline this strange girl became the more she fascinated me.

She replied, in a voice as full of mystery as ever, while for a moment she fixed her eyes on mine with a penetrating glance. They were deep, clear, violet eyes, full of feminine witchery, despite the unreadableness she contrived to put into them.

"Had I a will," she whispered, "should I not choose to love, wed, grow old, and die, like any other maiden?"

Thus was ever the case when we seemed on the brink of closest confidence. She broke away from me under some pretence or other, and could not be brought to resume the thread of our discourse.

Chapter IV.

FOREBODING.

Absurd as it may appear, being in perfect health at the time, I stayed on at that hydropathic establishment two whole months. Its fortunes were now made. The sweetness of the place, the liveliness of the society, the handiness of a health station near London, and within a few hours' reach of Paris, the excellent cosmopolitan cookery, introduced at the suggestion of Mr. Bolingbroke—all these things contributed to a success quite unprecedented in the history of such ventures. For my own

part, I felt convinced that the graces and accomplishments of the Bolingbroke family had more to do with the flourishing condition of the house than all the aforementioned causes put together. I, for one, was rooted to the spot, unable to tear myself from Lionelle.

It was odd that, although she carried on so many graceful flirtations, none were of a nature to make me in the least degree jealous, and none, as far as I could discover, had come to a climax except in my own case. The young Hindoo barristers, the curates, the half-dozen middle-aged idlers, each, in turn, waltzed, strolled, sang, or played cricket with Lionelle; but she contrived so nicely to restrict flirtation within its proper limits that, while all these men paid homage to her, not one had been permitted to fall in love. Even more creditable to her finesse was the fact that, on the other hand, the women had not become jealous. She was so sympathetic, so ready to be taken into feminine confidence, so apparently free from vanity, that only the really ungenerous or malicious could possibly have picked a quarrel with her. As a rule, moreover, very young maidens do not frequent valetudinarian resorts; and, except the pretty American damsels alluded to, who were sure to get plenty of admiration wherever they went, and needed not begrudge Lionelle's share, she had few possible rivals. Our ladies were, for the most part, elderly spinsters or sober matrons, only too glad to have the sparkling, caressing vision of my Lionelle ever before them.

My Lionelle!

Mine, as yet, by virtue of adoration only. Into the future I hardly dared to peer.

I did, however, begin to put to myself in secret a few of those questions that naturally occur to a man suddenly bent upon marriage. Could the income that had never been too much for one suffice for two—for a household? Would the much-travelled, versatile, brilliant Lionelle be happy by an ordinary mortal's fireside? Was I wise to throw in my fortunes with those of a family addicted to roving—perhaps not unacquainted with

adventure? Lastly, and above all, was I not bound to fathom the meaning of those eerie words of hers—to find out if she were something more than a mere paragon of beauty and excellence? Was she phenomenal among her sex—in a subtiler sense separated from the rest of humankind by virtue of supernatural endowments or unexampled destiny? Was she, indeed, exempt from the wonted fate of humankind, doomed to perpetual youth, undying loveliness, an existence that ended not after the fashion of others?

It may seem strange that I should go to the length of asking myself such questions as these; entertain, even for a moment, propositions so diametrically opposed to every-day experience and the accepted order of things. But the unusual and mysterious had ever charms for me. From my youth upwards the dominating characteristic of a careless, versatile nature had been a tendency to penetrate into the regions of the unknown, to lift the veil from the inscrutable, to unriddle the Sphinx-like aspects of life. From the first, moreover, a certain indefiniteness, an airy unreality, about Lionelle had fascinated me even more than her faultless outward self—she was rather faultless than lovely—and her dazzling gifts. She seemed hardly to have a solid, tangible past, much less to look forward to any clearly marked-out future. Even her domestic relations savored of the unreal. Devoted, affectionate, as she was to Mr. and Mrs. Bolingbroke, I doubted that she was their daughter; nor could I at times believe that she was anything more than a sister by adoption of the handsome, agreeable, and accomplished, albeit somewhat cynical, artificial Julian. If, then, not of such kith and kin, what was her lineage? I allowed my fancy to run wild, and accorded her an origin such as that of the Undines and half-fauns of romance, those unsubstantial, ineffably lovely creations of the poet and romancer we believe in and become enamoured of as if they were real personages.

But to be mated with a fateless child of immortals, to wed a being whose feet touched our familiar globe without belonging to it, to have to wife a fay, an elf-child, wearing the guise of a mere

woman—that was wholly another matter. Swayed, therefore, by two inclinations, two resolves, one moment wishing one thing, the next drawing back, I was at the same time prey to another kind of terror. I could not help entertaining suspicions that Lionelle would take sudden flight before my mind was made up. Some day we should all wake up to find the incomparable Bolingbroke family vanished, gone forever; without warning and without farewell, returned to that unknown whence they had come. Lionelle once thus lost to me, I felt convinced that I should never recover her again.

And not vague suspicions only pointed to such a catastrophe. Ever on the alert in so far as Lionelle was concerned, I had gathered from a stray remark here, a cursory hint there, that departure impended.

Keeping my own counsel, and affecting a well-studied indifference, I now watched the movements of the Bolingbrokes night and day.

Exactly what I had foreseen took place. As a rule, there are never any very late or very early departures in these valetudinarian resorts. People go away comfortably in the middle of the day, giving chance-made acquaintances an opportunity of saying adieu and exchanging little courtesies. But I felt sure that none of us were to have as much as an "Au revoir" from Lionelle's family.

Whenever wheels should be heard grating the gravel walk at midnight or early dawn, the sound would be sure to indicate a stolen march on the part of the Bolingbrokes. The merest bagatelle—a trifle in itself so absurd that only a man in my desperately inquisitive case would have noticed it—let me into their secret.

In this admirably conducted house, where grace was never sacrificed to parsimony, certain economies were practised quite consistent with a liberal sumptuary scale.

Thus, while our table-napkins, each placed in a numbered plated ring, were regularly changed three times a week, I had noticed that in the case of visitors about to depart on the next

day no exchange was made. Having made sure of this fact, I steadfastly observed the table-napkins.

Sure enough, there came a Tuesday evening when the rest of the company had, as usual, clean napkins, while those of the Bolingbroke party remained the same. As the napkins were never made a show of, but with neatest foldure slipped into the rings, I gave myself credit for no little ingenuity in making the discovery. And I knew without being told that Lionelle was to be taken away from me that very night.

Chapter V.

VALEDICTION.

The evening was one of rare beauty and sultriness, while, from a sociable point of view, it seemed as if it would never come to an end. Immediately after dinner the entire company adjourned to the pleasure-grounds, even the invalids venturing out to watch the moon rise. The youthful and venturesome had betaken themselves to the wide sweep of heath stretching above the establishment towards the sea, and a few strolled down to the sea-shore. It was the rule of the house that guests should retire to their chambers and lights be put out in the reception-rooms by eleven o'clock. Ten had already struck, and my chance of securing a *tête-à-tête* with Lionelle seemed slenderer than ever.

Now she was waltzing with a recent adorer, an elderly post-captain, who had returned to England, after years of active service, to cure a liver-disorder and presumably settle in life; now making the round of the flower-garden with a devoted adherent of the other sex, an old lady who had taken the greatest fancy to her; now dancing with Julian, the galliard, a bewitching old Spanish dance, for the general benefit. Last of all, I heard her well-trained, rather than fine, voice leading a glee that suddenly delighted our ears from the extreme end of the inner garden.

Never had I seen this incomparable girl exchange one *rôle* for another with such grace and dexterity. Queen of the drawing-room, mistress of the art of coquetry and persiflage, sparkling, finished, brilliant, no part seemed beyond the limit of her capacities, and each was played to perfection. There was only one quality missing—that of spontaneousness. It never seemed to me that Lionelle was moved by impulse, like any other girl. This absence of spontaneity, combined with a certain studied faultlessness—the cold impersonality before alluded to—more than anything else, distinguished her from the rest of her sex. She lived, moved, breathed among us; but in one sense—the sense of careless, common enjoyment—belonged to us not at all. At last I missed her on a sudden, and realized, with a quickened beating of the heart, that the eagerly desired moment was come at last.

She was hiding herself from her little world of hangers-on in order to grant me a final audience.

It was the amiable custom in our little Arcadia for one guest occasionally to *fête* the rest. To-night, for no reason in particular, except, perhaps, that the unwonted charm and serenity of the weather inspired a feeling of jollity, light, sparkling wine and dainty cates were served to all by our post-captain, in the dining-room.

Nothing, perhaps, so completely absorbs the mental faculties as the behavior of a bottle of champagne at the critical moment of uncorking. How will the wine go off? Will it go off at all? Where will it go to? Such are the questions that, for the moment, keep out every other problem from the spectator's mind.

Public attention thus happily diverted, I now stole away from the rest of the company, sure, at least, of ten minutes with Lionelle. I knew well enough where I should find her. There was a certain little summer-house in which I had caught the weary girl napping many a time before now. No more than Julian could she win everybody's heart without paying desperate scot for such excessive popularity. Sometimes, as I scrutinized her handsome and youthful, yet slightly worn feat-

ures, and graceful figure, often limp with sheer bodily prostration, I felt convinced that the girl was just killing herself with abnormal exertion, wearing out alike body and mind by this perpetual strain.

Yet she would never countenance such an imputation—never snatch a brief interval of repose except in secret. On this especial occasion, however, something in the shape of presentiment told me that it was not repose and solitude she sought now, but a final understanding with myself—a last word with her lover ere she quitted him forever.

I knew very well that she was not in love with me, that she did not love me at all in the accepted sense of the word. I could hardly boast of having received any show of favor at her hands at all. Yet, despite the habitual indifference, aloofness, impersonality of her manner, I perceived, or thought I perceived, a touch of real feeling—sisterly, friendly, it might be, yet real feeling, nevertheless. She had been invariably kind to me, and had seemed to understand my sympathy, my lurking compassion, for what I could but take to be an unwelcome lot. It was evident that, in some way or other, Mr. and Mrs. Bolingbroke made capital out of their daughter's gifts, and traded upon her powers of fascination.

I had judged rightly. True enough, she was there. The moonlight played upon her white silk dress and gleaming ornaments—the brooch and bracelets of serpents self-entwined in gold and enamel. Once more, too, she wore her symbolic flower, her bloom of amaranth. The crisis I felt impending; her silence, her beauty, gave me courage.

"Lionelle!" I cried, and the words that had trembled on my lips for days—nay, weeks past—were out at last, spoken beyond recall. "Lionelle, stay with me. Consent to become a mere mortal's wife!"

We were alone and secure from eavesdroppers, at least for a moment. Emboldened by her passiveness, and growing courageous under the desperate fear of losing her forever, I added a wild word more.

"You say you cannot grow old and die, like other maidens. At least you can love as well as they. Retain, then, your vaunted immortality if you will. Only love me, let me love you for this little life—this brief, brief, mortal span."

She smiled very pensively and kindly, and, without a shade of coquettishness, much less emotion, made room for me on the rustic bench beside her.

As we sat thus, the moon shining full upon us, I saw how pale she was, how more than weary. My love became all at once tinged with strangest pity. I longed now to be let into the secret of her mysterious lot as much for her sake as my own, to be permitted to wrest her from it, to give her repose and heap tendernesses upon her so long as I lived. Her very collectedness, and the easy cordiality of her manner, inspired confidence. The more approachable she seemed, the less outwardly lover-like I permitted myself to appear, so unwilling was I to check her growing trustingness and nip her confidences in the bud—much nearer than any lover I seemed, in this sweet, adorable nearness of mere comrades.

"You must know it," I went on. "This existence of empty pleasure and ephemeral popularity is undermining your health, killing you, in spite of that exemption from mortal doom you hint at. Let me snatch you from such a career. Marry me without more ado," I added, caressingly, "then we will steal away to some sweet spot, there to live for ourselves and each other."

She shook her head, that weary little head, and as on a brother's breast it now drooped to mine—lay there for a blissful moment pillowed to sweetest rest.

"Gerald," she began—"we had once or twice called each other by our Christian names in bewilderingly frolicsome moments of our out-door play—"Gerald, even my friendship can be yours for a day, an hour, only; love I have none to give. I am going away. You will soon lose your poor Lionelle, and you must never try to find her, never, as long as you live."

"Nay," I retorted lightly, yet under a jesting word was hid

a fast resolve. "The locomotive—if not love's wings—may be the privilege of all. You cannot prevent me from purchasing a railway-ticket, no matter with what configuration of letters it is stamped."

She now roused herself from her lethargic attitude, and, sitting up, held my hand fast, while she spoke rapidly and eagerly, as if in terror lest time should steal a march upon us.

"If you value my peace of mind, if you care for me at all, you will retract those words; you will give your promise never to try and discover me, never to follow me, in whichever direction I go."

I listened with lips unsealed. What conceivable right had she to demand such a sacrifice of me? How could I rely upon myself to keep such a compact if wrought upon to make it? The farther this beautiful vision of Lionelle receded from my reach, the more passionately I clung to its vesture skirts.

"You are wilfully shutting your eyes to the truth?" I said, for a moment letting outraged feeling have its way; then, subdued to a softer mood, overcome by my great love for her, I gathered her little hands to my lips, and kissed them again and again. "No, Lionelle; it is not so," I cried. "My secret was yours long ago. You know how I love you. Listen. This worldling of yours never cared for any one or anything in the wide world till he learned to know you. Bid me not lose you altogether."

"My poor Gerald!" she began, and in her turn she took my hands and pressed them to her cold lips. "I am linked to the strangest fate against my will. If, indeed, you were to track my footsteps and follow me to the world's end, you would be no nearer happiness. You could not belong to me any more than if we were at opposite poles. I am in reality as much of a stranger to you as if we had never watched the glow-worm under the rose together!"

There ran through the speech, mingled with much sadness, even tinged with despair, a playfulness that gave me courage to ask more. The comrade was uppermost in Lionelle's thoughts,

not the lover. Perhaps in him she might yet be won over to confide. And I still clung to the shadow of a hope.

"At least tell me why you impose such unnatural conditions? Who and what are you, that you can thus afford to toy with human affection, and make a jest even of mortality?"

"Ah, those are questions—questions I may not answer; but rest assured of one thing," she answered, "I am not the light-hearted, sportive girl you take me to be. Against my will, against my conscience, I am compelled to act a part."

"Free yourself, then, from such odious thraldom!" I cried. "The door stands wide. Escape is easy. Take the honest hand, offering deliverance, held out to you."

She smiled, and putting a hand on each of my shoulders, bent her face towards my own as she answered, her voice gathering force and persuasiveness, her eyes wearing a strange expression of distance, yet endearment:

"I would love you, dear, if I could, but I have no love, no life to give. This much I may tell you. Love is dead within my breast, the strange lot that wins your pity is but the price of having loved too well! A task is before me, a goal I must win, and when I have done happiness and affection can never be my reward." She added, with sudden animation, "I rebel against my destiny, and would fain be free and careless like any other maiden. Yet in one sense I am privileged beyond most, for," she went on, now throwing into her words something of a real, passionate individuality, for the first time during our acquaintance giving me the impression that unutterably deep feeling underlay her words, "my real, my best self, the true Lionelle, will remain youthful and winning forever. This poor beauty of mine you praise so much, strange as it may seem to you, can never fade."

I looked at her with a growing amazement that she did not fail to discern. Quick as lightning she read my inmost thought.

"Do not set down these words to unreason. I am no more moonstruck than yourself. It is as I say. Some day, perhaps, you may understand. My lot is to renounce, to suffer, yet with

marvellous compensation. I have a dual existence, a second self—the one to become careworn, spiritless, the other never to be touched by the hand of Time."

Her cold, passive hand lay in my own, but responded not to my lover-like clasp; she realized what I was suffering for her sake—that I could tell without a word from her; but she had no hope to hold out to me, no consolation to give. And once more she reiterated the request that a few minutes before seemed so cruel, so unbearable, but that now hardly moved me from my lethargic despair.

"Let me go, then, as I have come; for though you should seek me, you would but find a phantom, a hollow image! the Lionelle you love—never!"

She leaned forward, and I understood the gesture. A kiss laid upon her beautiful lips was to seal my reluctant word. I held her for a moment in my arms, but no heart beat in warm response to my own. The mouth I kissed was cold. I was about to whisper one desperate appeal more, her face still touched mine, when the silvery tones of Mrs. Bolingbroke reached us from the lawn.

"Lionelle, my imprudent darling, the night is chill. Pray come in at once."

Chapter VI.

RETURN.

Twenty years had glided by—a goodly portion out of man's allotted span. The idler of thirty was an idler still. With travel, dilettante tastes, and, let me say at least this much on my own behalf, some desultory work for the public weal, I had contrived to occupy myself so that the two decades were come and gone as a dream.

Youth but a thing of yesterday, and already age had come!

I had never fallen in love again, and holding no strait-laced notions as to the duty of every son of Adam to become the head of a family, remained a bachelor.

From the date of that moonlit night and reluctant promise wrung from me with a kiss, Lionelle disappeared from my ken as completely as if we were denizens of separate planets. She ever retained her old place in my heart, and her hold on my imagination. Fickle and desultory in all else, here I was constant.

Perhaps my faithfulness had root in vanity. Perhaps I remained true to the ideal of my youth because I had never found another woman I would fain have made my wife.

It was a superlative July day. On just such an afternoon, twenty years before, leisurely riding along a country road that led upwards from the sea, I had first caught sight of Lionelle. And now, so strange chance would have it, I visited once more the same pleasant seaside town, and suburban country dotted with villas—the very scene of enchanted days so long past, yet unforgotten.

I had been invited by a rich Australian acquaintance, recently settled in England, to join a party of friends about to assemble in his country-house.

"We possess everything in the way of material comfort that the heart of mortal can desire," wrote my host. "A mansion fitted up in what my upholsterer assures me is the newest style, conservatories filled with tropic plants, croquet-lawns, horses and carriages, well-trained servants, the smartest page-boy, the most ladylike maids, the most gentlemanly footmen imaginable. All that we now want, and hardly know how to set about obtaining, is a little good society. We are now going to muster a few friends together, and shall try to give, with their aid, an out-of-door party or two. So come as soon as you can, and stay as long as you will, in order to aid us unsophisticated bush-folk in this our first plunge into the vortex of fashionable life. My wife's solicitations accompany my own."

There was a frank *bonhomie* about this letter that disarmed criticism, and having thankfully enjoyed my friend's society during my bush travels, I felt bound to accord him all the good offices he asked at my hands now.

I accepted the invitation, therefore, and, by an odd coincidence, the date of my arrival exactly corresponded with the only unforgetable one I could boast of in life's calendar—that day on which the vision of Lionelle had dazzled me for the first time.

Having sent up my luggage, I rode leisurely in the direction of Appleby House. As I left the bay and the town—doubled in size and importance since I had visited it—I found that the destination indicated to me by my host must take me close to the hydropathic establishment of romantic memory.

True enough, there rose the solid old mansion in gray freestone from its sombre *entourage* of veteran ilexes; there were the shrubberies in which I had played hide-and-seek with Lionelle; and there—I could not be mistaken—peeped out from the surrounding greenery the tiny summer-house in which I had sealed my fateful promise with a kiss. It occurred to me all at once to pull out my friend's letter, for this seemed the very place described to me as Appleby House.

I found my conjecture perfectly correct. The hydropathic establishment, then, had gone the way of so many other similar ventures. The bath-houses had been turned into stables—their original use — the bright colored-glass lamps, advertising the place, removed, and the old-fashioned country-house in every respect had resumed its normal aspect—that of a home of rich gentlefolks. Strangely enough, therefore, I was about to spend a few days amid surroundings consecrated to the one love, solitary uncommonness, and crowning sorrow of an every-day mortal's existence. And to the one mystery! I had no clearer conception now than then of what Lionelle meant by those enigmatic utterances on the subject of undying youth and a dual existence. And as the scenes of that last passionate episode once more passed before my eyes, I could explain to myself why I had been able to keep my word, and consent to let Lionelle hide herself from me forever. Ah! had her conduct been different that night when we exchanged a last valediction, should I now be able to boast of a promise inviolably kept? I almost shuddered

as I recalled her impersonal smile, her ice-cold kiss. I was content to believe that all was dark and mysterious concerning her. I hugged the notion that once, during my humdrum, prosaic existence, I had touched the shores of the impalpable and unfamiliar. We all accept mystery as one of the conditions of human existence. Why, then, should we feel such astoundment when brought face to face with phenomena we cannot explain in the human as well as the inert globe? Why might not Lionelle be a wholly exceptional being, a creature whose outward frame was not doomed to decay?

A bend in the road brought me suddenly in full view of the well-remembered terrace and smooth-shaven lawn where I had seen Lionelle and Julian playing battledore and shuttlecock in their dazzling youth and beauty, a full score of years ago.

But could I believe the evidence of my senses? Were these images, now impacted on my retina, substantial, living forms, or the phantoms of a disturbed fancy? Was I, indeed, to be ever within these precincts the victim of enchantment and wizardry?

There, hardly changed, if changed at all—there, in the undeceiving July sunshine, standing out against the green foliage bright and clear as in a picture, I beheld the same group that had fascinated my gaze twenty years before.

Lionelle, in her white gown, played battledore and shuttlecock with the bright Julian as in days gone by. Mr. Bolingbroke and his wife, perhaps a trifle aged, but bland, animated, gracious as of old, looked on from the rustic seat. The sister's clear, sweet voice, the brother's mettlesome reply, reached me where I paused, as the pair playfully quarrelled over their game. I heard the subdued laughter of Mrs. Bolingbroke, her husband's gently uttered comments; but without pausing to catch more, I gave my horse the rein and rode on.

A stableman, evidently belonging to the house, happened to stand by the portico; the hall door stood open. So merely giving my name as I alighted, I hastened through the drawing-room towards the group on the lawn. Mr. Bolingbroke rose

to greet me with the slightly artificial smile, and easy, yet perhaps studied, grace I remembered so well.

"Our host will be here presently; he bade me welcome you in his place," he began, with extreme suavity, and evidently not in the least recognizing me; but I broke forth with frank, almost brutal impatience:

"Good Heaven! then it is only I who have grown old? I do, indeed, behold a group of immortals!"

Chapter VII.

UNRAVELLINGS.

My interlocutor looked more than puzzled, and I was at the same time conscious of a thrill of shocked surprise electrifying the little group. The first solution of the mystery occurring to all was evidently that a maniac had effected his entrance into the house surreptitiously. Did, indeed, a transient hallucination take possession of me? Had some collyrium temporarily blinded my vision to the solid realities of things? Certain it is that as I glanced from one to the other I verily believed myself among immortals in a new, strange sense, creatures of flesh and blood, like myself, but untouched by the hand of Time.

I went straight up to Lionelle. The sun shone in my eyes; I could not see her face clearly, but the slender form, the fair hair beautifully arranged in a coronet, the pale, finely cut features, the exquisite finish of dress—all these were hers, and hers unchanged.

She had, then, been true to her word, she had not grown old!

"Lionelle," I cried, taking her hand, and drawing her a little apart, "you at least cannot have forgotten me. Not mine, like yours, the privilege of perpetual youth; but in one respect I am unchanged—I, your lover of twenty years ago, Gerald Archer, love you still!"

She drew back with a startled look; the beautiful head was averted in dismay.

Mr. Bolingbroke, however, had either caught the sound of my name, or had been unexpectedly reminded of my former self by something in voice, look, or manner, for he now approached me quite cordially.

"Mr. Gerald Archer!" he said, smiling his old bland smile, "how well I remember the name now! The fellow-guest we were bidden to expect, and—I cannot be mistaken!—a fellow-guest of my own in this very house years and years ago."

He nodded to the little group of immortals on the terrace.

"Go on with your game, my dears," he said to the players of battledore and shuttlecock. "Resume your embroidery, my love," he added to the smiling, elegantly dressed matron beside him. "Meantime my old acquaintance, Mr. Archer, will take a turn with me in the shrubberies."

He put his arm within my own, and led me towards the outer garden.

I assented without so much as looking back.

I realized already that whatever revelations were in store for me, I had not found my Lionelle.

"I now recall every circumstance connected with our former acquaintance," he began: "your kind interest in the hydropathic establishment, your prolonged stay, your unconcealed admiration of the young lady accompanying me—my pseudo-daughter. It is not astonishing that you should express some surprise at finding us all here again—to use your own words—a veritable group of immortals."

He laughed, not without underlying irony. Then he grew friendly, even confidential.

"Very likely I look wonderfully young for a septuagenarian, but age and infirmities tell upon a man, in spite of the perruquier's skill and the staymaker's cunning—never a greater fallacy than to fancy women the sole patrons of corsets and whalebone! Could you see me off duty, in undress, so to speak, you would find a wrinkled, decrepit, haggard, aged man."

We had now reached the extreme limits of the upper garden, and he turned into the little summer-house in which I had taken such passionate leave of Lionelle. Bringing out a couple of cigarettes, he handed me one, and motioned me to be seated.

"True, the youthfulness of my companions is not simulated. But, you see, they are mere duplicates—replicas of the charming associates of your youth. Since we lost sight of each other, indeed, how many blooming daughters and accomplished sons have I not had, how many devoted partners, ladylike better-halves! My profession, you see, necessitates it."

"You are here professionally?" I asked, beginning to see my way through the maze.

"Precisely; that pretty domestic tableau, for instance, you came upon just now has been arranged and rearranged, I dare wager, five hundred times. It is my trump-card, and has made the fortune of scores of boarding-houses, set things going for dozens of unsophisticated parvenus. You would never conceive the pains it has cost me. Every detail has been gone into over and over again, down to my wife's knitting pins."

Again he laughed his odd, worldly, almost sardonic laugh, and went on:

"You, of course, took me and my little troupe for just what we appeared to be twenty years ago — an amiable family, of cosmopolitan tastes, in quest of change and recreation. I will let you at last into a curious secret. I dare say that you have found out for yourself, long ago, that humanity may be classified under two heads: the first, consisting of those who can amuse themselves; the second, of those who cannot. The calling of men like myself supplies the needs of the latter class. I have floated hydropathic establishments, *pensions de famille*, hotels, country-houses of new-made millionaires, in all parts of the civilized globe; but, while entertaining and enriching others, I remain a pauper. Were old Horatio Bolingbroke to be gathered to his fathers to-morrow, he would hardly leave the wherewithal to provide his remains with Christian burial."

"I am very sorry to hear this," I said.

While making this confession, Mr. Bolingbroke had allowed himself to shake off his forced elasticity of manner, to forget his society smile—wrinkles were allowed to have full play, the trim, upright figure to fall into its natural bend. I saw before me a careworn, feeble wreck of former days.

"My company," he went on, "my artificial family, is a very expensive one, and extortionate to boot. The salaries of these people, my dear sir, increase every year, and you little know how much else I have to contend with. These soft-voiced duennas, these playful sons and daughters, I assure you, quarrel like cat and dog behind the scenes, and make life intolerable to me."

"But Lionelle?" I asked. "Talk of her."

"Ah, she had nothing in common with the mercenary herd I allude to; she ever treated me kindly and becomingly," said the old man, wiping away a genuine tear. Then, with a sudden touch of the theatrical, he added: "As long as I live, were it to cost me my last morsel of bread, I shall place an immortelle on that sweet girl's tomb."

"She is dead, then?" I asked, for the moment unmindful of the intervening years, unmindful also of her mystic words and inexplicable innuendoes, dwelling only on her beauty, sprightliness, and grace, so fresh in my memory still.

He replied, "Lionelle is dead. She died a few years after the date of our sojourn here in your company, and died, as I fully believe, on the eve of a splendid triumph."

New light now flashed on my mind. I began to discern what Lionelle's playful vaunt might mean. She had been, then, an actress, and, throwing herself heart and soul into ideal characters, might well boast exemption from the ordinary doom, in a certain sense, of a bright, an enviable immortality. The radiant impersonations into which the born artist throws herself—the Juliets, the Rosalinds, the Ophelias of the poet's creation—may not these fittingly wear emblematic flowers of amaranth, serpent self-entwined, since they live forever? I realized now Lionelle's impersonal gayety, her aloofness from every-day feel-

ing and passion—how, while seeming to take part and lot in ordinary existence, her inner life, her individuality, had nothing in common with us. But the dark tragedy she had hinted at, the secret sorrow, the undying grief—what were these? I allowed Mr. Bolingbroke to prattle on.

"Triumph was undoubtedly in store for her, but a short-lived artistic career at best," he continued. "Such slender, fair girls have not the coarser stuff of the artist in them. And my poor Lionelle was very unhappy—she had given her heart to a villain! Her father, an incorrigible gamester—a kind-hearted man, for all that, ruined this fellow, Lionelle's lover, in play. The poltroon cast her off, and, like the brave girl she was, she set herself the task of earning enough money to pay back the debt, thus vindicating her father's honor and nobly revenging herself. Death overtook the dear visionary ere her task was fairly begun."

Just then my old friend, catching sight of our host approaching, pulled himself together, put on his set smile, and became the Mr. Bolingbroke of every day.

"Ah," cried the bluff, cheery master of the house, breaking in upon our confidence; "you have made my guest feel at home already, I see. Mr. Bolingbroke—Mr. Gerald Archer."

The formal introduction over, my Cagliostro, vacating his chair, made room for our host, and quitted us "to join the ladies," he said, smiling pleasantly.

"A most agreeable, well-informed, polished old fellow that," said my Australian. "No acquaintance—a make-believe. The fact is"—and here the unsophisticated millionaire broke into a hearty laugh at his own expense—"my wife and I are so completely at sea in the matter of entertaining people and the ways of society in general, that, at the suggestion of the upholsterer, we have got a professional master of ceremonies to set us going. You will see how he manages our first croquet-party, to take place to-morrow. My belief is that it will go off capitally."

And once more he laughed. I also could not resist a smile,

although my heart was heavy within me. Some selfishness was mingled with the sorrow; at least Lionelle had never belonged to another, I could call her mine still.

The lawn-party—and how many other parties?—went off well, but when Mr. Bolingbroke's mission was fulfilled, and the term of his engagement expired, I carried him off to my country home. I was not very rich, but I could afford to give the worn-out old man all that he needed—a fire to warm him, a cover laid for him, a bed to lie on for the remainder of his days.

For several years he has enjoyed the coveted privilege of having no one to entertain but himself. Long may it be his! The decayed, infirm, but invariably amiable, courteous gentleman is all I have to remind me of my beautiful Lionelle—my Group of Immortals!

THE REBUKE AMID ROSES.

THROUGH the rose-scented valleys of Kensington Gardens strolled Frederick Vivian westward, bound to one of those perfect little dinners for which we are never too late. There are dinners, as there are projects of marriage, capable of being indefinitely put off, yet sure to come to pass in the end. This especial one was indeed to combine a proposal on the part of Frederick Vivian—all the more reason for his dilatory mood. A bachelor of thirty-five, he had at last made up his mind to marry, and his hostess of this evening had promised him the desired opportunity. At the small but elegant house of his friend Doring and his charming wife, he was promised an after-dinner *tête-à-tête* with a spirited and beautiful girl just introduced to the world of London, and just the girl he would fain have for a wife. She was Australian born and bred, daughter of an official of high rank, and although gracious and self-possessed, as became a governor's daughter, a very wild rose of fresh, ingenuous, girlish grace and feeling. Her Australian birth and bringing up, moreover, lent a certain novelty to attractions of themselves out of the common way. This sweet, gay, innocent girl, possessed of tact and quickness, combined with dignity and reserve, could but realize a man's ideal of marriage and fireside happiness. So, at least, thought Frederick Vivian, as he now walked gayly through the rose-alleys towards Palace Gardens and destiny. What an evening! Not a discord made itself audible in this London world of freshly watered flower-beds, sweet-smelling shrubberies, and rich, umbrageous shadow. Perhaps nothing imparts a more luxurious

feeling than such a scene. Exotics, smooth-shaven lawns, and woodland solitudes, islanded from the life and movement of the great city, so near, yet apparently so far away. The Park and the Gardens were growing more and more deserted, for it was the hour of almost universal dinner, yet not a fragrant nook was without its loiterer, not a bench without its occupant, and over all bent a warm, amber sky—golden frame to the brilliant picture.

Vivian, as we have said before, was in no hurry. Those incomparable little dinners of six guests at Mrs. Doring's—when the wife is a paragon the world is apt to ignore the husband, however excellent — were so conveniently arranged that they could take place half an hour sooner or later without any detriment to the dishes. This elasticity was, indeed, the great charm of Mrs. Doring's cosey gatherings. There was time enough to get through the business of the day, however arduous, and of any day it was the climax and crowning enjoyment.

Vivian, although a man of the world, was genuine. He could thoroughly enjoy, and not only gratifications of a material, but also of an intellectual kind. He relished alike good company, good literature, the best in art. In fact he was just the man any affectionate woman of the world would desire to have as a son-in-law. A girl's future could safely be intrusted to such keeping, was the usual maternal verdict. He sauntered on lazily till he reached a cool nook familiar to him, where he might enjoy yet a few minutes more of the captivating hour.

The bench under sweet shadow he knew of was already occupied by a poor, but decently clad woman, who had that moment hobbled towards it on crutches. He was about to seat himself at the other end, when an ejaculation of surprise and dismay rose to his lips.

"Good heavens, Lilian!" he cried, as he glanced at the woman; "what has brought you to this?"

Thus addressed, she looked at her interlocutor, and into her face also now came a look of recognition.

She was a pale, delicately formed, slender creature, and it was

easy to see, in spite of the crutches and unbecoming garb, that she was still young, and had been beautiful. Vivian gazed and gazed, positively reddening. It was not only the unsightly crutches that forced upon his mind a contrast the most striking and painful conceivable, but also her dress and appearance generally. What struck him more than anything about her looks and garb, contrasting them, as he could not help doing, with a dazzling vision of another, yet the self-same, Lilian of a few years back, was the sight of her leather shoes.

Those little feet of Lilian's, those glancing, twinkling, fairy feet—he had never forgotten them. Now they were shod in what looked like poor-house shoes, uncouth, of thick leather, and laced up with a leathern string such as ploughmen use. Her dress, too, if a trifle superior to the poor-house uniform, was not that of a working woman who buys her own clothes. The cotton gown, the light woollen kerchief worn over the shoulders, the neat-fitting, dark straw hat, all told their own story to eyes not usually very discerning in such matters. Lilian's dress, spotless, decent, and certainly neither unseasonable nor uncomfortable, was that of one dependent, if not on the poor law, on private charity or benevolence.

But if metamorphosed as to outward appearance, still more was she in look, and especially in expression.

The Lilian he remembered had been a thing of sparkles, smiles, childish ecstasies, a veritable smile incarnate! Now the fair, small features and beautiful eyes wore a cold, passionless, automatic look. Suffering and privation, or it might be some form of cold, Calvinistic theology, had evidently hardened her, for it did not escape his observation that a little manual of devotion was stuck in her girdle. She had hobbled forth from some home under the direction of pious women, to breathe the cool air, and, perhaps, stare at the brilliant equipages and gay dresses, reminding her of a world in which she had lived once.

But there was no capacity for enjoyment, hardly sensibility to the mere pleasure of summer sights and smells, to be detected in her face. Bare life was there, with the stern neces-

sity of food, air, shelter; the woman, the creature that smiles, weeps, loves, and looks forward, was dead.

Full of compassion, Vivian's hand was in his pocket swift as lightning, and he would fain have thrust some gold pieces in her own, but she let the money fall to the ground, with a cold, hard look.

"What brought me to this?" she said, without the slightest personality in the bitter tone of her reproach, speaking much as if it were of some one dead, and long since insensible to suffering. . "You, Frederick Vivian, ask me such a question?"

Then she looked away from him towards the rose-bushes, smiling a scornful, almost cruel smile.

Vivian's eyes remained riveted to the harsh picture, but while he looked another rose in its place.

His memory ran back ten years, when this same Lilian had for a brief moment flashed before him, an incarnation of frolicsome loveliness and gayety. One especial scene became now as clearly imaged before his mind as when it had been no mere recollection, but the warm, living reality. He saw then, as he sat near this sickly girl in crutches, a radiant creature, so fairy-like in her movements as hardly to touch the ground. She came dancing towards him, holding in one small, fair hand an antiquated musical instrument, which she thrummed merrily with the other, her feet keeping wild time to the air.

It was impossible to forget the vision of those fairy feet as they had twinkled before his eyes then. Encased in the finest imaginable silk stockings of creamy white, embroidered with gold clocks, and in shoes that gleamed also as if of gold, those little feet of Lilian's seemed veritable sprites to intoxicate and bewitch.

She wore, moreover, a dress of pale-blue shot silk, in wonderful contrast to her hair—not yellow hair, but of a hue more uncommon by far—light-brown, having gold edges and coruscations; all else was of a piece with that fair hair waving about her brow and throat. So airy, radiant, and captivating the vision of the slender, dancing girl in blue, that but for a cer-

tain indescribable carelessness and abandon of look and manner, she might have furnished an artist with an ideal of Joy, if indeed any could have caught the sparkling look of mere enjoyment, the almost frenzied expression of delight. Yes! many and many a time since he had said to himself, when on the verge of being enticed by other loveliness, "How cold and inanimate compared to my blue Bacchante!"

He had regretted keenly that this distracting thing could have no part or lot with all that was honest, manly, outspoken in his existence, and that even such visions and a mind at one with itself were incompatible.

So, although it was only a secret memory he had ventured to keep of the glowing picture, it had never faded from his memory, and the sight of the wan, lame girl beside him now had called it up in all its first vividness once more.

With regard to his own share in such a life he had never, till now, felt a pang of reproach. 'Twas all a matter of course and custom. More's the pity! The world and the human beings in it would never be perfect, forsooth.

It was impossible, however, for any good-natured, kindly disposed man—and certainly Frederick Vivian was all these—to help feeling moved by the spectacle before him and the recollections it called up—all the loveliness gone, the grace and the wild enjoyment, the bare existence that was left. He felt just as sorry, perhaps more so, as a lover of animals would be at the sight of some once peerless pet overtaken by decrepitude and uncomeliness. What so natural for him as to say, "I am very sorry for you, Lilian; pray, believe how sorry I am"?

The girl's thin hands, into which he would fain have thrust his gift of money, remained unclosed. Indifferently, without any malice, without the faintest approach to gratitude, she saw the gold pieces fall to the ground. There they lay; and the fastidious, elegantly gloved gentleman beside her was compelled to stoop down and pick them up one by one.

Even that action, mortifying as it would seem, did not call up any retributive look in the pale, worn face, with its cold

blue eyes watching him. The girl merely said, her rebuke sounding hard and impersonal, as if issuing from a grave:

"Be sorry for yourself, not for me."

But in spite of the rebuke, the feeling of caste, of well-being, moreover, and the sense of triumph that is born of perfect health, vanquished even Vivian's dire humiliation. The contrast between her position and his own came out too painfully to be resisted. She so forlorn, so fragile, so hopeless; he in full bloom of life and prosperity, and, so he had thought but a quarter of an hour ago, on the threshold of a career to be satisfactory in all respects.

He made another attempt to force the money upon her.

"You must need little comforts," he urged, eagerly and awkwardly. "I would have befriended you long ago had I learned of your misfortunes."

So saying, he would fain have slipped the gold coins into the pocket of her print apron, from which protruded a coarse pocket-handkerchief. But she put a thin, ungloved hand over the aperture.

"Honest bread is mine as long as I live," she said, in the same unmoved voice, "a bed to lie on, and clothes to wear, but of woman's giving. 'Tis but natural that women should feel for one another."

Then she added, looking at him with an expression he would find hard to forget:

"Keep your money, but for better uses henceforth than the buying of a human soul."

So saying, she turned her face away. His presence had not in the least agitated her. It was evident that he might sit there as long as he chose. She had nothing more to say to him. He had no power to trouble or soften her. As much of his existence as had been linked with hers was dead, joy also, and hate. Life could never now mean anything but a routine of frugal comfort, austere duty, and such enjoyment as this—liberty to enjoy the fresh, sweet air, and a sense of being provided for in her feebleness and isolation.

Frederick Vivian left her without a word. He, had, indeed none at hand at all adequate to the occasion. But, as he continued his walk, it was with a step less elastic than before. His talk at that cosey round dinner-table flagged. Not his hostess's wit, not the high girlish spirits of the wild rose from Australia, could now animate him. There was everything to put him at ease and make him enjoy himself, if indeed it were always easy to enjoy that self of ours! The little banquet was as perfect as out-of-the-way cookery, choicest flowers, and crystal could make it. The fellowship of six could not be improved upon. He had never thought the pretty Australian so engaging before. As she sat beside him, fresh and sweet as the roses on her bosom and in her hair, he felt more and more convinced that here was the very wife of his ideal. And he fancied that he discovered evidence of confidence and liking on the part of the girl he had made up his mind to marry. But when the much-desired opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* came, he felt himself grown, not nervous and shy, certainly, but reluctant and vacillating. The vision of a pallid woman in a cotton gown, hobbling on crutches, seemed to shut him out from the bright image by his side. He was dumb.

"What ails you?" said his hostess, when the party, except for Vivian, had broken up. "I am quite disappointed that you did not keep your promise to me, as I am sure you have not done, to propose to my pretty, pretty Amy."

Then she looked at him with an arch expression, half satirical, half reproving, and added:

"Is she then not good enough for you?"

Vivian took up his hat to go, and all he said was, with a strange, nervous smile:

"What if I thought the other way?"

THE END.

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