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# SOPHY CARMINE

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

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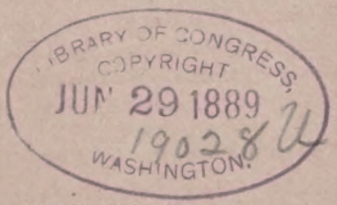
BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER,

*Author of "Bootles' Baby," "Houp-La," "Mignon's Husband," "Beautiful Jim," "My Poor Dick," "Harvest," "Bootles' Children," etc., etc.*

H. E. Vaughan Stannard

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Dear Sir,

The edition of my novel "Sophy Carmine" which you are to publish in America (under the agreement now being exchanged) is the only edition which has been or

by me for publication in the United States of America, or the Dominion of Canada.

Yours truly,

Howells E.V. Stannard

(John Strange Winter)

John W. Lovell, Esq

New York

# SOPHY CARMINE.

## CHAPTER I.

### MRS. FERRERS' ARRANGEMENTS.

It was getting near Christmas-time and the mistress of Ferrers Court was busily occupied in arranging her party for the festive season.

It was always a busy time with Mrs. Ferrers. There was her own not very small household to look after—her six children, and all the servants and dependents about the place to each of whom, in accordance with a time-honored custom established years and years ago when Captain Ferrers had been the most popular officer in the Scarlet Lancers, must be given a Christmas present, conveyed with some sort of surprise of her own invention, which should be a secret to everybody but the giver until the moment of giving it should come.

Then the house was always filled with visitors, and this year their party was one which in a manner had come by chance, for their nearest

neighbors—the Landovers of Landover Castle, nine miles away—had had a misfortune with the drains of that palatial mansion, the entire organization having gone grievously wrong after the manner of large country houses and show places.

The Landovers had thus been prevented from having their usual gathering, and Captain Ferrers had suggested to his wife that they should put them up for a week or two.

"Mignon does dislike Jane Landover so, Algy," objected Mrs. Ferrers, who was rather by way of liking Mrs. Landover herself.

"Well she did before she was married, darling," answered Captain Ferrers—"but then that was natural enough, for Jane Carmine really did make a bit of a set at Lucy, and of course Mignon couldn't stand that. But now that they're both married it will be quite different—Mrs. Landover of Landover will look down on Major Lucy's wife I've no doubt, all the more because she once had a fancy for being Major Lucy's wife herself."

"Well, of course, I'll ask them if you wish it, Algy," Mrs. Ferrers said, cheerfully—"I always get on very well with Jane Landover. Anyway I have already written to Sophy—I wrote at once when I found that Jane had been obliged to put the visit off, and she comes to us on the same day she would have gone to them."

"That's all right. And who are you going to

ask besides?" asked Captain Ferrers with interest.

"Well, there will be General Coles, and Captain Brookes, and your friend Colonel Kerr, and Mr. Alleyne; and I think that is all, Algy."

General Coles was just home after five years' service in India, and was an old friend of Captain Ferrers, or, as everyone called him, "Bootles." Colonel Kerr was also an old friend, in fact, an older friend, though he was a younger man than the General, and, like him, was just home from India, having come on sick-leave and sorely against his inclinations. Brookes was not very far up the list of Captains in the Black Horse; and Tommy Alleyne was an exceedingly popular man in Town, who had been in the service for a few months, and, having got sick of the sameness and dreariness of life in country quarters, had, one fine morning, after an extra hard time in the riding-school, sent in his papers, drifted to London, and gone on the stage, where he had found a calling, which, to use his own language, suited him down to the ground.

Then, in addition to these, were Major and Mrs. Lucy, who almost always spent their long leave at the Court, which to Mrs. Lucy meant home—for before her marriage, two years previously, she had been Mignon Ferrers, though she was not Captain Ferrers' own daughter, but the child of his wife by a former marriage.

"But I say, my dearest," said Bootles to his wife, when she had thus counted her chickens, "aren't you going to ask any more girls?"

"Not just yet, dear," said Mrs. Bootles, gently, yet with decision.

"But, darling," Bootles ejaculated, in utter dismay, "all these fellows — Coles, Kerr, Brookes, and Alleyne—and nobody but Sophy Carmine to meet them?"

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Bootles, evidently not prepared to alter her plans in the least.

"If it had been any *ordinary* girl," Bootles went on, blankly, "of course it wouldn't matter —but Sophy Carmine! Why—why, it's downright cruelty."

"But, Algy dear, I do want to do something for poor Sophy," Mrs. Bootles explained. "She really has never had a chance before, for Jane always took care that she didn't get one before she was married, and she has never done anything for her since. And a great shame it is, with her income and such a husband as Geoffry Landover, and no children or anything; and so I thought, as Sophy was coming to us for Christmas this year, I would see what *I* could do to get her settled."

Captain Ferrers burst into a great good-humored laugh. "You've set yourself a nice task, little woman," he cried—"a nice task. I wonder how it will work?"

"Oh, we shall see," Mrs. Ferrers answered. "I don't despair at all. Sophy is *very* nice when you get to know her; she is worth fifty Jane Landovers any day. And, somehow, Algy, I don't know what she has been doing to herself, but, really, I thought she looked quite pretty the last time she was in Hill Street."

"I didn't see her," said Bootles, with meaning.

"Well, but I did, and I couldn't tell *what* it was, but there's something different about her—she is improved anyway. And, poor girl, she must have a very uncomfortable time now that their mother is married. I really should like to see Sophie settled in a good home of her own."

"And which of them is to be the victim?" Bootles asked teasingly. "I don't suppose old Coles will have altered very much since we were quartered together at Blankhampton—he used to have a deuce of an eye for a pretty face. Kerr won't marry—at least, I hardly think so—and Lester Brookes has seen Sophy Carmine before. So there's only Tommy Alleyne left, and if you think a man with Tommy's opportunities is likely to fall a victim to Sophy Carmine's charms, well, all I can say is, that *I* don't believe it is very likely."

"Oh! well, we shall see," returned Mrs. Bootles, not in the least shaken by his arguments or convinced that her little arrangements would

probably all be made in vain. "And if the men do seem to find it a little dull, it will give me the chance of asking Fraulein and Miss Maitland down now and then. They are really both of them very good, and they don't get much of a time on the whole."

"Oh! well, of course you know best," cried Bootles with a laugh. "It won't make any difference to me—not the very least in the world."

Well, the days went on and the twenty-second of December came round; it was soft muggy weather such as made the men wild about hunting and set the women wondering if measles or scarlatina might not very soon become the order of the day. There was no meet, however, within reach of Ferrers Court that day, and Captain Ferrers came down to breakfast at nine o'clock wearing ordinary light-colored clothes.

"Is there a letter from Mignon, darling?" he inquired of his wife who sat fair and serene opposite to him.

"Yes"—Mrs. Ferrers answered—"they will be at Eccles at four o'clock, dear."

"Are you going to meet them?"

"I don't think so—my throat feels a little sore still," she replied. "But I believe Pearl and Maud are dying to go."

"All right. By the by, what day are the Landovers coming?"

"To-morrow, dear."

"All right. Well, I shall be rather busy this morning—I've got to hear all Terry's arrangements."

"I have plenty to do myself," said Mrs. Ferrers smiling.

The door was pushed open and the two eldest of the six Ferrers children came in—Pearl twelve years old, Maud a step younger, both tall, handsome, sweet-faced and sweet-mannered children, fair and blue-eyed, with ruddy golden curls.

"Father," said Pearl,—Pearl was always the spokeswoman — "you've got a new hunter, haven't you?"

"Yes, my woman—what about it?" Bootles asked.

"Well, Maud and I want to go and see it. Can we? Are you going to the stables? Can we go with you?"

"To be sure. Ah!"—with a make-believe groan—"it's an awful thing when a man suffers from misfortunes of flesh as I do. I'm half a stone heavier than I was when Mignon was married—and my hunters cost me fifty guineas apiece more in consequence."

"Well, but father, you shouldn't laugh so much," said Pearl in a very wise tone.

"I don't know that I do laugh more then the ordinary run of people," Captain Ferrers replied. "But supposing I do, what has that to do with it."

"Humphie says that laughing makes you grow fat," Pearl informed him.

"No, Humphie says,"—broke in Maud, who was always ready to give chapter and verse in support of any argument put forward by her sister—"whenever any of us laugh more than usual, Humphie says always 'Laugh and grow fat, my lamb.' That's exactly what Humphie says."

"And what a lot Humphie must have laughed in her time," chuckled Bootles, thinking of the vast expanse round the old nurse's waist and the general extensiveness of her person.

"We went into Sophy's room on our way down, mother," said Pearl, "and she slept very well and is enjoying her breakfast *enormously*."

"That is all right," said Mrs. Ferrers.

"And she is coming down for luncheon"—Pearl went on, "she is very tired this morning—Stop, stop, father, wait for us," she broke off as Bootles went out of the room.

In a moment the three had departed, and Mrs. Ferrers went off for a consultation with the housekeeper and to attend to other matters which would keep her well occupied till lunch-time. And upstairs, Sophy Carmine was taking a judicious rest after her ten hours' journey from the far north, not wishing—although she knew that she was no beauty—to appear at greater disadvantage than need be against her sister, Mrs. Land-

over, when she arrived the following day; for Mrs. Landover had at all times on her side the advantages of youth, to the extent of three years, a certain prettiness of person and an enormous allowance for dress—advantages, let me tell you, that are none of them to be despised in that race wherein "Trifles make perfection."

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## CHAPTER II.

### SOPHY CARMINE.

When Sophy Carmine made her appearance at luncheon, Bootles found himself scanning her curiously every now and then, having his wife's little plans for the young lady's future in his mind.

He admitted to himself that Mrs. Bootles had been quite right in her declaration that Sophy had improved in the matter of looks; that certainly was so, though he could not tell how or in what particular feature the improvement was. Yet without doubt there was an improvement, Sophy looked brighter and less acid than he had been accustomed to fancy her, and her figure too looked rounder and more pliable than of yore.

"Shouldn't wonder if Nell doesn't manage it after all," said Bootles within himself—"I dare

say it is getting from under Madam Jane's thumb. It must have made a wonderful difference to her, Jane marrying a man like Landover."

Yet he kept looking at her again and again—surely there was something more material than mere expression that had wrought this change in Mrs. Landover's sister. He could not make it out. It was not paint—no, for she was sitting full in the not very becoming light of the wintry day and, beyond a little powder perhaps, he could see that her face was innocent of that kind of beauty; the previous evening at dinner he had fancied that the improvement must be due to that—now, however, in the full light of day, he acknowledged that there must be some other cause for the change. "And I wonder now," he chuckled to himself, "which of them it will be."

"Mignon and Major Lucy come to-day, do they not?" Sophy asked at that moment.

"Yes—at four o'clock," Mrs. Ferrers answered.

"Do you care to come with me to meet them, Miss Carmine?" asked Bootles, civilly.

Sophy looked doubtful. "Are you going, Mrs. Ferrers?" she asked.

"No, dear, my throat is scarcely quite the thing yet."

"We are going, Maud and I," struck in Pearl.

"Who said you were going?" laughed her father.

"Well, I don't think anybody said we were," Pearl replied, "but nobody said we were not."

"A clear case of logical deduction," laughed Bootles gayly.

"What *is* logical deduction, father?" Pearl demanded.

"Logical deduction—oh! well, it's—"

"It's what Mignon has in her handwriting." put in Maud—"Oh! yes, father, I do know, because the very last time Mr. Landover and Jane were staying here, mother was saying one day that Mignon very seldom took a dislike to anyone, but that when she did there was always a good reason for it, even when the dislike came before the reason. And Jane Landover said—'Oh! logical deduction is a great quality with Mignon—her handwriting shows it plainly!, I said at once to Jane that it was all nonsense, for Mignon writes a beautiful hand. But Jane said *that* had nothing whatever to do with it."

The child's tone was so exact an imitation of the Mistress of Landover's tart accents, that Bootles got up in haste and went to get himself some more bread at the sideboard, although there were two servants in the room who could have brought it in answer to a look. Sophy, on the contrary, laughed immoderately.

"Why, what a little quiz Maud is—it was

Jane's tone to the very life, Jane's tone when she is not altogether in her very best humor either. I see I shall have to mind my P's and Q's when you are about, young lady."

"But Jane did say that exactly," cried Maud, who had not intended to imitate Mrs. Landover by any means, but only wished to give an exact account of what she had said on the subject of logical deduction.

"Of course Jane said just that—we none of us dispute it," cried Sophy Carmine with a good-natured laugh.

Maud looked wonderingly at her with her big honest blue eyes, and shook her ruddy golden curls in genuine perplexity—"Do you think she knows what she's talking about?" she murmured in an undertone to Pearl.

"*She* was the cat's mother," said Pearl with severity.

At the other end of the table the master of the house was speaking—"Then you don't care for the drive to-day, Miss Carmine?"

"I think I would rather stay quietly at home," she answered. "I was so awfully tired yesterday, it was such a long journey; yes, I should like to get rested before Jane and her husband come."

So in due time Captain Ferrers went off with the break—the omnibus that is—to meet Mignon and Major Lucy, and beside him on the box

instead of Sophy Carmine, he had his two charming little daughters, who were wild with excitement at the prospect of seeing their sister again.

It was always a great joy to Captain Ferrers to have his children about him. He loved listening to their wise remarks and hearing their childish philosophy, often such wise philosophy, oh, my friends. They were talking then.

"I can't think," said Maud, "why Mr. Landover wanted to go and marry Jane Carmine. Sophy is *ever* so much nicer, and she isn't much worse looking than Jane, is she?"

"Not much," answered Pearl, tucking her hands more comfortably under the bearskin rug. "After a bit I shouldn't wonder if she doesn't get much the prettiest of the two. She's got two new teeth since she was here before."

"By Jove, that's it," exclaimed Bootles in an ecstasy of discovery.

"*She* was the cat's mother," remarked Maud with withering scorn, not having forgotten the same rebuke administered to her at luncheon that day.

"Yes, I know—I told you that," returned Pearl with quiet disdain—Pearl could be very disdainful when she chose—"But I meant Sophy Carmine, of course. Sophy used to have much uglier teeth than Jane, at least those two at the front stuck out much further—but, somehow, I think when Jane gets hers changed, they won't

be as much improvement to her as Sophy's are."

"Father," cried Maud in a puzzled tone and without staying to answer Pearl's remarks—"Do you know where people buy sets of eyelashes?"

"Sets of eyelashes," repeated Bootles in astonishment—"What do you mean?"

"Well, you go to the dentist's for sets of teeth" —she replied—"Mr. Carpenter told me so the very last time I had a tooth pulled out myself, for I asked him what any one would do if he pulled out all their teeth, and he said—'Put a new set in, little lady. But all the same, I can't think where people go to buy sets of eyelashes."

"Who does have sets of eyelashes?" asked Bootles, not gathering any idea of her meaning.

"Oh! Sophy Carmine has several sets," explained Maud blandly.

"*What?*" said Bootles.

"Yes, she has! For I saw Margaret this morning taking her letters up to her room—Margaret waits on Sophy, you know—and I offered to take them in to her. And Margaret said—'Thank-you, Miss Maud, I'm sure,' and so I took the letters in to Sophy's room; one was from Jane Landover, and Sophy just looked at it and said —'Oh! lor! What next I wonder?'—and the other was from Redfern's to say her new gown would be here to-morrow at the latest—Sophy told me so. It's a blue velvet gown with cut

steel buttons. *I* think Sophy will look lovely in it."

"And about the eye-lashes," put in Bootles, finding that Maud had wandered away from the subject which had most interest for him just then.

"Oh! Sophy was wearing a set of white ones," Maud replied in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone.

"Eh?" Bootles ejaculated blankly.

"Yes, white ones—at least yellowish white," Maude explained with great accuracy. "And when she came down to lunch she had put on black ones. She looks much better in black ones; if I were Sophy I would never wear white ones again—they don't suit her at all."

For a moment Bootles was strongly tempted to go off into agonies of laughter; but he had a chivalrous nature and the bread-and-salt feeling was always very strong in him. Besides he felt that it would not do to set his little quick-witted daughters the example of turning his guest's personal appearance into ridicule; yet to tell the truth it was a hard struggle, and for a few minutes he could not trust himself to speak. Maud, n the contrary, who had not the very smallest idea of ridiculing Sophy Carmine or anybody else, and was bent only on giving him an exact account of what had taken place concerning her eyelashes, went innocently on.

"If I was Sophy Carmine, I would never wear white ones again, not even to sleep in; but perhaps they're cheaper you know."

"I'll tell you what *I* think," said Bootles, finding his voice at last and putting on the most proper, not to say severe, manner he could assume—"and that is, that you had better not say anything or think anything about it at all. Miss Carmine would not be very pleased if she knew that she was being talked about like this and all the secrets of her toilette were being brought to light."

"But it isn't a secret at all," objected Pearl, who had now got the reins and was giving most of her attention to the horses—"because I was telling Fanchette about it this morning and she seemed to know all about it—'Pooh! Mad'moiselle Pairl,' she said quite contemptibly—'Zare is nozing in zat—it is quite easy—put a 'air-pin in ze gas and zare you are.' I did put a hair-pin in the gas, but it didn't do anything to my eyelashes—they aren't a bit different to what they were yesterday"—and then she gave her attention to the horses again and had evidently nothing further to say upon the subject.

Bootles positively roared! But when he had had his laugh, the chivalrous bread-and-salt feeling began to come back, and he made haste to—as he put it—"shove a moral in."

"Well, you'd better not talk about it to any

one else, not even to Fanchette," he said. "It isn't exactly polite, you know, to go and talk about what you see in people's bedrooms—nobody is supposed to know anything about it; you see you might just get hold of a wrong idea or a wrong story and happen to tell it to the wrong person, so if I were you both, I would just keep on the right side and not say a word to a single soul."

"Then we won't, father—not to a single soul," they cried in one breath.

They were by that time within sight of the station and Bootles held out his hands for the reins.

"I can manage it," Pearl said, confidently.

"Can you? Pull in a little then," he answered.

In two minutes they had turned out of the main road into the short one leading to the station, and Pearl had triumphantly brought the horses to a stand-still.

"Uncommonly well handled," was her father's comment, whereupon Pearl gravely got down and went on to the platform feeling quite proud of herself.

The first person she saw was Mr. Callum, the station-master, with whom she and Maud were great favorites, and to him she addressed herself.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Callum," she remarked—

"I suppose the train won't be very long now?"

"Not very long, mem," returned Mr. Callum—"I hope the Mistress is braw and bonny the day?"

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Callum—Mother is quite well," returned Pearl politely.

"But mother's throat is not at all well," said Maud, aghast at Pearl's inaccuracy.

"Mother *has* had a sore throat"—said Pearl with dignity—"but she only stayed in because she thought it was a risk to come out. Nobody could call mother ill to-day, Maud."

"Eh, but I'm sorry the Mistress has been out of sorts, mem," put in the station-master with much concern. "Eh, but I think the weather is most consairned in it. I bear in mind, the auld saying—"A green yule-tide maks a full kirk-yaird. Noo, if I might mak a suggaastion to the Mistress——"

"There's the train," exclaimed Pearl, pointing along the line.

"May I inquire if it is Miss Mignon that you're expecting, mem?" asked Mr. Callum, who, like every one else about the neighborhood of Ferrers Court, fairly worshipped Mignon—"Mrs. Lucy, I should say."

"Yes—and Major Lucy too. They are coming for two months," Pearl replied.

"Well, not exactly two months—leave is always measured by days," corrected Maud.

"Major Lucy's last long leave was fifty-six days, and I should think this will be the same."

"But they always call it two months," Pearl declared.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE PRICE OF EXPERIENCE.

"MIGNON, dear child," said Captain Ferrers to Mrs. Lucy, "I wonder if you would mind waiting twenty minutes for the down-train?"

"Not a bit, dear," returned Mignon promptly. "I'll go in and see Mrs. Callum. Who is coming by the down-train?"

"General Coles—old Coles, you know. You'll remember him at Blankhampton," he answered.

"What, 'Ta, Ta?'" laughed Mignon.

"The same," cried Bootles, laughing too.

"That was the old chap who invawriably wremembered everything the day before yesterday," remarked Major Lucy.

"But how could he remember anything the day before yesterday," said Pearl rather blankly, while Maud stood by with wide-eyed amazement wondering how anybody could explain the truth of such an assertion as this.

Lucy laughed good-naturedly.

"Ah! I see I am going to be on the gwrill for the next two months with you two accu-

wrate young ladies. I meant to say that Colonel Coles had always heard evewrything the day before yesterday—Genewral Coles I mean."

"But how could he hear if it only happened to-day?" exclaimed Pearl, thoroughly puzzled.

"Oh! that makes no diffewrence," explained Major Lucy blandly.

"Things that don't make any difference are *very* awkward to understand," observed Maud plaintively. "Seems to me it's like Mignon's handwriting—it is and it isn't. Pearl, I vote we go and see Mr. Callum's dog."

So the two little ladies went off to see Mr. Callum's dog, and Mrs. Lucy (how odd it seems to call Mignon "Mrs. Lucy") went in to have a chat with the station-master's wife, to drink a glass of sweet and sticky port, and to have the real home-made Christmas-cake cut in her honor, and, whether she would or no, have a great wedge thereof pushed on to her plate and, Mrs. Callum being a North-country woman, also a generous helping of cheese from a prime Cheshire, to eat with it.

Now Mignon knew Mrs. Callum's Christmas-cake of old, and tried hard to get off the honor thus unexpectedly thrust upon her.

"Half—no, a quarter of that, Mrs. Callum, *please*," she entreated. "Remember I'm not the great hungry child I used to be. No, not any

cheese, Mrs. Callum—I know it's just lovely, but I'd so much rather eat the cake by itself."

"Oh! I couldn't let you pay me a visit at Chris-a-mas time, Miss Mignon," the station-master's wife said hospitably, "and not cut the cake for you—I'm only proud to have the chance. It won't hurt you, Miss Mignon—there, what am I saying? Mrs. Lucy, ma'am, I should say. I'm sure I ask your pardon."

"It doesn't matter, Mrs. Callum," Mignon protested—"but no cheese, please, and do take half this cake back."

"It won't hurt you, ma'am; its *home-made*," returned Mrs. Callum, with a proud air. "I can recommend it, for I made it myself; so I know just what's in it."

So did Mignon—from a bitter, or, I should more correctly say, a stodgy experience of the past; but she saw that Mrs. Callum was determined to make her partake of a full measure of her hospitality; so she resigned herself to the inevitable, and, with an inward shudder, set her pretty white teeth into the uncompromising wedge of cake reposing on a very gaudy dessert-plate before her. Suddenly a bright idea came into her mind. She knew that it would be useless to explain that there would be afternoon tea when they reached the Court, and that her mother would certainly be disappointed if she were able to eat nothing; but if she could nibble at her cake

instead of eating it, and could put the time on until the down-train came into the station; she could plead not liking to keep the horses waiting any longer, and *eat the rest on the way home.* Bright idea! Happy thought!

"Are the little ladies here?" Mrs. Callum asked, in surprise, as Pearl and Maud went past the window. "Eh! but I must fetch them in for a bit of cake," and away she bustled to the door, all excitement at having so many distinguished visitors.

Mrs. Lucy, I must confess, took the opportunity of disposing of the piece of cheese, which she dropped into an old envelope, and slipped into the pocket of her sealskin coat.

"A little bit more cheese, ma'am," suggested Mrs. Callum, as she bustled back again and saw that Mignon's plate was empty.

"Not for the world—thanks," cried Mignon, feeling very guilty and blushing a little.

"Now, little ladies," said Mrs. Callum, turning to the two children, "sit you down, dears, and I'll cut you a good slice of cake each. It's my own make, and won't hurt you. *I* know where the sweet-tooths are."

Maud, after a look at the cake, cast a glance full of meaning at Pearl.

"Poor children, I don't see how they are to get out of it," said Mignon to herself.

But Pearl was more than equal to the occa-

sion. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Callum," she said, politely; "but mother does not like us to have rich cake without leave. If you could give us a piece of spice-bread each, we may have that."

"Oh! my dears," cried the station-master's wife quite in a flutter of pride, "I should never have thought of offering you my spice-bread—but if you think the Mistress——"

"I'm sure mother wouldn't let us eat such rich cake as yours is if she were here," Pearl replied. "We may have the spice-bread, and we like it just as well. And we're awfully hungry," she ended.

"We like it a great deal better," chimed in Maud, who, poor child, had been hard driven between her love of plain honest truth and her innate and cultivated politeness.

"These children are ten times as clever as I was at their age," ran Mignon's thoughts. "I should have eaten the stuff if I'd killed myself with it,"—and then to her joy the train ran in and her time of penance was over.

"There it is! How glad they will be not to keep the horses waiting any longer. No, I won't wait to finish my cake, thanks, Mrs. Callum. I'll take it with me. Come, dears, don't keep father waiting. Good-bye, Mrs. Callum, a real merry Christmas to you. Mind you don't kill Mr. Callum with so many good things."

"Bless you, Mrs. Lucy, ma'am, Mr. Callum never so much as tastes the cake from Chris-a-mas to Chris-a-mas—he says there's no sort of satisfaction in such stuff. And you'll give my duty to the Mistress? Eh! bless you, my dear, it's a treat to see your bonny face again, that it is."

"Good-bye, good-bye," cried Mignon.

She had still nearly the whole of the great wedge of cake in her hand when she went out to meet the new arrival, General Coles.

"Why Mignon, my pet," cried Bootles, looking at it comically.

"I hadn't time to eat it, dear," she replied. "Am I going to sit by you?"

"To be sure. General, how will you go?"

"Inside," replied the General promptly. "I can't get warm *anywhere*, but the inside must be warmer than the outside."

"That's so. Wait till we get you to the Court, we'll make you warm enough. The wife's got a bedroom for you that is heated by hot air—keeps at one temperature all day and night. And, by-the-bye, she sent a hot-water tin for your special benefit—yes, here it is. Do you mind going alone? You can smoke, you know."

Mignon was already in her place, and as Bootles shut the door and came round to see if she was all right, the two girls ran out of the house, each holding in her hand a substantial

slice of buttered spice-bread doubled with the buttered sides together.

"Hollo! you been foraging too?" cried Captain Ferrers laughing—"Ah! Mrs. Callum spoils you all. She never so much as offers *me* a crumb, often as I come to her very door."

"The guidwife wad be prood the day," remarked Mr. Callum, who was seeing them off.

"Ah! that's all very fine," laughed Bootles gaily. "Good day, Callum. Yes, let 'em go."

"Bootles," said Mignon solemnly, after they had turned into the main road, "You've let yourself in for it nicely."

"Eh! what?"

"Did you ever taste Mrs. Callum's Christmas cake?" she demanded.

"No, I can't say I ever did."

"Then just take a bite out of that," holding up her own wedge, "a good bite."

Captain Ferrers did as he was told and, being a polite man, he also swallowed it.

"I don't think, Mignon," he remarked reproachfully, "that I have deserved that from you."

Mignon laughed. "I am cruel to be kind," she said. "I have tasted Mrs. Callum's cake many times, and that is what you have to expect if you once begin tasting it by her invitation. It was a happy thought of mine to finish it on the way home, though the children quite put me to

shame in the way of ingenuity, by declaring that mother did not like them to have rich cake like hers, and by asking for spice-bread instead. Is it good, Pearl?" turning back to the seat behind her.

"Oh! lovely," said the two in the same breath.

"Does mother object to your eating rich cake?" Mignon asked, wondering whether their objection to the cake had been the beginning of a new and severe rule at Ferrers Court, or simply the result of their own ingenuity.

"Well, mother doesn't like us to eat anything that's stodgy," replied Pearl, "and as, of course, we couldn't say to Mrs. Callum, 'Your cake is stodgy and so we can't eat it', we call it rich—and it does just as well."

"Those children are a thousand times cleverer than I was at their age," said Mignon in an undertone to Bootles.

"Yes, they are clever as daylight," Bootles murmured in reply. "But, though they're my own children and all that, my bird, they'll never be more to me than you were."

"I'm glad of that," whispered Mignon with a happy little sigh.

"You've been married two years, Mignon," Bootles went on.

"Yes, over two years now."

"And you're happy still, I suppose?" with a laugh.

"Happy—yes, utterly happy."

"And how is it with the old regiment? Why, bless me, there's scarcely a soul in it that I knew, except Lucy. How soon does he expect to get the command?"

"In March, I believe."

"Ah! that's good! Odd thing that you should be in command of the Scarlet Lancers, for that's what you will be. By-the-bye, you know Sophy Carmine is with us?"

"Yes."

"And that the Landovers come to-morrow?"

"The Landovers!" in surprise.

"Yes, they've got something wrong with their drains, so they're coming to us."

"Oh!" Mignon's tone was not very sympathetic, but Bootles did not notice it.

"Kerr is coming to-morrow—you don't remember him—he was before your day. And Lester Brookes and Tommy Alleyne—you know them both, don't you?" he went on. "And for the present I think that is all."

"A very pleasant party," said Mignon—but all the same she did wish that something had not gone wrong with the drains at Landover Castle. Yes! she certainly did.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SOPHY MAKES AN IMPRESSION.

In spite of her delicate throat, Mrs. Ferrers ran out to the steps of the great entrance to bid the new-comers the best and tenderest of welcomes.

"My dear child, my dear child," she cried, "How well you look! Oh! my dear, it seems such a long time since you were here, such a long time."

"Well, it is a long time, mother, darling," answered Mignon, with a gay laugh. "It is more than three months, and then it was but a glimpse of you that I had."

"True, true—but come in, darling, go to the fire at once. You will find Sophy Carmine and the others there. Ah! General Coles, I am so glad to see you again. Do you find the English winter very trying?"

"My dear Mrs. Ferrers, thanks to your kindness and forethought, I found the drive here really delightful," answered the old soldier, quite forgetting the coldness of the wintry day in the —to him—genial atmosphere of a pleasant and pretty woman's smiling welcome.

"Ah! that is like you to say so," said Mrs. Ferrers; "but do go in to the fire. We have made it up specially for you. Cecil, my dear, I am delighted to see you," she said to Major Lucy, as the old General passed on.

They all trooped into the hall then, where they found three young ladies—or what society by courtesy calls young ladies when they are unmarried. Well, no, let us be strictly accurate and say one young lady and two unmarried ones.

The young lady was young and, moreover, she was lovely—small and pale and piquante, with soft dark eyes and soft silky dark hair—and as Mrs. Lucy turned round from greeting Sophy Carmine, she said "Oh! how do you do, Miss Maitland? I hardly expected to find you here."

"Miss Maitland is staying over the holidays as a visitor, dearie," explained the mistress of the house, who had followed Mignon closely.

"I am sure I am delighted to hear it," said Mignon, with her own delightful courtesy. "I hope you mean to have a very good time, Miss Maitland, *I* do."

"Yes, I hope so," answered the girl a little shyly.

"General Coles, I want to introduce you to Miss Carmine," said Mrs. Ferrers turning round to the old soldier, who, having got rid of a great fur-lined coat and other wraps, had come into the inner hall which they always used as a sitting-

room, and was making much of the large fire blazing upon the hearth.

He turned at his hostess's words and made his best bow to the lady whom she indicated. Bootles watching the little scene, admitted to himself that, after all, his wife was not so far out of it as at first it had seemed she would be. Positively, in the pleasant rose-tinted light, Sophy looked quite pretty.

"Come and sit down here," she said, pointing to a seat next to her own. "This has been set here specially for you because there is no draught in this corner, and if there was the high back would keep it off."

The seat in question was an old oak settle, elaborately carved, but only in such places and parts of it as would not be uncomfortable to the occupants of the seat. It was black with age and, moreover, was filled with a luxurious crimson velvet cushion which was carried well up the back. It was circular too, and so had a most delightful corner, and it was to this Sophy pointed. "Come," she said, invitingly.

The old General needed no further bidding, his rubicund old face fairly shone with delight as he settled himself beside her. After all, he told himself, a man gets to that time of life when womanly tenderness and thought for one's creature comforts have a deeper and more lasting attraction for him than mere beauty. When he

first came into the hall he had, with an instinct that was second nature to him, cast an eye on the pretty little dark-eyed girl, who seemed like a shy sweet violet, and he had felt for a moment as he used to feel in the old Blankhampton days, that he must spruce himself up, straighten his back, and give a glance a-down his leg—but stay, I think the dear old General was getting just a trifle mixed! Surely he had given up glancing down either of his legs long before the old Blankhampton days—oh! surely! However, when Sophy Carmine, who looked warm and comely enough, and who was certainly not shy, bade him install himself in the very cosiest corner in all that large and comfortable hall, and also made him feel that by so doing, he would confer a favor upon everybody who was present, he sat down beside her feeling that beauty was but skin deep and a mere matter of comparison and of taste at that—and that he was going to enjoy his Christmas at Ferrers Court uncommonly well.

"I am sure it is very kind of you to take so much care of me," he remarked.

"Ah! well, you are cold and tired," she answered, "and I have a fellow-feeling for you. I had a ten hours' journey yesterday from the North, and really I was hours before I got thawed at all. But this is a wonderful house for

getting warm. I believe it is the most comfortable house I was ever in in my life."

"Then I shall appreciate it fully," said the General, stretching out his hands to the warmth of the blaze as a cat stretches out her paws when she is stroked according to her fancy.

"It was so cold up in Scotland," Sophy went on; "I was quite up North last week, and only stayed three days in Edinburgh on my way south; but up in Clashnessie it *was* cold, I can tell you."

"Clashnessie," replied the General, with a palpable shudder, "at this time of year! Why, what were you doing up there?"

"I should have been having an uncommonly good time if the cold had not been so awful," Sophy answered demurely. "Not that I was the one who felt it the most, for there was a poor fellow staying in the house, just home from India—and, by-the-by, he is coming here to-morrow."

"Really! Who is he?"

"A Colonel Kerr."

"Oh! Kerr. Yes, he used to be in Ferrers' regiment—went out to the White Dragoons and has the command now. I never met him. I've been in the same station with him more than once out in India, but I never had to know him officially, and personally I have always understood that he's an unsociable sort of fellow."

"Perhaps he is a little unsociable," Sophy admitted. "He is in bad health and looks as if he had some trouble or other. And yet he is not morose or disagreeable at all—quite the contrary, in fact. But I might be mistaken about that, for I've often seen men who have been a few years in India with the same melancholy tender sort of look about them."

Miss Carmine spoke in an abstracted kind of way, as if she had forgotten General Coles altogether. Her eyes were fixed on the fire, and very well her eyelashes, which were naturally long and beautiful in all but color, looked. General Coles straightened himself up. Did Miss Carmine mean to imply that *he* had a tender and melancholy expression of countenance, as if he was the victim of some secret trouble or other?

It happened that just as she uttered her sweet little speech, Captain Ferrers came towards her with a cup of tea and a sugar-basin, followed by Pearl carrying a plate of hot muffins. He was, as Sophy was gazing abstractedly into the fire, in time to hear the whole of her pretty compliment concerning the effect of an Indian sun upon the complexion of a man of arms, and I am bound to confess that moment, Bootles almost died that he might keep himself from laughing in their very faces.

"You'll have a cup of tea, Miss Sophy?" he said by way of attracting her attention.—"No,

you sit still, General, you shall help to wait on the ladies to-morrow; or better still, help Miss Sophy to sugar and hold the basin till I bring you a cup for yourself." Thus, encouraged to sit still, the General took the basin from Captain Ferrers.

"One lump or two, Miss Sophy?" he inquired with intensest interest.

"Two, please," answered Sophy coquettishly. "I'm quite a baby in the way of sugar and sweets of all kinds."

"Sweets to the sweet," said the General gallantly.

Bootles turned sharply away. "Oh! Lor'," he said within himself, "if this flirtation goes on as it has begun, it will be the death of me—the very death of me."

"Sophy, aren't you going to have some muffin?" asked Pearl, bringing the pair on the old settle back to life and every-day matters with a shock.

"Thank you, dearie," murmured Sophy, helping herself.

"I think I had better put the plate on this stool and then you can help yourselves when you feel inclined to," Pearl suggested.

"Thank you, darling," Sophy answered, then looked up from under her eye-lashes at the beaming old soldier. "Are *you* fond of muffins?" she asked tenderly.

"I love 'em," returned the General.

"I can't think," said Pearl confidentially to Maud when she got back to the tea-table again—"I can't think why Sophy Carmine wants to put on that dying duck look for? I'm sure if she could once see herself she'd never do it again. I wonder if a little dill water would cure her? That's what Humphie always gives Baby when *she* turns her eyes upside down."

"We'll ask Humphie about it," answered Maud gravely. "Bertie, don't steal the sugar and then pretend you've not. If you want a lump take it like a man and crunch it. Stealing is mean, and father hates meanness."

In the face of this sharp rebuke, the lordly young Bertie had no choice but to put his hands into his pockets and swagger away across the hall as if he had not heard what his sister said. By so doing he found himself—having by a kind of instinct betaken himself out of the way of the two governesses—close up against Sophy Carmine and General Coles.

"Well, young gentleman," said the General graciously, "and what is your name pray?"

Not having yet got over the ignominy of Maud's snub, young Bertie, who was nine years old and very quick for his age, and also of a very lordly disposition, was not in the very best of tempers and resented the liberty promptly; and the better to put the too familiar old gentleman

in his place, he answered the question by another.

"Don't you know me?" he demanded.

Now General Coles knew or at least inferred from the general situation, that this was one of the children of the house; but he answered him after the facetious manner of more or less untruthful banter highly popular with those who have had no practical experience of little folk.

"No," he said, putting his head on one side and blinking wickedly like the hoary old sinner that he was. "No, my little man, I haven't the faintest notion in the world as to who you can possibly be. In fact, I don't know you at all." The effect on the boy was precisely contrary to what was intended. Young Bertie having a lordly idea of himself, loathed the use of the word 'little' as a personal adjective, and resented its uncalled for application to himself accordingly.

"Ah! that's your misfortune," he said with much dignity, and turned on his heel without deigning to waste another word upon a person so rude and so lamentably ignorant of the ordinary rules of behavior.

"What's the matter, Bertie?" asked Pearl, seeing the cloud on Bertie's face. "Has General Coles vexed you?"

"Yes—I'm in a wax," said Bertie, with an in-

dignant glance at the pair in the settle. "I don't know what father wanted to ask him for."

"Why, don't you like him?" Pearl exclaimed—she liked the cheery old soldier immensely.

"No, I don't—he's—he's an old porcupine," said Bertie in disgust, "he's a—a hippopotamus."

"I suppose he saw you stealing the sugar just now," said Maud, who was remarkable for the uprightness of her whole moral nature. "You shouldn't do such things and then you wouldn't be found out."

"It's a great pity you don't like him, because he has only just come," added Pearl.

"I wonder," growled Bertie, "how soon he is going away?"

"And how long are you going to stay?" Sophy Carmine was saying at that moment.

"I don't know, I haven't thought about it," the General answered—"but, unless something very disagreeable happens, I shall probably stay until—until I'm turned out."

"I don't think any one will want to turn you out," said Sophy in her tenderest tones.

## CHAPTER V.

### DREADFULLY TRUTHFUL.

THE following day Mr. and Mrs. Landover arrived at Ferrers Court in time for afternoon tea. Again Sophy Carmine had refused an offer to go to the station for a drive, when Captain Ferrers went to meet Colonel Kerr and Mr. Alleyne, who would come down from town by the same train.

Sophy had come down to breakfast at nine o'clock, looking remarkably well and smart. Then she had taken a little walk with Mrs. Lucy, who had gaily gone all round the place, ending by a visit to an old friend of hers who occupied a set of rooms over the west wing of the stables, and was known in the household at the Court as Mrs. Terry; and as Mrs. Lucy was more interested in the head groom's baby than Miss Carmine was, Miss Carmine wandered down into the yard below to look at a sweet Pug puppy, and by a lucky chance—a mere accident, of course—to meet with the General, who had come shivering out under protest to look at a particular hunter which was told off for his especial use—a hunter

by the bye, that he had not the smallest intention of ever mounting.

Somehow Sophy and he deserted the stable-yard for the more congenial atmosphere of the hall, where they sat snugly together on the old oak settle and congratulated one another on their good sense in preferring to be within doors on so cold and miserable a day.

"It's very funny," said Mignon to Captain Ferrers, "to hear Sophy Carmine complaining so bitterly about the weather. I always thought the Carmines were invulnerable to that kind of thing. With their tailor gowns and their double-soled boots, and their high linen collars, and their hard pot hats, I thought they were ready for anything and everything that meant being out of doors."

"Ah! but Jane has altered a good bit," said Bootles, with a laugh; "and Sophy always follows Jane, you know. Since Jane Carmine became Mrs. Landover, there never was such a hot-house plant known. She shivers at a drop of rain like a cat."

"I call it very silly," was Mignon's comment.

So when Mr. and Mrs. Landover arrived in the course of the afternoon, instead of finding a "tailor made" mud-splashed Sophy, with thick boots and a red nose, they found a very elegant and ladylike Sophy, keeping Mrs. Ferrers company by the hall fire. At Ferrers Court after-

noon tea was always served in the large Hall, which was more like an enlarged "boudoir" than what is generally known as a hall.

"Well, Sophy, my dear," murmured Mrs. Landover languidly, "I'm delighted to see you. No, I'm not *very* well," putting back her rich furs. "I think Landover does not suit me. I used to be so strong, as you know; and now the least little exertion seems to upset me. Geoff dear, take my furs, will you?"

"Geoff dear," who was very big and very blundering, made haste to do his wife's bidding, and trod on her foot in his eagerness to obey.

"Oh, my dearest, I'm so sorry—the poor little foot," he cried, feeling something between his own foot and the floor.

"Geoff—*dear!*" cried Jane reproachfully, then sat down with the air of a martyr beside Mrs. Ferrers. "And has Mignon come?" she asked, "and Major Lucy?"

"They came yesterday, dear," answered Mrs. Ferrers with a smile. "Do you know General Coles? Let me introduce you: General Coles —Mrs. Landover."

The gallant old soldier bowed politely, and Mrs. Landover gave him one of her prettiest smiles. "Let me give you a cup of tea, dear," said Mrs. Ferrers.

"Yes, I should like one, thanks. Oh! here are

the dear children. Come and speak to Mrs. Landover, dears."

As she spoke, Pearl and Maud came in with Miss Maitland, and tall Pearl came straight across the room and held out her hand to the new arrival. "How do you do, *Jane?*" she said, with an emphasis on the name which told but too plainly that she resented Mrs. Landover's way of speaking to them, "I hope you are quite well."

"I hope you are quite well, *Jane*," chimed in Maud, much to Sophy Carmine's secret amusement.

"Thank you, yes, dears," said Mrs. Landover, with studied sweetness.

It was odd that she always had the same passage of arms with them every time she came to Ferrers Court. She was not a favorite with the Ferrers children, who had known and disliked her as Jane Carmine, and having called her Jane then, resolutely declined to remember now that she was Mrs. Landover, of Landover Castle.

"We always call her 'Jane,'" said Pearl once in explanation, "because we used to call her Jane when she was just Jane Carmine and nobody in particular. I daresay she would like us to call her Mrs. Landover, but we never do."

"And we never mean to," Maud had added with decision.

This afternoon Mrs. Landover, having rather

short-sightedly started these two young damsels on an adverse strain of intercourse, began to reap the benefit thereof in a way that she hardly quite liked.

"Mignon and Major Lucy came yesterday," said Pearl, still standing in front of Mrs. Landover's chair, "but they have gone to the station with father to meet Mr. Alleyne and Colonel Kerr. Do you know Mr. Alleyne?"

"No, dear," still in the same, sweet tone and with a little sigh, as if she was shut out from the world now. "Who is he?"

"He is an actor," said Pearl. "When we were in town last season we went several times to see him act. He plays the funny old gentleman, something like General Coles. I daresay the next time he has to act a funny old gentleman he will make up just like General Coles."

"Pleasant for me," put in the General with comic dismay.

"When they copy any one to play a person on the stage they call it 'making up,'" Pearl went on. "I believe Mr. Alleyne is going to do some theatricals here, but if he does it will only be for Mignon."

"Only for Mignon—How?" asked Mrs. Landover rather tartly.

"Well, Mr. Alleyne is particularly fond of Mignon," said Pearl.

"And what does Major Lucy say to Mr. Al-

leyne or Mr. Anybodyelse being particularly fond of Mignon?" Mrs. Landover inquired with a not very pleasant laugh.

By this time, Mrs. Ferrers was on the other side of the hall, chatting to Geoffrey Landover; Miss Maitland was at the tea-table, and near enough to Sophy Carmine and the General to join in their conversation, so that Mrs. Landover was practically at the mercy of the two sharp, plain-spoken young ladies, who, though they were utterly unconscious of it, were ever on the look-out for the joints of her harness, and would certainly never miss a chance of sending one of their bolts, charged with the deadly precision of absolute truth, right home to the very haft.

"I don't think Major Lucy minds anyone being fond of Mignon," said Pearl seriously.

Mrs. Landover raised her eyebrows, as much as to say, "Has it come to that?" Pearl continued.

"You see he couldn't very well, because he is so fond of her himself."

"Cecil adores Mignon," broke in Maud indignantly.

Mrs. Landover laughed. "How very nice," she remarked, jeeringly.

Maud looked at her with great, blue, reproachful eyes, her childish serenity ruffled by something she knew was in Mrs. Landover's mind, and yet which was beyond her comprehension.

Pearl, on the other hand, not only saw, but went straight to the point with an appalling amount of truthfulness and lack of conventionality, such as made Mrs. Landover positively shudder.

"I wonder why you don't like Mignon?" she observed, meditatively.

"I?" cried Mrs. Landover, with a great show of surprise.

"Yes, Jane, you," said Pearl promptly. "You don't like her, do you?"

"Oh! my dear, I'm quite *awfully* fond of Mignon," said Mrs. Landover, rising. "I always was, as Mignon herself would tell you, I'm sure. You should not let such odd ideas get into your head, my dear. It is very bad for you, very bad. Nobody will love you if you get fancying such things," and then Mrs. Landover carried her cup over to the tea-table for another supply of tea, and with a little joke, she sat down on the settle with her sister and General Coles.

"Jane Landover is vexed," said Maud in dismay to her sister.

"But Jane cannot bear Mignon," said Pearl wisely. "It wouldn't have vexed her if it hadn't been true."

For a little time they remained as they were, and the two children sat together on the big sofa and finished their plate of muffins, and thoroughly talked over Jane Landover and her ways. Then

Mrs. Ferrers asked Miss Maitland if she would sing something, if it was not too soon after tea?

"Not a bit," said Miss Maitland, who was every hour getting less shy, and feeling more at home.

She got up, and went to the piano, and Mrs. Ferrers saw, with some amusement, that the old General followed, on the plea of turning over her music. Mrs. Landover moved nearer to her sister.

"I can't understand how such really delightful people as the Ferrers come to have such horrid children," she remarked.

Sophy laughed. "They are dreadfully truthful," she said; "sometimes quite inconveniently so," and wondered what awkward and unanswerable questions they had been plying Jane with.

"Horrid little brats, I call them," said Jane with decision, as the strains of a tender melody began to steal out from under Miss Maitland's slender fingers. "That girl plays well," she added. "Who is she?"

"The English governess," Sophy answered.

"Oh, yes! to be sure. I have seen her here before. Rather a mistake of Mrs. Ferrers to make her so prominent, don't you think?"

Sophy Carmine did not answer in words, for Miss Maitland began to sing; but she turned and looked at Jane, and then she looked across the

hall at Geoffrey Landover—a look filled with wonder and something very near contempt.

It was such a pretty, tender song that the girl was singing—

> "To the tears I have shed and regret not,
> What matters a few more tears?
> Or a few days waiting longer,
> To one who has waited for years?"

There were more listeners than she knew of, for when the last notes died away, Mignon pulled the velvet curtain of the door leading to the outer hall aside, and came in. "What a lovely song," she said. "We have been standing outside listening to every word. Let me introduce you to Miss Maitland, Mr. Alleyne."

"I am delighted to meet you," said Mr. Alleyne taking the girl's hand in the peculiarly flattering fashion which you never see except in men who live mostly in London. "Your song was charming—perfectly charming."

"I am glad you think so," the girl answered, feeling at ease with him at once—as most people did with Tommy Alleyne. "But I don't think you could hear very well."

"Every word, I assure you—every word," he protested.

"Let me introduce Colonel Kerr, Miss Maitland," said Mignon; so Miss Maitland had to turn from the actor, who at once went off to the mistress of the Court.

"What an exquisite song," the Colonel began, when Captain Ferrers came across the room and caught hold of his arm.

"Charlie, old fellow," he said, "come to the fire. I believe you are very cold, you ought to have gone inside. Miss Maitland, won't you give Colonel Kerr a cup of tea?"

"Of course," said she willingly.

"Or do you prefer anything else?"

"No, thanks, I'd rather have tea, much rather."

"Then come along. You know Miss Carmine, don't you? And these are my two daughters—my eldest daughters, that is, I've got a few more."

"Only two, father," said Pearl, as she held out her hand to the new-comer.

"And *eight* is a few," said Maud severely.

"Eight—eh? How do you make that out?" laughed Bootles.

"Well, Humphie says," said Maud gravely, "that eight is a few because eight persons came out of the ark—and it says they were a few, somewhere in the Bible."

"Ah, you two do keep me up to date," cried Bootles laughing; then slipped his hand under Kerr's arm. "Charlie, old fellow," he said, "I'm glad to have you back again."

"Thank you, Bootles," was all the other said.

"And," said Pearl afterwards, "he looked just like father did when Mignon was married."

## CHAPTER VI.

### GOING BACK A LITTLE.

As Pearl had predicted to Mrs. Landover, Mr. Alleyne had not been many hours at Ferrers Court before the question of private theatricals was mooted.

"You keep New Year's Eve," said the actor—"then you had better have the show on that night, hadn't you?"

"If you can get ready in time," Mrs. Ferrers answered.

"Oh! I think we can get ready, if we work," he said, hopefully; "but remember, those who play must do *nothing* else—no hunting, no shooting, no anything but rehearsals until dinner-time. You have the stage that you used last time, Mrs. Ferrers?"

"Oh, yes! It can be put up in a few hours. If you like it can be put up at once."

"It would be much better, and when we have decided on the piece, we must see about scenery—I am afraid you'll have to have a man down from town."

"Miss Maitland can paint the scenery," said Pearl.

"Miss Maitland!" exclaimed Mr. Alleyne in some surprise. "But have you ever painted stage scenery?" he asked turning to Miss Maitland; "it is very different to ordinary painting, you know."

"Yes; I know," she said, smiling—"but I know a good deal about it; my father was Maitland, the actor."

Tommy Alleyne's jaw fairly dropped. "Your father was Maitland, the actor!"—he exclaimed—"you—you surprise me. Then, pray, what are you doing off the stage yourself? Or are you an actress?"

"No, I have never been on the stage at all," she answered; "my father would never let me do it and when he died, I did not like to do the one thing he had never allowed, so—here I am."

"But you will play in these theatricals?" he urged—"Oh! you must, I won't take any refusal."

"I will paint the scenery with pleasure," she said, smiling—"it's not the first I have done, nor the second, nor the third. In fact, at one time, I had a great idea of taking it up professionally, but somehow I didn't, I found it easier—at least, that's not quite it, but I happened to hear that Mrs. Ferrers wanted a governess and one of my friends spoke to her and here I am."

"The loss is to the stage," said Mr. Alleyne,

gallantly. "Then let me see—what piece shall we do?"

There was an argument about this question, of course. One wanted to try "David Garrick;" another to do "The Bells," and a third to have something really good—"As You Like It," or "Claudian." Eventually, however, they decided on playing "Sweethearts," and a little two-act comedy of Tommy's own writing.

"And who will play Jenny?" asked Mrs. Landover, with a great interest.

"Either Miss Maitland or Mrs. Lucy," answered Mr. Alleyne, promptly.

"I did not know that acting was one of your accomplishments, Mignon," said Mrs. Landover, who wanted to play it herself.

"Neither did I," said Mignon, good-humoredly.

"*I* have always played in private theatricals from the time I was sixteen," remarked Mrs. Landover to the company in general.

"Really—is that so?" said Mr. Alleyne, with polite interest. "But, all the same, I don't think that Jenny Spreadbrow is *quite* suited to you, and either Mrs. Lucy or Miss Maitland would look the part admirably."

"I have played it several times," persisted Mrs. Landover, who never liked to give up anything upon which she had set her mind.

"Well, we shall see, of course," said Mr.

Alleyne, blandly — so very blandly that Jane would have shaken him at that moment with much pleasure, if it had been practicable. "By-the-bye, Ferrers, did I hear that Lester Brookes is spending Christmas with you?"

"Yes; he comes this afternoon," Bootles answered.

"He is the very man we want," said Mr. Alleyne, vastly pleased.

They loitered about the dining-room and hall a little, as people do when breakfast comes to an end, and Tommy Alleyne took the opportunity of having a little confidential chat with Mrs. Ferrers.

"I want you, my dear Mrs. Ferrers," he said, "to give over to me, entirely and absolutely, the whole charge of these theatricals. You see, we have very little time, and shall have a great many difficulties to get over, and if I don't have the entire command——"

"Yes, I know," exclaimed Mrs. Ferrers, with a laugh—"I understand exactly, Mr. Alleyne. I give you the absolute management of the theatricals from beginning to end."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ferrers," he said, in a tone of great relief.

After this he mysteriously disappeared, and then Miss Maitland also went off in a casual sort of way, as if she was going to get her needlework or to see if Fraulein's bad cold was better,

or something equally uninteresting in the way of occupation. And then Mignon asked Colonel Kerr if he had ever seen the ball-room, and when he said "No, it was built since my day," suggested that he should go with her and have a look at it. So they, too, betook themselves away; and then Captain Ferrers carried Squire Landover off to the stables, and his wife with a word of apology, departed on her daily visit to the housekeeper.

"What are you going to do this morning, Sophy?" inquired Mrs. Landover of her sister.

"Keep myself warm by the fire, my dear," said Sophy promptly.

"Oh! and you, General?"

"I—well, I think I am going to keep Miss Carmine company," he replied.

Mrs. Landover smiled. "Well, I don't feel inclined to stay indoors; it is a lovely morning," she said, "but as everybody has gone off on their respective ways, I think there is nothing for you and I to do, Major Lucy, but console one another."

"I am at your service," said Lucy politely. "Shall we go and see the horses, or walk about the place a little?"

"Oh! I should like that so much," cried Mrs. Landover in quite the old sprightly way which had been her habitual manner before she became so important a lady as Mrs. Landover, of Land-

over Castle. "I'll run up and get my hat and coat,"—and then she suddenly remembered that she never wore anything less dignified than a bonnet now, and that her maid would be horrified at the idea of her exceedingly languid mistress "running up to get her things." "General Coles, will you ring the bell for me?" she said, relapsing into her pretty helpless Mrs. Landover manner.

After five minutes delay the maid Cérise came, a smart and pretty Frenchwoman who understood her mistress's weaknesses better than any other person in the world.

"I am going out for a little walk, Cérise," said Mrs. Landover; "bring me something to put on."

Cérise retired, returning with some garments which she considered suitable to the occasion—a well-cut ulster, with so many capes, and collars, and pockets, and lapels, and buttons, that Sophy looked at it, speechless in wonder and admiration. To wear with this wonderful garment was a little scarlet velvet cap, and Mrs. Landover looked at them with the delight of a surprised child.

"Oh! Cérise, how charming. You never told me Redfern had sent me these," she exclaimed. "The last time we were in town," she explained to Sophy, "they suggested I should have something quite a change—they think I have been

dressing *too old* lately. So I left it to them to send me something for wearing in the country, or in Scotland, that really would suit me."

"Let us see you in it," said Sophy, who had never pretended to be above feeling an interest in new garments, whether they happened to be for herself or anybody else.

Thus encouraged, Mrs. Landover, with Cérise's help, insinuated herself into the new garment, which was made of thick heather mixture cloth and suited her admirably, making her look like the Jane Carmine of four or five years before, with a certain richness and a *chic* air which she had not possessed in those days.

"It is a charming coat," cried Sophy, enthusiastically. "Isn't it, General?"

"Oh! charming—most ravishing," answered the old General, with emphasis.

"Do you like it, Major Lucy?" asked Mrs. Landover in a shy little voice, and turning herself round very slowly, as if she was a young lady in a show room persuading him to buy it.

"I'm afwraid I'm no judge," said Lucy deliberately. "I always think Mrs. Landover charming.

Mrs. Landover positively blushed. "Give me the hat, Cérise," she said.

Cérise had brought a gold dagger, with which her mistress usually fastened her head-covering

securely on her head, and in two minutes she announced to Lucy that she was ready.

It was really a very smart little figure that went out into the soft wintry morning beside him; and Lucy, being safely married, and therefore in no danger of falling a victim to Mrs. Landover's kind glances (as he had once been), was not unwilling to spend an hour or so dawdling round "the place."

"Shall it be the stables?" he asked, as he opened the door.

"Presently," said she. "I am interested in horses, but I am more interested in conservatories and hot-houses. Suppose that we go through the fernery, and right round by the different glass houses to the stables?"

"A vewry good idea," said Lucy, blandly.

"You may smoke," she said presently, when they found themselves in the principal palm-house. "I don't like a great deal of tobacco. Smoking concerts always make me ill, but I don't mind *one* cigarette at a time. In fact, I rather like it."

"You are awfully good," said Lucy, in his most imperturbable manner; "but the fact is, I seldom or never smoke so early in the day; it spoils your nerve for hunting."

"Are you going to hunt *much* here?" asked Mrs. Landover, in a piteous little voice.

"Yes; I genewrally put in a good bit of hunting while we are staying with Ferwrers."

"But to-morrow is Christmas Eve," she cried, reproachfully.

"I believe we don't hunt until Saturday," said Lucy, mildly.

"Oh! And then you will hunt every day, I suppose?"

"Never on Sundays, you know," said Lucy, more mildly still. "But why don't you hunt, Mrs. Landover? You used to be gwreat at outdoor pursuits, and surely you must have enough horses to hunt even on Sundays, if you wished."

Mrs. Landover sat down on a wicker-work seat that was half-hidden under a great clump of palms which reached to the glass roof of the house. "I used to hunt, and fish, and walk—nay, tramp, or do anything that meant being active and gay. But since I married, everything seems so different. Of course, Geoff is the best husband in the world—I don't suppose you are half as good a husband, Major Lucy. But—but—he will persist in coddling me so awfully that sometimes I feel as if I could scream out aloud from sheer nervousness. If there is a drop of rain, he is sure I shall get a chill and have inflammation of the lungs, or rheumatic fever. If I don't smother myself in furs till I have only the tip of my nose showing, he is sure I am not well-wrapped up enough. He never will hear of

my using my own feet to walk anywhere—I must have a carriage out. And as for riding—well, really, I think he would have a fit at the mere mention of such a thing."

Lucy was quite interested. "You don't say so, Mrs. Landover. What a pity! Why, it's a thousand pities!" he returned sympathetically. "You ought to educate him better. He's such an all-wround good chap, Landover, that it wreally is a pity to have your good times spoilt like that. Suppose you come out for a wride with me this afternoon?"

"I don't even possess a habit!" exclaimed Mrs. Landover dismally.

"Borwrow one fwrom you sister or fwrom my wife," he suggested.

"I'll see. Oh! here is Sophy with the General. Don't let us spoil sport, Major Lucy; let us be off before they see us."

So some hours later, when the theatrical conspirators appeared at luncheon and Mignon asked gaily, "Well, good people, what have you all been after?" Mrs. Landover answered in her sweetest tones, "Oh! Major Lucy and I have been dawdling about the glass-houses *all* the morning. We have had a lovely time. I hope you don't mind my monopolizing your husband, Mignon dear?"

"Not the least in the world, so long as Cecil is amused," said Mignon, shortly.

## CHAPTER VII.

### REMEMBRANCES.

Captain Lester Brookes arrived at Ferrers Court that afternoon, and the house-party was complete.

There was not a soul in the hall when he and Bootles arrived from the station in an inordinately high dog-cart, but before long, the different members of the household began dropping in by twos and threes, as the time of tea and muffins drew near.

The dramatic conspirators, as Bootles called them, came in together and soon claimed Captain Brookes to themselves, carrying him off to a corner where they imparted to him all that he would have to do, and stated more particularly all that he would have to leave undone during the next ten days. Then Mrs. Ferrers came in with Sophy Carmine and the General, and Brookes promptly began to chaff him as unmercifully and quite as respectfully as he had been used to chaff him years and years before when they had been quartered together at Blankhampton.

"Yes, yes," he said to the conspirators. "I'll do anything and everything you like; but I

must go and speak to the dear old boy now, he's the best fun I ever knew in my life, and I haven't seen him for years."

Then he straightened himself up and went across the hall. "How do you do, sir?" he remarked blandly. "I'm afraid you hardly remember me—Lester Brookes, of the Black Horse?"

General Coles got up from his cosy corner. "My dear boy," said he, "I'm delighted to see you. Why, let me think: surely we were quartered together at——"

"Blankhampton, sir," said Brookes, with a twinkle in his eye. "We had a great many mutual friends there, if you remember, sir; Mrs. Trafford, for instance."

"Ah, yes! Mrs. Trafford," said the General, suavely. "Yes; she had several daughters."

"Two daughters and a niece, sir—yes. The niece married Orford, of my regiment, and Miss Laura married Staunton, Sir Anthony Staunton's son, of the Black Horse."

"Ah! yes, yes, I remember. Charming people—charming little woman, Mrs. Trafford. Very nearly married your colonel, Urquhart."

"I believe she might have married Urquhart if she had chosen," said Brookes, "but she resisted the temptation. I'm quite sure, as I told you at the time, General, that Mrs. Trafford would never have resisted *you*, if you had asked her."

The General fairly chuckled with delight, and,

if the truth is told, was highly flattered by the reminiscence. Lester Brookes blandly and innocently went on:

"Then there was Mrs. Fairlie, General—you haven't forgotten her, *of course*," Brookes went on.

The General shook his head seriously, but looked, at the same time, pleasantly conscious. "Well, Mrs. Fairlie certainly was a great friend of mine—a very charming woman, Brookes. I liked her immensely."

"Of course you did, sir," rejoined Brookes, civilly. "Everybody knew it. Of course you've heard what they say about it in Blankhampton?"

"No; I haven't heard a word. What do they say?" asked the General, all his curiosity aroused.

Brookes looked at him doubtfully, and Mrs. Ferrers put her hand under Sophy's arm, feeling a thrill of commiseration for the old man in her soft and tender heart. "They are going to talk scandal, Sophy," she said; "so we will go and pour out the tea. Come, dear."

"Oh! of course," said Sophy, who, by-the-bye, was dying to stay where she was.

The General, with an air of relief, slipped his hand under the younger soldier's arm. "And what do they say in Blankhampton, my dear boy?" he asked, when the ladies were out of hearing.

"Well, they do say, sir," answered Brookes,

"that Mrs. Fairlie's husband has never quite got over his jealousy of you, and that one has only to speak of General Coles to put him into a most infernal temper at any time."

The General opened his eyes with a most innocent air of surprise. "Bless me, you don't say so, my dear boy?" he remarked. "But why? I admired the lady, it is true——"

"And the lady admired you," put in Brookes.

"Tut, tut, tut," returned the old man, blandly. "I dare say she found me amusing enough—but dear, dear, dear—what fools men are. Here was I—old enough to be her—her grandfather."

"Scarcely that, sir," said Brookes, with great gravity. "Say her uncle, or her elder brother, or even her cousin."

"Well, considerably older than the lady, anyway," admitted the old man. "And—but then, Blankhampton was always given to that sort of thing."

"Blankhampton is a unique study of human nature," said Lester Brookes, solemnly. "A place where everybody has a coat-of-arms but nobody possesses a grandfather; where the majority of people are churchy, but nobody gives you the idea of being good; a place presenting the oddest social contrasts possible to be found in the kaleidoscope of life, for the spiritual head of one church is but the second remove from the peasantry, and the humble sweeper out of another is Prince Paul

Wolhenski, the twenty-third in the direct line, and the head of what was, in his youth, one of the richest and most powerful of the noble families of that unhappy country, which autocratic Russia has crushed under her heel. I have seen," Lester Brookes went on—"I have seen Prince Paul Wolhenski take off his hat to the Lord Bishop of Blankhampton. Well, he is dead now, poor old man; his sad and uncertain life is over. But of the two, I would rather be Prince Paul lying in his quiet grave than I would be the great man, whom most people cordially detest."

General Coles nodded assent. "Yes, I suppose most of us would," he said, quietly. "And yet, I don't know why I should say so. John was always uncommonly civil to me."

"Yes!" answered Brookes, in his driest tone. "Yes! By-the-bye, did you ever hear that story about Greville Howard and the great John?"

"No—I never heard a word. What was it?" the General asked eagerly, on the alert in a moment when there was a scrap of news in question. "You mean Howard of Dangerfield?"

"No, I mean his brother, Greville, the parson at Linkwater. Greville married an heiress, you know, and has money of his own beside—has a good living just to his liking that Lord Linkwater gave him, which is conveniently near Dangerfield."

"Yes, I know, popular sort of chap—very tall, reddish, big family all reddish."

"That's your man. Well, he has a profound love of John—likes him, like he would a stoat, don't you know. Well, I'm told that not very long ago, John Blankhampton approached him in his most condescending and lordly way, and told him that he had noticed that one of Howard's boys was paying a good deal of attention to one of his daughters."

"'I don't think there is any reason why it should not be, Howard,' said John very blandly —'It would be a suitable marriage in every way. What do you think about it?'

"'I don't think, my lord,' said Greville Howard very politely, 'that any one of my sons would have the presumption to——'

"'Oh! come come, Howard, broke in his lordship with great affableness. 'I cannot look at it like that. Indeed, I think, providing that the young people give us a lead—that it would be a most suitable marriage in every respect. For instance in age and station——'

"Greville Howard murmured something to the effect that this unexpected honor was too great, and John Blankhampton by way of putting him at his ease, said—'My dear Howard, you are too modest altogether——'

"'The younger son of a younger son,' put in Howard.

"'Still, you are of good family, Howard, said John—'yours is a very old landed interest in Blankshire, is it not?'

"'Well, my lord,' said Howard dryly—'We have been Squires of Dangerfield since Stephen's time, if that is what you mean.'

"Well, within a week, Howard had packed his young hopeful off to the other side of the world—'I've always let my boys go their own way pretty much,' he remarked when he told the story, 'but one must draw the line *somewhere*, you know.'

"Never! he never said that, surely," chuckled the old soldier in huge delight; a very good joke 'pon my word, a very good joke.'"

"Why, there's Lucy," Brookes exclaimed, as Mrs. Landover came in followed by Major Lucy—"Lucy, my dear fellow, how are you?"

"How d' do Brookes?" answered Lucy pleasantly. "Er—how d' do, old fellow? Glad to see you again."

"Captain Brookes doesn't remember me," murmured Mrs. Landover in the old coaxing coquettish voice that had been hers in the days gone by.

"Oh! yes, Mrs. Landover, I do," returned Brookes; "I am very pleased to meet you again. The fact was I couldn't quite see who was with Lucy—those veils ladies are wearing now are very disguising."

"Oh, my dragon veil," said she, putting up a neat little hand in the neatest possible riding-glove to touch her veil. "Yes, I believe they are a little so. Geoff thinks me a perfect lunatic to wear one; he says he can't think what I want to hide my face for, and I tell him I don't, but these dragon veils are the fashion, and one must wear what is the fashion whatever one looks like. Ah! Mignon dear, we have had a *delightful* ride—and I have won a couple of pairs of gloves from your husband. Mind you pay up, Major Lucy," turning to him and speaking in her most coquettish tones.

"Oh! I will pay up," replied Lucy gravely—"What size, by the by, and what color?"

"Six and a quarter—any shade of tan, and Penberthy's gloves, please, I can't wear *any* gloves but Penberthy's," Mrs. Landover replied.

"You see I've such a difficult little hand to fit. What size gloves do you take, Mignon, dear? Six and a half? Do you go to Penberthy's for yours?"

"Mignon takes sixes," answered Major Lucy quickly and taking his wife's hand that he might show its small size and beautiful shape.

"I shouldn't have thought it," said Mrs. Landover tartly; somehow the sight of the two big diamond half hoops which blazed upon Mignon's wedding-finger always made her, as she called it savage—to think of the ring she had

been made to give her for a wedding-present, because that foolish Geoff was so proud of his wife and was so grateful to the Ferrers for having first met her at Ferrers Court. Ugh! it was sickening.

"Mignon has a vewry small hand," said Lucy mildly—"By the by, my darling, will you remember to get the gloves for Mrs. Landover—two pairs, tan, six and a quarter?"

"Oh! yes, Lal, I'll remember," said Mignon.

"I will go and get rid of this dirty habit," said Mrs. Landover in a frozen sort of voice; and away she went with a sudden accession of the Mrs. Landover manner, which contrasted oddly enough with the skittishness of the manner that she had brought in with her. Mignon's great soft eyes followed her till she disappeared and it was with a charming smile that she turned to her husband, who was still holding her hand.

"Lal, dear," she asked—"do you remember Miss Dudley?"

Lucy shook his head. "No, my darling, I don't," he answered.

"Not 'the ghoul'?" she persisted.

"Not in the least."

"If you was *my* little girl," quoted Mignon, referring to an incident of years and years before—"I should not allow you to have any likes and dislikes. I am afraid your mother spoils you, my dear."

At the remembrance thus called up Lucy laughed out aloud, and he laughed yet more at the similarity between 'the ghoul' and Mrs. Landover which Mignon's question implied

"What a funny child, you are," he said, tenderly as he set her hand free.

In less than ten minutes Mrs. Landover came down again having got rid of her habit and got herself into a tea-gown, a garment of such resplendent elegance that the old General, who was quite a connoisseur of feminine garments as he was of feminine charms, cast conventionality to the wind and at once complimented the lady upon its beauty.

"It's a pretty gown and very comfortable," said Mrs. Landover carelessly—"I used not to like tea-gowns, as you may remember, Mignon. Now, I simply cannot live without them."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LITTLE DANCE.

CHRISTMAS Day came and went, and I need not stop to tell anything about it because one Christmas is very much like another Christmas, and on this one nothing out of the common happened; nothing at least that in any way affects my story.

But three days later, Mrs. Ferrers, by way of making things a little pleasant for her guests, who were kept with their noses to the grindstone of dramatic production, instead of the usual dinner-party in the evening, sent out invitations to a few of her neighbors for what in town would have been called a Cinderella. That is to say the house-party dined at seven instead of eight o'clock, and soon after eight the guests for the dance began to arrive. It was a pretty sight for all the men, or nearly all the men, came in pink, and nearly all the women wore white. Mignon wore a gown of soft India silk, which showed her pretty white neck and arms off to perfection. Sophy Carmine appeared in a white silk gown also; but hers was of a thicker, heavier material, and was one which had seen service during the previous season. Mrs. Ferrers, too, was in white, but her gown was shaded by a good deal of black lace and a good quantity of black velvet, and on the left side of her bodice she had a cluster of pink feathers.

Miss Maitland had on a pretty white muslin frock, and Mrs. Landover appeared in what she called 'a little Empire' gown. It was short in the waist and skimpy in the skirt, it had nothing at the back and a voluminous sash at one side towards the front; it was entirely white and very soft, and without joking, Mrs. Landover looked about seventeen in it.

With her 'little Empire' gown Mrs. Landover sported a fan made of a bunch of white plumes mounted on a mother-of-pearl handle, and round her throat she wore a string of pearls fastened by a diamond clasp.

"Do you like me?" she asked, turning herself slowly round before an admiring group gathered in the drawing-room, and finally letting her eyes rest upon Major Lucy so that she seemed to be asking the question of him more than of any one else.

"Oh! Mrs. Landover, it is too charming," exclaimed Miss Maitland.

"It suits you delightfully," said Sophy Carmine. "I feel like an old rag doll beside you."

"You don't look at all like an old rag doll, Sophy," said Mignon quickly.

"Ah! but this is so pert and *chic*," said Sophy, touching her sister's gown with caressing fingers.

"Vewry quaint," remarked Major Lucy placidly, "wreally vewry quaint."

Mrs. Landover tossed her head, she did not care to be called quaint.

On this night, as a great treat, it being Christmas-time, the two elder of the Ferrers' children were to sit up for the dinner and dance, and just then Pearl and Maud, in frocks that were the very counterparts of Mrs. Landover's, came into the room.

"Why, Jane," remarked Pearl in surprised tones, "your dress is just like ours."

"So it is, dear," replied Mrs. Landover, suddenly feeling, between the child's comment and Major Lucy's, as if her gown was hideous and she had no more pleasure in it.

"Did your maid copy ours?" asked Maud, in all innocence, poor child, for her mother's maid, Fanchette, was always glad to get a hint from a good model.

"My maid never copies any one," said Mrs. Landover tartly.

"Dinner is served," said Brown, at that moment.

Mrs. Landover was quite relieved. It was such a comfort, she told herself, to get away from those horrid children and really she did think it so injudicious of Mrs. Ferrers to have them so continually to the front as they were.

She did not, however, get so very far away from them; for Maud, who went in to dinner in state on Mr. Alleyne's arm to her intense satisfaction and his extreme amusement, sat immediately opposite to her, so that she was vexed by the sight of her own gown in miniature during the whole dinner. Major Lucy, too, whom she wanted to go in with, was put right up at the other end of the table where she could not even see him, while Mignon, whom she never wanted to see, sat just opposite to her between Geoffrey Landover and Mr. Brandon, who with his wife had come up from the Rectory to join the Court dinner-party.

"You'll give me a couple of waltzes, won't you, Mrs. Lucy?" she heard Geoffrey Landover say in his loud voice.

She could not hear what Mignon said, but evidently she assented, for Mr. Landover pulled down his cuff and scribbled something upon it.

"Fancy Geoff asking that girl before he has asked me what I mean to give him," thought Mrs. Landover indignantly.

"You are going to dance to-night, Mrs. Landover? said Captain Ferrers at that moment.

"Oh! yes," she answered.

"Will you dance the first waltz with me?" he asked. "We open with a square as usual, you know," and looked toward Mrs. Brandon as if to indicate that he was engaged to her for that.

"Oh! I think not the first waltz, the second if you like," said Mrs. Landover very graciously; and then she saw Mr. Alleyne say something to Maud and Maud pass it on to Geoffrey Landover, who said in a voice which could well be heard all over the table. "Mrs. Lucy, Alleyne wants to know if he may have the first waltz to-night?"

Mignon bent forward and looked with a smile at Mr. Alleyne. "Not the first. I always dance that with Lal," she answered. "But the third, if you like."

Mr. Alleyne began to write on his cuff. Mrs. Landover began to fan herself, although she was

not hot, in unutterable disgust. "They were all mad, those men," she said to herself, "about this milk-and-water chit, who had nothing in her, positively not two ideas in her head, whom she had always disliked intensely, having thought her even more objectionable, at the same age, as she thought Pearl and Maud now.

"Do you dance?" she said abruptly to Colonel Kerr, who sat on her left hand.

"I have not danced for years," he answered.

It happened that Bootles overheard both the question and the answer.

"Charlie, old fellow," he said persuasively. "do you mean to say you have given up dancing?"

"I've never danced a step since I went to India," Kerr answered.

"But, my dear old man, you must dance to-night—its good for you—it's not the right thing for any man to give up dancing till he gets the gout or something of that sort to stop him."

"I don't think any one will want to dance with me," said Kerr, rather sadly.

"I will, if you ask me," said Mrs. Landover in her softest little voice.

"It's awfully kind of you. I'm afraid, though, you'll repent your good-nature," he said. "I shall prove about as clumsy as an elephant. Why, positively, I haven't danced for twenty years."

"Charlie, is it twenty years since you went away?" exclaimed Bootles.

"Twenty years," said Kerr.

"Twenty years. Yes, of course. Mignon is just twenty you know. How time flies."

"Yes," said Kerr briefly.

There was a story in Kerr's life, a story to which Captain Ferrers held the key. It was a sad story, too, one in which a girl, young and fair, and all that was good and charming, had died of a broken heart, because the one love of her life had given her up for a passing infatuation! Well, as Bootles was thinking at that moment, it was a miserable story, and Kerr would blame himself for his folly and his inconstancy as long as he lived. And, yet twenty years had gone by, twenty years of voluntary exile and remorse, and surely that was penance enough for any man.

He had been hard upon him at the time, very, very hard, for he had known and liked the dead girl with all his honest heart; but now when his old friend and he had come together again, Captain Ferrers' great wish was to help him to forget the past and try to be happy.

At the other end of the table, Mrs. Ferrers was teasing the gallant old General. "Do you mean to say, really and truly, that you have quite given up dancing?" she was saying. "And you won't even ask *me* to dance?"

"Yes, my dear lady, I do most emphatically,"

he answered. "Of course if you wish to honor me so far, I shall be delighted to walk through the square affair at the beginning. But at the same time, I am sure that you would easily find twenty more agreeable partners than a gouty old man like myself."

"Well, I don't want to make a martyr of you, General," said Mrs. Ferrers smiling. "Are you dancing to-night, Sophy?"

"I think not to-night," said Sophy languidly. "I don't feel as if I cared much about it, I am not *very* keen on dancing at *any* time you know."

"Why," Pearl broke out, aghast at this statement, when Major Lucy suddenly diverted her attention by saying, "Pearl, I was always a fool or next door to it. Do you know what I've done now?"

"No," answered Pearl, forgetting her astonishment at Sophy Carmine's assertions.

"I brought you and Maud each a fan from Farlington to-day, and I quite forgot to give them to you," he said, solemnly.

Now this was as much a stretch of the imagination as Sophy's remark that she was not very keen on dancing had been, and had she known it, the truthful Pearl would have been simply horrified and she would probably have gone into a catechism of the strictest kind—"What he meant by it, and where he thought he was likely to go to if he told such stories?" Pearl, however,

knew nothing of this and the divertissement was made, and those people within hearing breathed freely once more.

"A fan—a fan each?" she cried. "Oh! that is very lovely; mother, do you hear? Cecil has bought us each a fan; isn't it good of him?"

Mrs. Ferrers smiled and patted Lucy's arm. "You are always good, Cecil," she said in a low voice; then after an instant added with meaning, "and *very* considerate."

But, although Pearl's attention was diverted for the moment, she had not forgotten Sophy Carmine's assertion, and as soon as they reached the drawing-room again, she made for Maud that she might tell her about it. Equally also was Maud bursting to impart her gleanings to her sister, so the two retired to a distant sofa and settled themselves comfortably upon it.

"I can't think," began Pearl, "why, people want to tell stories. Sophy Carmine actually told General Coles at dinner that she wasn't keen on dancing. Why, it was only the other day I heard her say she adored waltzing."

"Perhaps adoring it does mean being keen on it," suggested Maud, who was always loath to believe the worst of any one. "I wonder why Jane Landover was so vexed at our having frocks like hers?"

"Was she?"

"Yes, for I heard her telling mother this

morning that she going to wear a sweet 'little Empire' frock. I wonder why they call frocks like these, Empire frocks?"

"Oh! I think," said Pearl promptly, "because they are the fashion in the Holy Roman Empire."

"Where is the Holy Roman Empire?" demanded Maud.

"In Rome, of course."

"But the King of Italy lives in Rome! If it was an Empire, they would have an Emperor, wouldn't they?"

"Not in that one," answered Pearl, "for the Pope is in Rome too and has one palace, and the king has another. They are both kings, or sort of kings; they seem to quarrel a good bit. But I know that one of them has a special empire all to himself with lords and ladies and everything. It's very puzzling," she ended with a sigh; "for I was reading an account of a wedding in the *Queen* yesterday, of an Irish girl who got married. It said she was a Countess and Canoness of the Holy Roman Empire, and yet she was a plain Miss and she was Irish, too. It's very puzzling, I can't make it out at all. But depend upon it that's where the sweet 'little Empire' frocks come from.

"Oh! here's Jane coming!"

Mrs. Landover came and sat down near the two children. "Well, young women," she said,

quite brightly. "So you have got frocks just like mine."

"Just like yours," they cried in a breath.

"It is a great treat stopping up for dinner," Mrs. Landover went on, "and now I suppose you are going to bed?"

"Oh! no," said Pearl, "we are both engaged for every dance! How many dances are you engaged for, Jane?"

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## CHAPTER IX.

### "SWEETHEARTS."

THE evening of the private theatricals at Ferrers Court had come, and great was the excitement both before and behind the newly-painted drop-curtain of the stage, which stood at one end of the long ball-room.

At eight o'clock the ball-room, or theatre—whichever you please to call it—was crammed even to suffocation; for, besides the twenty rows of chairs and front seats placed for the gentry, there was provision behind for all the tenants living near enough to the Court to be able to come; and up in the gallery, where generally the musicians sat, were packed as many of the servants and helpers about the place as could find standing-room. No, I don't mean that they

were all standing; but behind the double row of seats men were standing as close as they could crowd.

In the front row of what we may call the stalls, sat, among some of the most important guests, Sophy Carmine, with her attendant General; and in the row behind her was Mrs. Landover, with a pair of exceedingly long-handled eye-glasses, elaborately explaining to Major Lucy that she never preferred to sit in the front row, because she did not care about seeing the make-up of the performers.

"Then, my dear Mrs. Landover," said Lucy, mildly, "if you *don't* want to see the make-up, *why* do you trouble yourself to hold up those glasses all the evening?"

Mrs. Landover put them down. "Well, really, Major Lucy, I don't know," she answered. "I think it is simply from the force of habit. It's the fashion, you know, to use these things, and so one gets into a way of using them. But never mind my glasses. I want to ask you something. No, put your head nearer; I must whisper it."

Lucy bent his head toward her. "Yes?" he said, inquiringly.

"Do you think," asked Mrs. Landover, putting her lips within an inch of his ear, "that those two"—pointing with her fan to the General and Sophy, who were exactly in front of them—"are going to—to make a match of it?"

Major Lucy looked puzzled for a moment, then began to laugh immoderately.

"Is it at all probable?" he asked, turning round in his seat and looking at Mrs. Landover with an interest as great as it was sudden.

"*I* fancy more than probable," she answered. "All the same, he's the very last man in the world whom I should have expected Sophy to marry."

"And he's the last man in the world whom I should have expected to marry her, or any one else," rejoined Lucy, bluntly. "I thought old Coles was sworn off all that sort of thing."

"Mrs. Lucy," said Lester Brookes behind the curtain, at that moment, "come and look through this. Really, the house is quite a sight."

"Oh, what a lovely spy-hole!" cried Mignon, and looked through just in time to see her husband looking down with interest at Mrs. Landover, and Jane looking up with tenderness at him. "How she does make up to Lal," she said to herself. "It's so silly of her; and she little thinks how he dislikes her!"

But all the same, during the rest of the evening, she did not forget that those two were sitting together: and, somehow or other, it was a circumstance which she would much rather have forgotten, if she could.

The curtain went up a minute or two later, and all the audience were wrapt in the sight of

Mignon playing Jenny Spreadbrow, and Lester Brookes, the lover; Miss Maitland, looking piquant and lovely as the little maid, and Tommy Alleyne quite at home in the character of the old gardener.

Mrs. Landover put up her glasses again. "I should have thought Mignon would look better as Jenny Spreadbrow," she remarked, in a tone that was scarcely disparaging, and yet which was not one of approval.

Lucy looked at her quite sharply—for him. "You don't think she looks ugly, do you?" he asked, coolly.

"Oh! Major Lucy!" she cried, in shocked accents—"what a dreadful thing to say! You don't mean that you think dear Mignon ugly, surely?"

"I?" repeated Lucy. "Why, I think my wife the loveliest woman I ever saw in my life. But I thought you found some fault with her appearance."

"Not with her appearance—oh! no. I was speaking from a dramatic point of view altogether. To be very pretty is one thing, and to look well on the stage is a totally different matter. That Miss Maitland is pretty, is she not?"

"Yes; remarkably pwretty, and as clever as she is pwretty," Lucy answered, smoothly. "The scenery and dwrop-scene are particularly well painted."

"Oh! extremely so. She's not much of an actress, you know."

"Oh, I don't know. By-the-bye, why are not you acting to-night?"

"I? Well, I used to do that sort of thing," Mrs. Landover replied. "But, to be quite candid, acting is a great deal of trouble, and I thought I should enjoy myself better on this side of the curtain."

Meantime the couple in front was also discussing the merits of the performers.

"Mignon is awfully pretty," said Sophy Carmine to the General. "I think she gets prettier."

"She was always pretty," said the old man, genially; "and yet her father was one of the ugliest men you ever came across."

"Oh! Did you know him?"

"Of course I knew him. I saw him killed, poor chap; at least I saw him thrown, and he died the same night."

"And what was he like?" Sophy asked, with deep interest.

"Oh, a fair size, badly built, black and sallow, with black evil eyes and a sneering sort of mouth. A marvellously unpopular man—the most unpopular officer I ever knew in my life; he was simply detested all round—in fact, I don't believe the man had a friend in the world."

"Then how did Mrs. Ferrers come to marry him?"

"I believe he was her cousin, and that she had been brought up by his mother, and the match came about nobody quite knew how. It was a bad one for her, poor child; for he never owned her as his wife until the night he died. I remember that evening," the old General went on, "that I dined with the Scarlet Lancers. It was a dreadful time, and we ate our dinner in silence, or almost in silence, for the poor chap was lying with his back broken just overhead. The awful part of it was that nobody cared. I don't mean that nobody cared about the accident, because everybody was just as sorry as he could be that it had happened. But nobody had liked the man, and they couldn't be more than sorry that the accident had happened, don't you see?"

"Yes—I understand. And how old was Mignon at that time?"

"Oh, she was about five years old, I think. Bootles had had her several years. And then that night when Gilchrist told him that Mignon was his child—well, old Bootles said very little about it, but we all knew it was an awful blow to him. It never made any difference to the child though—she was the same sunny little soul then that she is now—Bootles adored her always. And then when he married Mrs. Gilchrist—why, it was right all round."

"I never knew what the story was before," said Sophy, interested beyond measure. "Of course I knew that there was a story, but I never knew the details of it. I don't wonder that Mignon is so fond of Captain Ferrers—what a difference it must have made to him. By the by, have you noticed Miss Maitland at all?"

"Yes. She is very pretty," returned the General, promptly.

"She is lovely," said Sophy, with honest admiration, "and nice too. There's nothing forward or disagreeable about her! And more than one gentleman in the house has found it out."

"Eh? What? Who?" cried the General, asking three questions in almost the same breath.

"Captain Brookes for one," said Miss Carmine, nodding her head airily.

"You don't say so."

"Yes, I do," she answered.

"And is it—is there—do you mean——" he began.

Sophy nodded. "Yes, I don't think there is much doubt about it. And it will be a nice, suitable, pretty sort of marriage—I am always glad when a girl who stands practically alone in the world, gets married and is happy; it's a dreadful thing for a woman to be by herself—to be alone," and then Sophy sighed, as if she was speaking out of her own experience.

The old General turned and looked at her sharply. "Why do you sigh like that, Miss Sophy?" he asked. "One might fancy that you know what it is to be alone in the world."

"So I am—so I do," she said, gravely—"as much alone in reality as if I had not a single relation. My sister is married and is taken up with her dignity and her big house, her husband and one thing or another. My brother, whom we used to live with, is married now and his wife likes to have her house to herself."

"I am sure she must like to have you there," said the General, testily. "No one could find you a nuisance."

"Well, perhaps not. Oh, I get on very well with her—I have never had the least little disagreement with her, and I hope I never shall. But all the same, I know when I am wanted and when I am not; and when my sister-in-law asks me to go to 'The Lake' she always asks me from one date to another—well, one knows what that means. They spend the season in town—last season she asked me for a fortnight."

"It is incredible," blustered the General, almost boiling over with indignation.

Sophy laughed. "Yes, but the incredible things are very often true," she said, quietly. "So, you see, I do know what it is to be lonely, and I do know, nobody better, how to sympathize

with a girl who suddenly finds herself lonely no longer."

"Miss Sophy," said the General, dropping his voice to a mere whisper, through which the strains of *Auf Wedersehen* floated softly, "If I were younger, if I were Kerr's age instead of an old man of fifty-five, I should ask nothing better than to try and make you forget that you have ever known what that kind of loneliness is."

Sophy Carmine's heart seemed to stand still for a few moments—then it began to beat harder and faster than she had ever known it to do in her life. "Would you?" she said, in a tone which invited him to go on.

"But I'm such a broken down old wreck," he continued—"I've got the gout, and India has played the very deuce with me all round, and I'm not very well off—fifteen hundred a year is as much as I've got, all told."

"It's a very good income," said Sophy, "*I* have only five."

"The worst of it is I'm so old," said the General, with pathetic regret, "I must be five-and-twenty years older than you at least, and I might be forty years older to look at me."

"Oh, no," murmured Sophy, "I am older than I look. But I never tell my age, except as a dead secret, to any one, because it vexes Jane so. You see I am three years older than she is and everybody knows it, because our brother

comes in between. So Jane likes to be thought a great deal younger than I am ; and as I really look younger for my age than she does, we just say nothing, but let people think what they like."

"But your sister must be thirty——" he began, but stopped, not liking to put the question plainly.

"My brother is five-and-thirty," said Sophy, quietly. "You can draw your own deductions from that, General Coles."

"Then—after all," he exclaimed, eagerly, "there's no real reason why we should not—oh! Miss Sophy, won't you say something?"

"You have not yet asked me to say anything definite," Sophy murmured, demurely.

"Miss Carmine—Sophy—will you give me the right to take care of you?" the old General pleaded. "I shall be so proud, it will make me so happy—I'm not rich, but I'm a good sort of old fellow, I think—and I can give you a good time, I can promise you that."

Sophy laid a long fan of white ostrich plumes with which she had been toying all the evening, so as to cover the very small space between them, and then she slipped her hand into the one which he held out to her.

"Yes," she said, simply, "I know you will be all that is good and kind. I shall be very proud to become your wife."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE LAST BIT OF LOCAL NEWS.

In an incredibly short time the news of Sophy's engagement to the General spread through the house, and every one was agog with excitement and curiosity. Probably neither Sophy nor the General would have told anybody a word about it that night, but Mignon happened to notice something unusual about the two as she came through the hall with Tommy Alleyne in quest of supper.

Sophy and the General were sitting comfortably enough in the old oak settle, and Mignon stopped, saying—"You know there is supper in the dining-room to-night, Sophy?"

"Is there?" said Sophy, in what would have been an indifferent tone if she had not looked so bright and happy.

"Yes—won't you come, and have some?"

"Presently, dear," returned Sophy.

"There are oysters," said Mignon hospitably, feeling pretty sure that the General would be disappointed if he did not discover the fact till the oysters were all eaten, and there was nothing but the shells left to tantalize him.

"I'll bring her in presently," he said, and so Mignon went on with Tommy Alleyne, wonder filling her heart.

In the supper-room she found Mrs. Ferrers.

"Mother," she said in a whisper. "Something has happened."

"Happened, where? How?" exclaimed Mr. Ferrers anxiously.

"No, I don't mean in that way," said Mignon smiling, "but with Sophy Carmine and the General."

"Mignon, you don't mean it," cried Mrs. Ferrers in great delight.

"Well, they certainly didn't tell me so," replied Mignon cautiously—"but there is something, you keep your eye on them and you will see for yourself."

"Where are they?"

"On the settle in the hall," but they are coming in to supper.

"Yes, there they are. Now, look at them—oh! depend upon it I am right. Now I'm going to get something to eat."

Mrs. Ferrers watched the pair for a few minutes, but then she could restrain her curiosity no longer and went round the table to where Sophy was standing toying with half-a-dozen oysters.

"Sophy," she said meaningly, "what is it?"

Sophy's eyes fell.—"Mrs. Ferrers," she said.

"Sophy dear," said Mrs. Ferrers, "don't keep me in suspense."

"I am so happy," whispered Sophy.

"Oh! my dear, I am so pleased, so glad," whispered Mrs. Ferrers in the same low voice—"I am *so* glad. Is it a secret? May I tell Algy?"

"Oh! I think so, I—" Sophy began, when the old General came up behind them with a glass of champagne in his hand and overheard Mrs. Ferrers' question and Sophy's hesitating reply.

"Secret!—what should there be secret about it? We are not ashamed of having gone and got engaged to each other—at least, *I* am not. I never felt so proud in my life as I do at this moment."

As quick as thought when he had put down the glass of champagne beside Sophy. Mrs. Ferrers took his hand in hers and shook it, looking at him with all her soul in her tender eyes.

"I am so glad about it," she said, and her voice sounded glad too. "*So* glad, for Sophy has been very lonely since Jane married Mr. Landover—and it is dreadful for a woman to be lonely. You can't know how dreadful it is; but I do."

"She shall never feel lonely again, Mrs. Ferrers," said the General heartily, "not as long as I live, that is."

"No, I am sure of that. And I know you will be everything that is good, and kind, and

charming. Sophy will have a delightful husband," Mrs. Ferrers wound up breathlessly.

"And I a delightful wife," said the General, gallantly.

"Nobody knows it better than I," rejoined the mistress of the Court, who was dying to get away and tell the news to Bootles. "And I may tell Algy? Oh! he will be so pleased."

She got away from them then, and went hastily in search of her husband, whom she found taking care of a stout old lady of title, who was the most important guest of the evening.

"Algy, I do want to speak to you, it's most important," she whispered, then turned to the stout old lady and said a few words in the winning way which had helped to make her one of the most favorite hostesses in the county.

Captain Ferrers nodded to his wife, and a few minutes afterwards left the stout old lady under the care of Tommy Alleyne, who was an immense favorite with all important old ladies, and went to look for his wife.

"What is it, darling?" he asked. "I hope nothing wrong."

"Algy," exclaimed Mrs. Ferrers eagerly, "what do you think? You will never guess. Sophy Carmine and General Coles have come to an understanding."

"*What?*" cried Bootles, incredulously.

"They're engaged," asserted Mrs. Bootles

triumphantly. "Yes, it's true and it's no secret. And, oh! Algy, I'm so glad."

"By Jove!" was all that Bootles found breath to say.

"Mignon found it out first, and I went at once and asked Sophy," Mrs. Ferrers went on; "and she looked so nice, and he spoke up so nicely and bravely about her never knowing what it was to feel lonely any more, really I was quite inclined to cry. I was, indeed."

"You dear little tender-hearted woman, I can quite believe it," Bootles said, smiling down upon her. "Well, I must go back. I'll just speak to them on my way, and when all these people are gone, we'll drink their health and be ever so jolly over it."

However, long before that, an inkling of what had happened had crept out among the people staying in the house, and although no body liked to plainly ask the suspected lovers about the rumor, everybody was eager for information.

Well, it happened that Miss Maitland, on leaving the little stage, found herself quite alone with apparently nobody at hand to take her in to supper or see that she was looked after in any way, and while she was hesitating whether to go on to the dining-room by herself or not, Colonel Kerr came down the wide old stairs and seeing that she was alone, stopped to speak to her.

"Why, Miss Maitland, you all alone?" he said, in surprise.

"Yes. I was rather long in changing my gown," she answered, "and they all seem to have gone. I was just wondering whether to go in alone or not."

"Alone? I should hope not," said he quickly. "Do give me the pleasure of taking you in to supper."

"Oh, I will, with pleasure," said she, willingly.

Ever since he had been in the house, this man had interested her and fascinated her more than any other man she had ever met in her life. He was so big and so manly, his legs were long and his shoulders were broad, and he had a haughty way of throwing back his head, a mere trick of manner, which to Dorothy Maitland was simply irresistible. Then he was an unusually handsome man, fair-haired, and with a skin that would have been fair, also, if the suns of twenty years spent in India had not bronzed it so darkly. And he had gray, gray eyes, real killing Irish eyes, and the pleasantest smile, when he did smile, which was but rarely,—'about once a day,' Dorothy Maitland thoughts ran,—that the girl thought she had ever seen.

And yet both before and since he had come, she had heard Captain Ferrers speak of him as 'poor old Charlie," in tones so full of pity that

she felt sure there was some unhappy story in his life. Yet, what could it be? It was not money, no, he had evidently always had plenty of money—he had always been keen at soldiering, and yet there was that something in the back-ground to which Captain Ferrers' 'poor old Charlie' referred! She wondered what it was, as she had wondered many and many a time during the past few days.

However, to-night, she thought he looked brisker and brighter than she had seen him look yet, and he found her a seat and hustled about to provide for her, which he did most comfortably and lavishly, and then he fetched himself some supper too, and a bottle of champagne for them both, which he tucked out of sight on the floor, lest some unscrupulous prowler, after supper, should snatch a chance of seizing it and carrying it off.

Twice he went off on the prowl himself, and during one of these absences, Mignon going gayly by with Tommy Alleyne, stopped and whispered the last bit of local news into Miss Maitland's ear.

"What is it?" asked Colonel Kerr, who came back just in time to see Miss Maitland's stare of surprise and hear her incredulous ejaculation—"*No*, you *don't* say so!"

"Well, Mrs. Lucy *says* that General Coles and Miss Carmine are engaged," replied Dorothy.

"Engaged—old Coles! oh!" and then somehow, Kerr went off into what was, perhaps, the gayest fit of laughter that he had indulged in for many and many a year.

"Well, it is funny, of course," said Dorothy, who was showing all her pretty white teeth in a smile, "but all the same, I can quite understand her. She is quite alone in the world, you know, except for that Mrs. Landover, who does not do much to make her life, or any one else's life for that matter, the brighter. Well, I believe there is a brother, but she told me one day that he is married and his wife is a cold sort of woman. I don't know that a brother or a brother's wife would be much advantage to any one, or do much toward making one feel less alone in the world."

"Have you no brother?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No. Nor father, nor mother, nor sister, not even a cousin. I haven't a single relation that I know of in all the world."

"And no home?"

"And no home—except this," she answered, "But they are very good to me here."

"Yes, I am sure they are. Old Bootles is the best hearted fellow in the world, and Mrs. Ferrers seems to me to be just like him."

"Yes, they are both good. They never snub you or make you feel uncomfortable, because you

haven't got a big house of your own, like a great many other people do. Now, Mrs. Landover," Dorothy went on composedly eating a merangue, "thinks it such a mistake of Mr. Ferrers to have that sort of person about, and those dreadful children always to the front--most injudicious, really—"

"What sort of person?" asked Kerr, not understanding.

"Me," laughed Dorothy, patting herself gayly.

"*You*, oh! she couldn't have said that about you," he broke out, indignantly.

"But she did. I heard it myself with my own ears. So, don't you see, Colonel Kerr, with only a sister like that to stand between her and the world, it is no wonder that Miss Carmine has accepted General Coles. For my part, I hope she will always be very, very happy."

"And so do I," said he heartily, and then he sighed, and Dorothy Maitland saw that the shadow had come back into his eyes again, and she was more touched by it and more wishful to know the cause of it than ever.

"Why need you sigh like that?" she asked.

He looked at her with his handsome gray eyes that seemed to go through and through her. "Why?" he repeated. "Oh! I think I was envying the old General his luck, and wishing that—that I could go and get married and be

happy ever after. I think I was wishing that, Miss Maitland."

"Then, you are married?" she asked.

"I? oh! no. I have never been married," he said, quickly. "What made you think so?"

"Because you spoke as if it was impossible for you ever to marry," she said wonderingly.

The shadow fell over his eyes again. "So it is," he said, shortly; "utterly impossible."

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## CHAPTER II.

### A HEALTH TO THE BRIDE.

WHEN the last carriage had rolled away from the door, Captain Ferrers went back into the dining-room door and held a hurried consultation with the butler.

"Here, Brown. I want you," he said. "Get us some more champagne up at once—the best in the cellar. We've got to drink a health before we go to bed."

Now, Brown had been Bootles' body servant for many a year in the old Scarlet Lancer days and held a very confidential position indeed at Ferrers Court.

"Yes, sir. We had better clear away, hadn't

we, sir? Long?—oh, dear, no, sir—ten minutes at the outside."

"Yes, but be as quick as you can or the ladies will be running off to bed."

Brown made a sign to his subordinates, who redoubled their exertions to get the tables cleared, and himself disappeared in quest of the champagne necessary for the coming ceremony.

"Mignon," said Bootles, catching sight of Mrs. Lucy at the door, "don't let any of them go to bed just yet."

"Very well," said Mignon, and straightway went out into the hall where the various members of the household were gathered together preparatory to slipping away toward their beds or the smoking-room as their tastes or inclinations happened to run, and said, "Will none of you go to bed, please, Bootles has something or other on."

"That is dreadful slang, Mignon," remarked Pearl, who, with Maud, was but too delighted at the chance of sitting up half an hour later and thus beating any previous record in that line.

"Slang, what was that?" asked Mignon, in genuine surprise.

"Well, to say father has got something 'on,'" Pearl answered; "at least, if *we* say so, we always get sat upon horribly for it."

"I think," murmured Mrs. Landover, to Mignon, "that slang is such a mistake for women,

for anybody, in fact. Why, those delightfully quaint children will be quite spoilt if they are allowed to become slangy."

For a moment Mignon felt as if her indignation must boil over. The next moment the angry feeling, however, gave place to the most intense amusement, for Pearl had turned quickly round to the mistress of Landover Castle:

"It was only yesterday, Jane," she said, with a severe emphasis on Mrs. Landover's Christian name, "that I heard you say to the Squire, 'Oh, what a lark!' Was that a mistake, too?"

"I think it was you who was mistaken, darling," answered Mrs. Landover with her sweetest smile.

"Oh, no, for I heard you, too, Jane," chimed in Maud, eagerly. "We were in the hall here, looking at the papers, and the Squire came in and told you something in a whisper, we didn't hear what, and you said right out loud, 'Oh what a lark!' and then the Squire laughed, and Pearl and I *looked* at one another. We really were surprised," Maud wound up.

"We couldn't believe our ears," added Pearl, "because you always seem so shocked at anybody else's slang."

At this point Squire Landover, who remembered the incident perfectly, burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, and in the face of this, Mrs. Landover was unable to continue her

sweet protests about the children being mistaken. And moreover, Maud, in her anxiety to tell the exact truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, did not give her the chance of saying more than an imploring "Geoff!" to her spouse, accompanied by a piteous look implying "for mercy's sake, help me out with these dreadful children."

"We shouldn't have told anybody about it, Jane," Maud said, with dignity, "because whatever we are, we are not tell-tales, and we never meant to tell, only you reflected on Mignon's character and so, of course, we had to," and I am bound to say at this point the entire company, who had been listening in intense amusement to the small battle between Jane and the children, put a stop to further discussion by going off into shrieks of laughter, in which nobody joined with more apparent heartiness and enjoyment than Mrs. Landover herself.

"Oh, my dear Mignon," she exclaimed, putting a scrap of filmy lace to her eyes, "what a pair of little champions you have in these two delicious little mortals."

"Little pitchers, you mean," said Mignon, smiling at the two children.

Then Captain Ferrers appeared under the curtained archway which led to the inner hall and towards the dining-room. He went straight up to Sophy Carmine and offered her his arm

saying, "Miss Sophy, will you come into the dining-room?"

Sophy rose at once. The other guests looked at one another, for they realized that the moment of satisfied curiosity was at hand.

Well, they all trooped into the dining-room, where they saw Captain Ferrers put Sophy Carmine into a seat near the head of the table, and then Brown solemnly began to fill up the glasses and the others to hand them round.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Bootles, holding up the glass which Brown handed to him last of anyone, "I have the pleasure and honor to announce to you the engagement of Miss Carmine to my friend General Coles, and of asking you to drink a health to the bride-to-be."

To this, of course, everybody drank a bumper, and then somebody suggested the health of the bridegroom, and after that there was a general hum and buzz of chat and congratulation.

Mrs. Landover's congratulations were distinctly characteristic. "I am quite charmed, Sophy," she said, giving the edge of her cheek for her sister to kiss, "it will be so much more agreeable in every way to have a married sister rather than an unmarried one. Of course you will be married from Jack's place?"

Bootles, overhearing this, turned sharply round. "Miss Sophy," he said, quickly, "you

will give us the pleasure of the wedding, of course?"

"Oh! Captain Ferrers," Sophy said, "you are good; but as yet I haven't thought about it or anything."

"Of course you haven't; but there are questions that cannot be settled too soon, eh, General?" slipping his hand under the old soldier's arm.

"Wherever Sophy wishes," returned the General heartily.

"Then it shall be here, eh, Miss Sophy?" said Bootles. "Now come, say that you will."

"But it seems such a trouble to you," said Sophy reluctantly, looking at her sister.

"Of course, Geoff and I will be delighted to have the wedding at Landover," said Mrs. Landover, with elaborate politeness.

"Of course we shall," chimed in Squire Landover, heartily, "and though it's awfully good of you, Ferrers, and all that, it seems more natural for the event to come off at our house."

"Not a bit of it. We have known Miss Sophy ages longer than you have," laughed Bootles, "and it's a bad time of year, and you've a tremendous walk up to Landover Church from the Lych Gate, and no possibility of getting a carriage anywhere near the church door, and Coles here is an old friend of mine, and—I—we all love a wedding. You can't give any of us a

greater treat than to give us a wedding to manage. Can they, Nell?" appealing to his wife.

"Say yes, Sophy dear," said Mrs. Ferrers, in her most persuasive accents. "I think I deserve it."

"Of course if you put it like that," murmured Sophy, who was dying to be married from Ferrers Court, only she did not quite like to say so.

"That's right," cried Bootles, "'pon my word I think we ought to have another bumper on the strength of it."

Nobody, however, at that late hour felt inclined to venture on that course, and the whole party gradually cleared out into the hall, where they lingered about in little groups, most of them discussing the great event.

Mrs. Ferrers sent Pearl and Maud off to bed. "Good-night, my darlings," she said, kissing them. "It is dreadfully late, and you both look all eyes. Don't hurry up in the morning."

"Good-night, mother dear," they said, and went off without another word, only stopping to hug Sophy Carmine and tell her they loved her, and hoped she would be awfully happy when she was married, as happy as Mignon and Major Lucy. "And you'll ask us to be your bridesmaids, Sophy, won't you?" ended Pearl.

"Of course I shall," answered Sophy, to whom such an arrangement seemed an admirable one.

"That will be lovely. And, Sophy dear, you won't expect us to call you 'Mrs. Coles,' will you?" Pearl asked, as a special concession to Sophy, on account of their liking for her.

"Because we never shall," cried Maud resolutely.

"No, darlings, you never shall," Sophy answered gayly; and then the two slim little figures in their pretty white frocks went hand in hand up the wide stairs and disappeared in the direction of their own room.

"Seems to me," said Lester Brookes, sitting down on a couch beside Dorothy Maitland, "that the very mention of a wedding is enough to set this house in a blaze of excitement. Really I don't know whether Mrs. Bootles or old Bootles himself is the most inveterate match-maker of the two."

"Oh! Mrs. Ferrers decidedly," Dorothy answered at once. "Captain Ferrers thoroughly enjoys the fun when somebody else has made the match. Mrs. Ferrers leaves no stone unturned to bring the match about."

"Oh! that is it! I wonder now if Mrs. Ferrers could manage a match for me, if I asked her about it?"

Miss Maitland laughed in a very whole-hearted and unembarrassed way. "I will ask her; and if you really want to give her an unqualified pleasure, put yourself in her hands and let her

marry you to somebody right off. But I shouldn't tell her to-night if I were you, for I am sure with the excitement of this engagement fresh in her mind she will never sleep a wink. Wait till the morning and then state your case, and ask her advice."

He looked at her keenly. "You think that would be the best thing for me to do, Miss Maitland?"

"Yes, if you can't make up your mind for yourself," she returned.

"But supposing that I could make up my mind—that I have already made up my mind," he said, significantly.

"Ah! well, of course, you know the best about that," she said, simply.

He watched her for a minute or so as she toyed with the fan of feathers which she had carried that evening, and saw all too plainly for his liking, that she was not in the least touched by the sentimentality of his tone. In fact, Dorothy Maitland was not one of those young women who sees a probable husband in every unmarried man who spoke to her or who paid her a few passing compliments. At that moment she was looking bright and piquant, but so utterly unconscious as to any intentions he might have towards her, that Lester Brookes, rich, gay, handsome dragoon that he was, felt as if he had run his head against a blank wall.

It is not altogether a pleasant feeling, though sometimes it is a useful one, even when one hardly recognizes its usefulness at the time; and when Lester Brookes discovered that he was feeling just that, he heaved a great sigh by way of attracting her attention.

"I never thought I should know what it was to envy old Coles," he said, ironically.

Dorothy looked round at him with scared eyes—"What! Then you have made up your mind all the time?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," he admitted.

"And he has stepped in before you? Oh! poor thing. I am sorry for you," she cried. "Why ever didn't you ask her before it was too late?"

For a minute he stared at her incredulously, and then the full beauty of the situation presented itself to his mind. "Miss Maitland," he said, "you don't understand. I am not envying the General his bride—only his luck in being about to be married."

"How very odd," said she absently, "You are the second man who has made the same remark to me to-night."

"And the other one was?"

"Oh! I cannot tell you that," she said quickly.

"No, of course not," he answered; and then he looked up moved by some undefinable motive, and saw Colonel Kerr standing at a little dis-

tance, his eyes fixed upon them, and he knew as if by magic that he was "the other one."

By an uncontrollable impulse he got up, with some idle excuse, and moved away. "Hang the fellow, how handsome he is," he said to himself. "I suppose I—" and there his thoughts were interrupted by seeing Colonel Kerr going across the hall and seat himself just where he had been sitting beside Dorothy Maitland.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT.

A FEW days had gone by and the excitement of the love affair had somewhat passed off. The General had made a mysterious expedition into Farlington, where he paid a visit to one Mr. Bond, the principal jeweller of that town, and a few hours later Sophy Carmine became the owner of a resplendent ring of sapphires and diamonds, and also of a beautiful brooch in the form of a crescent to match it. The children were greatly excited about them.

"Sophy," said Pearl eagerly, when the stanhope containing the bridegroom elect had driven away from the courtyard—"Sophy, the General has gone into Farlington and I heard him ask father just now, which was the best jeweller's?

Father said of course, that Mr. Bond's was the best—"

"Well, father didn't *exactly* say that, Pearl," broke in Maud; "what he said exactly was —'Ah! that's it, old chap, eh? Well you go and talk to old Bond—one of the best fellows in the world, does all that kind of business for me—just as honest as daylight. Tell him you are staying here and he won't treat you any the worse for it, I'll promise you.' Now *that* was what father said exactly, Pearl."

"Well, so it was," Pearl admitted, "but I gave Sophy the gist of it, you know."

Sophy Carmine burst out laughing. To tell the truth, ever since she had been in the house, she had been puzzled by the wonderful command of language possessed and displayed by these two young damsels. For instance, when she had heard one of them tell Mrs. Landover that they would not have said a word if she had not cast reflections upon Mignon's character, and now to be talking quite in a grown-up manner about giving her the gist of her father's remarks. "Now, how in the world," she asked, "did you get hold of such a word as gist?"

Pearl edged a little nearer to her and rested her head upon her shoulder. "Well, Sophy, I don't think either Maud or me knows just altogether what gist means, but you know mother can't bear us to be slangy; and, though father *is*

rather slangy and *stablish* at times, he doesn't like us to be slangy either, because he wants us to be just like mother, and mother *isn't* slangy, you know. So Maud and I agreed that we would never be the least little slangy, if we could help it. But sometimes we hear father say things, and then we say them because we think they're all right, and sometimes, you know, they turn out to be slangy and then we have to get off them. It's rather a bore, sometimes, when the slang just says what you want to say, and try as you will, you can't find out exactly the proper words to put your thoughts into."

"Well, that is rather a nuisance," Sophy answered, with a laugh. "And about 'gist'?"

"Well, you see poor Fraulëin, our German governess, has been really ill ever since the day you came here—in fact, she has had to be in bed most of the time, and I believe she cries to go home, and is altogether very miserable and dull. Mother goes several times a day to sit with her, and she gave her the prettiest Christmas present of anybody, because she was ill. Mother always does those things, Sophy, because once—a long time ago—before she had ever seen father at all—when, in fact, she had another husband, who was Mignon's father, you know—mother was very dull and miserable herself, and so she is always awfully sorry for people who are not so happy as she is now. And Miss Maitland,

she goes and sits with Fraulëin, too, pretty often —and I don't know how it is, but Fraulëin used to think Miss Maitland was frivolous, but she never says she is frivolous now. And then we go to sit with her, too—Maud and I, that is. Bertie and Cecil never would because Bertie always has an uneasy conscience and Cecil always does as Bertie does. So now, of course, they are at the Rectory, and out of the way. But Maud and I go twice every day and sit with Fraulëin; we don't very much like her, you know."

"We don't like her at all," put in Maud, honestly.

"Well, that's true, we don't; but, anyway, we do go, and the other day I was telling her about the theatricals and I happened to say, 'There, Fraulëin, I think I've given you the cream of it,' and really, Sophy, it is what you may hear father say almost any day; but poor Fraulëin, she nearly had a fit—she nearly choked, and she said it was dreadful—dreadful! Then we asked her, of course, what we ought to say, and she told us to say 'the gist of it.' We thought it very funny," Pearl ended, with a puzzled sigh; "and we even looked it out in the dictionary, but *that* didn't help us to understand it any better; so we just thought we would use it and find out what it meant afterward."

"But didn't the dictionary tell you?" asked Sophy, greatly amused.

"No, it didn't, exactly. It said something about lodgings and something about pith, and then we looked at pith, and we found it is the inside of trees or the marrow of bones, and as that *couldn't* have anything to do with lodgings, we didn't see how it could have anything to do with our theatricals. So we gave up trying to find out about it any more."

"But the funniest thing was," cried Maud, "that yesterday Pearl asked father if he knew what the gist of a thing was of telling a story or giving an account of anything? Father looked ever so puzzled for a minute, and then he said: 'Oh, well, if you don't want to tell exactly a whole story, you just give the gist of it.'

"'Well, but what does *gist* mean?' we asked.

"'Oh!" said father, "'the cream of it, to be sure.' So Pearl and I gave it up after that," Maud ended philosophically.

Sophy Carmine laughed—"I should think so, you poor puzzled little souls."

"But, Sophy," asked Pearl, "what has the General gone to Mr. Bond's to buy?"

Some ladies in Sophy's position might have avoided such a question, but Sophy's hold over these children consisted in the fact that she never prevaricated. She always answered them as if they were her equals in age.

"Well, you need not tell everybody about it, dears," she said, simply, "but I think the

General has gone to Farlington to buy me something."

"Of course he has—but *what?*" they demanded.

"I think it will be a ring," said Sophy, flushing a little.

"Of course," said Pearl, "people always have engagement rings when they're going to be married. Father gave mother a diamond one. She always wears it. First she wears her wedding-ring—then the turquoise one that father gave her the day they were married, and then her engagement ring."

Well, in due course, the General came back almost frozen to death by the drive in the stanhope, but nevertheless beaming and more charmed by the delights of the cosy corner by the hall-fire, and the sympathetic murmured talk of his fair intended, than ever. And then everybody wanted to see Sophy's ring and expressed themselves delighted with the beautiful crescent, and for Sophy it was quite a gala-time, a time indeed with only one discordant note to mar its melody and harmony.

"Really, Sophy," said Mrs. Landover, after closely examining the crescent, "you *are* lucky. Why, I haven't got a finer brooch than this one. You wont know us after a time, if you go on having such lovely presents as these."

For a moment there was a dead silence, Sophy

looked up with eyes that were filled with pain, and the consternation on the old General's face was almost ludicrous; Dorothy Maitland, who had felt the sting of Mrs. Landover's sharp tongue and had a fellow-feeling of the most tender kind for Sophy Carmine, fairly caught her breath in a gasp, while Mignon drew up her proud young head higher than ever any of those present had ever seen her hold it, excepting on one memorable occasion when something—Jane Carmine, to be explicit—had come between her and Major Lucy for the first and only time in all their lives.

Mrs. Ferrers came quickly to the rescue. "It is a beautiful ring, dear Sophy," she said, "and a more beautiful brooch, and I hope you will wear them for many and many a happy year. I am so fond of sapphires—and blue is your favorite color, too, isn't it? Ah! here is Brown with the tea. Do you know I feel quite sad to think that by to-morrow at this time our pleasant party will be broken up, and only some of us will be left. I suppose you are *obliged* to go," turning to Tommy Alleyne.

"My dear Mrs. Ferrers, I have been here an unconscionable time already," he answered.

Mrs. Ferrers smiled. "Yes, I know that a few days in the country is like a season in town. Miss Maitland, will you help me with the tea, dear?"—then as Dorothy turned quickly toward

her, whispered: "Talk—flirt—do anything to take off the awkwardness, my dear. Really, Mrs. Landover is"—and then she broke off short as Pearl approached the table.

The injunction was, however, unnecessary, for Mignon in her disgust and anger was doing precisely what her mother had asked Dorothy Maitland to do, for she had knelt down beside Sophy and was, with much joking, pinning the beautiful crescent in her gown.

"If I put it just there where the bodice fastens," she cried, gaily holding the brooch up against that part of Sophy's gown where the buttons began, that is, just below the left shoulder. "And do you know it just matches the color of the velvet? Is this a Redfern gown? Why don't you have one like it, Jane? It would suit you ever so much better than those be-frilled affairs you always wear."

Mrs. Landover, quite unconscious of the little stir that she had made, glanced with a simper down her elaborate tea-gown of heliotrope brocade and old Oriental embroidery. "Oh! I simply *live* in my tea-gown," she said. "I should die if I sat indoors in a tight gown like Sophy's."

"Well, that might be so," returned Mignon, dryly; "but all the same you would look a great deal better in it and a good ten years younger."

"Oh, no. My woman tells me this suits me

exactly," smoothing out the rich folds complacently.

"A cup of tea, Mrs. Landover?" said Mr. Alleyne at that moment.

"Oh! thanks so much. Ah, here are the gentlemen. Well, Major Lucy, have you had a good run? Sit down here and tell me about it. I am so interested in all that sort of thing, you know."

Lucy sat down beside her with a tired sigh. "We've had a vewry stiff day, Mrs. Landovah," he answered deliberately. "Tommy, my dear fellow, since you'wre so pwressing, I will have a cup of tea. Well, my dearest," to Mignon, as she drew near them, "what have you been doing with yourself all day?"

"Oh! amusing myself," Mignon answered.

"And amusing Colonel Kerr, too," put in Mrs. Landover, with apparent innocence. "I am getting quite jealous of Mignon," Major Lucy laughed serenely as he stirred his tea, but Mignon turned her head and looked straight into her pale eyes. "I do not think that you will ever *get* jealous of me, my dear Jane," she said quietly, yet with meaning.

"Of course, I was only joking," said Mrs. Landover, uneasily.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### "NO."

BY eleven o'clock the next morning Mr. and Mrs. Landover betook themselves away from Ferrers Court, going thence to London for a few days —as Mrs. Landover elaborately explained, because she wanted to see "my woman" about some gowns.

"One can't go about without things," she said lackadaisically to Major Lucy, and to whom she had, in a sort of come-by-chance way, placed herself at breakfast.

"No, I suppose not," said Lucy, politely.

"Of course, my woman is very good, and gives me very little trouble over my things," she went on. "When she has something quite in my own style she lets me know, which is such a convenience. It's such a bore thinking out one's clothes into proper combinations."

Now Mignon, sitting on the opposite side of the table, happened to hear these remarks, and might have been annoyed if she had not seen the gleam of amusement in her husband's face, and known by the way in which he smoothed his fair

moustache that a spirit of mischief had entered into him.

"Yes, he said, sweetly, "you'wre quite wright, Mrs. Landovah; it must be a bore unquestionably. It would never have suited you to have marwried anybody less wrich than Landovah. If you wremember, I always wrecommended the palatial style of life to you."

Mrs. Landover began to look sentimental at once. "Oh, I don't think I care anything about money, Major Lucy. I never give it a thought —I don't really."

"Possibly not — vewry possibly not," said Lucy, serenely. "But if you, for instance, had marwried some poor beggar in a marching wregiment instead of Landovah, you would have had to think about money, and to think a good deal about it, too."

"Oh, yes, in that way; but I should never have money weigh in the balance against my affection," she asserted.

"Ah! but take my word for it, my deah Mrs. Landovah," said Lucy, "that you would never, under any circumstances, have found the marching wregiment so thoroughly to your taste as the palatial mansion."

"Perhaps," in a very doubtful tone.

"Now, to some women, the details of their lives makes but little diffewrence to their happiness. Take my wife, for instance: it's all one

to her whether she lives in two rooms or a mansion."

"Oh! but Mignon was brought up in a barrack," said Mrs. Landover, tartly.

"The best bwringing up, too, that a soldier's wife can have," said Lucy, quickly. "But put her in a castle, with the wrong people, and——"

Mrs. Landover rose from the table with a sigh. "And she would be like many another woman who lives in a castle, Major Lucy," she said, significantly — "she would be miserable." And then she went away, leaving Lucy stroking his moustache thoughtfully, and wondering if circumstances had not been rather hard on the little woman, after all.

Mignon was eloquent about the matter. "A woman with a respect for herself or for her husband wouldn't let herself whine about being miserable because she had had a fancy to marry a man who did not want to marry her; and you never did want to marry her, did you, Lal?"

"Never!" said he, with emphasis.

Well, an hour later saw the Landovers driving out of the great court-yard, with Mrs. Ferrers in the open carriage; and I must confess that Mrs. Lucy and Sophy Carmine, who were standing together on the steps of the principal entrance of the Court, gave a great sigh of relief as the carriage disappeared under the archway which led to the avenue.

"Are you *very* sorry she has gone, Sophy?" Mignon asked, slipping her hand into Miss Carmine's, and feeling a thrill of compunction that she should feel so glad at their departure.

Sophy Carmine turned and looked at her. As I have said, she never prevaricated, and she did not prevaricate then. "Sorry, my dear Mignon?" she said, frankly—"Jane is always a little trying to live with, but I have never known her so utterly unbearable as she has been the last few days. I begin to breathe."

"What is it?" asked Mignon. "Isn't she happy?"

"Oh, as happy as she will ever be," Sophy answered, carelessly.

A few hours later Mr. Alleyne also departed, and Colonel Kerr also made a feeble effort to get away.

"My dear Bootles," he urged, "I have been here a fortnight already."

"And, my dear old chap, you are going to stay another fortnight," Bootles answered, "and another after that—No, it's not the least use, your pretending you've got business in town; you've got no business you can't transact just as well, if not rather better, by means of the post. You may just as well make up your mind to what is a fact—that you are *not* going."

"But, Bootles——" he began.

"My dear Charlie," broke in Bootles, "was

there ever a time, in the old days, when you didn't have to give in to me and do what I told you? It's no use saying anything more about it, because I have made up my mind that you are going to stay where you are."

So at Ferrers Court Kerr had to remain; and as the general atmosphere became very much more lively, chiefly because Mrs. Landover had departed, he settled himself quietly down and set himself to bear what he fain would have avoided —the task of watching Lester Brookes try to win the love of the dark-eyed, soft-voiced little girl, Dorothy Maitland.

Probably never had the life of a man changed more utterly in the course of a few months than had that of Colonel Kerr. He had been in India for twenty years, and during that time he had lived the life of a hermit. He had lived with no intention whatever of coming home again; he had *meant* to die in the East. Then he had had one or two sharp attacks of fever, which had told upon him terribly—he who had never been ill in all his life before — and he had been ordered home; and, in spite of himself and his resolutions, he had practically been forced to obey.

And here he was at Ferrers Court again, he who had been Captain Ferrers' greatest friend in days gone by, and here he was with the old familiar "Charlie" in his ears, with the old familiar feeling of Bootles' arm thrust through his, as if

there had never been those months of estrangement and twenty years of separation between them.

It was all very, very delightful to him, to see his old friend in his own home where he had stayed many and many a time when everything was different, when there was no beautiful wife whose presence pervaded the place, no happy, blooming, golden-haired, outspoken children; when there had only been a party of more or less noisy soldiers and there had been no Dorothy Maitland.

"I say, dearest," said Captain Ferrers to his wife one day, two or three days in fact after Mrs. Landover had gone, "have you got anything on your mind?"

Mrs. Ferrers looked distinctly startled. "On my mind, Algy? No, dear. What do you mean?" she said.

Captain Ferrers laughed. "I didn't certainly mean in that way," he answered, "but—but have you noticed anything fresh, lately?"

"Fresh, Algy? do explain," she said.

"Well, with Miss Maitland!" he explained. "It seems to me that Lester Brookes is getting—"

Mrs. Ferrers burst out laughing. "Oh! my dear blind old cat, have you only just found *that* out?" she exclaimed. "Why, my dearest boy, Captain Brookes has been *desperate, desperate!* ever since he first set eyes on her."

Bootles looked thoroughly astounded. "You don't say so?" he cried. "You surprise me. Well, it couldn't be better, I suppose, even to please you. She is pretty and good and charming, and Brookes has heaps of money, and is one of the best fellows I ever knew in my life. Then I suppose we shall be having another wedding here? Isn't it wonderful how things come about?"

"Well, it hasn't come about yet, dear," returned Mrs. Ferrers; "and, until it does, pray be careful not to say a word, not even to *look* as if you noticed anything."

"Oh! I'll shirk scrupulously," said Bootles, with a laugh.

Now, oddly enough, at that very moment, Lester Brookes was sitting in the large conservatory with Miss Maitland and engaged in urging his suit upon her with all the fervor and energy of which he was possessed. For days past he had been quite easy in his mind on the score of Colonel Kerr as a possible rival; for although he knew that a more dangerous one could scarcely be found, should the Colonel wish to make himself dangerous, it did not seem to him that he had the least desire to enter the lists against him, or that he even took any special pleasure in Miss Maitland's society.

"I'm pretty well off," he was saying at the very moment that Mrs. Ferrers was adjuring her

husband to be discreet in taking notes of what was going on around him. "In fact, Miss Maitland, I'm rather more than well off. I'm what you might almost call rich. I've got a pretty place up in Caithness and a house in town, only that's let for six years yet, it's true. I'm five and thirty, and—and I believe, I'm the best-tempered fellow in the service—yes, I do indeed.

"I should think you were good-tempered," said Dorothy, looking at him kindly. "And what a prize you'll be for somebody, some day or other, and how glad you will be then that I said no instead of yes."

She was quite friendly and collected, not upset or overcome in the very least by the exceedingly advantageous offer which had just been laid at her feet, and she put out a calm and friendly hand and laid it in his outstretched supplicating one and let it lie there, just as she might have done in Mignon's or Mrs. Ferrers'.

"But, Miss Maitland!" he cried. "Dorothy, why should you say no, why shouldn't you say yes? Are my feelings to go for nothing? Is my love to count for nothing?"

Dorothy Maitland shook her head. "Captain Brookes," she said, gently, "I know it is very, very kind of you to wish to make me happy, but I am quite sure that you do not really love me. I don't know why. I only feel that you

have no real love for me. I can quite understand it. You came here and you saw me in a position of what the world calls dependence. Mrs. Landover snubbed me and called me 'that sort of person' almost to my face, and you resented it for me. You see me poor and not as well dressed as some of the others; and you, who are rich, think it is a shame that a pretty girl—oh! yes, yes, I know that I am pretty in a fashion—should not have as many frocks and as many pairs of gloves as she would like to have, and you would like to give me everything that money could give me. But something, I don't know what, tells me that it isn't the real downright love that would risk everything and dare all for my sake. There is a great deal of pity in your feeling for me, and—and I don't want to be married for pity."

"Dorothy, I swear to you—" he began eagerly.

Dorothy shook her head. "No, don't," she said. "We will leave all this for a little while, as if it had never been said, and next year you will perhaps come and spend part of your long leave at Ferrers' Court, and then you will say that I was right."

"And—but oh! Dorothy, think—do think for a moment," he urged, "I assure you I shall be just the same to-morrow as to-day. Next year as this! Believe me, pity has nothing to do with my wish to have you for my wife. It is

only because I love—I love you with all my heart, indeed I do."

But Dorothy still shook her head. "Oh! Captain Brookes," she answered, "please don't say any more about it. I cannot give you any different reply, I like you very much, very, very much, but I don't love you—and—

"And you do love somebody else?" he asked in a pained voice.

"I did not say so," she faltered.

"Not in words," Lester Brookes said, bitterly.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### DISAPPOINTMENT.

FOR a long time Dorothy Maitland sat in the conservatory after Lester Brookes had left her, thinking and thinking of what had just happened. He had been hurt, that she could not help seeing, and, of course, it was natural enough that it should be so. But he had been perfectly friendly and manly over his disappointment, and as she watched him go through the glass door which led by a little passage into the hall. Dorothy felt that she liked him better at that moment than she had ever liked any man in all her life, and a great pang of regret shot through her heart that she had sent him away.

And yet—she did not rise up from her seat (as she would have done if the wish had been a very real one) and go after him to tell him frankly and truly that she had not given him a fair answer. No, she sat still and did nothing more than think, and, unfortunately for poor Lester Brookes, thinking did not do much to prosper his suit, for, somehow or other—how do these things ever come about?—in pondering over Lester Brookes, there rose up in her mind's eye a pair of gray, gray Irish eyes and a face bronzed with the suns of twenty Indian summers, and in that dream she, for the time, forgot Lester Brookes as if he had never been.

As for Brookes himself, he went off at a swinging pace across the park and did not turn up until the dusk had fallen, and I am bound to say that when he found himself back at the Court again, he was more thoroughly and entirely in love with Dorothy Maitland than ever; indeed the very fact that she had refused to marry him only served to make her more desirable in his eyes. He had been a good deal sought after, in a matrimonial sense, and, of course, he could not help knowing that he was what is called a "good match," so that the mere fact that this girl had refused him because she did not really love, but made him the more anxious to win her.

But, although he did not mean to give up the idea of having her one day for his wife, he had no

idea either of boring her by persistent entreaties or of standing aloof from, as if he were dejectedly meditating what evil he could do her; so when he went into the hall, where he found them all making merry over tea, with the exception of his host and Major Lucy, who were hunting and had not yet come in, he sat down in an empty chair by Dorothy Maitland with precisely the same manner and remark that he would have done on the previous day when hope still had its abiding place within his bosom.

For twenty minutes or so not a soul saw that anything unusual was afloat, then Brookes himself seized the opportunity, when Dorothy went to the piano and began playing a dreamy gavotte, such as made Colonel Kerr feel as if he must go mad if he stopped any longer at the Court, of going over to Mrs. Ferrers and breaking to her the fact of his early departure.

"Mrs. Ferrers," he said, "I am afraid I shall have to leave you on the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow!" she echoed in dismay, "Oh! Captain Brookes, you really cannot, it is impossible! You have faithfully promised to go to Mrs. Bonner's dance at Farlington. She will be *so* disappointed if you don't go—and —and—so shall I."

"It's awfully good of you, Mrs. Ferrers," he said, "but indeed I cannot stop for it. I've inflicted myself on you for a cruelly long time al-

ready, and—and—I'm sure you must be tired of me. And, in fact, I must go on Saturday."

"I am not in the least tired of you, and if you go I shall be very angry with you," she exclaimed, when suddenly she stopped short, for Sophy Carmine, who happened to be sitting on the same settee, gave her gown an unmistakable tug which indicated clearly enough that she was wasting time, in trying to persuade him to prolong his visit. "But, of course, if you *must* go, Captain Brookes," she went on, when she had fully grasped the situation, "why, I can only say that we shall all—*all* of us—be very sorry to lose you."

"I am sure that some of you will, Mrs. Ferrers," Lester Brookes answered. "You have always been so kind and hospitable to me that I look forward to a visit here like a school-boy looks forward to going home for the holidays. But all holidays come to an end in time, you know—and—and perhaps you will let me come back again for a day or two before my leave is up."

"Oh! to be sure—we shall be delighted—any time that you like—you need only to let me have a telegram in the morning," she cried eagerly, and then, with renewed expressions of gratitude, Lester Brookes allowed himself to be carried off to the piano by the children, who demanded a certain comic song which he was occasionally persuaded to sing to them.

"Sophy, why did you pull my gown?" Mrs. Ferrers asked, as Captain Brookes went across the hall.

"Because it's no use your pressing him to stop," Sophy answered; "she refused him this afternoon."

"You don't mean it! When?"

"Oh, yes, I do. It was just after luncheon."

"But how do you know?" Mrs. Ferrers cried.

"Well because I—we—that is, Edward and I were going to the conservatory to look around a little, you know—we did not know they were there—and I opened the door from the garden just in time to hear her say, "Please don't say any more about it, I cannot give you any different reply," and then, of course, when I realized the situation, I pushed Edward back and shut the door very softly."

"So they never saw you?"

"No, nor I them. I only heard Miss Maitland say that," Sophy replied.

"Then you don't know that it was Captain Brookes at all! Perhaps—oh, perhaps it was Colonel Kerr. Don't you think it is very likely? He has not gone near her this afternoon. He has been talking to Mignon ever since he came in; in fact, I believe he has been for a walk with Mignon this afternoon. How long was it ago?"

"Just after luncheon."

"Ah! yes, you said so. Then I feel sure it was Colonel Kerr."

But as the evening went by and Lester Brookes still adhered to his first declaration that he must end his visit on the day after the morrow, while Colonel Kerr more than once spoke of "next week" and said he had no intention of leaving the Court at present, Mrs. Ferrers reluctantly came to the conclusion that Sophy Carmine had been right. Therefore, that evening when Dorothy Maitland went off to bed, Mrs. Ferrers quietly followed her into her bedroom and said—"I want to ask you something, my dear."

"Certainly," said Dorothy. "Is it something you want me to do to-morrow?"

"Not exactly. No, but I want to ask you a question."

"Yes?" said Dorothy, waiting to hear what it was.

"Do you know why Captain Brookes has ended his visit so suddenly, my dear?"

Dorothy's eyes fell and a vivid scarlet color flamed out on her cheeks instantly. Mrs. Ferrers went on speaking.

"I don't want to pry into your concerns, Dorothy," she said. "But I—I have a very warm feeling for you, and the circumstances of your life are in many respects so like the circumstances of what my life was the first time I

ever came to this house that I felt I must speak to you about it."

"My life like yours—oh! Mrs. Ferrers!" the girl cried.

"My dear, I came here and Captain Ferrers asked me to marry him and—and I had to say no. I could not help myself. And that night the lady who had brought me here came to my room—this very room—and asked me if it was true he had proposed to me and I had refused him. Well, it was true and there was nothing more to say. I would have given worlds to have said yes, but I had to say no. I could not help myself. My story came straight after all, and now I want you to confide in me and tell me if it is true that you said no to Captain Brookes, and if there is nothing I can do to help to make everything straight between you?"

"Dear Mrs. Ferrers," said Dorothy, sinking down upon her knees beside the mistress of the Court, "believe me, I have nothing to confide. You are always so kind to me, and ever since I have been here you have all been so kind to me that if I had a trouble or a difficulty, I should come to you at once and ask you to help me. But in this case, I meant to say nothing because there is nothing to be said—I have said everything there is to say."

"And you have refused him?"

"Well I—I am afraid I did," Dorothy admitted.

"But why—why? My dear, he is so handsome and such a good fellow in every way. Young, rich, popular—there is everything in his favor."

"Yes—but I don't want to marry him, Mrs. Ferrers."

"But why? You like him?"

"Oh! very much—but I don't love him. I don't, really."

"He is what any girl might be proud to love, Dorothy," Mrs. Ferrers cried.

"You have made me too happy here to make me eager to go away, Mrs. Ferrers," Dorothy declared.

"Yes, yes; but think, my dear, don't throw away such a brilliant chance of happiness as this without thinking it out carefully."

"I have thought it out. I have been thinking about him all day. I don't love him, Mrs. Ferrers, and I should never love him. You have urged that he is rich, and young, and handsome, and popular—well, they are all very good qualities, but if there is not love to put with them—"

"I can urge something better. He loves you," Mrs. Ferrers cried.

Dorothy shook her head. "I don't think so. Not as I think of love. By this time next year, he will have forgotten me, he will have forgotten

what color my eyes are and whether I was called Dorothy or Winifred."

Mrs. Ferrers got up with a sigh. "I am very much disappointed about it," she said, vexedly. "I had quite set my heart on the marriage, for, of course, I saw from the beginning what he felt about it, poor fellow."

Dorothy tried to edge a little closer. "Dear Mrs. Ferrers, I am so sorry to disappoint you, but if I went and married a man I knew I did not love, I should only be miserable and you would be miserable, too, to think that you had helped it on. I should be miserable—I should deserve nothing else. I should deserve to be unhappy," she ended with dignity.

Mrs. Ferrers bent and kissed her. "I dare say you are right, my dear," she said, resignedly; "so I won't say another word to you about it. I think I have a different sort of nature to yours, for I am quite sure if I were in your place, I should be only too delighted to marry such a charming fellow. However, I won't say any more about it."

And then she went off to her own room where she sent her maid away at once and sat down with tears in her eyes to tell Bootles all her troubles, and how actually a silly and perverse girl had ruined all her plans because of some high-faluting notion about love.

"No, don't say anything against love, my

dearest," laughed Bootles, who was dead beat after a hard day's run and wanted to go to bed. "You ought to praise the poor child for her frankness and her truth. It must have been a temptation to her not to refuse such a handsome chap as Brookes, with positively everything in the world to recommend him. I think she is to be honored for being so honest."

"But why I am so vexed is that she isn't in love with him, Algy. She *ought* to be in love with him. Now Sophy Carmine fell in love with the General at once, and then everything was quite smooth and pleasant for everybody. It isn't as if she was a rich society girl with everything happy and comfortable at home, and nothing to do but to pick and choose—it is quite different to that. Why, she might live with us for ten years and never get such a chance again. Algy, you're asleep," she ended reproachfully.

Bootles burst out laughing. "Well, my dearest, I believe I was—the fact is, I'm dead tired. Never mind the love affairs, darling; don't worry about it and it'll all come straight."

"That is what you always say, Algy," Mrs Ferrers exclaimed.

"Yes, and that is what things always do," he laughed.

## CHAPTER XV.

### PEACE!

WELL, on the day after the morrow Captain Brookes said good-bye to the people at Ferrers Court and took the afternoon train to London, quite convinced that nobody knew anything about his proposal to Dorothy Maitland and that he had behaved during those two trying days in such a manner as could arouse no suspicions. So he had, but of course, Sophy Carmine and Mrs. Ferrers had found it out at once; and with the best intentions in the whole world of being all that was kind and tender to the girl, Mrs. Ferrers continued to make Dorothy feel herself thoroughly in disgrace.

Twenty times a day did she bewail Lester Brookes's absence, and with each mention of his name Dorothy would cast such a look of supplication at her—of which Mrs. Ferrers was always supremely unconscious — and sigh in such a piteous way that two of the onlookers drew an utterly mistaken conclusion from her looks and her sighs; for Sophy Carmine began to think that Miss Dorothy was bitterly regretting that Lester Brookes had taken her at her word, and Colonel

Kerr believed that she was breaking her heart for him.

And in his case, as was natural with a man who had given more than one woman cause for suffering, he was simply boiling over with passion and a fury of indignation to think that Brookes should, as he thought, have loved and ridden away, careless of the breaking heart which he was leaving behind.

Thus matters went on till the day of Mrs. Bonner's ball at Farlington, when, at luncheon, Mrs. Ferrers in counting up heads for the drive, happened to say, vexedly, "And Captain Brookes promised Mrs. Bonner, without fail, that he would go—he promised most faithfully. Really," with a sigh, "I don't know *what* I shall say to her to account for his non-appearance."

Dorothy cast one of her looks at Mrs. Ferrers, then let her eyes fall, and sighed so piteously that Kerr, who was next to her, nearly boiled over in his disgust.

"Oh! it's nothing to do with you, mother," said Mignon, who thought that Dorothy was perfectly right to refuse a man if she did not care for him. "You have only to say that he has gone away."

"But he promised so faithfully to go," cried Mrs. Ferrers.

"Then he ought to have kept his promise," retorted Mignon. "I have got no patience with

men who faithfully promise things and then carefully don't keep their promises."

"But Captain Brookes would have kept it, if—" and then Mrs. Ferrers, stopped short with a guilty feeling that she had let herself be betrayed into saying more than she had any right to say, and, what to her was a more heinous crime, more than was very kind to Dorothy.

"Well, it is no use saying any more about him; perhaps you are right, Mignon," she found presence of mind to say. "Then there will be eight of us to-night. I suppose then that the omnibus will do."

"Oh! quite well, I should think," said Mignon, carelessly.

Well, as soon as she could escape from the table, Dorothy Maitland got out of the room and with the tears very near to her eyes made for the stairs. However, just as she reached the foot of them, she heard steps on the landing, and being in no mind to be caught actually crying, she hastily turned into the little passage which led to the large conservatory, and finding that she was not followed there, sat down upon the very chair, or rather the rustic seat, where she had sat with Lester Brookes a few days before, and covering her face with her hand, burst into violent weeping. Then, to make matters worse, while she was still unable to control her sobs, the door opened and Colonel Kerr walked in.

As soon as she realized who had come in, Dorothy sprang to her feet with a wild idea of rushing away; but to get into the house from where she stood, she would be obliged to pass close by Colonel Kerr, who was looking mournfully at her with all his own sorrowful past in his gray eyes. So finding that mode of retreat cut off, she turned back and sank down upon the seat again struggling hard to control her sobs and tears.

"Miss Maitland, I'm so sorry I came in here—but I'll go at once," he said, gently.

"No, you need not go," answered Dorothy, still keeping her head turned away. "I shall—be all right—in a minute," and then she resolutely dried her eyes and tried to force her lips to be steady. "It's awfully stupid of me," she found breath to say after a minute or so; "but I've a headache—and—and—it's headachy sort of weather, don't you know."

Now as the snow was at that moment lying some four inches on the ground, Kerr really did *not* know; however, he sat down beside her with quite the old tender manner that had been so thoroughly his twenty years before and told her that he quite understood.

"I don't think you understand at all," said Dorothy bluntly, feeling sure that he believed that she was crying for Lester Brookes.

"I have a far better reason for knowing than

you think," he said, the shadow deepening in his eyes. "For twenty years ago I went through the self-same story myself."

"You?" cried Dorothy, forgetting all about Lester Brookes in her anxiety and curiosity to know the meaning of the shadow in his gray eyes.

"Yes, I. Shall I tell you about it?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

So Kerr told her his story, told it for the first time in his life; spoke of it for the first time for twenty years.

"It is just one and twenty years ago that I spent my long leave in Cornwall. I was quite a youngster then. And I met a young girl, a lady, whom I fell in love with, and when I went back to my regiment, I was engaged to be married to her. Her mother was a widow, and lived in town during the season. And in April I had a week's leave; I spent it chiefly with her. We were to be married in September, and I was in the Scarlet Lancers then and quartered at a wretched little place called Ballingtown, a sort of watering-place where nobody ever seemed to go and you never saw a visitor above the tea-and-shrimps class. Well, all at once, a lady took a house for the season, a woman who seemed to have heaps of money and any quantity of servants and horses and all that kind of thing, and I—I was immensely struck by her beauty and her grand air, and—and with everything about

her—and—and you can guess the rest?" he said in a pained voice.

"No, I cannot. I have not the least idea of what is coming," answered Dorothy, breathlessly.

"Well, I fancied myself more in love with her than I was with my own dear little girl up in London. And—and under a plea to myself of being honest and fair and above board with her, I got a couple of days' leave and went and told her the truth, and asked her to give me back my promise."

"Which she did, of course," broke in Dorothy.

"Which she did," he answered; "and then I went back to my regiment and waited for my chance of winning the widow. I was wretched all the time. I couldn't get my little girl out of my head, but the beautiful widow had dazzled me, and, like the infatuated young fool that I was, I went madly on. Old Bootles had been my best friend up to that time, but he kept himself aloof from me, and as far as our familiar intercourse went, he cut me. Not officially, of course, and outwardly I daresay you wouldn't have known the difference; but he dropped off one little intimacy after another, gave up calling me 'Charlie,' and called me 'Kerr' instead—would ask me politely to sit down if I went into his rooms, and cut me to the very heart in a thousand ways. But still I kept on, madly on, and at last I asked the beautiful widow to marry me."

"And she was married already. She turned out to be a worthless adventuress?" cried Dorothy, excitedly.

"Nothing of the sort," said Kerr. "She turned out to be my little girl's half-sister, who had taken a house at Ballingtown just to give her the pleasure of seeing my surprise at her appearance. The widow in fact had been kept as a surprise too; and, as you may imagine, the shock brought me all at once to my senses and made me realize what an awful thing it was that I had done."

"And what did you do then? Why didn't you go back and tell the girl everything? She would have forgiven you," Dorothy said.

"I daresay—oh, I am sure that she would have done so, for she was sweetness and goodness and tenderness itself," he said, "but it was too late then; for, though I did not know it until after, she was lying dead at the very moment that I was asking her sister to marry me. So you see, Miss Dorothy, what a social leper and outcast I am, not fit to—to tie your shoes. I went out to India—to try to do what was impossible—to try to forget, and there I stayed, and there I would have died, only they insisted on my coming home when I got that last attack of fever, and I got an idea that it was cowardly to shirk facing it."

Dorothy sat with head a little bent, very

busily occupied in trying to poke her fingers between the spaces left by the cross wires of the seat. "But you are not sorry you came back now, are you?" she asked.

"Not now. I feel more at peace than I have been for twenty years," he answered; "and, of course, Bootles has always been my best friend—so that the mere fact of coming back after all that time and finding him just what he was before anything had come between us, was worth coming home for alone."

There was silence between them for a few minutes, and then Dorothy, in a piteous little strangled voice asked a question.

"Did you—that is, was you very fond of her? The girl who died, I mean?"

For an instant he scarce knew how to answer. "Well, to be perfectly frank with you, Miss Dorothy," he said, "I don't think that I was. I was at first, of course. She was so pretty, and so sweet, and so good, and I know she liked me. But I was only a youngster at the time, or what seems like a youngster to me now, and I don't think I was in love with her at all."

"And her sister?" still keeping her head turned away.

"Oh, that was the merest infatuation, the maddest, wildest passion possible; the sort of lunacy that sends young men, who for the time have no sense or reason, to their ruin.

But from the hour that I realized that I had killed my poor little girl—"

"Oh, no, no, don't say that," she cried, in a voice of agony.

"I am afraid I must say so. It is what I always think," he answered, sadly. "It is the crime for which my whole life must pay the penance."

"The penance?" questioningly.

"The penance of loneliness. For twenty years I have lived the life of a hermit, shut out from all that makes life most sweet to a man. I have been happy, comparatively, since I came here, because I have for the time lived the life that I would live by choice, if I could, for always. During the last few weeks I have seen more of women's gracious ways and of the children's tender innocence than I have seen in all the twenty years that I have been in India; and there have been moments when I have forgotten that, so far as I am concerned, they can never be anything to me except a vision; when I have forgotten that I am nothing more than a social leper in the grip of a moral penal servitude for life."

For full five minutes neither of them said one word. Dorothy Maitland was struggling hard with her own beating heart, and to keep the tears from flooding into her eyes, and as for him he was only conscious of one awful feeling that he

had lived for four and forty years and that this was the only woman he had ever loved. This soft-eyed, soft-voiced girl, who, like himself, was alone in the world, who was so close to him that he could at any moment put out his hand and take hers—which he did—and yet between him and her there lay the impassable barrier of a quiet grave away down in Cornwall, where the breakers dashing against the rocks beat an unceasing dirge to the memory of that tender rose—the Rosey of his youth—cut off in the morning of her life. He had forgotten utterly why he had told her his story; he had forgotten that he had had some unselfish, chivalrous idea of bringing her and Brookes together again and going back to his exile, happy in the belief that he had done some good in his life at last. Yes, he had forgotten all this; at that moment he thought of nothing except that he had sworn himself forever to the memory of Rosa Wendell, and that he was only forty-four! only forty-four! and he might go on living for forty years.

All at once he came to the consciousness that he was holding her hand in his; then gently and with reverence as he might have done to a saint, he kissed it softly and let it go. There was a moment's silence and then Dorothy Maitland got up very quietly and went away.

And there he sat like a man in a dream with two dreadful words ringing in his ears—all

over! all over! all over! They had been sweet and precious to him these few short weeks, and he had lived years, nay, a whole lifetime of happiness in his own thoughts whilst he had been at the Court; but it was all over now and he must go back into the darkness of loneliness again to suffer a thousand times more than he had ever known what it was to suffer in all his life before.

Well, it was no use sitting there thinking; he would have time to think, aye, time and to spare in the dreary years which were to come. He roused himself with a shake and walked off to the den where he guessed Bootles would be at that moment.

"Bootles, old fellow, are you here," he asked, with a knock at the door.

"Is that you, Charley? Come in—what is it?" answered Bootles cheerily. "Take that chair, old man, it's the best in the room for comfort."

"No, I haven't come to talk, old man," Kerr said, bluntly, for he knew if he meant to go it was best to get it out at once. "I wanted to tell you—I've had a good time at the Court. I've lived every minute of it, but I can't stop. I must get away."

Bootles got up from his chair in astonishment.

"What is it, Charley?" he asked, kindly.

Kerr fairly groaned, and hid his face upon his arm against the chimney-shelf.

"Its not the little girl, Dorothy?" Bootles cried incredulously. "Why you don't mean that she has refused you?"

Kerr lifted his head and looked at his friend with haggard eyes. "You don't suppose I have asked her, do you?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"But why not?" said Bootles, mildly.

"Why not! Good Heaven! do you think I have forgotten—that I ever forget—"

"My dear old man," Bootles broke in, with his kindest voice. "You are thinking of the past still, and poor little Rosey, poor, poor tender child. You never meant to marry, never to let your thoughts stray to any other woman but to live out your life as a sort of penance for what can never be changed now. Yes, I know, but Charley, old man, it seems to me twenty years is a long penance. It won't do, you know, to punish another girl for the sake of the first. If you break this girl's heart—and I'm afraid she likes you, old fellow, you know you were always first with the women—and I feel pretty sure it was for you that she said 'no' to Lester Brookes. What! you didn't know that?" as Kerr gave a start of surprise. "Ah, but it is so. So you see if you break this girl's heart it will do poor, dear, little Rosey no good. Don't say you'll go now. Sit here by yourself and think it out. Think it out with a pipe, old man, and I'll come back to you in an hour or so," and then, with

what was almost an embrace, a sort of rough hug, the master of Ferrers Court went quietly out and shut the door behind him.

His first thought when he got outside was to go and find his wife—then he remembered that Mrs. Ferrers and Mignon had driven away in the carriage half an hour before. And whilst he was in the strait of wondering whom he'd get to help him, he ran against the General, who was in search of Sophy.

"Do you know where Miss Sophy is, General?" he asked.

"No, I don't," the General answered, "I'm looking about for her myself. Here's Pearl, she is sure to know. Pearl, my child, where is Sophy?"

"Sophy is in mother's boudoir, with Miss Maitland," answered Pearl. "There is something the matter; Miss Maitland is crying her eyes out."

"Then go and whisper to Sophy that I want her particularly," said Bootles, "and come away yourself, sweetheart. When people are crying they like to be left alone."

Thus bidden, Pearl quickly disappeared and in five minutes came back with Sophy, who was looking anxious and distressed. Bootles drew her on one side and whispered a few words in her ear, and then carried off the General and Pearl to the stables.

Sophy, on the contrary, went straight toward the little study which Captain Ferrers called his "den." And a quarter of an hour later, Maud came running out into the stables, crying: "Father, father, where are you?"

"Here," he answered, "what is it?"

"Something has happened," Maud explained, "for I left my book in mother's boudoir, this morning, and just now I was going to fetch it when Sophy jumped out of the gallery-window and stopped me. 'You can't go in there, darling,' she said, 'but I want you to do something for me. Go and find Captain Ferrers, he is somewhere about the stables, and tell him just this: 'It's all right.' What is all right, father?" Maud asked.

"Something I asked her to do for me," Captain Ferrers answered—then turned round to the General and clapped him on the shoulder. "General," he said, "you'll have a wife in a thousand. I wonder how she managed it?"

Well, Sophy had managed it in this way. She had simply, as she herself put it, talked to Colonel Kerr like a mother, and finally she had insisted upon his going upstairs with her to see Dorothy. And when they reached the door of the boudoir, she stepped aside and imperatively motioned him to go in and then gently closed it behind him, and herself retired to the window of the gallery, where she sat in the cold for quite

half an hour, keeping watch that nobody should go in and disturb them. And Kerr, when he found himself in the pretty little room, looked round the screen which formed a cosy corner by the fire, and there saw Dorothy Maitland dejectedly lying back on a settee, her face very pale from her long fit of weeping, and her eyes looking bigger and darker than ever. As she saw him she sprang up, and in a moment Kerr had caught her in his arms.

"Dorothy, my love, darling," he burst out, "I did not dare to say a word more to you just now. I thought it was Brookes that—"

"Brookes!" she cried indignantly.

"But Bootles told me—told me that you had sent him away and that—Dorothy, haven't you got anything to say to me?"

Dorothy shook her head, but a shake of the head sometimes gives a great deal of encouragement to a man, and, feeling himself encouraged, he drew her still nearer.

"Do you know that I am forty-four?" he asked, scarcely daring even then to believe in his good fortune, and putting the only disadvantage he could think of on his side plainly before her.

"I should not care," said Dorothy, "if you were a hundred and forty-four, because I—I—"

"Because you—you—" he asked, "you—what?"

"Because I love you," she whispered, "but," after a moment, "I don't believe you would ever have come to me if Sophy Carmine had not gone down and fetched you."

"I think I should," he answered, confidently.

So there they sat in Mrs. Ferrers' cosy corner all unknowing of how long Sophy kept guard in the cold without, and slowly the afternoon waned and a blessed peace stole into Charley Kerr's soul, for the long twenty years of his penance had come to an end at last.

THE END.

# OGILVIE WHITTLECHURCH.

## CHAPTER I.

"THERE will be no half-holiday this afternoon."

It was Dr. Layiton of Olswick Grammar-school who spoke. His audience consisted of the ushers and pupils of that establishment.

The announcement was not altogether unexpected. In fact, two young gentlemen were already secretly congratulating themselves on having got off so easily. But their hopes were destined to be dashed to the ground—the doctor has not finished. How much does he know?

"I said, young gentlemen," he continued, "that there would be no half-holiday; but I speak with a reservation. If I can possibly avoid it, it is not my plan to punish the whole school for the fault of a few of its members. I call on those boys who robbed Mr. Hodge's orchard yesterday to give me their names. Unless I am greatly mistaken, they will do so. Will those boys stand up?"

Amidst a breathless silence, two lads stood up in their places.

"Is there no one else?" asked the doctor.

Then every one looked at every one else; the

big boys began to look very fierce, and the small ones to look very red.

"I have reason to know that there is another boy who ought to be standing up. I will give him a minute to do so." The doctor took out his watch. What an age that sixty seconds seemed! "Ogilvie Whittlechurch, stand up."

The boy addressed was a slender delicate little fellow in the first form, but with an open and intelligent face, not at all the face of a sneak. Scarcely seeming to take in what was happening, he obeyed; and then, seeing the gaze of the whole school concentrated on himself, burst into tears.

"I am sorry," said the doctor sternly, "very sorry to find that there is a boy in my school who can descend to a lie—to find a boy who is mean enough to see his companions punished while he himself goes free. The school may dismiss now, and leave their books out. There will be no half-holiday; we will resume work at three o'clock.—Parkins, Rimington, and Whittlechurch, go to my study."

Fifty boys do not allow themselves to be robbed of an afternoon's cricket without some retaliation; and many were the threats indulged in of "bedroom lickings" and "monitor thrashings" to be afterwards administered to the unhappy Whittlechurch. Besides, to do them justice, English school-boys have a strong sense of honor; and if a master will but show by his conduct that he appreciates and trusts in this sense, public opinion is always against a boy who takes advantage of him.

There had been a paper-chase the day before, and the hares on their return journey had passed

Hodge's orchard with the hounds close on their heels. Of course, at this, the most exciting part of the whole chase, none of the bigger boys, nor the good runners among the smaller ones, would have turned aside for all the orchards in the county. But the three unfortunates who were interviewing the doctor were known to have straggled early in the day, and nothing was more likely than that they had yielded to the temptation of lightening some of the overladen apple trees of their golden burden, more especially as Farmer Hodge was the avowed enemy of the school, and was said to have sworn to make the next boy he caught acquainted with his cart-whip. But how the doctor had "bowled out" Whittlechurch, no one could imagine.

Presently, the school-bell rang, and all trooped in again and took their places as before. Parkins and Rimington were already in theirs, looking very sore and uncomfortable; but Whittlechurch was not in the room. When every one was seated, the doctor tapped his desk for silence, and proceeded to address the school: "Whittlechurch is expelled. He persisted in denying his guilt; and as I have often told you that I will not be responsible for the charge of a liar, I had no course but to send him back to his father. That he was guilty, there can be no doubt. When Mr. Hodge's complaint reached me yesterday afternoon, I walked over to his farm. We went into the orchard, and there I saw his full name, Ogilvie Whittlechurch, cut on an apple tree. The work was quite recent; it could not have been done more than a couple of hours at most; and in the face of this evidence he still refused to admit that he had been in the orchard.

—Let this be a warning to you, young gentlemen. Never be tempted to tell a lie. If you do, you will most assuredly be obliged to tell a score more to substantiate it. But were you to tell a thousand, the end will be always the same —detection."

While the fifty or so young gentlemen at the Olswick Grammar-school were poring over their books in the worst of tempers, anb looking wistfully out of the windows at the cricket pitch, which now appeared doubly green and smooth—while, in short, these youthful aristocrats were extremely miserable, some twenty little paupers, inmates of the Olswick Union, were in the very wildest of high spirits. "The board" had just concluded its annual inspection, also its annual luncheon, and its annual cigars—the last two forming, by the way, a very considerable item in the annual bill chargeable to the ratepayers—and everything having gone smoothly, the chairman had requested the master of the workhouse to allow the old paupers a ration of tobacco and to give the children a half-holiday.

"Ooray! ooray! Chuck 'er up!" shouted one little ragamuffin.—"Oo's a-goin' to play tipcat?" cried another.—"Where's Oggy Whittlechurch with them happles?" yelled a third.

"Sh-sh, yer softy! D'yer want to get 'im nabbed? Oggy's took the happles over to the meadow. You come along a-me, and we'll 'ave a blow-out." So saying, the last two speakers separated from their companions, and running round behind the workhouse, cautiously crossed the garden. This brought them to a stone wall, over which they clambered. They were now in the meadow, and here, sure enough, sitting close

to the wall, they found another little fellow waiting for them.

"'Ave you got 'em, Oggy?" 'Ave you got the happles?" they both asked at once in an eager whisper.

"'Ave I got 'em!" replied the other contemptuously. "D'yer think I've left 'em behind?" And producing a piece of sacking tied up in a bundle, he proceeded to undo the knot, thus allowing to roll out a store of fine ripe red-cheeked apples.

"O blimy! ain't they prime?"

"'Ere's one for you, Bill; 'ere's one for Charlie Miller; and 'ere's one for me. 'Ere's two for you, 'ere's two for Ch—— Douse it, and cut! Can't yer see the Squire comin'! My! ain't 'e runnin'!"

The two lads who had just come were over the wall again before he had finished speaking. But the one who had been distributing the apples stayed for a moment to tie up the bundle; then, just as he was about to follow them, he suddenly saw the Squire trip up and fall heavily to the ground; and at the same time realized what he had not noticed before, namely, that the gentleman was not pursuing himself and his companions, but was trying to escape from an infuriated bull, which now made its appearance through a gap at the other end of the field, rushing madly, head down, straight for where he lay. What impulse prompted him he never knew. Had he waited but a fraction of a second to think, he would most probably have followed his companions. But he did not think. He ran as hard as he could go to where the gentleman was lying—the bull was now within six yards—picked up a

stone, and threw it at the animal with all his force. It hit the latter between the eyes. The effect was instantaneous. The bull stopped short, tossed his head, half-turned round, and then catching sight of some blankets hung up to dry, which were fluttering in a cottage garden near by, made off in that direction at the top of his speed.

Meanwhile, the Squire, who had twisted his ankle, had with some difficulty got up; and leaning partly on the boy and partly on his stick, hobbled to the gate. "What is your name, my little man?" he asked.

"Ogilvie Whitttlechurch, sir."

"Queer name that for a pauper," he muttered. —"Well, Ogilvie Whittlechurch, run back to the workhouse and tell the master that I want to speak to him.—Do you understand? Tell him that Colonel Forward wishes to speak to him."

"Oh, p-p-lease, sir, we wasn't doing no 'arm. Leastways, the other two wasn't. You'll only tell 'im of me, sir? Will yer?"

"What do you mean, my lad? I don't understand."

"Ain't yer goin' to tell 'im to whack us for comin' in the meadow? But you'll only tell 'im of me? Will yer, sir?"

"Oh, I see.—All right, my boy, I won't say anything about the others. Now, off you run, and fetch the master.—By Heaven!" muttered the colonel as he stretched out his leg, which was rather painful, "but I like that youngster extremely."

For a few moments he remained thinking; then, half-aloud, he muttered: "Why shouldn't I? I'm an old bachelor, and likely to remain

one. When I die there is no one to carry on my name. Yet I suppose that this is the kind of step that one ought to think over before taking. But then I don't fancy that the boy thought much when he saved my life just now. I wonder who he is. I don't ever remember having heard the name before; but it certainly does not sound a plebeian one.—However, here comes the master, and I'll find out.—Ah, Mr. Saunders, I want to ask you about that youngster, Ogilvie Whittlechurch. Who is he, and what is he?"

"Oh, the young scoundrel, sir; he told me that you caught him in your field; but I'll take good care that he doesn't do it again. He's the most mischievous boy in the 'ouse, sir. But he's not altogether a bad lot—he always speaks the truth."

"Humph! Always speaks the truth, and thinks of his companions before himself, besides being as plucky a youngster as one could wish to see. Why, the boy must have been born a gentleman!" Colonel Forward was evidently a bigoted aristocrat. "Never mind the trespassing, Mr. Saunders. I take an interest in the lad, and want to know who he is. How did he come to the workhouse?"

"We have never been able to find out who he is, sir. He was found one morning in the garden, wrapped up in a shawl. It was just after I came here; I remember it perfectly. He couldn't have been there very long, because the shawl was hardly damp, and the dew had been very heavy. But we never knew who put him there."

"How was he dressed? Were his clothes good?"

"Not very good, sir; but quite clean. The

matron has them now. But there was no mark on them, sir, nothing at all; only "Ogilvie Whittlechurch" written on a piece of paper and pinned on to his frock, as you might label a parcel."

"And is that all you know about him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Saunders——"

"Yes, sir."

"That boy has just saved my life at the risk of his own, and I intend to adopt him as my son. Inform the guardians, please, and let me know their answer."

"Wh—wh—what! sir?"

"I say that I wish to adopt Ogilvie Whittlechurch. Surely that is plain enough. Now, if you will kindly lend me your arm as far as my house—thanks."

Colonel Forward had acted, as we have seen, quite on the spur of the moment; and it was not until he came to think the matter over calmly, while smoking his after-dinner cigar, that he fully realized the magnitude of the step, and the great responsibility which he was about to incur. At best, it would be a hazardous experiment. However, having undertaken it, he would spare no pains to make it a success. And he determined that it should be through no fault of his if Ogilvie Forward—for so he intended to name him—turned out anything other than an honorable English gentleman. He did not care much for the neighborhood, and had long meditated selling his present residence. Now, it was clearly his duty to do so at once, as it would never do to bring the boy up within a stone's throw of his old companions. This point settled in his own

mind, he sat down and wrote the necessary instructions to his solicitors, smoked another cigar, and went to bed.

. . . . . .

Ten years have elapsed—years which have passed happily both for Colonel Forward and his adopted son. At nine a boy's ideas are unformed; his mind, is so to speak, pliable, and he is ready to take in new impressions. So that, when, after a few years passed with his kind protector, Ogilvie was sent to Eton—if we except perhaps a sound healthy constitution and good physical development—not a trace remained of his early workhouse training. As for the colonel, he has learned to love him more and more each year, and now blesses the impulse which prompted him thus to secure himself the solace and happiness of a son's society, and saved him in all probability from that terrible affliction, a joyless old age. His worldly fortune, it is true, is now considerably less than it was. The reason—speculation, in which, like many other retired officers of comfortable means who feel keenly the want of occupation, he had been tempted to engage. However, he still had enough to live on; but, for his son's sake, he regretted that it was not more.

From Eton, Ogilvie passed into Woolwich, and from Woolwich he was gazetted lieutenant in the Royal Engineers. His detachment was stationed at Leith, where they were employed renewing the submarine defences of that port. When the main part of the work had been completed, several of the officers, Ogilvie among the number, sent in their applications for leave,

which were approved in due course. His plans were to devote a week to a short walking-tour in the neighborhood, which he had hardly as yet had time to see at all; and then to spend the rest of his leave with his father. Accordingly, one fine June morning, stick in hand and knapsack on back, he started on his travels. It was quite early, and, except for a few workmen, the streets were practically deserted. There were also a few sailors hanging about the dockyard gates. One of these latter, who had been sitting on a bundle against the wall, got up as he passed and followed him. Looking round a few minutes afterwards, he noticed that the man was still behind him. "I wonder if that man can be following me for any reason?" he thought; and then smiling at the idea that he was getting as fidgety as an old maiden lady, he dismissed the subject from his thoughts.

It was a delightful morning, bright and exhilarating; and under the combined influences of the freshness of the weather and his own light heart, he stepped out briskly. When clear of the town, he stopped for a minute to readjust the straps of his knapsack, and, while doing so, had leisure to inspect the sailor, who was a few paces off. His appearance was certainly not in his favor. He was about middle height, solidly built, with a short thick neck, and bullet head surmounted by a fur cap. His face, which was adorned by a scrubby black beard and moustache, indicated both cunning and ferocity. His bundle and a pair of big sea-boots, as well as an indescribable something about his walk and carriage, showed him to be a sailor. But had it not been for these, one would have felt more inclined to put him

down as a professional burglar than anything else.

What, then, was Ogilvie's astonishment when, just as he was putting on his knapsack again, the individual we have described walked coolly up to him and thus accosted him: "And so you're Capting Forward."

To the best of his knowledge the man was an utter stranger; and he was so taken aback with his impertinence, that for a second or two he continued to take stock of him before answering. "Yes," he replied, "I am Mr. Forward."

"And you don't remember me?"

"No."

"What! you don't remember your old pal, Charlie Miller—and we used to be that fond of each other, too, we used. Now, try to think, Capting; surely, you must remember Charlie." Having said this in a mocking tone, the man remained looking at Ogilvie, his face formed into a half-sneer, half-grin, which had the effect of making him look absolutely hideous.

Suddenly a light broke on Ogilvie; it all came back to his memory now, the old days at Olswick, and the little paupers, his companions. He did remember him. With an inward shudder, he had to acknowledge to himself that this person had once been his friend. Naturally kind-hearted, he would, under ordinary circumstances, have been only too glad to do a good turn to one of his old associates, notwithstanding that their present paths of life were, and necessarily must be, on levels so very different. But suddenly confronted with him like this, he felt towards him a repugnance which he could not overcome. He made, moreover, a shrewd guess that it was

not alone for the pleasure of greeting an old acquaintance that Miller had tracked him down; and events showed that he was right.

"Now that you remind me," he continued, "I do remember you. You were one of my playmates before Colonel Forward adopted me. How did you find out where I was?—and what can I do for you?"

"Ah!—now you're beginning to speak. You were only talking before.—Never mind how I found you out—that don't matter. As for what I want—well, what d' yer think I want? Not money—Oh no! 'Tisn't likely. What I wants is L, and S, and D; but chiefly L, and that with a fifty after it; that's what I want."

"Fifty pounds!" said Ogilvie. "I cannot give you as much as that—certainly not now. But why do you want it?"

"Well, capting, you see, I was always very fond of yer, and hearing that the other young toffs down yonder at the barracks didn't know as 'ow you'd ever been anything different from what you are—and you bein' in course too modest to tell—I thought, d' yer see, as I'd be doin' you a good turn by letting 'em know the 'ole story. They'd respect you, so I thought—you 'avin' made your way so wonderful—it commands respect, that does. But this morning I thought—I was thinking of yer all this morning—afore you was up, I was thinking of yer—I thought this: Oggy weren't never a boaster, and p'raps 'e'd rather I didn't say nothing after all. So, when you come out of the barracks, capting, I says to myself: "Well, I'll just ask 'im myself," I says; "and if 'e tells me to clap a stopper on my jaw-tackle —well, p'raps 'e'll come down 'an'some." '

"So!" thought Ogilvie, after listening to the above speech, which was delivered in a sarcastic tone, showing that the speaker imagined that he had him completely at his mercy, "this is nothing more or less than a deliberate attempt to extort blackmail."

Now, although his brother-officers believed him to be Colonel Forward's son, he was sufficiently popular in the mess not to mind the true facts of the case coming to light. At the same time, however, he did not like the idea of this man appearing at the barracks in his absence with a sensational story which would most likely be adorned with numerous embellishments of his own. Of course, no one in the mess would listen to him; but that most probably would only have the effect of making him retail it in the canteen, which would be worse. Take it which way he would, it was a nuisance; and unless he chose to return at once, and so spoil his walking-tour, which he had no intention of doing, it could not be helped.

"Not only will I not give you fifty pounds," he answered, "but I will not give you fifty shillings. What you propose to do can cause me nothing more than a little temporayr inconvenience; so please consider yourself free to go and do it as soon as ever you please. If you have nothing more to say to me, I will go on with my walk."

The other's face fell visibly. This was not at all what he had bargained for. "What! you don't mind them young toffs knowing you was brought up in the Union along a-me?" Then suddenly changing his tone, he continued: "But there! you knew Charlie Miller wasn't a-goin'

to play a low-down game like that, didn't yer? Why, bless yer, Oggy, I was only larkin'. And to think you been and seen through it—and me thinkin' I was a-goin' to give you such a fright too. But, capting, if you 'ave got a thick-un or two to spare, I'm dead-broke—I'm really—been bousing up my jib all last week, and ain't got a dollar left. I want to get a ship at Glasgow, and by what I can see, I'll 'ave to tramp it."

Many people would have been equally deaf to this second appeal; but Ogilvie, although fully alive to its insincerity, could not help giving the fellow a sovereign. After all, but for a strange turn of the wheel of fortune he would very likely have been his friend to this very day, and been instrumental in keeping him straight. "Look here, Miller," he said. "I have not forgotten that we were boys together; but circumstances have altered our positions, and we can have nothing in common now. Here is a sovereign. I hope you will find a good ship at Glasgow; and let me advise you for the future to stick to your business, and not run about the country trying to frighten people into giving you money. It doesn't pay.—Now, good-bye." And turning on his heel, Ogilvie walked off in the direction of Queensferry.

For a few moments the other remained watching him in silence; but finding that he did not even look behind, he turned and commenced to retrace his steps towards Leith. "Blarst 'm!" he muttered. "I thought 'e 'd be worth a mint o' money to me. But I won't blow on 'im—'twouldn't be no good. Besides, a secret's a secret, and maybe it'll be worth something yet."

## CHAPTER II.

OGILVIE proposed to make his first halt at Queensferry, where, at the time of which we write, that immense and almost superhuman work of engineering, the Forth Bridge, was just being begun. He arrived there about noon. As yet the operations had not advanced beyond the merest preliminaries; but these alone were on so vast a scale, that the imagination recoiled from the task of estimating the amount of time, labor, skill, and capital it would take to bring this gigantic undertaking to a successful termination. A huge iron caisson, destined to form the base of a column, had been completed, and was to be launched that afternoon, and he determined to wait and see the operation.

No one in good health takes a long country walk without feeling hungry; and Ogilvie, who had been indulging in sharp pedestrian exercise for about three hours in bracing air, was simply ravenous. His knapsack held a small store of cold provisions, but that was only for emergencies. At present, a little inn, near at hand, seemed to offer the prospect of a much more substantial lunch, and thither accordingly he repaired.

In answer to his inquiries, the landlord informed him that the parlor was engaged, but whatever he pleased to order could be served him in the taproom.

"No, no!" interposed a young man, who at

that moment emerged from behind a glass door leading to the parlor in question, and who had evidently overheard the conversation in the tap-room. "There's lots of room in there, Forward, and this place will be chokeful of workmen in a few minutes. Come in, and let me introduce you to my mother and sister." The speaker was a young officer of the mercantile marine, named Rimington, whom Ogilvie had often met at Leith, where he had been staying to go through a course of drill, in his capacity of sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve, on board the gun-boat stationed there.

Gladly accepting his invitation, Ogilvie followed him into the parlor, where he was duly presented to the two ladies. The elder of these, Mrs. Rimington, was a widow. Her husband had been lost at sea not many years after they were married, and this, doubtless, had something to do with the subdued and rather sad look which her face so often wore. There was something very kind and winning about the look, notwithstanding its sadness—something that had the effect of making one feel at home in her presence from the very first—that seemed to say to Ogilvie: 'You are my son's friend, so of course you are mine also, and I hope that you will consider me yours."

Her daughter, Miss Rimington, was a delicately lovely girl of about eighteen summers, of a type of beauty rather Spanish than English. Neither in her manners nor conversation, however, was there discernible the slightest trace of that languid deliberation, sometimes natural to, and sometimes affected by brunettes. On the contrary, she was in every respect like any other

pretty, healthy English girl of her age. She seemed also to have inherited from her mother the gift of being able to put people at ease in her presence.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Rimington, "that you are like us, Mr. Forward, very nearly leaving the neighborhood without having seen the Forth Bridge?"

"Oh, well, mother," put in her son, "you know they say that there's many a Roman shopkeeper who lives and dies without seeing the Colosseum; and then we have come at last."

"Are you on a walking tour?" asked Miss Rimington of Ogilvie, as he unstrapped his knapsack.

"Only a very slipshod sort of a one, I am afraid, Miss Rimington," he replied. "I shall never walk farther than I feel inclined; and if at any time I want to avail myself of the coach, I most certainly shall do so."

"I was thinking of going for a tramp myself," said Rimington; "but I shan't have time."

"Isn't it a shame, Mr. Forward?" said his sister. "George has only just finished drilling on board that horrid little gunboat, and to-morrow he will have to go to Glasgow to join his ship."

"It does indeed seem hard," sighed Mrs. Rimington, glancing fondly at her son. "He hasn't been six weeks in England; and if Mary and I hadn't come up here, we should hardly have seen him at all."

"Nonsense, mother," laughed Rimington. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good; and if I hadn't been qualifying to serve my Queen and country on board the gunboat, we should have all stayed vegetating down at Whitby, and then

you and Mary would never have seen Edinburgh."

"Do you live at Whitby, Mrs. Rimington?" asked Ogilvie. "My father has just taken a house there, in North Crescent. I hope we are neighbors?"

"In North Crescent! Oh yes, we are neighbors, and very near ones too. We live just at the end of North Crescent, at Rose Cottage. I hope we shall prove good neighbors, and that we shall see you there."

"Well, I had no idea that you were a Whitbyite, Forward," said Rimington. "Why, I believe that the world grows smaller every day. I never thought very much of our planet after my first voyage to Australia, but lately I've positively got to despise it.—Hullo! here comes lunch at last. Hadn't we better set to work? It would never do to be late for the launch."

When they went out after lunch, the last preparations were being made round the caisson. Rimington, as became his profession, was chiefly interested in the actual launching arrangements; so was his mother. So, while these two were inspecting sluices and chocks, rollers and tackles, and the rest of the attendant paraphernalia, Ogilvie, as an engineer, was able to explain to Miss Rimington the construction and use of the caisson itself. And so interested and attentive did he find his pupil, that he went on to instruct her in the principles of the "cantilever" system of bridge-construction, demonstrating its advantages and picking out its weak points most impartially. The conversation, however, was disturbed soon afterwards by the very event which they had come to see—the launch of the caisson.

Everything worked perfectly; and in a few minutes, amidst the hurrahs of the workmen, the great machine was quietly floating in the firth, ready to be towed off to its position, and sunk.

Having taken leave of the Rimingtons, who were going back to Edinburgh, Ogilvie crossed the Forth by the ferry-boat, and, pipe in mouth, resumed his tramp. When a man smokes, he meditates; it's a law of nature. If his tobacco be ordinary, his meditations have a tendency to be practical; if good, they are more inclined to be abstract and philosophical. Now, Ogilvie's tobacco was good, and before he had walked a mile, he had satisfactorily established the hypothesis, that the pleasantest people are always those whom one meets unexpectedly; but then he was not thinking of Miller.

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## CHAPTER III.

"KEEP her as she goes, Mr. Rimington, and get a small pull at the weather-braces if the wind draws aft. If it draws aft much, you can set studding sails."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Rimington, second mate of the *Maharanee* clipper, and who was then on watch.

"But if we only have a little luck, we'll be first ship home; I'd bet a year's pay on it," said the skipper as he went down to his cabin by the after-hatchway after giving the above directions.

They had just caught the south-east trade,

after rounding the Cape, homeward-bound from China, with tea and one passenger; and, as the captain had said, it seemed by no means unlikely that they would be the first of that year's tea ships—not steamers, of course,—to take the pilot on board in English waters. But everything depended on crossing the line. If they were lucky enough to get a puff to carry them across the "Doldrums," it was a certainty. If not—well, they must hope that the others would suffer the same delay.

Rimington paced the poop, pipe in mouth, occasionally giving a critical glance at the main royal, and longing to get that little pull of the weather-braces; but each time that he looked, the shaking of the weather-leech told him plainly that nothing must be touched. It was two bells (nine o'clock), and his watch would be over at midnight. But he was not particularly anxious for that. There was no great hardship in pacing the poop and smoking his pipe in the soft moonlight; while the balmy air, set in gentle motion by the southern trade, fanned his cheek and filled the sails; and the ship, just heeling to its tender caress, except for an occasional gurgle under the bows, slipped noiselessly through the water.

Presently he was joined by the passenger, Mr. Parkins. The latter was a man with whom things had gone well. He had originally gone out to China to take up a post in the Customs, then, as now, chiefly administered by Europeans. His duties, however, were not so arduous but that he was able to carry on a certain amount of business on his own account. The Flowery Land at that time presented a grand field for an

enterprising man; and by unflagging diligence, aided by a few lucky speculations and a natural aptitude for business, he found himself in a few years, and while still quite young, one of the richest tea-merchants in Shanghai. He had resigned his Customs appointment some time ago, and was now going to revisit his native country. He had intended to take a berth on board one of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's splendid steamships; but chancing to light on his old schoolfellow and chum, Rimington, serving on board the *Maharanee*, he had changed his mind and taken passage in her instead.

The two friends continued for some time to walk about in silence; then Parkins said: "It's a strange chance that has brought us together, old chap. I suppose that if I had been asked, there is no one in the world whom I should have said that I thought I was less likely to meet walking along the jetty at Shanghai than yourself. You never used to talk about going to sea."

"No; I never had any intention of doing so; in fact, when we knew each other, I don't think we either of us troubled much about professions. On the whole, I'm not sorry that things have turned out as they have. A sailor's life is a hard one; but there are a good many worse; and if you don't stop my heaven-born right to growl at anything and everything I have to do, I can jog along very happily. Every one can't be a Crœsus like you."

"No; I suppose not. Certainly, I have been very lucky. It would be interesting to know what has happened to all the other Olswick fellows.—By the way, there is one especially I want

to speak to you about. Do you remember a little chap called Whittlechurch, who was expelled? Wasn't his Christian name Ogilvie?"

"Yes; it was.—What about him?"

"Well, it's rather a long story, and a very curious one.—Wait a minute, till I get a light."

"Right you are," said Rimington; "and meanwhile I'll get the yards in a bit.—Watch, round in! Weather-braces! Come along there; shake up, shake up!"

For a few moments the watch could be seen moving about the deck in obedience to the order, while the blocks creaked and the yards were trimmed. Then all was quiet again.

"Finished, old chap?"

"Yes.—Now, let's have your yarn."

"Most of my property," said Parkins, "as you know, is some way in the interior; and last tea-harvest I went to inspect some improvements which I had had made on one of my estates, up the Chongokiag. I reached the place by a little steam-launch, without any misadventure; but when we started to come back, we found that one of the cylinders was out of order and could not be used. I didn't care to take a passage down in a junk, so there was nothing for it but to wait. The engineer said he should be about three days repairing the damage; and for want of a better way to spend the time, I decided to visit Wangtsing, the capital of the province and the seat of government. I found it the most thoroughly Chinese place that I had ever seen. Not a single mission has managed to build a church there, and I don't suppose that there are half-a-dozen Europeans in the whole place. It so happened that I arrived at a very opportune

time: the whole town was *en fete*, and a long procession was being formed to meet and welcome the governor's army, which was returning victorious from an expedition against some pirates, and was expected back that evening. I had heard something about these pirates at Shanghai, and knew that the expedition was the result of several very urgent remonstrances made by the Western ambassadors to the government at Pekin; and I was heartily glad to hear that it had been successful."

"I heard of them too," said Rimington. "But I fail to see the connection between a nest of Chinese pirates and our old schoolfellow, Ogilvie Whittlechurch.—What are you doing with the helm down there? Keep her away, man, can't you? Give her the helm! You'll have the ship aback in a minute.—Who is that at the wheel?—Miller?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me recommend you to keep your eyes open, then."

"He's a good enough seaman, as a rule," explained Rimington; "but they all go to sleep on a calm night, if you don't look out.—However, to continue your yarn. I had just said that I didn't see what the pirates could possibly have to do with Ogilvie Whittlechurch, or Ogilvie Whittlechurch with the pirates.

"Wait a minute, old fellow; I am just coming to it."

"Well, that evening, sure enough, the army did come back, and with such a beating of drums and waving of banners as you never saw in all your life. A Chinese soldier is a rare hand at that sort of thing, if at nothing else. Then there

was a whole wagon-load of heads; and two of the pirates' prisoners whom they had rescued, and who were carried in litters. One of these litters contained an old Chinese merchant who had been captured on board one of his own junks, and who, except for a good fright, was very little the worse for what he had gone through. The other, an Englishman, was Ogilvie Whittlechurch's father."

"Whew! How did you find out that?"

"From the man's own mouth. The governor sent me a message that a fellow-countryman was dying at the palace, and would like to see me. I found the poor fellow worn down to a shadow with fever, and obviously at his last gasp. He seemed to have something on his mind that he wished to tell me; but it was perfectly awful to listen to him trying to speak while his voice came and went spasmodically—interrupted every minute by terrible fits of coughing. The gist of what he said was this: His name was John Whittlechurch. When he was young, he had been a bad lot—a drunkard, by what I could make out; then he emigrated to America, leaving his wife and her baby in England. For a long time he seems to have got on no better in the new country than he did in the old; but a few years ago he had a stroke of luck at the diggings, and became a millionaire. He then started to come home, westward, to try to find his wife and child; but the ship was wrecked in the China seas, and all who escaped the waves were captured by the pirates. Before leaving America, however, he had taken the precaution to make a will, which he left with his solicitors at Sacramento. In it he left everything to his wife, to

go to his son Ogilvie at her death. In case neither should be found, everything was left to a certain Pedro Bersaño, who seems to have been a sort of banker at the diggings, and who on this condition had advanced him money to carry on digging his claim."

"What usury! I suppose the fellow is a thorough scoundrel."

"I shouldn't wonder. Anyway, he seems either to have done fairly well out there, or else to have made the place too hot to hold him; for he has gone to London, so the dying man told me. His present address is "The Californian Club," near Leicester Square."

"Humph! I'll bet he's a rascal.—But wait half a minute, old chap;" and so saying he walked to the compass—the ship was two points off her course. This was too much for Rimington's patience, and he told the helmsman so in no very gentle language; threatening, if he had again to find fault with him during the watch, to give him an extra trick to practice in. Having thus given vent to his indignation, he returned to where his friend was standing and resumed the conversation.

"Did he give you no details by which to trace his wife and son?"

"No. I think that he wanted to; but his strength was quite used up in telling me as much as he did, and he died in my arms not an hour after I had come in."

"But how do you know that the Whittlechurch we were at school with is the man you want."

"I can't be certain, of course; but Whittlechurch is such an uncommon name, and so is Ogilvie as a Christian name, that I hardly think

there can be two. Besides, the age seems about right."

"Well, there should be no difficulty in finding him. We can trace him from the school. And then, even if he is not the man himself, he must surely be a cousin. I suppose you told the lawyers all you knew?"

"Yes; and they sent me a telegram to say that they were employing a detective in London to make inquiries."

"Well, I wish a relative of mine would die a millionaire and make me his heir.—And now, I think I'll try how the topmost studding-sail stands.—No; I won't, though; it's just eight bells. The other watch can do it when they muster."

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## CHAPTER IV.

THE *Maharanee* did win the race, and now lay safely secured alongside the wharf. The crew have gone; and the officers, who are now at breakfast in the cuddy, have only to send in their store accounts and turn the ship over to the owners' agents, before they, too, will be free to go home.

The post has brought Rimington two letters. The one he opens first is in a lady's handwriting:

ROSE COTTAGE, Monday.

DEAR OLD GEORGIE—Why don't you come home? Mother and I go to the station about six times a day. I try to impress on her that you're not worth it; but I know we shall go on

doing so until your majesty deigns to honor us with your presence. But your poor sister's spirit is not yet *quite* crushed, and she doesn't mean to wear out her best pair of shoes for nothing. So be advised in time, sir. Take the first train north, and throw yourself on the mercy of the court. Remember the cold pigs that somebody got last year.—Mr. Forward, whom you introduced to us in Scotland, has been here a good deal when he has been on leave. His father is the nicest old gentleman you ever saw. They have been awfully kind to us, and take us out in a little yacht of theirs. We went to Robin Hood's Bay in her last week; it was so jolly! Colonel Forward says that he hopes you will come in her a lot, if you do not have enough of the sea at other times.—The post is just going, so I must make this letter a short one, and say good-bye.—Your affectionate sister, MARY.

The other letter was from Parkins:

GRAND HOTEL, MONDAY, Sept. 12.

DEAR RIMINGTON—It seems that we were entirely on the wrong scent. Our Ogilvie Whittlechurch is at present in a solicitor's office. His father and mother are both alive, and he has no first-cousins. He is going to look me up to-morrow. Come and lunch with us at one o' clock. —Yours very sincerely, JOHN PARKINS.

*P.S.*—Where the right man is remains a mystery.

Rimington had a good deal to do that forenoon, and could not help arriving rather later than the

hour which Parkins had named. He found them waiting lunch for him. It was so long since he had seen Whittlechurch, that it required some effort of memory to recall his appearance; but this made he fancied that in the young man before him he could still trace some resemblance to the little fellow he had known so long ago at school.

Lunch was served in the dining-room, and afterwards they retired to Parkins' sitting-room for cigars and coffee. During lunch the conversation had been chiefly about Parkins' adventure at Wangtsing, and now it again drifted back to the same topic.

"Well," said Parkins, "this shall be a warning to me never again to confuse probability with certainty. That there should be another Whittlechurch in the world was only likely; but that there should be another Ogilvie Whittlechurch of about your age, not a relation, I thought impossible."

"But I have suspected his existence for a long time," quietly put in the young solicitor.

"You have!" exclaimed at once both Rimington and Parkins.

"Yes. Don't you remember that when I was kicked out of Olswick, old Layiton said that he had seen my name cut on one of the apple trees I was supposed to have robbed."

"But hadn't you been there?" asked Parkins.

"No, I had not; and to this day I remember my indignation when the doctor refused to believe me. The question then arises: how did the name get there? And to this question there are only two possible answers. Either one of the fellows at school owed me a grudge, and carved

it; or else some one of the same name had been in that very orchard the same afternoon. A cynic would say that the first answer was the more likely; but I prefer to believe the second."

"There are blackguards everywhere," said Rimington. "But if a fellow did carve your name, and then allowed you to be expelled without saying a word, he must have been a very black sheep indeed. Why, a fellow who could do a thing like that as a youngster, would have murdered a man or robbed a bank before he was twenty. Under ordinary circumstances, however, I should be inclined to accept the first theory. That there should be another fellow of your name, and that that fellow should have been at a certain place at a certain time, is too much to assume. But now the case is altered. We know for a certainty that there is, or, at any rate, that there was, another Ogilvie Whittlechurch. Is it, then, more likely that this individual was at a certain place at a certain time, or that one of the Olswick fellows was, for his age, one of the most utter sneaks and blackguards that ever stepped?—What do you say, Parkins?"

"I won't venture an opinion; but what I will do is to write to Pryer the detective, who is employed about this; and it will be for him to decide whether the trace is worth following up."

After some further conversation, Rimington and Whittlechurch took leave of their host, who promised to write and inform them of anything which happened in the matter.

From the *Grand Hotel* in Northumberland Avenue to Gatti's café at Charing Cross is not

five minutes' walk; yet, while Parkins and his friends were still sitting over their coffee at the former establishment, Mr. Pedro Bersaño, at the latter, was waiting for Charles Miller, able seaman, who was to meet him there at three o'clock. Thus does chance delight in 'impossible' coincidences. While, however, Parkins, Rimington and Whittlechurch were quite disinterested parties, actuated solely by a not unnatural desire to follow to its conclusion, and, if possible, facilitate the unravelling of a mystery which had been so remarkably thrust under their notice, Mr. Bersaño, on the contrary, had, as we know, a very considerable personal interest in the question. Miller also was bent on business, inasmuch as he had no intention of giving his information for nothing.

"Gatti's" is something of a compromise between an English refreshment bar and a continental café. In shape it is long and somewhat narrow, its greater dimension being parallel to Villiers Street. Entering at the end nearest to the river, there is a door on the left leading into the restaurant. Then comes the bar, which extends about half the length of the room. On a level with the upper end of the bar there is a sort of semi-partition, which more or less divides the room into two parts. Above this, again, is the door which leads to the ladies' cloak-room on the left. Behind the bar, two Hebes are in attendance; and an Italian waiter looks to the wants of those visitors who prefer to patronize the numerous little marble tables which are scattered, in true Neapolitan style, about the apartment.

When Mr. Bersaño arrived, it wanted ten min-

utes to three, and the café was absolutely deserted. He called for a tankard of *lager*, and sat down at a table opposite the bar. He had not long to wait. At about five minutes to three, Miller entered by the upper door, glanced round, and then accosted him: "Are you Mr. Bersaño?"

"I am.—And you, I presume, are Mr. Miller?—Come over here." So saying, he led the way to the farther corner of the room, where they would be out of hearing of any stray customers.

"Now, what is your business?"

"I'm thirsty."

"Porter?"

"To begin with."

The porter was brought and paid for, then Bersaño continued: "You say that you have information of great importance to me. What is it?"

"'Tain't nothing to be given away."

"Indeed! And may I ask the reserve price?"

"A hundred pounds."

"You are drunk."

"And yet, I don't speak so extraordinary thick. There's others will give me just as much for it."

"Others will give you just as much, will they? In what way does your information concern me?"

"'Twouldn't do you any 'arm if a certain Ogilvie Whittlechurch was found, by any chance, would it, mister?"

Cool and sharp-witted as he was, Bersaño could not help an involuntary start at this sentence. The man evidently did know something, and he had not come on a fool's errand, after all. Instantly recovering himself, he replied: "True;

it will be slightly to my advantage if they fail to find him."

"It would make you a millionaire?"

"Well, not quite; but I have yet to learn in what way you can be of service to me in the matter. So far you have told me nothing that I did not know already."

For reply, the other tapped his tankard.

"More porter?"

"Rum.—Ah! that's more warmin'. 'Ere's at yer, mister."

"Well?"

"I can give yer the whereabouts of this chap for a hundred quid; and if yer don't like that—well, I'll give 'im the straight tip about the will."

"I conclude, however, that he knows his own name, and will be fast enough to answer when they advertise for him."

"Young men don't read the papers—leastways, not carefully—and there ain't nobody but an old bloke to point it out. You see, 'e don't call 'imself Ogilvie Whittlechurch."

"Well, I accept your terms. When I have your information, I will give you a hundred pound."

"Yes?—I don't think. We'll put it t'other way, please. You shell out the shiners—then I'll spin the yarn."

"As you will. But I don't carry the Bank of England about with me, so you must come to my rooms."

Both men were now in earnest. As soon as they were safely in one of Bersaño's rooms, he produced without further haggling a cash-box, from which he took fifty sovereigns and five ten-

pound Bank of England notes, and handed them to Miller.

The latter then proceeded to give his information, which he did faithfully and fully and without omitting a single detail; and explained also how the story of the will, and Bersaño's address, had come to his ears.

The other had grasped the situation before he had half finished, and was busy maturing a scheme of action while he listened. A shrewd unscrupulous cosmopolitan, familiar with the ways and customs of every state in Europe and America, he knew that England was the worst, from his point of view, in which this could have happened. In France, Germany, or the United States of America, his course would have been simple. He would have introduced himself to Forward under an assumed name, picked a quarrel with him, and shot him. In other parts of America, a hundred dollars would have paid for a few inches of steel, which would have done the business with even less trouble. But in England—in England, one has to be discreet in these little matters. However, something must be done.

When Miller had finished, he was rising to go.

"Stay," said the other, looking at him fixedly. "You have been of great service to me, but you can be of greater service still."

"'Ow's that?"

"You say that he lives at Whitby?"

"Yes."

"The cliffs are high on that coast?"

"Yes."

"And overhanging?"

"In some places.—Why?"

"Merely curiosity. But you must be thirsty. I have some excellent brandy in the cupboard here; will you try a glass?"

Miller nodded.

"Water?"

"No."

"I see you appreciate it.—Have another?" And without waiting for a reply, he refilled the glass. Then he continued: "Let's see what was it we were talking about?—Oh yes, the cliffs at Whitby—I wonder if people often fall over them?—I wish this fellow would; but of course he won't. I would give a thousand pounds to know that he had done so."

Their eyes met.

"Make it two."

"I will draw you a check for fifteen hundred, dated ten days hence. If the account of a certain dreadful accident does not appear in the papers before that date, it will be stopped."

"And if 'e ain't at Whitby?"

"Well, then he might possibly fall over a cliff somewhere else, or even into a canal—life is so uncertain."

Two days after this interview, George Rimington was able to leave London for the North, and arrived at Whitby station at about nine o'clock in the evening. It was rather more than two miles to Rose Cottage; but, feeling rather stiff and cramped after his journey, he chose to walk, notwithstanding that the night was stormy and threatened rain. In view of the latter, he took the precaution to put on a big Flushing overcoat, which was strapped up with his rug. It was a good thick coat, an old friend, which had stood

him in good stead on many a cold night-watch, and was fitted with an enormous hood, that rendered its wearer completely secure from the fury of the elements. He took a handbag with him, and left directions for the rest of his luggage to be forwarded in the morning.

It was indeed a terrible night; and the weather was rapidly becoming worse. The wind blew in sudden gusts over the cliffs from seaward, while at the foot of them the angry waves broke with a deafening roar, which promised but little mercy to any ship which, through bad seamanship or unfortunate circumstances, should be wrecked that night upon the coast. Happily, the quiet which reigned both at the lifeboat shed and the rocket-apparatus house was a sign that, as yet, at any rate, no vessel had fallen a prey to the tempest.

His thoughts as he walked turned naturally to the home he was approaching, and to his mother and Mary. Who but a sailor can appreciate that word home in its true sense? In all his wanderings, in all his hardships, the thought of it is there, shining ahead like a guiding star, a beacon of hope. Coming up Channel on a dirty night, the wind cutting him like a knife, the snow blinding him, and with every chance of a collision at any moment, he remembers that he is only a few hours off England, and the thought cheers him up. Rimington knew that they were not expecting him till the next morning, and he amused himself by thinking of their surprise when he turned up. He pictured to himself his mother, sitting in her armchair by the fire, with Mary on the rug at her feet, working or reading aloud. Then would come his knock at the door, and

they would wonder who it could be at that time of night. But their wonder would not be for long. Mary would have guessed that it must be him, and be peeping from the top of the stairs when the maid let him in. Then what a kissing and hugging and asking of questions! How he would enjoy his supper that evening, and his pipe after it, sitting with his mother and sister by the fire. He was now nearly there; and just as he arrived at the little iron gate leading into the garden, he was rather surprised to hear, during a temporary lull, the sounds of a piano, and—yes, there was no doubt about it—a man's voice singing to its accompaniment. Who on earth could it be? He remained listening for a few seconds with the gate open, and was just going to reclose it after him, when, as he turned to do so, his attention was drawn to the figure of a man standing a little way off in the path along which he had just come. There would have been nothing very strange in this, but that he had happened to notice on his way that he was the only individual on the cliff.

"Some one who has walked across the common, I suppose," he thought, "to see whether there is a wreck, and get a blow through."

Just then, however, to his intense astonishment, he saw the man deliberately lie down on the ground. "By Jove!" he thought, "the fellow's in liquor. I can't leave him there, or he'll either die where he lies before morning, or else wake up and fall over the cliff." So, hastily reclosing the gate, he started forth, like a good Samaritan, to rescue the unfortunate wight from his perilous position.

## CHAPTER V.

BEFORE Rimington had gone many yards in the direction of the cliff the moon became obscured; but he was able to make pretty straight for where he had seen the man lie down. In a few minutes he espied him, lying like a log, a few paces on his right. He advanced, and was just stooping down to shake him to his senses, when the seeming inebriate jumped up, and, springing at him with all his force, endeavored to throw him over the cliff.

On occasions like this, ideas rush through the brain with lightning-like rapidity, time, indeed, being almost a negligible quantity. But, though the thinking powers are at a maximum, the capacity for putting the thoughts into practice and profiting by the conclusions arrived at, becomes almost nil. The brain, so to speak, divides from the nerves, which, since they can no longer keep pace with it, it leaves behind, and rushing on through, it may be, an analysis of the circumstances, it may be a retrospect of previous events, leaves to the inferior organs, backed up by a sort of instinct, the practical task of saving the whole. Sooner or later, however, the normal condition of affairs is resumed, and all the faculties, mental and physical, act once more in unison. The time it takes for this to happen varies with the individual. It seldom exceeds a second or two, and its length may be said to be more or less a gauge of his practical character and fitness for respon-

sibility. In plain English, it is nothing more or less than the time he takes to regain his presonce of mind

With Rimington, accustomed and trained to act promptly in emergencies, that time was almost inappreciable; but short as it was, it had sufficed for him to recognize Miller, able seaman in the *Maharanee*, to speculate on his motives, and come to the conclusion that he must either be the victim of a drunkard's frenzy or of mistaken identity. Soon, however, these speculations ceased, and all his energies were enlisted in the desperate struggle, on which, it seemed, depended his very life. Both men were strong, and at first the contest was fairly equal. Rimington, however, was encumbered by his thick greatcoat, and this told on him more every second. He felt that he was being slowly but surely forced nearer the edge of the cliff. So far, the struggle had been carried on in silence; now he shouted for help. With an oath, his opponent tried to put his hand over his mouth, and, in so doing, partially threw back his hood. Just before, he had been gathering himself together for a final throw; but when he saw Rimington's features, he suddenly started back, paused a second, and then saying, "Great God! it's Mr Rimington," made off at the top of his speed.

"Hi! Stop him! help!' cried Rimington, giving chase, for he had no mind to let him off so easily.

"Hullo! What is it?" cried a voice from the direction of Rose Cottage.

It was that of a young man, who, seeing how things were, ran to cut off the fugitive. He judged his direction well, and at first it looked as if, between the two, Miller would be secured.

The latter, however, had a good start of the stranger, and was greatly assisted by the darkness of the night. He was also a good runner, so that, although the chances seemed against him at first, he managed to give both his pursuers the slip.

The latter now turned to speak to each other. "Hullo! Rimington," cried Forward; "I'm awfully glad to see you back.—But what on earth has been happening?"

"That's more than I can tell you," replied the other. "At least, if I can tell you what has been happening, I certainly can't imagine why it has happened. I walked home from the station; and just as I got to the door, I saw a man—tipsy, as I thought—close to the edge of the cliff. I went to see what I could do for him; but I soon found that the obligation was more likely to be on other side—he very nearly did for me."

"How?"

"Simply enough. He tried to throw me over the cliff. Indeed, I thought he would have done it, too; but luckily for me, just as I thought that it was all up, my hood got shoved aside, and he recognized me, started back as if he had been shot, and ran away. So here I am, all over mud, and very glad that it's no worse."

"You say that he recognized you. Do you know the man, then?"

"Yes, I do; and that is the strangest part of it all. He was a seaman in the *Maharanee*, a man called Miller."

"Charles Miller?"

"Yes.—Why, do *you* know him!"

"I do know something of him, and what made me ask was that I thought I recognized him as he

was running across the common.—What are you going to do now?—Inform the police?"

"Well, I really scarcely know. It all seems so incomprehensible. He evidently did not wish to murder me—that is, when he saw who I was —because he could not have had a better chance. I can hardly believe that the man goes in for highway robbery. He certainly never tried to take my watch. But I suppose that the best plan will be to inform the police, as you suggest."

"Approved," replied Forward, "with one amendment. I am going home, and the police station is on my way, so I'll look out for that. You go straight home."

"It's very good of you.—Thanks, very much."

"Not the least trouble in the world," said Forward; "good-night. There is something I want to tell you; but this business ought to be done as soon as possible; and I think that Mrs. Rimington will tell you all about it to-morrow morning; so I won't stay.—Good-night again."

"Good-night."

The next morning, when he came down, Rimington found his mother awaiting him, but not Mary. "Why, mother," he said, "where's that sister of mine? I thought that she was an early bird."

"Mary won't be long," she replied. "Perhaps she knows that I have something to talk to you about." Mrs. Rimington spoke seriously, and her son saw that she had something of importance to communicate.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Your friend, Ogilvie Forward, has proposed to Mary. She has accepted him, and I have

approved of her choice. He spoke to me about it yesterday morning, and Colonel Forward was here in the afternoon."

"Well, mother," he replied, as soon as he had completed a very long-drawn whistle, "you know him better than I do. Still, I have seen quite enough of Ogilvie Forward to be able to congratulate Mary from the bottom of my heart, as far as his character goes.—But what about his money?"

"Colonel Forward is very liberal about that. He has offered to buy and furnish a house here at Whitby, and is going to settle twenty thousand pounds on them, in addition to Ogilvie's present allowance, on the day that they are married. It might not be thought very much by some people; but our Mary's husband will be better off in this world's goods than her mother was; and if she loves him, and he will make her a good husband, what should we have to say against it?"

"It is hard to lose Mary, mother; but, as you say, it is her happiness, not ours, that we must care about.—What did you tell Ogilvie?"

"I gave him my consent, and I answered for yours. There was something else which he asked me to tell you; Mary, of course, knows it too. He is not really Colonel Forward's son. Who he really is, who his parents were, he does not know. The Colonel adopted him from a workhouse in the south of England. Of course, it was right of him to tell us; but at the same time we know him and like him for himself, and I told him that it could make no possible difference."

"No, mother; certainly not," replied her son. Then he added, as if struck by a sudden thought: "Did he tell you what his name was originally?"

"No, dear.—Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I had an idea; but it is much too improbable to be worth consideration. I suppose, though, that his Christian name is the same as it was before.—But never mind; here comes Mary.—Now, my lady, aren't you ashamed of yourself? Yes; it's no good blushing. Mother's been telling me what you do when I'm at sea. Who is going to fill my pipe in future, I should like to know? However, I suppose that you want to be congratulated; and, on the whole, I think I'll do so.—Now, go and make the tea."

After breakfast, Rimington announced his intention of going to look up Forward. When he arrived at Colonel Forward's house, the bell was answered by Ogilvie himself, but looking so strangely disarranged and wild, that he could not help asking him if anything was the matter.

"Yes; something is the matter," he replied, "and it has made me the unhappiest of men.—But come in, and let me tell you about it."

Old Colonel Forward was seated at the breakfast-table, from which the remains of that meal had not been cleared away. Rising as Rimington entered, he shook him by the hand, saying at the same time: "I suppose that Ogilvie has already told you about our misfortune? Poor boy, it is hard for him to bear. For myself, it does not matter; but for your sister and him it is hard, very hard."

"No, sir," replied Rimington; "I don't know what your trouble is; but it must be very great to affect you thus."

"This, then, will tell you," said the old man, putting into his hand a business-looking letter which lay upon the table. It was the announcement of the failure of a Mining Company.

Rimington read it through, and then put it down and looked at the colonel for further information.

"My whole fortune was in that undertaking," he said simply: "and now my son and I are penniless."

"And now," said Ogilvie, "you know why I am the unhappiest man in the world. Yesterday, I would not have called the Tzar my uncle. Now —what is there left for me to do but to tell your sister that I have not enough to offer her a meal, let alone a roof to——"

"But, Forward, you don't think that Mary, you cannot think that she——"

"That she would turn me away if I came to her a beggar in rags? No; God forbid! But in honor I cannot now ask her to be my wife. You don't understand how I am placed. It's not as if I had a couple of hundred, or even one hundred a year left. Then, with my pay, we could live in India, a soldier and his wife; and my father would come too. That was my one hope when first this cursed letter came. But we shall not have a farthing—literally, not a farthing—except this house and the clothes we stand in. I must leave the army.—But she will wait," he added passionately. "Say, as her brother, that I may ask her to wait. My father and I are going out to Australia and I will work as never man worked yet to make a home for him and her.—It can gain nothing to put off telling her; I will go at once."

"Wait a minute," cried Rimington, as Ogilvie was leaving the room. "I can't tell what, but something says that there is yet hope. It is a very small chance; but the thought of it crossed

my mind this morning, and I can't help thinking of it.—You were not always called Forward. What was your name before?"

"Whittlechurch."

Without saying a word, Rimington burst out laughing. It was now Ogilvie's turn to look surprised.

"Why, man, you are a millionaire! There is a fortune waiting for you."

"What?"

"I mean exactly what I say. There is a fortune waiting for Ogilvie Whittlechurch, and there are detectives scouring the country to find him—to find you."

At this moment there was a ring at the bell, and the maid brought in a card: "Mr. J. PRYER, Detective Department, Scotland Yard," At the bottom was written in pencil; "To speak with Captain Forward on important business."

"Why, here's the very man?" cried Rimington, laughing. "He already looks on you as a millionaire, and shows it by giving you brevet rank.—Well, I'm off, and shall expect you at Rose Cottage in an hour's time at the latest, holding your head up with all the dignity of your new-found thousands."

His first visit was to the police station, where some very startling news awaited him. Miller's body had been picked up at the foot of the cliffs, just under a well-known dangerous place, about half a mile from where the struggle took place. He must have doubled, to throw his pursuers off the track, and then, venturing too close, without a sufficient knowledge of the neighborhood, have slipped and fallen. But the strangest part was yet to come. On the body had been found a

check for the extraordinarily large sum of fifteen hundred pounds, signed Pedro Bersaño.

Then Rimington understood what had happened. He asked to speak to the chief inspector, who happened to be then at the station. They had a long talk in private, of which it is only necessary to give the last few words. "So, taking it all together, sir, I don't think there is any case," said the inspector. "I suppose that the gentleman's death would be no advantage to this Bersaño now?'

"No."

"Then, sir, I think that the best thing to do will be to leave matters as they are. You see you have no proof, and the man is out of the country by now. If the sailor had actually attacked your friend, the case would be weak enough; but as it stands, I call it hopeless."

Rimington thanked the inspector and walked home.

His mother was sitting in the garden. He could see Ogilvie and his sister walking together by the sea.

"Georgie," said Mrs. Rimingtom, "how long shall you have ashore?"

"Nearly three months."

"I thought so; and that was why we've just settled that the marriage shall take place towards the end of November." lively

THE END.

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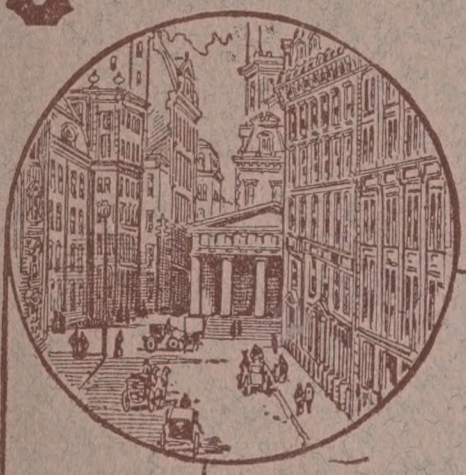

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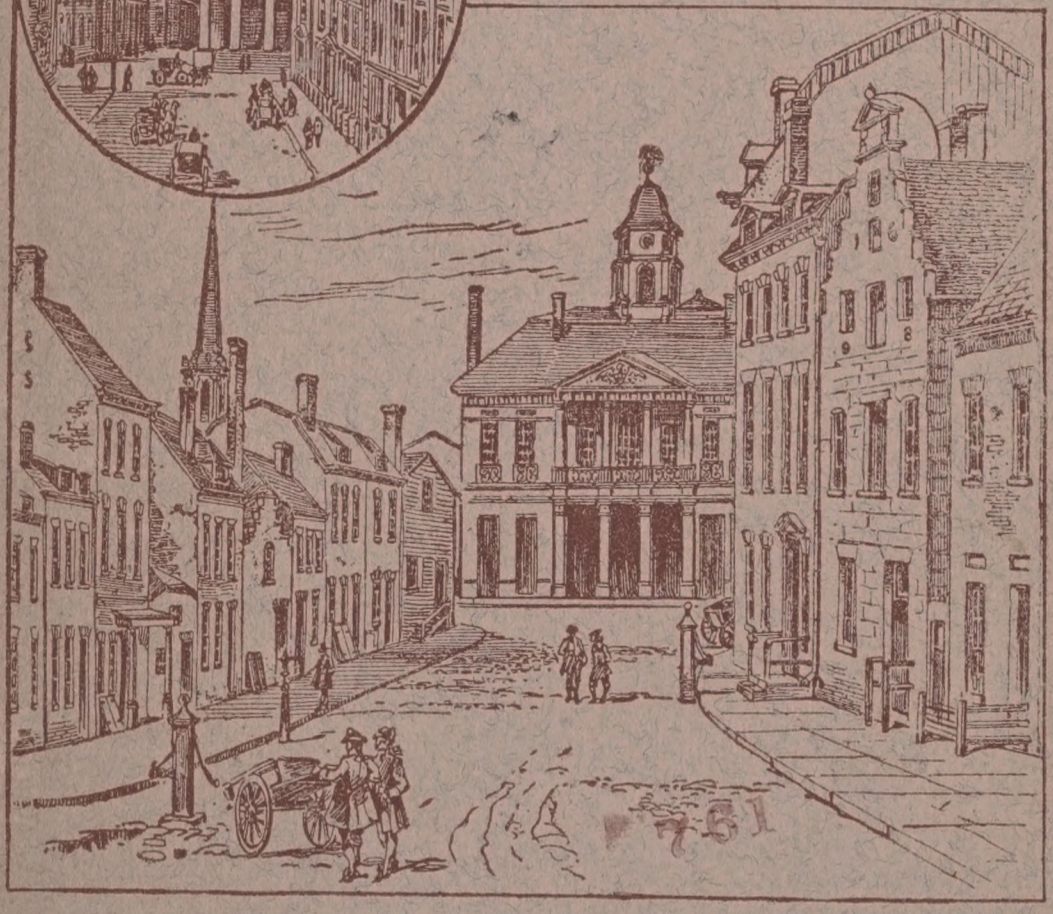

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