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No. 1.

A Terrible Family

BY

FLORENCE WARDEN.

*Author of "The House on the Marsh," "Those Westerton Girls,"
"Ralph Ryder of Brent," etc., etc.*



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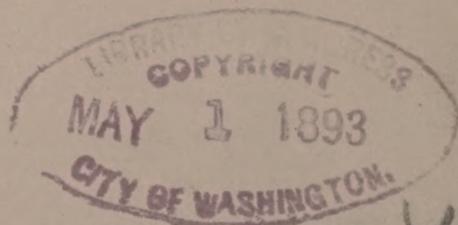
A

TERRIBLE FAMILY

BY *Alice Price James.*
FLORENCE WARDEN, P.S.

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A TERRIBLE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

A VERY BAD CHARACTER.

"My dear Mrs. Head-Bleau, I am very sorry to distress you, but there is no doubt that your new tenants are a terrible family."

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Lady Constantine seemed to expand with the indignation of a provincial great lady, when she heard of the habit of villagers over whom she has been in the habit of domineering there appears a degenerate upstart who refuses to be domineered over.

Mrs. Head-Bleau was neither ally, nor adversary, least nor in any way indebted to Lady Constantine; but so great is the force of popular opinion that she pushed a little and grew prodigious under the great lady's frown.

"I am afraid that they are perhaps not quite all one could have wished," she said with an anxious look. "You see where there is no lady in a family the manners are apt to get a little rough. But I assure you they have their good points."

A TERRIBLE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

A VERY BAD CHARACTER.

“MY dear Mrs. Hoad-Blean, I am very sorry to distress you, but there is no doubt that your new tenants are a terrible family!”

Lady Constantia Fitzjocelyn drew herself up and seemed to expand with the just indignation of a provincial great lady, when in the midst of the placid villagers over whom she has been in the habit of domineering there appears a degenerate upstart who refuses to be domineered over.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean was neither silly, nor subservient, nor in any way indebted to Lady Constantia; but so great is the force of popular opinion that she quailed a little and grew apologetic under the great lady's frown.

“I am afraid that they are perhaps not quite all one could have wished,” she said, with an anxious look. “You see where there is no lady in a family the manners are apt to get a little rough. But I assure you they have their good points.”

The poor lady uttered these last words with the fervor of conviction; for the free-handedness with which the new tenant had made a payment in advance, without even being asked for it, could not fail to be appreciated by a mother with five big children to provide for, and next to nothing to do it on. But Lady Constantia's ire was rather fanned than assuaged by hearing an excuse put forward for the offending ones.

"A lady!" she echoed. "I don't think a lady would find herself in very congenial society among such a crew. Their language is something too appalling—what one can understand of it! Unfortunately, there is nothing but a wall to divide the Priory grounds from ours; really, if they had the place for long, we should have to let ours and go away."

And Lady Constantia folded her arms with the feeling that, in uttering this threat, she was committing a cruelty for which she had to nerve herself with a great effort.

But she had gone too far. Her hostess's two handsome daughters, who were trying in vain to draw something more than monosyllabic answers from Lady Constantia's daughter Harriet, both looked up and reddened. Mrs. Hoad-Blean's lips tightened a little, and she answered, in the very quiet voice of one who thinks it is time to make a stand:

"I should be very sorry if you had to do that. But they have taken not only the Priory but the shooting for three years certain, and I hope they will like it well enough to renew the lease."

A look of relief and of pride in their mother crossed the faces of both pale, fair Jane and rosy, bright-eyed Pamela at the other end of the narrow room.

“As for the language they use, if you mean anything worse than old Mr. St. Rhadegund’s dropped h’s, I am very sorry. But after all, the grounds of Salternes Court and the Priory are both large, and you will only have to avoid just that corner where they touch, when the young men are about.”

For a moment the tyrant’s breath seemed to be taken away by the failure of her own bolt. Then as she rose to go she said, with offended dignity :

“It is not always convenient to be exiled from a part of one’s grounds, however far from the house it happens to be. And as it happens to be the kitchen-garden end, I suppose we must give up all hope of having any fruit this year. One of the creatures has already had the audacity to speak to Harriet, as she was turning over the leaves of the apricot tree yesterday.”

At her mother’s words, Harriet, a down-trodden, frightened-looking girl, blushed a vivid pink and began to stammer :

“He was only saying, mother, that if the tree on the other side shaded the apricots too much, that he—he w—would cut a branch off for me.”

Lady Constantia listened to this explanation with her eyes on the ground, her head held back, and a look of icy annoyance on her face. For this feeble interpolation savored of contradiction.

“Highly unnecessary,” she said. “A mere excuse

for scraping acquaintance. You will not go into the kitchen-garden again, except with me, while these people remain at the Priory." Then turning to her hostess, she held out her hand, and said, with a change in her tone to commiseration: "Well, good-bye. I know it isn't your fault, and you must be quite as much annoyed as we are about it. After the nice people you had there last year too!"

"Yes, but they didn't pay all their rent, and they broke a lot of things that we only found out afterwards," said Mrs. Hoad-Blean.

"And they left debts in the village too!" said Pamela, the second girl, softly, though her sister frowned to her to stop.

"At least," said Lady Constantia, more haughtily than ever, "they were received by everybody, and they were not a disgrace to the place."

She was going out at the door into the tortuous passage which formed the hall of the rambling and ancient village house, when suddenly remembering something, she returned to say:

"I see there is a threshing-machine in the home farm to-day, so I suppose they are going to take down the big stack to-morrow. I shall be there early in the morning to protest against any rat-hunting, which is the sort of brutal sport those young men would delight in, I know."

"Oh, pray don't—pray don't interfere!" began poor Mrs. Hoad-Blean, in a tone full of anxiety.

But her visitor had sailed off, and was already stumping down the village street in a pair of huge hygienic boots, the peculiarity of which seemed to

be that they always made more noise than any other sort, even on a sandy footway. The meek Harriet, more dispirited than ever, stumped after her in a pair of smaller size. Mrs. Blean, looking puzzled and worried, sat down again and took up her needlework. Pamela ran to her mother, put her arm round her neck, and kissed her on the forehead.

“Don’t worry, mamma,” she said. “It’s awkward, of course, having such people for tenants. But then they do pay well, and that’s something, isn’t it?”

“It’s everything, unfortunately, my dear child,” said her mother wearily. “I don’t know what we should have done if we had had people like the Ramseys last year, who wanted so many things done that we should have done better to have gone on living at the Priory ourselves. I know these people are nobodies, and that Mr. St. Rhadegund himself is not very well educated or very refined. But he is very liberal and perfectly honest, and doesn’t want anything done. And really, lately,” she went on, the brave woman’s voice breaking with a sob, “I have had such very hard work to keep things going——”

“It’s all that Edward!” cried Pamela, springing up, full of indignation. “Why doesn’t he do something, and earn some money, instead of always coming upon you? It’s disgraceful. Why, do you think if Jane and I were boys, that we would idle our time away and be always worrying our mother for money? Girls as we are, we would do anything, anything to help you, if it were only not considered more of a disgrace for gentlewomen to work than for gentlemen to be idle!”

Mrs. Blean, who had been trying in vain to silence her daughter, answered very reproachfully :

“ My dear, you don't understand these things. If poor Edward has not settled down to anything yet, remember he is very delicate, and he has not had the best of examples.”

But these words, which contained, as they knew, an implied reproach against their father, brought both girls in arms against her. For Colonel Hoad-Blean, though he was rather a trial to his wife, was adored by his daughters, being one of those fascinating men whom to know pretty well is to love, and to know very well is to heartily despise. And while his wife knew him very well, his daughters did not. For when he found his income so seriously diminished by his extravagance, that he could no longer live upon it in luxury with his family, he chose to live in luxury without his family, and to be so much occupied with the business of trying to get something to do, that it was more convenient for him to live in bachelor chambers in town than to share the rustic seclusion of his wife and daughters. His only son, being entirely of his mind, followed his father's example, and only visited home when it became necessary to squeeze more money from the slender purse of his too indulgent mother.

“ Well, at least papa had served his country as a soldier !” said Pamela. “ While Edward has done nothing.”

“ And never means to do anything,” chimed in Jane.

“ Never mind, mamma, we won't tease you,” cried

Pamela affectionately, noting the effect which disparagement of her idol had upon the poor lady.

“I suppose there is no way of getting rid of these people?” suggested Jane, in a resigned voice. “There is sure to be an open quarrel between them and Lady Constantia before long, and then she will very likely turn round upon us.”

There was a short silence. It was no use pretending that this would not be a calamity; for the gayeties on which girls’ happiness so much depends were most of them centered, as far as Jane and Pamela were concerned, in Salternes Court. Besides this, Lady Constantia’s only son had already paid rather marked attention to Pamela.

Mrs. Blean broke the silence.

“It can’t be helped,” she said, desperately. “I can’t be dictated to in everything by Lady Constantia, who doesn’t know herself what it is to have——”

The rest of her sentence died away on her lips as loud cries and shouts, and the noise of scurrying feet, attracted her attention in the road outside. A sturdy-looking, rather thick-set boy, of about twelve years of age, was racing along the quiet little village street, crying: “Ss-cat! Ss-cat!” and stooping every now and then to pick up a stone, which he flung with all his force. He had scarcely passed the window when Mrs. Blean’s twin daughters, Olive and Myrtle, rushed by and dashed into the drawing-room like a whirlwind.

The twins were pretty girls of fourteen, fair, sweet-faced, usually as placid as turtle-doves, and

so ridiculously alike in speech and in thought, that the opinions of one would always serve for the other. Some microscopic differences there may have been between them in taste or in temperament, but these no study had hitherto sufficed to discover.

Both began together :

“That horrid, horrid St. Rhadegund boy is chasing our cat!”

“He’s hurt it already!”

“Our poor Minnie!”

“Do, do go out and stop him, Pamela!” wound up Myrtle imploringly.

Now Pamela, always the militant member of the family, was just in the humor to go and “stop him.” She flew out of the house, and after the abandoned boy, and caught him by the shoulder just as he was stooping to pick up another stone.

“How dare you throw stones at our cat?” cried she, giving him a good shake, in which she concentrated all the noble rage of the county family condemned to let its mansion to the vulgar parvenu.

“How dare you? How dare you?”

“She called me a brute!” cried the boy, raising a flushed and angry but honest face to the lady’s.

“So you are!” returned Pamela promptly, with another shake.

Now it is not to be supposed that in making this personal attack upon the boy, Pamela was taking a mean advantage of her superior size. For the boy was well-built and muscular, and could probably have freed himself if he had made a strong effort to

do so. But he made none; and Pamela, shamed by his non-resistance, was on the point of letting him go, when a new opponent appeared upon the scene, in the shape of a tall, strong young man, who sauntered up in dusty riding-dress, with his whip in his hand.

“What’s the row, Bob?” he asked, laconically, without taking the slightest notice of the young lady.

“Your brother is throwing stones at my sisters’ cat,” explained Pamela, with more than a touch of haughtiness, as she relaxed her hold of Bob. “Perhaps you approve of that?”

“She was eating my little chicks,” explained Bob.

“Then I do approve of it certainly,” said the elder brother promptly, turning to Pamela and speaking in a slow, off-hand tone which she found particularly exasperating. “Cats are only vermin, and when vermin become troublesome they have to be checked.”

“I think you’ll find it dangerous to begin ‘checking’ other people’s pet animals, Mr. St. Rhadegund,” said Pamela, in whom indignation and disgust were getting the better of prudence. “Lady Constantia Fitzjocelyn, your nearest neighbor, is a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; and she would most certainly put the law in force against any one who tortured dumb animals about here.”

The young man, whose stolid, imperturbable manner was the greatest possible contrast to Pamela’s

air of suppressed passion, listened quietly, with his eyes upon the ground; he laughed a little when she had finished.

“Lady Constantia: that’s the hideous old woman who insults my father, and who isn’t worthy to breathe the same air with him. You tell the old lady, with my kind regards, that if she sets any one to interfere with me, I’ll shoot all the vermin I can find on *her* side of the wall, beginning with her cub of a son.”

Pamela was aghast. The “cub of a son” was her admirer, Alfred Fitzjocelyn, who believed so firmly that he did Salternes Court a great honor by his visits to his parents, that all the neighbors had begun to agree with him. He was in the Army, and had now been at his mother’s home for the unprecedentedly long period of six weeks, a fact which was generally put down to the attractions of brown-eyed Pamela Blean. It was natural that the girl should feel her wrath redoubled at this disparagement of her admirer. Her nimble tongue, which had often before got her into scrapes, got her into another now.

“Of course I know that there is as much difference between you and Mr. Fitzjocelyn as there is between you and a cat. Only in the latter case the advantage is on your side, while in the former it is not.”

But Dick St. Rhadegund made light of the insult.

“Oh, we’re all proof against snubs by this time; at least, we boys are,” said he, looking at the red-tiled roof of the cottage near which they were stand-

ing. "For I tell you we won't stand any more rudeness to my father. He is worth a dozen of yours, and he's never done anything worse than pay three times the rent he ought to pay for an old tumble-down set of rat-holes not fit to store fire-wood in, much less shelter a family of decent Christians."

Again Pamela was thunderstruck. The Priory, St. Domneva's Priory, the pride of the guide-books, the chief show-place for miles around, teeming with historical interest and with "bits" which threw artists into ecstasies—to be called an old tumble-down set of rat-holes! It shattered her faith in Man. And the worst of it was that she had no means of redress. She could not be satirical with him, for she could not make him care. No matter how crushingly she might taunt him with his barbaric lack of taste, her words would have no effect upon this stolid, placid man, who stood towering above her, playing with the ends of his long fair mustache, as if he were only idly passing the time.

A dozen splendid rejoinders jostled one another in her head, but none of them were sufficiently definite of shape to be uttered. And as they did so a surprising little thought crept into her mind: it was that this very rude and ill-mannered man was not entirely wrong in being annoyed at the slights which he, with or without reason, considered to have been put upon his father.

She became quite suddenly somewhat abashed, and her tone changed to one altogether feminine and gentle, as she said:

“I am afraid you’re right. Perhaps some of us are not quite as nice as we ought to be to—to strangers. But then, you see, we are not used, over here in England, to men who can take their own part so very well against ladies.”

Of course the little reproach which she uttered, raising her head with a touch of dignity, had no effect upon the big young man. He just glanced at her when she changed her tone, but immediately transferred his gaze to the red-tiled roof again.

“Not my own part,” he corrected, coolly, “though I don’t see why I shouldn’t do that too. It’s my father’s part I’m taking, as it happens.”

Then, without any further ceremony, unless the careless raising of his whip to his hat was to be taken as a salutation, he turned on his heel, and sauntering the few paces which took him to the end of the street, he turned into a path across a turnip-field, and went whistling away.

CHAPTER II.

A RAT HUNT.

PAMELA was left standing by herself in the little village street, Bob St. Rhadegund having disappeared at an early stage of her encounter with his brother.

The girl made a pretty picture as she stood in the sunshine of a bright May afternoon, with a white sun-bonnet belonging to one of the twins on her head, blushing red with mortification at Dick St. Rhadegund's discourteous behavior. Deep down in her heart, too, was a little resentment at the fact that, while she had been involuntarily admiring his undeniable good looks, he had seemed quite unaware that he was quarreling with the acknowledged prettiest girl in the county. Now Pamela was not vain, in the sense of putting an undue value upon her own beauty; but with her neat figure, black eyes, white teeth, wavy chestnut hair, and rich brown complexion, she was far too handsome to have been allowed to remain altogether unconscious of it.

She came slowly back towards her mother's house, where the twins were waiting for her in the doorway.

It was an ancient white-washed house, with one protruding wing, and with pointed gables, this new

home of Mrs. Hoad-Blean and her four pretty daughters. A rambling, unpretending dwelling, with no strip of garden to divide it from the sandy roadway, nothing but the tiny stone-paved square formed by the wing on one side and a tall brew-house on the other. Not a door-post or a window-frame in the place that was not out of the perpendicular with age. The rest of the half-dozen houses on that side of the road were even more unpretending than theirs, while the dwellings on the opposite side were all laborers' cottages pure and simple. And the hardest part of it was that the trees of beautiful St. Domneva's were in sight; for the ancient wall which shut in the grounds of their old home faced the end of the little street, not a hundred yards from their own door.

"Oh, Pamela, what did he say?"

"Was he very rude to you?" asked the twins.

They had watched the proceedings from this distance, because mamma had forbidden them to go and take part in the scene which was taking place in the open street.

"Yes, very," answered Pamela, with the tears rising in her eyes.

And she ran past her inquiring sisters to her own room, where the quieter Jane soon joined her, to condole with her on the insults to which the family poverty exposed them.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean was so sore upon the whole subject, that, by tacit consent among the girls, the name of the St. Rhadegunds was not mentioned in her presence that evening.

On the following day, however, the poor lady was condemned to hear little else. She took a very early train to Canterbury, to do some shopping, and Pamela went with her.

Jane, dangling her mother's huge bunch of keys, was superintending the erratic doings of the country servants, and keeping an eye on the twins at their lessons, when the ominous sound of Lady Constantia's voice in the hall caused her to frown with annoyance.

Jane was a thoughtful and diplomatic girl, who felt more strongly than any of them that it would not do to estrange the autocrat; and something in the autocrat's morning voice told her that she had come with some request which was a command. Jane was a girl of almost stately height, with a slender, graceful figure, golden hair, and a face which, though not so beautiful as Pamela's, and very pale, was not without beauty and attractiveness. In her plain gray stuff morning gown, she came down the mean little staircase like a queen, and held out her hand to an enormous bundle of waterproof, with goloshes on its feet, black cloth gloves on its hands, and a dripping umbrella, which was all that was to be seen of Lady Constantia Fitzjocelyn.

"My dear," began the autocrat promptly, "I want you to put on your waterproof and come with me at once. I know that your mother is out, your parlor-maid has just told me so.—By the by, why don't you make her wear a cap that hides more of her hair? That light, fluffy hair does not look right

for a girl in her position.—However, what I want you to do is to come round with me to the Priory farm, to see that there is no cruelty practiced when they pull down the stack. You must make haste, for they will have begun already long before this.”

“Won’t you come in?” asked Jane faintly, opening the drawing-room door.

“No, I’ll wait for you here. Now, make haste, there’s a good child!”

“But, dear Lady Constantia, you are surely not going to stand in the rain in a soaking farm-yard to save a few rats from being knocked on the head!” cried Jane.

Lady Constantia emphasized her answer by a thump of her umbrella which threw a little shower around her.

“Certainly I am. All dumb animals have a right to be protected from wanton cruelty, and I know these young rascals enjoy it.”

The vicious emphasis which she put upon these last words showed the observant Jane that there was quite as much ill-feeling towards the boys as good-feeling towards the rats in the lady’s action. She tried remonstrance again.

“Don’t you think it will be rather rash to—to——”

She did not like to say interfere. Lady Constantia replied to her unfinished sentence:

“I don’t care how rash I am in the cause of humanity.”

“And you know these rats bite sometimes!”

“They won’t bite *me*!”

Jane looked at her, and thought that a wise rat wouldn't.

"Don't you think you could do without me?" said the girl, in a mild voice.

"Dear me, no, certainly not. I should have taken your mother if she had been here. Don't you see, I must have some one belonging to their landlord's family with me to give me a right to interfere?"

Poor Jane grew haggard. She foresaw that this would be the beginning of even a worse state of things than already existed between them and their tenants. She tried entreaty.

"Ah, mamma might have been of some use. But don't you see that it wouldn't be proper for me to take her place in such a matter, and without consulting her? Please, please let me off."

"Do you think your mother would have refused to come when I asked her?" said Lady Constantia authoritatively. "Surely I am as good a judge of what is proper as she, and I say you are to come."

Jane gave way. She had a little hope that, not having herself come into actual conflict, as Pamela had done, with the St. Rhadegund family, she might perhaps, by adopting a very conciliatory manner, do more good than harm. She did not, however, take her visitor's advice and put on her waterproof. Waterproofs are unbecoming things, and Jane knew that on a diplomatic errand one ought to look one's best. So as the day showed signs of clearing up, she put on a short cape-cloak which was very becoming to her graceful figure, and went downstairs.

“Are you going in that thing?” asked Lady Constantia, with a disapproving eye.

But Jane, who thought that her dress was her own affair, merely said, “Yes,” as she took her umbrella from the stand.

At the end of the little street they had to turn to the right, and passing the blacksmith’s forge, entered the huge farm-yard, the great barns of which, with their moss-grown thatch, had been the scene of many a childish game when Jane and her sister were children.

In marched Lady Constantia, past a big duck-pond with a walnut tree hanging over it, to the place where the great threshing machine stood, already hard at work, the center of a busy group.

High on the diminishing stack of corn stood two men, throwing down the yellow-brown sheaves. These were caught up by others, and handed to the man on the top of the big machine, to feed its yawning mouth with. Fast as the great jaws separated the grain, it fell in heaps to the ground, giving two more men as much as they could do to clear it away, and to pass it to two others, who tied it again in sheaves ready for fresh storing.

But all this, although the legitimate, was quite the least exciting, part of the proceedings. Round about the stack stood the three youngest St. Rhadegunds: Jim, a dark-haired, dark-eyed, wiry, vivacious-looking man of twenty-five; Tom, a lad of three-and-twenty, at present thin, angular, and a trifle weedy-looking, but who promised to become in time a copy of his stalwart and handsome eldest

brother Dick ; and Bob, the youngest of the family. All these, with sticks in their hands, were waiting for the rats and mice whom the unstacking of the corn had turned out of their home. Dick, the eldest of the family, was holding back a rough-haired terrier, who was whining and yelping with impatience ; while old Mr. St. Rhadegund, from his seat on a five-barred gate, watched the scene with as much interest as his sons. He was a splendid-looking man, this terrible upstart who had brought such a disturbing element into the peaceful village of Salternes ; six feet two inches in height, massively built without being stout, with a head of curly gray hair, clear, hawk-like blue eyes, and a mustache and beard already white, he was far more distinguished-looking in appearance than any of the neighboring gentlemen. So that it was a little disappointing to hear him cry, with a mixture of a cockney accent and a yankee twang :

“That’s it, Jim ! ’It ’im, ’it ’im on the ’ead. That chap’ll never run no more !”

A fringe of men on the lookout for a job, and of small boys eager to slay such of the vermin as might escape the nimble young masters, completed the scene, to which the tall trees which shut in the farmyard made, with their young green foliage, a soft and pretty setting. The rain was still falling gently. But Lady Constantia, with an exclamation of triumph which might be called her war-whoop, shut up her umbrella violently, and dashed into the middle of the group. She had caught them red-handed.

Just as she approached the whirring machine, a whole family of mice and one large rat diverted public attention from her entrance, and set the whole excited throng of young men and boys jumping and shouting. Dick let go his terrier, and even the busy men at their work turned their heads to see him finish the rat.

“Stop!” cried Lady Constantia, raising her dripping umbrella aloft as a standard; “I won’t have this. It is inhuman, brutal; I insist on its being stopped.”

But the sport went on just the same, and as she pressed rashly onward, a sheaf of corn fell from the stack upon her head, so that her continued expostulations were lost in a buzz of ill-suppressed laughter. Nothing daunted, however, she moved out of the way of the falling sheaves, and haranguing the young men on the cruelty of their conduct, threatened them with “The Society” and its penalties if they went on in their evil ways.

“Here is your landlord’s daughter, who disapproves of your wicked amusement as much as I do, come to join her protest with mine,” she went on. And turning to where the girl hung shyly in the background, she sharply beckoned to her to come forward.

Poor Jane, who had a horror of rats, was whiter than ever as she timidly and reluctantly obeyed. Her physical terror was so great that it was only by a strong effort that she dragged her limbs to where Lady Constantia stood, hoping to soften the effect which the autocrat’s words were

evidently beginning to have in irritating the young men.

“Tell them, Jane, tell them what your mother would think of this cruelty,” said Lady Constantia imperiously.

There was a pause, a slack time for a moment, the last batch of mice having been killed, and no other having at present been disturbed. The St. Rhadegunds, who had had skirmishes with the other three girls, had never spoken to Jane, whose dignity and pale beauty rather impressed them. But her words and her tone, when she spoke, were only the words and tone of a shy young girl of twenty-two, so that their momentary interest and awe vanished immediately.

“I am sure,” she began, with a face which was brave not from austerity but from timidity, “that my mother would not wish to interfere in any way——”

A strong young voice interrupted her, a voice ringing with a young man’s passionate indignation :

“But she always is interfering! I never knew such an interfering lot in all my life! We can’t have a new window put in where we’ve only got a monk’s peep-hole, but she interferes and says it’ll spoil the place’s architectural beauty! We can’t have slates put on instead of the beastly tiles that let the rain in, but she interferes and says it’ll take away the primitive look of the building. It’s as much as we dare to sneeze in the house, for fear she should come over and tell us it’ll shake the building!”

It was Jim who spoke, standing up face to face with Jane, and frowning at the girl as if she had been some savage monster whom he was bound to slay. By the time he had finished speaking, Jim was joined by his eldest brother, who put a hand on his shoulder and said, in the slow tones which contrasted so strongly with Jim's rapid utterance :

"Perhaps your sister, the one who catches little boys and beats them, the athletic sister I mean, thinks she has a right to all the rats found on the estate. I see cats count as live-stock in this country; perhaps this other sort of vermin does so too."

But here Lady Constantia came to the rescue of her less strong-minded companion.

"Come away, my dear," she said. "In *their* country it's very evident that they don't know how to treat ladies, at all events!"

"We know how to treat ladies, ma'am, perfectly well," returned Dick more slowly than ever, and with an insolent uplifting of his chin. "But as there are different sorts of ladies, we treat them in different sorts of ways. For instance, there are some ladies who know so jolly well how to take care of themselves that we needn't trouble ourselves to take care of them. Otherwise, ma'am, or your ladyship, or whatever you call yourself, I might warn you that my terrier has just unearthed a swarm of rats in the barn yonder, and that they're making this way as fast as they can cut."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when, as he said, the rats were upon them. Lady Constantia, with an ear-piercing yell, sprang into the air

and fell upon Bob, whom her portly form nearly crushed. But she got out of the way of the rats.

Jane, however, was not so fortunate. So much troubled was she at the violence of the antagonism which was developing between the two sides, that she had scarcely taken in the sense of Dick's warning. Before, therefore, she could move out of the way, a dozen rats, large and small, which had rashly made their way, in their fright, to the very point of danger, were scurrying through the group of which she formed the center. She stood petrified with fear. The next moment she felt something upon her dress: before she knew what was happening, a great black rat was hanging from her hand with its teeth imbedded in her wrist. She looked at it; she did not cry out: when the momentary excitement of the rush was over, and most of the boys were in full chase, Jim, who had foregone the delight of pursuit for this occasion only, and was contenting himself with watching it merely, saw the lady stagger. An exclamation of horror broke from him when he saw what had happened; the next moment he had his hands round the rat, and by throttling it, forced it to release its hold on her wrist.

"Thank you," said she faintly, and taking out her handkerchief, she tried with her left hand to fasten it round her wrist.

"Let me do it, let me!" cried Jim eagerly. "I won't hurt you; I'll do it gently and better than you can."

He had seized her handkerchief, in spite of her refusals, which were indeed uttered in the faintest

and weakest of voices. Suddenly, as his hands touched her wrist, she recovered enough command of herself to speak almost in her usual voice as she snatched her hand away and put it under her cloak:

“I don’t want it bound up. It is quite unnec——”

She turned as she uttered the words, staggered again, and fell in a heap among the loose straw which was lying on the ground.

Lady Constantia had been so much occupied in making sure that she had not suffered in her involuntary encounter with Bob, that she had seen nothing of all this. When, therefore, she suddenly perceived her companion lying on the ground, she hurried at once to her side in much alarm. For with all her oddities, her kindness of heart was genuine. But Jim would not allow her to come near. He was down on his knees beside the half-unconscious girl, and with a face nearly as bloodless as her own, and a touch as gentle as a woman’s, he had raised her head, loosened her cloak, taken off her hat, and begun to fan her with his handkerchief. He looked up with a frown as Lady Constantia came near.

“Leave her to me,” he whispered. “I’ll take her home.”

But Jane shook her head, and tried feebly to push him away.

“I haven’t fainted,” she said. “I am quite well. Go away, please.”

And she struggled to rise.

“Won’t you just let me bind up your wrist first?”

“No.”

Without a look at him, Jane, who had now re-

gained her feet, offered her handkerchief to Lady Constantia, with a request that she would perform the office for which Jim had offered his services.

“That I will, my dear, and we will get out of this murderous hole before the other young savages come back.”

Jim stood, livid with rage, watching them. When the operation was finished, and they turned to leave the farm-yard, he sprang to Jane's side and said, angrily :

“I thought you were better than the rest : you are worse. There's nothing in the world so hateful as an unforgiving woman.”

Jane, without condescending to answer him, turned to Lady Constantia.

“It has quite left off raining now,” she said.

And, as if in superb unconsciousness of the presence of any one but themselves, she accompanied her autocratic companion out of the farm-yard.

CHAPTER III.

A DANGEROUS PROTECTOR.

THE rain had left off by the time Lady Constantia and Jane went out by the farm-yard gate, the former giving her arm to her companion, and speaking to her in a tone full of kindness, for she felt that she was herself to blame for the accident which had happened to the girl. Naturally, however, she found excuses for herself, some of them rather odd ones.

“It is marvelous what a delight people of that sort take in setting themselves up in opposition to people of birth and position,” she moralized, as they went up the little street, Jane having declined an invitation to go back with her to Salternes Court. “I suppose they are galled by the feeling of their own inferiority, which of course they can’t get rid of.”

“I don’t think the St. Rhadegunds seemed to feel it much. It seems to me they look down upon us at least as much as we do upon them,” said Jane, encouraged by Lady Constantia’s kindness to be more frank than that autocrat usually allowed any one to be.

“Look down! How can they? You can’t look down from below!”

“Well, all social distances are largely imaginary, aren't they? So if only your imagination is stronger than the collective prejudices of your neighbors, you can enjoy the belief that you are everybody's superior, and nobody can take it away from you.”

Now her companion had let her finish this speech mainly because the opening sentence was so shocking that for a few moments it took away her breath. When she had recovered from the blow, and put on her spectacles to see whether these revolutionary opinions had begun to work any havoc in the younger lady's appearance, she said, in a severe tone:

“My dear, be thankful that it is only I who hear you—I, who am old enough to make allowance for the absence of reasoning power in the very young! All social distances largely imaginary!” she repeated, in a *crescendo* of horror; “why, you'll say religion is imaginary next! Believe me, my dear, you may think that sort of talk very clever, but if you give way to it you will never get a husband, except perhaps among the very dregs!”

In which emphatic word, pronounced in a voice of overpowering authority, Lady Constantia summed up all her fellow-creatures except the royal family, the nobility, and the county families.

Jane accepted the rebuke with apparent meekness, for she made no answer. But as Lady Constantia continued to talk about the determined and malignant opposition of the St. Rhadegunds to the “best people,” she could not help wondering what *they* thought of the “best people's” determined and malignant opposition to them.

They had reached the house, and Jane, who wanted to change her things, which had got wet when she fell on the rain-sodden straw, longed to go in. But Lady Constantia would neither come in nor go away; she remained haranguing her victim in the little court-yard on the "pretty state of things we're coming to," until a heavy step in the road behind them made her turn.

The new-comer was old Mr. St. Rhadegund, who, coming on to the stone pavement, and taking not the slightest notice of Lady Constantia, addressed the girl in a blunt way which yet showed some fatherly concern:

"What's this as I 'ear about them boys o' mine lettin' their rats run over you? I'm real sorry, that I am, that you should ha' come to 'arm, my dear, along o' their pranks. Mind, I'm not saying it was all their fault: they've been worried and plagued into what they've done—not by *you*, my dear, but by them that ought to know better. And like 'igh-spirited lads, they kick. But it wasn't you that the rat ought to ha' bitten. Let this be a warnin' to you, my dear, to be more partic'lar who you take up with, and never to back up them that pokes their nose into other folk's business instead of minding their own."

He nodded to her with a good-humored smile, and touched his hat as he walked away, leaving poor Jane in much confusion, and Lady Constantia spell-bound at this fresh outrage. Fortunately, however, for poor Jane, her indignation took, after a few moments, the form of a desire to give the clown a

piece of her mind upon the spot. So she bade the girl a hasty farewell, and promising to look in again by and by, which Jane sincerely hoped she would forget to do, she started in pursuit of the enemy.

When Mrs. Hoad-Blean came back from her shopping expedition, it may be imagined with what feelings she received the news which awaited her. Pamela and the twins were furious, and vied with each other in heaping terms of withering hatred and contempt upon the young St. Rhadegunds. Pamela was more impartial, and let Lady Constantia share her vituperation.

“And she’s coming to see me this afternoon, you say?” said Mrs. Blean, with a groan. “That’s the worst of all.”

“You sha’n’t see her, mamma,” said Pamela promptly. “I don’t see why you’re always to be worried. Lady Constantia is quite able to fight her own battles, and like other generals, she lets her subordinates get the wounds. If she comes, I shall say you’re asleep.”

And so she did, to the horror of the twins, who knew that mamma was in the store-cupboard, and who rather expected Pamela to drop down dead like Sapphira when she met Lady Constantia’s piercing eyes.

Thanks to this bold action on the part of her second daughter, Mrs. Blean, to whom a journey by train always resulted in a violent headache, was able to enjoy a little rest that afternoon. And in the evening, just before dressing for dinner, she thought a little fresh air would do her good, told the twins to

put on their sun-bonnets, and went with them to the station to await the arrival of the London train, bringing the evening papers. The sky had cleared after the rain, and the sunset glow shone on the pretty faces of the twins, as they watched the train, like a little black snake with one bright eye, gliding over the marsh towards them.

They were standing at the end of the platform farthest from the advancing train, so that when it drew up to the little station they were close to the engine. They would have to wait, they knew, until the train had gone on again and the platform was cleared, before they could get their paper. As they stood waiting, they became aware that something unusual had happened, by seeing a little crowd collect at the other end of the platform. Peals of laughter soon told them that the event was an amusing one; and as one by one the people grew tired of looking, and detaching themselves from the curious group, came up and passed through the station door, the three ladies heard comments such as "He's mad!" "No, only screwed," and saw grinning faces and shrugging shoulders.

"Oh, mamma, come away; do let us go away! There's a tipsy man on the platform! I heard them say so," cried Olive, in horror.

"Well, my dear child, he won't hurt you. He won't come near this end. They will take him out by the door."

The crowd, with the object of its amusement still in its midst, was pressing on to the door of the station. Myrtle, who was a step nearer than her mother

and sister, saw through a gap in the crowd the person who had caused the commotion.

“Oh, mamma,” she cried, in a whisper, “he’s waving his newspaper about like a madman. He’s—— Oh!”

She stopped short with a little scream, and turned, with a face full of horror, to her mother. Mrs. Blean’s face, even in the sunset, looked drawn and ghastly. She too had caught sight of the “madman.”

“Mamma,” said Myrtle, seizing her mother’s hand, with a pretty instinct of consolation. “It isn’t he, it can’t be—Edward!”

“Run away home, my dears. And don’t say anything to your sisters till I come.”

But they had to wait until the passengers had passed out, by which time the poor mother had recovered all her self-control. The eccentric individual whom she had just seen, with his hat on the back of his head, waving his rolled-up newspaper like a conductor’s baton, and making himself the laughing-stock of the crowd, was her son Edward, as she knew. The time had come when she must pay for her one error—the injudicious indulgence of her only son. Edward caught sight of his little sisters as they ran past him; and coming up to them, he insisted upon taking one on each arm and accompanying them home. They were both very much alarmed, but as he did not indulge in any further eccentricities, and their home was only a very short distance away, they arrived without having suffered any further annoyance except that caused by the fact that as they passed the gates of St. Domneva’s Priory, they

saw two of the hated St. Rhadegunds smoking their cigarettes on the lawn inside the railings. The automatic way in which the pretty twins averted their heads from the loathsome sight attracted their brother's attention.

"What, not reconciled to the new tenants yet?" said he, much amused. "Of course I know they're beastly cads, but still I should have thought you'd have got on more comfortably by being on good terms with them."

This was said more to his mother, who had walked on quietly on the outside of the group with only the briefest of greetings to her son, than to the little girls.

"Oh, Edward, you don't know what dreadful people they are, nor how shockingly they've behaved!" said Olive, who was still puzzled by her brother's vagaries at the station, but was reassured on seeing that his manner with them was exactly the same as usual.

"How dreadful! What have they done? Do you want me to go and thrash any of them?" he asked.

But his mother, not so easily satisfied as her two daughters, answered for them quickly:

"Of course not, of course not. The children exaggerate. We have nothing to complain of."

But Olive and Myrtle exchanged looks of such meaning at this point that their brother's curiosity was effectually aroused. As, however, by this time they had reached home, it was easy for Mrs. Blean to secure a diversion. She took Edward at once up

to the tiny room which was rather ambitiously called her boudoir. It just held a writing-table, two chairs, a few shelves, and a waste-paper basket.

Edward threw himself into one of the chairs rather sulkily.

“Now I’m to be catechised, I suppose,” he said, shortly, slipping his hands into his pockets. “What I’ve been doing, why I’m here, how long I can stay, and the rest of it. Well, one part is very easily answered—why I’m here. I want some money—I must have it. There!”

Now Mrs. Blean was used to these appeals, but not to this tone. It added to the alarm she felt—an alarm which swallowed up all her mortification at her son’s undutiful behavior. Her poor anxious face quivered, her arms were aching to go round his neck. But he frowned her off. As there was a long pause, he raised his head and moved impatiently.

“How much can you let me have?”

“My dear boy,” she faltered, “I can’t let you have any just now. I haven’t got any, except——”

Her habitual truthfulness betrayed her into the folly of this last word. When she stopped, of course her son Edward pressed her.

“Except what? Let me have that, whatever it is.”

“I was going to say except what was absolutely necessary for our current expenses. Your father wrote for some the week before last, and I had to send him all I could scrape together. You must—you must wait.”

He sprang up impatiently, moving about with a

restlessness which alarmed his mother more and more.

“I can’t wait, I tell you, I can’t. I must have some money to-morrow, or the next day at the latest. You can find it for me somehow; people with property can always raise money. I tell you I must have it.”

“But what do you want it for?”

“Oh, heaps of things. Nobody can get on without money, and I’m always short—always.”

He got up, looked out of the window, which was at the front of the house, commanding a good view of the trees in the Priory grounds. Then he put his hands wearily up to his head, and was silent for a few moments. The view from the window apparently sent his thoughts into a new channel.

“I think it’s awfully silly of you, mamma, to quarrel with those people who have taken the Priory—or to let the girls quarrel with them, which is the same thing,” he added, as he saw his mother about to protest. “Olive and Myrtle turned their heads away in the rudest manner when they saw two of the sons in the garden. Now it’s absurd to pretend that they haven’t a right to walk about the place they’ve rented, and you’ll end by driving away good tenants, if you don’t take care.”

“It isn’t my fault, Edward,” said Mrs. Blean, who, utterly puzzled and distressed by the change in her son, thought it best to humor him as much as possible. “You see they are not quite the same sort of people as the rest of our neighbors, and so they don’t get on very well with anybody.”

“Oh, but that’s such rot!”

Poor Mrs. Blean was thunder-struck. To hear such a word from the lips of her darling son seemed to her the most striking proof of entire demoralization that he had yet given. He went on without noticing the effect of his shocking language: “Nobody troubles about that nowadays. In our grandmothers’ time, I believe, people never condescended to know anybody else until they had found out their history for four generations back. Now, in town, if a man’s got a big house, and above all if he gives good champagne, you go to the house and drink the champagne if his father drove a penny ’bus. These people are rich, very rich; the old man has some mines out in America which may make him a millionaire any day. He might be very useful to you, and here you all go insulting them.”

“My dear Edward,” said Mrs. Blean gently, “how can you say that without knowing anything? You are tired now, and worried perhaps. Go and dress for dinner; it will be ready in a few minutes; and presently we will have another talk, and I will do the best I can to satisfy you on every point.”

Edward opened the door slowly, looking on the ground.

“Money too?” he said, in a sort of sleepy way.

“Yes, money too, as far as I can,” said his mother, with a sigh.

Modest as the establishment in the village house was, the ladies still kept up the custom of dressing for dinner, and assembled in the little dining-room which the former occupants of the place had been

content to call the back parlor, in low-necked dresses. Edward, however, came down in a morning coat and waistcoat, and said, in answer to his mother's look of reproach, that to keep up the customs of a mansion in a cottage was absurd. And the girls looked just a little inclined to agree with him.

Of course the twins had not been able to resist the temptation of telling their elder sisters of Edward's behavior at the station, and equally of course the elder girls had decided that he must have been the victim of a champagne-luncheon. When, therefore, they had to admit that the guess was a wrong one, they were at first as much bewildered as their mother herself. Edward was brusque, somewhat absent in manner from time to time, and more slangy in his talk than ever before; but there was nothing about him to suggest that only half-an-hour before he had been under the influence of drink. The amount of wine he consumed at dinner, however, made them rather uneasy; still they could not say that it seemed to have any effect upon him, and when they went into the drawing-room, there was still nothing in his manner to suggest that he was not perfectly sober.

His mother would have liked to have him again by herself for a little while, but he seized the twins each by a shoulder and took them over to the window-seat to read them a lecture:

“Now look here, young women,” he said, severely, “I'm going to talk to you about your idiotic conduct in thinking you can snub those young fellows at the Priory. Never mind what their father was or is. The sons are all decent young chaps enough, much

better educated than I've been, and much better-looking."

"Oh, yes, that's true," said Myrtle thoughtfully, without noticing the rather disparaging nature of her remark.

"Well, then, you be more civil, both of you. The best thing that could possibly happen to any of you would be for one of those young fellows to take a fancy to you and——"

But here he was interrupted by such a chorus of shrill feminine indignation as drowned even his deepest big brother voice. He was surrounded in an instant by all his sisters, exclaiming, protesting; haughty, angry, contemptuous, and fierce. The very suggestion had insulted them as they had never, never been insulted before. The twins went further. In spite of warning looks from their mother, in spite of her attempted interference, they hurled at their brother, in alternate sentences, a full account of their supposed grievances of that day and the day before, winding up by saying that one of them had set a swarm of rats running at Jane; and as they said this, they pointed triumphantly to the bandage which, hidden by a ribbon, was round her right wrist.

The effect of their words shocked the poor little twins beyond measure. Edward listened in a sort of stupid silence to their tale, as if he scarcely took it in. When, however, they had finished, he repeated to himself, in a slow, rather thick voice: "Let a rat bite my sister's wrist! My sister's!"

Then, before they could add another word, he sprang up from the window-seat with a fierce cry,

and stood for a few seconds in the middle of the room, swaying backwards and forwards, staring in front of him, repeating the words he had just uttered in a still lower voice than before. His face had lost all trace of color, and become a leaden white.

His mother, running towards him, called out "Edward!" in a heart-broken tone of voice. He started, looked at her, and brushed her arm roughly aside, while his face grew crimson to the roots of his hair.

"I'll teach them," he said between his teeth—"I'll teach them to insult a member of my family. I'll shoot them—shoot the first man among them that refuses to apologize."

He spoke so indistinctly that the girls could not understand all he said. But Jane understood enough to reply: "Oh, Edward, they did apologize—they did." But before she had finished speaking he had broken away from their detaining arms, and was running down the street towards the Priory.

The girls exchanged looks of terror. Their mother, making a brave effort, tried to reassure them.

"It will be all right," she said, "it is only his way of speaking. He has been ill lately, I can see that; and he is worried, very much worried. They will see that he only wants an apology, as any high-spirited brother would do. And they will give it. It will be all right."

The elder girls exchanged glances, and affected to acquiesce entirely in their mother's suggestion. But they got together for a moment in the corner by the piano, and Jane whispered to Pamela:

“What do you think is the matter?”

And Pamela answered in a lower whisper still:

“It looks as if—as if he was going—out of his mind.”

“That’s what I think,” Jane whispered back.

CHAPTER IV.

VERY OPEN HOSTILITIES.

NOT one of the four girls cared much for their only brother, and it was not their fault. As not unfrequently happens in a family where there is only one boy, the mother, judicious enough in the education of her daughters, had fallen into the error of making an idol of that one son and of letting him know it. So that Edward, already handicapped by the inheritance of his father's utterly selfish disposition, had sunk to the level of a mere burden upon his family, about whose doings, moreover, there was always a little anxiety brooding in the minds of his feminine relatives.

This latest action of his, following his eccentricities at the station, filled them all with dismay, which the girls tried to hide for the sake of their mother. But knowing the temper of the young St. Rhadegunds, they felt some excitement about the result of his visit. Olive, indeed, secreting herself behind a heavy curtain in the window-seat, put her little pink face against the pane and watched for his return. In about a quarter of an hour from the time of his departure, there came from behind the curtain a little suppressed explosion of girlish laughter. Myrtle slipped into the window-seat, and there

was another suppressed explosion. Then there were steps in the little stone-paved yard.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean, still trying to hide her anxiety, got up and went out of the room. Behind her back the elder girls peeped into the narrow passage, and were in time to see the door open and a strange figure enter.

With water streaming from his hair, his hands, his clothes, covered with green duck-weed from head to foot, and with his feet going squelch-squelch in his boots as he walked along, Edward presented a piteous spectacle. His mother screamed with indignation and solicitude.

“Who has done this?” she asked, most unnecessarily.

He spluttered out the name of her tenant, with epithets which struck terror to her heart.

“Hush, hush, Edward,” she said, as she drew him upstairs. “It is infamous, infamous; but they shall apologize, they shall. I will insist upon it.”

“Apologies w-won’t prevent my c-catching a b-b-beastly cold!” snarled Edward, as he disappeared from his sisters’ sight, round the head of the staircase.

The girls shut themselves softly into the drawing-room, and laughed, as noiselessly as they could, till the tears ran down their cheeks. It was only when they heard their mother’s step descending the stairs that they left off, and hurriedly dispersing to different improvised occupations, tried to look as if they were very sorry. But their mother was not so easily deceived; and being still much excited

about the outrage to her son, she scolded them all angrily, and said they ought to be ashamed of themselves to laugh, when their brother had only tried to avenge the indignities offered to them. Then she sat down to the writing-table, and with angry eyes and tightened lips dashed off a hurried note, which she addressed to—

“JOHN ST. RHADGUND, ESQ.,

“ST. DOMNEVA’S PRIORY,

“SALTERNES COURT,

“KENT.”

She left the room, called the housemaid, and instructed her to take the note to the Priory at once.

But Jane, hearing the order given, slipped out into the passage, and detained the maid by a gesture, while she put her arm round her mother’s shoulders and whispered:

“Don’t send it, mammy dear. I think we’ve been a little in the wrong as far as these people are concerned. It is natural for you to be angry, but hadn’t you better wait and write to-morrow?”

“No, you must allow me to know best. Go at once, Amy.”

And Jane went sorrowfully and apprehensively back to the drawing-room, while Mrs. Hoad-Blean returned to her half-drowned darling upstairs. Pamela looked at her sister inquiringly, and Jane shook her head.

“It was no use,” she said. “I’m afraid there is going to be what Edward would call ‘a jolly row.’”

I shall waylay Amy and try to find out how they took it."

So when the maid came back, Jane went out to meet her and asked who took the note.

"I took it round to the front, ma'am, 'cos of that great barking dog in the yard that I'm frightened of. The young gentlemen was in the front, smoking, and all laughing very merry. And one of them took the letter, and when he see who it was from, they nearly laughs again, and then pretends to be very solemn. And he told me, the great tall one did, to wait for an answer. An' he went indoors, an' I heard a great shout, like as if he an' somebody else was burstin' themselves with laughing, ma'am. An' then he come out an' give me this note."

Jane took the letter, which was directed in a beautifully neat masculine hand to—

“MRS. HOAD-BLEAN,

“SALTERNES,

“KENT.”

“Very well, Amy; I will take it upstairs,” she said.

As soon as Mrs. Blean had read the note, Jane saw by the expression of her face that her fears were well-founded.

“May I read it mamma?” she asked, gently.

“If you like,” said her mother, in a despairing tone.

Jane took it up and read these words:

“Mr. St. Rhadegund has received Mrs. Hoad-

Blean's letter, and is glad of the opportunity of affording the explanation which Mrs. Hoad-Blean requires. Mr. Edward Hoad-Blean having called at the Priory about half-an-hour ago without his hat, in a state of great excitement, and threatened to shoot Mr. St. Rhadegund and his family, that family, with the sanction of Mr. St. Rhadegund, felt compelled, in the best interests of themselves and of Mr. Edward Hoad-Blean himself, to eject that gentleman from the premises. They regret exceedingly that, in crossing the yard, the gentleman had the misfortune to fall into the duck-pond.

"If Mrs. Hoad-Blean will appoint an hour at which Mr. St. Rhadegund can call upon her, he will be pleased to arrange to give up the Priory immediately, which, from the tone of Mrs. Hoad-Blean's note, he understands to be what she desires."

When she had read this, Jane looked grave too.

"I was afraid of something like this, mamma," she said, sadly. "It would be very inconvenient for them to give it up, would it not?"

"Inconvenient!" exclaimed her mother bitterly. "It will be much more than that. I simply don't know what I shall do. Of course I had reckoned upon their tenancy."

Jane looked thoughtful.

"It's a pity," she said. Then, after a few moments' consideration, she said: "You wish them to stay, don't you, mammy?"

"Of course I do. But you see it's of no use. They won't."

“Will you give me full power to treat with them, and arrange things so that they shall stay?” said Jane, with decision.

“It won’t be of any use.”

“May I try?”

“Oh, yes, if you like. You can’t do more harm than has already been done by you as well as the rest,” answered her mother impatiently.

“Then I will go and see the old gentleman at once,” returned Jane, without taking any notice of her mother’s petulant reproach. “He spoke to me very good-naturedly this morning, and I think he is kind-hearted, if only he is approached in the right way. Good-bye, mammy. Perhaps I shall have some good news when I come back.”

Now Mrs. Hoad-Blean had had occasion to put some reliance on her eldest daughter’s judgment, but she thought that this was a case beyond her powers. But she gave the girl a kiss, and a faint smile of gratitude for her sympathy, before she let her go.

If the distracted mother could have witnessed the scene which was at that moment taking place in the dining-room at the Priory, her doubts as to the success of her daughter’s mission would have been doubled.

As soon as Amy had started to carry the answering note, which had contained the sentiments of old Mr. St. Rhadegund in the language and hand-writing of his son Dick, the three younger boys returned tempestuously to the dining-room to learn what that note had said. Jim was indignant that it had

been couched in such comparatively inoffensive terms.

“You should have given it ’em hot and strong, Dick,” he grumbled. “I wish you’d let me write it. I’d have put in something that would have made them curl up, especially that stuck-up May-pole of a Lady Disdain who was here this morning. I didn’t think I could hate a girl as I hate that one. With her martyr-like airs of not minding, and being too proud to scream. I should like to throw a pail of water over her, and see if that wouldn’t make her squeal out.”

“*That* one!” cried Dick. “Why, she’s a pearl compared to the little hussy with the dark hair that cheeked me so yesterday. I swear I could have boxed her ears.”

“I don’t see so much harm in those two big ones,” cried little Bob. “It’s those beastly twins that I can’t stand. They look at me just as if I was a ragamuffin out of the streets, and turn away their heads whenever they see any of us coming. I’m going to put a string across the road next time I see them coming past.”

“No, boys, no, I can’t allow none o’ that,” broke in their father’s kindly voice in grave tones. “You mayn’t be what them folks calls gentlemen, though what the difference is between you and them I can’t see, ’ceptin’ you’ve the misfortune to ’ave a father that was born before folks got so mighty partic’lar about them there h’s. But you’re men, and you mustn’t play no mean tricks on them that’s only women.”

“You’re too indulgent, father,” said Dick, who had stretched himself out on the morocco-covered sofa, with a cigar between his lips. “There isn’t so much difference between men and women that the good behavior should have to be all on one side. It was all very well to call them angels in your time, when they just existed, and simpered, and didn’t make themselves actively offensive. But now that they do just what men do, only don’t do it half as well, they’ve shown themselves up, and broken the spell, and let us see that they’re just a superior sort of animal, and so much our inferiors as not to be worthy to be named in the same breath with us.”

All the other boys roared with appreciative laughter, in which their father joined with a twinkle in his eye and a shake of the head.

“You’ll change your toon some day,” he said, dryly. “We all go after the gals sooner or later, an’ it’s better to go early than late. If you leave it late you may ’ave the luck of poor old Fitzjocelyn at the Court. ’E married late, an’ see what ’e’s got!”

But the outburst of abuse of Lady Constantia which followed these words was mild compared with what they had lavished on the Hoad-Blean girls. The old lady was amusing, and they could not have spared her. They did not take to heart her enmity as they did that of their foes of their own generation. Presently Jim asked a question which cast a slight gloom upon the party.

“I suppose, then, governor, after that letter of Dick’s, we shall have to turn out, eh?”

“Yes, if she wants us to, certainly,” replied the father. “And I sha’n’t be sorry neither. I never lived on bad terms with my neighbors before, and I don’t like it. I thought we should ha’ got along here as comfortable as anything, for I must say I quite took a fancy to the old lady and those pretty gals.”

“Pretty!” echoed Tom contemptuously. “I don’t see this great beauty I hear so much about. Why, that Pamela that they call the prettiest girl in Kent, I don’t see that she’s good-looking at all. Nobody would think anything of her out in the States.”

“Oh, I don’t say that,” put in Dick, with an air of generosity. “She’s got a fairish complexion, and a decent figure, and her eyes aren’t bad, and her hair looks pretty in the sun. And she hasn’t got the enormous splay feet some of these English girls have, either; or else she wears better boots, or something. And there’s something about the way her head’s put on her shoulders that’s rather taking, and her ears aren’t too big, nor her hands. But she’s a vixen and no mistake!”

“You seem to have looked her over pretty well!” said Jim. “I’m sure I shouldn’t have discovered so many good points if I’d looked at her five years. To my mind, the only one of the family who has any pretensions to good looks is that beast Jane. Now she has got pretty hair and a good figure, if you like! But if ever a girl tried hard to make her good looks count for nothing, and to make men run away from her like the plague, it’s that girl.”

“Well, boys, they’re not the only girls in the world. I think we’ll try further north next time. I was born in Kent, in a workhouse for all I know, and I was dragged up in Lunnon. But now I’ve tried ’em both since I’ve made my pile, and I don’t care so much for neither of ’em. S’pose we look out for a place up Yorkshire way?”

But the boys were not eager in their answer. The enmity between them and their neighbors had undoubtedly given an interest in life to the lads—an interest rendered doubly keen by the fact that some of these enemies were of the opposite sex and not ill-looking. They didn’t want to go to Yorkshire, but they felt that it would be a little inconsistent to say so. In the slight pause which followed, Bob, who had his elbows on the window-ledge, and his cheeks puffed up on his hands in the endeavor to hide his eyes with them, suddenly turned round and pirouetted further into the room.

“It’s one of the girls, the eldest!” he exclaimed, in tones of excitement.

There was a perceptible stir in the emotions of every member of the group. Jim was fired into anger.

“She’s got more cheek than all the rest, that one,” he said, fiercely. “Let me see her, father. I won’t be rude—really I won’t; only I’ll just let her understand that we can’t have her tipsy brother interrupting us at dinner to tell us that he’s going to put a bullet through our heads!”

Then a hush fell upon the group, as they heard the front-door bell ring; there was silence until a

servant came in to announce that Miss Hoad-Blean desired to see Mr. St. Rhadegund, and that she had been shown into the drawing-room.

The old man got up, and told his boys to behave themselves during his absence.

“Now, mind, no tricks; I won’t have no tricks,” he said. “It isn’t her fault she’s got a cub of a brother; I expect she’s come to say she’s sorry for what he did.”

“Now, father,” said Jim emphatically, “don’t you let her talk you over. And don’t you say it doesn’t matter, and you’re sure it is not her fault, or anything of that sort. You let her eat humble-pie first. Tell her we’re all very angry, and that we’re not used to that sort of thing. Say everything you can think of that’ll make her wild and mad. Make her cry if you can.”

And, bound upon honor to carry out these simple instructions, his father left the four young ruffians together.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD HOME WITH A NEW FACE.

It was the first time that Jane had been in the old home since the arrival of the new tenants. Jane loved space, and air, and ease; and she stood in the long drawing-room which had always been her favorite room, drinking in the beauty of it, of the vaulted stone roof which had been their pride, of the wide stone fire-place; above all, of the view through old stone windows of the beautiful green lawns and shady trees outside. Some changes she noticed, without being able altogether to disapprove of them. A handsome tablecloth, of sober coloring, a good imitation of old tapestry, was on one of the side-tables. Some spindle-legged whatnots had been removed; and a variety of cosy arm-chairs, of different sizes and shapes, seemed to suggest that each member of the family had chosen and bought his own favorite sort of seat. And there was a mounted lion's skin at one end, which covered a worn space of the carpet and called forth Jane's unqualified admiration. There were some bronze statuettes too, which Jane affected superciliously to regard as fortunate mistakes on the part of their purchasers, so beautiful were they. And there was a new grand piano which Jane's fingers longed to try.

Jane had taken in both the old objects and the new in a few rapid glances when old Mr. St. Rhadegund came in.

It is sad to record that he did not fulfil the promises he had made by tacit assent to his sons, of treating the young lady with harshness and discourtesy. On the contrary, he held out his hand to her on entering, with a good-humored smile upon his handsome face.

“Glad to see you, my dear, in your old home, and I wish we saw you here oftener,” he said. “’Ope you won’t think my boys have knocked the place about much.”

Jane, who was by no means so calm as she looked, was grateful for this kindly greeting.

“I’m quite sure you take as much care of the place as we ourselves could do,” said she, with a very faint reflection of his smile. She tried to go on, tried to come at once to the subject in hand, but she felt a little nervous, and so at first she stammered and failed.

At once he came to her rescue, offering her one of the arm-chairs, first brushing it with his hand like a cottager.

“Well, I don’t say they’re quite as gentle-like in their ways as you young ladies, them wild young fellows. But their ’earts are all right, and their bark’s worse than their bite. ’Ope your brother’s none the worse for his duckin’,” he added, with a look which was half shy, half sly, to help her to what he felt sure was the object of her visit.

Jane had not seated herself on the offered chair,

but was leaning against the high back of it, which she grasped tightly with one hand.

“Oh,” she said, “we are so sorry, so much ashamed of him! It looked as if we had sent him, when really we have been miserable about it. He only arrived this evening, and we are sure he can’t be very well, as his conduct has been most strange. I’m afraid he made himself very objectionable,” she went on, with anxiety in her eyes.

The old man shook his head. “My dear, he was drunk. Excuse my puttin’ it plain. You needn’t tell the old lady, but that was what was the matter with him. ’E bust ’is way in past the servants, and said he’d shoot us all. Of course the boys wouldn’t stand that; ’twasn’t to be expected of ’em. So they just up and turns ’im out, and p’r’aps they wasn’t too partic’lar which way they led ’im to the gate, since that accident didn’t seem quite promisc’ous-like, I admit.”

“Of course he deserved it,” said Jane humbly. “I’ve come to apologize, not to take his part.”

Mr. St. Rhadegund looked at her shrewdly.

“Your mother didn’t send you, then?”

Jane blushed.

“My mother knows that I’ve come, and knows part of what I’m going to say. But not all. Mr. St. Rhadegund,” she went on rapidly, her breath coming and going quickly and her face growing animated, “I have come to do a very bold thing. I have come to put myself at your mercy; in fact, to say to you what my mother would not and could

not say—to tell you something about us which perhaps you do not know.”

But the old man interrupted her good-humoredly, “Law bless you, my dear, don’t take on so. I can guess what you’ve come to say. You don’t want us to take the old lady at her word and turn out.”

“That’s it—oh, that’s it exactly,” cried Jane, in much relief.

“Well, well, there’s an end of the trouble then. The old lady was angry at what my boys did to her boy, and wrote off to say more than she meant.”

“Oh, oh, yes, how clever you are! You see the difficulty we are in, we girls. The one son outweighs us all with her, of course, and we can’t dictate to our own mother; we can only suggest. You do understand, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes, I understand right enough. And a lot more than you say. But why didn’t you come and speak out frank to me before? It ’ud have saved lots of unpleasantness. Do you think because I’m not a fine gentleman I’ve got no eyes in my ’ead? And look at my boys now! I’ve ’ad ’em educated, for I got my money, or part of it, long before little Bob was born. Ain’t they fit to talk to you or anybody? Lots of fine folks would have taken ’em up, as you call it, long ago, if only they’d ’ave been willin’ to turn their back on their old father. But there was too much of the man in ’em for that, and so, instead of bein’ reckoned fine gentlemen themselves, they’re only my sons—my splendid sons.”

Jane was touched by the old man’s earnestness and feeling.

“Why,” she said, simply, “there is no one in the neighborhood to be compared with them. And nobody denies it. But they are just a little aggressive, aren’t they?”

“Maybe so,” said the old man, smiling. “But you gals are every bit as bad as them.”

Jane had come forward to take leave, but Mr. St. Rhadegund detained her offered hand.

“Come and ’ave a look at the stables,” said he. “I’ll get a lantern and take you over.”

Jane did not wish to disturb the newly-signed truce by refusing; so she was soon crossing the lawn overlooked by the dining-room, in the company of the master of the house.

Already the stables had been improved and were in course of being enlarged, for one hobby of the whole family was horses.

“My sister Pamela ought to have come here instead of me,” said Jane. “I like horses, but I have more respect than friendship for them. Now my sister can make friends with a strange horse at once. And she can ride anything.”

“Can she reely now? I’ve never seen her on ’orseback.”

“No,” said Jane, with a little laugh, “she doesn’t ride now.”

“Ah, dear, dear, the old trouble!” said Mr. St. Rhadegund sympathetically, while Jane reddened; “that’s very ’ard, very ’ard.”

“Haven’t you seen a little bay mare, with one white fore-leg, driven about in Hodgkin’s cart?”

“Hodgkin the market-gard’ner? Ay, so I ’ave, so

I 'ave; a nice-going little animal too? Did she belong to you?"

"To my sister Pamela."

They went on through the stables, but the host had become silent and thoughtful. At last, when the tour of inspection was finished, and he was shaking hands with Jane at the gate, he said, diffidently :

"If we was out in Colorado, my boys could come round on their own nags, with a couple more saddled, ready for you gals, in the morning; and you'd think nothing of havin' a ride with 'em. But over 'ere, I s'pose you'd fly up if I were to suggest such a thing. There's things like friendship and kindness out there in the new country, but over 'ere you can't be friends and you mustn't be kind to any one that doesn't stand exactly where you do yourself. Good-night, my dear. And don't let the old lady worrit."

"You are very, very good—very good and kind," said Jane as she shook his hand.

And when she got home she told the other girls that they were never to speak disrespectfully of Mr. St. Rhadegund again. She spoke more guardedly to her mother, whose resentment at the treatment her darling son had received was still fresh; but she told her that their tenant had received her very kindly, and that he had no wish to leave the Priory, unless they asked him to do so.

In the mean time Mr. St. Rhadegund had been cross-examined by his boys as to his treatment of the young lady.

"What did you take her into the stables for,

father? We saw you," said Jim, with a suspicious frown.

For to take any one over the stables was a special mark of Mr. St. Rhadegund's favor.

"You've let her get round you, I know you have," added Tom.

"You'd better have left it to me, or to Jim," said Dick gloomily. "These women-folk have a way with them that it wants no end of nerve to resist. Now Jim would have been all fire, and I should have been a stone. I bet my bottom dollar you were neither."

"Well, p'r'aps I was as near to either as you would ha' been yourselves, lads. She's a nice girl, a real nice girl, and as han'some as a queen. It makes me feel kind o' uncomfortable to see them lasses trudging along afoot, when I guess it's the fault of their men-folk they aren't livin' herein their old home still. Seems the second one--Pamela, I think they call her--is fond o' ridin', and 'ad to sell her little mare to Hodgkin the market-gard'ner. It made me real sorry to hear it all, that it did. And the girl that fond o' the animal too, it seems!"

"There! I said she'd got round you!" said Jim triumphantly.

But Dick, who had listened to this little story about the mare with a queer look on his face, stared at the candles and said nothing.

The next day passed without any encounters, hostile or otherwise, between the two families. The only event worth recording was Edward's early departure by train to spend the day at Margate,

which, though not quite the nearest, was certainly the liveliest watering-place within reach, although the season for the Jews and the Gentiles of the East End had not yet begun. He returned home late, and Mrs. Hoad-Blean met him and took him straight upstairs without letting him meet his sisters. But the girls perceived, by their mother's looks next morning, that the visit of her darling was not proving an unmixed pleasure. Again that second morning he evaded his mother's watchfulness, and went off by the same train without saying where he was going. Jane saw the cloud on her mother's face when she knew that he had gone.

Jane, with her gentle voice and manner, could say things which other people dared not say.

"Why do you let him go, mamma?" she whispered. "You needn't let him have the money."

Her mother shook her head.

"My dear," she said, with white lips, "I daren't refuse."

Jane said no more. She saw fear in her mother's face which had better not be put into words—at least, not yet.

It was two days after Jane's visit to the Priory that Pamela, who refused to take Jane's new and more humane view of the St. Rhadegund family, had an encounter with her arch-enemy Dick, which threatened to make the relations between the two houses more strained than ever. She had been performing the office of reader at a Mother's Meeting held by Lady Constantia in the school-room, a little stone building just outside the church-yard and a few

paces from the "Gray Horse," the second in importance of the inns of the village. The meeting had broken up, and the mothers were standing, prepared to go, and were enjoying the benefit of private advice from Lady Constantia, whom they all made a point of consulting in turn about some trivial domestic matter because they knew she liked it, and because each was anxious to fix herself individually in the remembrance of the local Lady Bountiful. Lady Constantia was in her element on these occasions, and her loud, decided voice was ringing through the little school-room, the stuffy atmosphere of which made Pamela's head ache. The girl couldn't bear Lady Constantia, and was not in the very best of tempers, having received a command from that lady to wait for her. At last Pamela ventured to open the door, and stood just outside, drinking in the air, which was fresh and sweet after a shower of rain. She peeped out to the left, where the old "Three Tuns," an ancient inn, which had been cruelly modernized, and the trees of the vicarage garden made a pretty village picture. She peeped to the left, and lo! there stood her little mare, Pearl, hers still in heart, though it was now some time since the mare had had to be sold to Hodgkin.

Pamela could never restrain a little exclamation at the sight of Pearl. But here was a puzzle. The little dog-cart to which the mare was harnessed was not Hodgkin's certainly. Had her old favorite changed hands again? While she asked herself this question, she could not help calling out in a low voice, "Pearl!—my little Pearl!" The mare, whose

head was turned towards her, recognized her voice, and made a step in her direction. Her owner, whoever he was, was inside the inn.

Again she called softly, "Pearl!" and again the mare made a step forward. Then she softly closed the school-house door behind her, and stepped carefully through the mud to the side of her old favorite. At that very moment, Hodgkin himself, who had been making a purchase in the butcher's shop opposite, crossed the road, and touching his hat, said, with an air of great complacency:

"Your little mare has got a good berth this time, Miss Pamela."

Before she could answer, the voice of Dick St. Rhadegund, who was "chaffing" the pretty barmaid at the "Gray Horse," fell on Pamela's ears and startled her.

"You've not sold her to those people at the Priory, Hodgkin, have you?" she asked, in a tragic voice.

"Yes, ma'am, I have. Mr. Dick must have noticed her about, for he came yesterday round to my place, and says he, 'Hodgkin,' says he, 'I want that little mare of yours,' says he, 'so name your own price.' An' I named a good 'un, you may be sure, ma'am, for the little mare's worth it. An' he said all right without so much as a word o' chaffering. 'Twas a good day's work for me, ma'am, I don't mind telling you."

But Pamela was distressed beyond measure.

"Oh, how could you? You might have spoken to me, Hodgkin. That man has a spite against us,

and I'm sure he bought Pearl on purpose to annoy me. Oh, I know he won't treat her well!"

The words were scarcely out of her mouth, when, turning sharply from Hodgkin to the mare, she saw Pearl's new master frowning at her from the other side of the animal.

"That's a most unwarrantable thing for you to say," he said, angrily. "It would serve you right if I did treat her badly, and——"

"Only you're not in Colorado now, and there's a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in this country, which prevent brutes from working their wicked will on dumb creatures," cried Pamela, with her black eyes flashing fire.

At this moment, unluckily, Lady Constantia came out of the school-house. Hodgkin beat a safe retreat; Dick sprang up into the dog-cart and seized the reins.

"What's this, my dear, what's this?" cried the lady of Salternes Court, overhearing enough of Pamela's foolish words to perceive an excuse for her interference.

But Pamela knew the autocrat's capacity for pouring oil upon the flames, and she bit her lips and held her tongue. Lady Constantia turned towards Dick, who was drawing on his driving gloves without so much as a glance at her. Lady Constantia was too much irritated by what she considered his insolence to follow the younger lady's example and be wise.

"Young man," she said, solemnly, "I never threaten unless I mean to carry out my threat. If

I hear of your treating your horse with anything like cruelty, I shall——”

“Clk—clk,” said Dick. “Let’s see if you can go.”

Raising his whip with a great flourish, Dick gave the mare a sharp cut with it, which sent her off at a spanking pace. Raising his arm again, he brought the whip down with what looked like most ferocious lashings on the mare, but which, with a dexterity which he had acquired out cattle ranching, swept the mud on the ground without touching the animal. Lady Constantia shook her umbrella menacingly.

“I’ll put a stop to your conduct, you scoundrel!” she said, with pursed lips.

Pamela said nothing: she was broken-hearted. When Lady Constantia turned and looked at her, she could only burst into tears. Without a word of farewell, or apology, she went quickly away in the direction of her home.

But she had to pass the Priors gates, and before she got to the little street in which she lived, Dick, who had made a round past Salternes Court, came up in his dog-cart. The mare was trotting along very quietly.

When they came in sight of each other the dog-cart was only some thirty yards from Pamela, who stood for a moment still with the shock of the meeting. Dick drew rein at once and approached her at a foot-pace. But with a look of horror and disgust, Pamela, hastily drying her eyes, which were again wet with tears, ran with all the speed of her young

limbs to the corner of the little street, heedless of his entreatings cry :

“Miss Pamela! One moment!—do wait one moment!”

She never stopped until she had reached the door of her home.

CHAPTER VI.

THAT HORRID MR. ISAACSON.

AND so Jane's humble visit to the Priory did very little good after all. For although she herself had established a warm feeling of friendship and kindness between herself and old Mr. St. Rhadegund, the obstinate twins still continued to turn away their pretty little faces whenever one of "those horrid boys" came in sight, and now between Dick and Pamela an entirely fresh feud had broken out. To do them justice, there was less fault now on the side of the Hoad-Blean girls than on that of their enemies; for Tom, the third son, who had remained entirely unmoved by their personal charms, and who was the most pugnacious and vindictive of the brothers, did his best to keep the quarrel alive.

This young man, unsusceptible as he was, had started an odd sort of flirtation with the down-trodden Harriet Fitzjocelyn. Despised by her mother, and neglected by her father, this young girl used to spend long hours in solitary wandering about the grounds of Salternes Court. Tom, from a nest which he had made for himself among the branches of a tree in the Priory paddock, saw the girl and was sorry for her. In the beginning Harriet, taking fright at the sight of the human

thing looking down at her from the walnut tree, used to retreat, at sight of him, to the other end of the grounds. But becoming accustomed, as the days went on, to his silent presence, she had grown gradually bolder, until in the end it had become quite an accepted thing for them to exchange half a dozen demure words upon the state of the weather or the progress the fruit trees were making.

At last one day she found him sitting on the wall that divided the Priory grounds from those of the Court.

“Good-morning,” said he.

“Good-morning,” said she.

“You don’t mind my sitting on your wall?”

“I can’t, since it’s yours, too.”

“Well, if you objected to my feet dangling over your side, I could tuck myself up on the top, you know.”

“You needn’t do that.”

“You don’t mind my being here, then?”

“No.”

“Nor my talking to you?”

“No.”

“But your mother would, though, wouldn’t she?”

Poor Harriet turned white.

“N—n—I don’t know,” she stammered.

“But you do, though. She hates us all like poison. She thinks we’re common. Do you?”

Poor Harriet was very much confused by this direct question.

“Oh, Mr. St. Rhadegund, how absurd!”

“No, it isn’t absurd to say she thinks as common,

because she does—you know she does. Now the question is, do you think us common? Because if you do, I'll get down and go away," he said, with decision.

Harriet took fright at this. She hardly ever got a chance of speaking to any one except in her mother's presence, when she was so strongly possessed by the fear of committing some *gaucherie* and being publicly reproved for it, as to be almost without the power of speech. So she took courage to say:

"Of course I don't think so, Mr. St. Rhadegund."

"You don't think us common? Well, neither do I. I think we're uncommon, uncommonly fine fellows, taking us all in all. And how a pack of miserable women-folk like those about here can pretend to turn up their noses at us I can't understand. Look at my brothers, Dick and Jim. Did you ever see handsomer fellows than they are—did you, I say?"

"N—no; they are very good-looking, certainly."

"And yet those two stuck-up Hoad-Blean girls—(Hoad-Blean! did you ever hear such a name? Not half so well-sounding as ours!)—those two idiotic girls give themselves airs of being too good for them! Look here, Miss Jocelyn, I'm thoroughly disgusted with them; and if they haven't the spirit, my silly brothers, not to leave off troubling their heads about the creatures any more, I shall just choke them off myself."

And Tom nodded with a frown of much meaning.

"Oh, Mr. St. Rhadegund, what will you do?"

"Never mind. My plans are not quite settled yet. Anyhow, I shouldn't tell you what they were, be-

cause you're friends with those girls and you'd put them on their guard. And I'm not Mr. St. Rhadegund; that's my father. I'm only Tom; so you can call me Tom."

"I don't like to."

"I knew you'd say that. But you've got to. If you don't call me Tom I won't come and talk to you any more; and I'm sure you must be glad to have me, not because my conversation is so particularly entertaining, but because you've got nobody else."

There was a long pause. Then blushing very much, and with a manifest effort, Harriet said:

"Very well. I will call you Tom. Because" (with a sigh), "as you say, I've got nobody else to talk to."

"Thank you," said Tom. "It's not very flattering, but never mind. I've got to go in now; I'm going for a ride with my brothers. Say 'Good-bye, Tom.'"

"Good-bye, T—Tom."

"By the by, I don't mind your telling your friends, the Hoad-Blean girls, that their disreputable brother is certainly going off his head. Good-bye."

Harriet did not tell her friends what Tom's opinion was, but they would not have been surprised if she had done so. For Edward's conduct was becoming a greater source of trouble to them every day.

Not only did he break out from time to time into little eccentricities of speech and manner which warranted the supposition that his brain must be slightly affected, but from various quarters tidings came to their ears of the undesirable society in which he passed his time. For he went out early in the morning and returned late at night, finding,

as he said, Salternes "too beastly slow for him." Then, from remaining away all day, he soon went on to remain away two and three days, until at last his mother was constrained to ask him why he did not go back to London, adding that she could let him have no more money and that he must apply to his father.

Edward shrugged his shoulders.

"To the governor? Yes, that would be useful, wouldn't it? He's just as hard up as I am. Well, if you can't let me have any more, I must get it somewhere else, that's all."

"Oh, Edward, you will not go to some money-lender's in town, and raise money that way?"

Edward laughed.

"I've raised all I can raise that way long ago," said he cynically. "As for going back to town, I can't. I've got no money, and no credit, and everything I had has been seized there."

"Well, dear," said his mother, trying to hide the tears which would rise to her eyes, "let me write to your uncle, and try to make him get you some appointment. I'm sure he has influence enough."

"You can write if you like," said Edward sulkily. "And now you can give me my fare to Margate, I suppose."

"What do you do at Margate that you are always there, so that your sisters and I see nothing of you?" asked his mother, as she took out her purse and reluctantly gave him the small sum he asked for.

"Yes, my sisters are very anxious for my society, aren't they? I go to Margate because I've picked

up some friends there—friends who'll do more for me than my own family, if I'm not mistaken."

In spite of his mother's entreaties, Edward would give no explanation of these enigmatic words, but took his leave abruptly and ran off to catch the train.

He did not return for a week. When, at the end of that time, he did put in an appearance in the family circle, he was dressed in a brand-new yachting suit, and had his pockets full of sovereigns which he ostentatiously used as counters when playing *vingt-et-un* with the twins.

When his mother, in much anxiety, asked him where he had got the money from, and if it was the result of gambling, he replied briefly that it was "no such luck," that it had been lent him by a friend. And no further explanation would he deign to give her.

The next morning Edward went away by train as usual, and this time he did not return for ten days. From some hints which he had let drop when he was last at home, as well as from the costume which he then wore, Mrs. Hoad-Blean knew that he had been yachting, and supposed that he had gone away on another cruise.

It was about five o'clock on an evening early in June, and Jane was pouring out tea in the drawing-room, when Pamela, who was in the window-seat, and could see down the little street, rose and ran across the room to her mother, with consternation in her face.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, it's Edward; and who do

you think he's brought with him? Why, that horrid man who tried so hard last winter to get introduced to Jane! The man who comes to church to stare at her!"

Mrs. Hoad-Blean and her eldest daughter exchanged glances of horror; but Mrs. Blean, who knew more about the unwelcome visitor than her daughters did, uttered a little cry. For she knew that this rich Mr. Isaacson, who had a beautiful country-house, not many miles off, and who had such queer people down from London to stay with him as to create a scandal in the neighborhood, was a Jew money-lender with half a dozen offices and half a dozen aliases in town. Her husband had told her so; and however deficient Captain Hoad-Blean's knowledge might be on other points, as far as money-lenders were concerned, his information might be looked upon as correct. The poor mother was distracted. That the man had some hold upon Edward she was sure, and it must be a strong one for even such a scapegrace as her son to dare to bring to his mother's roof so notorious a person. She had not made up her mind what to do or how to receive them, when Edward opened the front door, let himself and his friend in, and put his head, with an air of the easiest *nonchalance*, into the drawing-room.

"Ah, there you are, mamma," said he good-humorously, as he entered, dragging in his friend, a short, fair, rather good-looking gentleman, inclined to be stout, about forty-five years of age, and of a slightly Jewish cast of countenance. The cut of his clothes, the color of his necktie, were just a little bit too

loud to be in good taste, and he excited the horror of the girls by wearing a diamond horse-shoe scarf-pin, and a big diamond ring on his little finger.

“Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Isaacson,” said Edward.

Mr. Isaacson, genial, self-satisfied, and smiling, made Mrs. Hoad-Blean a profound bow, and spoke with an air of great humility :

“I have reason to believe you have heard bad accounts of me, Mrs. Hoad-Blean,” he said, with a rather pleasing frankness of manner. “I hope you will find out that I’m less black than I’m painted.”

“I have no doubt of it,” said Mrs. Hoad-Blean coldly.

Edward gave his mother a warning look, as taking his friend’s arm, he introduced him to his sisters. Both the elder girls were as cold as ice, but the little fair man was not to be snubbed. He went on smiling as genially as ever, and had the audacity to say to Jane with an air of triumph, and a glance of, to her, the most offensive admiration :

“This is a pleasure I’ve waited a long time for, Miss Hoad-Blean, and that I was determined to have some day.”

Jane turned her back upon him, and walked over to her mother’s side.

But already the poor mother had had her warning.

“Don’t, don’t offend him, Jane, you must not,” she said in a low voice ; “wait till I have heard everything.”

When, after having forced her to invite the unwelcome guest to stay to dinner, Edward did tell

his mother everything, or at least as much as he chose to own to, his mother found that his obligations to the Jew were so heavy, that to save her son she felt bound to be civil to his creditor: she entreated her daughters to follow her example.

“You know, my dears,” she said, “it’s only for one evening!”

“But, Pamela,” whispered Jane to her sister, as they went downstairs together, “whatever poor mamma thinks, it isn’t only for one evening.”

Pamela looked shrewdly and despairingly at her sister.

“You needn’t tell me that. That is not the sort of man to be content with the thin end of the wedge.”

The events of the evening proved that they were right. It was impossible to “sit upon” Mr. Isaacson; his elastic spirits bounded up after every rebuff, and he seemed just as pleased by a cold or indifferent answer as he could have been with a friendly and sympathetic one. One after another, they all, except Jane, gradually felt their dislike of the man melting under the charm of his pleasant manner, and his determination to make himself agreeable. Jane, however, who felt his visit a personal offense, was obdurate: she refused either to be interested or amused by him, and maintained an icy frigidity in spite of all his efforts, and of her brother’s private menaces.

“You can bully poor mamma, Edward,” she answered coolly, when he had followed her to the piano to administer a sharp remonstrance with her for her rudeness, “but you cannot bully me.”

“You’re a fool,” he said, angrily. “He has fifteen thousand a year, and he admires you immensely. If you played your cards well you could marry him.”

“I should not choose a husband among your friends, Edward,” she answered, quietly.

“Rubbish! Girls without money don’t choose their husbands: they think themselves jolly lucky if they got chosen. You’ll never have such another chance, and you’re twenty-two, remember.”

Jane cut the *tête-à-tête* short by leaving the piano abruptly. The twins were playing “Tiddledy-winks,” so she stood behind to watch them. On the other side of her the genial Mr. Isaacson was talking to Pamela, with whom he was getting on much better than with Jane, who could not help hearing what they were saying.

“Miss Pamela, believe me,” were the words she first heard, “there is nothing nowadays which you cannot procure with money, if you set about it in the right way.”

“Oh, but that’s nonsense,” she answered, laughing. “You cannot buy affection with money, for one thing.”

“Yes, you can. Easiest thing in the world. You can win the affection of any nice woman by kindness; and kindness, to most of them, is buying them everything they want. Just as you can buy your way, indirectly, to a woman’s hand, you can buy your way, directly, to her heart. I’ve so much faith in my plan that I mean to put it in practice.”

As he said this, there was something in his tone

which made Jane, against her will, glance at him. His eyes met hers, looking at her steadily, with an expression of quiet determination which filled her with dread. The blood seemed to rush to her head; she held Myrtle's shoulder tightly, feeling as if she should fall.

"You look pale, Jane," cried her mother from the other end of the room. And her voice seemed to Jane to come from a long way off.

"It's nothing, mamma. My head aches a little, that is——"

Her voice broke; she felt that she was suffocating. Crossing the room quickly, she opened the door, shut it after her, and staggered along the passage that ran right through the house from the front to the back, out into the garden.

It was a pretty garden, not very large, with little winding paths and wide flower borders, and a thick growth of shrubs and trees at the bottom. There a wooden paling only separated it from an orchard, at the bottom of which ran a wide stream hedged with pollard willows. They used to fish in that stream, and to take unwished-for baths in it, in the old days when they were little children at the Priory. Forcing herself through the shrubs, Jane laid her arms, regardless of her white dress, upon the paling, and looked out with a smarting pain at the long grass and the willows.

"Money, money, money!—always that hateful money! I wish I were dead!" She laid her head down on her arms. She could not relieve her feelings by a burst of tears as Pamela would have done;

her head ached and her eyes burned, but she could not shed a tear.

As she stood like this, she heard a sound in the grass beneath her, and with a start saw something long and dark in the thick under-growth. At the same moment a face reared itself up close to hers—a face with a pair of glowing, passionate, kindly brown eyes.

The long dark thing was not a boa-constrictor; it was Jim St. Rhadegund.

“What has money done to you,” said he, “to make you wish you were dead?”

CHAPTER VII.

MR. ISAACSON TO THE RESCUE.

ON recognizing Jim St. Rhadegund's face and voice, Jane started back from the fence, and would have run straight in-doors, but that her dress had got caught on a nail. As she stooped to set herself free, Jim sprang up from the grass.

"I hope I didn't startle you, Miss Blean," said he humbly. "On the other hand, you certainly startled me. I had dropped my match-box in the long grass, and was kneeling to look for it, when suddenly I heard a voice above me calling out: 'Money, money, money!' You haven't lost any, I hope?"

"Oh, no. I never have any to lose. I don't know what I said, or why I said it."

Jane had got her dress off the nail, and was turning to go in-doors.

"Wait one moment, please, Miss Blean. I want to tell you something; it is about your sister and my brother Dick. I dare say you know he's bought a mare that used to be hers, and she's taken it into her head that he won't treat her well. Well, it's ridiculous; I want you to know how ridiculous it is. Why, my brother Dick wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Oh, how can you say so? When he encouraged your brother to throw stones at our cat!"

“Oh, well, cats are different. But he wouldn't have done that if your sister hadn't provoked him. I never knew such a provoking girl as your sister.”

“But your brother ought not to let himself be provoked to be cruel, and Lady Constantia as well as my sister saw him whip poor Pearl unmercifully!”

“Lady Constantia! That old woman's a public nuisance, and the parish ought to subscribe to get her removed,” said Jim, who was getting angry. “What business has she to interfere at all? Why, you would never have come and interfered that day we thrashed the corn if it hadn't been for her. And you'd never have been so rude to me when I wanted to bandage your wrist if it hadn't been for her. She's your evil genius.”

“She saw your brother ill-treating the mare, though, and my sister saw him too.”

“I tell you he didn't ill-treat the mare, he only pretended to. He's ten times fonder of horses than any woman could be,” said Jim angrily. Jane made no answer, but sweeping superbly round, made a way for herself with her white hands between the thick-growing yew trees.

Jim changed his tone directly.

“Wait, oh, wait one minute,” he cried, entreatingly.

But she took no notice of the appeal until she was suddenly startled to hear a crash among the undergrowth behind her, and to feel her wrist seized in a grip there was no wrestling with.

“You *shall* wait! I won't be put off with your fine-lady airs. No, you will not get away till you've

heard me out, and if you scream you'll make yourself ridiculous. I'm not going to hurt you, but I won't be treated like this just by a girl. Now listen! I was sorry for you when I heard you speak just now in that heart-broken tone, and I wanted to comfort you, or I shouldn't have spoken at all, but should just have kept quiet in the grass till you'd gone away. But no, you wouldn't let me. You tried to snub me again, as usual. And then, just because I tried to make things right about Dick, you turn nasty, and of course make me lose my temper. Now why won't you behave like a reasonable woman?"

Jane was quite shaken out of her usual stately composure by this impetuous attack. The warm hands which held hers, emphasizing each point in their owner's vehement speech by a momentary tightening of their grasp; the passionate, flushed face of the young man as he looked into her face, and insisted on her eyes meeting his own, were experiences new and startling enough to upset her balance altogether. She began to speak, but her tongue faltered, her lips trembled, and a piteous look of helplessness came into her face.

Dick's manner changed in a moment.

"Oh, don't be unhappy, don't say I'm making you unhappy. I want to do you some good, and you won't let me," he said, in a low, tender voice. "What is this about money that troubles you so? You said you wished you were dead. Well, if it's only for want of money, let me lend you some. Do; do let me. I know it's considered an awful thing

over here, but it's absurd, isn't it? And it's more absurd still to go on wishing you were dead when you can have what you want and give pleasure to somebody else by having it."

It may be imagined what effect this shockingly unconventional offer had upon poor Jane. In horror most unfeigned she tried to get away from him, assuring him that she gave him credit for his kind intentions, but that his offer was unheard of.

"You don't understand," she said, with a touch of the haughtiness which annoyed him—"you don't understand what you're suggesting. I do know how kindly you make the suggestion, but I assure you that it is the most absurd idea that could come into any one's head. Please, please let me go."

Unconsciously the voices of the young people had risen considerably during the last few minutes, and had reached the ears of some of the occupants of the drawing-room. While, therefore, Jim, still holding her hands, was begging her to think better of her decision, and while she was again commanding him to let her go, there came suddenly upon them round a clump of evergreens the portly figure of Mr. Isaacson. Delighted at this opportunity of rescuing a damsel in distress, and the very damsel of all others for whom he would have chosen to perform that service, he sprang forward, and striking the young man a violent blow on the shoulder, commanded him to let the lady go.

"How dare you detain the lady against her will, you young ruffian?" he cried, with much ferocity. "You've had your answer: the lady won't have any-

thing to do with you. Do you think you can get an English lady for a wife by force of arms, as you would a squaw in the bush?"

The moment he received Mr. Isaacson's blow, Jim dropped the hands of the lady, who fled to the house without a moment's delay. He turned sharply round in fighting attitude, but on perceiving the person of his assailant, he let his fists fall contemptuously, saying:

"I sha'n't fight you. You're too old and too fat."

"I'm very glad to hear it," returned Mr. Isaacson, whose valor had cooled now that the lady was no longer there to witness his prowess. "And I shall be very glad to hear also that you intend to leave the lady unmolested for the future."

Jim was silent for a few moments, during which he was evidently agitated by some strong feeling. Then he said, in an altered voice:

"Are you engaged to her?"

"I am going to marry her," answered Isaacson coolly.

Jim, who had not expected this answer, stood very still for a few seconds, and looked inquiringly at Edward, who had now come up, and who was holding a lamp in his hand.

"Is it—true—what this man says?" Jim asked him.

"Of course it's true. Do you suspect my friends of telling lies?" said Edward.

Jim turned to Isaacson:

"I apologize, then, sir," he said in a husky voice. "I did not know. But I was not proposing to Miss

Blean; she hadn't given me any encouragement. She seemed unhappy: I wanted to know—if in any way—I could help her. I hope you will succeed, sir, in making her happier than you seem to have done at present." He turned abruptly, vaulted over the wooden paling, and disappeared in the orchard. Mr. Isaacson, jubilant at having got a possibly dangerous rival out of the way, chuckled to himself as he put his arm through Edward's, and returned with that young gentleman to the house.

Jane had offered only the briefest of explanations to her mother and sisters, who had heard the talking going on in the garden, but had not been able to distinguish the voices. Edward, however, seeing that Jane was the only absentee, had guessed that she was one of the speakers, and had had the happy thought of taking Isaacson into the garden in search of her.

Jane only told her mother that she had been talking to Jim St. Rhadegund over the fence; and that when Edward and his friend went out, she had come in.

She had scarcely finished this account, when the two gentlemen returned to the drawing-room. During the whole of the evening, the strength of Mr. Isaacson's influence over Edward had been apparent to the ladies; but they were rather surprised when he presently began to use it to the young ladies' advantage, by reproaching him for neglecting his home, and not taking his sisters about, as he ought to do.

"Why," said he, "if I had such a bevy of charm-

ing sisters, I should be only too proud to be seen with them on every possible occasion."

"Indeed, Mr. Isaacson," put in Mrs. Hoad-Blean, glad of the opportunity of administering a reproof to Edward's friend, while excusing her son, "he spends too much time with you to have any to spare with his sisters or with me."

"You shall not have to reproach me like that again. Now, Edward, instead of coming back with me to-night as you proposed, you shall take your sisters to Birchington to-morrow. There's a lawn-tennis tournament to be held there, which would interest the young ladies, I am sure." Perceiving a refusal in Mrs. Hoad-Blean's eye and in her compressed lips, he hastened to add: "I'm sorry that I shall not be able to be there myself, to have the honor of joining your party."

Still Mrs. Hoad-Blean, who could not have undertaken the fatiguing day herself, and did not trust much in Edward's protectorship, would have vetoed the proposal, but the girls themselves, with the exception of Jane, caught eagerly at the suggestion of such a break in their monotonous lives. So that it was decided to make the expedition on the following day. Having thus succeeded in establishing himself somewhat in the favor of three of the ladies, Mr. Isaacson then took his leave, having put up his "trap" at the "Three Tuns." And, much against the wish of Edward, who would have liked to accompany him on his drive back home, Mr. Isaacson left the house alone.

That night Mrs. Hoad-Blean insisted, much against

his will, on interviewing her son, and interrogating him on the subject of his obligations to Mr. Isaacson.

“I must know, Edward, what you owe this man.”

Her son turned upon her irritably.

“Nothing—I owe him nothing; he’ll never ask me for a penny if Jane will marry him. You know he’s in love with her; his admiration has been the talk of the neighborhood ever so long, and with your ridiculous, old-fashioned notions you left it to me to insist upon introducing him to her. How can you expect to settle the girls if you don’t make use of their chances?”

“Edward, remember you are speaking to your mother. Surely you know the reputation of this man! A money-lender too! And the persecution he has subjected Jane to, coming to church and sitting in a seat from which he could stare at her, and making his admiration, as you yourself say, the talk of the neighborhood!”

“Where’s the harm of that, since he means to marry her?”

“I would not give my daughter to such a man!”

“Oh, nonsense. You can’t have everything, and Isaacson’s a very good fellow. And he’ll steady down all right when he’s married. Do you want all the girls to be old maids on your hands, that you deliberately throw away every chance that comes in their way?”

“Edward, pray remember to whom you’re speaking. Jane detests this man.”

“Very well. Then I shall have to leave the

country. For I can never pay him back what I owe him. Good-night."

And not another word could his mother draw from him that night.

The next day, much against her wish, the four girls all started off with their brother for Birchington. They met a few friends at the tennis tournament, prosy old gentlemen, and delightful but deaf old ladies for the most part; so that the girls were beginning to feel rather bored with the entertainment when a dashing hooded phaeton drove up to the grounds, and Mr. Isaacson, very carefully got up, and pleased with the sensation made by his splendid chestnuts, threw the reins to his groom and sprang down eagerly to greet them. It was impossible not to feel more pleasure than annoyance at his appearance. Only Jane was really sorry to see him, although the three others, exchanging whispered comments as he drove up, affected to hope that he would not notice them.

"This is a pleasure!" cried he, in his genial voice, as he shook hands first with Pamela; "it was in the hope of seeing you that I managed after all to come over, but I was afraid that the doubtful look of the morning would have kept you from coming. How do you do, Miss Blean?" he continued, as he held out his hand to Jane.

But Jane, who had entrenched herself behind the twins, only bowed without giving him her hand, and answered so coldly that the poor little twins, who had quite gone over to the enemy, were really angry with her. As usual Mr. Isaacson appeared

not to know that he was snubbed, and went on to ask them if they didn't find it "rather slow."

"It isn't very amusing," said Myrtle. "It's always the same thing."

"But they've invited us," said Olive, "to have tea in the tent."

"Oh, you're not so misguided as to look forward to that, are you? Why, do you know what you'll get, that is, if you're lucky? A cup of cold tea and an earwig. And if you're not lucky, you'll get the earwig without the cup of cold tea. No, you come with me, and I'll take you to a place where they'll treat you much better."

The misguided twins were ready to be off at once; but the two elder girls hung back. They did not want to be indebted for their entertainment to their irrepressible new acquaintance. Of course, however, the two young girls were outwitted by the experienced man of the world, who, taking Olive on one arm and Myrtle on the other, went off the ground with them at a rapid pace before any one could interfere, thus compelling the elder girls reluctantly to follow with Edward.

"Where is he going to take us to?" asked Jane suddenly, when, after having walked for some minutes in the direction of the seashore, they saw Mr. Isaacson stopping before a pretty bungalow facing the sea, the veranda of which was a bower of flowers.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Edward sulkily. "Come along."

There was no help for it. Those miserable twins

had already disappeared on the other side of the veranda.

“Who lives in this house?” asked Jane sharply, when they had arrived at the front door, which was open, displaying a hall prettily furnished with oriental hangings and cosy lounging chairs. But Edward, escaping from his sisters, had followed the first comers round the veranda. Pamela and Jane looked at each other.

“We must go too—now,” said Pamela, “if it’s only to fetch away Olive and Myrtle. But don’t make a fuss, Jane, if you can help it. We’ve made a mistake, but it won’t do to be rude. We must make the best of it.” For the truth that they had been led into an ambush, had forced itself upon her mind.

Poor Jane felt ready to cry with mortification. She let Pamela precede her as they made their way round the opposite side of the house. Here they came upon a scene which, in happier circumstances, would have called forth their unbounded admiration. The broad veranda was a raised bank of flowers, in the midst of which were two little tables covered with dainty white cloths and dishes of scarlet strawberries. Half a dozen comfortable low chairs, two of which were already occupied by the excited and happy twins, were half lost among palms, hydrangeas, ferns, and tall white lilies; while baskets full of ivy geraniums and yellow marguerites hung between the pillars of the roof.

“Here is a seat for you, Miss Hoad-Blean, the post of honor,” said Mr. Isaacson, as, with the un-

mistakable manner of a host, he invited Jane to take her seat in an arm-chair covered with delicate brocade. The girl sat down with a slight bend of the head, but without a word. Her silence, however, might well have passed unnoticed in the babble made by the twins, in which Pamela presently joined. As soon as they were all seated, Mr. Isaacson touched a little silver gong on one of the tables, and two smart maids came out of the bungalow, bearing trays laden with bread and butter, sandwiches, dainty teacups, and a glistening silver tea-set.

“Miss Hoad-Blean,” said the host, turning to Jane, “may we trouble you to pour out tea?”

She tried to say “With pleasure,” but the words, though she formed them with her lips, made no sound. She was growing so much afraid of this man that the sound of his voice, when he addressed her, made her turn cold. He had no mercy.

“It is presuming upon your good-nature, I know,” said he suavely. “But I’m one of those unconscionable people who are never satisfied. As soon as I have obtained one favor, I make it the stepping-stone to another. Give me an inch and I take an ell.”

A burst of delighted laughter from Olive and Myrtle saved Jane the necessity of replying. She poured out the tea, but she tasted none herself; she allowed Mr. Isaacson to help her to strawberries, but she did not touch them. Presently perceiving this, her host, with the first touch of annoyance he had allowed himself to show, expressed a hope that she

had no fault to find with the tea and that she did not dislike strawberries.

“They are very nice, thank you,” said she, raising her eyes coldly for a moment to his complacent face; “but I am neither hungry nor thirsty.”

It was the one small revenge she could take, not to eat or to drink anything of Mr. Isaacson’s providing. To his intense chagrin, when tea was over, she rose from her seat fasting.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RESOLUTE WOOER.

PAMELA, who knew her eldest sister's face well enough to see that she was in great trouble, found an opportunity, when the twins were engrossing the attention of the two gentlemen, to exchange a few words apart with her.

"He admires you very much, dear. Are you quite sure you couldn't like him?"

Indeed Mr. Isaacson's admiration was evident enough. When speaking to Jane his whole manner underwent a change, not superficial merely, not assumed, for he grew red when he addressed her, and a tremor came into his voice. On the other hand, when he was talking to any one else, his eyes were still fixed on Jane.

Pamela had never heard the gentle-mannered Jane put so much emphasis into any speech as she did into her answer :

"I hate him. I can't bear to look at him, or to hear him speak."

"Really and truly?"

"Most really and most truly."

Pamela looked half incredulous. If she had been Jane, she would have shown far more spirit: she

would have been audacious, rude; she would have shown Mr. Isaacson very plainly that she would jump into the sea rather than have anything to do with him. But Jane was different. Of a calmer and more thoughtful temper than her sister, she saw more clearly all the different sides of the question, and moreover, she had only the courage that suffers without complaint, and shrank from such bold steps as her more daring sister would have proposed. All the family troubles, the want of money, Edward, the tacit hostility with the Priory, and Lady Constantia's coolness towards them—all seemed to jostle each other in her mind, and point out to her that marriage with this detestable, fair, fat-faced Jew was the only remedy for all of them. Mr. Isaacson was rich, he was the only person who had any control over Edward—a man who would not be dictated to. But every reason which made the encouragement of his admiration seem desirable only increased her aversion for him. His voice, breaking suddenly upon these thoughts, made her start.

“Won't you do me the honor to come inside and see over the little place, Miss Blean? Your younger sisters, who are much kinder to me than you are, are already inside.”

Jane moved forward with as much animation as a statue, and let herself be shown over the bungalow with the rest of the party.

The twins were in ecstasies with all they saw. Indeed, the place was furnished with taste as well as with luxury; just a little too extravagantly, perhaps, for a mere summer-house, as the owner

called the place, but with a prettiness with which a young girl's taste could find no fault.

"Oh, how happy one could be here!" cried Olive, accepting an invitation to try a particularly inviting chair, and looking up at the painted ceiling, at the figured silk curtains, and the silver lamps which hung on brackets from the walls.

"I wish you could make your eldest sister feel the same!" said Mr. Isaacson, in a low tone of voice, which, however, Jane's ears caught as they were intended to do.

Olive sat up and stared at him with round eyes of wonder.

"Why," said she, "do you want to marry Jane?"

For this is the last folly of which a younger brother or sister suspects any man.

"It is the dearest wish of my life," he replied, with as much dramatic effect as he could manage.

"And won't she?" Olive went on more incredulously still. And receiving her reply in her sister's troubled looks, she added ingenuously: "Oh, what a goose she is!"

"Look, look, Olive!" cried Myrtle from the window, "there's such a lovely little steam-yacht out there. I should like to be on her!"

"Would you? Well, your wish can be very easily satisfied," said Mr. Isaacson, "for I ordered her to be brought round here in case any of you young ladies would like to try a little cruise."

Pamela looked at Jane with meaning. The ambush which had been laid for them was now confessed. Even she, who had none of the bitterness

against their host felt by Jane, saw the propriety of refusing to take advantage of this new offer. But the twins were irrepressible. They were rather spoilt, these two sweet-faced little creatures, and the force of their united will was irresistible. Mr. Isaacson, thanking his stars that he had secured such allies, now suggested that the yacht should take them as far as it could on their way home. Landing at Deal, they could reach home thence by train. It was all settled in a few minutes. Mr. Isaacson got out his map and his time-table, and calculated distances; and the twins, intoxicated with delight, were looking forward to a perfect end to a perfect day, when Jane, with the same perversity that Olive had already remarked in her, tried to spoil all their pretty plans by declining to go on the yacht at all. Very quietly, but very firmly, she declared that she should be sea-sick, and declined to venture. Mr. Isaacson was equal to the occasion.

“Don’t let us deprive the little girls of their pleasure,” said he indulgently. “If Miss Pamela is not afraid of the sea, I shall be delighted to take them on the yacht; and we will make this chivalrous brother of ours take you back, Miss Blean.”

Jane looked relieved, yet she was not without a lingering suspicion of his good faith. Edward grumbled loudly, and suggested that she could go back by herself. But his host would not hear of this.

“There is my phaeton at your disposal,” he said. “I will send round to the place where it is put up, and it will be here in a few minutes. You will have

a very pleasant drive back in the cool of the evening. The groom knows the way, I think. At any rate, on these country roads, the directions are pretty simple to get from one place to another."

Edward was immediately reconciled to the idea of escorting his sister home; but she herself, having noticed that the chestnuts were spirited animals, and having a very mean opinion of her brother's capacities in any direction, protested that she would rather go back by train. She was very anxious to put herself under no further obligation to Mr. Isaacson, and the thought of taking such a long drive in a vehicle which everybody knew to be his, was distasteful in the extreme to her. Edward, of course, paid no more heed to her objections than did Mr. Isaacson himself. He had never before been trusted to drive the chestnuts, much as he had longed to do so; and he could scarcely believe his ears when his friend proposed this arrangement. Pamela, who was as much delighted with the prospect of the sea trip as her younger sisters, was inclined to make light of poor Jane's distress.

"You may be sure Mr. Isaacson would never trust him to drive those lovely horses if he thought he couldn't do it," said she. "And after all, Jane, isn't it just what you wanted, to go back without him?"

But Jane was not to be comforted. By the time the phaeton came round, Pamela and the girls had already started for the shore, where a boat was waiting to convey them to the yacht. Mr. Isaacson lingered with Edward at the door, and helped Jane up into the seat beside the driver's. Edward, Jane

noticed, looked unaccountably surly and annoyed. The reason was soon apparent. Scarcely had Jane taken her seat, when Mr. Isaacson, with a rapidity and neatness which betrayed the fact that his action was premeditated, sprang up into the seat beside her. The groom left the horses' heads and got up into his place behind as quickly as if he had been moved by a spring, while at the same moment Edward stepped down, and the horses started.

It was all so sudden, everything had been so adroitly managed, that Jane, who had none of Pamela's alert nimbleness both of mind and body, was stupefied, and for a few moments incapable of uttering more than a protesting "Oh!" When she had collected her wits, the phaeton was already going along at a good rate of speed, and Pamela and the twins had reached the boat without so much as a look behind.

Jane felt utterly helpless, lonely, miserable, and, above all, afraid. Instead of being touched by the persistency of his suit, she was shocked and alarmed by it. The Jew's pushing audacity filled her with repugnance; his bold-eyed admiration made her blush. A man less shrewd than Mr. Isaacson might have thought, as he looked at the pale, shrinking girl, who sat so silently and so timidly with averted head, without uttering a single protest, that she would be too ridiculously easy a conquest. The clever Jew knew better. He was seriously in love with the tall, dignified, stately young woman; his admiration dated from the very first moment when, seeing her at some small local function, and notic-

ing the grace with which she returned the greetings of her friends, he had at once decided that she was the ideal wife for him. This was really very flattering to Jane, since the Jew was not what was known as a marrying man. It is true that the fact that her acquaintances were all members of the county families, men and women whom Isaacson had had pointed out to him, but with whom he had hitherto found it impossible to get on terms of acquaintance, had something to do with the rapidity with which he made up his mind; but the grace of her person and of her manners had still more. Money, what money can bring, and a fair amount of good looks, he considered that he possessed already; if he could get a wife who possessed dignity and the friendship of "the best people," Isaacson thought he should soon be as near to perfect happiness as he could hope to be. With the tenacity of his race he had therefore sought, for a long time unavailingly, to make her acquaintance; now that this preliminary object was obtained, he was not likely to let the grass grow under his feet.

That there were still a great many steps between him and success he never doubted for a moment. But her coldness and reserve did not daunt him. He waited for a protest, but none came. He had to start the battle himself.

"I hope you will forgive me, Miss Blean, for inflicting my society upon you when you expected the pleasure of your brother's. At the last moment, however, I took fright at the thought that he was perhaps not quite an experienced enough driver to

be trusted with so precious a charge. So, much against his will, and I am afraid much to your annoyance, I changed places with him, and sent him on the yacht, while I did myself the honor of escorting you."

Jane felt a mild impulse of rage.

"It was very good of you, Mr. Isaacson," she said, haughtily. "But if I had known your intention, I should have come back by myself by train."

Now her haughtiness was just the quality that Mr. Isaacson adored her for. He couldn't be haughty himself: he could be loud, blustering, swaggering, dictatorial, insolent; but it was not at all the same thing. He thought, therefore, that haughtiness was a born privilege of the upper classes, and the combination of the quality with a tall figure and a stately carriage was irresistible to him. Therefore he was fired into fresh admiration by her answer.

"That's very rough on me—confoundedly rough," said he, not in a despairing tone, but with some complacency.

To this pushing gentleman, the greater the lady's repugnance to him was, the more it proved his own cleverness in having obtained this *tête-à-tête* with her.

"You've never given me so much as a kind word yet," he went on, in an aggrieved tone, "and yet the silent but constant devotion of seven months might count for something, one would think."

"Not when it is manifested in such extremely offensive ways," returned Jane, with rising spirit.

But the haughtier she became, the more desperately humble grew her distasteful admirer.

“You mean that I looked at you in church?” said he deprecatingly.

“I mean that I had to change my seat more than once on account of the conspicuous manner in which you stared at me,” said Jane, flushing deeply. “It was a dreadful thing for a girl to have to do, or even to have to speak about. The mere fact that you cannot understand this shows how impossible it is that I should ever even tolerate you.”

But Mr. Isaacson was undisturbed even by this outburst.

“Oh, no; not impossible,” said he good-humoredly. “I don’t say that you can even tolerate me all at once. But a man who could wait seven months just for a bare introduction, just for the right to raise his hat to you, and to be unmercifully snubbed by you, has some patience left in him still, you may be sure.”

“You had better use it on some more promising object, Mr. Isaacson,” said Jane, with her head in the air.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when her attention was distracted from her companion by the sight of two horsemen, still in the distance, who were riding towards them along the hedgeless Kentish road. Without being able to tell why, Jane, who immediately recognized the riders as two of the St. Rhadegund boys, was thrown into a panic of alarm and acute distress. It was more than the mere dislike of being seen by any one in her companion’s society, it was a dislike of being so seen by those particular persons. As the young men came

nearer, and proved to be Jim St. Rhadegund and his brother Tom, the keen-eyed Jew noticed that it was Jim's face that flushed at the sight of the lady, and that Jane, meeting the young man's eyes only for a moment, grew paler than before. He remembered on the instant that he had seen the young man before; and a suspicion flashed into his mind that Jane's treatment of the young fellow on the preceding evening did not exactly correspond with her real sentiments towards him.

The greeting was on both sides a very cold one: Jane gave the stiffest of bows, Jim raised his hat very coldly, while Tom contented himself with raising his whip to his with a scowl.

"Who are those fellows?" asked Mr. Isaacson, with something in his tone which gave Jane the first intimation she had received of that side of the Jew's character, which he kept chiefly for his business dealings.

"They are acquaintances of ours," she answered, coldly.

"Ah!" said he, rather snappishly, "I thought they couldn't be more than that. Don't belong to one of the best families, I suppose?"

Jane, without knowing why, was nettled.

"They belong to as good a family as I know, or wish to know," she answered, quickly.

"Oh, indeed. From the young man's ungentlemanly conduct to you last night, I supposed that he was some very common person whom you were trying to get rid of."

"I should not have been so silly," said Jane, with

a little flush in her cheeks, "for it is impossible to get rid of common people."

This was a blow full in the face, and so neatly administered that even complacent Mr. Isaacson could not pretend to misunderstand. He affected to laugh, but he was so ill-pleased that he whipped up the horses smartly, and taking a shorter route than he had intended, drew up at the little house in Salternes much earlier than even Jane had dared to hope. She was elated by the success of her daring speech, and delighted to feel that the ordeal of the drive was over. So that she looked animated and particularly handsome as she stood up and prepared to descend. Mr. Isaacson, who had by this time recovered from her rebuff, was on his side again a little triumphant in the knowledge that, with her will or against it, she had been seen that afternoon in his society, which was in itself an object gained.

"I hope, Miss Blean, that this is only the first of many occasions on which I shall have the honor of driving you," said he, with a tone and manner in which humble entreaty was mingled with hope.

"And I," rejoined Jane, with some fire in her gray eyes, "sincerely trust that it is the last occasion on which I shall have the annoyance of so much as seeing you."

She turned with the intention of sweeping majestically into the house. But there on the door-step waiting for her was her mother. And to Jane's surprise and disgust, Mrs. Hoad-Blean looked displeased at her daughter's words, which she was near enough to overhear. Jane hurried past her mother into

the house; through the open window she had the mortification of hearing Mrs. Hoad-Blean exchanging civilities, in an entirely conciliatory tone of voice, with her unwelcome admirer.

“Mamma, how could you? How could you be civil to that odious man? He tricked me into driving back with him—tricked me in the most shameful manner. Wait till Pamela comes back, and you shall hear.”

But Mrs. Hoad-Blean sighed wearily and spoke petulantly. Besides her anxiety on Edward's behalf, this poor lady, who had felt the pinch of poverty so keenly herself, could not stifle an involuntary wish that Jane would regard this rich suitor with more favor. What if he were a money-lender? She was old enough to believe that there might be good money-lenders as well as bad ones. And what if he were not, in age, appearance, and, above all, “tone,” the ideal of a young girl's heart? Captain Hoad-Blean had been all that, and he had made a very bad husband: this far less promising individual might make a very good one. So reasoned the poor harassed mother, who, though she would never have attempted to coerce her daughter, would have been, oh! so glad if Jane could have taken a fancy to this rich man. So she answered with a good deal of bitterness:

“Oh, I don't want Pamela to tell me that Mr. Isaacson did his best to get a hearing from you, and that you were very rude to him!”

Jane turned round, quite white, and looked at her mother. But Mrs. Hoad-Blean pressed her lips

tightly together and would not meet her daughter's eye.

Then haughty, dignified Jane broke down, not into loud sobbing, but into a torrent of silent tears. Edward, the twins, Pamela, and now her own mother, were all against her. And Jim, that insolent Jim St. Rhadegund had given her a look which she could not forget. Jane started up. There was one hope left to her, one only.

"I will go up to papa—I will go up to papa!" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean answered only by a short laugh, which strengthened Jane in her resolution. She and papa, she thought to herself, were the two members of the family who were misunderstood.

He would take the part of his daughter's heart, she felt sure, against all the world.

CHAPTER IX.

A BROKEN REED.

JANE was full of impatience for the return of the yachting party. She felt sure that when her own account of Mr. Isaacson's conduct was confirmed by Pamela's, her mother would agree with her in thinking that she had been shamefully treated. She examined the time-table, and finding that the last train from Deal reached Salternes at a quarter to seven, knew that they could not possibly catch it, and that she must resign herself to waiting while they came by road.

It was not until past nine that the sound of horses' hoofs and merry girls' voices outside announced the home-coming of the party. All three girls burst into the drawing-room radiant, breathless, each striving to get out her own version of the story of their delightful day before the others. Mrs. Hoad-Blean was nearly torn to pieces. Myrtle seized her on one side, Pamela on the other, while Olive put her chin on her mother's shoulder from behind. But Mrs. Hoad-Blean was thinking, as she put her hand into her pocket, of the terribly heavy fare she would have to pay for this nine miles' journey.

“How much is it?” she asked, anxiously, as Edward sauntered into the room.

But at that moment the fly was heard driving away.

“I’ve paid it, mamma,” said he.

And having recovered his spirits a little since his disappointment about the drive in Mr. Isaacson’s phaeton, he threw himself on to the sofa and listened with some complacency to his sisters’ account of the magnificence of his friend.

“Oh, mamma, such a yacht! It was like a little palace!” cried Olive.

“And all the brass shone like gold, mamma, and the deck glistened—it was so bright!” cried Myrtle.

“And she seemed to cut through the water like a fish,” added Pamela. “I never enjoyed myself so much in my life. Oh, Jane, why didn’t you come too?”

Jane was dumb. It became every moment clearer that she would find no support here.

“And the little cabin on deck was so beautifully fitted——”

“And we had ices, and beautiful lemonade, because Pamela would not let us have any wine.”

“Oh, Jane,” wound up Myrtle, in an outburst of irrepressible, passionate enthusiasm, “I hope you were kinder to Mr. Isaacson on the way back! It’s all because of you that he’s so kind, Pamela says. You will marry him, won’t you?”

“And then we shall be able to go on the yacht whenever we like!”

“Really, Jane, if you had been with us——” began Pamela.

But she stopped. For the misery depicted on Jane's white face suddenly made her sensible of her indiscretion.

Edward, too, noted the expression of his elder sister's face, and he spoiled the general harmony by saying in a snarling tone:

"I should advise her not to be too jolly cock-sure that Isaacson wants to have anything to do with her. Do you really think, you pack of silly girls, that a man with fifteen thousand a year can't have his choice of all the best-looking girls in the county, without having to beg for a civil word from a whey-faced Maypole of a girl who's always in the sulks?"

"Well, Edward," said Pamela, taking up her sister's cause, though not in the way Jane would have liked best, "whatever you may think of Jane's looks, it's absurd to pretend that Mr. Isaacson doesn't admire her, or that he doesn't want to marry her. Why should he have been so anxious to drive her back, when she certainly didn't give him much encouragement?"

While this discussion was going on, Jane slipped quietly out of the room. But her troubles were not even over for the evening, for Pamela presently followed her upstairs, and putting her arm round her sister's waist, began cautiously to suggest that really, since Mr. Isaacson was no doubt very seriously in love with her, and since Jane certainly was not in love with anybody else, that it might—really, you know—be as well to try—just to try, you know—if she couldn't like him a little.

"What, *you*, Pamela!" cried Jane. "You can't

understand how I hate him. A money-lender too! Besides, you don't know him as well as I do. Now and then I can hear something in his voice and see something in his face which shows me that he's hard and cruel really, and not a bit like what he seems to you and the girls."

But Pamela thought she was fanciful, and when Jane expressed her intention of going up to town on the following morning, and asking her father's advice about her difficulty, the younger sister shook her head, and said :

"I shouldn't expect too much from that, Jane. Papa's advice will be : Marry him."

But Jane would not believe this. She had, being a careful girl, enough money saved out of her allowance to be able to make the journey without asking her mother for money, and she had made up her mind. Pamela thought it a terrible extravagance, for "nothing at all," as she said.

"Of course you'll go up third class?" she asked. "*I* should."

But Jane was not democratic enough or courageous enough to make this sacrifice or dignity to economy.

"No," she said, "I could not. Traveling by myself, too!"

"Why," said Pamela, rising, candle in hand, and giving her sister a good-night kiss which had no great warmth in it, "it's much safer than going first class. And really, Jane, since you think so much of little things like that, it does seem to me that you're silly not to marry a rich man when he asks

you. If you cared for anybody else it would be different—but as you don't; well, it is silly.

The next morning Jane was leaving the house as her sisters came down to breakfast. Her train did not go until eleven minutes to ten, so she had a long time to wait. But she felt she could not face her mother and all the girls again this morning, with their praises of Mr. Isaacson—or rather, of Mr. Isaacson's possessions—and their reproaches, implied or expressed, of her folly. As she did not want to wait for nearly half an hour at the station, she went into the church-yard, which was close by, and sat down on an old tombstone under the trees. She had not been there more than a few moments when she became aware that a pair of human eyes were watching her over the church-yard wall. Though she would not raise hers to meet them, she knew quite well whose they were. Therefore she only pretended to be surprised when presently Jim St. Rhadegund came along the path, raised his hat, passed her with the air of one who was too intent upon the study of tombstones to have any time to spare for a stray fellow-creature; and after a tour of inspection of the stones on that side of the church, came back to her across the grass as if led by accident into her neighborhood.

“Nice morning,” said he. “You're about early, Miss Blean.”

“Yes, I'm going up to town.”

“By the nine forty-nine? So am I.”

Jane looked towards the station, but said nothing.

“We often run up for the day, my brothers and

I," he exclaimed. "You see you can't get anything you want in the village. And if it's anything particular that's wanted, like a gun, or a fishing-rod, or a saddle, you may just as well go up to town and get a good choice as go pottering off to Canterbury or Margate to look for what you know you won't get."

"Oh, yes," said Jane.

There was a long pause. Jim evidently had something in his mind which he wanted to say, but did not know how to express.

"I—I suppose we shall soon—suppose you will soon be going up—going off altogether?" he stammered out at last.

Jane raised her eyes, but not with her usual cool dignity. She knew what was coming, and she was agitated by the knowledge. Into her pale cheeks had come a little color, and her lips were parted in suspense.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean that—I suppose that—after yesterday, meeting you driving—you know—that you will soon be going away married."

Jane rose from the grave-stone, trembling.

"It is not true, it is not true," she said. "If you hear that said, say, please, that it is not true. I am not going to be married to—to anybody. Why do you say such things?"

Jim answered, quite as much agitated as she herself was. He took hold of the grave-stone by which he was standing, and pulled bits of lichen off it with rapid fingers while he answered:

"Now look here, Miss Blean, you can't be angry

at my thinking so. What was I to think? You are very particular; everybody knows it, and says so: much more particular than other girls. So that people say that you don't care for anybody, and that you never have cared for anybody, and that you will never care for anybody. I don't mean to say that it's true: I don't know, but it's what people say. Well, and then I meet you driving alone with a—a gentleman; and the sort of man that you wouldn't be driving with unless you were going to marry him. What am I to think? what would anybody think?"

He had abandoned his tombstone, and had come close to her, and was looking eagerly into her face. She, as much excited as he, was trembling and panting, and struggling to find words. Tears of mortification sprang to her eyes too. As soon as Jim saw these, he spoke again, with a note almost of tenderness in his voice.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't want to make you cry. I want to know why you seem so unhappy. Perhaps you'll say I have no business to interfere, to ask. Will you say that?"

Jane had recovered herself, forced back her tears.

"No," she said, almost fiercely, "I will tell you why; I should like you to know why. I was to be driven back yesterday by my brother; but at the last moment this man jumped up into the phaeton instead of him, and insisted on driving me back himself. I detest him. If ever you see me with him, and I sincerely hope you never will; but if you

should—you may be sure that it is against my will, and that I would have avoided it if I could.”

Jim looked at her in pitying astonishment.

“But I don’t understand,” he said, “how you could be made to endure the presence of a man you don’t like. You who look so proud and cold too! It seems so strange that you should submit.”

“I know. Pamela wouldn’t! She would have jumped out of the phaeton while it was going, or seized the reins and stopped the horses, or have done something like that. But I couldn’t; I haven’t nerve enough. I’m a delusion.”

Instead of despising her for this avowal, Jim seemed rather touched by it. There was something piquant in being able to pity such a tall, stately-looking young woman. As they stood there, both for a moment silent, Jane saw the train signaled.

“Good-morning,” she said, hastily, with a little bow of dismissal, as she went quickly towards the gate, and as soon as she had passed out began to run. But there was dignity even in her running, so Jim thought, and there was certainly grace. He followed at a respectful distance, and did not begin to run himself until she was inside the station. He saw her get into a compartment by herself, and wished that he dared follow her in. But as he stood for a moment wistfully near the door, she stared beyond him with a grand unconsciouness which forbade him to enter.

When the train arrived at Charing Cross, Jim jumped out of his own compartment in time to help her to alight, to put her into a hansom, and to give

the driver the direction to a well-known street, near Piccadilly where bachelors' chambers abound. He was consumed with curiosity, with something more. He would have given the world to have known who she was going to see. With some hesitation, and greatly fearing a snub, he then asked her with the meekest and mildest of voices by what train she was coming back.

"I—I might perhaps be able to be useful to you in getting a cab or looking after your luggage, or—or anything," he added, quickly, stammering as he remembered how impracticable both his suggestions were.

Jane saw this, and her reply was a serene rebuke.

"Why, there are no cabs at Salternes, and I have no luggage," she said. "But," she added, softly, as his face fell a little, "I don't suppose I shall be able to come back by an earlier train than the seven o'clock one—the one that gets into Salternes at nine forty-eight."

Jim stepped back on to the platform, radiant. "Right!" he cried to the cabman, and the way in which he sang out the word gave it a double meaning. He raised his hat, caught one last peep of a pale face and golden hair under a great black hat, and went on his way with a light heart.

This, alas! could not be said of Jane. It was with the feeling of a guilty man coming before his judge that she went up the steps of the house where her father's chambers were. She had to mount to the second floor, and she pulled the bell under a tiny plate on which was inscribed the name "Captain

Hoad-Blean" with a heavy heart. Her own faith in her father's sympathy remained, but it had been shaken by the doubts of her mother and Pamela.

A supercilious little foreign man-servant answered the bell.

"Is Captain Hoad-Blean at home?" she asked, in a voice she could scarcely control.

"I will see, ma'am," answered the man cautiously, "if you will step inside."

"Tell him, please, that his eldest daughter wishes to see him."

The man looked astonished, and half incredulous. But he disappeared through one of the two inner doors, carefully shutting it after him. Jane heard exclamations of impatience; and recognizing her father's voice, she grew more frightened than ever. In a few moments, however, Captain Hoad-Blean himself appeared in the door-way, and welcoming her with much effusion, said he hoped that no bad news brought her up so unexpectedly.

"Nothing very bad, papa," answered Jane, upon whom a new knowledge of her father was breaking, as she noted the luxury of his surroundings, and compared it with the shabbiness of the worn-out furniture at home. The very contrast between her father himself, whose hair and black mustache she now perceived for the first time to be dyed, and her plainly dressed mother was startling enough. He wore a gorgeous smoking jacket and a pearl-gray silk scarf, the rest of his dress corresponding in smartness. Mamma had nothing to wear in the morning but her old black merino, that she had turned last winter.

“I was afraid I should find you out, papa,” said she.

And then, glancing at the table, she perceived he had not yet finished his breakfast.

Captain Hoad-Blean saw the look and laughed.

“Well, my dear, I think you have found me out,” said he cheerfully. “But I was up late last night, had to see a friend off from—from Southampton, so I overslept myself this morning. Well, and now about your charming self, a far more interesting subject. What has given me the pleasure of this visit?”

Jane felt bewildered. Was this the father whose wise paternal advice she had taken this daring journey to get? This dapper little gentleman, with the waxed mustache, and the beautifully fitted rooms got up in the style of a lady’s boudoir? She stammered, hesitated.

“I have come to ask your advice, papa, and to beg you to speak to mamma for me?”

Her father looked rather crestfallen: it was a grandfatherly sort of thing to have to do, he thought, to give advice to a great big girl like this, whom he could not prevent from calling him “papa.”

“My dear,” said he, in the very airiest and most irresponsible manner he could assume, “if it is upon any matter of dress, say a new bonnet, or upon the choice of a good novel, or the best comic opera going, I may say that I’m your man. But if it is anything that you would call more serious than that, why, my dear, your mother is far more capable of giving it you than I am; and as to my speaking to her on

your behalf, she thinks me too frivolous a person for my intercession to have any weight."

"Oh, it would in this, I think!" said she earnestly.

She had risen, and come nearer to the couch on which he had elegantly thrown himself.

"It is a subject on which a father can best advise his child, for you know more about men than I or than mamma."

The pleasant little gentleman's face had fallen during this speech. He liked to forget the fact that he was a father, as well as to shirk the responsibilities of that position. The poor man perceived that he was to be bored.

"Well, my dear," said he resignedly, "go on."

Jane clasped her hands tightly together, and her father thought how handsome she looked.

"Papa, are not money-lenders hard, unscrupulous, and what you would call bad men?"

Captain Hoad-Blean bounded up like a cork, and, in spite of his surprise at this opening, burst into an emphatic answer.

"By Jove, they are!" he cried, heartily. "The hardest, most unscrupulous, and most altogether what everybody calls bad of any class of men on the face of the earth! But"—and here he stopped in his walk up and down, as astonishment in its turn got the better of passion—"what in the name of goodness have you got to do with money-lenders?"

But at first Jane, in her joy at having found a sympathetic hearer at last, paid no heed to this question.

“I knew you would say so ; I knew you would take my part ! Oh, I’m so glad I came to you, papa ! You know all about these men,” here Captain Hoad-Blean gave a shrug and grimace—“and you say that they are everything that is bad. Now they can’t persist in wanting me to marry a man who is everything that is bad ; so they’ll have to leave off worrying me to marry Mr. Isaacson.”

“Wha—a—a—t ?” screamed her father, glaring at her across the breakfast-table, on which he had lightly rested his white, perfumed hands. “Isaacson of Old Broad Street and—and the Strand and Jermyn Street ! Asked—you—to—marry him ?”

“Ye—es, papa,” stammered Jane, at a loss to understand this explosion.

Captain Hoad-Blean groaned.

“If I had only known this the day before yesterday,” he exclaimed. Then turning quickly to his daughter, he said, briskly : “My dear child, I congratulate you. If not exactly one of the richest, he is one of the soundest men in the city !”

“Why, papa, you said just now money-lenders were not fit to speak to !”

Captain Hoad-Blean waved away this misconception with a smile.

“Well, well, *to speak to*, no, no more they are. But *to marry*—that’s quite another pair of shoes !”

CHAPTER X.

A FATHER'S LOVE.

JANE was struck dumb. Was this the sympathy and support for which she had come so far? She felt that the ground was giving way under her feet. Captain Hoad-Blean pursued what he thought to be his advantage, taking up, only with much more emphasis, the line of argument pursued by Pamela and the twins.

“Why, my dear Jane, it is a chance in a thousand. When I said money-lenders were a bad lot, I spoke of their business relations. In private life, of course, they are just like other people, many of them most charming men. But are you quite sure, my dear, that it is Isaacson—Reuben Isaacson? And that he does really want to marry you?”

“Yes, papa, I am quite sure,” Jane answered, very quietly.

“Dear me!”

Captain Hoad-Blean paced up and down the room on the opposite side of the table to where Jane was standing, throwing at his daughter from time to time a glance full of new respect and admiration. He was turning the matter over in his mind, still occasionally half incredulous as to the beautiful truth

of the story. Splendid visions of the possibilities for himself in such a match rose in his mind.

“He’s got a yacht too, a beautifully fitted yacht, I believe,” he suddenly exclaimed.

“Yes,” said Jane; “the other girls have been on it.”

This confirmation of the main story intoxicated Captain Hoad-Blean, who was devising what his first action should be, to clinch the nail on the head. Since the girl was such a fool as to seem not to understand her good fortune, she must be made to avail herself of it first, and to understand it afterwards.

“My dear,” he said, with the first touch of real fatherly kindness that he had yet shown, as distinguished from the irresponsible kindness of the gay lady’s man to a lady, “I am very glad you came up to consult me. For I think I shall be able to persuade you better than any one else could, that it will be in every way for the best for you to accept this gentleman for your husband.”

“But, papa,” said Jane, not with exactly the same manner in which she would have spoken to him a week before, “I don’t like him.”

“Well, perhaps not just at first. These city men want knowing. But the fact that you are his superior by birth and breeding will be an advantage to you, believe me. You will be able to entertain all your old friends, and as this man will undoubtedly be much better off some day than he is already, you will find that the very highest society will be open to you. And Isaacson will be in a better position

than most of the self-made men, in not being burdened with a self-made wife."

Jane was going to protest. But he saw it in her face, and refused to listen.

"Dear me," cried he, looking at his watch, "it is one o'clock. I must take you somewhere to luncheon, and then we can go to the exhibition to pass the afternoon. You are in no hurry to get back, I suppose?"

"I am going back by the seven o'clock train," replied she.

"Well, that will give us time for a pleasant day, and a pleasant little argument together. Excuse me one moment while I write a note."

He crossed to a writing-table, sat down to write his letter, and then left the room to hand it to his servant, with instructions for its immediate delivery by hand. Jane would have been interested to know, what he was careful not to tell her, that the envelope was directed to "Reuben Isaacson, Esq."

If she had known whom the note was for, the poor girl would not have been as much surprised as she was when, walking about the exhibition grounds with her father, who was in the most amiable of humors, just as they were passing the little garden of the "Welcome Club," they came face to face with Mr. Isaacson.

He appeared amazed at the meeting, but Captain Hoad-Blean's assumption of astonishment was not quite so successful. His daughter shot at him a quick glance which made him redden. She had guessed by what means the "unexpected meeting"

had been brought about. And although he said, "Introduce me, my dear," Jane fancied that the two men had met before.

She was confirmed in this opinion on remarking a slight shade of insolence in Mr. Isaacson's manner towards her father, and a more apparent shade of deference on the part of her father to the money-lender. She was very quiet, very silent, speaking only when she was addressed; but, as usual, she made no sort of open protest. Mr. Isaacson, who was a member of the "Welcome Club," invited them in and entertained them at luncheon most lavishly. Every moment he grew more in love with her, as he noticed the impression which her stately beauty created on every stranger who passed. Indeed, the irritation and excitement from which she was suffering improved Jane's appearance, giving her cheeks more color and her eyes more brightness.

He was too wise to make love to her in her father's presence, contenting himself with attentions which were for the most part silent ones. Jane was grateful to him for this. Smarting as she still was from the revelation of her father's character, she felt that he would have supported her unwelcome lover in a manner which would have been more than she could bear.

It seemed to Jane that the afternoon would never end; she was looking forward to seven o'clock as to the hour of a joyful release, and when six o'clock struck, she rose from the chair on which she had been sitting beside her father.

“I must be going now, papa,” she said. “If you will put me into a hansom, I can manage by myself very well, and I need not take you to the station with me.”

“Is Miss Hoad-Blean going back to Salternes to-night?” asked Mr. Isaacson, in his suavest manner. “Because, if she is going by the seven o’clock train, I shall be very happy to escort her.”

“Oh, no, thank you, that is not at all necessary,” said Jane hastily.

But her eagerly solicitous father turned to Isaacson with gratitude :

“My dear fellow, I thank you ; I thank you exceedingly. I shall be very glad to entrust my daughter to your care for—for the journey. I can’t think how her mother could have allowed her to come up alone ! If it had not been for your kind offer, I should have felt obliged to go back with her myself.”

He was hurrying his daughter through the building. Mr. Isaacson paused a moment to buy some roses at one of the stalls. Jane seized the moment to beg her father to come back with her himself, as he had suggested. But he smiled at her benignantly, and said :

“No, my dear, it would be very inconvenient for me. And Mr. Isaacson will take every care of you, I’m sure.”

He hurried her out through the door, and put her into a hansom with a tenderly paternal air, requesting Mr. Isaacson, who jumped in after her, to take care of his darling.

Then he stepped back on the pavement and raised

his hat with a happy smile, feeling that for once in his life he had done his duty.

Mr. Isaacson was too clever to force the running. He had got a good start, that was something; he would not weaken his chance and expose himself to unnecessary snubs. So the drive to Charing Cross was almost a silent one. Jane hurried on to the platform and looked eagerly up and down. She saw no one she knew, and her face fell. On the other hand, there was some time to wait before the train started. She went to the book-stall, bought a paper, and affected to be deeply absorbed in its contents, to avoid talking to her assiduous companion, who now came up. From time to time, however, she stole a glance along the platform. But no one she knew came in sight.

At last Mr. Isaacson came up and respectfully informed her that he had found a nice carriage. Reluctantly she allowed herself to be conducted to the compartment he had chosen, and after lingering outside, until the guard warned them that it was time to enter, she entered the carriage more reluctantly still. From the meaning glance between Mr. Isaacson and the guard, Jane guessed that the compartment was to be reserved. As soon as they were in, indeed, the guard locked it from the outside.

Jane had a lingering hope still left. She was sitting by the window: she rose and put her head out. Yes, there at the other end of the platform, running for the train, was Jim St. Rhadegund. Without uttering a word she watched him, let him see her.

He ran up. When he had nearly reached the door of the compartment, she beckoned to the obsequious guard to unlock the door.

"This gentleman is with us," she said.

The door flew open. To Mr. Isaacson's extreme disgust, Jim St. Rhadegund, the handsome but odious young man whom the money-lender had already had occasion to notice for his unseemly attentions, sank breathless, smiling, and unspeakably happy, down on the opposite seat.

Mr. Isaacson turned pale. He seldom lost his temper when anything serious was at stake, but he lost it now. Jumping up from his seat, he leaped out on to the platform before the guard had time to close the door; and forgetting even to raise his hat in farewell to the lady, he disappeared from her sight as the train moved slowly out of the station.

Now the moment that Jane had successfully accomplished this piece of daring, she was overcome by the consciousness that it had only taken her out of one awkward situation to plunge her into another. Instead of a lengthy *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Isaacson, she had exposed herself to one just as lengthy with Jim St. Rhadegund. And as she glanced at the handsome young fellow on the opposite seat, who was openly exulting in fate's kindness to him, Jane almost began to wish that she had kept to her former companion.

"You did mean it then? What you said this morning?" he asked, in a low voice.

"What was that?" asked Jane, without looking at him.

“That whenever you were with him it was against your own will?”

“Oh, yes, I did mean that certainly.”

“Do you think he’ll have the cheek to come worrying you again, after this?”

Jane began to look troubled, as the thought of what she would have to put up with from her family if Mr. Isaacson chose *not* to worry her again crossed her mind.

“I don’t know,” she said, with a sudden soberness.

Jim’s radiant face fell a little.

“I don’t quite understand whether you want him to or not!” he exclaimed, impatiently.

“Neither do I,” said she.

Jim’s face grew more serious still.

“Well, then, if you are not quite, quite sure, wasn’t it rather a daring thing to do to—to——”

“To call you in?”

“Exactly. For, you see, of course it made me think—well, think—well, think—all sorts of things. That—that—perhaps you liked me better than him, for one thing.”

He had edged along the seat a little way, so that he was immediately opposite to her, and he was diligently tracing the marks on the carpet with the point of his walking-stick.

“Oh, I do,” said Jane.

But then the look he gave her, as he glanced up suddenly, and she found his face so very near to hers, set her blushing.

“You do like me better than him? But perhaps that’s not saying much?”

"No, it isn't saying much."

Jim bent his head again, and Jane, feeling a curious sensation which the near neighborhood of a man had never before caused her, shrank back into her corner and kept very still.

Jim cleared his throat once or twice before he spoke again.

"Do you think that it might ever be possible—for you to like me more than that?"

"More than what?"

"More than that isn't saying much?"

"Oh, don't ask me, don't ask me. If you knew how dreadfully worried I am just now you wouldn't ask me questions like that!"

Now, although this answer might have been taken in the sense of a mild rebuff, yet it did not seem to damp Jim's spirits. He looked up quickly with a sympathetic face, and came quite an inch further on his seat.

"Dreadfully worried! Poor girl! But if it's only that fellow, we'll soon choke him off."

The feeling that she had at last secured a listener who had the fullest, deepest sympathy with her in her dislike to Mr. Isaacson, put new animation into Jane and inspired her with confidence.

"Oh," she said, "you don't understand. They all want me to marry him—all. In fact they take it for granted that I must. Father, mother, brother, sisters—all."

"But you can't be made to marry against your will!"

"Oh, can't you? If you're a girl, and poor, and if a man comes and asks you who is rich!"

“But I’m rich too!” burst out Jim.

And then, perceiving, even before her shrinking retreat into herself, what a rash speech he had made, he jumped up, walked to the other window, and sat down by it. He jumped up again very quickly, though, finding that he had sat down upon something. It was on poor Mr. Isaacson’s despised roses, wires and all.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, so very sorry. Look what I’ve done.”

And very glad of this diversion, he brought the crushed flowers for her inspection.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Jane indifferently; “throw them out of the window.”

Jim obeyed with a savage delight. Letting down the window at the opposite end of the carriage, he flung the poor roses out with all the force of his arm, and came back instantly to Jane.

“If I were to bring you some flowers,” asked he, in a grave, judicial tone of voice, “would you throw them away?”

“Oh, no, of course not.”

“If”—Jim hesitated, looked at Jane, and reading some signs of agitation in her manner which he interpreted favorably to himself, crossed over to her side—“if I were to ask you to marry me, what would you say?”

“Say no, of course,” she answered, with decision.

“But listen. You don’t dislike me as much as you do this Jew: you’ve admitted that much. And if you say yes to me you free yourself at once from all the lot. For if you’re engaged to one man, it’s

evident you can't be expected to get engaged to another. They want you to marry him because he's rich. Well, I don't suppose I shall ever be as rich as he, because there are four of us boys. But I shall be well off, and I'm a Christian, and I'm twenty years younger than he is. And—and don't be angry with me for saying so—I have kept it back most beautifully, haven't I? But I do love you so! I think of you all day and all night. And when I'm not praising you, I'm abusing you, just for the sake of talking about you. For I can speak of nothing else."

His voice, as he spoke, vibrated with passion: he leaned towards her: his eyes shone with a light which no woman could fail to understand. Jane was moved—deeply, pitifully moved. Her pretty pale face was puckered with distress as she put her hand out, as if to ward him off.

"Don't talk like this to me—don't," she said, almost in a whisper. "I can't bear it—just now. I have learnt things to-day—dreadful things—which have made me so miserable that I can think of nothing else. Now, if you are generous, as I believe you are, don't say anything about this to me again. You know I don't dislike you; I like you. But I scarcely know you, and it seems even dreadful to me to be talking quite freely with a man I have known such a little while. Don't be offended because I tell you the truth."

But Jim knew better than to be offended. He drew back a little, and said, very quietly:

"I won't say another word about it. Only—when

you see me very cool and calm and collected with you, you mustn't think I've changed: I'm only trying to do what you wish."

And so, to her relief on the one hand, and yet perhaps a little to her disappointment on the other, Jim talked to her, for the rest of the journey, about horses, and about dogs, and about Colorado, and in fact everything but the forbidden subject. And they both enjoyed the journey immensely, in spite of this restriction.

By the time the train had got on to Salternes Marsh, Jim found that this terrific exercise of virtue had brought about a terrible reaction. Jane's sweetness, added to the charm of her beauty, had got into his head. She seemed, too, to show no great relief at having so nearly reached her journey's end.

Suddenly breaking off in a dissertation on rabbit-shooting, he asked, in a low voice which set something suddenly stirring within her:

"Will you give me a kiss?"

For a moment Jane looked horror-struck. Then, glancing at him, she began to draw her breath very quickly. Putting both hands up to form a barrier while she parleyed, she whispered back:

"Remember, it's not to count!"

"Oh, no," answered Jim, in a voice just as low, full of passionate indignation at the idea.

Before she had time to change her mind, if she wanted to, he had put his arm round her, and pressed his lips against hers with a suddenness which took her breath away.

Jane drew back, trembling, ready to get out. She had never kissed a man before, and the sensation was—oh! terribly different from what she had expected.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. ISAACSON'S REVENGE.

WHEN the seven o'clock train from London drew up to one of the three little platforms which formed Salternes station, Jane, who had exchanged not one word with Jim since that momentous affair of the kiss, stepped out of the carriage with a face which was still flushed and eyes still more than usually bright with excitement. And then, turning, she came face to face with Mr. Isaacson, who had traveled down in the next carriage.

Now, if Jane's face betrayed to the Jew's keen eyes that she had not been bored by her journey, the face of the young man beside her was still more eloquent. Jane was frightened by the scowl on the face of her rejected admirer. For a few moments she had had the pleasure of forgetting his existence, and now she was suddenly recalled to remembrance of the welcome which awaited her at home, where his suit was so highly favored.

"I see," said he, recovering with a great effort something like his usual manner, "that you have had a pleasant journey down, much pleasanter than you would have had with an old fogie like me. Your brother Edward is staying at my house: I must send him back to you to-night to congratulate you."

And before either Jane or Jim could make any answer to this menace, he had raised his hat and disappeared into the station, where the phaeton and the handsome chestnuts, surrounded by an admiring group of villagers, were waiting for him.

“Do you know what he means by that?” said Jane. “He has lent my brother money.”

“The coward!” cried Jim. “He deserves to be kicked. Never mind; don’t trouble your head about him. It will all come right, you’ll see.”

And as they came through the little wooden station together, he took her hand and gave it a gentle, comforting pressure, against which act Jane offered no remonstrance. They walked together as far as the Priory gates, where Jane commanded him to leave her. But with the remembrance of that kiss upon him, this was more than he could do.

“Let me just go as far as the corner,” he pleaded.

So they went on to the corner, where she stopped again.

“Now,” she said, “you really must go. I don’t know what they will say at home as it is.”

“They would say a great deal less if you would only let me go on with you to the door, so that they could see me with you, and then you could go in and say out boldly at once that you were engaged to me. Do, Jane, my own beautiful Jane, do.”

And he drew caressingly near to her, so that she almost fancied she felt a touch on her shoulder. Jane, who was already shocked at her own indiscretion in having given such pronounced encourage-

ment to a man she had not known six months, drew back in terror.

“Oh!” she whispered, “remember, you promised
_____”

Jim, with a wistful look, let his arm drop to his side.

“All right,” he said, gruffly. She would have run up the street without another word. But Jim followed her, so that after the first few steps she again came to a stand-still. “I say,” he whispered, “you won’t go and let them persuade you to have that fellow after all, will you? I couldn’t stand that, you know, really. Because, of course, though that—you know what—doesn’t count, still one remembers.”

“Oh, very well,” said Jane gracefully, glancing to right and left with tingling cheeks, as if afraid that the very swallows under the eaves might understand his allusion to that injudicious kiss.

Once more, as she would have left him, he detained her. This time what he had to say needed to be said in such a very low whisper that he thought it necessary to put his lips quite close to her ear.

“And—and you won’t let any other fellow kiss you and say it doesn’t count?”

“Of course not,” cried Jane indignantly.

And absolutely refusing to heed his further attempts to detain her, she finally broke away and went alone to the door of her home.

Of course the twins, to whom Jane was now the chief center of interest in the family, were on the lookout for her. They knew that she had gone up to London to see papa, and they were eager for news

of him, and of the matter which had taken Jane on this hasty journey. Jane broke away from them and went upstairs to see Pamela, who was dressing for dinner. There was more true friendship between these two than is generally the case with sisters, who generally prefer a female friend outside the family circle to whom to confide the loose chit-chat and trivial impulses which they call their thoughts and feelings.

Pamela sprang at her, full of excitement.

"Well, and what did papa say?"

In the scenes which had succeeded her interview with her father, Jane had for a time almost forgotten him. The memory of her disillusion now caused her face to cloud over.

"Oh, Pamela," she cried, "don't ask me what he said. He shocked me—he would have shocked you. We have always taken his part, but I never can again."

Pamela, who was regarding her sister in a critical manner, gave a queer little smile.

"To tell you the truth, I'm not so much surprised as I should have been two months ago. It is the things about papa which Edward has let drop that have opened my eyes. He advises you to marry Mr. Isaacson, of course?"

"Advises! Oh, Pamela, worse than that! I will tell you what he did to-day."

And she gave her sister a full account of her adventures, not even withholding, though she told this adventure with much shame, the story of the accorded kiss.

Pamela, whose interest and attention had been doubled at all the points where Jim St. Rhadegund came into the story, held her breath when the climax was reached.

"You did? You? You kissed him?" she asked, gasping between the concise questions, to all of which Jane replied by a nod. "Why, Jane, I wouldn't have done it!"

"I can't understand it myself," admitted poor Jane humbly. "I don't know how it was. But he was so kind, and I had been so worried, and he the only person who dislikes Mr. Isaacson as much as I do myself!"

"Well," said Pamela, with tactical promptitude, "if you like him enough to kiss him, surely you like him enough to become engaged to him. There would be an end to the difficulty."

"That's what he says. But I can't, all in a hurry like that. It isn't proper."

"Oh, Jane, what an odd creature you are! It's much more proper than to let mamma and Edward and the twins worry your life out. I simply don't know what Edward will say. He went off this morning, and I gathered from what he said that he was going to spend the day at Mr. Isaacson's bungalow, with his permission, and that when Mr. Isaacson came back from the city this evening, they were going away on the yacht together. And he was in great spirits, making sure after yesterday that you would marry this Mr. Isaacson, and that then he needn't trouble about his debts to him, but could have as much pocket-money as he pleased. So I

suppose this man bribed Edward every step of the way."

Jane shivered. That Pamela's surmise was correct she could not doubt; and from the words Mr. Isaacson had uttered at the station, she guessed that Edward would come home that night in a state of exasperation which, in his present condition, would be little, if anything, short of madness. Falteringly, Jane told her sister of this also, and the girls brooded in silence over the trouble they would have with their mother as well as with Edward, if he should prove very violent. For Mrs. Hoad-Blean, when the girls had gently approached the subject of his mental condition with her, had turned upon them fiercely, and had declared that their suggestion that she should speak to the doctor about him was spiteful, malicious, absurd.

"The worst of it is," said Pamela reflectively, leaning on the dressing-table, with her chin in her hand, "that I happen to be in disgrace too."

Jane was eager to hear the story of this misfortune, but the dinner-bell rang, and they had to hurry downstairs. It was not until after dinner, therefore, that Pamela was able to tell her more about it than just this: "that it was all on account of those wretched St. Rhadegunds."

When they went into the drawing-room, after dinner, Pamela found an opportunity of telling her story.

Not long after breakfast that morning a rather peremptory invitation had come from Lady Constantia, for Mrs. Hoad-Blean and Pamela to come to

Salternes Court to luncheon. The note contained an underlined postscript: "Alfred will be here," which Pamela resented as being supposed to contain an irresistible to her to come. On arriving at Salternes Court, the ladies found that Lady Constantia had sent for them to arrange the terms of an alliance between the two families, by means of which the St. Rhadegunds were to be boycotted, and eventually forced to leave the neighborhood. Alfred, who, Pamela said was sure had been made by the St. Rhadegund lads to feel his own inferiority in some marked and disagreeable manner, was even more eager than his mother. Mrs. Hoad-Blean had shown signs of yielding to the pressure put upon her, when Pamela, struck by the unfairness of the proceeding, raised her voice in firm protest. If the St. Rhadegunds were cut by everybody else in the county, she said, her own family would have to stand by them. They were good tenants, and that was all that they, as landlords, could concern themselves with.

"You know, Jane," she said, earnestly, "I'm not at all prejudiced in favor of these people, and as for that eldest, I hate him. But it was so unfair, and Alfred spoke so spitefully, that I felt I must say what I think. They wanted to keep them out of the horse show. Of course that was Alfred's doing, because he knew that their splendid riding would show up his, which is nothing great. So I got myself into terrible disgrace. Then, afterwards, I went into the conservatory to look at the new palms. And Alfred came out and tried to make it up, but I wouldn't give way. Then he said that I was an ob-

stinate little thing, and that I didn't deserve to be forgiven. I told him that, more than that, I didn't want to be. And he stooped, and tried to kiss me, and I—I behaved much better than you did, for *I* boxed his ears!"

Jane sighed.
"But then, dear," she suggested, meekly, "you don't care for Alfred!"

"Not much," admitted Pamela. "Still, everybody thinks so much of him about here, just because he is a Fitzjocelyn, that I thought my indifference rather noble. Especially," she added, with a sigh, "as it will shut me out of Salternes Court, and make mamma very angry. When I told her, she said I couldn't decently go to their garden-party next week. For that if I did, he would be sure to pay marked attention to some other girl, to make his defection from me the more marked."

"Don't trouble about it or about him, dear," said Jane soothingly. "You're much too good and too pretty to be wasted on that horrid Alfred, whom I never liked. Come and sing something: mamma keeps looking at us; she knows we're talking treason."

The girls got up, and went to the piano, and Jane, who had a sweet voice sang several songs to Pamela's accompaniment. In the midst of a song, they were startled by a shriek from one of the twins. Looking round in alarm, they saw that the door had been noiselessly opened, and that Edward stood just inside the room, clinging to the handle, and swaying as he stood. It was no wonder that

his appearance had frightened his little sisters, who sat immediately opposite to the door.

With a face of leaden pallor, sunken eyes, hanging under-lip, and head bent forward, he seemed incapable of speech or movement, and both the twins thought he was intoxicated.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean sprang up from her chair, and ran forward to meet him.

“My dearest boy,” said she affectionately, putting her arm within his and trying to lead him out of the room, “come upstairs; you look tired. Come and speak to me upstairs.”

For a minute he seemed not to understand her, and stood there helpless and sullen, only opposing a passive resistance to her gentle attempts to lead him out. But as his heavy eyes were lifted for a moment from the ground, he caught sight of Jane, and made a spring towards her, with a cry of rage. Fortunately his mother, still clinging to him, stood in the way.

“Let me get at her, I will get at her, do you hear?” he cried, in an indistinct voice, running the words together. “She has ruined me, had me treated like a dog. I will kill her—kill her. You shall not stop me.”

The poor little twins began to cry, divided between a wish to run away and a wish to stay and help to prevent their brother doing any mischief. Mrs. Hoad-Blean, hanging round her son’s neck, looked over his shoulder and told them to run upstairs and to keep quiet, commands which they obeyed readily enough.

Pamela wanted Jane to go away too. But her eldest sister, who had courage enough of the passive sort, refused to leave her mother and sister alone with a man whom they could scarcely doubt to be a dangerous lunatic.

“He will calm down, perhaps, if he did not see you,” suggested Pamela.

“No. He will be just as angry with you for keeping him from me as he is with me.”

While the girls rapidly exchanged these few words, a change came over their brother. The rage which a moment before convulsed his features gradually gave place to the dull, sullen look he had worn on first entering the room. He ceased to struggle with his mother, but looked down at her stupidly.

“What are you doing?” asked he; “can’t you let a fellow alone?”

Half re-assured, Mrs. Hoad-Blean tried to laugh, and taking his hand, led him to a sofa, on which she made him sit down. As he crossed the room, Pamela, with a quick gesture, entreated Jane to take the opportunity of escaping from the room while his back was turned.

“But mamma?” whispered Jane.

“All right. I have an idea,” said Pamela back.

The girls, went noiselessly out into the passage, and Pamela ran to the kitchen, and asked Mrs. Gibson, the cook, a muscular woman untroubled with “nerves,” to go into the drawing-room.

“Mr. Edward has come back in a furious passion about something, and we are afraid he will be violent and frighten mamma,” she explained, hastily.

Mrs. Gibson, who had her suspicions about Mr. Edward, obeyed at once. Pamela ran into the dining-room, which was at the back of the house. There was only one window to this room, and it had once been attempted by burglars: so Mrs. Hoad-Blean had had it fitted with an iron shutter, which fastened with a key. Pamela now pulled up this shutter, locked it, and put the key in her pocket.

“I think we had better get him to sleep in here,” she said. “He can have a bed made up for him on the sofa, and we can lock him in. And in the morning mamma must let us send for Doctor Willoughby.”

As she spoke, she was busily clearing out of the side-board all the knives and forks, decanters and glasses.

“We mustn’t leave anything that he could hurt himself with,” she said.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when both girls heard a noise in the passage, hoarse laughter from Edward, and the cries of his mother. The next moment Edward had burst into the dining-room, and leaning upon the table, was staring savagely at his sister Jane, who was on the opposite side of it.

“You beauty!” he exclaimed, in the same thick, indistinct voice, as if his teeth were closed all the time he spoke; “you she-devil! You’re too good for anyone, are you? Too good to be looked at, are you? I’ll spoil your beauty for you, you detestable hag! I’ll spoil your face, just as I’ve spoilt the face of the young cad you’ve taken a fancy to, you know. You know who I mean! I shot him, I shot him, I tell

you. He's lying in the road dead, half-way between here and Rylstone. Ha, ha! You don't like that, don't you? It makes you shudder, doesn't it, to think of his lying there, quite, quite, in the dust? He rolled over, dead, without a cry. Your brother did that, I did that. And I'll serve you the same. Do you hear? Do you hear?"

While he delivered this terrible speech, all in a slow, drawling tone, as if utterance was difficult for him, Mrs. Hoad-Blean was holding one of his arms, and the cook the other. But as he did not make the slightest resistance, or any attempt to free himself, their vigilance and their hold gradually relaxed together, as they listened, horror-struck, but yet incredulous, to the terrible story he was telling.

Suddenly, when his voice had sunk quite low and his body was swaying as if with weakness or fatigue, he wrenched himself free with a violent effort flinging both the women back, and producing something with a rapid movement from an inner pocket of his coat, he raised his hand. Before either his mother, or Mrs. Gibson, or Jane herself, had realized what he was doing, they saw a flash, and heard a sharp report.

CHAPTER XII.

PAMELA'S NIGHT JOURNEY.

THREE out of the four women were too much paralyzed with fright to do so much as utter a cry. Fortunately, the fourth was quicker witted. Before Edward had time to fire a second shot, Pamela had thrown herself upon him, and flung up his hand with so much force, that the revolver dropped behind him upon the floor. He was so utterly taken by surprise that he made only a passive resistance as she pushed him before her towards the end of the room, where there was a sofa. But recovering himself in a few moments, he tried to throw her off, and she then called to the cook to help her. Between them, they got him down upon the sofa, and searched in all his pockets to make sure that he had no other weapon about him. Pamela took away his pocket-knife, and handed it to Jane, at the same time whispering to her to pick up and carry away the revolver.

When his eldest sister came near, Edward burst out afresh into violent abuse of her; but the strong hands which held him prevented him from attacking her. Although not powerfully built or specially muscular, Edward struggled hard enough to tax the strength of his sister and the cook to the utmost; for the frenzy which possessed him gave him for the

time more physical force than was normally his. It was not until Jane had left the room that he became calmer.

All this time Mrs. Hoad-Blean was sobbing quietly on a chair a few paces off, murmuring below her breath: "My boy! my boy!" ready on the slightest gesture to come forward and fling her arms round his neck. But he scowled when he caught her eyes, and turned away his head, sullen, inert, and morose.

"You'd better go away, mamma," said Pamela gently.

And Edward chimed in with a harsh voice:

"Yes, go away for goodness' sake. I can't stand that crying."

Mrs. Hoad-Blean left the room without a word. Then Pamela, with a sign to Mrs. Gibson to remain on the alert, left the room in her turn, taking with her the trayful of knives and forks and glass which she had taken from the sideboard. Having put these away in a safe place, she got the housemaid to help her to bring down some bed-clothes, which she carried into the dining-room.

"What are you bringing those things in here for?" asked Edward quietly.

"We are going to make you up a bed on the sofa here, because if you were to sleep in your old room, next to mamma's, she would be in and out all night, and neither you nor she would get any rest," answered Pamela composedly.

"All right," he answered, with apparent acquiescence.

But Pamela was not deceived by this amazing

calmness. There was a sort of smoldering fire in her brother's eyes which she felt might break out at any moment into another burst of rage. When the women were ready to leave the room, he suddenly burst into a husky laugh :

“ You think you've been very clever, don't you? You think you've made everything so nice and snug and safe? But you're mistaken, my dears. I've paid out one person, but there are two more to settle, and I shall settle them, whatever you may do. I haven't any grudge against you, I don't trouble my head about you : I have to do with Jane, and with Isaacson. Good-night, my dear.”

“ Good-night,” said Pamela, returning his mocking words quite gently. And she went out of the room, locked the door, and drew the two bolts which were the further precautions taken against burglary.

Then she went in search of Jane. But Jane was nowhere to be found. At last Pamela stumbled upon the frightened twins, crouching in a corner, who said they had seen Jane run out of the house, and had heard her talking to some one. “ One of the St. Rhadegunds, we think,” added Myrtle.

And Pamela was satisfied.

When Jane, with the others, heard her brother's account of his having shot Jim St. Rhadegund, and left him lying dead in the road, she had, like the rest, treated the story as an absolute fiction, a disagreeable fiction indeed, one that brought a pang to her heart and moisture to her eyes, but an undoubted fiction none the less. When, however, the pistol-shot, close to her ear, showed her that he was armed,

there flashed suddenly into her mind a horrible fear that the story might be true. She had obeyed Pamela's orders mechanically, taken the pocket-knife and revolver, and hidden them in a drawer in her own room. But then, snatching a hat without further delay, she had fled down the stairs and out of the house toward the Priory.

It was late: there were few lights in the house, and the lawn was deserted. Jane opened the gates and ran up the straight path to the house. A maid-servant, who had seen her from one of the windows, ran down to open the door before she could ring.

"Has anything happened, ma'am?" asked the girl, with concern.

"Mr. James St. Rhadegund—is he in?"

"No, ma'am, he hasn't been in all day. He said he would be back to dinner at half-past seven, but he hasn't been in yet."

Jane's face was convulsed with her distress, and the servant grew alarmed.

"You don't think—anything has happened to him, ma'am?"

Jane, who was breathing heavily, was at first unable to answer.

"The other gentlemen—can I see them, any of them?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"They're all out, ma'am. Master Tom and Master Bob has gone over to Canterbury with the master; and Master Dick——"

Jane did not wait to hear more. Turning away with a short "thank you," and a little stifled groan, she hurried down to the gate again.

“Jim, oh, Jim!” she said below her breath, as she clasped her hands and stood for a moment at the corner of the street, wondering which way she should turn.

But the whispered words were scarcely out of her mouth when she heard footsteps coming rapidly behind her.

“What—what was that you said?” cried a man’s voice.

Jane screamed; a very lady-like little scream it was, but yet a scream. Turning sharply, she had no time to repress the instinct which made her hold out her arms, before Jim had taken advantage of her indiscretion and put himself within them.

“O-o-o-oh, Jim!” half sobbed, half sighed out poor Jane, as she closed her eyes in unutterable thankfulness, and did not concern herself with the fact that Jim audaciously kissed her again and again.

He was too happy at first to trouble himself about the events which had led to his unexpected good fortune. Something had happened, of course, probably much family unpleasantness on the subject of her unkindness to Mr. Isaacson: but the precise details didn’t matter for the present.

“Now, mind,” said he, when Jane had gone so far as to give him a kiss back, “we do count them now. There’s to be no more shilly-shallying. I’m engaged to you, and you’re engaged to me; you understand?”

“Oh, Jim, don’t talk about such things now. I thought you were dead, dead! Oh!”

“Well, you’re quite satisfied that I’m not, aren’t you?”

“Jim,” said Jane, holding herself suddenly away from him, and looking up with terror in her eyes, “my brother said he had killed you, shot you. He said you were lying dead in the road. And at first I didn’t believe it; but when he took out a revolver and fired at me——”

“Fired at you!” interrupted Jim, unutterably shocked.

“Yes. Then I thought it might be true, and I ran out—to the Priory. And when they said you had not been in all day—Oh, Jim!”

“I’ve been walking up and down outside your house ever since you went in,” explained Jim, “first at the back and then at the front. I saw your brother go in. Where is he now?” he added sharply. “Who is looking after him?”

“Pamela was going to shut him up in the dining-room, where he can’t get out either by the door or the window.”

“And there’s no one but you girls in the house? Can’t I be of any use?”

Jane shook her head.

“I don’t think so. Mamma won’t believe that he’s out of his mind.”

“Well, then, she ought to be made to believe it at once. Let me go for your doctor. She would have to believe him.”

Jim took a step in the direction of the Priory stables, anxious to carry out his suggestion at once. But at that moment Mrs. Hoad-Blean herself

appeared at an open window above their heads, and said, icily :

“I am extremely obliged by your kindness, but your offer is quite unnecessary. My son is as sane as any one in the house, and Jane ought to be ashamed of herself by being frightened by the crack of a toy pistol which was only meant to frighten her.”

“But, madam,” said Jim earnestly, coming close under the window, and speaking in a low voice, for fear of rousing the neighbors, most of whom by this time were in bed, “your son is certainly not very well, or he wouldn’t be so excessively irritable. The doctor would give him a sedative, and he would be quite himself in the morning. I should enjoy the drive.”

“I am sorry to be obliged to decline your interference,” answered Mrs. Hoad-Blean in the same tone as before. “If you persist in bringing a doctor here, as I am quite sure that the sight of one at such an hour would upset my son, I shall take means to prevent his seeing him.”

“Very well, madam,” said Jim.

And thinking it unwise to irritate further the unhappy mother, Jim silently pressed Jane’s hand, raised his hat, and returned to the Priory. Jane crept indoors. Pamela was on the watch in the passage.

“I can hear him moving about, shaking the door, rattling the window,” she whispered. “I am afraid that poor mamma will want to go in and talk to him. She fancies, poor thing, that her influence will calm

him, although we have all seen that it does not. We shall have to keep watch here all night."

Jane told her sister of Jim St. Rhadegund's offer and the rejection by Mrs. Hoad-Blean. Pamela sighed.

"Better not to drag them into the business if we can help it," said she. "If he gets any more violent, I shall get Mrs. Nibson to sit up here with you, and go myself to Rylestone for Doctor Willoughby."

Jane did not ask how: when it came to active measures Pamela could be trusted to find a way.

Before long the restlessness of Edward in the dining-room and of his mother in her room overhead increased in such a degree that both the girls felt that the danger was no longer to be trifled with. Maniacal laughs, followed by a succession of jumps and animal-like cries, made it plain to every hearer but his mother, that the unfortunate young man was, for a time at least, insane. Pamela rose noiselessly from the chair on which she had been sitting.

"Mind," she whispered low in her sister's ear, "you are not to let mamma go in, or Edward come out."

Jane nodded; and Pamela, hastily putting on the hat and ulster which she had brought down with her in expectation of this emergency, slid out of the house without a sound.

Her plans were made. Further up the street, or rather lane, there lived an elderly woman who possessed a light cart and a strong pony. Pamela went to her cottage, woke the old lady without difficulty by tapping at her bedroom window with a bean-pole, and asked if she might go in the stable and

take out the pony and cart. Her brother was ill, she said, and she had to fetch the doctor. The woman at once dropped the stable key out of the window; and Pamela who had an inborn love of horses, and who had often saddled or harnessed a pony in the old days at the Priory, was soon on her way to Rylestone, taking care to go up the lane instead of returning past the house. She could gain the high-road by a turning farther on. It was about ten o'clock and the country was deserted. The moon, though not at the full, gave light enough for her to see her way without difficulty. Her route lay at first between hedgeless fields in which the young corn and green crops were growing; but soon a turn to the left, up a rough, narrow lane, led her into the Canterbury road, as it was called, being the high-road from Canterbury to Rylestone. Half-way up this lane, which was shaded by tall trees, she met a man on foot. She could not see who he was as he stood on the bank to let the cart pass; but she had hardly come abreast of him when he said, in a voice in which there were perceptible traces of anxiety:

“Miss Pamela!”

Pamela reined in, recognizing the voice of Mr. Isaacson.

“Anything the matter—at home? I hope not, I’m sure I hope not?”

Now Pamela rightly considered that much of the blame for Edward’s return belonged to his Jewish friend, who, snubbed by Jane, had taken a pitiful revenge upon Edward, whose temper and disposi-

tion he must certainly have had full means of studying.

“Indeed, Mr. Isaacson,” she retorted sharply, “if nothing serious has happened as yet, it is not through your fault.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mr. Isaacson, in a voice which he in vain tried to make only one of astonishment.

“My brother fired a revolver at Jane.”

Mr. Isaacson uttered an exclamation of such genuine horror that Pamela was a little softened towards him.

“The question is,” she went on in a less severe tone, “how did he get the revolver?”

In a state of pitiable nervousness and anxiety, Mr. Isaacson took hold of the cart, bringing a face full of terror nearer to hers.

“It was mine,” he said in a whisper. “I can’t tell you how I felt when I found he had taken it. I know I was to blame in telling him anything about the annoyance your sister caused me to-day; I admit I didn’t care if he went and blew her up. But I never thought—Oh, my God! I never thought that he would do such a thing as that! You do believe me, don’t you?”

Pamela believed him, because his sincerity was beyond suspicion. The man was in a pitiable state of alarm.

“Yes, oh, yes. But don’t detain me now. My mother won’t believe that he is out of his mind, so I am going for the doctor, who will make her believe. We are afraid she will let him out.”

But Mr. Isaacson was loth to let her go.

“What made me first suspect that he had taken the revolver,” said he, “was hearing a sound like a pistol-shot out in the road ahead of me. I had gone after him some distance, alarmed by the way in which he dashed out of the place, and——”

Pamela held her breath, she thought of Edward’s story that he had killed Jim St. Rhadegund, and a horrible fear sprang into her mind that he had perhaps really shot some other man in mistake for him.

“Let me go, let me go on,” she said, hoarsely.

“Don’t be alarmed,” cried Mr. Isaacson after her, “I have searched all the way along, but have seen nothing, nothing. There is no cause for alarm.”

But in spite of this assurance, Pamela whipped up the pony and trotted up the rest of the lane at a brisk pace. Just as she turned into the high-road, passing a pretty old red-brick farm-house on the right, she heard the neigh of a horse in a road which met the lane almost in a direct line. Pamela thought the circumstance sufficiently worthy of note to go up the lane a little way. Her heart seemed to leap into her mouth when she came suddenly, in the darkness under the trees, to a horse, whose bridle had been fastened to a post.

“Pearl!” she cried, as she sprang down out of the cart. The mare who recognized her and turned to her at once, was saddled; and the saddle was wet, wet with blood.

To make fast the pony to the opposite paling was the work of a few seconds; and then Pamela, with

straining eyes, examined the ground near the mare's feet. In a few moments more she had discovered a small dark stain disappearing from time to time altogether in the dust; the traces of blood could yet be followed in a direct line to the cross-roads she had just left. Here they appeared to the left, and crossing the road, disappeared in the hedge which surrounded a big orchard belonging to the red farmhouse.

Looking closer, Pamela perceived something which looked like a gate broken down. She scrambled through the gap which had been made, small as it was, for the branches on either side had closed over it. Then she stopped short, for a moment unable to move. For there, lying in the long grass under the fruit trees, with the moonlight streaming down on a still, rigid white face, lay the body of a man.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW HORROR.

PAMELA stood motionless, as if frozen with horror, staring at the body which lay at her feet. Although the man was lying with his face to the ground, she knew who he was, and the knowledge was perhaps more terrible than if he had been a dear friend. For grief at the death of a friend may be mingled with softer feelings, while the death of an enemy, brought home to one with a sudden shock, rouses feelings of horror and bitterness mingled with something like remorse. "Here lies the man dead whom I hated, perhaps unjustly hated," says Conscience. "And just or unjust my hatred has gone down with him into the silence, and wrong can never be set right for him and me."

This thought shot like a dart into Pamela's mind as she fell slowly on her knees beside the body, and touched him with a shudder and a sense of shrinking awe.

For it was Dick St. Rhadegund who lay silent and still in the long grass. Mastering her terror and repugnance, she raised his head, she succeeded in turning him, so that the moonlight came between the branches of the trees on his face. She could not doubt that he was dead, for the coldness of his hands

and face seemed to her limited knowledge conclusive. When, however, she bent closer, she heard a slight sound of heavy, stertorous breathing which forced from her a cry of joy.

Hastily divesting herself of her ulster, she placed it under his head, and laying him gently back, went in search of help.

The people at the Red Farm were new-comers, and Pamela did not know them. But she had seen them at church, and knew that the husband was a man of about thirty years of age, with a pleasant-faced wife a little younger than himself. And she knew that their name was Finch. Crossing the orchard quickly, she got into the farm-yard, and after in vain trying to rouse the inmates of the house from the back, she made her way down the out-buildings until she came to the front entrance, which was under a rustic porch covered with trimly kept climbing roses and honeysuckle. The whole of the front was trim, and smart, and new, and spick and span, with a smartness which did not destroy the charm of mellow red brick, crow-stepped gables and white-framed windows; a smartness which swept its carriage-drive, and mowed its lawn, and trimmed the great clumps of yew and of ivy that shut in the old place, and nestled right up to the eaves.

Pamela knocked loudly. A window was thrown open.

“Who is it? and what do you want at this time of the night?” said a man’s voice rather gruffly.

“There’s a man lying in your orchard. I am afraid

he is either dead or dying. I think he has been shot. Won't you please take him in?"

By this time the pleasant-faced wife had joined her husband at the window.

"Oh, Henry," she exclaimed, "perhaps that is what Nelly saw when she ran into the house, just before her bed-time, and said a strange man called to her over the hedge and frightened her!"

"All right," said he. "We'll be down in a minute."

When Mr. Finch and a rough-looking man-servant, who was a cross between coachman and gardener, reached the orchard, they found Pamela supporting the strange man, and hanging over him in an agony of anxiety and, as they supposed, tenderness.

"Poor girl!" said Mr. Finch to his wife, who had run out after him in her dressing-gown, "her brother, or else her sweetheart, I suppose."

As she heard the voices, Pamela looked up, with an expression which confirmed their innocent belief.

"He's not dead! He is breathing, I can hear him!" she cried in a quavering voice.

Mr. Finch knelt down and made a cursory examination of the wounded man.

"Yes, he's alive, but that's about all you can say," said he in a dubious voice. "Look here."

And he showed a place at the side of the head where the hair was singed.

"There's a bullet in here somewhere," said he. "And he must have another wound in his left arm, by the blood on this sleeve."

Pamela, on her knees on the other side of the un-

conscious man, wrung her hands silently, her face contracted with agony. Then she sprang to her feet.

"I must fetch a doctor, at once," she said. "You will take care of him, I know," she went on beseechingly. "You are good and kind. You will take care of him."

"Yes, we'll take care of him, never fear," said Mrs. Finch heartily; "shall we send the man for the doctor?"

Pamela wrung the hand of this good-hearted new friend, as she shook her head.

"No, I have my own horse here, at least, I mean his," she said. "I shall ride quicker than he will."

Mrs. Finch looked after the girl as she flew across the orchard to the gap in the hedge, and passed through it like an arrow.

"Poor girl, poor girl!" she exclaimed sadly. "I suppose he's her brother, Henry, as she said the horse was hers, at least his?"

"Sweetheart or brother, it's all up with the poor chap, I'm afraid!" returned her husband. "Bring me a pair of scissors, and we'll see what the damage to the arm is. Though that's not the worst of the business, I think."

As he said, the wound to the arm was trifling compared with the injury to the head. For in the former case the bullet had passed through the fleshy part of the arm without going very deep, and the loss of blood had been by no means sufficient to reduce the poor fellow to the state in which he lay. By Mr. Finch's orders, the gardener took a gate

off its hinges; upon this they laid the unconscious man, whom they carried carefully into the house, and placed on the sofa in the drawing-room.

Meanwhile Pamela had unfastened her little mare, as she still persisted in calling Pearl; and feeling even at that moment some consolation in being again on the back of her old favorite, she sprang on the little animal's back, regardless of the fact that she had no habit and that Pearl was saddled for a man; she was a good and careless rider, and on Pearl's back she would have trusted herself without saddle or bridle.

"Now, Pearl, my little Pearl," she said, in the fullest belief that the mare could understand her, "you've got to gallop to-night, my dear, as no horse can gallop but you. It's life and death, Pearl, to more than one of us!"

Gallop, gallop over the hard road, thick with summer dust, went the mare. She seemed as fresh as if she had only just left the stable, and as glad to have her old mistress on her back again as Pamela was to be on her. Past the long orchard they went, under the elm trees. Past the hop gardens, with the young plants creeping up the forest of poles. Out into the moonlight between the hedgeless fields of green young rye and barley. Under the railway bridge, and into the shadow of tall trees again. Past the young sapling which marks the spot where St. Augustine's oak once spread its wide branches.

And then for a moment Pamela drew rein.

For she was coming to the wall which enclosed

Mr. Isaacson's country seat, and its connection with the horrors of the night made her pause. Here in the wall was a gate which she had never before seen opened. Now it stood back, thrown wide on its hinges, so that by stooping she could see right into the flower-garden which surrounded the house. This, then, she thought, if not the gate by which Edward had left the grounds, was certainly the one through which Mr. Isaacson had gone in pursuit of him: and she concluded, from its being still open, that the master of the place had not yet returned. She wondered, almost hoping that it was so, whether he had gone to her mother's house. His influence had always been so great with Edward that she thought even now it might be of some avail; and she knew that for the first time the Jew's influence would now be for good. On she went, through a straggling village, up a hill crowned by a tree-shaded farm-house, on between open fields swept by a breeze from the sea, until she reached Rylestone.

Pamela loved Dr. Willoughby, and Dr. Willoughby loved Pamela. Not that he was at any loss for objects on which to bestow his affection, since he was the father of a family of real English size, of handsome, bright-faced boys and girls in all stages of budding manhood and womanhood. But he had a heart large enough to take a few more in, and Pamela held a foremost place in it.

"Well, my dear, what's the matter?" said he, when he had hurriedly dressed and come downstairs in answer to her summons.

“Oh, there’s more the matter than there has ever been before in the world, I think. Edward has gone out of his mind. I was coming for you to see him, to persuade mamma that he really is insane and not fit to be trusted, when I found on the road a man whom he has shot.”

“Good gracious! Has he killed him?”

“I don’t know,” answered Pamela, sobbing in spite of all her efforts. “He was not dead when I came away, and you can save him if any one can. Come, oh, come at once!”

Dr. Willoughby made her give him all the details she could as to the condition in which he was found, so that before starting he had a pretty good idea of what the nature of the mischief was.

“We’ll do the best for him we can, my dear, be sure of that,” said he kindly, patting her shoulder as she broke out, having finished her recital, into unrestrained weeping.

“I think there’s a case of broken heart as well as broken head here, eh?” he asked gently.

“Oh, no, no, Dr. Willoughby, not that,” sobbed she. “I didn’t like him; he didn’t like me. We were always quarrelling,”—at this the doctor nodded with meaning,—“but he was the strongest and handsomest man in the neighborhood, and only twenty-seven; and it seems so dreadful——”

The doctor nodded, and hurried her out, having interpreted this denial in his own way, which was not such a bad way either. He got into his brougham, and Pamela re-mounted Pearl, and in a very short time they were both at the Red Farm.

Dick was still alive ; that was the reassuring intelligence with which kind Mrs. Finch met them. But he had neither moved nor spoken : only the deep stertorous breathing had told them that he was not yet dead. When the doctor saw him, he was confirmed in the belief that the case was a grave one. He bound up the wounded arm, and then proceeded to the more serious work. Having found the place where the bullet had entered the skull, he probed for the bullet, and found it, embedded in a portion of the skull which had been forced in, and was pressing on the brain. By a skillful operation he extracted the bullet, relieved the pressure on the brain, and speedily had the satisfaction of seeing his patient return to consciousness.

When Pamela, who was waiting outside the door for the earliest tidings, heard the good news, she threatened to do what she had never done in her life, and what she was firmly of opinion no girl of the least sense or spirit ever did—faint away. Mrs. Finch saved her, with kind, sisterly arms supporting the shaking girl.

Dr. Willoughby himself was radiant. Nothing would convince him that Pamela was not desperately in love with this handsome young man ; and of course if Pamela was in love with him, it went without saying that he was in love with Pamela. He intimated his suspicions by a most significant look over the girl's shoulder at Mrs. Finch.

Now Pamela knew nothing of the expressive pantomime which was going on over her head ; for Mrs. Finch, being of the same opinion as the doctor, was

giving expression to it by many knowing nods and smiles and gesticulations.

The doctor took up his hat.

“Keep him perfectly quiet,” said he. “I’ll be back within an hour to see how he’s getting on. If he insists on seeing——” and he nodded towards Pamela’s back, “don’t let him talk.”

It is disgraceful to have to own that Pamela, who had retired a few steps up the hall while she tried to calm her agitation, was too much overcome with the joy she felt on hearing that there was a chance of saving his life to have caught the sense of the doctor’s words. The closing of the front door startled her. She turned round quickly as she heard the wheels on the gravel.

“Has the doctor gone?” she asked.

“Yes, dear. He will be back in an hour,” she said.

“Has he gone to my home? Or to fetch old Mr. St. Rhadegund?”

“He didn’t say.”

Pamela looked thoughtful.

“I ought to fetch his father, if the doctor hasn’t gone there,” she said. “But if he has, I should like to stay, if you will let me, till he comes.”

Mrs. Finch laughed softly, and put her hand on the girl’s shoulder.

“We won’t drive you away, be sure of that,” she said. “Would you like to see him?”

“Oh, may I?”

“Yes, if you’ll be very quiet. Wait a minute; I’ll tell him you’re coming.”

Pamela would have prevented her, but with a nod and a smile Mrs. Finch went into the room. In a few minutes she came out again, and signed to the girl that she might enter.

Pamela went softly into the old-fashioned room, which had been the cosiest apartment imaginable in the time of the last occupiers of the Red Farm, but which had been partly spoilt by the new-comers, who, while buying the old, solid-looking furniture, had added some of the spindle-legged sort among their "modern improvements."

On a big sofa, which had been part of the late tenant's furniture, lay Dick St. Rhadegund with his eyes closed. The room was lighted only by a shaded lamp placed on a table behind him, so that the light did not fall on his face. Pamela came softly up to the sofa, but received a little shock on noticing how deathly pale he was, and that his head was enveloped in bandages. For a few moments she stood perfectly still, gazing intently at his face, more troubled by his absolute stillness and by his ghastly appearance than reassured by the doctor's hopeful words. At last her fears grew so strong that she came close to him, and dropping very softly on her knees as the most noiseless way of bringing her ear close to his face, she listened to find out whether he was breathing.

Suddenly a very feeble whisper startled her.

"Yes, I'm alive," said the whisper close in her ear.

"Thank God!" whispered Pamela back.

And a tear, welling up suddenly, fell on his face as she drew her head back.

Dick smiled very faintly.

"They think you're my sweetheart," he said, not so much speaking the words as forming them with his lips, so that she had to listen and watch very closely to make them out.

"I don't care what they think, so long as you get well," said Pamela impulsively.

Dick slightly raised his eyebrows. Pamela, who had not risen from her knees, now attempted to do so. Dick opened his eyes.

"Don't go."

So she stayed where she was, on her knees beside him, with her hands folded in her lap, looking down, and silently praying for his recovery. But at last a sense of the desperate case in which this strong young man lay grew so strong within her that she could not help the tears falling silently upon her folded hands.

"I shall be all right," whispered he.

She looked up quickly, her pretty face blurred with crying, which, however, gave her a wonderful additional charm in Dick's eyes at that moment.

"Sh—sh!" said she. "You mustn't talk, you know. Please don't," she whispered most tenderly, touching the hand nearest to her, which hung limp from the wounded arm.

Dick's fingers closed feebly on hers, and she left her hand in his with a sudden sensation which she could not define, but which, as she told Jane afterwards, was like a pain at her heart.

"Only this," murmured Dick, "I didn't—hurt—the mare!"

“I *know* you didn’t.”

Until that moment Pamela had never doubted that he *had* ill-treated Pearl; and yet she now felt just as certain that he had not. Pamela was a bright, clever girl; but she was not logical. She jumped to conclusions, sometimes wrong and sometimes right; and this last conclusion happened to be a right one.

There was a long silence, during which Pamela still sat on the floor with her hand on his, glancing from time to time anxiously at his face. And whenever she glanced, she found his eyes fixed upon her. At length she began to find this steady gaze rather embarrassing. It was not like the look of a man for whom the world is over. She took her hand away and rose from the ground.

“I must go,” she said, “and bring your father.”

But at this Dick showed signs of sudden agitation.

“No,” he murmured. “He will be angry, and rough.”

“I don’t care. I shouldn’t think much of him if he were not angry. I shall ask, beg—his forgiveness.”

Her voice dropped, and her head sank.

“You know—who did it?” said Dick.

Pamela moved her head in assent without speaking. She knew by Dick’s tone that he had seen who his assailant was.

“He is mad, you know,” she said, in tones of the deepest humiliation and distress. “But you can never forgive us, of course.”

“*I will,*” whispered Dick. “On condition——”
 He stopped, and Pamela bent her head to hear.
 “That you will be—my ‘sweetheart’ till I get well.”

Again he felt Pamela’s tears upon his face.

“Don’t cry,” said he. “Perhaps it won’t be long. I mean—I mean,” he went on as her tears flowed faster, “I will get well soon.”

“Pray Heaven you may!” sobbed Pamela.

“Kiss me, then, sweetheart.”

Pamela kissed him on the forehead. She saw the first tinge of color come into his face as, raising her own, which was flushed a deep red from her chin to her hair, she whispered:

“Good-bye, good-night.”

And gently pressing his hand with hers, she fled away quickly from the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE MISCHIEF.

Now Pamela might have gone back in the cart, but she could not resist the temptation of another ride on Pearl. So she mounted the mare, when she had taken grateful leave of Mrs. Finch, and started for St. Domneva's Priory. She went by the high-road, not the lanes and by-ways by which she had come. She was almost in darkness all the way, for a thick border of elms on each side of the road shut out the moonlight. The girl was excited, certainly, and girls, in times of excitement, are apt to be fanciful: she told herself so half a dozen times as she cantered along under the trees. She was overstrung, not herself at all, so she said to herself more and more emphatically, as she felt a light breeze fanning her face and caught the first glimmer of the breaking day over the distant fields.

"The night elves and the pixies are still about, I suppose," she murmured half aloud, trying to laugh off nervous fears.

For, nearer and nearer, during the last five minutes, she had seemed to hear a mocking laugh away to the right, where the view of the open fields was

entirely shut out by the forest of poles of a hop-garden. As the words passed her lips, the wild laugh sounded again, and seemed to echo in the woods round Salternes. Involuntarily she checked the mare and listened; and then she fancied she heard the gallop of a horse's hoofs dying away in the distance, and a still fainter outburst of the wild, mocking laughter. Pamela shuddered, and made Pearl change her canter to a gallop. When she reached St. Domneva's, and found the gate of the stable-yard locked, she led the mare round to the front of the house and tied the reins to the railings. For there was no drive through the Priory garden, only a neat little foot-path cut through the velvety lawn up to the front door. Pamela ran up the path, and made the great house-bell clang loudly. Before its echoes had died away, old Mr. St. Rhadegund, in his riding-dress, opened the door.

His other sons had laughed at him for troubling his head about Dick's non-returning; but the old gentleman had not been able to make up his mind to go to bed in his absence. When he saw Pamela the look of relief on his face gave place to one of great anxiety.

"My boy! My son Dick!" was all the old man could say.

Pamela, who had been trying to herself all sorts of ways of breaking the news to him, broke down under the terrible anxiety in the father's eyes. Her tears burst forth again as she whispered:

"Oh, he is not dead——"

His face changed. In the yellow light of the lamp

he held, it seemed to her to become suddenly gray, and pinched, and withered.

“Not—dead!”

“But he is hurt—very badly hurt. He has been shot. He is at the Red Farm three miles off. I have just come from there to tell you. The doctor has been with him, and is going back again.”

Mr. St. Rhadegund's face had undergone several changes during this brief recital. The expression of his face, at first betraying anguish only, passed through successive stages of bewilderment, suspicion, and finally anger so fierce that Pamela quailed before it.

“My son Dick has never harmed man, woman, child, or beast. Who has done this? What devil has done it?”

“Sir,” she faltered, “I think I know. But I dare not tell you.”

Before he could answer, Pamela saw his three younger sons coming down the stairs. But when they heard the tones of their father's voice, they all three kept in the background and listened. The old man laughed harshly, if he could be said to laugh, when the sounds he uttered expressed only anguish.

“Oh, I know. It only wanted that. I've been annoyed, insulted, treated as if I was dirt, by your stuck-up family; my fine boys 'ave been looked down on by you miserable girls, and abused by your cur of a brother. An' now you've killed 'im. Ah! I know, killed 'im. My boy that was worth the whole pack of you twice over.” He turned sharply on his

heel, and left her at the door, and she heard him mutter to himself as he went through the house to the door which led to the stables: "It on'y wanted that! It on'y wanted that!"

Jim came up to Pamela and held out his hand.

"We know it isn't your fault, Miss Pamela," said he, while little Bob, openly blubbering, and Tom with a face of sullen anger, came closer to hear what had happened to their brother.

"Will you tell us about it?"

She gave them a short account, owning with the deepest humiliation and distress, her fear that it was her own brother who had done the mischief. Jim nodded sympathetically.

"You know, Miss Pamela," said he gently, "he's been off his head some time, and—well, and ought to have been looked after. Poor old Dick said so himself only yesterday."

"I know. But my mother wouldn't hear of it—" began she, when suddenly the voice of old Mr. St. Rhadegund, in tones which rang through the house, startled them and made them all turn.

"Who's had Ah Sin to-day?"

Tom answered at once:

"No one, father, he's been in the stable all day."

"He isn't in there now, though," cried Mr. St. Rhadegund, appearing among them with his stable key in his hand. "The loose-box is empty. He's been stolen."

"Oh, no," cried Jim reassuringly, "he's been put somewhere else."

“Come and see for yourself,” returned his father laconically.

And the boys swept off with him to the stables, while Pamela, who had taken small note of this lesser misfortune in the grief from which she was suffering, just shook hands with Jim, told him that she had left Pearl at the gate, and with a last caress to her old favorite as she passed out of the Priory gate, started to walk back to the Red Farm.

Her misery was more acute than before. Mr. St. Rhadegund's just anger had shown her the misfortune in a new and a more terrible light. If Dick St. Rhadegund were to die—the awful thought caused her an indescribable pang of anguish—Edward would be a murderer. And Mr. St. Rhadegund would never rest until he had brought him to justice. There would be the awful ordeal of a public trial, and even if he escaped the death sentence, Edward would have cast upon his family a reproach and a scandal from which they could never be clear again. This thought, terrible as it was, was soon lost in the miserable anxiety she felt for Dick himself.

As she trudged back along the dusty road towards the Red Farm, a shiver passed over her, as she again heard the distant gallop of horses behind her. This time, however, it was only Mr. St. Rhadegund and his son Jim, whom she could see some time before they came up with her; for daylight was now growing stronger. Jim raised his hat ceremoniously in passing, but his father rode by without a sign. Pamela, bruised at heart, and weary of limb, found Jim's salutation more cutting than the old man's

neglect. There seemed to her fancy to be a coldness in the action of the impulsive, impetuous young fellow, which wounded her own sensitive, passionate nature to the quick. After all, had she not done her best to remedy the harm caused by her insane brother? Was she not suffering even more bitterly than they could suffer?

When she got to the Red Farm, she lifted the latch of the gate as softly as she could, slipped inside the garden, and hung about in the shadow of the yew trees waiting until Mr. St. Rhadegund should come out of the house. Pamela was a brave girl, but she could not risk meeting that angry father again. So she stood watching the dawn as it spread itself over the wide fields of the marsh land, and when she heard the front door open she slunk away among the evergreens like a thief.

Peeping out, Pamela felt any faint resentment she may have harbored against the sorrowing father melt away, as the white light of the dawn showed her a man broken down by his grief, a man whom a short hour of suffering had changed from a hale, hearty, young-looking man, to one twenty years older, lined, bent and aged.

“He can’t get over it! My boy, my Dick!” she heard him whisper to Jim as they came out. Then, raising his head with a fresh outburst of ferocious anger, she heard him say: “An’ now, Jim, we go straight for the — as did it. He shall hang for this, sure as my name’s Jack St. Rhadegund!”

Jim only grunted in answer as they went out through the gate and mounted their horses.

Pamela guessed that they would go straight to her mother's, and she wanted to make haste home to give what help she could to her mother and Jane in the battle which she foresaw must take place: but she could not go without finding out if Dick St. Rhadegund was any worse. The front door was ajar, and Mr. and Mrs. Finch were talking inside. They started when they saw Pamela.

"Is he any worse?" she asked anxiously.

"Just about the same, dear," said the lady, with even more kindness than before in her tone. So it seemed to Pamela, and it roused her suspicions.

"You are *sure* he is no worse?" said she earnestly. "Let me see, oh, do let me see him!"

She was pressing on towards the door of the drawing-room, when Mr. Finch gently interposed.

"We had better tell you——" he began.

But his wife said quickly: "Sh—sh, dear, not now," laying her hand on her husband's arm.

For one moment Pamela swayed backwards and forwards, overcome with despair, for she never doubted that Dick was dead. Then, overcome with grief and physical fatigue, she fell in a heap on the floor. She had really fainted this time. When she came to herself Mr. Finch and his wife vied with each other who should reassure her first.

"It's all right, dear. He is alive, I tell you he is alive," said the wife.

"Then why would you not let me see him," asked Pamela faintly.

Mr. Finch replied this time:

"Well, because his father made us swear that

neither you nor any of your family should go near him."

"We couldn't help ourselves," hastily added the wife. "He threatened to take his son away at once, just as he was, whether it killed him or not, unless we promised."

Pamela, who was now on her feet again, drew herself up.

"There will be no need to use it as far as I am concerned," she said, proudly. She was turning to leave the house without another word when, remembering their kindness to her, she turned back and with a wintry smile offered a hand to each of them. "I forgot that I am not quarreling with you," she said. "I thank you both most heartily for your kindness to me, and to him. *I know* you will take care of him!" she added wistfully as she went out of the house.

She jumped into the pony-cart and went by the short cut back home. Mr. St. Rhadegund, having been detained by his younger sons to answer questions about Dick, did not reach Mrs. Hoad-Blean's house until just as Pamela was entering. Jane was waiting for her sister at the door.

"Oh, Pamela, I'm so glad you've come," cried she. "Doctor Willoughby has been here ever so long, talking to mamma in the drawing-room. Mamma wouldn't let me come in, and she won't let the doctor see Edward, and she keeps crying and going into hysterics, and——"

The words died away on her lips, as Mr. St. Rhadegund strode up to the door. Jane had heard noth-

ing about Edward's attack on Dick, so she was utterly at a loss to understand the harshness of the old man's expression.

"I want to see your mother," he said, shortly.

"Mamma will be very glad to see you to-morrow, I am sure," said Jane suavely, "but it is impossible to-night——"

"No," interrupted the old man sullenly, "she won't be glad to see me to-morrow, nor any time. But she's got to see me to-night. Which room is she in?" he asked roughly.

Jane glanced at Pamela, who nodded assent. She knew it was of no use to try to stop this determined man, and she thought it was better that he should see her mother in the presence of Doctor Willoughby, whose kindness and common-sense might soften the hard man and help the poor lady.

Jane silently opened the door of the drawing-room. As he left the door open, passing in with a heavy tread, Jane and Pamela could hear what passed.

"It's you I want to see, ma'am," said Mr. St. Rhadegund, to Mrs. Hoad-Blean, as he stopped and stood upright in the middle of the room. "Who's this?" he asked abruptly, looking Doctor Willoughby full in the face with the eye of a man used to measure at a glance the persons with whom he had to deal.

In a faint voice Mrs. Hoad-Blean, who had, by a wonderful instinct of danger recovered all her composure on her tenant's entrance, introduced them to each other.

"A doctor!" said Mr. St. Rhadegund solemnly.

“I’m glad of that. Perhaps you’ll be able to tell this good lady, sir, whether or no a man as runs amuck with a loaded revolver, and shoots a man down on the ’igh-road, is sane enough to be left at large.”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean listened very intently to his words, as she sat with folded hands, tightly pressed lips, and a scarlet spot burning in the center of each cheek.

“This is rather a sudden plunge into a story,” she said, keeping quite calm with an effort. “Perhaps you will explain.”

He turned upon her savagely, his blunt earnestness seeming to shrivel up her poor little affectations of ignorance.

“I mean, ma’am, as your cur of a son ’as shot down my eldest boy, my son Dick, nigh to the Red Farm yonder, leavin’ ’im for dead. And I mean as ’ow I won’t ’ave your son sent away on the quiet, an’ I’ve come ’ere at once to let you know. Either you shuts ’im up at once as a lunatic in er asylum, or I ’as him arrested for attempted murder. An’ it’ll be murder outright before morning, most likely. Now, then, which is it to be?”

“Really, Mr. St. Rhadegund, you come to your conclusions rather hastily, you find your son shot, you say, and you instantly come to the conclusion that it is my son who did it! Surely that is rather hasty!”

“No more palaver, ma’am,” said he shortly. “If you deny as your son’s mad, why did you lock him up when he came ’ome to-night?”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean replied very coolly:

“Why did I? Well, as a matter of fact, I have not done so.”

Doctor Willoughby glanced at the lady dubiously. She had owned to him that her son was locked in the dining-room, but had implored the doctor not to disturb him that night. The girls, too, exchanged glances of astonishment.

“You deny that your son is locked up in this house!” laughed Mr. St. Rhadegund mockingly. “Well, ma’am, then I tell you this: unless you open the door of that room at the back where the iron shutter is—you see I know all about it—I’ll send my son Jim that’s waiting outside to fetch the constable to arrest ’im for attempted murder.”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean flinched at the words. She cast a sidelong look at the rigid old man, a look of apprehension; then she slowly rose from her chair, and producing a key from her pocket with a trembling hand, crossed the room and, followed by all the others, went down the passage to the dining-room.

All four of her companions were in a state of the most intense excitement. What would the old man do, enraged as he was, when he came face to face with the man, who had struck his son down? What would the mother do, compelled to see this meeting? Above all, what would Edward, mad as they all knew him to be, do when he found himself suddenly confronted with another member of the family whom he hated?

For one moment the mother’s hand faltered, so that she found it difficult to fit the key in the lock. When at last it turned, and the door slowly opened,

Mr. St. Rhadegund, unable to restrain his impatience, pushed past her and rushed into the room. The shutter was intact, there was no other exit except by the door they had just seen unlocked.

But Edward was not there.

CHAPTER XV

THE ESCAPE

Mr. St. Rhadegund hardly gave himself the trouble of searching the dining-room; for a glance at Mrs. Head-Bear's face though she kept her eyes down, revealed to him the fact that she had not only assisted her son to escape, but that she had made all the delay possible in opening the door, in order to give him a chance of getting further away.

Doctor Wroughton looked at the lady with something like admiration. For the past hour she had been fencing with him, putting obstacles in the way of his seeing her son, when all the while he was not there to see.

The girls exchanged anxious glances. Both felt sure that Mr. St. Rhadegund was a dangerous man to defy.

The old Colonel gave a hard laugh. "Very good, ma'am, very good," he said. "You've played us a smart trick enough, but I know a smarter. He is not a domestic your son, you say? Well, then, he's a criminal. So I'll give a warrant out against him by sunrise."

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"Very good, ma'am, very good," he said. "You've played us a smart trick enough, but I know a smarter. He is not a loonatic, your son, you say? Well, then, 'e's a criminal. So I'll 'ave a warrant out again 'im by sunrise."

Mrs. Hoad-Blean, very pale, kept her eyes on the

ground and said nothing. Mr. St. Rhadegund had turned to go away, when suddenly a thought struck him which caused him to stop short with a little chuckle of triumph.

“By the by, ma’am, I don’t think it will be quite so difficult to trace your son as you imagine, for one of my horses was stolen a few hours ago, and I have a very good idea who the thief was. And a man and a horse, you know, can be tracked better than a man without a horse.”

This speech made all the ladies uneasy. As Mr. St. Rhadegund stalked out of the house, Doctor Willoughby prepared to take his leave.

“Are you going to see him?” asked Pamela softly. The doctor answered in the affirmative. Pamela looked wistful, and another question trembled upon her lips. She did not utter it, however, but only shook hands rather shyly.

“No message?” said the doctor, raising his eyebrows.

“No,” said Pamela in a very sad voice as she turned away.

When the doctor had gone, the girls were rather afraid of a scene with their mother, Pamela in particular expecting to be scolded for having expressed a belief that it was Edward who had shot Dick St. Rhadegund. But Mrs. Hoad-Blean went straight up to her own room without a word to either of her daughters; and they, both too heavy-hearted and too tired out for much conversation together, only exchanged a few words on the stairs before they separated for the night.

“Do you think it’s true that he’s taken the horse?” asked Jane.

“It seems likely,” said Pamela. “And I hope it is true. For mamma is sure to have given him money, so that he could ride to Dover or Folkestone, and take his passage for France early to-morrow morning; and as he is clever and cunning enough in his way, I think that start ought to be enough for him.”

The girls bade each other good-night at the head of the stair-case, and retired each to her own little room. Worn out with fatigue and distress, in a few minutes Pamela was in bed. She had put the light out and closed her eyes, though the tears were still trickling down her cheeks, when she was roused by hearing the handle of the door turned. She heard loud, panting breath.

“Who is it? Who is it?” she cried as she sprang up.

Jane’s voice answered, moaning :

“Oh! Pamela, Pamela, there’s more trouble to come. Edward’s taken the revolver!”

Pamela struck a light at once, her face reflecting the anxiety she saw in her sister’s.

“Are you sure?”

“Quite sure. When I picked it up from the dining-room floor, I brought it straight up here, and put it into my left-hand drawer under my lace handkerchiefs. You can come and see for yourself.”

Pamela did go to see for herself, and truly enough the revolver was not there.

The matter seemed even more grave to Pamela than it did to Jane.

“For,” she said, “the fact of his coming upstairs to hunt for it when every moment was precious for his escape, shows that he has vindictive feelings still. He thinks he has paid off Jim St. Rhadegund, but he said himself that he owed a debt to you and to Mr. Isaacson. You must be on your guard, and so must he.”

The two poor girls were so terror-struck that they decided they dare not sleep alone. For they had a very cunning antagonist to deal with in their brother, and their foolish mother was bringing her feminine astuteness to his aid. For it was she who had sent Jane to the top of the house under the pretence that she heard the servants calling out of their windows; and the girls had little doubt that it was while her daughter was away on this errand, with directions to quiet the maids, that Mrs. Hoad-Blean had unlocked the dining-room door and set her mischievous son at liberty.

The girls, after bidding each other good-night, lay awake a long time.

“Pamela!” cried Jane presently, “you are crying.”

A sob was the answer. Then there was a long pause.

“Pamela!” cried her sister again, “one would think you were in love with Dick St. Rhadegund.”

No answer at all this time. Jane heaved a long sigh.

“Well, never mind,” said Jane.

“But you know, dear, you were always much more bitter against them than I was!”

Next day they heard that a warrant had been

issued for Edward's arrest. The day wore on heavily for all the ladies: every sound in the street outside they took for the steps of a messenger come to announce his arrest. But night came and they had heard nothing, not even a word concerning Dick. Pamela did not dare go to the Red Farm again, did not dare send to the Priory to make inquiries. She was utterly miserable, and there was no one to comfort her, for Jane was oppressed by trouble of her own. She had seen Jim in the distance when she was out walking; and although she was sure he had seen her, he followed his father into the Priory stables instead of coming to meet her.

On the second day a most unexpected arrival disturbed the household at an early hour. It was Captain Hoad-Blean himself, who had heard of his son's escapade from Isaacson. He was not greeted with so hearty a welcome as he had been accustomed to receive from his two eldest daughters. Jane's visit to him in London had opened her eyes to a new view of the fascinating father, while Pamela had confessed to her sister that she had had increasing doubts concerning him. Only the twins hailed his unexpected visit with their old enthusiasm.

The very first speech he made on the subject of Edward estranged him more from his wife than ever, if that were possible.

"Well," he said when, unable to obtain the whiskey and soda he had asked for, he was contenting himself with a glass of sherry, "I suppose you've heard nothing more of our young hopeful, my dear?"

“I have heard nothing of Edward,” faltered Mrs. Hoad-Blean, with a change of expression which might have warned him not to strain still further what sense she still retained of wifely duty towards him.

“And you are not likely to hear anything now, I imagine. I always thought he had a tile loose, but he’s got quite sense enough to keep out of the way when there’s a warrant out for him. I think we may both be congratulated, my dear. He’s been the worry of my life in town, with the scrapes he got into and the troop of creditors he always had after him; and now that you’ve had a turn, and that his conduct down here has been more outrageous still, I’m sure you must be heartily glad to be rid of him.”

“Indeed, Marcus, you’re mistaken. I am by no means glad to be rid, as you call it, of my only son.”

Captain Hoad-Blean, who hated a “scene” rose at once with a slight yawn.

“Very pretty sentiments from a mother’s lips, very pretty, and very right. But I’m sure, my dear, you will see, upon reflection, that it is better for him, if not for you, that he should not show his face here again. What time do you have luncheon?”

“At two o’clock usually; but of course we can have it at any time you prefer.”

“Oh, no, no, I wouldn’t interfere with your arrangements for the world. This is only a flying visit on my part, and I can fall in with your hours whatever they are. I think I’ll take Olive and Myrtle for a little walk: there will be just time before luncheon, won’t there?”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean assented with some reluctance, as the twins ran joyfully away to prepare for this great treat, a walk with papa. It was easy to guess that Captain Hoad-Blean's object was to pump his little daughters on such points of the family history as he might wish to know. She could not descend so low as to put the children on their guard against their father, even if they had not both been his warm partizans.

He returned home to luncheon in high good-humor, and during the course of the meal informed Jane that he proposed to call with her at St. Domneva's Priory that afternoon.

"There is no sense in remaining on bad terms with one's neighbors, especially neighbors who are one's tenants," he said, with that easy decision of manner which seemed to give weight to all his utterances. "These St. Rhadegunds have not, I think, received fair treatment from the beginning, and they certainly have the strongest reason to resent Edward's behavior. Why, the eldest son is not out of danger yet, is he?"

The whole family were aghast at his proposal, while his reference to Dick made poor Pamela shiver with sudden pain.

"We cannot learn anything about him," said Mrs. Hoad-Blean coldly. "But as we deny that Edward was the person who shot Richard St. Rhadegund, and as his father has, in spite of that, taken out a warrant against him, it would be most improper for us to make any advances."

"I, on the other hand, think it would be most

proper for us to do so. Nobody with brains in his head could doubt that it was that fool Edward who shot the man, and it is our duty to make civil inquiries."

Mrs. Hoad-Blean said no more ; but when, about an hour after luncheon, Captain Hoad-Blean directed Jane to put on her hat, she ventured to come over to him and to lean on his chair, with her lips very near his ear.

"Papa," she whispered, "don't go to the Priory. We shall be insulted. This old man is very bitter against us."

"Rubbish, my dear. You will not be insulted while I am with you."

When they were on their way, poor Jane very miserable, her father light-hearted as ever, he went a little further in his comments.

"Your mother, my dear Jane, is the most estimable woman I have ever known, but she has not what I call a conciliatory manner. Instead of making the best of these people, and rendering them valuable acquaintances, she has encouraged, or at any rate allowed you and that silly old Lady Constantia to wage a sort of war with them, which was in the highest degree impolitic and ridiculous. Now I understand that one of the sons, James, I think his name is, has paid you a good deal of attention, and that you seem to find him, on the other hand, very much to your taste."

"Papa!" expostulated poor Jane.

But her father put up his hand to stop her.

"Now, my dear, if this is the case—and your dislike

to Isaacson seems to point to there being some truth in the story,—what could be pleasanter than a match between you and one of the tenants of your old home?”

“There is everything against it, papa,” replied his daughter, with spirit which surprised him. “You don’t understand the position we are all in to each other down here. You can’t see what an awful thing we are doing in going to the Priory at all. I tell you there is no talk of a match at all, and that I would not hear of such a thing. Papa, if you take me to the Priory, you will be sorry, very sorry.”

Captain Hoad-Blean looked at his daughter with amazement. She was threatening, positively threatening. Entirely secure in his belief in his own powers, both of controlling his daughter and of conciliating the Priory boar, as he playfully called him, he insisted on carrying out his plan, and treated as of no consequence the grave silence to which his daughter’s entreaties suddenly gave place.

Arrived at the Priory, they were walking up the path to the house, when they both caught sight of a young fellow lying lazily in a hammock on the left, in the shadow of the ruinous part of the abbey building. By the tell-tale blush which rose suddenly to Jane’s face as she turned her eyes at once in the opposite direction, her father guessed who the young man was.

“Is that Mr. James St. Rhadegund?” he asked in his most genial tones.

“Yes, papa,” answered she below her breath.

Captain Hoad-Blean stopped at once, and contemplated Jim with a benevolent smile.

“A very nice-looking young fellow too! My dear, I approve of your taste. I must make his acquaintance. Come, my dear, and introduce me.”

Seeing that Jane made no movement in the direction he wished, her father laid an imperious hand upon her arm. At that moment Jim, catching sight of Jane and guessing who her companion was, got out of his hammock and came towards them with a very red face.

“There is scarcely need for my daughter to introduce us, I think,” began Captain Hoad-Blean, holding out his hand. “Still, she may do so as a matter of form.”

He turned,—still holding out his hand to Jim, who took it at once,—to Jane. But she, profiting by her moment of liberty, had deliberately turned her back upon them, and was walking up to the house by herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK'S SWEETHEART.

CAPTAIN HOAD-BLEAN'S anger at his daughter's open defiance of his commands, knew no bounds. He joined her at the door of the house, shaking and stammering with rage.

"D-d-did you hear what I said? D-d-d-did you understand me?" He almost gasped.

"Yes, papa," was all Jane's answer, as she met her father's eyes quite firmly, though she was trembling from head to foot.

"Then you d-d-defy me? Openly defy me and my authority as your father?"

"No, papa, I don't do that. But you were doing something you would not have done if you had understood how things stand between us. It is impossible for me to meet him just now."

Her tone was humble enough; it was even one of entreaty. Captain Hoad-Blean might have been touched by it, if he had not been one of those persons who are too much absorbed in pursuing what they think to be their own advantage to pay the smallest regard to the feelings of others. He was willing to look upon her beseeching tone as an

apology, however, so he answered as if he were forgiving a grievous wrong.

“ Well, well, my dear, I don’t want to be too severe, but you may trust to me to put things right between you, and you must not interfere with my discretion.”

Discretion! The word seemed to ring in irony in poor Jane’s ears as, the servant who came to the door having said, Yes, sir, in answer to Captain Hoad-Blean’s inquiry whether his master was at home, father and daughter found themselves traversing together the hall of their old home. Captain Hoad-Blean had no sentimental regrets over the loss of the place, though he sometimes affected to have. He had always stigmatized it as a dull hole, and he never saw it without feeling a sentiment of relief that it was off his hands. Nevertheless, he thought proper to sigh as he glanced up the carved oak staircase and at the trophies of travel and of the chase on its walls; and to say to Jane, in a tender voice, as he pointed to an arrangement of buffalo horns and Indian spears over one of the doors:

“ They wake some old memories, those trophies, eh, Jane?”

“ Not that one, papa,” answered Jane’s quiet voice. “ Those buffalo horns belong to Mr. St. Rhadegund.”

“ Oh, ah, yes,” answered her father, very little, if at all, disconcerted by his mistake. “ But I’m sure we had some horns, antlers or something, up in the hall. And here,” he went on, feeling himself on surer ground, as they were shown into the drawing-

room where he remembered being bored to death on many a long evening, "is the old room where your mother and I spent many happy hours."

Jane did not contradict him. She sat silently near one of the windows while her father walked about the room, patronized the old place, and made apologies for the new tenants.

"Odd, this fancy of *parvenus* to get into decent houses! One would fancy they would like brand-new red brick better, with a German tower at one end and a pagoda at the other. Very odd fancy! But lucky for us poor devils of gentlemen. And it's queer how they sometimes tumble on the right thing, too! Somebody tells them, I suppose!" he continued, as his attention was arrested by a clever bronze of a horse and his rider. At this point his tone underwent such an abrupt change that Jane knew, without looking round, that Mr. St. Rhadegund had entered. All the mockery, and nearly all the patronage suddenly disappeared at the very next word. That word was:

"Ah!" and it spoke volumes. Jane could see, without looking, how her father's hand went out in urbane friendliness towards the man whom he had been lightly sneering at. It made her shiver to know, still without looking, that the proffered hand was refused.

"Mr. St. Rhadegund, we must be friends," Jane heard her father say, in a wonderfully pleasant, persuasive voice.

There was a very short pause, and then a rougher voice said, without any affectation of geniality:

“If you’re Captain ’Oad-Blean, I don’t see for why.”

“Don’t you? Well, let me try to put it to you,” said the genial voice, as brightly as ever. “You are a man, Mr. St. Rhadegund, of whom I’ve heard a great deal——”

“Aye, I daresay.”

“And everything I’ve heard is to your advantage,” he went on, the slight touch of patronage in his tone a little more apparent, perhaps, than before.

“I wish I could say as much o’ you.”

The tone of patronage disappeared altogether, and gave place to one in which mortification and anger struggled with assumed indifference :

“I am not surprised that you should let your indignation at my son’s unworthy conduct affect your judgment of his father. I have come, in fact, to apologize for him, and to express my regret, not only at the mischief he has done your son, but at the somewhat cool reception which my wife and her friends have given you in this neighborhood. I have remonstrated with her on the subject of her cold manners to strangers scores of times. I am sure you know that the hearts of our English ladies are none the less warm for a slight coldness of manner, and I assure you she has felt for your son as much, or almost as much, as you can have done yourself. She begged me to make inquiries about him, and one of my daughters insisted on coming herself on the same errand.”

To this speech Mr. St. Rhadegund at first replied

with a particularly hard, unpleasant, incredulous laugh. Jane, looking round in terror, for she saw that there was something worse to come, and dreaded her father's next words, saw that every trace of the man's habitual good-humor had left his face, which was stern and hard, and square-looking, so that she wondered how her father could go on with a task so hopeless as the attempt to soften him. She likened the encounter, in her own mind, to a butterfly playing about a rock.

He answered at last in words which made Jane rise, hoping that he had not noticed her, and that the discovery of her presence might put some check on his harshness.

"I want no apologies and no inquiries. As for your wife's manners, if you want them to be any different, you should live with her and look after her. I don't mind them, or want them any different. What I want is for you an' your family to let me and my family alone till we leave this place, which will be when I can take my son Dick away, dead or alive."

Jane cried out, unable to restrain her horror at the man's tone, and at the almost despairing suggestion it implied. The old man turned upon her fiercely:

"Aye, you may cry out! You and your sister, after turning up your noses at my splendid boys, you may snivel and cry and pretend to be sorry now one of 'em's dyin'——"

He broke off abruptly, afraid of the effect upon himself of his own emotion. Jane put her face in

her hands and sobbed. Captain Hoad-Blean would still insist upon taking advantage of what looked like a favorable opening.

“My dear sir,” said he in a voice of passionate assurance, “my girls are nearly broken-hearted over this unhappy affair. As we came up the garden we met one of your sons, a splendid young fellow, as you say. My daughter could not speak to him——”

“Papa!” expostulated poor Jane, in an agony of shame.

Mr. St. Rhadegund looked hard at the girl, and then turned abruptly to her father again.

“I’m sorry for your girls,” he said in a tone which, though hard, had a ring of remorse in it, “I’m sorry to have to talk ’arsh to a girl. But I can’t help myself. There’s madness and something worse than madness in their family; they don’t come of good stock; an’ if I catch one of my boys talking to either of them again, I’ll send ’im straight back to Colorado with just ’is passage money out and not a ’alfpenny besides.”

At last Captain Hoad-Blean was really frightened. There was the decision of a practical man in old St. Rhadegund’s tones, and the idea of assisting one of his pretty daughters to marriage with an emigrant, with just a spade and red shirt to start house-keeping with, killed his sympathy at once. He drew himself up, and shook with indignation as he answered:

“My daughter Jane, Mr. St. Rhadegund, would have been forbidden by her *fiancé* to come to this house at all, if he had known of her intention. You

need not be afraid of having to send your sons away on her account or on that of either of her sisters."

Oh, how grateful Jane felt for the little spark of self-respect which her father at last allowed himself to show! She walked across the room to him with the air of a queen, and put her hand through his arm to urge him to take leave immediately. Captain Hoad-Blean had by this time had enough of Mr. St. Rhadegund's society, so he made no resistance to his daughter's wishes. With a very stiff bow, he said "Good-morning"; and, accompanied by his daughter, who bowed without raising her head, he left the house.

No sooner had he reached the gate, however, than his pleasant opinion of himself, bounding up again after the blow it had received, caused him to say:

"I think we had the best of him, Jane, my dear. I'm very glad we went. It's just as well to let these beggars know sometimes what their superiors think of them!"

"Yes, papa," said poor Jane without further comment.

She was utterly crushed by the humiliating scenes she had just gone through; and when she reached home it was some time before she was sufficiently mistress of herself to give Pamela an account of their disastrous expedition. Pamela's indignation set fire to her own. Admitting that their father had behaved, to say the least, unwisely, they both felt their pride roused by old Mr. St. Rhadegund's insulting words concerning themselves.

“He shall see whether we are anxious for them to speak to us or not,” said Pamela. “I only wish one of them would try to speak to us, so that he might see how we will treat him. Now mind, Jane, don’t let your natural civility get the better of you: if that Jim should attempt to speak to you, you are to turn your back upon him without any answer, and be just as rude as I could be!”

Jane, still stung by the remembrance of the scene she had just witnessed, promised readily enough.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean quite warmed to her husband, so strong was his indignation against old St. Rhadegund, whom he described as “the most insufferable cad he had ever met.”

“I did you injustice, my dear,” he went on magnanimously. “Of course it was out of the question for you to be on friendly terms with these people: it would have been a humiliation to be anything but distant in your behavior to them.”

Neither he nor Jane told her the particulars of the interview, but Mrs. Hoad-Blean knew her husband well enough to guess that he had not had the best of the encounter. This view was confirmed by his insisting on returning to town that very evening. They all saw him off by the seven o’clock train, and then had the satisfaction of cutting Jim and Tom St. Rhadegund dead outside the station on their return home.

Tom, whose instincts, where his antipathies were aroused, were those of the untutored savage, threw a fir-cone after them; but Jim, though he went home

whistling with his hands in his pockets, was cut to the heart.

So was Jane. Pamela in vain tried to brace her up by applauding her spirit; Jane, who said nothing, had to blink all the way home to keep the tears back. And tears came less easily with Jane than with Pamela.

Pamela did not know how soon her own fortitude would be tried.

They had just finished dinner that evening when she was told that there was a boy outside who wanted to see "Miss Pamela." He had a note in his hand, the maid said, but he refused to give it up to any one but Miss Pamela herself. Pamela had her suspicions. She grew red, and then white, and at last asked:

"What sort of a boy is he?"

"He looks like a farm-hand, ma'am. He has great hobnailed boots and——"

"I'll come," she interrupted, "take him into the hall."

Jane, who had been near enough to overhear this colloquy, whispered:

"Do you think he comes from Edward?"

Pamela shook her head, and escaping from her sister, left the room quickly. A shock-headed lad was waiting for her in the hall, who touched his forelock and asked, with a grin:

"Be you Miss Pameler?"

"Yes."

"Then I wus to give you this."

"Who told you to bring it?" asked Pamela doubt-

fully, seeing that the direction outside the envelope was to "Miss Pamela Blean, Salternes," in an unknown feminine hand.

"The missus up at the Red Farm."

Pamela opened the envelope, and found a sheet of paper inside on which was written only these words :

"I want my sweetheart.—DICK."

"There is no answer," she said, in a trembling voice ; and the boy disappeared.

She ran upstairs to put on her hat and cloak, and in little more than a minute was peeping inside the drawing-room door, beckoning to Jane.

"I'm going to the Red Farm," she whispered when her sister came out. "I don't want mamma to know until I'm gone, for she would make a fuss and try to stop me."

"What? After all you said to me, you're going to see him?"

"I must."

She was too much agitated to be teased, so Jane kissed her and let her out very softly.

Pamela ran as soon as she had turned the corner of the street and was out of sight of the cottages. There was a short cut to the Red Farm, a footpath over the fields, and this she took, running like a hare the greater part of the way. She thought, innocent girl that she was, that it was remorse at her brother's conduct which made her so anxious to obey the behest of his victim, and that the fact of her having disliked Dick without due reason made her

feel that she owed him some amends on her own account. Her indulgence of the will of a sick man, she thought, could not be held to infringe the compact she had made with the rest of her family against the St. Rhadegunds in general ; she was very careful to put this to herself, and to arrive at an understanding with herself that she would not transgress the rules again.

It was about eight o'clock, a bright June evening, and Pamela, when she reached the high-road, where the trees grew thickly, felt rather nervous ; for although a spirited and brave girl, ready to face any danger in time of necessity, she was unused to being out alone so late. However, she met no one except a farmer returning late from market in his cart, until she came to the corner by the Red Farm. The house was not yet in sight, being thickly surrounded with evergreen trees. She had turned to the right and was approaching the gate when heavy footsteps on the drive made her draw back. A moment later the gate was opened by old Mr. St. Rhadegund.

There were trees on the opposite side of the road, and it was now growing dark, while Pamela had her back to the faint light in the west. So for the moment he did not recognize her, and she saw in his face nothing but deep anxiety.

"Are ye comin' in?" he asked, as he held open the gate.

"Yes," answered Pamela in a very low voice.

At the sound of her voice the old man's face changed, and coming through the gate himself he shut it and kept his back to it.

"You're one o' the Bleans, I see. What do you want here?"

"I have come to see your son. He has sent for me."

The old man frowned, and the hard lines came into his face.

"Whether he was fool enough to send for you or not, you don't see 'im."

Pamela fired up.

"I will, though," she said with spirit. "I'll see him if I wait here all night."

Mr. St. Rhadegund was evidently taken aback by this opposition.

"Oh," he said in a jeering tone after a moment's pause, "you're running after 'im now, are you? I s'pose your father and sister didn't tell you what I said to 'em?"

"Yes, they did. But I don't care. When your son gets well I shall hate him just as much as I do you. But it was I who found him, fetched the doctor for him, and perhaps saved his life, remember that. And while he's ill I shall see him if he wants me to. Let me pass, please."

Mr. St. Rhadegund frowned still as he stared at her, and muttered something about "brazen impudence" and "cheek that licked creation." But he did at last reluctantly edge away from the gate, and Pamela calmly opened it and went up to the house.

When a servant opened the door to her and showed her into the dining-room, where Mrs. Finch was, Pamela's hardihood had of course oozed away and left her so nerveless and shaken that the lady

asked her at once if she had been frightened by some one. Knowing that she was with a good friend, Pamela gave her, as briefly as she could, the outlines of the situation; and both Mrs. Finch and her husband, who now came in, applauded her for making a stand with so much spirit.

“And indeed, my dear,” added Mrs. Finch regretfully, “I am sorry to hear you hate the young fellow so; for he is so nice that we’ve grown quite fond of him in these two days. And—and oh! he seems so fond of you! I asked him if you were engaged, and he shook his head and only said one word: ‘But;’ so I had hoped perhaps——”

“Oh, no,” said Pamela quite stiffly. “But as he sent word that he wished to see me, of course I felt bound to come.”

“Come then,” said Mrs. Finch, looking dubiously at her, as if doubting whether such a hard-hearted girl deserved the privilege about to be accorded to her. And crossing the hall, she showed her into the drawing room, which had been fitted up comfortably as a bedroom for the sick man. A professional nurse, who was busy with some fancy-work at the window, rose when the ladies entered, and prepared to leave the room.

“You’ll make him keep as quiet as you can, and not let him talk much?” she said in a low voice to Pamela, whose interest in the invalid she evidently imagined to be of a tender nature. “He is going on very well, but the wound in his arm proved more serious than was expected, and he is weak from the loss of blood.”

Then the nurse and Mrs. Finch left the room.

A screen hid the door from the patient's sight. But Dick had heard the whispering, and he called out:

"Who's there? is anybody there?"

Pamela was shocked by the weakness of his voice. She came round the screen slowly like a guilty child. They had put him into a bed, and the bandages round his head made him look ghastly as he lay back on his pillows. Pamela was shocked: he seemed to her to look so much worse than he had done when she found him lying in the orchard. She felt sure that he must be dying, and it was with a face softened by deep feeling that she came softly up to the bedside. She tried to speak, but she was too much moved, not only by compassion, but by the joyful welcome she saw in his pale face.

"You have come," said he, as he moved the fingers of his left hand, the nearest to her, as a sign to her to give him hers. She did so at once, very gently, for it was the left arm which was wounded.

"So you were not offended," he added softly.

"No, oh no! don't talk!"

"I must talk. I have something to say—to you, that if I were well you wouldn't let me say." A pause, during which Pamela took off her glove and took his hand between both hers very gently. "And as I may never get well, I use my chance, you see."

In the pause which ensued now, Pamela slid down softly on her knees beside the bed as she had done two nights before beside the sofa. She knew what

he was going to say. When he said it she dropped her cheek gently on to his hand.

“I love you. I think I did from the first. I am so happy—knowing it was you who tried to save my life—that I would rather die like this than have gone on living without your ever having come nearer to me.”

“Don't, don't talk like that,” whispered Pamela, trying to keep quite calm. “You must be quiet, quite quiet, you know. You are not to agitate yourself.”

“I don't. It is you who are agitating yourself. When a man lies expecting to die he gets very quiet, I find.”

Pamela raised a tear-stained, quivering face, and looked straight into his eyes, as if the force of her will would carry out her wish.

“You must not die. You *sha'n't* die,” she whispered between her set teeth.

A change came over his face, and his eyes glowed.

“You don't want me to?”

“No, oh no, no!”

“But you only promised—to be my sweetheart—(and a very neglectful one you are too!) till I got well.”

She was so over-wrought that she scarcely knew what she was doing: she kissed his hands half a dozen times with a little moaning sound. He put his right hand out till it touched her wavy brown hair.

“Will you be my sweetheart—whether I go—off the hooks—or not?”

“Yes, yes, whatever you do, as long as you don’t die!”

“Kiss me, then. Stand up and give me your hands and kiss me. I’m not a very handsome sweetheart to look at just now, but you shall be proud of me, presently.”

Nobody would have thought, if they had seen Pamela kiss her sweetheart, that she had been coerced so cruelly into her engagement. Though she cried and trembled, she looked as happy as could be.

When the nurse, thinking he had had enough of what she was still inclined to think must have been an exciting interview, knocked at the door, Pamela came at once into the hall with a particularly demure expression of face.

“I must make haste back,” she said, to Mrs. Finch, who was watching her narrowly. “It is quite dark.”

“Good-bye, my dear,” said the lady, stopping some words of gratitude which Pamela tried to utter, “I’m so glad you came this evening. Only I’m sorry to hear that you dislike him so, and that you are not engaged.”

“*We are!*” whispered Pamela, with a crimson face, as she rushed out of the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEWS OF THE FUGITIVE.

PAMELA was ashamed of herself. After her severe admonitions to Jane on the subject of Jim St. Rhadegund, how could she go humbly to confess to her that she had broken down with regard to Dick? She half resolved to keep her own counsel for a little while; but remembering in time that she would never be able to keep a secret from Jane, which would involve much prevarication, she made up her mind to get her confession over as quickly as possible. The dreary and rather alarming walk back in the dark was quickly accomplished, and then she had to face, not Jane but her mother, who was utterly scandalized on learning that her daughter had gone out alone at such an hour.

“Pray what is the meaning of this, Pamela?” she asked severely, as she let the culprit in. Pamela glanced at Jane, who was lingering in the background, as if to ask whether she had not given her mother some explanation. “I want your account, not Jane’s,” said Mrs. Hoad-Blean, as she made her truant daughter precede her into the drawing-room. “You girls are much too ready to shield each other.

Between you, I can never get at the truth of anything."

The reproach was quite unmerited, but the poor lady, unable to be just where her darling son was concerned, was still enraged against the St. Rhadegunds, and chose to fancy that her two eldest daughters were more inclined to take their side than hers, in the quarrel caused by Edward's conduct.

Pamela at once perceived that she had something worse to dread than Jane's reproaches. However, she was ready to show fight, and thought she had a good case.

"Dick St. Rhadegund sent word to ask if I would go and see him, mamma," she answered quietly; "and as he was ill, I couldn't refuse, of course."

Mrs. Hoad-Blean frowned at the beginning of this speech, and went on frowning more severely at the end of it.

"I wish you would both leave off speaking of these young men by nick-names," she said, petulantly.

"Well, mamma, every one calls them so."

"What they or their father do is no business of yours. Nick-names are extremely bad form. And if this Richard St. Rhadegund did send for you, which was a most improper thing for him to do, it is quite a new thing for me to hear that young girls can run off late in the evening, without their mother's presence and even without her knowledge, to call upon young men, however ill they may be."

The two girls knew that their mother cherished a grudge against Dick for allowing himself to be shot

by Edward, and so getting her poor boy into all this trouble. This made it the more difficult for Pamela to confess. But excitement had put her into a reckless mood, and she resolved to "get it over."

"He is very ill, mamma. Come with me to-morrow and see him. And you will see for yourself."

Jane looked at her sister with some mild astonishment. But her amazement was nothing to her mother's.

"Go—with—you to-morrow!" she exclaimed, as if she had not heard aright. "Are you going to make a practice of visiting young men when they are ill?"

"Yes, mamma, this one. For I have promised to marry him, if he gets well."

"Pamela!" cried poor Jane, overwhelmed.

While Mrs. Hoad-Blean herself, poor lady, was too much shocked to answer at all. After a vain attempt to do so, she sat down in an arm-chair and began to cry. She did indeed feel that all the world was against her. Pamela, diffident and remorseful, drew near with gentle words of explanation and apology. Jane threw her arms round her mother's neck and tried gently to persuade her that Pamela was not altogether heartless and depraved. But it was a long time before they succeeded in calming her; and when at last they persuaded her to let the wicked girl give her a good-night kiss, she looked as if she feared that the touch of Pamela's lips would leave a scar.

This was not the last of the ordeal Pamela had to go through; for there was the explanation to be

given to Jane herself in the privacy of their own rooms. Jane was merciful, but pained.

"It's rather funny, you know, after the way you talked at me about poor J-Jim, whom I really, really liked," she said with a tremor in her voice, "when you know you always pretended to hate Dick!"

"I know I did!" admitted Pamela ruefully; "at least I thought I meant it until—until I saw him lying there, and then—and then I felt somehow—as if, as if I shouldn't know what to do with myself if he died!"

"Well, of course you wouldn't, nor should I, knowing that our own brother killed him. You might feel like that and yet not care for him very much," said Jane dubiously.

Pamela interrupted her rather impatiently:

"At any rate I do care for him, so it's no good talking to me. And—and—and I think—after m-m-m-mamma—you might—" she sobbed, growing incoherent.

Jane took her pretty brown head into her hands soothingly.

"Yes, yes, I know—I might leave you in peace. Well, dear, I will. Only don't forget that it isn't only you volcanic people that have feelings."

In the course of the following morning Pamela and Jane went for a walk together; they went in the direction of the Red Farm, and Jane waited outside while Pamela went to see Dick; which was noble, considering the circumstances. And the hard part of it was, that as they came back they saw Jim

riding toward them; and that, as soon as he caught sight of them, he turned his horse aside across a field to avoid them.

“Never mind,” whispered Pamela to Jane, “it will all come right.”

She had just seen her lover, and was cheerful.

Jane, who had *not* seen her lover, except for that unsatisfactory moment, declined to take the same view.

“N—n—no, it won’t, I feel it won’t,” she said, tremulously and despondently.

They thought it prudent to say nothing to their mother of the direction in which they had walked, and to their surprise Mrs. Hoad-Blean, who looked flushed and excited, asked no questions. She seemed extremely absent in manner all that day, answered any question that was put to her almost at random, and behaved so strangely altogether that the horrible thought suggested itself to the girls that the trouble she had had through Edward was affecting her own brain. This fear was strengthened by the certainty both girls felt that night that they heard her soft footsteps about the house when everybody else had gone to bed. This confirmation of their fears seemed so terrible that they scarcely dared to speak to each other about it on the following morning.

Jane was darning a tablecloth, and Pamela was superintending the practicing of a duet by her little sisters, and trying to keep them within a bar or two of each other, when a loud ring and an imperious knock which they knew, announced the arrival of Lady Constantia. Since the misfortune of the

last few days, Mrs. Hoad-Blean had developed a positive affection, who, to do her justice, was a partizan of the warmest kind. Conceiving that in espousing the cause of Mrs. Hoad-Blean against John St. Rhadegund she was upholding the cause of the threatened aristocracy against the usurping democracy, she threw her whole soul into the quarrel, and went even further than Edward's mother herself in maintaining that whatever harm Edward might have done to an individual St. Rhadegund, the family had brought it upon that individual member and deserved all they had got. So that her visit poured balm into her friend's wound, and they chatted away in perfect harmony, while Harriet sat bolt upright, looking even more forlorn and being even more difficult to draw out than usual.

"I came to tell you and the dear girls that I've had to put my garden party off till next week, as Alfred had an engagement he can't get off; and I don't think that Pamela, for instance," and she gave an arch glance at that crimson-faced young woman, "would enjoy herself much unless Alfred were there."

Jane looked at her sister maliciously, but Pamela would have died rather than raise her eyes or admit that she heard. Mrs. Hoad-Blean pursed her lips, and wondered whether there was even yet any possibility of freeing Pamela from her "unhappy entanglement" before Thursday week. She was obliged to tell herself that there was none, and it was with a sigh that she answered:

"It is very good of you to come and ask us, and I'm sure the girls will be dreadfully disappointed;

but I don't feel, while poor Edward's fate is hanging in the balance, as it were, through that spiteful man's vindictiveness, that we ought to go to any gathering of pleasure."

The girls did not look disappointed, but Lady Constantia could not spare two beauties at one time from her garden party, so she combated Mrs. Hoad-Blean's suggestion.

"But you can't neglect your girls' interests in that way. It isn't necessary, and it isn't right," said she imperiously. "As for Edward I have some news of him."

At these words, the girls noticed a very curious change come over their mother's face. She did not look astonished, she did not look pleased, only curiously intent and watchful. Lady Constantia went on:

"You need be under no further anxiety about him: he has got safely away." Still Mrs. Hoad-Blean's face showed no change in expression, though with her lips she affected delight and a strong wish to know more. Lady Constantia continued: "It came to my ears in a very roundabout way, which I need not trouble you with at present, that the horse that old St. Rhadegund missed out of his stables that night has been found near Queenbro', so there is no doubt that your son has crossed to Flushing, and got away like that. So that really, now you know he is in safety, there is no reason for you to shut yourselves up. You must show a bold front in the world, my dear. All decent people will be on your side, and at last this man will find the force of public

opinion too strong for him, and will let the matter drop quietly. Of course you will give him notice to quit at the end of his term?"

Mrs. Hoad-Blean admitted that this was what she would now have to do; and Lady Constantia, delighted at having at last gained her point, was kinder and more tenderly patronizing than ever.

"I am delighted to see you showing so much spirit," she said. I am sure that now you will be as much delighted as I, when these people are driven out of your beautiful home. I must tell you that I have serious thoughts of sending Harriet away, on account of the annoyance she suffers from one of the crew, a creature they call Tom. The other day—you will scarcely believe it, I caught him pelting her with cherries. She hadn't the spirit to complain to me, or even to run away; so I ran out and brought her indoors, telling him what I thought of his behavior. The girl looked nearly dead with fright: she seemed too much alarmed to move."

Jane and Pamela, who knew, by some means or other, perhaps by girls' freemasonry, more of the matter than the speaker did, glanced first at Harriet, who was crimson, and then at each other.

"He didn't hurt me, mamma," faltered Harriet.

"Hurt you! I should think not. I would have had him taken up if he had. But it was insolence, the height of insolence, and if you were not more of your father's daughter than mine, you would have resented it in a proper manner."

And she rose, still ruffled with her indignation, and carried off her meek offspring after having again

insisted on the appearance of the girls at her garden party.

When she had gone, Jane and Pamela seized the first opportunity of exchanging confidences. Pamela the impulsive broke the ice first.

“Jane,” she said, “did you notice mamma’s face when Lady Constantia said Edward had escaped to Flushing?”

Pamela assented.

“Well, what did you think?”

But Jane did not like to say what she thought, so Pamela said it for her.

“You thought, remembering the noises we heard last night about the house, that he wasn’t quite so far off.”

“Oh, sh—sh, Pamela, sh—sh!”

“Well, we must watch.”

But to this Jane objected mightily. They could not spy on their own mother, she said. But Pamela was of opinion that they could, and ought to do so, to save their own mother, and perhaps a few more of them, from being shot or strangled.

“He is mad, and she won’t believe it. And they say that mad people are so cunning that they deceive even their keepers to carry out the horrible schemes they make. I tell you we must watch, and if you won’t help me I must get somebody else to.”

In the end, Jane, who saw there was reason in her sister’s words, agreed to her plan. That night, therefore, when they had retired to their rooms, both girls came softly out again, and, while Jane returned

to the drawing-room, Pamela secreted herself in a big cupboard in the hall.

Both girls had to wait, as they had expected, more than an hour before their intently listening ears caught the light sound of a footstep on the stairs. Each could hear her own breathing as she waited, in the dead-night-silence, for the next sound.

Creak, creak, went the old boards of the wooden staircase, while the chirping of the cricket in the kitchen seemed to grow deafeningly loud, and the faint, unaccountable night-noises to fill the air and drown the sounds for which they were waiting. Jane, trembling very much, but following her sister's instructions to the letter, lit a candle, seized a book, and came close to the drawing-room door. The noise she made in striking the match, or her light showing under the crack of the door, must have alarmed the person on the stairs. Something was kicked by a hasty foot, a hall-chair perhaps. And the noise was so near the drawing-room that Jane knew the right moment had come. She turned the handle of the door, and came face to face with the nocturnal wanderer.

It was her mother. Mrs. Hoad-Blean was ghastly pale, and as the sudden opening of the door alarmed her, the long cloak she wore fell back a little, and showed upon her arm a big basket. Jane forgot her part, which was to pretend that finding herself unable to sleep, she had come down in search of a book.

"Mamma," she said, entreatingly, "you are going to Edward!"

“Sh—sh!” escaped her mother’s ashy lips.

“Oh, mamma, let me go with you. Where is he?”

Her mother had recovered herself, and seeing that she had been spied upon, was growing angry.

“What do you mean by springing upon me in that way? Can’t I move about my own house without having spies at my heels? Go up to your room, and—and”—she looked round fearfully and her tone changed pitifully, and became one of entreaty, “don’t say anything about this to Pamela, or of course to any one.”

Jane caught her mother’s hand. “Oh, mamma, mamma,” she cried piteously, “why won’t you trust us? It is not right for you to go to him alone? It is dangerous. You think you can control him, but the moment will come when you will find you cannot. Now tell me, don’t you really know by this time that he is not quite right?”

Her mother faltered and looked down. Truth to tell, the poor thing had not been without qualms of doubt, and her next words revealed this fact.

“It is all right. You needn’t be frightened. The poor boy can harm no one,” she said, complainingly, as she plucked nervously at her daughter’s sleeve. “Listen, Jane, and then you will know there is no need to speak to Pamela.”

She put her lips close to her daughter’s ear. “He is shut up: I have locked him in,” she whispered.

“Where?” asked Jane quickly.

But her mother would not trust her with the secret.

“Oh, a long way from here, a very long way,” she said, hastily.

“But——”

“Oh, of course he cannot stay where he is. I am going to send him away right away. So there is really no need for you to trouble your head about him.”

“But, mamma, you cannot send him away yourself, without help!” said Jane persuasively.

But opposition was beginning to irritate the poor lady.

“Yes, yes, I can, without your help, without anybody’s. And I won’t be dictated to by my own children. Go back to your room at once,—at once I say.”

And she stamped her foot on the floor.

Turning very sorrowfully, Jane obeyed, and went straight upstairs. She had done her part, which was that of persuasion, and had failed. Now it was the turn of stratagem, and that was left to Pamela.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. ISAACSON'S LITTLE TRIUMPH.

No sooner had Jane gone upstairs, than Mrs. Hoad-Blean went into the drawing-room, and after a few minutes Pamela, who had put the door of the cupboard in which she was hiding ajar, heard her come into the hall again. As soon as her mother reached the hall-door, Pamela, safe in the darkness, slipped out of her cupboard. Mrs. Hoad-Blean let herself out of the house with very little noise, and her daughter, after waiting to give her a few moments' start, slipped out after her, ran across the little stone-paved yard, and peeped out into the road. It was rather a dark night, a fact which favored the girl; for seeing dimly her mother's tall figure in her long black circular cloak going up the lane, she was able to follow with little fear of being seen.

Before the very last of the cottages on the opposite side of the road, Mrs. Hoad-Blean stopped short. A light broke upon Pamela. This end cottage stood back from the road and away from the others. It was a tumble-down place, at the end of a long strip of untidy garden, in which weeds and marigolds struggled for the mastery. A clump of elder bushes

screened it from the row of cottages which came next, and under their branches stood an old water-butt, full to the brim of water which was covered with a thick green slime. The shutters were barred from the outside across the two lower windows, and in the garden stood a rickety post bearing a paper label with information that "This Four-Roomed Cottage" was to let at the rent of three shillings a week.

When her mother stopped, Pamela stopped. When the former, after a hasty look round, went through the gate and up the garden path, Pamela ran up the lane until she was exactly opposite to the cottage. And when Mrs. Hoad-Blean took a key from a nail on which it was hanging in the porch, unlocked the door and went in, Pamela ran up the garden in her turn and secreted herself under the elder bushes. There she had a long time to wait, so long that, fearing her brother might have done his mother some injury in a fit of mad rage, Pamela came out of her hiding-place and prowled around the cottage. The windows of the back were also fastened with outside shutters; but she concluded that the glass inside must be broken, for she could quite plainly hear both her mother's voice and Edwards, and after a few moments, as they grew more excited, she could even hear the words they said. Mrs. Hoad-Blean was trying to persuade her son to give up to her the revolver; while he, in a dull but obstinate voice, was repeating over and over again a dogged refusal.

"Well then, dear, at least promise me that you

won't attempt to use it," she persisted coaxingly. "Don't you see, dear, if you were to be found with it, they'd say that all those dreadful things that were said about you were true. And then they would take you away from me and shut you up, so that I should never see you again."

Pamela could hear him reply petulantly:

"Oh, I'll take care. I'm all right. How long are you going to keep me shut up here?"

"Only a day or two, dear, till I can get some money together, enough to send you away with. And you will go this time, won't you, dear? Because you know you're not safe here, not for long."

Pamela, who could feel little sympathy for her brother, felt a pang as she noticed the anxiety, the deep, hopeless tenderness, in her mother's voice. It was a long time before the voices ceased inside, the mother at last giving up her task of persuasion as nopeless. Then there was a long silence, during which Pamela knew that the mother was stroking her boy's head with caressing fingers, and that the boy himself was submitting to her caresses with an ill-grace and with many ejaculations of impatience. At last, with a heavy sigh, Mrs. Hoad-Blean rose up, and telling him that she would find an opportunity of coming to see him on the following morning, and that she would bring him something he liked better (from which Pamela inferred that he had been grumbling at the food she had brought him), she bade him a most tender farewell and left him.

Pamela stole round the cottage again, watched her mother lock the door and hang the key on the

nail; then she only waited until Mrs. Hoad-Blean had got out of sight, before she stole round to the door herself.

There was one fixed idea in her mind: she must get that revolver away from Edward. Now, a struggle with a lunatic is not a thing to be lightly entered upon, so she stood for a few moments with the key in her hand, debating how she should set about it. She knew that Edward had been provided by his mother with a light; and she guessed, from the words which had passed between them, that Edward carried the revolver upon his own person. She thought that perhaps, by slipping into the house very quietly, she might be able to watch him a little while through the keyhole or the cracks of the door, and be able to decide on the best way of attack. Having opened the outer door of the cottage, she left the key in the lock, so that in the probable event of her having to make a rapid escape she could just slam the door to and lock it without delay. For this reason, also, she left the door wide open. The door of the back room, in which Edward was, she found ajar, the fact being that the catch of the lock was worn out and would not hold. From the sounds inside the room she could tell that Edward was eating: surely, then, this would be as good a moment as any in which to take him unawares. She ventured to peep in. By the light of a solitary candle Edward, who was reclining pretty comfortably on the floor on a pile of the drawing-room cushions, was eating sandwiches and looking at an illustrated paper. Pamela could almost hear her heart beating.

He was wearing a pea-jacket, which was thrown open, and she could not doubt that the revolver was in one of the pockets of this. She rapidly decided that her success must depend upon surprise: she must overturn the candle, throw him back upon the cushions, ransack his pockets and escape before he had any idea who his assailant was or what was her object.

Snatching her opportunity when his head was bent over an illustration, she stole into the room and overturned the candle with astonishing quickness. But as the candle fell, it burnt for a moment on the floor before it was extinguished by the draft from her skirts. In that moment Edward saw just this—that there was a woman in the room. He sprang up with a fierce yell, and made a spring in the direction of the spot where he had seen her. But she had stepped aside in a fright as he rose, so that he just missed her, and she was able to distinguish the outline of his figure against the crack above the window shutter. She could make out no more than that he was between her and the door, between her, therefore, and all chance of immediate escape.

They stood there for a few long moments in the dark, hearing at first absolutely nothing. But some slight sounds, either of her feet on the old boards or of her quick-coming breath, must have reached his ears; for presently he made another spring at her, catching the bead fringe of the little cape she was wearing, part of which, as she wrenched herself away, was torn off, and scattered a pattering rain of beads upon the floor. Again and again, uttering

strange groans and cries, he sprang at her, and again and again she evaded him, aided by the darkness and by the fact that his rising frenzy made his aim less accurate. At last, when he had made a wild plunge forward, Pamela heard something fall upon the floor. The idea sprang into her mind that it was the revolver. When he made the plunge she had eluded him, so that they had changed places. Feeling about quickly with her feet, she touched something. She stooped, and as she did so, she suddenly became aware that Edward was stooping too, and that his hands were close to hers, feeling about the floor. Without a moment's delay, she thrust out her hands, touched his shoulders, and flung him backwards with all her strength. Taken by surprise, he lost his balance and fell backwards. The moment was enough. Her groping hands found the revolver and seized it; before her brother could get upon his feet, she had rushed out of the room, down the little stone passage, and out of the cottage, not forgetting to lock the door behind her.

She had scarcely turned the key in the lock when she heard Edward shaking the door. If he could burst it open she was lost! she could not hope to struggle with him successfully in the open. A happy thought struck her: the water-butt! Holding the revolver from her with a women's unspeakable dread of firearms, she dropped it through the green slime into the stagnant water, and ran down the garden as if for her life.

Jane was waiting for her, and in answer to a soft little scratch on the front door, she let her in.

The poor girls held a long consultation, in which it was finally decided that, having done the most they could in disarming Edward, they would neither speak to their mother about him again, nor make any further movement in the matter. Pamela had heard from her mother's own lips that she intended to send him away, so they could only hope that she would do so as quickly as possible. In the mean time, they could not be without fears that Edward would grow tired of discretion, and break out of his prison to do more mischief.

On the very next day an event occurred which strengthened these fears. Lady Constantia called early in the morning to say that she was going to Rylestone to give some orders in connection with her garden-party, and to know whether any of the girls would like to accompany her. Mrs. Hoad-Blean wanted various things, so she sent Jane with the autocrat, who was chiefly in want of an opportunity to "pump" some member of the family about Captain Hoad-Blean's recent visit. They went by train, and on arriving at Rylestone the two ladies separated, each to do her own shopping. It was decided that they were to meet at the railway-station for the return journey. Whatever pleasure Jane might have had in her day's work was completely spoiled by two meetings she had in the course of the morning: one was with Mr. Isaacson, who was driving the celebrated phaeton, and the second was with Jim. The former, whom, she noticed, was looking pale and worried, appeared delighted to see her, and raised his hat with a flourish. To escape him, Jane dashed

into a shop. On the other hand, Jim, whom she met on horseback as she came out, pretended not even to see her as he rode up the street. Poor Jane tried to believe that she was only angry at his incivility. But in truth, she was cut to the heart by his unkindness.

She had done her shopping, lunched with a friend, and paid a duty-call for her mother, and was walking up the hill to the station with a multitude of small packages in her arms, when she heard sounds behind her which she knew must come from the hoofs of Mr. Isaacson's horses. He drove past her, pulled up, threw the reins to the groom, and got down. More plainly than before, she noticed the worried expression on his face, and felt curious to know whether it had any reference to Edward's doings. She was not left long in doubt. After warm greetings, and obsequious inquiries concerning her health and that of her family, he insisted on taking her parcels from her and giving them into the charge of the groom to take up to the station. In his manner Jane quickly noticed a falling-off in his admiration and a coming-on in his anxiety.

"Have you heard anything of your brother?" asked he in a low voice, while Jane's eyes fell. "Of course I heard of the unfortunate affair with young St. Rhadegund; and then—why, then," he continued looking at her in a very penetrating manner, "I *heard* that he had gone away."

"Quite true," answered Jane without meeting his eyes, "he did go away."

"But," said Mr. Isaacson, in a significant tone,

"have you any reason to suppose that he has come back again?"

Jane flushed guiltily. What could she say? She said nothing.

"Because," went on Mr. Isaacson, pretending to look down upon the ground to relieve her embarrassment, but casting an occasional glance at her out of the corners of his eyes, "I really had a fancy that I saw him myself two nights ago, looking in at the window of my dining-room while I was at dinner. The sight produced a very uncanny impression upon me, I do assure you. I sent the butler out into the grounds at once, and he said he saw some one run away. And it is certain that there were foot-marks in a flower-bed on the lawn, and that a gate which had been supposed to be closed, was found open. Can you help me to account for these things?"

"Mr. Isaacson," replied Jane quickly, turning to him an agitated face, "I can tell you one thing: you had better leave this place for a little while; it would be safer for you. Please don't ask me any more."

"But, Miss Jane," said he, with genuine solicitude in his face and voice, "if there is danger for me, there is also danger for you."

"Well?"

"Why don't you give him up? He is mad, you know, and nothing worse can happen to him than to be put into an asylum."

"Perhaps not. But surely, Mr. Isaacson, that suggestion does not come well from the person who did more than anybody else to develop his madness."

“Don’t say that, Miss Jane, don’t say that! It is most unjust, most cruel of you. When I first made his acquaintance he was gloomy, depressed, out of spirits, and out of pocket. I took him about on my yacht, cheered him up, lent him money——”

“You had no business to do that,” interrupted Jane quickly. “And you did it with an object in view. You wanted to get him into your power. The men of your nation have the reputation of not being so generous, Mr. Isaacson, as you would make yourself out to have been to my brother.”

They were both getting very much excited, and as they walked up the hill to the station they kept stopping in order to give greater emphasis to their words. All this was noticed by Jim St: Rhadegund, who had left his horse at a stable in the town, and was strolling up to the station with the express purpose of seeing Jane there. The afternoon trains being few in number, he had been able to guess by which one she would return home; and not having seen her with Lady Constantia, he did not know under whose chaperonage she was.

When Jane delivered her taunt to Mr. Isaacson, the money-lender took it very quietly, though the expression of his eyes was not quite pleasant to see.

“You mean, I suppose, that I am a Jew, and that Jews are considered mean, but that is a great mistake. A Jew objects to pay for a thing more than the thing is worth. Quite right too. But, on the other hand, a Jew is always ready to plank down a big price for a good article, an article he thinks worth getting. Now I considered the honor of your

acquaintance so well worth getting, that I must have it, cost what it would. And I planked down a good price for it. Perhaps you think that a vulgar way of putting it; but it's true, you know."

Jane was rather amused, even rather touched, though she was more than rather disgusted. She paused for a moment, unable to find the exact words in which she would choose to reply, and in that pause there bustled out from the station-door Lady Constantia, with a new brass bird-cage bursting out of its brown paper covering in one hand, which she had just rescued from the hand of a porter in the belief that he was not to be trusted with her purchase. Worse than this, at the same moment Jim St. Rhadegund came up to the station-steps.

Both the new-comers, not unnaturally misled by the earnestness of the conversation they had interrupted, came to the conclusion that it had been of a more tender sort on both sides than was the case. And this impression received confirmation when Mr. Isaacson, with all the air of a man who has the right to pay these attentions, took Jane's parcels from his groom and deferentially asked whether he might wait until the train came up and put them in the carriage.

Poor Jane glanced at Jim, who, instead of passing through into the station and buying a paper or a book as a pretext for coming there, seemed to have lost his head, and stood under the portico, watching Mr. Isaacson with a scowl which frightened the girl. Lady Constantia, who had on all previous occasions on meeting the money-lender, looked through him

as if a person of his inferior condition must be treated as being non-existent altogether, now with caprice quite as typical of her class, smilingly gave him the permission which Jane wished to refuse. She also favored him with the bird-cage, and after a few moments' conversation, full of gracious condescension on her part, expressed admiration for his rhododendrons, and wound up by inviting him to her garden-party in the following week. "If you gay London gentlemen care for such a modest entertainment as a country garden-party!"

To judge by the profusion of Mr. Isaacson's thanks, the pleasure was the greatest which life could afford him; and indeed this was not far from being the truth, since it seemed to him the first step towards a social rise and towards Jane Blean's hand at the same time.

Jane glanced piteously at Lady Constantia, and then looked at Jim. He had been near enough to overhear the invitation. But it had scarcely been given, when, turning sharply, he walked with rapid steps down the hill; and poor Jane stood staring after him until Lady Constantia brought her round with a strong hand and marched her into the station, where she left all the conversation to her chaperon and Mr. Isaacson until the train started.

"Oh, Lady Constantia, how could you invite that odious man?" cried Jane in a voice of anguish when they left the smiling and bowing Isaacson behind on the platform.

Lady Constantia settled herself back in her corner in a complacent manner.

“My dear, I made up my mind all in a moment, that it was the best thing I could do for you. There was that young St. Rhadegund hanging about, and it has been said about the place that he admires you. Now that sort of rumor in a place like this sticks to a girl and does her no good. So the happy thought came into my mind to choke him off and bring the other one to the point at one blow. You saw that he slunk off immediately.”

Jane said nothing. She was too miserable to speak.

“And I’ve no doubt, my dear, that it’s the last time you will be troubled with the sight of the creature, for they are all of them going away within a fortnight.”

Still Jane said nothing. But as Lady Constantia settled herself once more with the air of a person who has done a good deed, the girl looked out on the broad fields and the distant sea and felt as if all the light and color had gone out of the world forever.

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY CONSTANTIA'S GARDEN-PARTY.

POOR Jane! Instead of feeling the spirit of fierce resistance rise within her, as Pamela would have done, she began to sink into a dull and bewildered condition of helpless, hopeless acquiescence in the fate that was to give her for a husband a man she detested. Lady Constantia had quite settled the match in her own mind, and she accompanied Jane home for the purpose of impressing the fact upon Mrs. Hoad-Blean.

"You know," said the autocrat, "nobody thinks anything of a man's being a Jew nowadays. Of course, in our young days it was different. And he isn't a Jew by religion, because I've often seen him in church."

"That was only because Jane was there," said Mrs. Hoad-Blean dubiously.

"Yes, that is another point," said Lady Constantia excitedly. "His admiration has been so persistent that he has managed to get himself talked about with her, which is bad for any girl, especially for one who does such daring things as both Jane and Pamela sometimes do." The mother flushed angrily and looked up quickly. Lady Constantia

went on with a soothing hand on her friend's arm, but with a rather disagreeable tone of voice. "I don't want to be unkind, but Pamela has been seen lately running about the lanes at all times of the day and night: really I don't know what Alfred would think if he knew."

Into Mrs. Hoad-Blean's mind there flashed the first spark of satisfaction she had felt in Pamela's engagement to Dick St. Rhadegund. From motives of policy as well as of friendship, she did not want to quarrel with the very quarrelsome Lady Constantia; but she could not help thinking that it would be balm to the feelings the autocrat so often wounded if Alfred were to propose and be promptly rejected by Pamela. On the other hand, Alfred was certainly, from her point of view, by far the better match. A man's connections had to be considered as well as himself; there was no doubt of it.

"Pamela is a good girl, if she is rather head-strong," she said, looking down into her work-basket.

"Oh, my dear, I've no doubt of *that*; nor that Jane is a good girl too. But, though I'm the last person myself to listen to tittle-tattle, I couldn't help hearing it said that not so very long ago she went up to London all by herself one day, and that she came back in a compartment alone with one of the young St. Rhadegunds—the creature they call Jim, I think it was. Really, those young men seem to pervade the place; there's no end to the mischief they're causing. And now I hear there's a young woman with a child been seen about the place, who says she's married to one of them."

Mrs. Hoad-Blean at this point looked interested indeed.

“Where did you hear this? Is the woman in the village? Married, do you say?”

“Oh, don’t distress yourself so much about it. Of course *that* part of the story isn’t true; but that the woman and child have been seen about, there’s no doubt, unfortunately. I only tell you to put you on your guard. And believe me, my dear, you can’t do better than make Jane be civil to this Isaacson.”

Now, the patronizing tone in which the lady said this was more than flesh and blood could stand. Mrs. Hoad-Blean snapped back at last.

“Would you let him marry your daughter?” asked she, sharply.

Lady Constantia laughed rather guiltily.

“Well, no, my dear,” she answered after a moment’s pause, with a frankness which savored of insolence, “I don’t think I should. But then you know I have only one daughter, which makes a difference, and it has made it so much easier to look out for her. I’ve always kept her in almost nun-like seclusion, brought her up a little too strictly, perhaps, so that it will be my own fault if she’s too particular to get married at all.”

She rose here, and held out her hand. Mrs. Hoad-Blean took it very coldly in hers, and did not hide the fact that she was thoroughly displeased. Her daughters, who had not been present at this interview, met her in the hall when she had shown Lady Constantia out, and were surprised at the expression of her face.

“What’s the matter, mamma,” asked Pamela, and they followed their mother into the drawing-room.

“That woman is getting insufferable,” she began, not only to the girls’ astonishment but to their delight. “She talks as if her plain, gawky daughter were your superior. And you’ve brought it upon yourselves, and upon me,” she went on fretfully, unconsciously glad to find some one upon whom she could vent her annoyance. “I told you, Pamela, that you ought not to run backwards and forwards to the Red Farm to see this Richard, who is very fond of you while he is lying ill, but who wasn’t even decently civil to you before his accident, and who will be just as rude as ever when he gets well again.”

Both Jane and Pamela attempted to protest, but she silenced them abruptly, turning to Jane.

“And you, Jane, from whom I really did expect better things, you have so compromised yourself by permitting this Isaacson’s attentions, that I don’t see how you can avoid marrying him.”

The girl looked horror-struck as her mother went on:

“And that is not all. You never told me that you came back from town with another of these miserable St. Rhadegunds. But you were seen, and everybody is talking about you. And men of such bad character too, as they are! Thoroughly abandoned and depraved, as far as women are concerned!”

This was rather an imposing superstructure to build upon Lady Constantia’s vague statement about

the woman and the child. But poor Mrs. Hoad-Blean, who was almost hysterical with vexation and with the thought of all her troubles, was in one of those moods in which the feminine tongue roams widely.

The two girls were far too much frightened to ask questions, and to bring her down to definite facts. They soothed her as well as they could, and Pamela called Lady Constantia a pompous old busybody, which gave Mrs. Hoad-Blean some comfort, though she faintly protested. It was with no great feelings of pleasure that the two girls looked forward to the garden-party. Pamela was led to expect a proposal of marriage from Alfred Fitzjocelyn, Jane one from Mr. Isaacson. But while the former was preparing a decided refusal, poor Jane knew that she would not dare to take such a valiant course with her distasteful admirer.

“Why not, Jane?” asked her more vivacious sister impatiently. “You don’t like him: well, then it’s very simple—don’t have him.”

But Jane sighed and looked doubtful. She felt the pressure of opinion round her far more keenly than the less sensitive Pamela. She knew that by refusing Mr. Isaacson she would not only offend everybody, but would also do something that seemed far worse in her modest eyes—seem to tell Jim St. Rhadegund that she was waiting for him to come back to her. Now to Pamela this appeared absurd. If she cared for a man, and knew that he cared for her, she would go down on her knees, and ask him to come back to her, rather than lose him.

“ Ah,” cried Jane, “ but I don't feel sure that he does care for me ! ”

“ You're not conceited enough,” laughed her sister. “ Now when a man tells me he adores me, I'm quite ready to believe him.”

So the days went slowly by, not too happily for anybody ; for even Pamela began to lose her spirits when she noticed that old Mr. St. Rhadegund, instead of looking over her head when he met her as if she had not been there, began to treat her to a malicious stare, which boded no good for her and Dick. Dick himself changed for the worse in his manner towards her as he grew better. Not that he grew less loving ; on the contrary, he seemed to count the minutes hungrily that she spent at his bedside, growing gloomy and morose as the time drew near for her to leave him. But he had lost his cheerfulness and even his trust of her ; and showed so much jealousy that she thought it better to make no allusion to the garden party. He must have heard it talked about before he fell ill ; but as he had evidently forgotten all about it, she did not remind him of it. She was always very careful to say nothing unkind about his father, but she could not help feeling conscious that it was the old man's influence which was working this change in Dick's manner towards her.

Affairs were at this stage when the day of the long-expected event arrived. Pamela tried hard to get as far as the Red Farm in the morning, knowing that Dick, who expected her, would be terribly annoyed and distressed at her not coming. But at the last moment her clever fingers were wanted to make

some alterations in the new frocks for herself and Jane, which had just been sent home for them to wear that afternoon. So she wrote an affectionate little note, and gave it to one of the village boys, whom she thought she could trust, to deliver at the Red Farm. But it was with feelings of uneasiness on his account as well as on her own that she started with her mother and Jane for Salternes Court that afternoon.

It was a sunless, sultry afternoon, and a threat of thunder in the air gave interest to the proceedings. The guests were arriving in numbers, but Mrs. Hoad-Blean had the satisfaction of perceiving, what she had indeed already known, that her handsome daughters would be the strongest attraction in the grounds. She knew nearly all of the guests; and as they had been chosen for birth and social position rather than for good looks or personal charm, they were for the most part a collection of oddities rather than an assemblage of the representatives of beauty and fashion. Young maidens there were indeed in plenty, and young maidens are for the most part fair to look upon. But the vagaries of mamma's taste and of the local dressmaker had, in the case of most of these damsels, reduced their comeliness almost to the vanishing point. The older matrons, who were present in much greater numbers than they should have been, were without exception "dowdy;" while those among the younger women present who had gallantly tried to dress for the occasion, were for the most part overdressed.

The Hoad-Blean girls were saved from the fate of being either under-dressed or over-dressed by the instinctive correctness of taste of Pamela: so that in silver gray alpaca, with big black hats trimmed, the one with yellow and the other copper-colored roses, they made the very most of their beauty, and attracted the admiring attention of every one present.

Salternes Court was a modern house, imposing only by its size, Mr. Fitzjoceyln having a mania for building, which he indulged by adding a fresh piece to his house whenever the fancy seized him. The consequence was that it looked like a barrack, and that half of the building was decaying for the want of being lived in. But the grounds were beautiful enough to make one overlook the defects of the house: and if Lady Constantia had been a better hostess, her garden-parties would have been more that *succès d'estime*, and invitations to them would have been hailed with hopes of enjoyments instead of as acknowledgments of the social position of the recipients. In common with most entertainments in the country in which horses are not concerned, there was a remarkable absence of men in the prime of life, their place being unsatisfactorily filled by gentlemen under the age of seventeen and over the age of seventy. To do her justice, Lady Constantia worked very hard, and even tried to bully melancholy looking guests into enjoying themselves. But it was not of much avail; the elements present assimilated badly, and the dullness of the festivity may be judged from the fact that the presence of Mr. Isaacson created a flutter of excitement.

The money-lender behaved beautifully. He was on his mettle; and having the advantage of most of the men present in being brimful of London topics and London stories, he was able to make himself agreeable to the elderly ladies and gentlemen to whom he was introduced, and made Lady Constantia feel quite proud of the happy thought which had induced her to invite him. So that it was some time before he felt free to do more than raise his hat to Jane, though he followed her about with his eyes wherever she went.

Jane, who had been dreading the afternoon on his account, was delighted at this respite from her admirer's attentions.

Pamela was not so fortunate. Alfred Fitzjoceyn, abruptly leaving the person he was talking to when she came into the grounds, immediately attached himself to her, in spite of her coldness, and insisted on taking her to hear the "Swiss Choir," who were jodelling very terribly in one corner of the grounds, to the astonishment of the cows in the neighboring field, who came up to the hedge and looked over at them disconcertingly.

"Not up to much, these fellars, are they?" said he, close to the ears of the principal Swiss, who, being a native of Bethnal Green, understood him perfectly.

"I don't care much for mountain music," replied Pamela more discreetly. "But perhaps mamma would like to hear them; I'll go and ask her."

"Oh, better not disturb her!" said Alfred quickly. "She's talking to our 'lion,' the only one we could

get, and considered very good at the price—a New Zealand missionary, who only just packed up his tracts and came back in time to avoid being cooked for dinner in his parishioners' soup-kettle."

"They don't eat missionaries in New Zealand," objected Pamela.

"Don't they? I'm sure they're very welcome to begin."

But Pamela would not be amused, and again she made an excuse to get away. In vain. Alfred was as constant as her shadow, and quite as impervious to snubs. More and more devoted he grew, as he insisted on taking her to the marquee where the refreshments were, and thence to the lawn-tennis ground, where a few enthusiasts were playing. Several times he approached the subject which she was determined he should avoid; on each occasion she checked him abruptly, and he accepted her rebuke with meekness. At last she began to think it would be better to let him come to the point and get it over; then she could give him a point-blank refusal, and he would leave her in peace. But when she had made up her mind to this, it seemed to her that Alfred's enthusiastic devotion began to flag; at any rate, he missed two or three openings which a lover ought to have seized. So that when at last she got away from him, on the pretext of devoting herself to old Lady Acol, who had to be shouted at through an ear-trumpet, Alfred had not yet made his proposal, and was therefore still unrejected.

In the meantime, Jane had not been without her sorrows. After escaping her fate for a long time,

she was pounced upon and carried off by Mr. Isaacson, who, if a less obsequious lover than Alfred, seemed to be a more determined and straightforward one.

One would have thought he had been at Salternes Court before, so unerringly did he choose those paths and by-ways which led to the most remote part of the grounds ; and this too, while apparently so much absorbed in the conversation he was carrying on as to be unable to choose his way. The direction in which they went was towards the adjoining grounds of St. Domneva's Priory.

"What beautiful grounds these are of Mr. Fitzjocelyn's," he began, as he looked at her admiringly, and felt extremely proud to be walking beside a creature with whom no one present except her own sister could bear comparison for good looks ; and even Pamela, Mr. Isaacson thought, was deficient in that grand air and graceful carriage which made Jane always "look like somebody," as simple folk express it.

"Yes, they are very well laid out," said Jane indifferently.

If she had been in a happier frame of mind, she could scarcely have failed to assent with more enthusiasm ; for the walks and gardens of Mr. Fitzjocelyn's place were the prettiest in the neighborhood and were renowned in that part of the country.

"Let us go into the hot-houses," said he.

Jane, concluding that it was impossible to escape her fate, acquiesced listlessly, and they entered a

house full of beautiful palms, of which even she was obliged to express admiration.

"I will have a palm-house built, since you like it so much," said Mr. Isaacson boldly.

Jane walked on, pretending not to hear.

They entered a fern-house, where the delicate varieties of maiden-hair ferns again drew from Jane's lips expressions of pleasure.

"Which sorts do you like best?" said the persistent Isaacson, as he drew out a note-book and pencil. "The names are on them; if you will dictate them I will jot them down."

"Oh, I don't care to do that," said Jane, as she passed on.

Everywhere it was the same; she could not admire a shrub without his saying he would get one like it; nor pause to inhale the scent of a rose without his taking note of the species. In desperation she at last expressed admiration of a bed of cabbages.

"You won't want to grow those, I suppose," she added, rather petulantly.

Mr. Isaacson stopped and struck a gently remonstrant attitude.

"You ought not to sneer at me," he said; "you ought at least to be touched by my devotion."

Jane, whose spirit was at last roused, flushed as she answered him:

"It isn't devotion," she said. "Or at least it's not so much devotion as obstinacy."

"Well, well, I don't care what you call it, as long as it has the desired effect. I want you to be my

wife, Miss Jane. I won't refuse you anything; and if I am a Jew, as you accused me of being the other day, why, you know that Jews make good husbands."

"How can you trouble me about things like this, when you know that we are living on a volcano just now, you, as well as my whole family?" cried Jane, a happy inspiration suggesting this diversion. "Do you forget that we have a dangerous lunatic in the fam——"

But at this word Mr. Isaacson started so violently that Jane stopped short. He was looking into the bushes a few yards in front of him.

"What's the matter?" asked Jane.

And then a sudden horror fell upon her. For her companion's eyes were still fixed upon the same spot, and his rosy complexion had grown livid.

"It was your talking about lunatics," he said, trying to laugh, but still looking intently at the bushes. "You almost made me fancy—Oh, well, never mind; it *was* only fancy, and so—shall we turn back and go as far as the marquee? You would like a cup of tea, would you not?" And Jane having agreed, rather thankful that something had happened to divert the current of her companion's thoughts, he suddenly broke out: "Your brother is safely shut up, I think you said?"

"I don't know about *safely*" she returned frankly, "but he is shut up. Why?"

"Well, because I had a ridiculous fancy that I saw a head, or a hand, or something moving just now among the shrubs."

Jane started.

“Oh, and you know that he has a grudge against you. You had really better take care, Mr. Isaacson, for——”

“Oh,” said he with a laugh, “you don't suppose I should trouble about him on my own account, Miss Jane. It is on your account, entirely on yours. He has attempted to injure you once, and he might do so again.”

They were approaching the marquee, but at this point of the conversation they suddenly came to a little nook where a few seats were arranged beside a bed of monthly roses and under the shade of some tall trees. Mr. Isaacson suggested to Jane that she should sit here and that he would bring her a cup of tea. She, delighted to get a few moments to herself, and hoping for a chance of escape from him, consented.

No sooner, however, had he left her, than a slight noise made her look round.

She saw nothing but trees and evergreens. Believing that she was haunted by nervous fears only, and rather ashamed of them, she did not leave the nook, as her first impulse had inclined her to do, but remained standing very still, with her heart beating a little faster as she considered the possibility of Edward's having escaped from the cottage, and found his way here, to make a scene among all the people.

The next moment her heart was in her mouth: undoubtedly she did hear a rustling and crackling under the trees, and she was hardly sure of this fact

when she saw a stealthy hand draw down a branch of laurel and felt that a pair of eyes she could not see were fixed upon her.

“Edward!” she gasped.

Jane was not naturally brave. It was only by a great effort that she stood her ground. But she felt that in the interest of everybody and at the risk of her own safety she must speak with him and do her best to persuade him to retire without being seen by other eyes than hers.

“Edward!” she repeated.

The branches of the laurel parted suddenly, and there appeared a face so terrible in its livid ferocity, with starting, staring eyeballs and lips drawn apart to show clenched teeth, that she remained rooted to the spot, too much frightened to cry out, even if she had wished to.

It was Edward, the creature who now came stealthily out, walking slowly like a cat, with bent back and hands raised close to his face and curved like claws, was her brother, mad now beyond a doubt, —mad and dangerous. For he was coming towards her with mischievous if not murderous intent, drawing his breath quickly like an enraged animal, preparing himself for a spring. But now she dared not move. Rightly or wrongly, she felt that if once she moved her eyes from his face and turned to escape, he would spring upon her, and fling her to the ground. Fascinated with horror, she watched him, therefore, for what seemed an hour; when suddenly upon her grateful ears fell the sound of footsteps approaching across the grass. She knew they were

those of Mr. Isaacson, returning with her cup of tea. Never had she expected to hail his coming with so much joy.

She knew that he had a corner to turn, that he had not yet seen Edward. She felt that she must keep her eyes still fixed upon the lunatic until her rescuer, in the shape of the hitherto detested Isaacson, was by her side.

One moment more: he was there.

“Have I been long, Miss Jane?” said his voice persuasively in her ear.

At last daring to move, Jane turned swiftly towards him.

“Oh!” burst from her lips—an ejaculation full of joy.

But Mr. Isaacson, alas! was unprepared. If he had been given half a minute more, he might perhaps have screwed his courage to the sticking point, and have won his hitherto reluctant beauty with one bold movement. Unhappily that half minute was not his. As soon as he caught sight of Edward, and saw the lunatic transfer his wild stare of hatred and revenge from Jane to him, his courage fled. Dropping the cup of tea, but involuntarily retaining the saucer in his hand, Mr. Isaacson, without a word, ran away.

CHAPTER XX.

EXIT MR. ISAACSON.

AT the very moment when her insane son was springing forward to attack his sister Jane in one corner of the garden, poor Mrs. Hoad-Blean, in another corner, was having poured into her ears by Lady Constantia a tale which filled her with horror. Lady Constantia, though she did not own it to herself, was fond of gossip and still fonder of scandal, and not a scrap of either could float about in the air of Salternes without its reaching her ears.

She had now got hold of a story which, "as a matter of duty," she was eager to impart to Mrs. Hoad-Blean; and when she had greeted all her guests, and they had begun to walk about the grounds to listen to the Swiss Choir, and to an appallingly bad band of boys belonging to a charity school of her own organization, she took Mrs. Hoad-Blean aside with eyes full of what she believed to be sympathetic condolence.

"My dear," she began, "I have been most anxious for an opportunity to speak to you. I would have come round to you about it this morning or yesterday evening; but with all the bother of preparing for this afternoon, I couldn't find a moment.

I have heard something about those wretched people which it is most important for you to hear. I think you did tell me your girls had given up taking the least notice of a St. Rhadegund young man?"

She said this with a very searching look into the other lady's face, a look less purely congratulatory, and more inquisitive than she knew.

"Well, what about them?" asked Mrs. Hoad-Blean, wishing with all her heart that she could have given a direct answer in the affirmative.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Lady Constantia fervently. "My dear, they are nothing better than hypocrites. They are all as bad as bad can be."

"Well," said Mrs. Hoad-Blean a little impatiently, "you have never supposed them to be anything else, have you? And really, they have never pretended to be so very good!"

"There are degrees of badness!" replied Lady Constantia, drawing back her chin and speaking very excitedly. "The eldest, Richard, seems to have the very lowest."

"What has he done now?" asked Mrs. Hoad-Blean rather pettishly. She was tired to death of the St. Rhadegunds, and she wished them all under the sea.

"Perhaps you will be able to answer that when you have heard what I am going to tell you," replied Lady Constantia, who did not like the tone her friend was taking with her. "I told you about a woman and child who have been seen about here, and that the woman let it be known that she had

come to look for a man who, she said, had married her. Well, the husband, or the man she calls her husband, is this Richard St. Rhadegund."

"What! Oh, no! Impossible!" cried poor Mrs. Hoad-Blean.

But she knew that it was not impossible, and tears of distress, anxiety, and mortification sprang to her eyes. Her Pamela, her beautiful, high-spirited Pamela, to have had anything to do with this scandalous monster! It was too awful, too terrible!

"Oh, dear, no, it is not impossible," said Lady Constantia suavely. "He has been seen with the woman again and again, and heard trying to persuade her to go away. The last thing I heard was that she was lying ill at some place a short distance away from here; that he was visiting her and paying for her there."

"He can scarcely be visiting her now," said Mrs. Hoad-Blean coldly. For Pamela's sake the good lady found herself siding with Dick against her informant. "He is lying ill at the Red Farm. However, ill or well, his movements don't concern me. I have sent Mr. St. Rhadegund an intimation that if he wishes to give up the place before the end of his term, I shall be quite willing for him to do so, and I have no doubt that in a few weeks we shall be rid of them altogether."

"The sooner the better, my dear," said Lady Constantia dryly.

The words were not out of her mouth when, as both she and Mrs. Hoad-Blean turned to go back to

the principal lawn, they were surprised by a most unusual spectacle.

It was that of a stout gentleman, on the verge of middle age, running as fast as he could towards them with an empty saucer in one hand, and the marks of desperate alarm on his features.

“Mr. Isaacson!” cried Mrs. Hoad-Blean. “What is the matter with the man?”

At that moment a shrill scream startled her and the rest of the people present. From the very nook out of which they had seen Mr. Isaacson issue, they saw Jane stagger backwards. She was in full view of her mother, Lady Constantia, and a great number of the guests; these all saw her stop short, saw her hands drop to her side, and saw the girl recover herself, as she turned and found a crowd approaching her.

Everybody in the grounds had heard her scream; and in a very few moments she was surrounded by an interested and curious group, which was reinforced every moment by fresh arrivals, until hostess and host, guests, and the very maids from the refreshment marquee, had all assembled round the spot, where there was nothing to see but one pale and trembling girl.

“What was it?” “Did any one frighten you?” “You are not hurt, are you?”

These and similar questions were being rained upon Jane, who, however, answered none of them very clearly until Lady Constantia, a striking figure in her heliotrope silk gown with salmon-colored trimmings, bore down upon the crowd, parted

them, and, as it were, took the frightened girl in tow.

In answer to her peremptory questions, Jane, at last, laughing faintly, said that it was nothing, that she had thought she saw some one among the shrubs, a face——

“Whose?” asked Lady Constantia sharply.

Jane faltered, and at last, in a low voice, said she had seen one of the St. Rhadegunds look over the wall. As the boundary wall between Salternes Court and the Priory grounds was close to this spot, the answer seemed at first sight to solve the mystery, and Lady Constantia had angrily expressed her opinion that it was “that peeping Tom again!” when one of the few people, who were still lingering near cried out that there was a knife on the ground.

The crowd grew thick again immediately. For there was no doubt about it; there on the grass, under the evergreens, was an ordinary table-knife, which Lady Constantia’s sharp eyes immediately recognized as one of her own.

“It has been stolen from the marquee!” she exclaimed, and at once returned in that direction.

Her movement of course sent all the curious maids scurrying back to their places. And the first two who reached the marquee rent the air with piercing shrieks. As, however, strong-armed English maid-servants are frequently among the bravest of their sex, there happened to be one of those two who did not content herself with screaming. She rushed behind the table, and seizing a young man, with hair all rough, and his hands cut and bleeding,

whom she found in the act of escaping under the canvas at the back, she held him until her mistress came up, when half a dozen of the lads present struggled for the honor of helping her with her prisoner.

They dragged the wretch to his feet, and amid the amazement of the assembly and of themselves, disclosed the fact that their captive was Jim St. Rhadegund.

“I want to speak to Mrs. Hoad-Blean,” said he, looking very red and very angry.

But Lady Constantia looked upon the request as an outrage. Telling him tartly that nobody wanted any explanation from him, that all they desired was his immediate and permanent absence, she informed him sharply that unless he at once left the grounds of his own accord she would have him forcibly ejected. So Jim, quickly hiding his lacerated hands under his coat, bowed without a word, and after one wistful, reproachful glance at Jane, who was being held back by force between her mother and sister, he walked out of the grounds, not in a shamefaced, hurried manner, but with his head erect, and the step of a man who thinks rather well of himself than otherwise.

As Lady Constantia remarked, his effrontery was amazing.

“He actually wanted to insist upon speaking to you, my dear,” said Lady Constantia to Mrs. Hoad-Blean, with almost a tone of reproach.

“Did he?” burst from Pamela’s lips. She had not yet been able to exchange a single word apart

with Jane, but she had a very shrewd suspicion who the real author of the mischief was, and was most anxious to know what Jim had done with him. Jane whispered to her mother that she would like to go home, that she wanted to speak to her. But at that very moment, Mr. Isaacson, very much ashamed of himself, and most anxious to retrieve his lost position, came up to them and asked Jane if she had quite recovered from her fright.

“I thought you were ill, or faint,” he said, “and I was hurrying in search of Mrs. Hoad-Blean when I heard you scream, and——”

Jane interrupted him with a haughty little laugh. She wanted no help, no encouragement, to dismiss him, now that she thoroughly despised him.

“I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Isaacson, for your services; I shall not require them any more now, or at any future time.”

And, with a bow and a supercilious little smile which cut him to the quick, Jane turned her back upon him and gently forced her mother to walk away with her.

The money-lender knew too much of the world not to understand that, as far as Jane and the hopes he had built upon marriage with her were concerned, he was a lost man. He had an uneasy feeling, too, that his unfortunate action had been observed by others, who put an unkind construction on it. He remained very little longer in the grounds, and as he left Salternes Court that afternoon, he felt that the doors of the county families, which he had seemed to see ajar, were again closed against him,

and that his social ambitions as well as his amorous inclinations, must now find an outlet in another part of the country.

Pamela had witnessed the discomfiture of Mr. Isaacson, with mixed feelings. She had rather liked him for his kindness, and admired him for his persistency; and if Jane had quarreled hopelessly with Jim, it would have been better, Pamela thought, to be "on with a new love," and forget him. So she gave a little sigh, as Jane and her mother walked away together, and left her standing by herself.

The sigh had scarcely escaped her lips when she heard a voice in her ear.

"Miss Pamela, you are not all going away so soon! Don't let Mrs. Hoad-Blean take you away."

"Y—yes, we must go. Jane hasn't got over her fright yet, and she won't care to stay any longer."

"Oh, that was nothing. Only a trick of one of the young St. Rhadegund's. Not in very good taste, but what can you expect from such awful cads?"

"They are not cads," said Pamela, sharply; "there was an explanation, of course, but he was given no time to explain. He ought to have been listened to."

Alfred, anxious to conciliate Pamela, agreed with her in this.

"Yes, he ought to have been allowed to speak certainly."

"He asked to see my mother, and she ought to have heard what he had to say. It may have been very important," she went on.

"Well, it can't be helped now," said Alfred.

Pamela, who was moving in the direction of her mother and sister, stopped short and looked at him.

“Yes, it could,” she answered quickly, “if you cared to do me kindness.”

“A kindness!” cried he eagerly. “Only give me the chance!”

Pamela was all gentleness, all persuasiveness, in a moment.

“Will you then go after him and ask him to write his explanation in a note, for me to give to my mother?”

Alfred’s face fell at this. It is one thing to offer to do a girl a kindness, and another to find that that kindness would involve your carrying a written communication to her from a man handsomer than yourself.

“If he wants her to know, he can send her a note without my having to go for it, and to give it to you,” he objected. “There’s the post, and the cost of transmission of a note is only one penny, or a half-penny if he can write it on a post-card.”

“Oh, very well, it is of no consequence,” said Pamela haughtily.

“I’ll go,” said he. “But——” as Pamela turned eagerly round to thank him, “the postman gets paid; a special messenger ought to get paid still better. Will you—will you let me come round and see you this evening?”

Pamela frowned; she had been beautifully discouraging all the afternoon, and now she was afraid of exciting groundless hopes.

“You can call upon mamma whenever you like, of

course, if you want to see her with any message from Lady Constantia for instance. I can't give you an invitation myself, of course."

"But will you be any kinder to me than you have been this afternoon?"

"No," said Pamela, looking down, in a tone decided enough for the most obtuse admirer to understand.

"I'll do it all the same," said Alfred magnanimously.

Pamela saw him leave the grounds at once, by a side entrance which led to a short cut to the Priory. Mrs. Hoad-Blean wished to go, being worried, distressed, and anxious to have a talk with both her daughters. But Lady Constantia delayed her for a short time, to discuss some pet project of her own for the elevation of the surrounding humanity to her own level, in which she wanted the co-operation of the ladies of the neighborhood.

By the time they left the grounds, therefore, Alfred had fulfilled his mission, and was on his way back. He met them on the road, therefore, and, emboldened by the service he was rendering her, he drew a little way behind Mrs. Hoad-Blean, with a glance at Pamela to intimate that he had something for her own ear. Accordingly she too dropped a little behind the others. They were just coming to the point where the by-road to Salternes Court joins the high-road. They heard a vehicle coming along this road, and they all drew on one side, lest it should be coming round the corner towards them. To the astonishment of the whole party and the horror of Pamela, the cart, when it came in sight, proved to be one belonging to Mr. Finch of the Red Farm; and sitting beside

Mr. Finch looking very ill, was Dick St. Rhadegund himself. He saw them, and Mr. Finch drew rein. Pamela was springing forward with a cry. Just at that moment she had taken eagerly from Alfred's hand the note he had brought from Jim. It was in her hand as she ran forward. Dick had seen the action, the taking of the note, as Alfred, who had caught sight of him before Pamela, had intended him to do. But before she could advance half a dozen steps, her mother's hand seized and held her.

"You will not speak to him. I forbid it," she said in a low voice, but with so much firmness that Pamela dared not try to disobey.

With one imploring look at Dick, she stopped. But Dick would give no sign of recognition but a frown.

"Drive on," he said shortly.

CHAPTER XXI.

WITHIN THE PRIORY WALLS.

MECHANICALLY Pamela gave her hand to Alfred, who whispered, as he took his leave, that he would see her that evening. Though she smiled and murmured some words more civil than he had expected, she did not know what they were. On the previous day she had seen Dick, and he had apparently had then no intention of leaving his room for some days to come. And now she saw him driving out. She knew enough about him not to be surprised at his looking angry to see her with Alfred; she knew that he was inclined to be jealous and that he would be angry with her for her failure to visit him that morning. Where could he be going?

Upon Mrs. Hoad-Blean the sight of Dick St. Rhadegund produced an effect of extreme irritation. She hurried her daughters home, and told them shortly, as soon as they were inside the house, that she had heard something about Richard St. Rhadegund which made it impossible for her to allow Pamela to have anything more to do with him.

“Mamma,” said Pamela gently, but firmly, you “must tell me what it is. You can see that that is only fair to me and to him.”

“ Oh, as for him, I don't trouble myself about him. If you wish to know what I have heard, it is simply this : he has a wife already and a child, and they have come down here in search of him.”

For a few moments poor Pamela looked very white, very much distressed. This sudden drive, when he was still unfit to move, was mysterious enough to trouble her. But she was a brave girl, and not the sort of person to give in quickly, nor to withdraw her faith easily, where she had once given it. So that even before she had quite quenched the fearful doubts in her heart, she said stoutly :

“ I don't believe it. It's some story of Lady Constantia's.”

“ Lady Constantia could have no object in making up such a story. If untrue, it could be disproved in a moment,” said her mother, who, instead of going upstairs to take off her bonnet, or sitting down to rest, was standing with her hand upon the door-handle.

“ Are you going out again, mamma ? ” asked Jane rather timidly.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean flushed a little.

“ I think I will go just a little way. My head aches, and I had better be out in the air a little longer, I think,” said she in some confusion.

Now Mrs. Hoad-Blean, after a little extra fatigue, was wont to go at once to lie down, as she was far from strong. Therefore the girls exchanged glances, knowing at once that she had her suspicions as to the real culprit of that afternoon, and that she was

going to the cottage where she kept him concealed to see whether he had escaped.

“Mamma,” said Jane, coming softly up to her, and speaking in a caressing voice, “don’t go. I have something to tell you, something that will trouble you very much to hear, I’m afraid.”

In the mean time Pamela had torn open the note given to her by Alfred, and had read these words :

“DEAR MADAM,

“I was looking over the wall between the Priory and Court grounds just now, when I saw Edward Blean crawling along among the evergreens with three or four knives in his hand.

“I watched him, and saw him rush out upon his sister. I jumped over the wall, pulled him back, got the knives away, and saw him get over the wall into the Priory grounds when the people began to crowd up; I was putting back the knives in the marquee when I was caught myself. I couldn’t give an explanation before all those people. My father was in the grounds. I don’t suppose he let him go.

“Yours truly,

“JAMES ST. RHADGUND.”

When Jane had read this note, which was directed to nobody, and might be intended either for her or her mother, she went over to the latter and said :

“Mamma, we must tell you something dreadful. Can you bear to hear it?”

The mother snatched the note from her hand, read it, and uttered a moan of despair.

“My boy, my boy! If that wretch has got him, we are all lost.”

The girls could not quite agree in this view, so they said nothing. Indeed, almost before they had collected their thoughts enough to make a remark, their mother was already out of the house on her way to St. Domneva's Priory.

Her first glance at the face of the servant who opened the door convinced Mrs. Hoad-Blean that her fears were well-founded. The man seemed uneasy at the sight of her, more uneasy still when she asked if Mr. St. Rhadegund was at home. He said he was not sure, and showed her into the drawing-room. She had been several times to the Priory during the earlier months of her tenant's stay; but since the first dissensions arose between the two families her visits had ceased. She paced up and down the room, full of miserable anxiety, starting at the slightest sound, until a heavy tread outside told her that the man whom she now regarded as her most dreaded enemy was close at hand. The next moment the door was thrown open, and Mr. St. Rhadegund, with his face set like a rock, entered the room.

“Mr. St. Rhadegund! My son——”

She was too much agitated to say more. He replied, in a voice which was hard and rasping.

“Your son, madam, is in safer care than he has been for the last six months, or since he had the ill-luck to go off 'is 'ead. I'm very sorry for you, 't isn't

no fault of yours ; but you've done wrong to let 'im go about, an' it's a mighty good thing he's done no more 'arm than what he has."

"You are keeping him here, then? But you have no right to keep him. By what right do you dare——"

Mr. St. Rhadegund waved his hand as if her haughty words were so many flies buzzing about in the air.

"Every man 'as the right to keep a lunatic from doin' any 'arm until he's been placed where he'll be better looked after still."

"You mean you will give him up to the police?" cried the mother, divided between indignation and terror.

"Not if you act like the sensible woman as I used to take you for. Look 'ere, ma'am. This son of yours is insane, an' you know it as well as I do ; 'e's tried to kill 'is sister, 'e's 'alf-murdered one o' my sons, 'e's threatened the same sister with a knife, an' now he's nearly cut my boy Jim's hands to pieces. Do you mean to tell me, in the face of all that, you think 'e's fit to be about?"

Mrs. Hoad-Blean, trembling, kept her eyes on the ground.

"He has been irritated," she said. "He has been in bad hands lately, and has been encouraged to drink more than he ought to. He would be perfectly safe if he were allowed to go quietly away with me."

"Sorry to be obliged to differ with you there, ma'am. Now, please listen to reason: I mean to

keep 'im 'ere, where we can keep 'im close, till he's been seen by two doctors, as the law says. You can send your own doctor for one if you like. If they say 'e's right in the 'ead, you shall take 'im back with you and welcome. If they say contrary, why, you must send 'im to a 'sylum. If you don't agree to that at once I'll send for a policeman to take 'im up on the warrant."

Mrs. Hoad-Blean knew she was at war with a will against which she was powerless.

"You must do as you please," she said, in a tone full of mortification. "This is your last stroke, I suppose. You and your sons have ruined the happiness of my family."

"Stuff an' nonsense, ma'am. There's been some 'ard 'itting on both sides, but you come off no worse than we do. If you've lost a son that was no good, I have gone nigh to losing one as was worth fifty thousand of 'im, beside gettin' another one damaged so 'e'll 'ave to be fed like a baby till 'is 'ands get well."

"Of course it is useless for me to argue with you, because our standard of conduct is not likely to be the same," said Mrs. Hoad-Blean, in a voice trembling with anger. "But it certainly is rather astonishing to me that a man can make light of his son's engaging himself to a young girl, when he has already a wife living and a child."

Mr. St. Rhadegund's face changed, and became even sterner than before.

"I don't understand you, ma'am. Say straight out who you mean, and what you mean."

“I mean that your son Richard has engaged himself to my daughter Pamela, when it’s well known in the village that he meets a woman with a child who says she’s his wife, and that the child is his daughter.”

“It’s the first I’ve ’eard of this,” said the old man shortly. “Maybe it’s true he is married, but if so ’is wife wouldn’t ’ave ’ad to come after ’im. Dick might keep from ’is father what ’is father ought to know, but ’e’d never leave a woman to starve, wife or no wife. An’ mark this, ma’am: if the woman’s ’is wife, ’e’s not engaged to your daughter. My boys may be fools, an’ there must be a bit o’ that in ’em, or they’d never ’ave gone after girls that were your ’usband’s daughters or your son’s sisters; but my boys aren’t scoundrels, an’ I ’ope for your sake and your daughters’, you’ll get sons-in-law ’alf as good or ’alf as good-lookin’ as my boys.”

“I don’t trouble myself about that,” returned the lady haughtily. “My only trouble is lest either of my girls should be prevailed upon to marry one of your sons.”

“I’ll do my best for you, I assure you,” said Mr. St. Rhadegund with spirit. “If either of my boys *should* marry one of your girls, I’ll give ’im a pick an’ a spade an’ ’is steerage fare out to Manitoba, an’ I’ll never set eyes on ’im again nor let ’im touch another dollar of my money. Will that do for you, ma’am!”

“Perfectly,” returned Mrs. Hoad-Blean as, with a sweeping bow, she left the room.

She returned home in a flutter of excitement, in a

whirlwind of rage. Jane met her, but she asked sharply for Pamela. Jane hesitated, stammered, and the truth came out.

“I know,” said her mother with more bitterness than Jane had ever heard in her voice, “she’s gone to see that miserable scamp at the Red Farm!”

Jane could not deny it. And as she listened with burning cheeks to her mother’s account of Mr. St. Rhadegund’s insulting threats, the girl felt her own pride rise as high as her mother’s, and she felt bitterly ashamed of the kisses she had given Jim on that well-remembered evening.

Pamela had only waited for her mother to leave the house, before she had started for the Red Farm. Wherever Dick had gone, she said to herself, Mr. Finch would not allow him to remain out long while he was still so far from strong; so she reckoned that long before she could tramp on foot across the fields to the farm, the gig would have returned. She had to keep to the fields, even when she would have preferred the better walking in the high-road, for she did not want to meet the carriages containing Lady Constantia’s guests returning homewards.

The day had been a dull one, and now a light rain began to fall, greatly to the disadvantage of Pamela’s simple finery. By the time she reached the farmhouse, the pretty black hat was growing limp, and the pretty frock was showing rain spots.

“Is Mr. St. Rhadegund in yet?” she asked of the maid who opened the door.

“No, ma’am,” answered the maid, who was very much interested in the little romance which was

going on under her mistress's roof, but who was not largely endowed with brains. Mr. St. Rhadegund's drive was a subject of gossip in the household, and she could not resist the opportunity of telling what she knew about it.

"He was not, as you may say, well enough to go out at all, ma'am," said she, brimful of interest. "We hadn't thought as he'd go out for some days yet, though he's going on nicely enough. But this afternoon, ma'am, a girl came saying as how she was come from a woman who lay dying, with her little girl all alone. And the girl that came said as how the woman wanted to see Mr. St. Rhadegund, if he'd be so good as come. And when he heard that, he had the girl in and spoke to her himself, an' then he begged Mr. Finch to let him go. An' at first the master said no, but I believe he thought that not going would worrit Mr. St. Rhadegund an' make him worse than goin' out: so he orders the gig an' drives him himself."

Pamela listened very quietly. Then she asked after Mrs. Finch and the children, and was glad to hear that the lady was out. She wanted to get back home, she wanted time to think. But she was brave enough, in all her trouble, to go through the ordinary forms of civilized life, to make the proper inquiries, and to start on her homeward journey with a staunch bearing.

But Pamela was one of those impulsive creatures who find ready relief in tears, and before she had crossed the field they were flowing fast.

What could she think now but that the story was

true, the story which she had put down to Lady Constantia's malice? She felt that there was just the possibility that she might have to go on loving him still; but at any rate he should not know it.

Although the rain had left off, the day was so dull that evening fell quickly, and by the time she reached home it was dusk in the little street.

Her mother herself opened the door to her, with a cold, angry face. She reproached the girl for her expedition, and told her the words old Mr. St. Rhadegund had used on the subject of her and of Jane.

Pamela burst out laughing hysterically.

"Then thank Providence, mamma," said she, "that I did make that expedition. For it has given me the spirit to tell Dick St. Rhadegund I don't care a straw for him, even if it breaks my heart!"

Afraid of breaking down into the tears that were so ready to come, Pamela ran upstairs, aching and longing for the sympathetic words and touch of her sister Jane.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK'S VILLAINY.

PAMELA and Jane were not left long in the melancholy enjoyment of exchanging confidences on the subject of their love troubles. They had to dress for dinner, and to get through it in haste; for Pamela had told her mother that Alfred Fitzjocelyn was coming. Mrs. Hoad-Blean was delighted to hear this, as it seemed to foreshadow the possibility of a match on which she had long ago set her heart. What more triumphant reply could be made to old St. Rhadegund's contemptuous remarks concerning her daughters, than the announcement that one of them was about to make the best match of the year in that part of the world?

Pamela herself, however, her mother was grieved to see, was not in a fascinating mood. When Alfred came, she left the task of entertaining him to Jane and her mother, and took refuge at the piano. Mrs. Hoad-Blean was still brooding over the fate which menaced her son. Jane had not recovered from her grief at the injury Jim had received in her defense at Edward's hands, so that Alfred was enjoying himself with a very chastened joy when there was a ring at the outer door, followed by the appearance of a

maid, who said something in a low voice to Mrs. Hoad-Blean.

“Mr. Richard St. Rhadegund, ma’am, wishes to speak to you. He wouldn’t come in here, so I’ve shown him into the dining-room, ma’am.”

Jane, who overheard the words, glanced at her sister. She saw by her face that Pamela also had caught the words, though she did not look up or leave off playing.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean excused herself and left the room.

She found Dick in the dining-room, leaning against the table, looking white and ill.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean was suffering too much from mortification from the father to be compassionate to the son. He made a step forward, as if hoping she would shake hands with him ; but she only bent her head very stiffly, and said :

“I am sorry you have called in your present state of health, as it makes my reception of you seem unkind. But I had hoped never to see you or any of your family again.”

Dick paused for a moment, breathing heavily.

“Never mind my health,” said he in the husky voice of extreme weakness, “I am a man, ill or well; and can bear what a man may. But I want to see Pamela.”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean, alarmed by his evident weakness, offered him a chair. He shook his head, and went on :

“I have just seen my father. I have heard about your visit, and know it was a painful one for you.”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean laughed shortly.

"Painful!" she interrupted. "I was received by your father with cruelty and insult which I can never forget. Not satisfied with impertinence to me, he spoke insultingly of my daughters. Fortunately, my girls have spirit enough to treat men whose attentions are disgraceful as they deserve."

"How can any words of my father's make my attentions disgraceful, or Jim's either?" asked Dick simply. "You are evading the point, Mrs. Blean. You wouldn't treat me like this on my father's account, I know. Now come, what have you got to say to me?"

He looked down straightforwardly into her eyes, his habitual solidity of manner giving weight and directness to his speech.

Poor Mrs. Hoad-Blean was amazed at his effrontery.

"I have nothing to say to you, Mr. St. Rhadegund, if your own conscience has nothing."

"Oh, never mind my conscience! You have heard some story about a woman, I believe?"

Mrs. Hoad-Blean drew herself up.

"A woman and a child. Yes, Mr. St. Rhadegund, I have."

"And Pamela, has heard it too, of course?"

"That, Mr. St. Rhadegund, is no concern of yours."

"I beg your pardon, madam. What Pamela knows or does not know, what Pamela believes or does not believe, is more my concern than anybody else's. She is engaged to marry me."

Mrs. Hoad-Blean could scarcely speak.

“Is it possible,” she gasped, “that you don’t understand that an engagement with my daughter is now totally out of the question?”

“That is our lookout. Let me see Pamela.”

“Certainly not.”

“Well, if I don’t see her in your presence, I’ll see her out of it. You don’t suppose I’m going to allow myself to be ridden over rough-shod like that.”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean saw indeed that she was going too far.

“Surely you can see that I, as Pamela’s mother, have a right to an explanation of your conduct.”

“About the woman?”

“Of course.”

Dick’s expression altered.

“I have just seen her die,” said he in a grave voice.

Mrs. Hoad-Blean grew impatient again.

“And I suppose that because the poor thing is dead, you think it doesn’t matter.”

“Well, it’s better, perhaps.”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean pursed her lips.

“You take the matter very coolly,” she said.

“Indeed I do nothing of the kind. But the woman was an entire stranger to me until a fortnight ago.”

“Unfortunately we have heard a different story,” said Mrs. Hoad-Blean icily.

“You’ve heard plenty of tittle-tattle about it, I’ve no doubt. You’ve heard of a poor woman with a child at her heels coming down here in search of a young man. But, Mrs. Blean, I’m not the only young man in the place.”

Mrs. Hoad-Blean made a slight movement in the direction of the door, as if she thought her interview with this mendacious and insolent person might now come to an end.

“Mr. St. Rhadegund, your attempt to cast the blame on some one else’s shoulders does you very little credit.”

But Dick got to the door first somehow, not very steadily. If she had thought him insolent before, it is difficult to imagine what she must have thought of him then.

“You won’t take my downright denial then? What! Do you think I would deny my own child, if it were my child, whether the woman was my wife or not? I’m afraid your male relations have accustomed you to a low standard, ma’am.”

If the sneer was a cruel one, it was now unprovoked. And, to do him justice, Dick was sorry as soon as he had said it. She shivered a little and looked fixedly at the door. He opened it, and as he passed out, he said:

“I am sorry if I have said more than I ought. Won’t you let me see Pamela now: I sha’n’t be able to come out again for days.”

“It is impossible now. My daughters are entertaining a guest.”

“Who?” asked Dick sharply.

“Mr. Alfred Fitzjocelyn,” answered Mrs. Hoad-Blean, glad that the announcement would be another blow.

To her surprise, Dick, who was very much ex-

hausted by his long and exciting talk, coming at the end of a day of unusual exertion, burst out into a peal of laughter. He leaned against the wall until it was over, and then, recovering himself, went on toward the front door.

But Pamela had heard his voice, and she flung the drawing-room door open just as he was staggering past.

“Oh Dick, oh Dick!” she exclaimed, in almost a wailing tone, as she saw how ghastly he looked and with what unsteady steps he was walking. He stopped at once. Supporting himself against the wall with one hand, while with the other he warded off her approach, he asked abruptly:

“You believe this story about me, you know what I mean? You believe it, of course? I shouldn’t have seen you taking a note from another man if you had not!”

“Oh Dick!” was all Pamela said, as she clasped her hands pitifully, and looked through tears at his pale face.

But he insisted, raising his voice angrily.

“Do you believe it?”

“Oh, I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know. And I don’t care! Oh Dick!”

Overcome by anxiety on his account, by shame at the shameful story, by a little doubt and by very much affection, Pamela covered her face with her hands.

Even Mrs. Hoad-Blean, who remained unnoticed in the background, was touched both by her daughter’s emotion and by Dick’s. For she could see that

his hands went out lovingly and wistfully towards her while her eyes were covered.

"Look here, Pamela," he said at last, in a whisper which she could scarcely catch, "it isn't true, not a word of it. Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

"Then you may kiss me if you like."

The invitation was accepted promptly. Mrs. Hoad-Blean, who dared not interfere, since having found one of the pair as much as she could manage, she could not face them together, disappeared. They had not exchanged half a dozen words when the drawing-room door opened, and Alfred, having taken leave of Jane, and being suspicious that scenes of an interesting nature were taking place in the hall, came out.

"Oh!" exclaimed Alfred dryly. "You're well again then, Mr. St. Rhadegund?"

"Not quite," replied Dick, whose appearance entirely confirmed his words. "I'm out for the first time to-day. I've got Mr. Finch's gig outside, and I can't drive myself yet. Will you come with me a little way?"

His manner, as quiet as usual, was yet so imperative that Alfred, after staring at him in astonishment for a few seconds, complied with his request. Pamela gave each man a very modest hand-shake, saw them out, and saw Mr. Finch, with many warnings to Dick that the latter was doing too much, give up his place in the cart to Alfred.

"I ought to warn you," said Dick, when they had gone a little way in the direction he indicated,

“that I am going to take you to make a very unpleasant visit.”

Alfred started, and it was evident that an inkling of the truth had come into his mind.

“What do you mean? What business is it of yours?” then he added, as he reined in the horse abruptly, “I won’t see her.”

“Ah!” said Dick.

Alfred was preparing to get out.

“You can’t leave me like this, can you?”

Alfred looked into his face, and in the look Dick saw something to encourage him.

“Look here, be a man. You’ve got it in you, I think. It is a woman, and—but there, you know all about it. She came down here looking for you, two weeks ago, very ill, with a child, your child. She spoke to me on the road between here and Rylestone, asking me for money for a night’s lodging. With a few questions I learned something, and learned also that she didn’t know how near she was to the home of the man she came after. I directed her to a village a little way off; I thought I would let you know, and a scandal might perhaps be avoided. Then she fell ill, I suppose, for I heard no more till she sent for me to-day, urgently, as the only person she knew in the place. Of course I went. I saw her die.” Alfred started. “She stuck to it to the last that she was your wife. Was it true?”

“Yes,” said Alfred.

“Then you deserve to be kicked, don’t you?”

Alfred did not deny this, but began to make inco-

herent excuses, blaming the woman. Dick cut him short.

“The child was yours?”

Alfred admitted it.

“Then you ought to have looked after it: all the more that the little thing wasn't in good hands. Now, what are you going to do?”

“I haven't thought about it.”

“You must think about it. Take my advice. Acknowledge the child, and take her home with you——”

“Oh, nonsense! Why——”

“Take her home with you,” repeated Dick. “You're a free man now. You can marry again. But you can't deny your responsibility for the child, and I should hope you don't want to. Make a clean breast of it: your mother adores you: if you take the bull by the horns the difficulty will be over in a minute; if you don't you'll have a miserable time of it, with a secret to keep that's not worth keeping, and always the chance of its coming out some day. Now will you come on with me to the cottage?”

Alfred, whose weakness got the support it needed in this unexpected friend, assented. He went to the cottage where his dead wife lay, saw and acknowledged his child, left money for the funeral with the woman of the house, and arranged to fetch away his child on the following day. Alfred was weak of nature and lax of principles, but the blame had not been all on his side in the affair of his unfortunate marriage, and he was not too corrupt to be undeserving of sympathy.

“By Jove!” he said, as he took his place again beside Dick in the gig, “if anyone had told me last night that I should do what I have just done, I should have laughed at him for a lunatic. Mind, I’m not out of the wood. I’m in an awful funk as to what my mother will say, and very likely at the last minute I shall turn tail and hold my tongue.”

“No, you won’t,” said Dick. “It’s been sprung upon you so quickly that it’ll be easy to get it all over while the excitement is on. And so you were hanging about Pamela Blean, keeping other fellows off, when you knew you couldn’t marry her!” he exclaimed suddenly, with tartness.

Alfred answered very composedly:

“Well, I didn’t keep *you* off, at any rate, old chap! Now I think of it, I’ll just make use of my liberty to say a few words to Pamela.”

They were by this time back at the corner of the street where the Hoad-Bleans lived. Before Dick could remonstrate, Alfred had thrown the reins to him, stopped the horse, and jumping out of the gig, made his way to the house they had both so lately left as fast as his legs would carry him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LADY CONSTANTIA IS CRUSHED.

THE ladies were all a good deal startled by a loud ring at the bell when Mrs. Hoad-Blean was wishing her daughters good-night.

What was their astonishment when Alfred Fitzjocelyn, his face and manner expressing the highest excitement, dashed into the drawing-room!

“What is it?” “What’s the matter?” “Dick is ill!” they all cried together.

“Mrs. Blean, Miss Pamela,” began Alfred, “forgive me for coming back again at this unearthly hour, but I was afraid if I waited to grow cool I shouldn’t do it at all, and it must be done. I have come to tell you that Dick St. Rhadegund’s a splendid fellow. Perhaps you knew it, Miss Pamela, and that’s why you had the good taste to be so uncivil to me. But you didn’t, Mrs. Blean, nor did my mother; so now you and she have both got to eat humble pie and say you’re sorry.” The ladies looked at him and at each other; but Alfred continued his panegyric: “I won’t do you the injustice to suppose, Miss Pamela, that you would have had me when you could have had him. But let me tell you that if now you were ready to take me instead

of him, now I know what he is like, I wouldn't have you, I should despise you so much."

Though she could not help laughing, Pamela saw that the feeling which had prompted this odd speech was genuine; and she held out her hand.

"Thank you," said she, "thank you."

He shook hands with her heartily, wished the other ladies good-night, and went out, Pamela following him to the hall-door. She peeped out.

"Has he gone home?" she asked.

"No, I left him in the gig at the corner."

"Oh!" cried Pamela as she took a step forward into the road. "You ought not to have left him: the poor fellow isn't well enough to be left alone. I—I think I'll just run down and wish him good-night."

With a glance behind her to see that there was no frowning mamma in the doorway, Pamela ran down the street. Alfred, who followed her, heard an exclamation of distress as she reached the gig.

"He has fainted!" she cried. "Oh, my poor Dick!"

"We had better take him into the Priory," suggested Alfred. "It won't do to drive all the way back to the Red Farm with him."

"Go and tell them to come out and help to carry him in," assented Pamela as she climbed up in the gig to support Dick's head.

Alfred obeyed.

But neither he nor Pamela had reckoned with old St. Rhadegund's prejudices, which were as obstinate as those of Lady Constantia herself. The old man

started up, full of solicitude, and told the servants to hurry out to fetch Master Dick in. But at the front door he either caught the sound of a girl's voice at the gate, or else was seized with a shrewd suspicion. Telling the servants in a voice of thunder to "Stop!" he turned sharply to Alfred and asked who was with his son.

"His *fiancée*, Pamela Blean," answered Alfred at once.

"Oh, his sweetheart, I suppose you mean," said old St. Rhadegund in his hardest voice. "Then he stops outside."

There was a faint murmur even among the servants. Alfred told him hotly that he was an old brute, and ought to be ashamed of himself; then, without further waste of time, he returned to the gig and reported his ill-success.

"That's nonsense," said Pamela, promptly. "He must take in his own son: we'll make him."

"*You* can't do anything. You're not strong enough. You don't know how heavy a big man like that is," objected Alfred.

"I'm strong enough to help to carry my poor Dick," said Pamela. "Try me."

Very carefully, and not without difficulty, they got Dick down from the gig and between them managed to carry him up the garden to the house. Before they reached the front door, however, Jim and Bob, who had been sent for by the servants, ran out to help them. Old Mr. St. Rhadegund, who was still standing in the doorway, no longer refused his eldest son admission. But he looked coldly at Pamela, and

when she came out of the room where they had laid him, after seeing him recover consciousness, the old man said to her :

“You know what you’re bringing upon him, I suppose? You know that if he sticks to you, he’ll be turned out a beggar as soon as he gets well?”

“Then he’ll only begin where his father did,” returned Pamela with spirit. “But I hope he’ll never get on so well, if it makes him grow as hard.”

“Very pretty spirit, I’m sure,” sneered the old man. “But you’ll sing a different tune, my young madam, when you find yourself called upon to give up your fine clothes to become the wife of a working man. You’d better look after your second string, take my word for it.”

And with a nod in the direction of Alfred, who was waiting outside for her, the old man shut the front door before she had taken half a dozen steps away from it.

Alfred comforted her as well as he could, telling her that every one knew how fond and proud he was of his boys, and that Dick would be tenderly cared for enough. Even this did not satisfy Pamela altogether, for while it comforted her on the one hand, it made her jealous on the other. They would speak against her to him, instead of being sympathetic like the Finches. She was too miserable even to mind the sharp reproof her mother administered to her for this latest escapade.

Meanwhile, Alfred, having sent the gig back to the Red Farm in charge of one of his father’s grooms,

entered the house in a frightful state of trepidation. As he walked back, he had begun to indulge a hope that everybody had gone to bed, and that he should be able to postpone his confession until the morning. But he found the house still brightly lighted, and in a state of unusual animation. The servants seemed to be running about a good deal, and his father was pacing up and down the long drawing-room with an anxious face.

“What’s the matter, father?” asked Alfred.

“Where’s my mother? Not ill, I hope?”

“Not ill, my boy, but we’re a good deal worried, both of us. Here’s Harriet nowhere to be found. It seems nobody has seen her since the middle of the afternoon. Your mother is in a fearful state; thinks she’s fallen into the pond, and wants to have it dragged.”

“Nonsense! She couldn’t get into the pond unless she threw herself in; though I am sure the life she leads under the mater’s bullying is enough to make her do even that.”

His father seemed rather to agree with his view.

“Well, well,” said he, “we’ll hope it’s not quite so bad as that. I’ve an idea myself——” And he looked stealthily round the room, “I didn’t suggest it to your mother; but as soon as I knew she was out in the grounds, I carried it out. I saw her talking very earnestly to her aunt, my sister Susan, early in the afternoon. So I wired to Susan myself, and I expect her answer every minute.”

“You won’t get an answer to-night. It’s too late to send out,” said Alfred shortly.

“Oh, I made arrangements for that. Sent a note to the station-master and told Jenkins to wait at the station till the reply came. Of course it's only a chance——”

“You think she went away with Aunt Susan, then?”

“Well, you know your aunt is Harriet's god-mother, and that she's always objected to the girl's being so much kept under.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Alfred shortly.

His father turned to look at him.

“Do you know anything about it, then?”

“No, oh no. Only it's rather odd that both Harriet and I should get into trouble on the same evening.”

“*You!* Good Heavens, what have you been doing? But there, don't tell me unless you like, and for goodness' sake don't tell your mother to-night. I shall have a nice time of it, as it is, if your sister doesn't turn up; and if you put your mother out too, there'll be nothing left for me to do but to go and shoot myself.”

And the mild little gentleman, who passed his life in frantic endeavors to be in the left wing of the house when his wife was in the right, and *vice versa*, put his hands through his white hair (people did say he had gone prematurely gray) and stared at his son in pitiful dejection.

But his pleadings were of no avail. For Lady Constantia burst into the drawing-room a few moments later, and at once attacked her son. Harriet, not being at hand to bear the brunt of her annoyance

with things in general and her daughter in particular, Alfred might be used as a substitute. Now all she had heard concerning his doings was that he had been seen with Dick St. Rhadegund; but this was enough to arouse her displeasure, and Alfred's conscience at once led him to suppose that she had heard something more.

"What is this I hear about *you*, Alfred?" she began in her usual overbearing manner. "I shall be glad if you'll give an account of your doings since you left us so unceremoniously directly after dinner? I supposed that you had gone to Lady Acol's to see if she had driven Harriet back with her, as she did the last time she came here; but it seems you were out amusing yourself without a thought of your mother's worries."

"Oh, perhaps the old lady did take her," suggested Alfred, putting off the evil day of confession.

"No, for finding you did not return, I sent over to inquire. I repeat: what were *you* doing?"

There was no escape. Alfred, affecting a good deal more ease than he felt, threw himself on the sofa.

"First," he began in a languid tone, "I went to the Hoad-Blean's."

"Well," said Lady Constantia tartly, "you didn't stay there all the evening!"

"No, then I went out."

"Yes. But who did you go with, that's the question?"

"With Dick St. Rhadegund."

Lady Constantia shuddered.

“I would have soon it had been with one of the grooms !”

“Well,” returned Alfred, drawling more than ever, “you see I see so much of them.”

This allusion to his fondness of the stable exasperated his mother still more.

“Well, and where did you go with this particularly desirable acquaintance ?”

Alfred looked at her out of the corners of his eyes. The blow was going to fall now, and he was growing reckless.

“I went to see my wife.”

There was an awful silence. Mr. Fitzjocelyn sat up in his arm-chair, and turned quite pink. But Lady Constantia grew purple.

“Your——*what?*”

But her voice was quite faint.

Alfred didn't care a straw now; indeed he was almost enjoying the sensation he was making.

“My wife. A girl that I picked up at a luncheon bar, five years ago and married.”

“Without consulting me ?”

The words slipped out of Lady Constantia's mouth mechanically. Alfred saw their absurdity and laughed.

“Why, yes, mother, you would scarcely have been likely to give your blessing.”

“And you think I shall give it now? You think that I shall allow this creature, whom you have brought to the very threshold of your parents' house, to remain there?” cried Lady Constantia, whose helpless rage was becoming pitiful to see, as she at

last met, in the very bosom of her family, with a tone of opposition.

“You can’t prevent it,” said Alfred, rising and speaking more gravely.

“Can’t prevent it, indeed! We’ll see about that. Where does this woman propose to take up her abode?”

“In the churchyard,” replied Alfred grimly, and not without an undercurrent of feeling in his voice. “She’s dead. She was dead when I saw her. But she’s left a child, my child; and look here, mother, unless you choose to make arrangements for her being properly brought up as my child and your grand-daughter, I’ll be hanged if I’ll ever come near this place again.”

“Then you never will,” returned his mother, shaking with passion. “For most certainly I shall make no arrangement of the sort. You may go away as soon as you please, and take your child where you please, and you will never get any more help from me.”

To the astonishment no less of Alfred than of his mother, a voice whose mild tones they knew well enough, but whose decided tones they now heard for almost the first time, broke upon their ears. Mr. Fitzjocelyn had risen from his easy-chair, and standing on the hearth-rug, he, for once, spoke as the master and owner of the house.

“Don’t give way, my boy, don’t give way. You’re in the right. You owe a duty to your child, and I’ll help you to carry it through.”

The old gentleman spoke in such a manner that

it was evident he meant to carry out his promise. Through long years of overbearing conduct and aggressive manner on the part of Lady Constantia, it had gradually become a belief on her part, on her husband's and on that of everybody else, that Salternes Court and the property generally belonged absolutely to her to dispose of as she pleased. This was an error, from which the unexpected self-assertion of the real owner woke them all with startling suddenness. Alfred looked at his father with eyes full of gratitude and respect.

"Thank you, father," was all he said.

And before Mr. Fitzjocelyn had had time to abdicate his new and startling supremacy, before Lady Constantia had made up her mind whether she should try majesty or martyrdom in this unexpected strait, the door opened, and a servant brought in a telegram.

From force of habit the man was taking it to Lady Constantia, when his master's voice startled the poor fellow so much by its unusual peremptoriness, that he nearly dropped the letter.

"That telegram is directed to me, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the man.

"Bring it to me, then."

Mr. Fitzjocelyn took the telegram, and read it to himself. As soon as the footman had left the room, he gave a little laugh.

Like a strong man who reels under a blow from an unexpected quarter, Lady Constantia was dazed by the force of the surprise. It made her for the moment almost meek.

"Harriet! Is she safe?" she asked.

Mr. Fitzjocelyn laughed again.

"I am afraid you will say not, my dear," he answered as he handed her the telegram.

It was as follows :

"Harriet is with me. She will remain here until she marries Tom St. Rhadegund."

"Never, never, never!" cried Lady Constantia, falling in hysterics on the sofa while Alfred beamed with delight.

"My dear, I believe you will think better of it by and by," said her husband quietly. "You have not been quite judicious in your training of the girl, and you may think yourself lucky to have got one of those straightforward, manly young fellows as a son-in-law."

But Lady Constantia refused to be comforted. She sobbed and she sighed, and rocked herself in demonstrative grief.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LADY CONSTANTIA CLIMBS DOWN.

It was not to be expected that Lady Constantia, after years of unquestioned tyranny over her husband and family, should submit meekly to the new position she had been forced to take. The news of her daughter's rebellion, coming close upon the revolt of her son, had for a time overpowered her. But when she had had time to think matters over, she came to the conclusion that there was yet a chance left of escape from at least one of the difficulties which had so suddenly presented themselves.

There was still the hope left to her that by bringing all her forces of insolence and indignation to bear upon old Mr. St. Rhadegund, she might induce him to forbid his son's marriage with her daughter.

On the morning after her garden-party, therefore, without saying a word about her intention to her husband, whose opinion she had so suddenly learned to fear, the mistress of Salternes Court presented herself at St. Domneva's, and asked to see Mr. St. Rhadegund.

The servant's answer took her breath away. Mr. St. Rhadegund, said the man, had given orders that no more ladies were to be admitted on any pretext

whatever. Lady Constantia had the sense to see that she could do little against an enemy of this temper, and she returned to her home in a reflective mood.

The result of her reflections was : that she went up to town that very day, made a hollow peace with her sister-in-law, forgave Harriet, went with her to order the wedding trousseau, and brought her back to Salternes the same evening.

Nor was this all. She made a point of meeting old Mr. St. Rhadegund as he came out of church on the following Sunday, and made such gracious amends as only a great lady can do, asking his opinion about the headstrong action of their children, and behaving altogether so graciously that the old man expressed to his sons the opinion that there was nothing to beat the civility of "them 'igh and mighty folk, when they was pleased, 'cepting their incivility when they was displeased."

And he added that it was a pity some other folk, by which his sons supposed he meant Mrs. Hoad-Blean, hadn't the sense to follow her example.

For although Edward's mother had finally to submit to her son's being confined in a private asylum, she altogether declined to make one step towards a reconciliation with the person upon whom she threw the entire blame of this piece of good fortune for the good of the community. And as, owing to her rupture with Jim, Jane was forced into appearing to take her mother's part, Pamela, whose loyalty to Dick was beyond question, found herself standing alone. He was ill again, as a result of his most injudicious exertion on behalf of Alfred's wife. He was there-

fore condemned, not only to see nothing of Pamela, who dared not approach the house, but to be the victim of the gibes and taunts of his brothers, who, with the exception of little Bob, were always in a white-heat of indignation with the whole Hoad-Blean family. Tom even went so far as to try to bribe Bob not to carry the letters which passed between Dick and Pamela. But the little fellow was loyal to his eldest brother, and only asked Tom, with a grin, if he thought Dick was the chap to be "done" as easily as that.

"If I didn't carry his letters, do you think he wouldn't get somebody else to?" he asked with contempt.

"Let him get somebody else then," said Tom hotly. "And if you're so fond of him, don't help him to his own degradation."

But little Bob only laughed, and went on carrying the letters as before.

Jim's opposition to his brother's engagement was still stronger and still more open. As soon as Dick was able to bear his rather exciting conversation, Jim overwhelmed him with reproaches for "going over to the enemy," and made a strong point of the way in which Pamela's relations had treated Dick's father.

"I tell you, Dick," said he, "your sticking to that girl has cut up my father more than you will believe. He broods over it. And you may think he doesn't mean his threats about cutting you off if you marry her; but if you do think so, you're making an awful mistake. Although you've always been his favorite, or because of that, perhaps, he's

angrier with you than I ever yet saw him with anybody."

Dick laughed. He had let Jim talk on for a long time, being inclined to silence himself, except when he was much moved.

"That'll do, Jim," he said, simply. "I'm awfully sorry the poor old governor takes it to heart so, more sorry about that than to lose the money. I know him, too, and I know he's in earnest; but I'm not going to give her up. Did you think I should?"

"Well, no," admitted Jim. "But it's none the wiser for that."

"I liked that girl better than any other girl I ever saw the first moment I set eyes on her," observed Dick stolidly. "I shall never meet another I like as well. From her pretty black eyes to her headstrong temper there's nothing about the girl I don't next to worship. Are you satisfied?"

Jim stared at his brother and grew thoughtful.

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," said he. "But I shouldn't myself think of worshiping a girl who comes of such stock as she!"

And he waxed sublimely contemptuous.

"By Jove!" murmured his brother. "How you took us all in! I thought you quite liked her sister Jane. Something the other boys told me made me think so, I suppose!"

Jim reddened furiously, and answered in a very dogged, determined tone:

"I admit having had a flirtation with her, and it's quite possible that it might have grown serious if she had been a decent sort of girl. But when

I found," he went on, growing less deliberate and more vehement, "that I was to be dropped and taken up again, cut or smiled upon just as the fancy seized her, I very soon let her see that it was 'off,' and that I didn't mean to allow any woman to ride rough-shod over me!"

"A very proper spirit! So she marries the Jew, eh?"

Dick knew better than this, being kept *au courant* by Pamela's letters. A look of complacent satisfaction appeared, in spite of himself, on Jim's features.

"No, the Jew has disappeared."

"Oh!" was all Dick said, as he took up a book as a sign to Jim that he had had enough conversation for the present.

Dick's engagement and the feeling it gave rise to had broken up the happiness of the Priory household. Mr. St. Rhadegund rarely visited his eldest son's sick-room, and when he did, he only asked a few formal questions and went away again. On the other hand, the rupture with his best loved son made him seek the society of the others; and he got on with them all very happily until he came one day upon little Bob in the act of receiving a letter from the hands of Pamela, under the trees by the yard gate.

He came upon them so suddenly that neither of the guilty pair had time to escape. Frowning severely, he caught Bob by the shoulder; he addressed the young lady in a tone of cold displeasure:

"You think it right, then, to make my boy do things underhand, unbeknown to 'is father?"

Pamela fired up indignantly.

“There’s nothing underhand in it. As I can’t see Dick, I have to write to him, that’s all.”

“Can’t see ’im?” said the old man ironically, as he gave Bob a slight cuff and let him go. “Oh, yes, you can if you like. You’re welcome to come and see ’im when you’ve a mind, as long as you remember one thing: if ’e marries you, ’e ’as nothing; if ’e don’t marry you, ’e ’as five thousand a year.”

“I’ll tell him,” said Pamela steadily. “Then he can choose for himself.”

“Oh, of course ’e’ll stick to you, ’e’s too much of a man not to. An’ you’ll ’ave the pleasure of knowin’ you’ve been the ruin of ’im.”

He stalked away without another word, leaving Pamela trembling. She hesitated for a few moments whether she should not take advantage of the old man’s ungracious permission, and go to see Dick. But she feared that she might not have self-control enough to refrain from exciting him by the struggle which was going on in her own heart.

While she stood deliberating, she saw Dick himself crossing the yard to meet her. He looked so terribly white that she ran forward to meet him and made him sit down on the edge of a stone horse-trough.

“Dick,” she said, impressively, clasping his arm tightly the while, “you’ve got to give me up. Your father says you won’t, but I’m going to make you.”

“All right,” said he.

And seeing there was no one about, he gave her a kiss.

“How can you? Be serious, please. This is a very serious matter—to me, at any rate.”

And she sobbed.

“So it is. So serious that if I am to give you up, as you say, I must take all the kisses I can get first.

What have I done that you should give me up?”

“You’ve not done anything. It’s your father.”

“And what has he done?”

“He’s just told me that you will have five thousand a year if you don’t marry me, and nothing at all if you do. Now I’m not going to marry a man with nothing at all.”

Dick took no notice of this threat. He sat silently playing with her hand for a few minutes, and then said, gravely:

“He’ll come round in time, I’ve not the least doubt. But we may have a rough time of it at the beginning. Do you think you could put up with a couple of years or so, or perhaps not so much, of rather rough and rather poorish life in London? Now mind,”—he held up his hand to stop her vehement protestations—“it will be dingy and dirty and altogether beastly, and you’ll be laughed at by everybody for having made such a mess of it. Now what do you say to that prospect?”

“Oh, you know!” whispered Pamela.

“Well, I suppose I do. When I’ve got a situation as a clerk, then, you will marry me. Is that so?”

“That is so. And oh, Dick, we sha’n’t get on so badly, for I can cook a little, and I can sew beautifully, really beautifully. But oh, Dick, you won’t be strong enough to work for a very long time!”

“Oh, yes, I shall. One can always do what one has set one’s heart upon, and I’ve set my heart upon marrying you before Christmas.”

It was with some misgiving on the girl’s side that they parted. For Dick’s spirit was a great deal stronger than his body.

On his way back to the house Dick met his father, and would have spoken to him; but the proud old man, who chose to feel very much aggrieved at his son’s proposed alliance with a family so distasteful to him as the Hoad-Bleans were, avoided him, pretending not to hear.

That night there was a great commotion at the Priory. For Dick was nowhere to be found; and on inquiries being started among the servants, it was found that Dick’s portmanteau had been packed by his directions, and that he himself had left for London by the last train.

Then poor old John St. Rhadegund’s assumed stoicism gave way. His eldest boy, his best loved son, Dick, had left him without a word of farewell, all for the sake of a girl he had not known a year.

As proud as ever in his mortification and misery, the old man, when he avoided the company of his younger sons that night, and shut himself up alone in the study, said that he was going to “look over his accounts.”

But he had not been there ten minutes when his head sank down on his hands, and the tears stole down between his fingers; for, though he was still too proud to call him back, his heart yearned for the son whom his harshness had driven away.

CHAPTER XXV.

ONLY A LIRTATION.

ON the following day, Tom, returning from his usual visit at Salternes Court, brought back a piece of news which filled little Bob with wonder, and big Jim with indignation. Harriet insisted on having all the Hoad-Blean girls for bride's-maids, "if they would come." And she added that if they didn't come she would be miserable.

"Of course you told her," said Jim, "that it was out of the question, and that you would rather not be married at all than have them inside the church on this occasion?"

"Of course I did not," retorted Tom. "Bride's-maids and all those things are a woman's business, not a man's."

"Then I sha'n't come to the church, I promise you," said Jim.

"I can't help that," said his brother, taking the announcement philosophically.

Jim, too indignant for more words, took a long walk as far as Canterbury by himself that afternoon. He returned by train; and putting his head out of the window as he drew into Salternes station, he saw Alfred Fitzjocelyn in earnest conversation with

Jane. They were walking slowly up the road towards the station. Alfred was going to London that evening, as Jim knew from Tom. Evidently Jane had come to see him off.

Now Jim's hands had been so much cut about in the struggle he had had with Edward on the day of the garden-party, that they were still bound up and of very little use to him. He could not turn the handle of the carriage door without risk of starting the wounds afresh, so he put his head out of the window again and called to the guard. The guard, who was at the other end of the train, could not hear him; but somebody else did.

Jane, who, with Alfred, was now on the platform, started at the sound of Jim's voice, turned from her companion to glance at the carriage, and seeing the difficulty he was in, sprang forward and opened the carriage door for him. The flush which had come into her face, and a gentle look, half of self-reproach and half of pity, made her particularly lovely. Jim, who had grown scarlet, thanked her stiffly as he got out.

But she spoke as he passed her.

"It's the least I can do, isn't it," she said in a low voice, "to help you, since it was in my defense you hurt your hands?"

"Not at all—it was of no consequence—I did it without thinking. I should have done it for any body!" blurted out Jim with incoherent brusquerie.

"Of course," returned Jane a little more coldly. "But as it was I who happened to benefit by your

courage, it was I, you see, who have to thank you for it. And this is the first opportunity I have had."

The coldness he now noticed in her tone irritated Jim to frenzy; so that the retort he made went very near to absolute rudeness!

"Pray don't mention it," said he. "It's more than a pleasure to have one's hands cut to pieces, to earn such thanks."

Jane turned quite white, and her lips trembled. With a little gasp, she turned abruptly away. Ashamed of himself and afraid that he had wounded her, Jim would have run after her, but in another moment she had joined Alfred and Harriet; and after seeing off the former by train, she walked back in the direction of the village with Harriet, who was consulting her about the details of her trousseau with something like animation. For her mother's reign of terror was over.

When Jane reached home, Pamela at once noticed that something was amiss. After a few questions the truth came out. Two things had happened to worry her, she said. In the first place, Jim St. Rhadegund had been rude to her.

"Well, I shouldn't trouble my head about that."

"Oh, of course I shouldn't," said Jane, with a little haughty turn of her head, "only it will be awkward to have to meet them at Harriet's wedding. I think I shall decline to be a bride's-maid at all."

"But you must meet the St. Rhadegunds some day, since I am going to marry Dick," objected Pamela.

"That will not be for a long time, since Dick

has quarreled with the rest of them on our account?"

"You said two things had worried you. What was the other one?"

"Alfred Fitzjocelyn. First, he pretended to want to talk about you, and said he didn't know what you must think of him. Then he wanted to know whether we were not all too much disgusted with him ever to speak to him again. So at first I pretended that we were, and then he seemed so miserable that I relented, and said we thought perhaps the blame had not all been on his side, but that he had been very silly. He said,—So he had. And then almost before I knew what he was doing, I found that he was trying to propose to me."

"Jane!"

"You're not more surprised than I was. At first I laughed, and then when I saw that he didn't like that, I pretended to be angry. But really I was more amused than anything else."

"Then you don't think you will have him?" insinuated Pamela gently.

She could not quite recommend Jane to take the admirer she had herself disdained, but she thought it was a great pity that her sister should throw away chance after chance of marrying pretty well, as she seemed bent on doing.

"Of course not," answered Jane disdainfully.

Pamela sat for a little while with a frown on her face, pondering something which troubled her a good deal, but which she did not like to tell Jane. At last Jane, who was experienced in the expres-

sions of her sister's face, asked her sharply what it was she wanted to say, but didn't like to. Pamela colored deeply.

"Well," she said, trying to laugh, "it is only that I wish you would marry, Jane."

"And what is your particular reason for this?"

"You won't be angry?"

"I won't promise. But I want to hear."

"It is because of something this impudent Jim St. Rhadegund said."

There was silence for a minute. Then Jane, who had remained very still, spoke in a low voice with a little tremor in it.

"About me?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"He was advising Dick to give me up, or at any rate laughing at him for being fond of me; and Dick turned round upon him and said he thought Jim had been fond of you once. And—and Jim said he hadn't really cared for you; it was 'only a flirtation.'"

Now Pamela, who had a little fear that her reserved sister's heart was still inclined to the faithless Jim, had wished to stir Jane up against him. She was, therefore, rather disappointed that Jane only said: "It was quite right. It was only a flirtation."

"Well," said Pamela sharply, "I don't think he has any business to go about saying so."

"He can do as he likes," said Jane.

With an affectation of indifference, which did not deceive her sister, Pamela put an end to the conversation by walking away.

Pamela was heartily sorry for her sister, whom fate seemed to treat unkindly as far as love was concerned. And her sympathy was all the more real, since she herself was only a little more fortunate. The more she and Dick discussed their prospects, the darker they seemed to grow. Mr. St. Rhadegund and his younger sons had grown colder to Dick, as the latter advanced towards recovery, so that he had confided his intention of going up to London to no one but her. Pamela knew that he had gone in search of a clerkship, and that he intended to go off to London by himself, and to come back and marry her as soon as he "had got used to the collar," as he expressed it. But she could not bear the thought of his having to begin such a dreary life by himself, in his still delicate state of health; and she had made up her mind to suggest to him a proposal which made her face tingle at the thought of it.

It was on the second day after her conversation with Jane, that Pamela, having had a letter from Dick that morning, stood on the platform at Salternes station to meet him on his return home. He had got his clerkship, and he was to begin work in three weeks' time. She was shaking from head to foot with excitement when the train came up, and had abandoned the idea she had been cherishing, in shame at the thought of proposing it, when the sight of his face brought about in her a quick revulsion of feeling in favor of her project. For he was looking extremely ill.

As soon, therefore, as they had left the station

together, and she had heard the details of his search for employment, she put her hand on his arm, and said in a great hurry :

“I have something to tell you, too. Dick, it’s no use—you are not strong enough to go and live in London—all by yourself. You want some one to take care of you.”

Dick stopped short, shaking from head to foot. He caught her hand, which was still lying on his arm, and pressed it against him.

“Do you—do you mean it, Pamela?” he said, hoarsely.

Pamela only nodded her head, which was bent so low that he could not see her face.

“Come along, then,” said he.

And before she knew what he was doing, he had turned round, keeping her hand on his arm, and taken her straight to the dwelling of the parish clerk, to whom he gave certain directions, while Pamela, red with shame at her own forwardness, tried to efface herself behind her lover.

When Dick got home, his brothers gave him a demonstrative welcome. But his father, though he was ten times more delighted and relieved than they, only gave him a curt nod, and addressed to him no single question as to the reason of his absence. The other boys, however, were by no means so reticent.

They bombarded him with questions, and were not satisfied until they had heard all the particulars of his visit to town. He had got a situation as clerk in a merchant’s office at a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds a year. And when they asked

him if he meant to live upon that, he informed them there had been five hundred and twenty-seven applicants for the situation.

“And,” added he, “I only got it because I was the son of the well-known John St. Rhadegund.”

“Why,” asked Jim, “how long do you suppose it will be before you can marry upon that?”

“The banns will be put up to-morrow, and I shall be married in a fortnight,” returned Dick quietly.

There was a general sensation. Old Mr. St. Rhadegund’s hands, which were holding his newspaper before his face, trembled.

“The banns!” cried Tom scornfully. “Surely your aristocratic *fiancée* won’t consent to be married by banns?”

“She’ll have to consent to many worse things than that, poor lass, I expect,” said Dick. “It’s all very well for a swell like you, Tom; but there will be no bride’s-maids and no cake at our wedding.”

A silence fell upon the boys. Jim glanced at his father, as if he expected him to say something. But the stern old man gave no sign.

Next day old John St. Rhadegund heard the banns published between “Richard St. Rhadegund, bachelor, and Pamela Hoad-Blean, spinster, both of this parish,” without moving a muscle. But his sons were deeply affected. They had looked upon their father’s quarrel with Dick as a sort of game of endurance between the two, which would speedily end amid general rejoicing. As the days went by, however, and there was no attempt at reconciliation on either side, Jim and his two younger brothers

grew anxious, and took to consulting each other in earnest, low-voiced conversation, at all times of the day and night.

Dick went up to town again one day to look for lodgings, and he came back rather depressed at the dinginess of the home to which he was to take his bride. Then Jim, in pursuance of a deep-laid plan, wormed out of him the address of these lodgings, in a manner to avoid exciting Dick's suspicions. So sensitive, not to say "touchy," did Dick grow under a sense of the trials which awaited his darling, that he refused to let his brothers know on what day he was to be married; and in spite of all their vigilance, he evaded them all by stealing out of his room at six o'clock in the morning on the day following that of the third publication of the banns, and waited about until eight o'clock, when, Pamela meeting him at the door, they stole into the church, were married, and started for town by the train which left Salternes at 9:53, before the rest of the household at the Priory had discovered his absence.

But if Dick had thus prepared a surprise for his family, his family had prepared a greater surprise for him. When he opened the door of the sitting-room of the London apartments he had engaged, he shut the door again and said to the landlady that she must have made a mistake; these were not the rooms he had engaged.

"Oh, yes, they are, sir," she replied with many knowing smiles and nods.

And she threw the door open and invited the lady to enter. Pamela could not believe her eyes.

"Why, Dick, what did you mean by telling me the rooms were dingy?" cried she, as she looked in delighted astonishment around.

"So they were," replied Dick, whose voice was trembling. "It's those wretched creatures, my brothers who have done this!"

They had done it, and they had done it well. All the shabby old furniture, the worn carpets, the darned lace curtains, had disappeared. The ceilings had been whitewashed, and the whole place had been fitted up, not only with luxury but with good taste. It was a transformation. On the table lay a brand-new spade, a very large and heavy one. On the iron lower part lay a note, directed in old John St. Rhadegund's firm round hand.

Dick opened it and read:

"MY SON DICK,

I promised you a spade for your fortune if you stuck to that girl. You have stuck to her, so here it is.

"Your father,

"JOHN ST. RHADEGUND."

Dick took up the spade with a curious feeling that there was something more to happen. Pamela perceived first what that something more was.

"Look," said she, as she held up the label which had been neatly folded under the handle.

It was a check for twenty thousand pounds.

The young couple looked at each other through tears: it was a long time before they could either of them find words to speak.

Then Dick said, hoarsely :
“I knew he'd relent, dear old dad ! But I thought he'd have taken a year to do it !”

It was not such a bad beginning for their wedded life after all.

The second wedding in the St. Rhadegund family was in every way a contrast to the first. It came off about ten days later, and the whole village was in a ferment of excitement over the magnificent preparations for it. The church was decorated ; the school-children had a holiday ; there were tents put up for a banquet to the villagers ; there was a triumphal arch ; there were six bride's-maids ; and the church was thronged.

Harriet, the bride, delighted to escape from her mother's tyranny, looked almost too happy for conventional correctness.

She was too happy even to be troubled by the fact that Jane had absolutely refused to be one of her bride's-maids, though the twins had accepted the invitation eagerly.

Jane had relented so far as to promise to be in the church for the ceremony, but that was the most that could be got from her. In fulfillment of this promise, when every one else except the bride was in the church, Jane stole in and squeezed herself into a corner in one of the back pews of the side aisle. From this nook she had a good view of most of the principal personages about to take part in the ceremony.

She saw the bridegroom himself, pulling nervously at his mustache, and glancing at the door. She

saw the bride's-maids waiting near the door, the pretty twins looking conspicuous among the rest. She saw her mother, sad-eyed and worn, unable to forget her unhappy son. She saw Captain Hoad-Blean, better dressed than any man present, looking serenely happy since he had learned the last turn in Pamela's affairs, and persuaded himself that he had himself, in some unexplained way, brought it about. She saw old John St. Rhadegund, looking happier since his reconciliation with his son. Last of all she saw Jim, with his hands still bound up, looking at her intently from a not far-distant pew. Jane blushed and turned away her head.

In some surprising manner, Jim seemed to take this as an invitation; when she turned her head again, she saw him entering the pew in which she sat. She could not walk out; he was between her and the door of the pew. All she could do was to keep her face turned steadily away. After this Jane saw nothing: not the entrance of the bride, nor the procession up the aisle, nor any part of the ceremony. She only knew that it was over and the people present began to whisper in little groups, and to turn in their pews to watch for the return of the bride from the vestry.

When they had all passed out of the church, Jane would have passed out too; but Jim sat there, blocking the way, as immovable as a statue. She was obliged, much against her will, to address him:

"May I trouble you to allow me to pass out?" she said ceremoniously.

He looked her full in the face.

“May I come with you and speak to you?” he asked beseechingly.

“Oh, certainly, if you please.”

So, the church being by this time nearly empty, they went out together.

“It was in this churchyard,” began Jim humbly, as soon as they were outside the door, “that you first allowed me to speak to you.”

“Yes,” returned Jane quickly and haughtily. “And I am very sorry——”

“That you ever did. Well, I don’t say so. Come round the old stone where I found you that morning for one moment—just for one moment.”

Jane hesitated. She began to know what acquiescence would mean, and the meaning was not unpleasant to her. Therefore something in the manner of her hesitation speedily gave Jim hope.

“You haven’t treated me very well, have you?” he insinuated in the gentlest of tones, advancing his face daringly near to hers.

Jane began to feel again the sensation of that day in the train, when he had come close to her and asked her for a kiss. She walked a few paces down the side-path with him, then suddenly stopped.

“You said,” she began, suddenly, with her voice and her heart full of bitterness, “that it ‘was only a flirtation!’”

“Well, what could I say? Didn’t you tell me yourself that it was not to count?”

“Yes, but——”

“Have you changed your mind?”

“No, but——”

They had strolled, by this time, down the path as far as the trees in which the east end of the church was half buried.

“Will you give me another kiss?”

Jane complied.

“Now,” said Jim doggedly, with his arm round her, “once for all, does that count or not?”

Both of them were laughing a little, very quietly, and both were a good deal agitated. At last Jane shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh, it counts, I suppose,” said she.

So when they came suddenly upon old Mr. St. Rhadegund, when they had walked home by the quietest way, he saw that an understanding had been arrived at and began to chuckle kindly.

“Ah, well, I’m very angry with you, Jim,” said he, in a tone which belied his words. “You don’t any of you take any sort of notice of your old father’s wishes. I suppose you’ll be wanting a spade too, eh?”

Jane burst into tears.

“Oh, Mr. St. Rhadegund,” sobbed she, “you’re not really angry with Jim, or with me, are you? I—really—I—I have been fond of him a long time, and—and of you too, Mr. St. Rhadegund.”

The old man was silent for a few moments. Then he took a hand of each and held them tightly in his own strong ones.

“God bless you both,” said he.

THE END.

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