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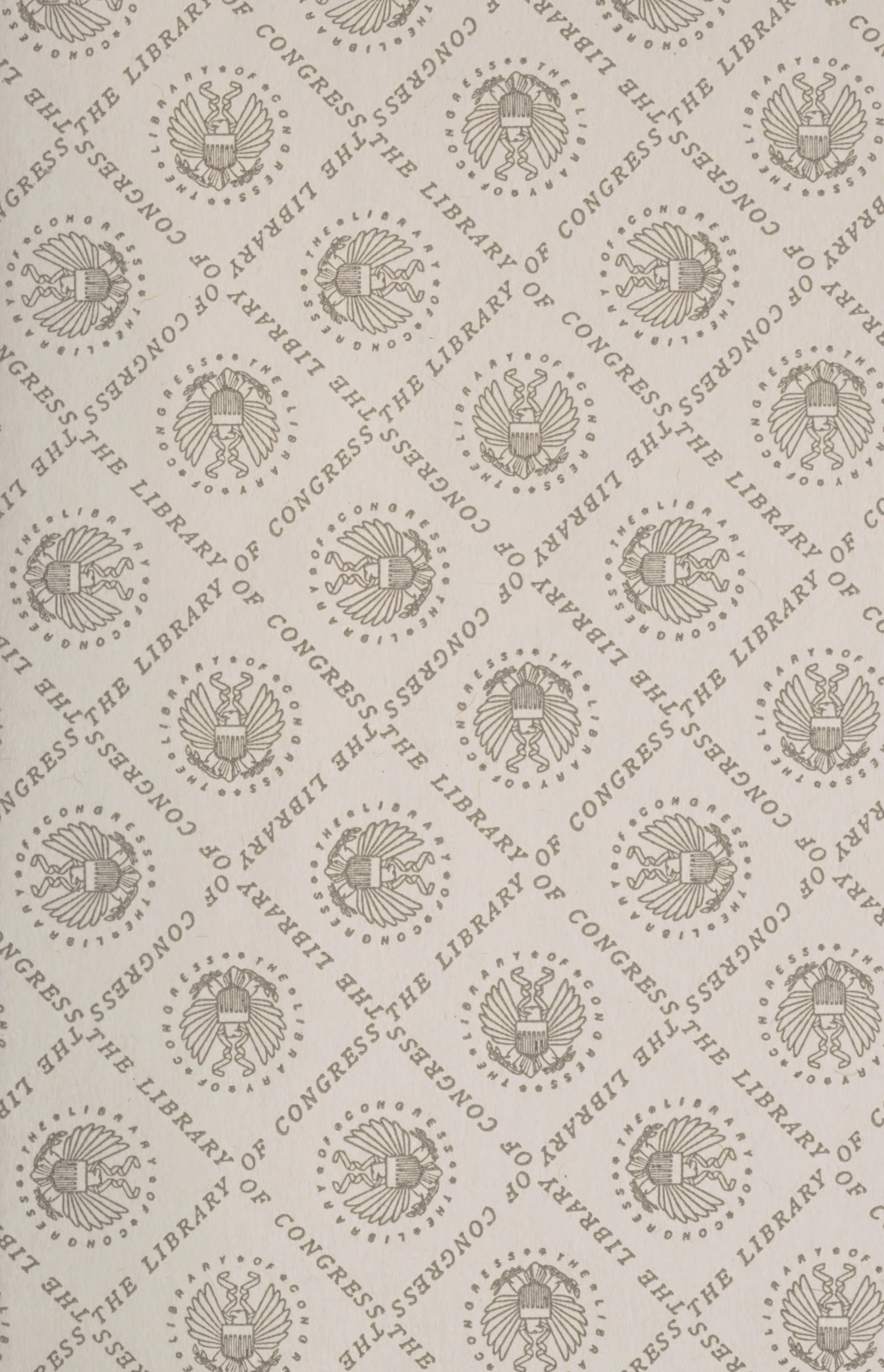
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MISS EYON OF EYON COURT

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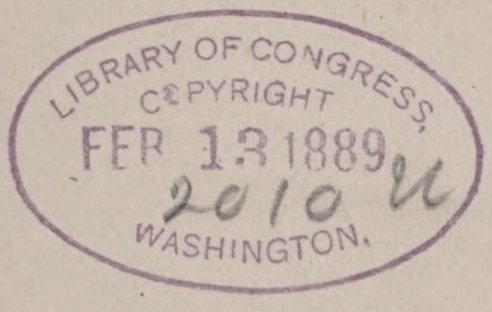
By KATHARINE S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF "PATTY," "AT THE RED GLOVE," "IN THE SWEET SPRINGTIME," ETC., ETC.



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MISS EYON OF EYON COURT.

CHAPTER I.

MARJORIE.

Miss Eyon had always lived at Eyon Court. Since her brother John died she had reigned as undisputed governor of Eyon Court and all that appertained to it. Down in Wenburn, the little gray village that lies on the hillside far below the gaunt Manor house, it was said that the property was very large and that Miss Eyon had no power to will it away. She was only a life tenant, everything, including the house and all the personal property, would go to a young girl, her great-niece Marjorie, the daughter of a man who had shamed his people, the Eyons, of Eyon Court, by marrying a mere pretty face, a girl without a penny, a poor country parson's daughter.

To-day, the weather being gloomy and lowering enough for November, though it was only September, the Wenburn gossips had assembled earlier than usual at the Bladebone, and while they stood before the bar window, each waiting for his mugful of ale, this one subject of the aunt and the niece was on every tongue—that

is to say, on every tongue that wagged; about four mouths were seldom closed; the other gossips listened and swallowed their thin ale.

On a stone seat outside the inn two men sat smoking long clay pipes. The pipes kept them silent, and a succession of blue wreaths of smoke had formed a veil, through which a shaggy red beard in the one case, and in the other a glowing crimson nose, could alone be accurately distinguished.

"She be comin'," said red-beard at last.

His companion bent his head on one side and listened, He was a trifle deaf, but even a deafer man could have distinctly heard the grating of wheels as they climbed the hill below the village.

"Woonkers—" the red-nosed man was speaking now, "Ah would like to see t' meetin' atwixt t' old maid an' t'young lass, nobbut t'will be cat an' dog life atween 'em."

The red-bearded man took his pipe from his mouth and held it between his fingers. He contemplated his companion with surprise, and also with some contempt.

"You roam from place to place, Tobias, till you forgits t'powers that be. Man, Muss Eyon is t'queen in this part of Yoredale, let alone other places, so now ye know."

Tobias closed his huge fist, then opened it, and flung his hand outwards with scorn.

"Mah sakes," he said, "Ah may roam, but Ah be a free man; Ah hev no customers to trim mah sails fur! Likes o' you, Muster Butterman, mun shape their tongues to please their betters. Poor deevils."

Mr. Luke White, who sold butter and all nccessary articles at the one shop in Wenburn, at this scoff turned so red that his face and beard and eyebrows seemed ablaze together ; but he did not answer.

A postchaise with two tired horses came up at the moment, and stopped before the Bladebone. Before the postboy could make inquiry, a girl's face looked out of the carriage window.

Tobias muttered an exclamation, but Luke White stood up and raised his hat.

"Go on as fast as you can," the girl's young voice said to the postboys ; "that is Eyon Court, the gray house upon the hill in front."

She drew in her head, and the carriage drove on.

Several of the mug drainers had come out, and now there was a noisy chorus of praise about the lass's beauty.

"Woonkers," said Tobias, "there will be a pair o' queens oop at t' Court.

Luke White shook his head and muttered something in his teeth that had a sound of dissent.

Meanwhile the younger Miss Eyon, or Marjorie, as the gossips at the Bladebone called her, was looking out at the scenery while the carriage climbed the steep ascent. The slow rate of the horses gave her plenty of time to observe that the carriage road was terraced up the left side of the ridge which shut in this side of Yoredale. Far below on her right was the broad dashing river, fuller than usual ; so much rain had fallen early in the month that instead of being partly cumbered by gray stone heaps, the water flowed briskly, churning yellow foam

against its stony banks and also against any obstacle that came in its way. On the farther side of the river the hills rose almost straight above it, and did not form an unbroken ridge like their opposite neighbors. Detached giants rose up with huge square-capped heads, while taller, more distant peaks, peeped over the shoulders of their dark brethren. There were few trees and little grass on the brown hills in the foreground, and Marjorie thought they made a drear and savage picture. Now and then a gorge showed between two of them, and in this she could make out a slender thread of silver as it glinted down to the river, shaded by trees overhead.

"There may be beauty in those little glens," the girl thought; "but I did not think a place could look so dreary at this time of the year."

She turned quickly; the chaise began to jolt, as if its back and front meant to part company. The mountain ridge on her right curved forward towards the river, and made a seeming barrier some way in front; on the spur of this, thirty feet or so above, but directly facing her, stood a sombre-looking house, which she knew must be Eyon Court.

The carriage was jolting across a little stone-cumbered stream which ran past the gates of the Manor House on its way to the Yore.

The postilion shrugged his shoulders when he got down to open the gates. There was no lodge in sight, and the drive inside the gates was almost as rough as the road had been. Another quarter of an hour passed at a crawling pace in semi-darkness, for the trees grew thickly

on each side, and then Marjorie saw in the gloom a heavy stone portico supported on pillars ; a faint light flickered in the pitch-like darkness within.

The carriage door was opened, a tall woman let down the steps, and held out a large hand to help the visitor.

"Follow me, ma'am," she said, "the man must wait——"

Marjorie was ready to say she would pay the man and dismiss him, but the woman had turned in at the dark doorway, and the girl felt she must follow her.

She saw that she was in a large hall, only lighted by a candle which her guide took up from the table.

"Ye'll come this way, ma'am," she said.

Marjorie could make out that she was going up-stairs. The girl put out her hand and felt the way ; but in a few moments her guide stretched a long arm across the balusters, and the cheerful light of a hanging lamp shone out over the hall and the broad staircase. Marjorie looked instinctively to see her guide's face, but she could only see a straight pair of broad shoulders, as the woman went briskly upstairs.

There was an open archway on the landing, and instead of following the staircase the tall woman passed into a long gallery beyond the archway, and went on till she reached a dark baize door on the right, at the end of the gallery. This gallery was feebly lighted, but Marjorie saw that stags' horns here and there projected from the dark walls.

Her guide opened this baize door, and then another door within.

"You are to go in, ma'am," she said.

Marjorie went in, and the door closed behind her.

She felt sure this was her Aunt's room, and she had resolved not to be shy with her.

Miss Eyon's letter of invitation had been cold enough, but Marjorie decided that she would go and live with her and make the best of things. She had the right of choice in the matter, and this had been explained to her by the lawyer before she left the house of her governess, Mrs. Locker.

Marjorie had always been a favorite, and she expected to please her guardian also, but this gloomy reception had startled her. She looked scared as she came out from behind the screen that masked the door and found herself face to face with her great-aunt.

The room was not very large, and it looked smaller from the dark oak panelling that reached from floor to ceiling. A silver lamp stood on the mantel shelf, and this was deeply shaded so that its light was concentrated on the figure seated in a high-backed wooden chair just below. A tall upright figure in a gown of stiff black silk, not high to the throat, but cut open in a point half-way to the waist, the opening filled in with crossing folds of soft white muslin fastened just below the chin with a small diamond brooch. What a chin it was, square and pale—there was no trace of color on it or on the rest of the face, not even on the high cheek bones. Pale brown threads showed in the bands of gray hair just peeping out beneath Miss Eyon's white muslin cap—this seemed fastened to her head by its broad band of dove-colored ribbon, for

she wore no cap-strings to hide her withered throat; only her eyes small and blue, showed that she was a living woman, as she fixed them on the startled girl.

Marjorie could hardly breathe, she had no power to look away, those eyes seemed to pierce through her feeble show of courage, and to read everything she really felt. A curious smile shortened Miss Eyon's long upper lip, and showed how colorless and compressed its fellow was.

"Good evening, Marjorie." It seemed as if an automaton had spoken—the voice was so lifeless—and yet the girl felt in it a rebuke for her want of self-possession. "Why do you stand in the back-ground like a child," it seemed to say, "instead of coming forward to greet me."

Marjorie went forward mechanically.

"Good evening, Aunt." She was going nearer to kiss the still face, when Miss Eyon held out her hand across her writing table.

"You are welcome," she said, "that will do. I am no kisser, Marjorie. We shall be better friends if you fall into my ways. Sit you down where I can see your face."

Miss Eyon sat before a leather-topped writing table; it had a double row of pigeon holes along the back and a little brass rail fenced in the sides. The only way of approaching her closely was from the right side of her chair, a huge fender guarded the other; and now, as if she feared a repetition of Marjorie's proffered greeting, Miss Eyon turned her back on the undefended spot. She pointed to a chair placed at the edge of the hearth rug, just in front of the fire.

Marjorie's cheeks tingled after her drive through the keen air, and she looked about for a hand screen. Once more the keen blue eyes seemed to be mocking her fruitless search.

Marjorie sat down before the blaze and submitted to her Aunt's silent scrutiny.

Miss Eyon held up a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses that hung from her neck by a black ribbon, and gazed at Marjorie without any change of expression. Then she rang a bell that stood on her writing table.

"Hannah," she said, when the woman opened the door without any noise, "Miss Marjorie will go to her room, and at seven o'clock you will bring her to the dining-parlor."

Marjorie felt inclined to dance as she followed Hannah. Instead of going back along the gallery, the woman went up three steps on the left which the girl had not previously noticed beyond the baize door. Opening another door, she led Marjorie into a much longer gallery than the first, high and narrow, with only a flickering light at its further end. Marjorie saw that this light came from a half-opened door. Hannah silently held the door open for her, and she passed into her bedroom. A cheerful fire in a good-sized grate, and a pair of lighted candles on a muslin-covered toilet table, gave at first sight a cheerful aspect to the room; a gloomy-looking mirror in a black frame, and beside it a huge dark wardrobe, damped Marjorie's joy at her escape from investigations. She shivered a little. Still, it was a relief to see on the further side of the room a modern brass bedstead without hangings and some ordinary bedroom chairs.

"Ah'll fetch you when dinner's served." Hannah looked hard at her, and Marjorie was able for the first time to see her guide's face. It was thin, and not in any way remarkable. A long nose and a pair of dark, sunken eyes, gave a look of shrewdness, but Marjorie's attention was chiefly caught by the long-armed, angular figure, and its stiff movements.

"Can't you stay, Hannah?" the girl said. "I want you to unpack my trunk, please."

"Then Ah must have your keys, ma'am."

The voice was not unmusical, but Marjorie thought the woman was staying against her will.

Hannah went down on her knees before the trunk and began to remove the paper wrappings; she gave a suppressed grunt at the sight of two dainty evening gowns that lay at the top of the trunk.

Marjorie was taking the things out of her bag.

"Don't you like my gowns, Hannah? I thought you would admire them."

"They're well enough, ma'am, no doubt; but I donnut understand such fripperies, I was thinkin' o' t' waste. You'll find no use for them at Eyon Court, ma'am."

The girl laughed so heartily that Hannah shook her head and frowned.

"Now, Hannah, I have always heard that Aunt Louisa was a beauty. I am sure she used to wear smart gowns when she was young, and she'll like to see me in them —of course she will. I shall never be a beauty, but for all that I shall make myself look as nice as possible." She looked very winning as she said this.

"My mistress always wears black, ma'am"—

"Of course, and very proper, too. If old women only knew how gay colors jar with their faded skins they would always wear black or white. Tell me, I want to know whether my great-aunt was not very handsome. It is so strange she has never married."

Hannah had been unpacking and placing various articles on the trays of the wardrobe. She turned round a reproving face.

'Miss Eyon is my mistress, ma'am."

"Well, but I'm not asking you to tell any tales," you old goose, Marjorie said to herself, "I am sure she must have been very handsome from what I've heard."

Hannah gave a quick look of inquiry, and then became graver than before. "Is there not a picture of her somewhere?" the girl went on, "there surely must be. Ah, well, I shall explore the house to-morrow, and then I shall find out."

"There is a picture of Miss Eyon," Hannah spoke slowly, "but you would not find it yoursel', ma'am; it lies in t'barred room, and that is in t'next gallery. Ah'll mebbe show it ye, ma'am, one day."

She went away hurriedly. While the girl was dressing she thought over Hannah's words. "Another gallery, is there. I suppose the house is square. Well, I shall see to-morrow."

When she was ready she looked at her watch—only half-past six. Another box which held her books and her other possessions had not been brought to her room;

there was not so much as a print hanging against the walls which she could fill up time by looking at. Marjorie felt unwilling to go back to her aunt, and the old lady evidently did not want her till dinner-time, but the novelty of everything, and the stir which this important change in her life had caused, made the girl feel too excited to sit still and wait for Hannah's return.

"I might as well find the 'barred room,' as she calls it, and see the picture; there can't be any ghosts about yet."

Her dark blue eyes were dancing with mischief, as she took up one of the candles from the dressing-table.

CHAPTER II.

THE BARRED ROOM.

MARJORIE looked up and down the passage outside her room. There were three doors on the opposite side, and at the end, close by, was a larger door. She tried this. It was fastened, but the key was in the lock ; it turned easily, and led, as Majorie expected it would, into another long passage at right angles with the gallery she had left. There was a close misty atmosphere here, and yet the girl fancied the air felt warmer.

She passed two doors on her right, on the left was a blank wall. Beyond the doors she saw something dark, and as she came up to it she saw that it was a dark green curtain.

She found herself shivering. "Nonsense, what is there to be afraid of ; I am too absurd ; I believe this is the barred room."

She drew aside the curtain, the rings caught one in another, and as she put up her hand to help them something fell on the ground. Marjorie held down her candle and its light fell on a key that had evidently hung above the door behind the curtain. She put the key into the keyhole and opened the door. The room seemed to be full of dust, but how large it was. When she held her candle above her head the girl saw there were two uncurtained

windows, and across these from top to bottom were thick iron bars, set so near that even a child could not have squeezed between them. The close atmosphere increased the likeness to a prison.

"Will Aunt Louisa shut me up here, I wonder, when I'm naughty." Marjorie laughed, but it seemed to her strange and uncanny that there should be such a place in the house.

The walls were panelled with dark wood like those in her aunt's study, and there was some heavy dark furniture.

Marjorie shivered at the sight of a gaunt four-post bedstead shrouded in brown holland till it looked enormous. There was one picture over the high mantel-shelf and the girl gazed at it attentively. Could this be meant for her aunt? It was difficult to believe that this lovely, happy face could be a portrait of Miss Eyon.

"What trials she must have gone through," the girl thought, "to bring that hard look she has now," and yet as she continued to gaze at the bright young face a likeness revealed itself. There was the firm chin, but it looked round instead of square on the canvas, there was that keen searching expression in the blue eyes which had so troubled Marjorie. The mouth was a puzzle. Instead of the pale compressed lips which had looked so scornful, this mouth was full of love and feeling; the rosy lips curved as if to speak tender words, and one fair upraised hand seemed to be wafting a kiss.

"She must have been very beautiful," Marjorie said pensively. "I dare say I shall get to like her."

A sharp sound broke into the stillness; Marjorie started

and cried out, and then in breathless terror she fled out of the room, locked the door behind her, and pulled the curtain across it. This made a current in the still air, and out went her candle. She had to grope her way along the passage, helped by patches of dim gray light high up in the blank wall. She gave an exclamation of relief when she came out into her own gallery and locked the door of communication.

"Thank goodness," she said, and then turning she cried out again at the sight of a tall figure standing in her doorway.

"Dear heart," said Hannah, "and where may you have been, ma'am?"

"Oh, how you startled me, Hannah, but I had got a fright, so I suppose I was upset. I have been to your barred room, and I have seen my aunt's picture. She a beauty, Hannah, and I'm sure she must have been greatly admired.

Hannah held her head up stiffly, but she was silent.

Marjorie crossed to the table and looked at her watch.

"It wants a whole quarter to seven, and you have plenty of time. Were you here when my aunt was engaged? I know some one whose mother knew Aunt Louisa. I believe every one knows that she was engaged to be married.

"I do not say nay, ma'am.

Hannah had taken up the girl's travelling dress and was folding it ready to place in the wardrobe. Marjorie smiled.

"You had better tell me at once," she said, "I shall

not leave you in peace else. I was told that Uncle John stopped her marriage because the lover lost his money, and that Aunt Louisa never forgave her brother for doing this. I want you to tell me why she did not run away with her lover—I should."

"Ma'am—Miss Marjorie, we do not talk of such like things at Eyon Court. Miss Eyon was ill for months after the break came, and the gentleman—well, Ah believe he took a wife—but Ah nivver heard his name since."

"What a faithless wretch, and such a beautiful creature as she must have been. Oh, dear Hannah, I am glad you told me. Poor, poor Aunt Louisa. I expect she had hated all men ever after." She sighed and stood thinking. Then, in a changed voice: "Hannah, do you mean to tell me that men are not allowed to come to Eyon Court?"

"The doctor comes, ma'am, when he's sent for, and now and again the Vicar of Wenburn, and—and there's Mr. Brown."

"Who is Mr. Brown? Is he old or young?"

"Eh, ma'am, Ah cannut rightly say. Ah might call young what to you might seem old."

"Is he good-looking?"

Hannah nodded.

"We sud be moving, ma'am. It's on the stroke of seven."

"Wait an instant. What does Mr. Brown come here for? Is he my aunt's lawyer or business man? He can't be her lover, you know."

Hannah looked at her severely.

"Miss Marjorie, will you please not talk about lovers. If you named sic a word to my mistress it would breed a quarrel wiv her. She would not keep a maid in the house an hour who had to do wiv mankind, and she would say at your years, ma'am, 'twas far too early to carry such a thought aboot ye."

I'm nineteen, Hannah, and some girls marry at seventeen."

"Do they, ma'am. I'll light you, if you please, along the passage.

Miss Eyon was sitting in the dining-room waiting for her niece. She looked pleasanter and altogether more human than she had looked on Marjorie's arrival. The extreme distaste she had felt before-hand towards this interruption of her usual routine had doubtless affected her. She considered that by the terms of her brother John's will this girl was forced on her. The family lawyer had tried to show Miss Eyon that if she pleased to make a suitable allowance the girl could be placed elsewhere; but at this suggestion she had peremptorily said that Marjorie must come to Eyon Court. It was, therefore, inexplicable, not to say superfluous, that on the girl's arrival, feelings of repugnance should manifest themselves. Till lately Miss Eyon had had a companion, who read to her and mended her gloves and dusted the books that covered two sides of the study walls. But when Miss Eyon had decided to give a home to her niece she sent away her companion. She had her own plans with regard to Marjorie, and it would be far less

difficult to execute them if she only had the girl to deal with. Suspicion is apt to come with years, and the old lady told herself that the two young women would be sure to hang together and to plot against her.

Now, as she sat awaiting her niece, she was conscious of a certain relief. Marjorie was pleasant looking, without being a beauty. She would not, therefore, be likely to attract admirers. The old lady thought her niece seemed good-natured and simple—"she will do as she is bid without any fads"—whereas Miss Eyon had feared to see a fashionable young person full of airs and graces.

A soft glimmer of cream-tinted gauze appeared when the door opened, and Miss Eyon put up her gold eyeglasses at the unwonted sight. She was obliged to own secretly that the girl looked elegant as well as pleasant in her pretty evening dress. Marjorie's light brown hair clustered thickly over her forehead; her deep blue eyes shone brightly, and her lovely neck and arms had the exquisite color and the curves which only health and youth can give.

Her aunt was seated near the fireplace, and as Marjorie went up to her, the girl tried to find a likeness to the picture in the barred room.

Miss Eyon gave her a gracious smile.

"You find pleasure in dressing up, do you, Marjorie?"

"I—I thought you would expect me to dress, Aunt."

Miss Eyon's upper lip straightened

"You can do as you choose. I keep no company, Marjorie, and, as you see, I have not what modern people call a drawing-room. This dining-parlor is for your use

except at meal times, as the study is for mine. A plainer gown would be, I think, more in keeping with Eyon Court."

"Very well, Aunt."

The smile faded out of Marjorie's face as she looked from one end to the other of the long, ill-lighted room. two huge sideboards, an enormous dining table, and a row of chairs ranged against the wall, seemed to contradict Miss Eyon's assertion about company.

Two tall, stout maids came in, one with a soup tureen and the other with plates, and Miss Eyon rose and took her place at the head of the table.

The dinner was good but heavy; everything was carved on the sideboard, and there was no delay between the dishes; but there was a gloomy solemnity about it; Marjorie felt oppressed, and she was glad when Miss Eyon rose from table.

"We will sit in the study to-night," her Aunt said. "I shall not ask you to come there every night. You will, no doubt, be glad of an evening to yourself now and then."

"Shall I?" the girl thought as she followed her aunt to the study. "I rather think on those occasions I shall invite Hannah to spend the evenings with me."

Miss Eyon went back to her great high-backed chair, and Marjorie began to look about her. She walked up to the bookcases, which reached from the floor almost to the ceiling on two sides of the room.

"Come here, child," Miss Eyon said presently, while the girl was examining the books, "I want to talk to you."

The talk Marjorie found to be a series of questions so adroitly put that the girl became interested in answering them and, before she knew what she was doing, she had revealed more of her feelings than she would have chosen to do to her seemingly indifferent listener.

"I am glad to find, Marjorie, that you have not been used to society. You will not find Eyon Court dull."

Marjorie was silent. She had already found dinner time very dull.

Her great-aunt raised her glasses to her eyes and looked at her steadily.

"No one need be dull who is not a fool," she said, in the same automatic tone with which she had greeted the girl.

There was silence after this. Marjorie wanted to resume her survey of the bookcases, but a wish not to displease, kept her in her chair, trying to think of something to say.

"Is there a pianoforte, Aunt?" she said at last.

"Yes."

"Do you like music, Aunt?"

"No. I'm going to take a nap, Marjorie."

The girl waited and waited. Soon the pale lids closed. A great sense of freedom, came to Marjorie. Those blue, all-seeing eyes were off guard at last.

She rose up noiselessly, and returned to her study of the books. But she had soon read the names on those within her reach, and they did not attract her—they seemed to be old travel books, topographical books, county histories, and the like, while above them was a

voluminous treatise on jurisprudence and a collection of dictionaries. She was afraid to mount on a chair lest she should disturb Miss Eyon's nap; she went softly to the fireplace. Several miniatures and photographs hung on the side farthest from her aunt. Among these Marjorie recognized a likeness of her father; but she could not find one of her great-uncle John, Miss Eyon's elder brother, the last master of Eyon Court.

On the other side of the fire place there was only one portrait, a photograph of a young man. The face seemed to Marjorie so very handsome that she longed for a nearer view of it. She stood in the middle of the hearthrug, and craned her neck forward, but the shadow of the lamp made the photograph indistinct.

"Go round to the other side, you will see it better."

Marjorie started and looked round. Those blue eyes were fixed on her with the look she dreaded—the look that evidently could read her thoughts as easily as it could rest on her face.

"I—I—" she began to stammer.

"There is no need to invent an excuse," Miss Eyon said coldly. "You like beauty I see. Come this side of my chair and unhook the portrait."

She smiled with so much meaning that the girl felt troubled; she was provoked too. Miss Eyon seemed to think she had caught her trespassing, whereas it was quite natural that she should look about her.

She did as she was bid, however, and took down the portrait. Miss Eyon smiled to herself. She saw that Marjorie was neither deceitful nor untruthful, for she did

not as much as glance at her aunt before she fixed her eyes on the portrait she now held in her hand—evidently she was not accustomed to be watched.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

Marjorie hesitated.

"Is he—is this gentleman. a great friend of yours, Aunt?"

"I know him," she turned her face away. "Why do you ask that, child?"

"Because something in him puzzles me. When I looked at him from the other side I thought his face beautiful; I don't like it half so well now I see it closer."

"Why?"

"I think it is something in the mouth." She put her finger over the lower part of the face; "No, it is in the eyes; I believe it is in both," she said, after another experiment. "It is a cruel look, cruel and greedy; and yet the face is so handsome."

No answer came, and she looked at her aunt.

Miss Eyon had again closed her eyes; her face was death-like in its rigidity.

In her alarm Marjorie thought a fit had seized her, and she hurried to the bell-rope. Before she reached it her aunt spoke.

"May I ask what you are about to do?" and as the girl looked it seemed to her that Miss Eyon's eyes gleamed with anger.

"Cruel and greedy, eh?" she said. "Well, youth is always hard in judgment, and a photograph is apt to mislead; in your place, Marjorie, I would wait and judge

by what I see, and if you judge beforehand you may take up a foolish prejudice and be sorry for it later. You are sure to see this gentleman while you are at Eyon Court."

Marjorie looked again at the handsome face.

"It is certainly very good-looking, and I seem to have seen it before, she said, slowly. "I wonder if I can have seen this Mr.— what is his name, Aunt?"

"Mr. Brown. Now ring the bell, child; I am tired and you must be tired after your journey. We keep early hours at Eyon Court."

Marjorie rang.

"Aunt"—she had been longing to ask this question—"you know some one I know, I fancy?"

"She thought that there was a slight change in her aunt's expression.

"Really," she said, so indifferently, that the girl had scarcely courage to go on.

"Yes, Aunt, Sir George Wolff." Miss Eyon was looking at her now with interest, but Marjorie did not feel conscious of being read in the same way.

"I saw Sir George Wolff when he was a mere lad. I should not fancy," she said dryly, "that *his* photograph would be attractive—he was an ugly, awkward boy."

Miss Eyon had put up her eye-glass, and Marjorie's little flush was quickly noted.

"Sir George is so good and kind that one doesn't think about his looks—I cannot tell you how good he has been to me."

"Did he ask you to be Lady Wolff?"

Marjorie looked hard at her aunt; she began to think

she must be a witch, or else that she had some underhand way of getting information.

"Yes," she said, "he did ask me, and I was very sorry it could not be as he wished."

"You refused him, then—do you know why you said no, Marjorie?—as a rule a girl of nineteen should not answer for herself—she knows her own mind so little."

Majorie burst into tears.

"I almost wish I had said Yes. Oh, Aunt, I never meant to tell about poor dear Sir George. It was only because he was old."

"Old"—the concentrated scorn in her Aunt's voice was terrible to Marjorie—"the man is about forty. But you were right, child. He will be quite an old man before you have done with youth. I will keep your secret, never fear. No one shall know that you refused to be Lady Wolff. Good night."

While she was undressing, Marjorie felt nervous. She started at every sound, and the old furniture sighed and creaked as if it were in pain. Once, when she turned suddenly, it seemed to her that Mr. Brown's handsome face looked at her out of the polished door of the wardrobe.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

MARJORIE sat at her breakfast. The gloom of the weather was reflected on her downcast face.

The first few days at Eyon Court had given her plenty to do; she explored the house, and as she became used to its rooms and passages, she learned to laugh at her fears when the old furniture creaked and the mice scuttled behind the wainscot. She found out, too, that although the garden was bare of autumn flowers, it had plainly known better days; and here and there, she found a tangled creeper in some neglected corner, or else a rosebush almost hidden away in a luxuriant growth of weeds. But long before she had restored order in the garden near the house, before she had even begun to explore the country outside it, there came a downpour of rain. This lasted for more than a week, and then came a succession of mists. With the first days of October, rain fell again heavily, and Marjorie found that it was impossible to go beyond the gates. She had made the discovery two days ago, and on this gray, dull morning, life seemed intolerable. The house was so dark and gloomy, and, now that she knew her way about, so uninteresting. She searched the bookshelves in the dining-room, but she could not find a novel that was not at least fifty years old.

"What shall I do!" she said to herself this morning. "I have a great mind to ask Aunt if I may have Adelaide to stay with me."

She sat thinking, and then she shook her head.

"I love Addy as though she were my sister, but it would not do. She is too timid and too satirical to get on with Aunt Louisa. That grand manner would frighten Addy, and Aunt would think her foolish, and then——" The color flew into her cheeks. "No, I'd rather Addy did not come to Eyon Court."

It seemed to Marjorie that she could hear her friend's comic description of the bare old place and its pompous, antiquated ways—and also the laughter of her other school-fellow—there had only been two other pupils at Mrs. Locker's—as Addy gave a rendering of Aunt Louisa.

"No, no," the girl repeated quickly, "I could not have Addy here."

She longed for companionship, yet she did not know where she was to seek it. She had been twice down to the village. Except the alehouse there was nothing within sight bigger than a cottage, and even the cottages were very small and poor. Both the two Sundays had been so wet that her Aunt had sent Marjorie word she was not to go to church, but she had already learned from Hannah that the congregation was made up only of villagers and servants from Eyon Court. The church was two miles from the village, and the parsonage was at a greater distance on the farther side of the moor.

"It is too desolate," she said; "my hair will turn gray, and I shall be an old woman all at once."

"Miss Marjorie," Hannah's voice said at her elbow.

The housekeeper had come in silently and had been standing watching the girl.

"Oh, Hannah, how you made me jump!"

"When you have finished breakfast, ma'am, you are to go to the study, if you please." Then, as she saw how nervous Marjorie looked, she said, "the rain has ceased, ma'am, and t' mistress said you should take a long walk."

The dining-room opened on to the first staircase landing, so that Marjorie always had to pass her aunt's study, on the way to her own room. The ground floor of the house was given up to the kitchen and offices, and the rooms at the top of the staircase leading up from this landing had been formerly used as the drawing-room and library, and Mr. Eyon's bedroom. They were closed now, and the books in the library were so dull that they had not tempted Marjorie, when she explored the house, to a second inspection.

Her aunt always came to the dining-parlor through another door—which led through two rooms to her own study—there was therefore no chance of meeting Miss Eyon unexpectedly in the gallery; but her noiseless entrance into the dining-room had more than once startled Marjorie as she sat trying to read in the twilight.

Hannah had come in by this way just now, but she did not offer to show it to Marjorie. She opened the door that led on to the landing, and followed the girl along the gallery. "You can go in, ma'am," she said when they reached the study.

Miss Eyon was already busy at her desk. She nodded to Marjorie.

"You look pale, child. You shut yourself up too much. Why don't you take a walk?"

"I should like it, Aunt, only Hannah said I might lose my way in the mist."

Miss Eyon shrugged her shoulders.

"As Hannah seldom goes outside the house, she must be an excellent authority," she said, in the dry voice that always caused Marjorie to feel that she was snubbed.

"I want to send a note to the Parsonage," Miss Eyon said, "and you can be my postman. You have only to follow the path behind the village, across the moor."

The girl's eyes were bright with expectation. Her despondency fled at this prospect of change.

"Am I to bring back any answer?" she said.

"No."

Mrs. Locker's house, which had been Marjorie's home since her mother's death, was near a town and in comparatively flat country; her own home had been much nearer to Eyon Court, but in greener and tamer scenery. There was something fascinating to the girl in the idea of a solitary walk across the wild moor, and as she hurried to her room she wished that she had gone out sooner, instead of listening to Hannah.

"I have grown timid in this shut up house," she said.

When she reached the moor behind the village, Marjorie felt more like herself. Her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled as she looked across the broad heath-cov-

ered waste. The glory of the crimson blossoms had faded, but a rich purple tint lay on the moor, and this was barred by the burnished copper of the fast dying bracken. Here and there dull green and brown gorse bushes served to heighten the glorious hues of the brake, now burning like the wing of a golden pheasant, now gleaming with a cold metallic light among fronds where a tender green still lingered.

Hannah had been, however, right about the mist, there was no distant view to be seen; but the veil that hung over the landscape was not dense, and as Marjorie sped over the heather with a light springy step, her way seemed to open before her—till at last she saw a long low white house with a screen of trees on one side. The house looked lower than it really was, for the moor dipped into a little hollow, and but for this partial shelter the parsonage would not perhaps have been able to stand against the rash winds which had bent its screen of fir trees till they could not raise their heads, but stood crouching against the wall of loosely piled stones that fenced in the Vicar's garden. The sight of the Parsonage, fitted with the subject of Marjorie's thought, she remembered that Sir George Wolff had told her he had an old college friend at Wenburn, and he had once said, jokingly, "If you go to live with that terrible Aunt Louisa, I shall ride over and see you."

"Ah!" the girl sighed, "if he only had let well alone he could have come, I wish—oh! how I wish—he was only a friend."

She could scarcely remember when she had not known

Sir George Wolff. She was only eight when she lost her father, and even then Sir George used sometimes to come and see her mother. Two years ago, when her mother died, he had been her best and kindest comforter; she had felt that she could tell him all her troubles. Since then he had been abroad, but he had come to see her on her nineteenth birthday, and she had found him completely changed. Marjorie thought that absence had made him colder and stiffer, and she felt a little shy of him. He was ever so much older, she fancied—too old to be able to understand and help her as he used to do. And then a few days later came the letter from Miss Eyon, inviting her to Eyon Court; and next day came Sir George; and when Marjorie showed him her letter he asked her if she could not love him well enough to be his wife.

In her utter surprise the girl thought only that she had forever lost her friend, and she answered with cruel abruptness:

"No—I cannot—oh, how can you ask me—"

She had been going over this scene, and she asked herself which was hardest to bear—to marry an old husband, or to be shut up forever in dismal Eyon Court.

"I may learn to love Aunt Louisa—if I try very hard, but I do not love her now. She is so bitter; she makes me shrink, and she is very hard, too! Ah, poor soul, I suppose it was that faithless lover that turned her against all the world."

Marjorie was young for her age and her mind was un-

developed, but she was not unreal, and she saw that life must continue to be extremely dreary at Eyon Court.

Her sudden gayety had been a mere physical impulse. Perhaps the certainty that now, in a few minutes, her message would be delivered, and that she should be on her way back to the gaunt old manor house, helped to depress her. She skirted the stone fence on her way to the entrance gate.

A horse stood there fastened to the gate-post, and as she looked up the narrow paved way, with a plot of rank grass on either hand, she saw that a gentleman was speaking to a maid servant at the open door.

The woman pointed sideways to the path by which Marjorie had come across the moor. While the girl hesitated, the gentleman turned round, and then came hurrying down the path.

"Marjorie!—Miss Eyon, is it really you?" he exclaimed, in a joyful tone, and she, forgetting her late reverie, held out her hand with a delighted smile.

"Fancy meeting you here," she said.

"You have some business here? The Vicar, they tell me, is out."

"I have a letter from Miss Eyon."

Marjorie went forward and gave Miss Eyon's note to the rough country girl. It was evident that visitors were rare at the Parsonage, and the girl stared hard at Marjorie as she took the note.

Sir George Wolff opened the gate for Marjorie and then he led his horse along while he walked beside her.

"I never hoped for such luck as this," he said, "I was

actually going on to call at Eyon Court on the chance of seeing you."

"You will come now—won't you?"

"I think not. I doubt whether Miss Eyon would admit me, and it might get you into trouble. I believe she dislikes visitors. I can't bear to think of you living in that gloomy old den, Marjorie. Are you happy there, Marjorie?"

There was such tenderness in his voice that tears came to the girl's eyes. He, walking beside her with his eyes fixed on the simple, innocent face, saw them, but did not guess that he had drawn them forth.

"My dear child," he said, with so much excitement that she looked up surprised. "Does she—Miss Eyon, I mean, make you unhappy?"

Marjorie had recovered from her first surprise, and she wondered at her own coolness. She had fancied she should feel so timid when she met Sir George Wolff again, but it was just like old times, she thought, and he was talking to her in the kind fatherly way of two years ago.

"I don't think Aunt wants to make me unhappy, but it is awfully dull." She gave a smile, half merry, half sad, and then as she looked up at her companion she saw he was angry. He was not tall, but his square shoulders and broad chest gave him a certain dignity, and Marjorie felt afraid when she saw how severely he was frowning. He was not a handsome man; he had some good features, but exposure and the weather had reddened and coarsened his skin, and his gray eyes

wanted depth of color. Just now they looked darker than usual—the pupils were so large.

"It was altogether a sad mistake, Marjorie. I never could understand how your Uncle John came to make his sister your guardian. He, of all men, ought to have known better."

Marjorie felt troubled. It seemed as if she had been complaining. She stooped down and gathered a sprig of heather, for they had now reached the middle of the moor.

"You see," she said with a pleading look in her dark blue eyes, "I have only been there three weeks. I dare say it is partly my fault. I feel shy, and very likely that annoys Aunt. As I get more used to everything I dare say we shall get on very well."

And yet as she said the words she felt that they were not true.

He sighed.

"It must be difficult to quarrel with you," he said. "I can well believe that, but I know a good deal about Miss Eyon. My mother and she were young women together, and I cannot believe that hers is a nature likely to make those happy with whom she lives. She will wither all the joy and sunshine out of your life, child."

There was a sad note of warning in his voice.

The girl shivered. This was what she had told herself nearly every day since her arrival at Eyon Court, but she struggled not to give up hope; besides, it seemed cowardly to speak against her aunt.

"It seems to me," she said sadly, "that poor Aunt's

life has been spoiled by something that happened when she was youug. I dare say you know about it."

"That is what I mean, but I scarcely think you have heard the rights of the story, Marjorie : if your aunt was hardly used, she was bitterly cruel and revengeful. I believe you only know her version of what happened.

Marjorie felt interested.

"I know nothing directly from Aunt Louisa; my mother said that Aunt was engaged to marry a man she loved, and that all at once, without any good reason, her brother, Uncle John I mean, broke off the match. I believe she did not forgive him—but I don't wonder,"—the girl said impetuously, and then the color came timidly into her cheeks, as she remembered that the subject was uncomfortable.

It was too late—Sir George had seen her deep blush and her confusion only confirmed the meaning he read in it; he fancied she had some attachment, and this gave a death-blow to his own hope of winning the bright sweet girl. For a moment he was inclined to turn away and leave her, to spare himself the misery of learning that she had given her love to some one else.

"I believe—I wish you would tell me all you know of this story," she said, while he hesitated. "I don't mind telling you—though I would not tell any one else—that my great trouble is Aunt Louisa herself. I cannot make her out; she is a sort of sphinx, and so I never know what will please her. Most old women like to be kissed, for instance, but she does not, and I believe that helps to make me feel lonely—"

"Does it?" He gave her a fond look, and it seemed to warm her heart. She had been pining for affection, poor child.

"Do tell me the story," she said, in a happier tone; "it may help me to understand her."

Sir George gave a grunt of dissatisfaction. "Well, I have heard the story told more than once, and as it does not vary, I suppose the facts are to be relied on. Miss Eyon, as you say, was engaged to this Captain Delmer, and it is said that both his and her relations had consented to the marriage. He was a wild, dashing young fellow, and people wondered at his choice, for Miss Eyon had been brought up very strictly, and was never allowed to dance or to mix in society. Your great-uncle's wife, Mrs. John Eyon was a Puritan, very plain and awkward looking, with strict ideas on the subject of young men and young women. However, your Aunt being a decided beauty, Delmer had heard of her, I fancy, and somehow he managed to get acquainted with her, and they were engaged. He seems to have been desperately fond of her, and to have had a strong dislike to Mrs. John Eyon, who would never let him see his betrothed except in her presence. The day was fixed for the marriage, and then Mrs. John Eyon fell very ill and the wedding was put off. Mrs. Eyon died and then came the catastrophe. Your great-uncle learned that the failure of a bank and the explosion of a mine, in both of which Captain Delmer's property was invested, had left the young fellow with about a hundred a year to live on. It seems that Mr. Eyon knew of these disasters as soon as Delmer did,

and that he wrote at once to the captain to break off the match, and to forbid his visits to Eyon Court. Some people said that Delmer was already a ruined man when he met your Aunt, that the money lost by the bank failure would not have paid half of his liabilities, and Mr. John Eyon seems to have believed this report. He certainly did not hesitate : he sent for his sister and told her what he had done, and that she must make up her mind to forget Captain Delmer. Mr. John Eyon's temper was at that time quite as haughty and stubborn as his sister's was."

"How wicked," Marjorie said.

"Yes, but my dear Marjorie, do you know that the family was proud of this temper, which seems to have caused a good deal of unhappiness among them. Well, Miss Eyon naturally enough refused to listen to her brother. She said she would marry Captain Delmer and no one else, and that she preferred to starve with him rather than to live without him, besides, she said she knew she had enough for both."

Her brother would not listen to her. He sternly told her that her income was not sufficient, no Eyon had ever been poor, and that poverty was a disgrace ; and he reminded her that at her death her property would go back to the Eyons to be divided between your grandfather, who was then unmarried, two other brothers, dead since then, and Mr. John Eyon. Captain Delmer would not have had so much as a life interest in it, he told her. She would not now find him as eager for the marriage as she fancied: he would prefer to find as rich a girl as herself

whose money was not tied up by such vexatious clauses.

"At this Miss Eyon seems to have fallen into a strange and ungovernable rage. She raved, she would not listen to another word, and as he feared she would run away to her lover, her brother placed her in a barred room, which I have heard still exists at Eyon Court."

Marjorie nodded, but she looked very grave.

Her brother told her that she must stay there till she was reasonable. She did not have to stay there long. John Eyon had allowed her to write to Captain Delmer, and her lover wrote in answer freeing her from her engagement ; he told her that he had left the army, that he was going to South America and that she must forget him. My mother said it was after receiving this letter that your Aunt took her memorable resolution. Her brother came, unlocked the door of her prison and offered to shake hands in token of reconciliation. But she flung his hand sternly away.

"Bear witness," said she to a servant who stood by, 'I take a solemn vow that willingly I will never again look on yon man, John Eyon. I will dwell apart and feel apart. Neither in love nor in hate shall he hear word of mine again.'"

"How awful," Marjorie said, in a low voice.

"Ah, yes, it was very bad," Sir George answered gravely ; "but the worst is to come. For more than 30 years this brother and sister went on living apart under the same roof. When John Eyon lay dying he sent for his sister. He wished to be reconciled. The man was past sixty, and he and your Aunt were the last of the

brothers and sisters who had been born at Eyon Court. It was only human that he should seek to be reconciled before he died. She came to his room, a faded, middle-aged woman, and stood at the foot of his bed, and the dying man asked her to kiss him. She did not answer, but stood there proud and calm, looking at him, they say —for this scene had several witnesses—as if he were some curious spectacle."

"I know that look," Marjorie said, with a shiver.

Sir George looked anxiously at her.

"Well, the poor man asked her to forgive him over and over again, but she stood like a statue till the Doctor, who had come in, interfered.

"'You are murdering your brother, madam,' he said, and at this she turned and walked away as calmly as she had come. It seems, when all was over, that the lawyer ventured to ask her why she had been so hard, and he told my mother that she expressed her surprise that anyone could wish or expect her to break a solemn oath—you see, by her brother's death she was mistress of Eyon Court, and no one dared to take her seriously to task."

He stopped abruptly and looked at Marjorie's pale shocked face.

"My dear," he said, "even if you don't love me now, can you not be happier at Laleham than you are with Miss Eyon? Will you not come to me, Marjorie?"

He pointed to the manor house, which they were now very near.

"Oh!" she cried, impulsively, "how cruel you are. I had begun to feel so happy with you—just as I used

to—and now you have spoiled it." She checked herself when she saw his sad eyes. "Please be my friend, and forget all the rest," she said, gently.

"Forget!" he spoke passionately, and then he stopped. "Good-bye, my child," he said. "I will not torment you; but when you are in trouble, send for your old friend to help you."

He got on his horse and rode away, only waving his hand to Marjorie as he left her.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. BROWN.

BARBARA, the taller of the two stout maids, opened the door to Marjorie. The woman looked as if she wanted to speak, but Marjorie was impatient to get to her room. Of late she had had so little to think of, that to-day's adventure completely absorbed her. She saw, in a dreamy way as she went along the passage, that a portmanteau stood outside one of the doors in Miss Eyon's gallery, but this did not suggest to her that a visitor had come to the house. She was too full of her aunt's story and of her meeting with Sir George Wolff to care for anything else.

She felt mortified by this second offer from him. She began to think that she need not have troubled herself about Sir George's disappointment. He had asked her to marry him, not so much because he wanted her for a wife, as from kindness; he wanted to give her a home and to shield her from Miss Eyon.

"Well, why do I mind," she said; "it is much better, and it shows how good and noble he is."

But although she felt greatly afraid of her aunt, she told herself that it would be very miserable to be married from compassion, even by so excellent a man as Sir George Wolff.

The bell rang for luncheon. When Marjorie opened the door at the end of the narrow lofty passage she saw

a gentleman go into Miss Eyon's study. For a moment she wondered whether the Vicar had come to answer his note in person ; but no, this stranger looked young, and she had seen even in that brief glance that he was tall and stylish looking, and she had caught a glimpse of fair soft-looking whiskers. Hannah had said the Vicar was middle-aged and gray-haired. As she passed she looked out for the portmanteau, but it had either been a creation of her own fancy, or it had disappeared. Miss Eyon was always punctual, but to-day she was absent when Marjorie reached the dining parlor. The girl stood bending over the hearth, and she warmed her chilled fingers while she waited.

In a few minutes Miss Eyon's private entrance door into the dining-room opened, but not in its usual noiseless manner, and the tall, fair-haired stranger walked into the room.

Her surprise fluttered Marjorie. She was conscious that the new arrival was very handsome and that he looked friendly, but she felt too shy to look fully at him.

He held out his hand and she gave hers mechanically. He was not at all embarrassed, and he looked at her with admiring eyes.

"Miss Eyon has asked me to make her excuses and to introduce myself," he said.

He smiled very pleasantly, but Marjorie thought he was too much at his ease. He seemed actually to be doing the honors of the house to her.

"My name is Brown," he went on, "and I know that you are Miss Marjorie Eyon."

"Yes;" then her courage came back. "I suppose we are to begin lunch if my Aunt is not coming."

"By all means; allow me to carve for you," and he placed himself in Miss Eyon's seat at the head of the table.

Marjorie looked and wondered. She usually sat at the side and carved for her aunt at luncheon, but to-day the dish was placed in front of this visitor. It happened to be a pheasant, and Marjorie rejoiced that she had not to carve it before a stranger.

Mr. Brown seemed to be a dexterous carver, and the girl noticed that he helped her to the choicest bits. She thought he seemed bent on pleasing her.

"Do you not drink any wine? Won't you have any wine?" he said, as she refused it. I should have thought up in this cold north it was absolutely necessary to keep up circulation."

"No, thank you; you are not a northerner, then?"

"Oh, no; you must forgive me, but I was going to say, thank heaven. I am a Londoner. Do you happen ever to have seen London?"

"No, but I long to go there."

He gave her an approving smile which showed beautiful teeth under his fair silky mustache.

"You would enjoy it; let us persuade Miss Eyon to take you there next Spring; it would give me great pleasure to show you about our smoky comfortable village. Ah, there's no place like London, unless it is Paris."

"You would never persuade my Aunt to go to London," Marjorie said doubtfully.

He laughed.

"Wonders never cease, you know, I see no reason why such a thing should not happen."

He spoke so confidently, so airily, and the girl thought he looked so clever, that she found herself considering him as a kind of oracle. Just then she met his blue eyes fixed on her admiringly, and she thought she had never before seen so handsome a face. There was a winning expression in it which attracted confidence. Marjorie felt quite angry with herself for having said Brown looked cruel. He certainly was not greedy; she had seen that by the way in which he had helped himself to pheasant.

"You are not like your photograph," she said.

He looked delighted.

"Am I not? Well, no, I believe I am younger than it makes me, but photographs are a mistake, you know. May I venture to hope you will not object if I stay a few days at Eyon Court. My business with Miss Eyon will take that time, but she gave me to understand that if you objected to my visit I must go to the Inn."

Marjorie laughed heartily. "I am not such a dragon; on the contrary, I am delighted to have some one to speak to."

He bowed. "Yes," he twirled the ends of his mustache, "it must be terribly dull for you, both indoors and out, and I don't think this is quite the country for a young lady to take solitary walks in, it is so desperately lonely. It would be easy, for instance, for a tramp to make away with you, and then hide you in one of those out-of-the-way glens. Not a pleasant possibility is it?"

Marjorie shuddered.

"I had not thought of such a possibility. You should not frighten me," she said. "What can I do? unless I walk alone here. I must remain shut up forever."

"That would never do," he said kindly. You would lose all your roses; that would be terrible. Why should we not get as many walks as possible while I am here? Shall we begin this afternoon?"

Marjorie was delighted, and she felt grateful. This idea of escape from the dulness of Eyon Court gave her new life.

"Thank you, ever so much," she said. "You can't think how I hate being so shut up. I had not been out for two whole days till this morning."

"How very amusing. I don't wonder that you consider me a pleasant change."

He gave her a smile so full of sympathy that Marjorie's heart beat fast with happiness; here at last was some one who understood and entered into her feelings.

"I will wait for you here, then," Mr. Brown said, and she ran away to get her hat.

"I am really out of the cage now," the girl thought. "I am sure he is kind, and I fancy he has influence with Aunt Louisa."

Mr. Brown continued to twirl his mustache. "By Jove," he said, "she is a taking little thing, better in all ways than I expected. What did the old girl mean by saying that she was 'passable?' I call her 'pretty,' very pretty, piquant too when she gets animated; passable indeed!"

There was a slight sound, and he turned, with a look of alarm in his face.

Hannah had just come in by the door leading to Miss Eyon's rooms.

"If you please, sir, my mistress wishes to see you before you go out."

He felt annoyed, and he showed it.

"Look here, Hannah," he said, "go to Miss Marjorie and ask her to be kind enough to wait for me. Please say I am very sorry to detain her, but I shall not be long with your mistress."

Hannah looked after him as he closed behind him the door by which she had come.

"You cannot be sure o' that young man," she said. "You are very masterful, but you have to learn that two can play at that game."

She went slowly along the galleries to Marjorie's room.

"Wiv a young lass," she said, "'tis t' change for change's sake that cheers her, nobbut ah would nut hev thowt of Miss Marjorie settin' store by sic coompany.'"

CHAPTER V.

MR. BROWN RECEIVES ORDERS.

Miss Eyon was sitting before her desk, as stiff and pale as she had looked on Marjorie's first introduction to her. Even Mr. Brown, who had, as he would have said, "No nerves to speak of, felt subdued when he met the direct searching blue eyes fixed on his face. He had hurried impatiently through the rooms, telling himself that it was intolerable to be called back from his prospect of enjoyment, and that he should tell Miss Eyon that the interruption had vexed him; but when he stood before her, the strange all-seeing gaze which cowed Marjorie chained even his tongue. He stood silent, waiting till the old woman spoke.

"I will not keep you long;" he thought she sneered. 'I hear you are going out walking, but before you go I wish to know, Richard Brown, what you think of my niece."

"She is quite charming," he said quickly, and then her frown showed him that he had made a mistake.

"I don't mean," he went on, "that she is remarkably handsome, and so on, but she is very bright and pleasant."

"Bright, is she?" Miss Eyon sate thinking. "She is not usually bright," she added suspiciously, "and she is very shy. It is possible," she gave him a mocking look, "that Marjorie met an old sweetheart while she was out

this morning. I understand she was away much longer than was necessary."

"A sweetheart? How could that be?" he said, angrily. "You led me to suppose she was a raw girl, fresh from school."

"So she is; but I should have thought you knew that the fit period of love-making is a question of temperament and opportunity. I fancy school-girls are apt to begin the occupation early."

"You might have told me sooner about this." He spoke impatiently, but he seemed to have forgotten his hurry to get back to Marjorie. He seated himself near Miss Eyon. "Do you know who the man is that the girl cares for?"

Miss Eyon put up her glasses and looked curiously at him.

"You seem interested; I wonder why," she said, and then seeing that he looked sullen, she softened a little. "You mistake me. I said the girl had a sweetheart, but I did not say she cared for him. Sir George Wolff, a landholder not very far off, a rich man too, asked her to marry him before she came here, but she refused him."

"If this is so, why should the sight of him cheer her in the way you suggested?"

Miss Eyon shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"For a man past thirty, who has spent his life in London, that is a strange question. Have you not learned that what a young girl most dislikes and rebels against is dulness and restraint? She will do anything, anything to vary such a life."

There was so much vehemence in her tone that Mr.

Brown looked up suddenly. He had been contemplating his own beautiful finger nails, but he forgot all about them in wonder, for he saw a gleam of passion in Miss Eyon's stern blue eyes.

"You think then that if your niece met this worthy baronet—I take it for granted, you see, that a rich landholder must be worthy—she would take back her refusal for the sake of change—of escaping in fact from Eyon Court. Well then, if this has happened, why did you ask me to come up here at such a time of the year," he said, sulkily.

Miss Eyon had stiffened into her old attitude. She was angry with herself for having betrayed emotion, and her voice was even colder than ever as she answered him:

'I did not say the child had met Sir George Wolff. I see that such a meeting is possible; but even if this should happen, Marjorie cannot marry until she is of age without my consent. I do not mean her to marry Sir George Wolff."

She said the last words as if she shut the door on any such hope, and then she sat silent.

Mr. Brown looked hard at her, but her face was altogether expressionless. At last he said: "May I ask why you have now sent for me?'

"I have told you, I wished to learn how Marjorie had impressed you. Now that I know," she said very slowly, "I wish to give you a caution. You are going out for a walk with her, and you are like other men with a woman, I suppose; fire and flame to get what they wish; smoke and cold ashes when they have got it.

Marjorie, I see, has excited you. I tell you not to let her see that you are excited; please her as much as you can, win her confidence, but let her think only that you are kind and friendly; she is an Eyon, remember, and she may have the will of the Eyons; if you set that up against your wishes, even I may not be able to influence her."

He rose up and took one of her hands; they were withered, but they were delicate, like bits of blue-veined ivory.

"You can do anything you choose; besides, you have promised me." She bent her head, and then he loosed her hand. "Your instructions are, then, that I am to keep clear of love-making for the present."

"Yes."

She pointed to the door, and leaned back as if she were tired.

Mr. Brown nodded, but as he went back to Marjorie he whistled very cheerfully.

It did not seem to him that it could be difficult to win the confidence of a young inexperienced girl, and he thought that on the whole he was glad to know of that episode about Sir George Wolff—the knowledge would help him to give Marjorie an opportunity to confide in him.

"Miss Marjorie is waiting for you in the hall," Hannah said when he came into the dining-room, and then she went away.

Mr. Brown had a careless manner, but he was very observant. He remarked that the woman seemed to give

the message against her will, and she left the room as if she wished to avoid questions.

"Poor old Hannah," he said, "I wonder what I've done to offend her; she's usually civil enough to me."

Since the evening of her arrival at Eyon Court, Marjorie had not been able to wear any of the new articles of dress she had provided. To-day seemed an opportunity, and she had put on a large black hat with drooping black feathers, which suited her delicate complexion.

She looked up at Mr. Brown as he appeared on the landing, and he thought her bewitching.

"There is no need to ask whether the air of Eyon Court agrees with you," he said when he joined her. "You sparkle with health."

"You would not have said so yesterday; my walk this morning did me ever so much good."

"I wonder if Miss Eyon is right in her suspicion," he thought; "but I must wait a little; a direct question would put Marjorie on her guard."

"Have you been this way, I wonder," he nodded down the valley in the direction of the village.

"No, only on my way here, as we came up a bit of Yoredale."

"Yes, but you could not drive where I propose to take you. Shall we go?"

"Yes, please, I should like it."

As they went through the village, Mr. Luke White looked through the shop window.

"Eh," he said to his wife, "t' lass will not bide lang

at t' Court. More than likely thaat's a sweetheart wi' her. It's young Brown !"

"Eh, my sakes !" Mrs. White's broad, rosy face was full of contemptuous amusement; "t' young man he may want it, nubbut it donnut follow at t' lass is willin' ; t' apples donnut fall to t' first that shakes t' bough ; nay, nay, Luke, you wud mak believe ony man can hev t' lass he fancies. Nay !"

But in spite of her scorn, Mrs. White hastened to an upper window and watched the young couple till they had passed through the village and were out of sight—along the path cut on the steep hill-side.

Marjorie was so happy that she walked along prattling like a child about the beauty of the scenery and the delicious air which met them as they followed the path high above the dashing river, yet screened from the wind by a border of tall trees. The trees were splendid in their gold and russet foliage that went down clothing the bank almost to the water's edge. The morning mist had cleared, and across the river every now and then came peeps of distant hills ; and all at once appeared, cradled among the soft-tinted gray rocks, a grand baronial castle.

"Oh ! how beautiful," the girl exclaimed, "I wish we could cross the water and get close to it. Can we?"

She looked up brightly at her companion.

"It is further off than it seems. We could not get there and back by daylight, and when you get to it it is only a ruin, a tumble-down place full of bats and owls."

Marjorie felt disappointed at his want of enthusiasm.

"I like ruins," she said, "don't you?"

He laughed at her look of entreaty.

"Well, no; unless they are in pictures. I like everything to be bright and fresh and young—a ruin is like an old woman, full of suggestions of what has been, but also full of signs of decay. No," he gave her an admiring look, "give me youth."

Marjorie laughed.

"According to that, if you marry, you will dislike your wife when she gets old. That will be very unfair, I think.

He seemed amused.

"No, that would be a risk, she might return the compliment; I too should be no longer as young as when I married; but you know there are women who have the charm of perpetual youth; they are always gay and full of sunshine. You will be like that, do you know—it is an enviable faculty."

"How can you tell," she said shyly, she had a dim consciousness that his intimate tone had come too quickly, "you have known me such a short time."

"I will tell you how I know," he said very confidently. "There are persons whose faces may be read like a book—truth and innocence can seldom be successfully imitated by a young girl; it takes a good many years to acquire that art."

Marjorie walked on, thinking over his words. She liked this sort of talk, for he had spoken seriously, and not as if he were paying a compliment. She could not help applying his words to Sir George Wolff.

"That candid look does not belong only to young girls." She looked straight before her, she could not have said why, but she did not choose to meet her companion's eyes while she spoke. "I have seen it in another person's face."

Mr. Brown was watching her attentively. "Ah!" he said, carelessly, "I dare say you are right; one sees it, for instance, in women who live in retirement, and who have never mixed with the world."

"I was not thinking of a woman. I know a middle-aged man who shows his feelings and his meaning, too, in his face. I am sure he is candid."

"He must be a very remarkable person," Mr. Brown sighed ostentatiously. "He is a friend of yours?"

"Yes. I have known him ever since I was a child."

"Then perhaps you are not a good judge. A child cannot judge of facial expression, and a child is easily cajoled; besides, if it takes a liking it often blindly clings to its first idea, and never sees the flaws that every one else can see in its idol. I have known a case where this childish infatuation led to a most unhappy marriage."

He spoke very earnestly, his vexation made him forget his resolution to seem indifferent.

Marjorie laughed.

"In the case I am thinking of your reasoning would be all wrong. *My* friend is universally loved and looked up to—and yet I don't think a girl would fall in love with him."

"Perhaps not; but—" he looked full into her dark blue eyes, raised to his—"she might marry him because

every one else loved and looked up to him, don't you see? That is just what the girl I am thinking of did, poor little trusting soul."

He gave another deep sigh.

Marjorie felt very pitiful.

"Were you"—she began, "I mean, was she a great friend of yours?"

She thought the poor fellow was in love.

"I liked her, that was all; but I can't bear to see such a mistake as a marriage between a young girl and a man double her age, it's a fatal mistake. There can be no lasting sympathy between them. She, poor child, has lived always in her home-nest; and she wants, of course, to peep over the edge and take her fair share of the pleasures and amusements that belong to her age. Her husband has seen and done everything; all he cares for now is to hunt and shoot when he is in the country, and when he is in town to read the papers and talk politics and scandal at his club. He has had as much dancing as he cares for, and he now finds it a bore to take his girl-wife out to dances and so on."

He watched Marjorie's face and he saw that she was thinking over his words.

Presently she said, in the unexpected way he liked so much in her:

"It would be a bore about the dancing; but don't you think,"—she looked at him appealingly—"that middle-aged men *do* sometimes like dancing?"

"That depends so much on what is meant by middle-aged. A man of forty may be very fond of dancing in

theory, but he may be a martyr to gout in his feet. You care for dancing, then?

"I!"—Marjorie turned to him with sparkling eyes—"I love it. Why, even at Eyon Court, one very rainy day, I danced alone up and down the passage outside my room. It was better than nothing, you know."

She shook her head and smiled at him.

"Yes, that is what I said just now. You will do the same in thirty years time. You will dance and smile though your troubles till they will not know how to take hold of you. You are the last person who should be shut up in gloomy old Eyon Court, and yet it seems to me you bear the dulness bravely."

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned into a path that curved upwards, so leading them homewards on a higher level than that by which they had come.

Marjorie could not answer her companion, for she was busy clambering over a moss-covered boulder that lay just in the track. Mr. Brown held out his hand, but she disdained help. When she raised her head, bent in the disentanglement of long briar arms from her skirt, she looked so bright and flower-like that he felt his pulses beat more quickly as he looked at her.

"Do you know," she said, "that you are quite wrong. I have not been at all brave—I have actually been coward enough to cry more than once in my bedroom. Sometimes I can hardly bear the dulness."

"Poor little girl," Marjorie colored and winced, but he went on, "No, it is not a fit place for you. Miss Eyon is an old friend of mine, and a very good friend,

but for all that I must say she cannot be a lively companion. My wonder is that you consented to come to such a place."

"Well, but I could not help it," she looked up with surprise, "Aunt Louisa is my guardian, so I had to come. Besides," she said slowly, "do you know, I was curious."

"Curious to see your guardian, eh?"

"Well, just a little, but I was much more curious to see the house. One of my schoolfellows stayed two years at Askrigg, and she heard the strangest stories about Eyon Court. I suppose I did not realize that I should have to live there always till I saw how gloomy it was." She sighed, and he thought there were tears in her eyes.

"I say, this can't go on, you know," he said, impulsively. "I have some influence with Miss Eyon. I have known her for years past. Is there anything you would like altered? I dare say now you would like a smart girl to wait on you, instead of that dismal old Hannah."

"Hannah is a dear old woman, I love her; she is not dismal, I can tell you, when she is alone with me."

"But a young maid could take walks with you; by Jove, it is horrible to think of you cooped up alone with those two old women. I don't suppose you ever see any one you can speak to," he added carelessly.

Marjorie hesitated.

"Don't tell Miss Eyon," she said pleadingly, "because she might fancy things, but I did see an old friend this morning on the moor."

"Indeed," he said slowly. "And that made you feel brighter, eh," he laughed. "You don't know how crest-fallen I feel. I hoped it was my companionship that had helped you a little and that you would care for a walk with me, and now I find that I have only come in as second fiddle, have in fact bored you—you would have preferred to be left alone with the pleasant thoughts your old friend gave you."

He looked so disconcerted that Marjorie was eager to reassure him.

"How can you say such things. I was delighted to come out with you; it is the first time I have been taken for a walk since I left Selby. I met Sir George Wolff by accident, and I do not think I am likely to meet him again."

"May I ask why?" he said, gently. Majorie's face had grown pensive.

"I like to be frank," she said, "especially to people who are frank with me," she gave him a grateful glance, "but I cannot exactly say why I think I shall not see him again." There was a touch of regret in her voice, and Mr. Brown noticed it. "One reason, though, is because he said that my aunt would not like him to call at Eyon Court, and he is not a man who would care to meet me without Aunt Louisa's knowledge."

"Then I don't call him a true friend. If I thought I could help you out of any trouble, I would run any risk of Miss Eyon's anger over and over again; but I am afraid this talk is as dull as Eyon Court is. Never mind. I shall find some way of amusing you; you shall not be

left long in that gloomy house. How would it be this evening if we tried a little dance ?"

Majorie's eyes shone with delight as she looked up under the shadow of her hat.

"It would be ever so nice," she said, "but dare we ?"

"Yes, we dare." He nodded so confidently that she took courage. "Unless you are afraid of a dobie, as they call the ghosts, we can go upstairs. No one can hear us in those old disused rooms."

"You mean the old drawing-room ?"

"Well, yes, but the library is snugger and farther from the staircase ; we shall be safe there. Shall I wait for you in the library after tea ?"

"All right."

Marjorie walked home gayly. This would be a little adventure, and the risk of being found out and scolded by Hannah gave it a sort of special relish.

"I do believe it's naughty," she thought as she ran up to her room, "Well, I should soou become sly if I lived long at Eyon Court."

CHAPTER VI.

A WALTZ.

DAYLIGHT had faded long ago, and only a weak gleam fell across the darkness from a solitary candle which Mr. Brown had struck into one of the tarnished sconces. At first sight the long close-smelling library looked deserted, but a rustle and then a merry laugh came from a dark corner, and Majorie and her partner waltzed rapidly into the faint light.

"I must stop, please," she panted; "I'm out of breath. I think the dust chokes one."

He stood still as she spoke, but he kept his arm round her waist as if he wanted to begin again.

"Yes, we have literally kicked up a dust, but the dust proves I was right in saying that no one comes near these old rooms. I believe the servants dare not venture here in the dusk; the dobie-room is next to this, you know, it was your uncle's bedroom."

She shivered. She had just moved a little away from her partner, but at this she shrank near him again. "Do you mean a ghost?" she whispered. He was sorry to reassure her, it was so delicious to feel that she trusted and clung to his protection, but he remembered that terror sometimes caused a girl to scream inopportunely.

"That's all nonsense, you know. I believe your uncle, Mr. John Eyon, died in the room beyond this one;

there was some disagreement between Miss Eyon and her brother, and she had all these rooms shut up after his death. Naturally the dobie story has grown out of that," He bent down over her and whispered, "Do you know you looked awfully pretty when you were frightened just now.

"Please let me go," said Marjorie abruptly, "and I don't like compliments."

He took his arm away from her waist, not so much because of Marjorie's request, but it seemed to him there was a faint sound near the disused drawing-room.

"Hush," he whispered.

Marjorie had also heard the sound, and she was trembling, almost paralyzed with fear. Her hair seemed to rise on her forehead.

"Is any one there?" The voice sounded hoarse and strange. "Is it you, Miss Marjorie? What are you doing there?"

"It is Hannah," the girl said, taking the candle between her fingers, she went forward.

"Why, Hannah," she held up the candle, "you are as white as death. How frightened you look! Did you think we were ghosts?" she said, softly, as she pinched the old woman's pale chin.

"We?" Hannah exclaimed. "Who may you hev with you, ma'am?"

Mr. Brown laughed. "Only me, Hannah. Your young lady and I have been trying a dance in the old library, but it's awfully dusty work. A good many years, I'll bet, since anything so lively happened here."

"My mercy!" she said. "How could ye venture it? T'lass knawed nowt aboot it; nobbut you, sir, must hev heeard tell o' things at sud make t'place respected from such frolics."

She stretched out her long arm and took the candle from Marjorie.

"Come to your room, I'll show ye the light, ma'am," she said, and the girl followed her,

Mr. Brown came up to Marjorie and whispered:

"Don't go, why do you knock under; the way to get on at Eyon Court is to resist tyranny."

But Marjorie's eyes had suddenly opened to her own imprudence, and she was glad that the light was too dim to show her flaming cheeks; something whispered that she had been giddy, that Mr. Brown would not have been so free with her if she had been more guarded with him. She wondered whether Sir George Wolff would have asked a stranger to waltz with him in a lonely room. Instead of answering Mr. Brown, she hurried on and placed herself beside Hannah, while her cheeks burned yet more hotly.

When she reached the door leading into her special passage, Marjorie said:

"That will do, thank you, Hannah; I can see my way now, the lamp outside my door is sure to be lit."

Hannah looked over her shoulder, and she saw that Mr. Brown had not followed them.

"As you please, ma'am," she said coldly, and opening the door for Marjorie, she closed it behind her.

The girl was greatly relieved; she had expected a lec-

ture, and she knew she should have rebelled against it, and have answered saucily.

"Old women are always cross to girls about men," she said, when she had reached her room and had drawn a low chair cosily in front of the fire. "After all, it is only quite natural that a young man and a girl alone in a dull house should like one another's company, and amuse themselves." She sat, looking into the blazing logs. "Perhaps it would have been better if we had had our waltz in the parlor, as Miss Eyon calls it; then Hannah would not have ventured to look glum. After all I really think I am too old to be interfered with. She marched me off to my room just as if I were a naughty child."

The uncomfortable feeling soon came back, and her cheeks grew hot as the fire itself. On the whole, she was glad that Hannah had been interfering and a busybody.

What had made such a sudden change in Mr. Brown's manner, she wondered. Could he have taken a fancy to her. Oh, no; he had known her only a few hours. Ought she to like it or to dislike it. He might have an impulsive nature, and she had heard that some people fall in love at first sight; if this were his case he could not help it, and she had no right to be vexed with him.

"What a strange thing Love must be," she thought, shyly; "I wonder if I shall ever feel it. I wonder if there is much difference between liking and loving."

Hannah usually came and helped her dress, and this evening Marjorie wanted help, for she had decided to

wear the dainty evening gown in which she had made her first appearance, instead of the ordinary high-necked frock she always put on for dinner with her aunt.

The girl waited until she feared to be too late, and then she struggled into her gown and managed to fasten it herself, although this was not easy. She had gathered some exquisitely-tinted blackberry leaves in her afternoon's ramble, and she grouped these into a brilliant knot at one side of the square-cut bodice

She held up a spray of leaves against her rich brown hair.

"I would put them in if it were not for Aunt Louisa. She might say I was too smart, and I do love peace, and if she looked glum I could not eat any dinner, and that would never do. Between the walk and the waltzing I am as hungry as possible."

In her far-off room the dinner bell was not heard. Hannah usually set the door ajar, but Marjorie, left to herself, had not thought of it.

Suddenly she looked at her watch, and found that she must be some minutes behind time.

She flew along the passage, and was pale with fear by the time she reached the dining-room.

Miss Eyon and Mr. Brown were both seated at table.

"I am very sorry, Aunt," the girl began, and then stopped ; her tongue felt stiffened by the sight of Miss Eyon. She sat very erect and she was so pale that she looked gray, but her eyes were keener than ever as she fixed them on Marjorie's gown.

"You need not make excuses," Miss Eyon said in the

tone that Marjorie dreaded. "I see what has made you keep us waiting. Mr. Brown will readily excuse you, for this extra adornment is doubtless intended for him; you do not honor me with it when I am alone."

She spoke in a low tone and the servants at the farther end of the long room could not hear what she said. They could, however, see the deep red flush that spread over Marjorie's face and the conscious shame of the girl's attitude.

Mr. Brown smiled at her and at Miss Eyon.

"I expect that soft cream color must have suited you admirably," he said coolly. "I believe it would always suit such a complexion as yours, Miss Eyon. Did they wear that color when you were a girl?"

Miss Eyon was aware that he meant to soothe her, and it pleased her that he should try to do this: but, for all that, she would not spare Marjorie.

"Do you fancy there is anything new under the sun?" she said. "I have gowns put away somewhere, of my mother's, of just that color and appearance, but they were ball gowns, and were only worn on suitable occasions," she said with emphasis.

Mr. Brown was vexed by her bitter tone. He kept silent for some time, and then he asked Marjorie if she had seen the Falls of Aysgarth, higher up the valley.

Miss Eyon's rudeness had helped to restore the girl's courage. She was still flushed, but she had raised her head, and she no longer looked ashamed.

"No;" she smiled at Mr. Brown. She felt determined to show her aunt that she would not submit to rudeness.

"I should like to see the Falls. Will you take me there to-morrow?"

"I shall be delighted," he said; but he did not look as much pleased as Marjorie expected, and his eyes went back at once to Miss Eyon.

Miss Eyon looked from one to the other, her own face was without expression.

"After breakfast, then?" Marjorie asked.

He only nodded in answer, and the girl felt piqued. She was conscious that her aunt might say that she had sought Mr. Brown while she had only tried to seem at ease.

Mr. Brown, however, appeared heedless of her good opinion; he had plunged deeply into an agricultural question connected with one of Miss Eyon's farms. He took no more notice of Marjorie, and during the rest of dinner she had perforce to keep silence.

She felt surprised and disappointed in Mr. Brown. It seemed to her sly and ignoble to treat her with indifference before her aunt and yet to be almost lover-like when they were alone. She made a little resolve that she would reverse this order of things. To-morrow when they went to see the Falls, she would show Mr. Brown that she too could be indifferent when it suited her.

At last Miss Eyon rose from table.

"Give me your arm as far as the study," she said to the young fellow. "You, Marjorie, will be glad to go to bed early after so much fatigue, so I don't ask you to join me this evening. Good night."

She smiled as she went out, leaning on Mr. Brown's arm.

Marjorie had risen to follow them. She stood still for a moment, stupefied with surprise.

"How horrid!" she said. "She is more unkind than I thought she could be, it is not possible to love such an unfeeling woman. She must think I am an insect, or does not she care about wounding any one. I shall not go to bed—though I shall go to my room. She might come back here, and then she would say I waited to see Mr. Brown again. Oh, she *is* disagreeable."

When she reached her room the girl began to cry. Her mortification had almost choked her, and tears brought relief with them, her unusual bitterness softened, and she began to excuse her aunt's unkindness on the ground of her early trial. To see two young people happy together Marjorie argued must make a person miserable who had suffered as her Aunt Louisa had.

Marjorie's gown fastened behind, and as she unlaced it, a knot came in the lace and stopped further progress. Much against her inclination she was compelled to ring for Hannah.

"Now for a lecture," the girl said, when her door opened.

Hannah looked sad, rather than cross, and at first she was too intent on the knot even to speak. Her silence irritated Marjorie's ruffled temper.

"Why don't you begin to scold, you dear old thing," she said when a sudden release told her that she was once more free.

"I cannot do two things at once, ma'am," Hannah went on unlacing, so that the girl could not see her face.

"Nobbut it is not t' words that Ah says as signify. 'Tis something sadder," she added solemnly.

Marjorie turned so suddenly at this awe-struck tone that she wrenched the lace from the old woman's fingers.

"There was nothing sad in a waltz Hannah, it was such a good one, it warmed me and made me feel happy, till you came creeping in like a—what is this you call it —dobie."

Hannah tried to stop her words. "Eh, but hush, hush, ma'am, t' walls may carry sounds, who knows." She looked fearfully round her. "Miss Marjorie, in a house where unlove has gone on from year to year, cherished like as it were a friend, maybe the evil nivver dies, and who can say what shape it may take, what woe it may work. Miss Marjorie, ma'am, Ah hev heerd say best let t'deead rest, nobbut a mon that dees unforgiven cannut rest; an it is ill done to trespass where his poor soul may be seeking pardon wandering—" She checked herself at the sight of the girl's awestruck face. Marjorie's eyes were large with sudden dread, but she tried to smile.

"Is that all? Oh, I thought your shockedness was about something else; about me, you know. Well, I'll not go near the library again—even for another waltz."

Hannah went on folding and smoothing when she had helped Marjorie on with her dressing-gown, but she did not speak again till she had finished her work.

"Good night, ma'am," she said, and she turned to go away.

Marjorie felt strangely unwilling to be left alone.

"Can't you stay with me a bit, Hannah? I'm not going to bed yet."

"Ah mun be on t'listen for t'mistress's bell," said Hannah, resolutely, and she went.

Marjorie took a book and seated herself beside the fire. She could not sit in front of it, that position left an area of space behind her which—well—which she could fill with uncomfortable imaginings. She placed herself with her back against the wall and fixed her eyes on her book. But she could not read. The wardrobe creaked and made her start, and then suddenly she heard a stealthy step in the passage. She threw down her book, darted to the door, and locked it; but what was the use, she asked herself, and she found her teeth chattering with the dread that had seized on her.

"Nonsense," she said bravely, "what a baby I am," but she lit another pair of candles that stood on the high mantelshelf. Although this extra light cheered her she could not go back to her book. She said her prayers and undressed quickly, and then when she had blown out the candles, such a sickening dread overcame her that she nearly shrieked out. She scrambled into bed and hid her face to her pillow.

CHAPTER VII.

MARJORIE WRITES A LETTER.

DECEMBER had come but there was nothing genial in the dark, bleak weather; the persistent dulness of the house and its surroundings told on Marjorie's courage, she became depressed and languid. Snow had fallen heavily, and had lain already a foot deep on the ground, so that there really was nothing to be seen from the windows but an expanse of whiteness where these overlooked the moor, while from the hall windows the snow-laden branches of the carriage drive looked like a procession of white shrouded worshippers as they bent under their unaccustomed weight.

Marjorie had been shivering since she came in from her walk but now she seemed regardless of the cold. She was standing on the marble pavement of the Hall pressing her face against the glass beside the door, till both nose and cheeks were blue with cold. It was nearly four o'clock. She was watching for the postman, but every minute of increasing darkness lessened her hope of his arrival. The tall clock on the landing struck the quarter past four, and Marjorie sighed heavily as she turned from the window.

"Oh, dear! of course I ought not to expect him to write, but still I did. I suppose he thinks I'm a baby, and he treats me like one."

Tears had been ready for some minutes, and now as she walked slowly upstairs, they fell silently over her cold face.

She went into the parlor and seated herself before the fire This was a part of the day that she hated, for candles were brought in at a fixed hour at Eyon Court, and Marjorie had perforce to sit in darkness, unless she went to her room and braved the cold there.

"I am very miserable," she said, as she warmed first one dimpled hand and then the other. "I wonder what would have happened if I had said No to Aunt Louisa's invitation. She could not have brought me to Eyon Court against my will. Dear Mrs. Locker would not have allowed it, and I am sure Sir George would have taken my part. Am I so very sure though, that he would?" A long pause came at this point, while she debated many pros and cons, smiling and frowning in turn as they came.

"I really have tried to bear it," she said at last, "and I can't. It seems silly and impatient, and I suppose Sir George thinks so and he leaves me to my fate."

She clasped her hands in her lap and sat looking sadly into the fire.

She asked herself why she had come to Eyon Court. Mrs. Locker and Sir George Wolff had told her that if she shrank from her aunt's proposal some arrangement could doubtless be made; but Marjorie had said she was willing to go to the manor house.

She was proud of belonging to this old family, although her mother's account had not given her a favorable impression of its members; but then Marjorie knew that

both her father and her grandfather had married for love, and that their wives had not brought money with them, and she thought that as Aunt Louisa and her brother John had evidently been fond of money they had probably shown their worst side to the poor wives—her mother and her grandmother—and with the daring self-confidence of nineteen she had resolved to be fond of her Aunt Louisa. Mrs. Locker had a pretty moderate sized house, but there was nothing special in t, and Marjorie had thought it would be delightful to have the free range of Eyon Court. A view of the old place sketched by her grandfather had always impressed her imagination.

"What a silly child I was," she said sadly.

She had not seen Mr. Brown after that first evening. She had passed a miserably disturbed night, but next morning her nervous alarm had been soothed. She found a note from Mr. Brown which had been slipped under her door. It contained only a few lines of farewell. He expressed much regret that business obliged him to shorten his visit, but the presence of the note explained to Marjorie the cause of the stealthy footsteps which had so alarmed her overnight.

Miss Eyon made no further attack on her; and for a couple of days life seemed tolerable—then came the bitter north wind followed by the snow. Miss Eyon kept her roon and sent word that she did not want visitors; and at first Marjorie had enjoyed the freedom of solitude. But her aunt soon shook off the cold that had kept her prisoner, and reappeared at luncheon and dinner. She also asked Marjorie to spend her evenings in the study. Cer-

tainly, as the girl now told herself before the fire, it could not be that her aunt enjoyed her company. More than once she had spoken so unkindly that Marjorie had hard work to keep herself from open rebellion. At last, just a week ago, Miss Eyon had been almost silent for two days, and in her despair Marjorie sat down and wrote to Sir George Wolff; she told him of her utter wretchedness, and she begged him to come and see and advise her. But no answer had come from him.

The fire warmed Marjorie's feet and hands, and the blaze scorched her cheeks; but this glow did not help to cheer her. Her heart felt very heavy. Till this disappointment of her hopes she had not known how truly she believed in her old friend's love, or how much she clung to him for help and advice. She told herself, as she nervously twined her fingers yet more closely together, that it was a just punishment on her for having amused herself with Mr. Brown; it seemed to her fancy, which had of late grown morbid, that Sir George might have heard of her walk with this stranger, and might feel offended.

She had complained to him on the moor of her loneliness, and only a few hours later he might have seen her laughing and talking with this handsome young fellow.

"He is so humble-minded about himself," she said, sadly, "that perhaps he was not angry; perhaps the dear man gave me up in a broken-hearted sort of way, and persuaded himself I must like some one younger best, as if I could think of a stranger as I think of him. Oh dear,

what a foo—foolish girl I have been." She hid her hot face in her hands.

It did not occur to the simple girl that, although she had put her letter in the box in the hall, it was not a matter of course that it went to the post. Ever since Marjorie's arrival, Miss Eyon had inspected the contents of the letter-box before they were sent down to the village post-office, and she had smiled when she saw a letter addressed to "Sir George Wolff, Bart., with "*immediate*" in the corner. She opened and read the pathetic little letter, and was amused by its contents.

"This must be stopped," she said. "Dulness is breaking her heaat, is it?"

She watched Marjorie more closely, and she saw a great change in the girl, but she decided that it was best to give her waiting-time; best for her to see for herself that her friend was not coming to help her. To-day Miss Eyon resolved that no more time should be wasted. It may be that the girl's pale face and the restless look in her eyes at luncheon time warned her guardian that weak creatures, driven to bay, sometimes prove unmanageable. While Marjorie sat crying before the fire, her aunt rang her bell for Hannah, and gave the woman a message for her niece. Marjorie had not felt the same trust in Hannah since that night when the old woman came to look for her in the library. She suspected that she was her aunt's spy, and she was sorry she had talked so freely to her, When she saw Hannah come in by the private entrance she turned away her face to hide her tears.

"T' mistress wants you in t' study, ma'am."

Marjorie was startled by such an unexpected summons. She pushed her hair off her forehead and looked round.

"What does my aunt want me for?"

"Ah cannot say, ma'am. My business was nobbut to say you're wanted i' t' study,"

Marjorie's sweet temper had lost its readiness in all ways. She felt unwilling to obey her aunt's summons, and she was unwilling to trust in her. She was sure that she was sent for now to receive a lecture.

When she opened the study door, Miss Eyon was surprised by the calmness with which the girl looked at her.

"You had better sit down, child." Her tone surprised Marjorie, it was so much more genial than usual. "I noticed at luncheon," the even voice went on, "that you scarcely ate or drank; also that you looked worried. Is anything amiss? Are you ill, Marjorie?"

"I—oh no, I am not ill;" then she gulped down her pride, and tried to be her old frank self. "I am dull, that's all—and—and I am not used to it."

"H'm?"

Miss Eyon gave a long, critical stare, and the girl reddened under it. She felt that those cruel blue eyes had found out traces of her tears. It was so hard; let her try ever so much, this old woman seemed always to find out where she was weak.

"Well!" Miss Eyon had waited a few minutes. She liked to see the girl's blushes, and she enjoyed beforehand the surprise she was going to give. "You are, I suppose, too weak to find your own amusements. A strong nature has its resources. I am sorry you find Eyon Court

dull, Marjorie; I must try to make it more cheerful for you. You want a companion, I fancy, and—"

The girl looked up quickly, her aunt's new tone startled her as much as the proposal did. There was an indulgence in it for the shortcomings of youth that she fancied was unknown to her Aunt Louisa, and she said "Thank you," although Miss Eyon had not finished her sentence.

"I think," the old woman went on, "you did not dislike Mr. Brown?"

"I liked him, aunt."

"I am glad to hear that, because as he does business for me elsewhere it suits me from time to time to have him here; his visit this time can be made to suit a double purpose; when I have done with him he can go out walking with you."

Marjorie looked up gladly, but her thanks were checked by the mocking expression in her aunt's eyes. Miss Eyon's voice had sounded kind, and yet her blue eyes said that every word she had spoken was false.

"Is Mr. Brown really coming again," the girl said, thoughtfully.

"I have not yet sent him an invitation. You can save me that trouble. Sit down there," she nodded to a writing table on the further side of the fireplace, "and write a nice little note to him."

"In your name, Aunt?"

Miss Eyon smiled.

"You had better write from yourself. You can say I am tired and I bid you write. Ask him to come as soon as possible and stay as long as he can spare the time."

"Am I awake?" the girl asked herself.

It was so difficult to believe that it could really be her Aunt Louisa who had continued to speak in such a pleasant way, Marjorie saw that she had misinterpreted the look which she had thought mocking; she felt so much softened towards Miss Eyon that she fancied she had misjudged her.

She sat down and took up a pen, but she felt very shy at beginning. Should she put "Dear sir" or "Dear Mr. Brown"? She looked across the hearth. It was a relief to see Miss Eyon's eyes were closed. Marjorie breathed more freely, and she began "Dear Mr. Brown." She wrote a stiff little note, for she knew her aunt would want to see it; also she was afraid Mr. Brown would be critical; he had seemed to her so very, very clever. She did not feel sure how she ought to sign it; once, when she had written a business note for Miss Eyon, her aunt had dictated it and had told her to put "Yours faithfully."

Marjorie decided at last to put "sincerely," and then she signed her name very distinctly.

Miss Eyon opened her eyes. "Let me see it," she said, when the girl had folded her note. She smiled as she read it. "You can leave it here." Miss Eyon said; "I mean to write a few words, and I will put them on the blank page."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE BLADEBONE.

No one sat on the bench outside the Bladebone this evening. A keen east wind had whirled down the valley for some hours past, and it was now so dark that even the wanderer, Tobias, was glad to make one of the half-circle round the broad hearth of the Inn, although he asserted that his natural home was in the open air. Matthew Ray, the landlord of the Bladebone, a tall, strongly-built young fellow, who looked like a farmer, stood just now in the midst of his guests, with his back to the fire, and was seemingly enjoying the consumption of the wreaths of smoke which issued from the lips of his customers.

"He has been coming an' going mebbe more than ten years," he said, in answer to the last speaker, "but, till now, he's nivver come to Eyon Court twice within a quarter. You may laugh, Mister White, nobbut you'll hear wedding bells ringing across t' moor, and that before lang, Ah tell you." He looked sturdily at the butterman, but Mr. Luke White shook his red head authoritatively.

"You're wrang, Mat, you're wrang," he said. "Ah goes oop to t' Coort oftenest and Ah sud know if onybody

knows. Ah tell ye that t' lass is a bairn saxteen year owd or so, Ah reckon. T' mistress wull nut be matching her wiv a husband so sune ; so now you know." He again wagged his red beard as he ended.

Tobias looked at his pipe, and then taking it from his lips he puffed out a long wreath of smoke. He watched this curl upward round the landlord's head, and he half closed his eyes with the lazy look of enjoyment one sees in a cat ; then he laid a stumpy forefinger against his red nose.

"You hev a long head, Mister White," he said, "but you hev to mind t' duties o' your callin' ; mon, you cannot hev eyes everywhere ; you mun leave that to t' vagabonds like me. A month agone, whiles Ah set behind a bush, t' lad an' t' lassie passed by, an' to my thinking they wur not far from sweetheartin'. Nobbut he's willin', he'd not coom to t' Coort, he hev said, Toby, said he, how can ye bide in sik a dog hole as Wenburn—coom to London, he says, an' Ah'll make a man o' you. Nay, friend Luke, if t'lass is willin', we sall hev t'weddin' bells ringing by Christmas ; t'owd lass wad nivver stomach overlong coortin'—eh, Dannle, what hev you to say?—spit it oot, mon."

Daniel's old white head was sunk on the breast of his smock frock, while both his large veined hands clasped the top of his stick. He was the only non-smoker among the gossips, and yet did not use his lips more freely for speech than many others of the group. At this direct question he looked up and showed a worn gray face. with a stubbly beard in need of shaving, and large, dark, sunk-

en eye sockets, for which his watery colorless eyes seemed strangely small; they were over-shadowed by heavy brows, darker and coarser than his hair, and while he spoke these twitched uneasily, as if they had some connection with his words.

"Ah donnot know wherefore you sud ask me, Toby Horner," he said, very slowly. "Ah've knawed t'Eyons of Eyon Court, man and lad, seventy years and more, an' Ah hev nivver seen a change in ony of them. Ah sez t'lass 'ull do reet if sheea taks a man whiles sheea's young and such like. T'owd lass is harder than t'floor," he struck his stick on it as he spoke, and made the mugs rattle on the table. "'Tis enough to mak' t'lass fey," he said, "shut up wiv twae owd women-folk sik as Hannah Reeth and t'mistress—a house wiv barred windows! Ah'd as lief go to prison at ance." He paused, and then under his breath he added, "There's ane that walks there——"

There was a solemn silence. Luke White's beard had become very tremulous, but at this weird hint he got up from his seat and looked rebukingly at the landlord, who in his opinion should have checked such free spoken talk; but Mat Ray avoided the butterman's eyes; he owed nothing to Miss Eyon, and he found her hard and grasping about questions of repair and improvement at the Bladebone; it is possible that he secretly enjoyed Daniel's remarks, for he had nodded an accompaniment while he spoke, but Tobias shook his head.

"That's a lang say for you, Dannle, but you forgit t'owd saying, 'Oot t'frying pan into t'fire.' You've

knowed t'Eyons langer than t'rest on us—can ye tell where this Mister Brown comes from an' whar he wur reared? Ah'd like to know summat about un."

Luke White paused as he was going out.

"He's a freend o' Miss Eyon's, that's enuf to know, Tobias Horner."

Tobias shook his head.

"Go back to t'shop, mon; go back t'shop." He waved his hand. "What brains you had, mon, hev' run to lard an' butter. We hev knowed that mich for years past. We want to learn now why it is better, as Dannle says, for t'lass to marry wiv a stranger than to live oop at t'Coort."

Here Mat Ray interposed.

"Wait a jee," he said, with a broad smile, "You go a trifle fast, Tobias. The young man may have come down to Eyon Court on business without any regard to Miss Marjorie. Poor lass, I'm glad for her sake she has such a change as a young chap to speak wiv; she is sadly dull I am afeared."

Tobias grinned. "'Twill be more a change for t'lass than for t'lad,"Ah'm thinkin'—ah knows summat about Mister Brown—t'lass at t'Court isna t'first pretty face he's run after by mony a one. Nay, to my thinkin' t' lass sud bide wiv her guradian, nobbut a better man may coom forrard to give her a home. 'Tis her brass this chap's wantin'. He'll mebbe like mysen hev no more an' what he stands oop in."

This seemed to end the discussion; a general scuffling of feet, a reaching down of wraps by the older men from

the pegs they hung on, showed that the meeting was broken up, and although Tobias called for a fresh mug-ful, he had to drink it in solitude—the landlord having got notice from Mrs. Ray that supper was on the table.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHANGE.

MARJORIE was in high spirits. Hannah had brought her the news of Mr. Brown's arrival, and a message from Miss Eyon; her aunt wished her to wear her pretty gown when she appeared at dinner.

Mr. Brown's greeting and his admiring glances showed his appreciation.

He thanked her warmly for her note, and Miss Eyon smiled. She seemed satisfied that he should continue to talk to the girl through the dinner.

"You will come into the study this evening, Marjorie," she said, so graciously that the girl could hardly believe her ears. Dinner ended, Mr. Brown gave Miss Eyon his arm, and while Marjorie followed, she told herself it was just like a fairy tale in which, after some weeks of trial and sadness, the heroine finds her life completely changed.

"I know Mr. Brown has been my good fairy," she said. "I feel ever so grateful to him."

When they reached the study, Miss Eyon seated herself in her high-backed wooden chair and closed her eyes.

"You young people must amuse yourselves," she said, "I shall have a nap."

Marjorie looked at the pale, closed eyelids and she wondered whether the nap would be real, or whether her her aunt meant secretly to watch her behavior. The constant feeling that she was distrusted had made the girl wary, and when Mr. Brown drew his chair close to hers and began to whisper, she instinctively moved a little away from him.

"How charming you look to-night," he said. "Miss Eyon told me you had grown pale and languid, but I can't see what she meant."

Marjorie did not know how to answer. No one had ever spoken to her in this way ; she felt shy, and slightly annoyed.

"Tell me about London, please," she said. "Have you enjoyed yourself since you went away?"

"What a question! Cannot you guess, you sweet child, that I have been miserable without you. I have been thinking about you ever since we parted, longing to be with you again. I cannot tell you how happy that dear little letter made me."

He took her hand before she could prevent him, and he kissed it.

She quickly drew her hand away, and looked at her Aunt, but her eyes were still closed. Marjorie was vexed with her companion, she certainly had not given him the right to kiss her hand, and she sat in uncomfortable silence.

"Do not be angry," he whispered. "I could not help it, but it shall not happen again. I want you to listen to me. I want to tell you how I have been plan-

ning for you. I have settled that you must not go on living in this dismal place."

"It is not as dismal as it was. Aunt Louisa has grown to like me."

"She could not help that," he said, tenderly. "Who could help loving you, I wonder; but still this dulness is bad for you. You will lose little by little all your gayety; you will grow silent and sad; full of vague trouble and fear. How can I tell that you may not grow in your turn suspicious of others."

He nodded towards the sleeping figure in the chair opposite, and Marjorie felt nervous; It seemed to her wrong to carry on such talk.

"Will it not be better and truer to say all this out before my aunt. If you tell her you think that this place is not good for me, she will listen to you. I am sure she is very fond of you."

He pulled out his fair, soft whiskers and sat looking into the fire.

"Yes," he said at last, "perhaps she is—anyway I come here to advise her, so she will have to listen." He looked meaningly at Marjorie and she felt a little timid under his gaze. "Of course"—he said it more as if he were talking aloud than talking to his companion—"there can be no doubt as to the easiest way of setting you free; but that rests with you, you might not like the plan and then that ends it. I must feel my way. But be sure of one thing," he said earnestly, "I shall not leave you as I found you; before I go away the plan for your deliver-

ance shall be settled with—" He looked towards Miss Eyon.

His eyes remained fixed on her. Miss Eyon was awake and she was looking at him and at Marjorie.

"I have slept too long," she said. "I fancy it is late. Good-night, Marjorie. I have some business to get through before bed-time. Pleasant dreams to you, child."

This was a very unusual attention, but it chilled Marjorie. Once more she could have said that her aunt's eyes were mocking her.

The bed-candles always stood on a quaint old sideboard just outside the study door, and Mr. Brown followed Marjorie, and began to light her candle.

"I want to say one thing," he whispered; "she has eyes like a hawk, so be very careful; but look here, what ever happens, do not put any blame on me; remember that I am always at your service. You trust me, do you not, sweet girl?" He took her hand as if to say good-night, but as he ended he pressed it warmly between his own. "Believe me, I would not vex you for the world."

The girl was touched. She gently drew her hand away.

"Thank you," she said, "I promise to trust to you."

He stood watching her as she went up the steps. Her graceful figure, in its white clinging gown, stood out picture-like in the darkness. Marjorie heard him sigh as she opened the door into the narrow lofty passage.

Hannah was standing before the door of Marjorie's bedroom, and she did not turn to open it.

"It is farther on, ma'am," she said, bluntly. "T' mis-

tress hev given you a warmer room for t' winter. It is this way."

She did not wait to be answered. She opened the door by which Marjorie had explored the other gallery, and the girl followed her. It did not smell so musty this evening. One of the doors on the right stood open, and from it a flood of light and warmth streamed into the passage. Hannah led the way into this room. The fireplace was much larger; the room, too, was larger than Marjorie's bedroom had been. The girl felt a thicker, softer carpet underfoot, and there were comfortable easy chairs, and a table drawn in front of the fireplace. Yet in spite of these arrangements for her comfort, the girl felt a sudden shrinking, a sort of warning. She looked round her. On her right was the awful-looking canopied bedstead, and as she glanced above the high mantle-shelf there was her aunt's portrait. She was in the barred room.

"Why am I put here, Hannah?" She spoke angrily, but Hannah went on attending to the fire.

"Ah hev telled you, ma'am; it is for warmth. This room has been fettled a' purpose for you. T' mistress hev thowt t'other room was cold in winter. You will find all your things in t' drawers an' t' shelves, an' nobbut all is to your liking you mun tell me, ma'am."

"It is not to my liking to sleep here at all. Look here, Hannah, I don't mind about a fire. You help me to carry what I want for to-night, and I shall go back to my own room. I won't sleep here," she said vehemently. She snatched up her brushes and her dressing-gown, and hurried to the door.

"Donnut you fret yoursen, ma'am, t'other door is steekit, t'mistress hev locked it hersen, she hev t'key."

Marjorie's surprise made her pause, and calmed her excitement.

"My aunt came to my room, did she? I thought you said, Hannah, she never went about the house?"

"That is so, ma'am, Ah was freeted when Ah saw her standing there, an' she said, 'Hannah, t'room is too cold for my niece; t'other side o' t'house is warmer.'"

Marjorie looked hard at Hannah, but she thought the old woman was telling the truth. For an instant she resolved to go back to her aunt's study and insist on sleeping in her former bedroom, but her nature was essentially gentle, and she shrank from the quarrel which would have to take place before Mr. Brown. She stood thinking, while Hannah began to unloose her gown.

"Look here, Hannah," she said at last, "I am not going to give in, I will sleep here to-night, because my doing so will save you trouble, but I shall see my Aunt to-morrow, and tell her I dislike the change."

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET OF THE BARRED ROOM.

Miss Eyon sat in her high-backed chair, stiffer and even more erect than usual. There was a flash in her blue eyes and a tight compression of the lips; and her hands, instead of being as usual folded in her lap, grasped each an arm of her chair, as if by the action she were trying to keep in the anger that possessed her; but her face, with these exceptions, was as calm and pale as usual.

Marjorie had risen from her seat. She stood before her aunt with her hands pressed on her bosom; her head was bent slightly forward, and her dark-blue eyes shone with suppressed feeling as they fixed on Miss Eyon. The girl did not look like a culprit brought up for sentence. Her stern young face was more like that of an avenging angel full of innocence and truth.

There had been silence for some minutes, then Miss Eyon said, irritably:

"You need not stare at me, Marjorie, I have told you what you have to do. You fretted and you have complained of dulness; I do not care to have a discontented person with me. You have flirted with Mr. Brown and encouraged him, and yet you affect surprise because I

wise you to marry him. I expected truth from an Eyon —child, you are degenerate."

The girl had received an early summons to the study, and then, before she had time to complain of her change of room, Miss Eyon told her that she wished her to marry Mr. Brown.

"It is you who are not dealing fairly by me," the girl said. "I do not want you to take my opinion. Will you send for Mrs. Locker or—or Sir George Wolff, they will gladly relieve you of the charge of me."

Miss Eyon looked less angry, she even began to smile in the sneering way that Marjorie so much disliked.

"Mrs. Locker is not your guardian and I am. As to Sir George Wolff, it would not be dignified, I think, to thrust a girl on a man who has lost his interest in her. May I ask what reason you have for counting on Sir George Wolff's help. Have you been in correspondence with him? If he cared for you," she said, slowly, "he would have come to see you. He could not help it."

The expression of Marjorie's face altered. She hung her head in confusion. No, her aunt had spoken truly. She had no right to count on her old friend's help. She felt very forlorn. It almost seemed better to say she would marry Mr. Brown, and to take her chance of being happy with him. She shuddered when the idea came. What did she know of him? She did not even know what he was, or whether he was honest and true; each time that she had got to like him, and to feel contented in his company, he had done or said something that had vexed her and made her shy of him. Her first impres-

sion had been that he was not quite a gentleman, but that had become effaced by association—now it returned strongly.

"Well, you do not answer me. I am right then in saying that your old friend has given you up. You are a wayward girl, Marjorie. When I asked Mr. Brown if he would like to take you for a wife, he was full of gratitude. I believe the man is devoted to you. He is young and handsome, he has the means to keep a wife; you cannot give one reason against marrying, except a peevish girl's caprice. I have been at some unnecessary pains to explain myself, but there is one point I have left out. I never give up a purpose, nor do I falter in it, you may have learned so much about me. I do not intend to hurry this marriage or to ill-treat you, but I tell you in plain words, you must marry this gentleman before the year is out."

The girl stood watching her, and when she saw how pitiless those blue eyes looked, she thought of her aunt's story; if she had kept thirty years to her bitter resolution and had refused forgiveness to a dying man, what hope, the girl asked herself, could she have of finding any mercy in Miss Eyon. She shivered as though ice had touched her, and then an idea came to help her. More than once she had met the clergyman in the village, she liked his face, and his sermons had helped her in her sad life; she would go across the moor to the Parsonage, and ask him to advise her. She wished now that she had spoken to him before, but she had been too timid.

"You are very hard Aunt," she said; "it is enough

to make any one rebellious to be treated as you have treated me this morning. I don't feel that I can marry Mr. Brown ; but, at least, I ought to have time to think in ; it is all so cruelly sudden."

Miss Eyon smiled.

"That is not my fault. I spoke kindly, as a mother might have done, and you forgot yourself—you behaved like a poor, untutored village child. I will give you time. It is possible that Mr. Brown can plead for himself better than through me; but, Marjorie, unless you consent to obey me, I prefer that you should keep indoors. I do not confine you to your room, but I forbid you to leave the house. Now you had better go away."

Marjorie looked defiant.

'I have to ask you," she said, "why you put me in that barred room. I cannot sleep there. I lay awake all last night. It is like a prison."

Miss Eyon smiled.

"It was a prison years ago," she said. "I dare say you are curious to know how a room came to be barred in such a house as this. I will tell you. More than a hundred years ago there was a girl in this house whose reason left her. Her father was a foolish, fond old man, and he kept the matter secret lest his child should be taken away from him. He caused bars to be placed to the windows of that room, and the walls have a casing of wool behind the plaster to deaden sound. You might cry till you were tired, Marjorie, and no one could hear you," she said, with a sneer. "But," she went on more quickly, for Marjorie's scared face troubled her, and made

her wish to be rid of the girl's presence, "the foolish father forgot to give his daughter a keeper. One morning he found her hanging to the window bars by a silk ribbon halter she had knotted round her throat. Go, girl, go! Why do you stand staring at me? Ah!"

Miss Eyon got up from her chair, for Marjorie stretched out her hand, caught wildly at the air, and fell on the floor near her aunt's table.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER MEETING IN THE LIBRARY.

When Marjorie opened her eyes, she was alone in her aunt's study.

Some one had tried to revive her; her face was wet with eau de Cologne; a cushion had been placed beneath her head and a shawl had been thrown over her. She got up; she was not hurt, but she felt giddy and stupefied; she looked round her with a feeling of surprise. Her aunt's empty chair brought back memory, the horror she had felt at the unhappy girl's story revived.

She went slowly out of the study and along the passage to her former room. The door was locked, as Hannah had said. Marjorie went into the gallery beyond. The door of the barred room stood open. It was a relief to hear some one singing within; a maid was on her knees before the grate, singing while she brushed the bars. But Marjorie's eyes went at once to the window, and she shivered at the remembrance of her aunt's legend. The light shone in broadly now, but how would it be when the room was filled with shadows, or worse still, if she happened to wake in the darkness. She was impatient, however, for the maid's departure. She felt that nothing could be worse than to remain at Eyon Court, and she

must think how she could get away. Marjorie's disordered hair and ghastly paleness had excited the maid's curiosity; but the young lady seated herself with her back to the fireplace, and as there was nothing to be gained by staying, the maid gathered up her brushes and departed. Marjorie bathed her aching forehead and her eyes with cold water until the pain lessened, and she was able to think without effort. She asked herself if it would be possible to marry Mr. Brown, and then last night's talk came back, and she understood the meaning of his words. The shock of finding herself installed in this hateful room had banished them, but they now came back clearly. Marriage with him was "the easy way" Mr. Brown had hinted at, and he had looked very earnest and truthful when he followed her outside and asked her to trust him.

"I will trust him," she said. A sudden feeling of confidence suggested that if he loved her he could not be cruel, or urge her against her will. Yes, she would trust him; she would tell him about Miss Eyon's harshness, and she would ask him to take her back to Mrs. Locker.

The difficulty was to see him privately, now that her aunt had forbidden her to leave the house.

It suddenly occurred to Marjorie that her aunt might not yet have given any orders to prevent her from doing this and she at once put on her hat and cloak. It would be better, she thought, to seek the Vicar's protection before she appealed to Mr. Brown. If she failed with the Vicar, she could still apply to him. She went bravely along the gallery, lighted by pale ground glass windows, and through her own passage, till she came out facing

the study door. Her heart beat quickly. If Hannah should come out of her aunt's room what should she do, for she expected the old servant would stop her. "She knows everything," the girl said. She went on safely till she reached the stairs that led down into the hall. As she came down them, Barbara appeared from a door leading to the pantry.

She looked hard at Marjorie, and stood waiting till the girl had walked across to the entrance door.

"If you please, ma'am, t'mistress's orders are for you not to go outside; Miss Eyon hev said so to me herself."

Marjorie looked at the door and then at the maid, but she felt that she was no match for the broad sturdy woman; besides, she could not wrangle with Barbara. She walked to the window and looked out. The snow was loosening from the trees, and some of them had recovered their upright position.

Marjorie had never felt so angry. While she stood trying to calm herself she saw some one coming up the drive. She fancied it was Mr. Brown, but just as the figure came near enough for her to see that it was Mr. Brown, he turned abruptly into a side path leading round to the stables. Marjorie went upstairs, again disappointed, but determined now to appeal to him for help. He was plainly the only refuge she had from her aunt's tyranny.

A secret fear had come to the girl that as Miss Eyon had been capable of locking one door, she might find her way to the barred room and imprison her there. Marjorie went into the parlor. She put her hat and cloak

in a corner and tried to read. But her headache had come back, and she felt altogether unhinged.

The two stout maids came in and laid the table for luncheon, and presently they brought it in.

"Ah was to say, ma'am, if you please," said stolid faced Barbara, "that Miss Eyon takes luncheon in t' study, and Mr. Brown is not in t' house."

"Do you mean," Marjorie said in sudden terror, "that Mr. Brown has gone away."

"Yes, ma'am."

Marjorie thought that after this the woman hurried over her work, as if she feared to be questioned further. She wondered whether Mr. Brown was in the house. Barbara might not know that he was there. It was possible that her aunt suspected her intention of appealing to him, and had taken measures to keep them apart.

Marjorie still felt faint and giddy, as if she had been ill; but as she ate and drank she revived a little; she began again to think over a means of escape.

Supposing that Mr. Brown consented to help her, she was glad to feel that she need only adopt any plan he might suggest. She had plenty of money to pay the expense of her journey to Mrs. Locker's; but she did not know how to accomplish such a journey. Mrs. Locker had taken her part of the way, and they slept at York, Marjorie had made the journey thence to Eyon Court in a postchaise, and she could not hope to find such a vehicle in Wenburn.

Hope is strong in a young heart, and Marjorie had a buoyant nature. She knew that she could not be mar-

ried against her will ; but if her aunt were to lock her up in that terrible room, she asked herself whether she might not be brought to consent ; at this thought her fears counselled her to yield while there was time to do so with dignity. After all, she did not dislike Mr. Brown, and he had been very kind to her. She fell asleep at last over the fire, thoroughly worn-out. She roused suddenly. Some one seemed to be speaking to her. She opened her eyes, and she started. She was alone, but it was dark, candles had been brought in while she slept ; and it seemed to her that a tall gray figure was vanishing into the wall beside her aunt's door.

Marjorie jumped out ; stretched out her arms, and then she rubbed her eyes. Had she seen a ghost, she wondered, or had her aunt come to watch her whilst she slept.

The dressing bell rang as she left the room. On her way she met Hannah, and the woman turned and followed her.

"I really don't want you, Hannah," the girl said. "I can manage by myself."

Hannah followed as if she had not heard. When she had closed the bedroom door she said:

"Ah hev something particular to say, ma'am, and it cannot be spoken in a passage. Donnut you vex Mr. Brown, Miss Marjorie ; he is master here, an anybody that gets his ill word is safe to suffer for it. Keep you well with Mr. Brown, ma'am, and you'll go safe to t'end."

Hannah spoke with more feeling than usual, but she looked so stiff and solemn that Marjorie laughed.

"What should make you think I want to quarrel with the man?" Then, as the old servant looked mortified, she saw that the warning was kindly meant. It was soothing that one person in the house should have a friendly feeling towards her, and she patted Hannah on the shoulder.

"Thank you for your advice, but I am rather surprised at you," Marjorie said. "When Mr. Brown was here before, you came and took me away from him, and now you preach friendship. Well, I can tell you I want a friend badly just now."

Hannah looked wistful. She seemed ready to speak, and then she turned suddenly to the wardrobe and spoke over her shoulder. "Mr. Brown comes back to-night," she said. "Nobbut ye'll be mebbe asleep before he comes."

Marjorie had become suspicious. She knew that it was useless to question Hannah, but the woman never wasted words. She must have some motive for saying this about Mr. Brown.

"Perhaps she may fancy it comforts me to know that I shall not be alone in the house to-night with Aunt Louisa," the girl said to herself as she went in to dinner.

Dinner was at an end. Miss Eyon had taken her usual place at the table, but she had hardly spoken to her niece. And now she had gone away directly after the table was cleared.

Marjorie lingered beside the fire; she dreaded to return to her bedroom. But presently Barbara came in with

her bed-candle, and asked if she should put out the lights. Marjorie longed to say that she wished to sit later in the dining-room, but she felt unable to struggle against her aunt's will while she remained under her roof. A sort of helpless indecision was creeping over her. She felt listless and inert, with a consciousness that unless she could escape from Eyon Court, she must do all her aunt willed her to do.

She opened the door of her room timidly, and then she stood still instead of entering. She held her breath with expectation, for the door at the end of the passage, which she had always found to be locked, was slowly opening.

The thought darted quickly into Marjorie's brain that her fear was justified—her aunt was coming in this stealthy way to fasten her a prisoner in the barred room.

But in another moment she saw Mr. Brown.

He had a lighted candle and he said, "Hush!" although she had not spoken.

"Will you follow me?" he said, in a low voice.

Marjorie went after him, into what she found was yet another gallery, at right angles with the one she had left. Mr. Brown closed and locked the door behind her, and then he opened one on the right of the passage they had entered.

"Do you know where you are?" he said, and he placed the candle he carried in a sconce on the wall.

Marjorie was alarmed when she recognized the library.

"Oh, why did you bring me here," she said, eagerly. "I said I would never come here again."

He laughed and drew forward one of the old chairs.

"I am sorry you object," he said, as she seated herself; "but I really had no choice. I dislike to talk in whispers, and the walls here are deaf; and besides, I believe even Hannah dislikes to venture into these old rooms at this time of night. You want to speak to me, don't you, now that matters have come to a crisis?" he said, as if he had been reading her thoughts.

At first Majorie had felt a strong dislike to finding herself alone with him. She had hesitated whether she should not be safer in the barred room, and then she asked herself what she could have to fear from Mr. Brown? Was not this meeting that which she most wished for? Now her opportunity had come.

"Yes," she said, but she felt strangely shy. How could she say to him without any provocation, "I do not want to marry you."

She sat looking at her hands, folded in her lap; and he stood leaning against the chimney-piece looking at her. He had placed the chair so that the light fell on her face. For a minute or two he watched her quivering lips till he fancied she was going to cry.

"My dear child," he said kindly, "you are not keeping your promise; last night you said you would trust me. Am I an ogre, and do you think I shall gobble you up, eh?" He ended merrily. She looked up, and the sight of his smiling pleasant face so cheered her that she smiled too, and a load seemed taken from her spirits.

"To begin with," he went on, "you have not even shaken hands with me, and I cannot remember that I have seen you since last night."

He took her hand, but he did not attempt to keep it in his. "Now we must talk business," and he drew forward another of the heavy chairs and seated himself opposite her. He was very slow in doing this, but he was studying Marjorie intently all the while.

"Do you know," he said, at last, "that I believe instead of being cheerful I ought to be tearing my hair and gnashing my teeth with disappointment? Eh? What do you say, Mademoiselle?—smiling, I declare. Well, well, I suppose you think I have no feeling."

He got up and walked to the other end of the room.

"There, you need not say a word," for, as he came up to her, Marjorie began to speak. "I understand all about it: you are an Eyon, and, therefore, you will not be driven to do what your aunt chooses. By Jove! I can't blame you, though I am the loser. Well, now," he seated himself again, "we must settle things; you want to leave Eyon Court at once, do you not?"

Marjorie's eyes opened widely. "Who could have told you that? I did not tell any one?"

"My dear," he bent forward towards her, "I am not blind, and I know what goes on in this house. No girl with any courage or feeling would submit to be treated as you have been treated. Now, I am quite willing to help you if only you will tell me where you wish to go."

"To Mrs. Locker, please, near Selby. There is no one else to whom I could go."

"Isn't there?" he said, so mischievously that she looked up quickly, and then as quickly looked away, her face covered with blushes. "I thought, you know," he

went on, "that a certain friend we talked about on the moor would you give a warmer welcome, eh?"

Marjorie felt affronted and very haughty; and then she remembered Hannah's caution. Was the woman in Mr. Brown's confidence, and had she helped him to meet her in this way? It seemed to her that she might be close at hand watching over her. The thought helped Marjorie to be calm.

"If you will tell me how I can get to Mrs. Locker, I shall be very grateful," she said. "If I can get to Ripon I know then how to go on by train."

"I can do it," he said, "but I must have a day to arrange matters, and also it will be better to give Mrs. Locker some notice. You must give me her address. Do not write to her—you must not do anything to arouse suspicion here. Do you think you can endure another day at Eyon Court?"

"Yes, if I shall be free afterwards."

"That's a brave girl." He nodded his head approvingly. "You must try to be as usual to-morrow, as you have been to-day. On Thursday morning, after breakfast, I will arrange that Barbara leaves the key in the door, and you will walk out into the avenue as if nothing had happened; then you have only to make your way down the valley to the point where you admired the ruined castle—you remember?"

Marjorie nodded.

"A quarter of a mile further on the path descends and leads you to a bridge. On the other side of this bridge I will be waiting for you."

He paused, but she did not answer.

"Well?" He looked earnestly at her. "Are you afraid?"

"N—no," she said. And then more heartily, "Oh, no."

And yet, as she spoke, Marjorie felt a sudden chill, almost as if an unseen hand were laid on her shoulder. Was it a warning against her companion, she wondered.

"How pale you are," he said. "I am afraid you dare not venture. I am ready to do all I can, believe me, but I cannot save you from Miss Eyon unless you work with me. I shall not have time to come back here, and we could not leave the house together without exciting suspicion, and a fresh suspicion would end everything. Long before we reached the end of the avenue we should be followed. You would be brought back, and I should be forbidden to enter the house. As it is, I must see Miss Eyon before I leave, and lull her suspicions the best way I can."

"I shall not see you again, then," said Marjorie, timidly.

"No; I am off the first thing to-morrow. You will meet me at the bridge. You understand that I expect you there the day after to-morrow. The earlier you get away the better. Now when you have given me Mrs. Locker's address, I will see you safely along the gallery."

CHAPTER XII.

CONSPIRATORS.

When Mr. Brown had lighted Marjorie to the door of her room, he went on along the galleries that bordered the square, well-like yard in the centre of the house, till he reached Miss Eyon's study. He smiled as he tapped at the door.

"Come in," her voice said in answer.

It was past ten o'clock, but Miss Eyon still sat at her desk. Her face was drawn, and it looked death-like; almost as gray as the gown she wore.

"You are very late," she said, when the young man came up to her. "I have sent Hannah to bed."

"I could not come sooner"—he spoke brusquely, rudely even. "It is your fault, too; you have frightened that poor child till she is nervous and over-wrought; she wanted plenty of soothing."

Miss Eyon smiled.

"That is like a man's gratitude. For whose sake have I troubled myself, Richard Brown? Let me hear no more of that from you; tell me what progress have you made?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Progress! I told you beforehand that you must give

her time, and let things happen naturally. I can see that she likes me less than she did at first, and I intend to give the whole thing up."

He flung himself into a chair, and passed his hand across his forehead as if he were tired.

Miss Eyon looked at him, but not in the way she looked at Marjorie. There was an admiring pity in those hard blue eyes which seemed to make them tender; but her next words contradicted this expression, and indeed it faded almost as soon as it came.

"You propose, then, to begin life on your own account, to be completely independent?"

He looked at her between his delicate, outspread fingers, and then he laughed easily, as if he enjoyed the joke in her words.

"You must take people as they are, you know," he said. "For instance, the power of your will could not change Hannah into a courteous lady; and I am afraid at thirty-three it is quite too late to produce a working man, full of estimable, self-denying qualities, out of an idle, amiable, good-for-nothing. My dear friend, why do you frown; have I ever deceived you? Have I not asked you to pay my debts over and over again, and I am bound to say that your goodness has never failed me."

"My goodness, as you call it, may have been your ruin," she interrupted. "I always hoped you would sober down as you grew older."

"So I have, my dear. I am as steady as old Time, I never touch a card. I fancy the best proof of reformation I could offer was in my willingness to marry your very un-

appreciative great-niece—dainty little soul! She doesn't know what a husband she has lost."

The gray hue left Miss Eyon's face, she sat upright and grasped each arm of her chair; her eyes were bright with her impatience.

"Do not repeat that; it is foolish, and it irritates me; and, Richard, you and I cannot quarrel. I have told you that at my death the whole of the Eyon property goes to Marjorie, but I tell you now that all I have besides, a few thousands I have saved, I have also willed to her. I have done this because my will is set on your marrying her, and because if you had a separate means of living, for even a year or so after my death, you are unstable enough to carry on your bachelor existence, and to let another man step in and marry the girl, and so the Eyon Court estates would pass to aliens. No. You must marry Marjorie without delay, Richard Brown. I do not want her here in my lifetime."

Mr. Brown sat looking at Miss Eyon, his handsome head a little on one side, but he seemed more amused than annoyed.

"Well, well," he said after a pause. "It is a pleasure to listen to you, you talk so well, and one knows that you don't humbug as other women do. You say exactly what you think. Now you must not be put out if I am equally frank. I must tell you in plain words, my dear friend, that your coercion system with Marjorie is simply absurd. As a general rule coercion never answers except with fools and knaves, and I tell you plump that if Marjorie can only be forced into marrying me, I don't care to

have her. Of course I know that even a high spirit may be broken by working on the nerves and spirits and so on, but it mustn't be. If it is continued, you won't see me again at Eyon Court."

"May I ask how you mean to live?"

He bent forward and looked into her eyes.

"Don't be anxious about that, dear. I have a better opinion of you than you have of yourself. You could not let harm come to me." He took her hand and kissed it, but her face did not again soften. "Besides," he went on, "what is the need of making the affair so sudden. You are trying to deprive Marjorie of what she believes to be her natural rights. Every girl likes the courting time of life. Your first plan was far more reasonable. I was in a hurry then, and you said to me, 'Be patient; the girl will get so tired of the dulness here that you will have no trouble with her'; and I am bound to say that on my first appearance she received me very graciously, and I believe if she had not been coerced all would have gone well. Now you have put her back up."

"It will have to come down," said Miss Eyon, harshly,

"There you are again. You are a good and righteous woman, who rules her house with order, and who is called on by the clergy and subscribes to charitable institutions; and I am a butterfly who never did a hand-stroke of work for myself or any one else; but, Lord, I could not be hard on a poor little girl because she happened to disagree with me in opinion. At least, I don't think I could be hard on her. Time will show," he said, meditatively; "now, if you want Marjorie's back to

come down, stroke it down." Miss Eyon turned her head away. "You won't," he said laughing, "perhaps you can't. A man is better at that than a woman is. Will you leave her to me?"

"I told her I should do so." Miss Eyon did not look round, and her tone sounded sulky.

"Yes, but that is not what I mean. I can do nothing while she remains at Eyon Court. Give me *carte blanche* —let me take her away and manage her in my own fashion."

"You cannot take her from Eyon Court. She is my ward, and," she said suspiciously, fixing her eyes on him as if to discover his real meaning, "she is under age." But the idea was evidently acceptable, for she listened to him attentively when he went on :

"I have provided for that," he said, "but a ward sometimes runs away from a strict guardian, you know, and then meets with a protector or friend, or so forth, who occasionally becomes her husband, when he is of the male sex. Why should not you give Marjorie the chance of running away. I will be at hand as a good angel to see that she does not come to grief."

Miss Eyon sat mute at first ; she frowned, for it cost her a good deal to alter any plan she had decided on ; but she had taken a dislike to Marjorie's pale sad face, and common sense urged upon her that if her end was attained the means did not greatly signify. She looked with a questioning expression at Mr. Brown's careless attitude ; he was leaning back in his chair, his head on one side, while the fingers of his right hand pulled

gently at his fair whiskers ; she sighed, and she seemed restless and undecided, her hands moved aimlessly. When her eyes left Mr. Brown they seemed to be looking at something far away.

"You wish her to be left free, as she was yesterday," she said presently.

"Yes," he answered.

Again Miss Eyon sat thinking with that far away look ; then she said abruptly :

"How do you know that she will not make the best of her way to Sir George Wolff's. I fancy you would find him a serious obstacle to—to your marriage."

"I've thought of that too, but I shall be on the watch ; don't you think I am a match for a young girl?"

She gave him a look so full of uneasiness that he smiled.

"What is the matter now?"

"You will marry her, Richard," she said earnestly. "Marry her privately, or you will get into trouble, as she is under age. Still, you have my full consent to such a marriage, and there is no one else to interfere, only you must promise that you will marry her without delay, Richard Brown."

"My dear Miss Eyon, what next? Of course, if she is willing, I will marry her. I shall only be too happy."

"If she goes away with you she has no choice," Miss Eyon said, slowly. "Certainly, no one else would be willing to marry her afterwards."

He got up from his chair.

"Consider yourself free from all further responsibility,

my dear madam, and leave the girl to her own devices after to-morrow. Till then you had perhaps better keep the doors as they are now."

She looked at him admiringly, but she sneered too.

"You are so masterful that I wonder you don't rule the house entirely. I believe Hannah is right when she says you are master here."

He looked very angry.

"Hannah is a marplot; she sets Marjorie against me, confound her! she is always on the watch. I should have got more opportunities alone with the girl if that old prude had been less officious. If she were not so hard-featured, I should say her youth had taught her some lessons; she's a regular watch-dog."

He thought he had gone too far, for a slight flush rose on Miss Eyon's pale face; she evidently did not like to hear blame of her old servant.

"If you have nothing more to say, Richard, I will bid you good-night. You will find what I promised you in your room."

He bent over her hand and kissed his thanks, for those words had a definite meaning for him, and then he opened the door that led into her bedroom.

She gave him another suspicious glance.

"No, I have not finished writing. You can leave me here."

Her eyes lingered on him as he went to the other door. She sighed as he closed it behind him.

"He is a dear fellow," she said, "and he will be thrown away on that nervous, small-natured child; but dear as

he is, I cannot quite trust him, I cannot leave him alone with my papers—the temptation might prove too strong."

She sat thinking for some time.

By the terms of her father's will, the last survivor of his children, male or female, had power to leave the property to whom he or she willed. If Marjorie died first, her share reverted to "Miss Eyon.

"Her life is perhaps no better than mine," she thought; "it would be wiser in every way if she stayed at Eyon Court."

She stretched out her hand to the bell, and then she drew it back. She remembered that there was no one left to answer it. She could summon Hannah by another bell near her bed, but a hint was never lost on Miss Eyon. After what Mr. Brown had said of the old servant, she was unwilling to send a message to him by Hannah.

"If you want a thing done, do it yourself," she said, and she put a white shawl that hung over her chair on her head and opened the door by which Mr. Brown had departed.

There was no light in the passage outside. She came back and lit a candle, and then she went noiselessly along the passage, with her long gray skirt gathered up under her arm. She stopped at the door of the young man's room and knocked.

There was no answer; she opened the door and went in.

The room was empty, and as Miss Eyon looked round she saw that the portmanteau and all other signs of an

inmate had vanished—a pocketbook that she had placed on the table had also gone. Evidently Mr. Brown had left home to-night instead of waiting till morning. He was always sudden in his departures.

Miss Eyon went back to the passage, but instead of stopping when she reached the study she went on up the steps and opened the door of the high narrow passage. She walked along this, holding her candlestick well in front. She looked much taller than she was, for the shawl had settled in a high peak above her cap, and when she passed through into the second gallery her head gear touched the top of the doorway.

She stopped at the door of the barred room, bent her head and listened. The silence was deathlike. Miss Eyon bent down and softly opened the door.

She listened again, but there was no sound. The fire still burned on the hearth, and a night light glimmered faintly on the dressing table. The bed curtains were partly drawn so as to hide the face on the pillow, but there was the outline of a figure beneath the coverlet. Still no sound of breathing.

A strange dread came to Miss Eyon. She drew her shawl together and moved gently to the bed and drew aside the curtains. Marjorie's eyes were wide open, her lips were parted with terror. Miss Eyon let the curtain fall and reached the door more quickly than might have been expected; but before she opened it there came a piercing shriek from the bed.

This only served to quicken Miss Eyon's movements. She listened when she was once more safe in the passage,

but all was again silent. Then as she reached her room she smile with self-congratulation.

"It was fortunate that she was moved to that room," she said; "no one else could hear that cry."

She wondered when she lay down in bed why she had dreaded to find Majorie dead instead of asleep. The girl's death would simplify matters.

"But it would have disappointed Richard, so perhaps it is best as it is; the silly baby will go to sleep again and think she has seen a ghost."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ADVENTURE.

IDLE Tobias Horner sat smoking outside the Bladebone on Thursday morning. The weather was exceptionally mild for December, and only just now Mrs. Ray had been shaking her head and sighing. The buxom landlady had begun to kill her turkeys, and she said to the vagabond "there wad be nobbut a green Christmas."

Her forecast had not troubled Tobias. He smiled cheerfully at her, and answered that for those who lived out of doors "a green bed was better than a white one;" but when a drizzling rain began he looked serious, and rising he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, placed himself under the shelter of the door-head, and stood there refilling his pipe.

"Woonkers, t' lass mun be daft, wheer be she going?" he said presently, as Marjorie passed at a quick pace along the path below the inn. His curiosity was roused at seeing the girl out so early, but a wholesome fear of rheumatism kept him from following her.

She went so fast that she had not noticed him. She felt literally like a bird escaped from its cage, and she did not slacken her pace until a turn in the path hid her from the manor house and the village. She stood still beside

a group of trees and drew a deep breath. She looked round her with delight ; it was so cheering to see the river and the beautiful valley, even through the driving shower of rain ; she pulled her hat over her eyes, and drew the bag she carried within the folds of her cloak so as to shelter it.

"I am free," she said. "I shall never go back, thank God, to that terrible house."

She trembled so for a few moments that she leaned against one of the trees.

She had soon recovered from the shock of Miss Eyon's visit to her bedside. Her hearing, sharpened by terror, told her that the retreating footsteps along the carpetless gallery were those of a living person, and when she heard the door at the end close, she decided that her aunt had been spying on her.

The day that followed that night had been a silent one. Miss Eyon had only spoken a few words to her when they met at luncheon and at dinner time. When she said good-night as she retired to her study, Marjorie thought she said it more kindly than usual, almost as if she knew it to be a final leave-taking, and then the girl had hurried to her own room to pack.

She filled her boxes with her various possessions, locked them, and put the key in her pocket, having first left out a few necessaries for the bag she meant to take with her, but all this occupied some time. She had, however, almost finished when Hannah tapped at the door. Marjorie had bolted it by way of precaution, and she did not know what to do. She dared not let Hannah in to see the

empty wardrobe and book shelves, and yet she wished to say good-bye to her.

"I can't let you come in, Hannah," she said. "I'll say good-night through the door, and thank you."

"It seemed to her that Hannah lingered, but she did not again ask to come in.

Marjorie waited till she heard her go away, and then, tired with the excitement which had possessed her since her talk with Mr. Brown, she resolved to go to bed.

At first she slept soundly, but she suddenly awoke. The fire was out, but there was a faint glimmer from the night-light, and a strange awe crept over her—she felt convinced that something stood between her and the dressing-table on which the light was. She could not distinguish even a shape, but she seemed to know that her dead uncle, Aunt Louisa's brother John, was looking at her. There was no sound, and yet a noiseless message seemed to come into hsr ears. It bade her stay at Eyon Court, it told her she was safer there than she could be with Mr. Brown. To stay where she was was the path of duty, to escape in this clandestine fashion was— The vision ended.

Marjorie did not know whether she had become unconscious from terror or whether she fell asleep, the sudden blank baffled her, but she started awake again and again in sudden fear, hiding her head under the bed-clothes and shaking from head to foot, till at last feverish, fitful sleep came once more.

Her night warning had left, however, no abiding effect. She woke as soon as it was light, and left her bed resolved

that she would not sleep again in that hateful house. She dreaded that if she stayed at Eyon Court her aunt might lock her in her bed-chamber, and something warned the girl that if this happened she might share the fate of the poor crazed child, and lose her reason in the barred room.

Yet now, as she reached the point opposite the river, and began to descend towards the water—less bright than she had sometimes seen it, for the clouds lowered darkly overhead—Marjorie suddenly felt that she was acting rashly. The bridge lay below her, there was no one to be seen, why should she not keep on this side of the Yore. She was free, there was no one to hinder her, and she thought that if she could walk so far, she might perhaps get a carriage at Masham. She had looked this place out on the map when she began to feel the dulness of Eyon Court oppressive, and she knew that it was on the way to Ripon.

She hesitated. Till now she had never been called upon to act for herself; and both her mother and Mrs. Locker had held old fashioned ideas about the behavior of young women. Marjorie felt very timid as she tried to realize the unknown dangers that lay before her; for Yoredale was then a comparatively lonely region, without railways or tourists.

Marjorie argued, it would be unkind, and ungrateful, too, to let Mr. Brown take all this trouble for her and then to play him false, just because she had had a dream. The fresh air was helping her nerves, and the memory of her terror had become fainter since she had lost sight of the gray manor house. She looked along the valley.

There was no sign of a village, and for aught she knew Masham might be still a great way off. It would be impossible for her to reach Selby that night; it would be worse to find herself benighted among strangers than with Mr. Brown. She remembered that he had been amused at the idea of a halt; he said he would take her to Selby the same evening.

She felt ashamed of her own distrust, and went on resolutely towards the bridge. She had soon crossed it, and began to mount the road which led up to the ruined castle and the village at its foot. Long before she reached the first house she saw a lumbering carriage and a pair of horses coming towards her. It stopped, and then Mr. Brown got out.

"You are punctual," he said, as they shook hands; but he looked grave and Marjorie felt very shy of him. "I thought this was better than picking you up at the Inn. The less observation we attract the better for your sake and for mine too, for I suppose I run some risk in assisting a ward to escape from her guardian."

He turned and led the way to the carriage. "Now if you will get in I will go outside," he said.

This was a great relief to Marjorie. She could not have said why at the sight of the carriage she had felt so strong a dislike to the idea of Mr. Brown as a fellow traveller. His unusual gravity made her timid.

She smiled as she seated herself in the shabby old vehicle.

"You are sure we shall get to Mrs. Locker's to-night?" she said, as he fastened the carriage door.

"To-night," he laughed, "we must try to get there before night. I want to reach London to-morrow by the midday train."

"How very kind he is," the girl thought. "I believe he has delayed his own business to help me."

She leaned back in the carriage and closed her eyes. She felt full of relief and of thankfulness. Well, she had had a lesson. She had been quite willing to go to Eyon Court and to leave good, quiet Mrs. Locker, partly for the sake of change and partly because she longed to see the old home of the Eyons. "Dear Mrs. Locker; if she were not so good she would triumph at my disappointment. I have been well punished for my curiosity," she told herself. It would be such happiness to see her dear old friend again, and she thought of the delight it would be to sit at Mrs. Locker's feet and tell her all the adventures she had gone through.

"Life seemed very dull at Eyon Court," she thought. "while it went on; but looking back, a good deal seems to have happened in a short time."

The carriage suddenly stopped, and she roused from her reverie, and looked out of the window. Something had happened now, for Mr. Brown had got down from the box seat, and was examining the foot of one of the horses.

She drew in her head; and then she noticed that the driver had turned on his seat, and was looking sideways at her with a sort of admiring leer.

Marjorie was at once frightened and angry, and then she smiled. Of course this was only a hired man, she

told herself, and her companion could not be answerable for his behavior ; but she was glad to see Mr. Brown drop the horse's foot and get upon the seat again beside the obnoxious driver.

They went at a slower pace, however, and the way was so rough that jolts were frequent. They had turned into a narrow road with a high bank on one side, and on the other a bare rocky wall, which seemed to have flung down fragments from its surface on to the road, for this became rougher and rougher as the carriage jolted slowly along. At last the bank dwindled to a mere ridge, and the road, instead of following on beside the stony cliffs, proceeded to take its way across a broad waste. This looked very wild to Marjorie. There were scarcely any trees, and the hills before them were distant. The girl began to feel hungry, and it seemed to her they would have to drive a long way before they reached a halting place. Surely, she thought, they would need fresh horses.

Presently, to her surprise, the carriage left the road, which had been smoother since they had got on to the waste, and turned into what looked like a mere foot-track between the gorse and the heather. The jolts began again, and Mr. Brown got down and walked on in front, looking round him.

"Have we lost our way : Marjorie thought, and she grew uneasy. She wondered why Mr. Brown had not taken the road by which her post-chaise had brought her from Ripon to Eyon Court ; that had seemed direct enough, and she remembered that they had changed horses at Masham.

She looked out of the window. Mr. Brown was some way in front. She beckoned and called to him. He did not seem to see or hear her, although he was now looking back. At that moment the carriage jolted violently, and Marjorie drew in her head. A loud oath from the driver, the sound of a crash, and then the carriage fell over on one side.

For a minute all was confusion; then came Mr. Brown's voice.

He had climbed up on the prostrate vehicle, and was trying to open the door.

"Are you hurt?" he said, anxiously.

"I don't think so."

"Don't be frightened," he went on, cheerfully. "There's nothing serious; it will delay us a little, that's all. So long as you are not hurt it does not signify."

With his help, Marjorie soon scrambled out among the gorse. "Are you sure you are not hurt," he said anxiously.

"I'm all right, thank you," she laughed as she spoke.

A front wheel was off the carriage, and one of the horses lay on the ground.

The driver was bending over it, trying to coax it to rise.

"I do not wonder we upset," the girl said, as she looked at the uneven ground. "Surely the driver was in fault. We ought to have kept to the road."

"Yes, confound him," Mr. Brown said; "that is just what I told him. I'll have my own way when we start again." He looked perplexed.

"What are we to do?" she said.

"That is exactly what I am asking myself. The fellow says the next town is six miles off. I could soon be back with a fresh carriage if I took one of the horses, but I don't know what to do with you." There was a pause. Then he said: "Should you mind being left with the driver? If I send him, he'll not be back for hours. Shall you mind, eh?"

Marjorie glanced at the man as he stood by the prostrate horse, and she thought she had never seen such an evil-looking face. She wondered that Mr. Brown could propose to leave her in such a plight.

"I cannot stay with him," she said, decidedly, in a low voice. "I will walk along the road you take, and I shall meet you as you return with the carriage."

"Wait a minute," her companion said.

A little way further over the moor the ground rose, and he hurried to this point and stood looking round him. Presently he beckoned to Marjorie, and when she joined him she saw rather below them, about a quarter of a mile further, a sort of farm-house or cottage standing by itself on the moor.

"I think I know where I am now," he said. "I was shooting in these parts last year, and I am nearly sure that I put up at that cottage in a storm of rain, and spent the night there. It was quite a tidy little house then, and if the same people live there it wouldn't be half a bad place for you to wait in while I am away. I don't fancy leaving you alone on the high road. Some gypsy tramp might frighten you to death. Poor child!" he said

kindly, "I am so sorry. You have had frights enough of late."

"Well, never mind," said Marjorie, "it's only an adventure. Let us go and see. If I don't like the look of the people I need not stay there."

"Of course not. I'll just tell the driver where we are going."

He retraced his steps to the disabled carriage, and after a few minutes' talk with the driver, he came back to Marjorie and led the way across the moor to the cottage.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. BROWN SHOWS HIS HAND.

THE light had become dim ; looking over the moor the hills that made its horizon could not be separated from the clouds, and these looked still charged with rain, although there had been showers ever since Marjorie started in the morning.

She was standing at the cottage window looking out over the waste. A monotonous olive tint had spread over everything, robbing the scene—as middle age is apt to rob a face—of all color and delicacy of outline.

Just now the driving rain spread a gauze-like veil over moor and furze and heath, and increased its sad monotony. When Marjorie reached the cottage she had been pleased with the look of the woman who came to the door and with her manner in answering Mr. Brown. He had only come for a minute or so into the stone-floored room which opened by one of two inner doors from the entrance. There was no passage, these inner doors being set at right angles, and the woman had opened the right hand one. Mr. Brown went in and looked round, then he placed the only arm-chair in front of the fire and set an old footstool before it. "I will be as quick as I can," he said, "but I may not get back under three hours,

these country people are so slow compared with Londoners."

"He said three hours—and he has been gone more than four," Marjorie thought. Mr. Brown had told the woman to give the lady some lunch, but Marjorie felt too restless to have appetite for the broiled ham and eggs set before her. She was a good deal shaken by the upset. She tried to talk to the woman, but she was either shy or silent, and she went away as soon as she could. The room was clean, but its freshly whitened walls were bare. There were a few tattered books on a shelf in one corner, and a three-sided cupboard in another, but the cupboard, although it looked interesting, having brass mountings and hinges, was locked, and the books were so thumbed and greasy that Marjorie could not make up her mind to handle them. She became more and more uneasy.

There was an old cracked owl on the mantle-shelf, blue and white, with a Latin inscription, and about an hour ago she had found at the bottom of this an ivory cup and ball, yellow with age. When she had blown off the dust, this looked fairly clean, and Marjorie hailed it as a means of passing the time.

But she had tired of this resource, and now the evident coming of darkness changed her uneasiness into fear. She began to think that Mr. Brown had met with an accident. He was riding without a saddle; the horse had perhaps thrown him. Earlier in the afternoon she had thought of sallying forth to meet him, when the sun shone out brightly between the showers; but as she opened the door she saw the obnoxious driver sitting in front of the

cottage, smoking. Her fear of this man was so great that she could not bring herself to pass close by him when Mr. Brown was no longer present to protect her, and she quietly retreated. After all, she reflected, the showers of rain came so suddenly that she might be drenched before she met Mr. Brown.

Another hour went by, and now it was so dark that the woman came in with a pair of lighted candles in two tall brass candlesticks.

"They donnut give much light," she said, "but the lamp is out o' gear."

She was leaving the room again when Marjorie stopped her.

"I am sorry to trouble you so long," she said, nervously, "but—but if the gentleman should not come back, will you let me stay the night here?"

"Surely," the woman said. "T' room is fettled, an' Ah thowt——" Then she stopped and looked foolish. "Ah hev' nobbut ae room," she said, "t' driver he mun sleep i' t' stable."

Marjorie shivered. It made her uneasy that this man should stay under the same roof with her.

"Do you live here alone?" she said.

The woman looked hard at her, and was about to answer; then, seeming to recollect her caution, she went out of the room.

Another hour went by, the candles gave a miserable light, and Marjorie felt glad the room was so bare and small; it was not easy to fancy terrors in the dark corners.

She began to wish she had followed her impulse this

morning ; if she had walked to Masham instead of going on to meet Mr. Brown, she could certainly have found a carriage there, and although she was hazy about the rest of the journey, she felt sure that it would have been better to sleep at an Inn on the road, than in this lone cottage on the moor. But even while she thought this, she felt how ungrateful she was. After all, Mr. Brown had behaved well, he had not attempted to force his company on her, and it was, no doubt, not his fault that he did not come to help her.

Marjorie had scarcely ever felt so glad as when, soon after this, she heard Mr. Brown's voice.

He did not come in at once, he went into the other room and closed the door ; but it was such a relief to feel that he had come back.

In about five minutes he joined her.

He came forward and shook hands warmly, as if they had not parted only a few hours before. "How are you now? I am so glad to be with you again." He looked at her anxiously while he held her hand.

Marjorie did not draw her hand away.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to see you," she said, brightly. "I have been fancying all sorts of horrors."

"Well," he said, "let us sit down and I'll tell you all I've been doing ; you see it is so much too late to go on to-night that I brought back some supper with me, and the woman is cooking it."

"I expected I should have to sleep here ; but how shall you manage ?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The woman says I can

have a mattress here or an old sofa in the kitchen. I think I prefer a chair to either."

"I am so sorry," Marjorie said. "What trouble I have caused you. Now I want to hear your adventures; will a carriage come for us to-morrow!"

He nodded, and Marjorie drew her chair nearer the fire, with a sensation of comfort she had not expected to feel in that dismal little white-washed room. He sat down beside her and began his story. He had not been able to find a vehicle in Empsay, the town to which the driver had directed him, and before he came to the next likely place the horse he was riding fell lame, and he had been forced to leave it behind him. He had found great difficulty in engaging a vehicle.

"You will have to put up with an open dog-cart," he said. "I have settled for it to come in the morning. Then I waited an hour or so for the stage-coach, which happened to be later than usual, and only brought me to within a couple of miles of the cottage. I assure you the way on the moor was not easy to find in the darkness; if there had not been a light in the window I must have missed it. Now I am going to see if soap and water can be had."

While he was gone the woman came in to lay the cloth, and an appetizing whiff of roasting birds came in along with her. Marjorie asked if she could see her bedroom. The woman took one of the candles from the table and opened a door which Marjorie had taken for a hanging closet when, earlier in the day, she had peeped inside. The back of the closet formed a second door,

and this being opened, showed a ladder-like flight of steps, up which Marjorie followed her guide into a fair sized bedroom. There was no door, but a handrail and a low wooden gate at the top secured the square well of the staircase from the chance that a child or an unobservant adult might fall down it.

The room was larger and better furnished than Marjorie had expected. It looked clean, she thought, and she was surprised to see that the woman produced from under her arm two fine linen towels.

"Are those nice towels yours?" the girl said.

"No." The woman set down the candle on the dressing table, and having put a cake of soap on the washstand she went downstairs and closed the door below.

Marjorie felt sure that the towels were fresh proofs of Mr. Brown's kindness, and when she looked at the soap she put that also down to his account. The woman had carried up her bag, and it was very refreshing to wash her face and hands and then to make her hair more orderly.

Some one knocked at the door below and then Mr. Brown called out:

"Supper's ready when you are."

"It is really good fun after all," Marjorie thought.

"I wonder what sort of knives and forks they have in a place like this"

She went downstairs, candle in hand. The woman was bringing in a dish of fish, which Mr. Brown, as he helped it, declared to be capitally boiled. This was followed by partridges, and then Mr. Brown produced a

bottle of champagne, which he said he had brought in honor of Marjorie's escape.

"Champagne!" the girl exclaimed; "how could you find it in an out of the way town."

He was bending over the bottle as he drew the cork, and he did not feel it necessary to tell her that he had brought the wine from Eyon Court. There were no wine glasses; he poured out half a tumblerful of champagne for Marjorie.

"I never drink wine," she said, "except on birthdays. Well, I suppose this escape from prison is a sort of birthday, only I should not like it to come round every year."

He looked mystified.

"That means you will soon forget all about it and me also."

She looked at him gratefully. "You know that is not possible, you have been so very kind."

"I am glad to hear it." He spoke as if he were wounded. "I had an idea that you meant to snap your fingers at me as soon as you were safe with your old friends."

He re-filled his glass, emptied it, then filled it again, and tossed that off as if he were very thirsty.

"How refreshing it is," he said.

"You must have a very bad opinion of me," Marjorie said. "Why you have been kinder to me than almost any one I ever knew."

He waited to answer; the woman had come in and was clearing the table.

"You can leave the wine and shut the door." He

shivered as if he felt the draught that came rushing in at the open door. "Bring in a few logs," he said, "and then if we want anything more I will let you know." He turned to Marjorie and said, "You will never get warm as long as she comes in and out, leaving the door open; those sort of people always leave the door open."

Marjorie smiled; she had moved to the fire-place, and she thought Mr. Brown must be more chilly than she was.

The woman brought in the wood, and then they heard her putting up a bar across the great front door.

"This is cosey; a pleasant finale to our day."

Mr. Brown drew a chair beside Marjorie's, and warmed his hands at the fire. Then he rose and poured some more wine into her glass.

"No, thank you," she said, when he handed it to her.

"It will do you good, and keep out the cold." He put the glass to her lips.

"No, indeed," Marjorie said. "I will not."

"Well, then, it shall not be wasted," and he drank off the wine. "If I have been as kind as you say, Marjorie, why are you not rather kinder to me, eh?" he looked hard at her.

For the first time since her companion's return to the cottage the old feeling of distrust came back to Marjorie. He was looking at her in the way she disliked; the same bold, admiring stare that had more than once offended her at Eyon Court.

She thought it was best to treat his words lightly.

"Certainly I have not been unkind to you," she said.

"I have actually run away from Eyon Court in obedience to your wish." She smiled at him.

"Ah, that is pleasant hearing, that is something like. You are a dear little girl, and you will not run away from me as you did from Aunt Louisa, will you? That is all right."

"Why should I?" said Marjorie, gravely. He looked at her so confidently that she began to think the champagne had excited him, and she put on a repressive manner. "If I had wanted to run away, I could have done so this afternoon."

She looked full at him as she spoke. Her vexation had brought a flush on her delicate skin, and had darkened her bright eyes.

Mr. Brown had never thought Marjorie so charming as she looked at this moment, and he became impatient of his own caution.

"I am very grateful, believe me." He took her hand, but she drew it resolutely away. "I look on your confidence to-day as an earnest of the trust I want you to feel in me. Marjorie, dearest, I must say what is in my heart; won't you trust me wholly. Come with me to London and let us get married there."

Marjorie rose up and stood with her hand on the back of the chair. She was very much alarmed, and her only idea was to get away from Mr. Brown as quickly as possible; but it seemed to her that he had lost his senses and that she must not irritate him.

"I can not do that, and you do not mean what you say, Mr. Brown. I am tired, so I will say good-night."

He laughed, but he did not rise from his chair

"Sit down and be reasonable, dear girl," he said. "You shall go to bed very soon, but I want you first of all to understand me, and also your own position. My dear child, you look as lovely as an angel—there, don't be angry, darling; I am very sorry to hurry you. I know it isn't right to press you in this way; as I told Miss Eyon, coercion in such matters is always a mistake. I think a girl should be won slowly or quickly, according to her temperament. I have studied you, sweet one, and but for your aunt I would have given you months to tyrannize over me. Well, well, you shall have opportunity by and by."

The girl thought he must be talking nonsense,—she moved quickly across the room, but Mr. Brown reached the door leading to the stairs before she did.

"Come, come," he said, "I call that a breach of trust. You shall go to bed when I have explained myself, but I ask leave to do that, Miss Marjorie Eyon. I advise you not to drive me to desperate measures."

He drew himself up and stood looking very proud and handsome, with his back against the door.

"Desperate measures? I don't understand you, sir."

She was flushed and panting with indignation.

"Sit down and quiet yourself," he said sternly. "Do you not call it a desperate measure that I am obliged to compel you to stay in this room against your will?"

Marjorie looked at him; she thought he was frowning; his expression was like Miss Eyon's; she all at once remembered Hannah's caution not to offend Mr. Brown,

but she did not know how to act without giving him cause of offence.

She sat down, however, moving her chair further from his, and he came back to his seat beside the fire.

"I begged your aunt," he spoke in his usual quiet, pleasant voice, as if nothing unusual had happened, "to leave you in peace, but it seems she had become tired of having you with her—very bad taste on her part, wasn't it!" he said cheerfully. "I must own to you, my dear girl, that I had been vain enough to fancy you did not dislike me. You enjoyed that waltz now, didn't you? You have enjoyed my company, or was it all a make-up and a sham? Don't tell me, child, that you are a sham or I shall never believe in another woman—you did enjoy it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I enjoyed the waltz," then she added timidly in fear of his anger, "but that was because I so enjoyed dancing."

He made a low bow.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle, I cannot be too sufficiently grateful for your candor: and in the same way am I to conclude that you have tolerated my company because it gave you an opportunity of using your tongue?" He said this bitterly; then with a sudden change of voice he added laughing. "Aha, little deceiver, I have caught you tripping. If I am no more to you than a machine with which you dance, or an automaton to which you can speak, why were you at such pains to adorn your charming self in my honor. Aha," he clapped his hands gayly, "I have you there, you cannot deny it," he ex-

claimed joyously, as she blushed and looked confused under his gaze.

"Forgive me," he said tenderly. "You must indeed forgive me, for I cannot help it. I love you, darling, with all my heart and soul; and yet see how patient I am in spite of my impatience. The long and the short of it is you will be wise to do as I wish. There is no one to help you. The woman there will not interfere with me whatever happens; and yet, see, sweet child, I do not even take your hand. Be pitiful, Marjorie. I only ask you to say 'I love you, Richard, and I will be your wife,' *then* all will be right and easy."

Marjorie sat still as if under a spell. It seemed to her that she knew by heart every word before it came. She saw how completely she was in this man's power, and that she must weigh the words she uttered.

"You contradict yourself," she said at last. "You are trying to do just what you blamed Miss Eyon for doing, and yet you expect me to like you when you know how wretched that sort of thing made me at Eyon Court."

"Clever little girl," he said admiringly. "You have just brought me to what I wish to explain. If Miss Eyon had listened to me earlier, you might have got to tolerate Eyon Court, while you learned to love me well enough, to wish to leave it in my company. I consider your aunt has driven you into this fatal position, and you see, unless you become my wife, well—" he stretched out his long legs and pulled at his soft whiskers—"upon my soul, Marjorie, I don't see any other way open to you."

"What do you mean? What is to prevent me from going straight to Mrs. Locker to morrow?" She forgot her caution, and added, impatiently, "If we had taken the right road this morning, we might have reached her to-night. It was your fault; you should have made the driver keep to the road."

Mr. Brown helped himself to the rest of the wine; he shook his head.

"Dear little soul, it is getting fractious. It must not, for it looks so distractingly pretty that I might forget my good behavior, and——"

She gave him such a look of contempt that he stopped.

"Look here," he said, "we must end this. I have been very patient. I have behaved better than one man in a thousand would, and instead of rewarding me, you give yourself airs, and say unkind things. It is, therefore, better to speak plainly. You are nineteen, Marjorie Eyon, and therefore you are not quite a child, and you have shown me that you have plenty of sense. Listen to me; do you really suppose that a girl can elope with a man, and pass a night under the same roof with him—remember, there are witnesses who can prove this—and then go on her way as if nothing had happened to her. You have put yourself, by your own act, into a very equivocal position. Well, instead of taking advantage of you, I have behaved in a strictly honorable way, and I ask you to marry me. You have only to say 'Yes,' that is all I ask you to do."

She had turned white while he spoke. Innocent as she was, she understood his words, and she had a dim feeling

that shame and disgrace might henceforth attach to her. She put her hand up to her forehead. It seemed as if everything was becoming confused. Yes, she saw that what he had said was true, and oh, how horrible it was. How could she have waited so tamely for his return. If she had gone out and searched, she might have found a refuge where he could not have followed her. Even now she did not wholly suspect him, she only thought it was base of him to take advantage of the position in which she was placed by this accident. All at once she remembered the woman; she believed that she would protect her, let Mr. Brown say what he would.

She jumped up and hurried to the door.

Mr. Brown did not attempt to follow her this time. She went out and opened the door into the other room.

The woman was half asleep, sitting before the fire.

"I want to stay here!" Marjorie said.

The woman roused herself, and got up from her low seat. She stepped back from the girl, and Marjorie's scared face reflected itself in hers.

'Nay," she said, go back to your man, poor lamb. He means no wrong by you, poor daft soul."

'I don't want to go back. I must stay here with you."

Instead of answering her, the woman went out and called to Mr. Brown.

'You must come, master,' she said. "T' fit is on her; 'tis t' first she's had, poor lamb."

Marjorie stared, she felt stupefied.

Mr. Brown came forward; he took her hand gently,

but very firmly, and led her back to the other room, while the woman closed the door behind them.

"I have told her you are my wife, and that you are of weak intellect. Do you know, my angel, that if you don't come to your senses to-morrow, I am afraid I shall have to lock you up in the room above."

"You would not dare," she said, passionately.

"Do you think so?"

Then he let go her hand, which she had been struggling to snatch away from his, and stood looking at her, with a very unpleasant smile. His face had flushed, and his eyes shone. Marjorie felt desperately frightened.

"You should never dare a man who loves you as I love you, Marjorie. It is a sort of challenge. I have a mind to accept it," and he made a step forward—then, as she shrunk back with a look of disgust, he went on. "I have dared a good deal already, and all for love of you, sweet Madge. Do you think we took the wrong road by accident, or was it by accident, think you, that the carriage was overturned so gently that a mouse need not have been hurt in the tumble. See, naughty little girl, how much love will do. Love had already provided this shelter, and if you would only be reasonable, as well as kind, it might be a bower of bliss. To-night I have only asked you to say you will be my wife. To-morrow I may ask for more—everything depends on you, sweet one."

Marjorie had retreated to the wall, and now stood with bent head, her arms hanging limp on either side, the picture of despair.

"Well," he said, I cannot be hard on you. I love you too much for my own peace. You shall have time to reflect. A night will show you that I have spoken truly. I wish you good-night, sweet one."

He opened the door leading to the bedroom, and Marjorie hurried through it and up the stairs, feeling half dead with terror.

CHAPTER XV.

CAGED.

A FAINT blue light came stealing into the bedroom, and fell on Marjorie's pale face as she sat sleeping in a chair.

The first glimmer of dawn brought with it a chiller atmosphere, as if darkness had lent a material cover, which the coming of light stripped away. Marjorie had sat all night long by the window, wrapped in her fur-lined cloak, and at last she had fallen asleep in spite of her determination not to close her eyes ; but the cold touch of dawn awakened her.

She looked round her with a scared, unrecognizing glance ; she could not remember this low ceilinged room with its carpetless floor ; but the sight of the stair-hole brought memory back to the point at which she had gone to sleep.

She stood up and stretched herself ; she was very stiff and cold. She remembered that she had heard no sounds after she came up, except that a dog had barked under her window, and she went now to the stair head and looked to see if the two chairs she had let down last night, one on the top of the other, had been disturbed. No, they were there still, and Marjorie saw that no one could possibly come up the stairs till the barricade was removed, but

she also saw that the chairs could be removed from below, for the door opened outwardly. Still this could not be done without some noise and trouble, for the chairs were large and clumsy and the doors were narrow.

She had heard Mr. Brown draw two heavy bolts across the outer door after she left him, so that escape by that means was cut off. Last night she had not been able to see out of the window; now she saw that it was higher from the ground than she had expected, and that the dog she had heard barking was chained to a kennel just below it. She opened the window and looked out. A mist lay over the moor and blotted out everything into a sea of pale gray. The dog was evidently watchful, for he came out of his house. As he looked up at her he yawned and cried out, and Marjorie shuddered at the sight of his deep red mouth and huge jaws, with their long, hungry-looking teeth. She felt that there could be no escape that way, unless, indeed, she could make friends with this fierce jailor. But even then——she looked down and tried to guess at the distance to the ground. It was too far to let herself drop. She had read an old story in which the heroine tears her sheets into strips, and, knotting these together, lets herself down from a window; but there was nothing in the room to which such a cord could be fastened—not even a bedpost.

She closed the window softly. The country air had refreshed her, but she shivered with cold. She looked at the bed, and she thought it seemed very clean and comfortable. Almost without her will, nature took the lead. Marjorie mechanically unfastened her cloak, and lay down

outside the bed, drawing the warm cloak over her, she almost instantly fell sound asleep.

When Marjorie opened her eyes there was such broad sunshine that she felt dazzled, and the noise she awoke in confused her ideas. The dog was barking loudly under her window ; a deep grunting came from a pig-sty beside the cottage, but above all sounded a repeated knocking on the door at the foot of the stairs.

Marjorie started up in haste, for she heard one of the bolts drawn back.

"What is it?" she called out. The door opened and she saw the woman carrying a tray. The woman retreated when she saw the chairs.

"Here's t'breakfast," she said, sullenly.

Marjorie was very hungry, and she was anxious to keep her chairs on the stairs, as they formed her only means of blockade ; she drew up first one chair and then the other, but she found this much harder work than it had been to slip them down the opening.

The woman looked at Marjorie's sleepy face and tumbled hair, and then at the bed. The quilt was rumpled, but the bed did not look as if it had been slept in. She set the tray down on the dressing-table. Then she said, "Ye'll be cauld here mebbe."

"Oh, no," Marjorie said carelessly. She felt as if nothing would induce her to venture downstairs and face Mr. Brown.

While she ate her breakfnst she thought over last night ; she was even more alarmed than she had felt at the time. She saw now why Mr. Brown had advised her not to write

to Mrs. Locker ; and as she reflected on this, she wondered at her friend's previous silence. More than a fortnight had gone by since she had received a letter from her, or from her friend Adelaide.

A feeling of utter loneliness depressed Marjorie. It seemed to her that she might have died at Eyon Court and that no one would have known.

"Would they have cared?"

She said this aloud, and the bitterness of her own tone shocked her. Before she went to Eyon Court it had been almost impossible to Marjorie to think hardly of any one.

Her mother had been so gentle and indulgent that there had never been a dispute in her home life, and Mrs. Locker, who had been her governess, always seemed to be a sort of second mother to her when she went to live with her after Mrs. Eyon's death.

"Hannah said," the girl thought penitently, "that because evil things had happened at Eyon Court there was evil stirring there ; I believe it. If I had not hardened my heart against Aunt Louisa she would perhaps have thought more kindly of me ; if I had not refused to listen to Sir George Wolff he would not have given me up. He and Mrs. Locker have both forgotten me, and I suppose I deserve it, or it would not have happened."

Tears fell over her cheeks whilst she sat thinking. It seemed as if she dared not let her thoughts rest on last night. But when she had eaten her breakfast she felt cheered and strengthened ; she was able to think more calmly over what had happened and to decide on what she should do ; she must wait and watch ; there was evi-

dently no means of escape. The room in which she was, was in the front of the house, over the kitchen, so that even if she succeeded in pacifying the dog she could not escape unseen. At this thought of the dog she took a bit of bread and went to the window, meaning to begin her attempts at a friendly understanding with her outside jailer; but as she opened the window Mr. Brown came round the corner of the house.

Marjorie retreated, but he saw her and raised his hat.

"I must watch and wait," she said, "I can do nothing else. It is very wearying, but I may succeed in tiring him out."

She dropped her chairs down the hole again to prevent any sudden intrusion, and then she washed and dressed herself.

Mr. Brown was really more uncomfortable than she was. He had taken a short nap and then had kept awake nearly the whole of the night, patrolling the house and listening for every sound. He had not enjoyed those blessed snatches of sleep which had soothed Marjorie into forgetfulness. He felt that he was playing a desperate game, and anxiety did not suit his easy self-indulgent temperament any better than the absence of his daily luxuries suited him physically; and besides the discomforts and anxiety, there was the mortification of being obliged to confess that he had been foiled. It was confounding that this girl, whom he secretly believed to be fond of him, and whom he thought would be dazzled and pleased with the romance of an elopement, had shown such decided and unaccountable dislike to him. He felt that

she considered him a scoundrel, and he thought himself a very clumsy fellow, for he could not see what advantage he had reaped from the trouble he had taken. His impatience, instead of hastening matters, had ruined the success of his scheme; it had thrown him back for days, and perhaps weeks; it had, perhaps, ended his hopes of possessing Eyon Court.

"No," he said, sullenly, as he came in to breakfast. "I will not give in. I was never beaten yet; I swear she shall marry me if I have to keep her shut up a whole month. I suppose the little fool thinks I'm madly in love with her dainty self. Well, she's pretty enough, and bright enough, as women go, and she's worth some trouble to win, apart from her money."

Then he began his breakfast, and his hopes rose as he satisfied his hunger.

After all, he thought, Marjorie was only a woman, and he knew what women were. "I ought to," he laughed, "seeing how much of my life I have given up to them. No woman ever baffled me yet, and it is not likely that I shall not manage this unsophisticated child of nineteen. I admit I was a fool last night, I was excited—perhaps I had better apologize and so reassure her—but for the present I will not attempt to see her."

"He gave the woman of the house strict orders to keep the door bolted until he came back, and then he went for a walk over the moor. The mist still lay thick before him, but it had lifted a few feet, so that he could see where he was going. It was reassuring for the success of his plans, that after he had walked some distance, he

had not met with another cottage. He knew the woman s husband was a convict, and Mr. Brown saw that the woman's greed for money insured her silence and her obedience. Even if Marjorie should try and bribe her, his fiction that the girl was his wife and that she was weak in the head would prevent the woman from helping any attempt to escape.

"Here's a happy thought," he said. "I mustn't leave a blot anywhere. I will tell Mrs. Poacher—I haven't the slightest recollection of her name—that if my wife offers her money she may take it and keep it, only she must tell me all that happens.

If Marjorie did not soften after the apology he meant to write to her, he thought he would leave the cottage for a couple of days. Surely, if she could not endure the dulness of Eyon Court, she could not go on living confined to one miserable room. And yet when he came to the end of his plans he saw that it was a mistake to try coercion with a high-spirited girl. She might hate him for it. Would it not be far wiser and more politic if he set her free and threw himself on her generosity by ascribing all he had done to the ardor of his love.

"Not to day, either," he said, as he walked on, his hands plunged deep in his pockets, "she would turn on me at once and ask me as a security for her confidence to take her to this confounded woman at Selby, besides, though it seems hard on her, I think a day's imprisonment will bring her off the high stilts. I'll wait till the day after to-morrow."

He stopped suddenly; the mist was thicker here, for

the ground sloped into a hollow, and he was standing at the edge of what seemed to be a black tarn, with scanty reeds round its edge. Mr. Brown congratulated himself that he had come to the end of his cigar; five minutes before, as he walked carelessly along smoking and thinking, he might have plunged into the weird-looking pool.

"And there is no saying how deep it may be," he thought; "it may be the top of a bog."

There was something ghastly in the idea of a plunge into the cold slime, so far as he was from any chance of help. He would have been quite as helpless as Marjorie in the lone cottage.

"Well," he said, as he turned back in that direction, "I am not bad enough to behave as some men would in my place. I mean to marry her, and if the worst comes to the worst, and I can't get a willing consent, I shall propose to leave her free after the marriage. Miss Eyon has bargained that I call myself Eyon, so that Marjorie will not even have to change her name. Yes, I will be as generous as possible."

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR GEORGE WOLFF.

MARJORIE'S friends had not forgotten her, although they had given no sign of remembrance.

When Sir George Wolff left her on the moor, he reproached himself for having once more asked her to marry him.

If Marjorie wanted his help ever so much, she would now shrink from writing to him, lest she should give him a claim on her. He determined to see Mrs. Locker. He had known her a good many years; first, as Marjorie's governess, and afterwards when the girl went to live in Mrs. Locker's house, near Selby. He knew that she was a quiet, gentle woman, quite unfit to cope with Miss Eyon; but it seemed to him that at least one of her friends ought to watch over Marjorie's happiness. He had a strong conviction that it was unkind to leave her to the tender mercies of such a woman as her aunt. He resolved, therefore, to go and see Mrs. Locker. She was so timid that he fancied personal influence would be needed to persuade her to visit Eyon Court without invitation.

Since his talk with Marjorie, Sir George had suspected that a request for leave to visit her would only draw forth

a refusal from Miss Eyon, and would perhaps make her take measures to prevent any intrusion from Marjorie's friends.

By the time he reached home, the baronet had become almost happy again in the plans he had formed to lessen the dulness of the girl's life. But the next morning brought business letters which entirely set aside his visit to Selby; and there was also a letter from a friend, reminding Sir George of a promise to give the writer some shooting on his moors north of the Tweed.

Sir George was a keen sportsman, but his meeting with Marjorie had made him forgetful of his plans. He felt, however, obliged to write back accepting his friend's proposal to meet him the following day at Jedburgh. One friend brought another, till Sir George had a houseful of guests in his "hut on the border," as he called the shooting lodge, and as hospitality was one of his virtues, he could not easily free himself. He wrote to Mrs. Locker and suggested that she should go and see Marjorie without delay, and then he stayed on in Scotland.

When the last of his guests had departed, the baronet went straight to Selby, before he even showed himself in his own house, Laleham. He was disappointed to find that Mrs. Locker had not been to Eyon Court, and she looked very grave when he repeated his proposal. She was a small, nervous woman, near-sighted, and stooping, and when Sir George said "I think it absolutely necessary for you to go to Eyon Court," she crouched together till her chin approached her knees, and she sat trembling under his amused eyes, while she declared herself unable

to do as he wished. "I am very sorry to refuse," she said, "but I cannot face Miss Eyon."

He smiled at her.

"Dear Mrs. Locker, I always say there's no such word as Can't. Oh, yes, you will go to Eyon Court and I expect you and Miss Eyon will get on famously. Think of our dear Marjorie and how glad she will be to see you, and I am sure your objections will come to nothing."

There is often great strength in feebleness, and after some fruitless persuasion Sir George Wolff saw that it would be useless to send Mrs. Locker to Eyon Court. She would be no match for Miss Eyon's determination, and would probably allow herself to be sent away without having seen Marjorie.

"Well," he said, "I am sure it would please Marjorie if you went, but if it cannot be, I must go instead. I suppose if I can get leave, I may bring her to you to stay a week or so."

Mrs. Locker heaved a deep sigh of relief, and gave him an affectionate invitation for her child, as she called Marjorie ; and he departed feeling that he had been completely worsted, and by a weak woman.

"They are usually the most obstinate," he said. "They have not grasp enough to do anything really brave. A stronger woman would have tackled Miss Eyon with so much nerve and skill that the old woman would have been obliged to receive her. Well, I must beard the old lioness, I suppose."

Mrs. Locker had complained to him of Marjorie's silence, and this added to Sir George's anxiety. And now

he was on his way to Eyon Court two days after his visit to Selby, and he severely blamed himself for having allowed so much time to pass without making inquiry for Marjorie; the girl might be ill, she might have pined like a caged bird till she sickened from simple want of companionship and sympathy. He felt an angry disgust with himself at the remembrance of the weeks spent on the moors with his friends; he had enjoyed himself, while this sweet child was drooping in that dismal old den of a manor house. He had heard a good deal about Miss Eyon, and he believed that her self-will was equalled by her craftiness.

He must act warily, he told himself, when he got to Eyon Court. He had been there, his mother had taken him with her twice when he was a boy. Lady Wolff had been one of Miss Eyon's rarely admitted visitors, and while he waited for her, the boy had been allowed to explore the old house, although he was never allowed to go into Mr. John Eyon's rooms.

Twenty-five years had gone by since his last visit, but he had a distinct remembrance of the old rooms.

His plan was, if there should be any hesitation about admitting him, boldly to follow the servant into Miss Eyon's presence. After all she must be a lady, and if he tried to conciliate her she could not well refuse to listen to him. His healthy, hopeful nature made Sir George confident of success, and he told himself that the look of Marjorie's face would teach him whether she ought to be allowed to remain with her aunt. As he rode along the terrace-path on the side of the wild and beautiful valley,

the gray weird manor house, perched like some fabled rock bird on its spur of granite, came in sight, and he realized that Miss Eyon must certainly have undisputed authority in this dreary, lonely region. He remembered, too, that she was Marjorie's guardian, and for the next two years he knew that no one could withdraw the girl from her care unless indeed it could be proved that Miss Eyon ill-treated her ward.

He sighed. If she were unhappy, Marjorie had promised to write to him.

No, the only hope of rescuing her from this dull life was by persuading Miss Eyon that the girl needed change of air and scene.

There had evidently been much rain, the road was so heavy, and the front wall of the Bladebone was so soaked in moisture that it looked a dismal, dank gray. The trees in the Eyon Court avenue were drenched so that they seemed to exhale damp ; and when he reached the house the steps, worn lower in the middle than at the sides by the feet of many generations of Eyons, held the rainfall in little dark pools in which the films of green moss showed a brighter green than they did on the drier parts of the stone. The house was gloomy and silent. Sir George got off his horse and fastened it to a ring beside the door.

"More like a tomb than a dwelling," he thought, as he raised the heavy knocker.

But he replaced it without knocking ; he rang the bell.

The servants' dinner had not been long over, and Barbara, the maid, was having a comfortable nap in the

housekeeper's room. Faith, one of the under-maids, happened to be crossing the hall, and she, being younger than the other servants, suffered most from the dreariness of the unused, shut-up house. The sight of this fine handsome gentleman, as she thought him, was cheering. It was no part of her duty to open the door for visitors, but she knew that Barbara was asleep, and she ventured. It was a change in such weather to see a strange face—and such a pleasant one.

"Is Miss Eyon at home?" Sir George Wolff asked.

Faith nodded.

"Eh, sir," she said, "t' mistress is to t' house."

"Is she quite well—not confined to her room, I hope?"

Sir George congratulated himself on what he considered a shrewd hit. He felt encouraged by Faith's broad, stupid-looking face.

"Nay, t' mistress is in t' study. Shall Ah take up your name, sir, if you please!"

"Yes, my lass. You can say Sir George Wolff, and I'll follow you to save you trouble."

Now this was an unfortunate remark. Faith knew that Miss Eyon seldom received a visitor, certainly she never saw a stranger, and when she found that the gentleman was following her she shouted out "Barbara, Barbara!" in a frightened voice.

Hannah was also in the housekeeper's room and she roused Barbara from her nap.

"Barbara!" Faith called again, but this time from the landing outside the parlor door.

Hannah followed Barbara to the stair-foot. She saw that the big burly woman was only half awake, and she was curious to know what had made Faith call out so suddenly.

Faith stood with a scared face and outstretched hands, while Sir George, a few steps below, seemed to be trying to quiet her.

Barbara charged upstairs ready to seize the intruder by the collar, but Hannah caught at her skirt.

"Whist, Barbara," she said, "Ah'll speak wiv t' gentleman."

"Gentleman!" said Barbara, hotly, and planting her doubled red fists on her hips she looked pugnaciously at Sir George. "Ah wad hev thowt nobbut a thief wad coom sneaking oop t' stairs wivout leave asked or given. Nay, yon's none a gentleman."

Sir George Wolff reddened, though he felt amused.

"I should have waited, should I," he said. "Well, my good woman, I dare say you are right, but you see I am in a hurry." Then he turned from Barbara's angry face to pale, stiff Hannah.

"I remember you," he said. "I used to come here with my mother years ago. You are Miss Eyon's own maid. I am Sir George Wolff, and I have urgent business with Miss Eyon; will you take me to her at once? I have no time for delay."

A pang of sudden fear seized upon Hannah. This gentleman had brought news of Marjorie. The girl's sudden disappearance had alarmed her, and the more because

the shock of the news, when she took it to her mistress, had not apparently alarmed Miss Eyon.

Afterwards, when Hannah learned that Barbara had been bidden, very early on the morning of Marjorie's flight, to leave the door unfastened, she had guessed that the girl's disappearance had not surprised Miss Eyon as it had surprised her.

She longed to question Sir George Wolff, but only that morning Miss Eyon had forbidden her to speak of Marjorie to her or to any one. Hannah had lived with her mistress since she was fifteen, and she never disobeyed; but she had suffered many misgivings on behalf of Marjorie. The idea of so tender a creature alone on the high road had afflicted Hannah and had driven sleep from her eyes, and now she felt that she was going to hear that some grievous harm had happened to this child, and all, as Hannah keenly felt, because she had been frightened past bearing. The old servant knew too much of Mr. Brown to think him a safe protector for a girl, even if Marjorie had left Eyon Court to join him. But while her stiff face became yet more sad and set, she was going along the passage to the study door. She had not bidden Sir George to follow her, but when she stopped he was close beside her. Hannah hesitated.

"Ah must tell t' mistress you are asking for her," she said; "you will wait here, sir, if you please."

She opened the baize door, but she did not close it, and Sir George placed his foot to keep it open. Then he pressed forward, and politely held the inner door open

for Hannah to pass in behind the screen that masked the room from prying eyes.

"Is that you, Hannah? Come here!" Miss Eyon said, in such a harsh tone that the woman went in quickly, leaving the door to Sir George.

"What has happened? and why was Barbara called for so loudly?"

Sir George went forward; Miss Eyon was sitting in her usual place, but at sight of him she flushed, she half rose, then sat down again, and a look of alarm spread over her face.

"What does this intrusion mean?" She looked questioningly at Hannah.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Eyon," Sir George said, and he smiled and bowed. "I believe I frightened your servant by following at her heels, and she cried out. I must ask you to excuse my intrusion, but I want to speak to you on a matter of urgent business."

Miss Eyon had recovered herself. The flush faded from her face. She looked once more gray and statue-like. She stiffly bent her head, and then stared at him haughtily.

"It would have been better to send in your name, sir." She gave Hannah a severe look. "How was it that you did not tell this person to stay below till you had acquainted me with his name and his business?"

"It is Sir George Wolff, ma'am," Hannah stammered and hesitated, "he was urgent to—to see you—I—I——"

"Please don't blame your maid, Miss Eyon," Sir George said, pleasantly. "You must forgive me. I was bent

on seeing you without delay, so I took my own way of doing it." Then he looked round for a chair—he was determined not to yield till he had said his say. "I may sit down, may I not?" he went on, still smiling, "while I tell you what has brought me here?"

"It is a mere form to ask my permission for anything," she said, harshly, while she looked at the screen behind him, "when you have forced your way into my house and into my presence."

He looked at Hannah, who stood beside her mistress like a sentinel on duty.

"Shall I speak out?" he said, as he seated himself. "or do you prefer hearing what I have to say in private?"

"You can go outside, Hannah," Miss Eyon said, significantly.

When the door closed she looked sarcastically at her visitor.

"Well, Sir George Wolff having honored me with this intrusion, let me hear your wonderful secret; for it must be wonderful to cause Sir George Wolff to forget ordinary civilities."

There was such intense scorn in her look and tone that he was disconcerted for a minute or two; he felt as if he could not cope with this terrible old woman.

"My business relates to your great-niece, to Miss Marjorie Eyon," he said, abruptly.

Evidently she did not expect this; the scornful look faded; there was a sort of eagerness in her tone as she said:

"Well, sir, what about Marjorie?"

"I wish to see her, if you please. I have brought an invitation for her to spend a few days with Mrs. Locker."

"Is that your urgent business, Sir George Wolff? Fie on you. The mountain has truly produced a mouse."

She made an attempt at playfulness, which did not match with her hard blue eyes and sneering lips.

"I will tell you, dear madam," he said, very earnestly, "why I am anxious to have news of your niece. Some weeks ago I met her on the moor, and I thought she seemed sad and depressed. I fancy it must be dull for so young a girl to live entirely away from young companions of her own age. I thought that a week or two with Mrs. Locker and her old schoolfellows would cheer her."

It seemed to him that those blue eyes had pierced into his thoughts, he could not get free from the spell they fastened on him.

"I am surprised," Miss Eyon said slowly, "that you should interfere between me and my niece, and that you, Sir George Wolff, should think it necessary for Marjorie to have *young* companions." She paused, and when she saw that he avoided meeting her direct gaze, her sneering smile came back. "It appears that you did not judge it necessary for her to have a young husband."

He reddened at this taunt.

"I hope she is well," he said, "and that you will permit me to see her. She and I are very old acquaintances."

"So I have heard." Then, with deliberate emphasis, "My niece has been very frank with me."

He writhed under her smiling scrutiny. He felt that this cruel-faced woman enjoyed his discomfiture. At last he said firmly: "May I ask you, madam, to be kind enough to send for Miss Marjorie Eyon."

At this she smiled again, but more genially. It seemed, as if she were about to have some joke with him as she slowly began to speak.

"It is unfortunate, but it is impossible, Sir George Wolff. By her own act I am well rid of a murmuring, fretful child——"

"Why do you speak so ill of her?" he interrupted. "And what do you mean?—has Marjorie left Eyon Court."

"You interrupted me just now. I was about to say that although *you* did not judge a young husband necessary for Marjorie, she has preferred to judge for herself. She left this house two days ago, and I believe that she has eloped with Mr. Richard Brown, my man of business. By this time I have no doubt he has married her."

Sir George had risen from his chair. He came up to Miss Eyon, and fixed his eyes sternly on her.

"I do not believe it," he said, hoarsely. "There is some double-dealing under all this. The child has not had fair play. Her life has been made miserable, and she has been driven away. Who is this Richard Brown?"

Her eyes seemed to blaze with anger. She also rose from her chair and stood trembling with passion, while one withered ivory-colored hand grasped at the chair back for support.

"Who is Richard Brown? As good a man as you,

George Wolff, and young and handsome, and skilled in the ways that gain a young girl's love. Now, you know all I know about this self-willed child, and you will be good enough to leave me undisturbed."

"I will go, madam, when you have told me how Marjorie made this person's acquaintance."

Miss Eyon bent down and rang the hand-bell on her table.

Hannah appeared from behind the screen.

"You will see this gentleman downstairs," her mistress said, "and you will see the doors closed on him."

And then she turned, and with surprising quickness passed into her bedroom by the door beside her chair, and closed it sharply behind her.

Sir George Wolff followed Hannah like a man just condemned to a heavy punishment. All joy and hope had gone from his life; but even worse than this was his dread that Marjorie had fallen, perhaps, into more evil keeping than that of Miss Eyon, of Eyon Court.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPENSE.

It was the third day of Marjorie's captivity. All had been still since morning; only the barking of the dog and the occasional grunt of a pig broke now and then into the tomb-like silence that surrounded her, and roused her out of the lethargy that had crept over her.

As the day wore on she listened in vain for the sound of voices. She opened the window and looked out, but there was no sign of Mr. Brown. His cheerful whistle as he paced up and down below her window, smoking his cigar, had hitherto been sufficient warning to her that he had finished his breakfast; but as she leaned out into the raw, damp air she could hear nothing but the grunting of the pigs, with now and then the far-off plaintive cry of the moor-fowl.

The woman came with her dinner at mid-day, and Marjorie asked if Mr. Brown had left the cottage.

But she got the same answer that she had received to previous questions—a shake of the head and a silent look of pity.

Marjorie again thought of the old legend of Nicolette, and she wondered if she could not manage to fasten her cord in some way to the bedstead. It did not seem to her that the making of the cord would be difficult. She went to the window to calculate the depth, and was sur-

prised to hear suppressed talk going on below. She listened; one voice was the woman's, but the other speaker was not Mr. Brown.

Marjorie gently opened the window, but the dog heard the slight sound and set off barking. This naturally drew the attention of the speakers to the fact of something unusual. The man below, leaning on the sill of the window, looked right and left and then overhead. Marjorie swiftly closed the window. She saw with disgust that this man, who had evidently been talking with the woman, was the obnoxious driver who had alarmed her by his looks on the journey.

She almost wished that Mr. Brown would come back, and then a quick reflection showed her that it was he who had placed this man to watch her in his absence. There was no use in trying to imitate Nicolette. She had no hope of escaping in the dark because of the dog; it would certainly arouse its fellow brute, as in her heart Marjorie termed the man who had just now leered up at her window.

It seemed to the girl that she had been shut up in this room for longer than two days. On the first day, as she looked back on it, she saw that she had behaved like an angry child. She had cried and sobbed, and had run about the room; and when Mr. Brown sent her a note, she had refused to read it, and had thrown it out of the window. Yesterday she had been left to herself, and she had sunk into a sort of stupor, partly from despair, but chiefly from want of air and sleep. Although she lay down part of each night on the bed, she did not undress

till the dawn awakened her. It was so cold that she was glad to wrap herself in the bed-coverings, and she spent a good part of her time in walking up and down her room, like some wild creature in a cage, so as to keep her feet warm.

On this third day of imprisonment, Marjorie roused to the consciousness that she had grown older and more resolute; she told herself that she would n marry Mr. Brown if he kept her shut up for a whole month; she felt convinced that his profession of love for her was a falsehood; he wanted to marry her because she was heiress of Eyon Court.

Sir George Wolff, she told herself, had really loved her. He was rich, and could have no motive except love to make him wish to marry her. And how differently he had behaved; even when he was deeply wounded by her refusal, he had asked her to rely on his friendship and his help. It was true that he had been silent when she had written for help; but since she left Eyon Court, Marjorie had had more time for deep thought than she had ever had in her life, and she blamed herself now for her hasty judgment. She began to make excuses for Sir George.

She knew how fond he was of sport. He might have been absent from home, and her letter might not have reached him. Surely it would have been wise, even though it would have humbled her pride, to write again to so kind a friend. And then, while she pondered through the fast darkening afternoon, the truth dawned on Marjorie's startled mind.

She had begun to think out a letter to Mr. Brown. Yes, when the woman brought her tea, she would once more ask for the pen, ink and paper which had been refused her, and she would ask this adventurer, as she called him, to name the sum of money for which he would set her free. She would have to ask Miss Eyon to pay the amount, for she had only a moderate quarterly allowance till she came of age. She believed that her aunt would do this, for although she had bade her marry Mr. Brown, she would not approve of his conduct in helping her to run away. Suddenly something, she could not tell what, shed a broad light on her puzzle, and she sat in startled wonder at her previous blindness. Her letter had been intercepted, it had never reached Sir George Wolff, and she had walked blindfold into the trap which Miss Eyon and Mr. Brown had set for her.

The girl shuddered and looked round her with horror.

"How dull I have been. I may die here," she murmured. "No one will ever know or ask what has become of me. They will think from my silence that I am happy at Eyon Court. My letters to Mrs. Locker, too, have been kept back."

She hid her face in her hands. The hope which her plan of writing to Mr. Brown had called up was quenched in despair. Her tea and supper were left untasted, and when the woman came to take away the supper tray she eyed Marjorie curiously.

"She thinks I'm mad," Marjorie said. "Well, perhaps that will be the end of me."

But when night came her courage returned. She heard

the woman call out a loud good-night, and then the window below was closed and barred. She heard the barring of the door, and then came a deathly stillness. Usually she heard, just after this, Mr. Brown's voice in the room at the bottom of the stairs, but there was no sound to-night.

The girl determined to undress, so as to refresh herself by sound sleep; then, if she felt brave enough, she would try to escape in the morning. It seemed to her that the woman was alone in the house, and she had noticed how slow and clumsy she was in her movements. When she brought up the breakfast, Marjorie determined she would find some means of distracting her attention and then boldly make a rush downstairs. She could fasten the door below and escape, she thought, before the woman could call the driver to help her. It was possible that he would not be there in the early morning.

So she lay down to rest in the earnest hope that this might be her last night of imprisonment. She was conscious of an increasing calm. She had grown to take this confinement so quietly that her fear was lest she should sink into passiveness, and so against her own will consent to Mr. Brown's terms.

"If I can only sleep," she said, "I shall feel different to-morrow."

She slept heavily—a sound, dreamless sleep—unconscious of the evil that had been worked and thought over, in the room in which she lay.

Mr. Brown had spoken truly, he had lighted on this cottage by accident when he had lost his way on the moor, and he soon found out that the woman was in trouble,

and greedy for money, but if he had searched among the dales far and near he could not have fixed on a place better suited to his evil purpose. The woman's husband was still undergoing a term of penal servitude as a receiver of stolen goods, and her son, who had early followed his father's example, was in prison for burglary, although his mother called it poaching. The cottage had seen evil deeds and had heard foul words enough to give bad dreams to those who dwelt in it, but as Marjorie lay sleeping her sweet face was untroubled, and its look of peaceful innocence scared the evil visions that were used to haunt the low-roofed bed-chamber.

All at once she started and opened her eyes. It was still dark, but the dog was barking. Marjorie sat up and listened. The dog was barking excitedly, she thought, but no one seemed to notice him. The sound, however, made her restless. She rose up, struck a light, and began to dress herself.

When she looked out, the dog had gone back into his kennel, and the gray glimmer over the waste showed the beginning of dawn. But above the moor hung a pall of gradually whitening vapor, through which Marjorie's eyes tried vainly to pierce. This depressed her, for if it lasted she could not hope to find a path across the waste. The way by which Mr. Brown had guided her had no definite foot-track ; they had gone over clumps of heather and tussocks of rushes to the cottage. There might be a path leading away from the back ; Marjorie thought she remembered that Mr. Brown had said the stage-coach had set him down on the high-road a couple of miles away,

and her plan was to make for this high road, which must surely lead to a town—but it would be useless to start in a fog.

It was bitterly cold, and when she had finished dressing she sat by the window, wrapt in her fur cloak. She had been fond of learning poetry by heart, and now as she looked out at the mist she repeated to herself all the hymns she knew, and several psalms.

"I will trust and hope," she said. "I will not believe that God will permit that man to have his way."

She felt far brighter and clearer this morning, and also she was more cheerful and determined to try her plan of escape directly the mist dispersed.

All at once, as if in answer to her wishes, the wind came whistling round the house and soon scattered the mist; it seemed to break up into fragments, which hung like pale clouds on the lowering sky, that showed a red tint in its eastern quarter.

While Marjorie was gazing in the hope of seeing the sunrise, the dog barked again, and a faint far-off barking seemed to come in answer. The sound was repeated; it came nearer and more distinct. Marjorie's heart gave a wild bound, for now she knew that it was the cry of foxhounds. She sat listening with greedy, strained ears —they were coming this way, now they were not far off, she could hear the huntsman's voice as he shouted to the dogs, and then the pack burst into view, and as it dashed across from behind the cottage the huntsman followed; then came one or two riders, spurring their horses across the rough ground.

Marjorie flung open her window, and saw that the sportsmen, who followed now one after another, had to ride more slowly as they advanced.

"Help! help!" she cried out, as loud as she could, "for God's sake help me!"

The two nearest of the horsemen stopped, then another group rode up; they all looked hard at her, and seemed to be taking counsel together.

Two of them who looked older than the rest, shook their heads and rode on; but four others, who wore red coats, came towards the cottage.

Marjorie heard the outer door open, and the woman came out and ran towards the horsemen.

"Help! Help!" the girl cried again, "I am kept here against my will."

She could not hear what the woman was saying but she saw that she shook her head and pointed towards her. The effect of her words was magical. One after another the men rode on, each bestowing as he went a compassionate glance on the imploring girl, who stood with clasped hands at the window. The woman spoke to the dog, and his loud barking drowned Marjorie's voice as she strove to be heard by the next horseman that galloped past.

Until this last one was out of sight—it seemed to the girl that she had not fully realized the boon that might have been hers, the chance of escape which had drifted past her. To her grief she saw a number of horsemen cross the moor, evidently in pursuit of the body of the hunt, which had taken another lead over the moor from

that chosen by the huntsman and his immediate followers. the huntsman's horn sounded as the last horseman passed the cottage, and this had excited the dog and had doubled his deafening noise.

It seemed to the girl impossible that all hope was over. She stood staring at the open window as if the whole thing had been a dream.

"Am I awake," she said, "can I have let such a chance go by—I might have tried harder—can it be quite over?"

The woman's call at the door below roused her.

"Pull your chairs up," she said. "You should be ashamed to bring discredit upon an honest house by such screams and tales."

She spoke rudely and angrily.

"There is no hurry," the girl said, "I will pull the chairs up when you bring my breakfast."

"I'll not trouble you to do it,"—the woman spoke yet more roughly—"your window shall be nailed fast, and at once too."

She began to pull at the lowest chair, but it was a more difficult task than she had counted on, for as she used violence to pull the clumsy chair through, it stuck in the doorway.

But Marjorie took no heed of her doings. She had gone back to the window, and as the woman spoke her last words, two more horsemen came round the corner of the cottage. They saw the girl at the window and looked at her as she cried out once more for help. They stopped, and Marjorie's heart beat so fast she could hardly breathe.

One of the men rode close up to the cottage and looked up at her window. "What is it?" he said.

"For God's sake help me," she cried. "I have fallen into bad hands—Ah, Sir George Wolff," she cried. The shriek of joy made the woman leave the chair sticking in the doorway and hurry to the entrance. "Don't you know me, Sir George? I am Marjorie Eyon."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT BAY.

EVER since Sir George Wolff's visit, Miss Eyon had been strangely silent. Hannah was uneasy. Her mistress looked and seemed ill—the paleness of her face had changed its character. She was ghastly, and her eyes looked dull and without color. Yet when the old servant ventured to propose the doctor should be sent for, her mistress stared at her with derision on her lips.

"Are you in second childhood already," she said. "When I need a doctor I shall bid you fetch him. You have too little to do, Hannah, or you'd not find time in which to nurse fancies. We have none of us enough to do in this house."

This long sentence, after so many days of silence, reassured the faithful maid as to her mistress' health, and when an hour or so later Mr. Brown arrived, Hannah rejoiced in the hope that his visit would cheer her mistress.

Two days before Marjorie left Eyon Court, Miss Eyon had cautioned Hannah not to meddle between her niece and Mr. Brown, and to tell the girl of his expected return on that evening ; but for all that when Hannah found that the girl had fled, she felt positive that Marjorie had gone away to avoid a marriage with him. Hannah hoped, however, when she saw Mr. Brown, that he had brought news of the runaway, and she looked at him far more

graciously than usual. He asked to see her mistress at once, and she noted the excitement of his manner.

"My mistress is not quite well, Ah think, sir. She hev been sadly for several days," she said, before she opened the door, of Miss Eyon's room.

Mr. Brown frowned; he made no remark, he did not even smile as he went up to Miss Eyon's table.

He only nodded by way of greeting. "Have you got her here?" he said sharply.

Those old faded eyes had been scanning him curiously as he came in, had noted his splashed boots and clothes, and the hurry and agitation that had taken the place of his usual calm.

But his words startled her. She was at once terrified and angered. She felt as if the secrets of Eyon Court were bared to the world, for it was not likely that Marjorie would be silent as to the treatment she had received there.

"Have you come here, Richard, to tell me you have let her escape you. Buttered fingers," she said, with contempt.

At this he swore so fiercely that she shrank against the side of her chair.

"Hush!" she said impressively. "You are speaking to a lady, remember that if no other motive influences you. Tell me at once what has happened."

"I've been a fool, that's all," he said, bitterly. "I gave Marjorie time to come round. I forgot my creed about women, and I believed she was as simple as she seemed. I left her in safe keeping, as I thought, for two

days, and her friend, Sir George Wolff—curse him!—found her out, and he has carried her off."

Miss Eyon's hands moved restlessly, but her face was as rigid as ever.

"Well," she said, after a pause, "better he than another. Sir George is a magistrate; he knows the laws, and he knows that a runaway ward must be brought back to her guardian. He will bring her back to me. He will not care about keeping Marjorie. I told him she had eloped with you. You see," she added sarcastically, my plan was the safest. Sir George Wolff could not have carried her away from Eyon Court. She will come back here, Richard. She is perhaps now on her way, and she must marry you out of hand; her reputation requires it. I want no explanation from either of you," she said sternly. "Marjorie has been under your sole protection for nearly a week; it is therefore necessary for her reputation that you become her husband."

He was walking up and down the room, tugging impatiently at his whiskers and muttering to himself. He stopped in his walk and faced her.

"How can I?" he asked. "I have done all I can. I might, perhaps have had a chance if she had not got away, but there's no chance now unless, indeed"—he paused—"you'll consent, when she comes here, to let her be stupefied and managed that way."

He was startled by the flash in Miss Eyon's eyes. They seemed to be galvanized, so suddenly had life and color returned to them.

"You are a villain," she said, "and if there were any

other way to effect my plans you should not marry the girl. I know better than you do what time and seclusion will do for Marjorie. I have two years before me, and I tell you that before they are over you shall marry her. As you tell me she is averse to you, for the present you must keep your distance; she must be left entirely free, under my care. You have been a clumsy wooer, my fine gentleman."

He had often borne her scoffs before, but to-day his anger flamed out.

"Sneer away, you old fool," he said rudely. "I wonder whose fault it was that the girl ever thought of running away from Eyon Court; instead of humoring her until she did not know which end she stood on, and so sending her proud temper to sleep, you trampled on her and frightened her almost out of her wits; you are solely to blame. What chance had I after that? None, I say. Confound all women, old or young, the cat is in all of of them when they are rubbed the wrong way."

He had raised his voice as he glared at the shuddering women. Suddenly he broke off and listened. There was loud talking outside, too—women's voices, and now a man's voice above the rest.

The outer door of the study opened, and tones which Miss Eyon recognized made themselves distinct.

"I tell you, my lass, I am a magistrate, and I have to see your mistress in that capacity. You cannot prevent my entrance."

Brown turned a ghastly white and looked about him.

The old woman who just now had cowered under his

abuse, looked at him for an instant with pity. Then she seemed to gather in the fact of his danger, and without a word she pointed silently to her bedroom.

As Sir George Wolff appeared at the inner door, the bedroom door closed on Mr. Brown.

Except that she was less rigid than usual, no one would have guessed that Miss Eyon had just been greatly agitated. The only sign of the bitter humiliation she had suffered was in her unusual courtesy to the new comer.

"You have soon returned, Sir George," she said calmly. "May I ask you to be seated while you explain what your further business may be."

Sir George remained standing, although he bowed in acknowledgment.

"My business, madam, will not take long to explain," he said. "I am sorry to have again to disturb you, but I have signed a warrant against your agent, Richard Brown for the abduction and forced imprisonment of your great-niece, Miss Majorie Eyon, and I have ridden over with the constables to see it executed."

Miss Eyon smiled at his formal announcement. She saw that if she gave Richard Brown time he would be able to escape. She felt sure that he could overhear Sir George Wolff's words from her bedroom.

"This is a very strange statement," she said.

"Are you sure that you are correctly informed. Mr. Brown is a gentleman in whom I put full confidence."

"He has deceived you," Sir George said severely. "I have my information from Marjorie herself. She has suffered much ill-treatment at the hands of this person.

It appears that you were entirely mistaken in supposing that she wished to become his wife."

Miss Eyon looked at Sir George and smiled, but he was too much in earnest to argue.

"He will have to answer for this, and I am here," Sir George went on, "to ask your leave to searqh the house. We learned on our way that this man Brown was seen to ride up your avenue not an hour ago. You will therefore allow us to look for him?"

"May I ask Sir George Wolff from whom the informa- comes that Mr. Brown is here?"

Miss Eyon spoke so haughtily that Sir George felt impatient.

"I am not obliged to answer that question, madam, but a man named Tobias Horner gave me the information; and I find that he and this man Brown have been seen together more than once, so that there could not be a mistake of identity.

Miss Eyon looked at him with contempt. "It is well that you told me yourself," she said. "I could not otherwise have been brought to believe that Sir George Wolff, a magistrate too, could have been such a confiding simpleton."

He started as if he had been struck, but the next minute he smiled.

"That man, Tobias Horner," she went on to say, "is a notorious liar and vagrant, far more worthy your attention than any one I am likely to know. But I see that you are impatient. You wish me to answer your request to search the house."

She paused.

"We are losing time," he said. "If you please, Madam, I will make the search myself with one of your servants; it will be pleasanter for you."

She sat up and looked sternly at him, then, clasping the arms of her chair with those withered ivory colored fingers, she said in a loud harsh voice:

"You will do no such thing. You will go as you came, and you will not enter a single room besides this one. I am still mistress in my own house, Sir George Wolff. I refuse."

He stood for a few moments without giving her an answer.

"You are acting unwisely," he said. "I might insist, but you cannot prevent me from surrounding the house and taking this fellow into custody in that way; the plan I first proposed would have been less public."

Even then she could not repress her contempt. "What a fool the man is," she thought, "why does he blab out what he means to do. Well, Richard will be doubly warned. You will have to answer for this outrage," she said aloud. "I tell you there is no one in the house besides the family, but if you persist in your purpose, I shall not let it pass quietly. I am an old woman, but not too old and feeble to be at the mercy of a bullying magistrate."

Instead of answering, Sir George Wolff walked twice across the study; he seemed to be debating some purpose with himself. At last he came up to Miss Eyon's

table and stood, not looking at her, but with his eyes fixed on the door by which Mr. Brown had escaped.

"You had not denied he was in the house before," he said; "now you force me to speak more plainly. Just as I came into this room, while I was at the door, I heard a man speak in a loud and angry voice, and yet I found you here alone. Mr. Brown is in that room." He pointed to Miss Eyon's bedroom.

A faint sound like that of a closing door told him and Miss Eyon that some one had passed out of the other room, and Sir George Wolff made a quick step forward.

Miss Eyon rose up, and with surprising swiftness she had reached the door of the bedroom and placed herself against it.

"You betray yourself, madam," He could not help admiring her courage. "I must use other means. But why do you take the part of a fellow like this? Believe me, this Brown is a low impostor, who has gained your confidence for his own vile ends."

He meant to leave her as he spoke, for he was anxious to see that all the doors and windows were watched, but Miss Eyon came up quickly to him and laid her hand on his arm. Now that she stood erect he saw how tall she was: her eyes seemed almost on a level with his as she fixed them on his face. The hard scorn had left those pale blue eyes, they looked imploring; it seemed to him there was an agonized pleading in them.

"You must spare him"—her voice had a strange broken sound; "you cannot, as a gentleman, refuse to do so. Do you know why I shield this young man?

You cannot know, and I will tell you. Because I will not let you do a deed that would bring a sorrow on you. You have called Richard Brown an impostor, but that is not a true word. . . . He has been sinned against far more than he has sinned. . . . If he deserves punishment it must not fall upon him here——"

She gasped for breath. Her dry lips seemed unable to finish all she had to say, but Sir George Wolff listened in a sort of fascinated silence. That withered hand on his arm and the pleading of the sad eyes held him fast.

"Richard Brown is my child," she said at last. "His father was my son. . . . Now tear open, if you will, the shame of Eyon Court, and destroy in one moment the whole toil of a life. . . . Yes, I had willed that he should marry the girl. . . I will it still, or do you," she laughed with her old sneer, "do you mean to take his leavings?"

Her face contracted; the sudden passion that had supported her as suddenly fled. While Sir George Wolff stood stupefied by her words, her hands left his arm, she swayed backwards and fell back against the wall, close to the door by which Richard Brown escaped.

EPILOGUE.

The doctor turned away from the bed on which they had placed the stiff, insensible figure.

"She will not rally," he said to Sir George Wolff and to Hannah, who looked more dead than alive as she stood by the bed. "Life may linger for more than a day, but she will not speak or move again. I am of no further use."

The doctor buttoned up his coat and went.

The search for Richard Brown proved fruitless. The shock of Miss Eyon's sudden attack had disabled Sir George Wolff from taking prompt measures, and, although the house was thoroughly examined, no trace of the young man was found.

"Ah wad bide content, sir," Hannah said, when she had guided him along the galleries and into all the deserted rooms. "Ah wad let him be; ye'll mebbe do more harm than good both to dead an' livin'. Eh, sir, 'tis best to let ill-doings rest; there'll be mebbe a sting left in them nobbut you bring them to the light."

Sir George Wolff looked at her keenly and her eyes dropped. He guessed that the woman had known Miss Eyon's secret. Then, while Hannah hurried back to her dying mistress, Sir George Wolff dismissed the constables.

"Better so," he said as he rode thoughtfully through the village, "and then her secret dies with the poor old woman—Marjorie will never know why her aunt strove to foist this scoundrel on her as a husband."

Then he urged on his horse; he was not going home, he was on his way to Marjorie. He had remained in the cottage on the moor while the friend with whom he was staying went home to fetch a carriage, and then when Marjorie was ready Sir George had taken her to Selby. Now it seemed to him that he ought at once to take the tidings of Miss Eyon's illness to the girl.

Marjorie had been so excited by all she had gone through that after she had told him the narrative of her flight from Eyon Court, and of Brown's misconduct, Sir George had not encouraged her to talk, and as soon as he had seen her safe with Mrs. Locker he hurried back to Laleham to take measures for Brown's apprehension.

He asked himself now, as he rode from Eyon Court to Masham, how it would be with him and Marjorie when they met again. She did not care for this man Brown, or she would not have given him up to justice; and yet she had sought his help and his advice.

"Well," he said, at last, "I must be content to play a father's part. I shall have her friendship and her confidence, but she will choose a younger man to give her love to."

It was evening when he reached Selby, and he had become depressed. Even the prospect of seeing Marjorie had a certain bitterness, for he had decided that she could never love him well enough to become his wife.

He found her sitting alone, but she rose up and met him with a look of loving gratitude.

When she heard what had happened, she wished at once to return to Eyon Court to nurse her aunt, but Sir George would not permit this. He said that Miss Eyon would not recognize her, and that probably life would have flown before Marjorie could reach the manor house.

"You will be guided by my advice, will you not?" he said.

Marjorie looked up timidly. At the cottage, when she had given him a brief account of her adventures, she had spoken with horror of Mr. Brown; but still she feared that Sir George must be angry with her for her foolish trust in this man's protection.

"Yes," she said softly.

"And you will consider me your old friend, you will let me sometimes come to see you in the old way?"

Tears came to her eyes. She longed to tell him all she had learned about her own feelings in those sad hours on the moor, but she dared not. He was so frank, so brotherly in his manner, it was evident that he had left off loving her.

"You know you are always most welcome," she said, shyly; she did not look up at him.

Then his face took a new expression.

"Take care, my child," he said; "do not say more than you mean. It is cruel to be too kind to me, Marjorie."

She looked up at him. And he did not mistake the meaning he saw in her eyes. . . . . .

Few more words were spoken, but when Mrs. Locker came in to see her visitor, she found Sir George sitting with his arm round Marjorie.

"We have settled it," he said, as he went forward and shook hands; "this dear child says I am not as old as I fancied myself, and that she intends to put up with me as a husband. What do you think of her, Mrs. Locker?"

THE END.

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