

as he is, and the lawyer is deep and silent as the grave. And so for the nonce Oliver Ralston—or Mordaunt, as he must now be called—tries to make himself contented by wielding the sceptre at Fen Court and devising plans with the sapient Isabella for circumventing the young widow's resolution to remain undiscovered. But all in vain; three months pass, and they are still ignorant of her destination. It is close upon Christmas day, when one afternoon a card is brought in to Oliver on which is inscribed the name of Lord Mulraven. Now, before Irene's departure she had confided to him all the details of the torn letter, and her last interview with her husband, so that he hopes Lord Mulraven may have seen her or come from her, and goes in to meet him gladly. Two gentlemen await him in the library; one clad in deep mourning, whom he concludes to be Mulraven; the other, a shorter, fairer, less handsome, but more cheerful-looking man, whom we have met once before, but doubtless quite forgotten; who was Mulraven's chum at college, and is now Saville Moxon, Esq., barrister-at-law, and owner of the jolliest set of chambers in the Temple.

"Mr. Mordaunt, I believe," says Mulraven, rather stiffly; "the—nephew of my late friend, Colonel Mordaunt."

"I am Mr. Mordaunt; and I have often heard your name from my uncle's wife. Won't you sit down?"

His cordial manner rather overcomes the other's hauteur.

"Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Moxon," he commences, and then taking a chair, "We shall not detain you long, Mr. Mordaunt. I was much surprised to learn that Mrs. Mordaunt is not living at the Court. I came here fully expecting to see her. I am anxious to ascertain her address. Will you kindly give it me?"

"I wish I could, Lord Mulraven. I do not know it myself. I was in hopes you brought me news of her."

"Brought you news! How strange! But why is she not here? Is there any mystery about it?"

"No mystery—but much sadness. I am not a man to be envied, Lord Mulraven. I stand here, by my uncle's will the owner of Fen Court, to the wrong and detriment of one of the noblest and most worthy women God ever made."

"You are right there," exclaims Mulraven, as he seizes the other's hand. "But, pray tell me everything. My friend here is as my second self. You may speak with impunity before him. For God's sake, put me out of suspense. Where is Irene and the child?"

"If I may speak openly, my lord, that unfortunate child has been the cause of all our misery!"

"But—how—how?"

Then Oliver tells them how, in words that would be but repetition to write down again. He conceals nothing, hoping that Lord Mulraven may see the justice of following up Irene and relieving her of so onerous a charge as the protection of his illegitimate child. But as he proceeds he can perceive no blush of shame upon Mulraven's face; on the contrary, although he grows pale with excitement, his eyes never once flinch before those of his informant. When the story is concluded, he turns round to Moxon, and addresses him.

"Saville, we must leave this as quickly as possible. I must begin the search again in London. I feel as though I could not let an hour pass over my head without doing something. Thanks, Mr. Mordaunt, for your candid explanation. You have done me the greatest service possible. If Irene is to be found, I will send you news of her."

"But, my lord—excuse my curiosity—but will you be as candid as I have been, and let me know if the suspicious Irene holds with respect to her adopted child are correct?"

"They are so, Mr. Mordaunt, and they are not. The time for concealment is at an end. The boy whom you have known under the name of Tommy Brown is my lawful son—and the heir to my father's earldom." (To be continued.)

## THE HEIR OF THE VAUGHANS.

A singularly handsome woman, in spite of her fifty odd years, was Mrs. Major Vaughan. Tall and straight as an arrow, with a smooth fair face that had a faint flush of health in the beautifully-rounded cheeks, proud lips showing a glimmer of perfect teeth, clear, brilliant, steel-gray eyes, and hair like spun silver, the wonder and admiration of all who knew her.

But then the Vaughans were a remarkable race—very proud of the little excellences that distinguished them from the common herd, and this beautiful silken hair was one of them. No true Vaughan, they said, was ever born without it, and the haughty lady in question would not have parted with that silvery-spun glory for untold riches.

It was repeated in her handsome son, Cecil, only the silvery sheen had given place to a warm, rich, yellow glow, like sunlight shining on a southern wall. Very much like his mother looked this well-favored Cecil, only handsomer, brighter, and younger, as was befitting. A true scion of his noble race was he, and Mrs. Vaughan was proud of him, and thought mother never before was blessed with such a son.

"If he only marries to please me my happiness will be complete," she said to herself, with a little sigh, every day of her life. "But men do make such silly choices, sometimes, when they are looking for a wife! Cecil may prove no better than the rest, in that respect. I be-

lieve it would kill me, though, if he were to make a mésalliance."

For her own part, she had not been guilty of the folly of an inferior marriage. Born a Vaughan, she had wedded one of her own race—a distant relative.

She was too clever by far, however, to say very much upon this subject to Cecil himself. When he had once begun to drift toward forbidden havens, there would be time enough for remonstrance and entreaty.

But, though her lips were mute, that did not prevent her thoughts from dwelling pretty constantly upon this theme. In fact, she had made her own selection for Cecil already, and was only waiting for him to betray his individual preference, which she believed he would very soon do; for who, in all the wide world, was so well suited to him as her dear young friend, Bertha Kenyon? Had she not invited Bertha for a long visit on purpose to throw the young people together? Had she not plotted and planned and manoeuvred, until she felt very much ashamed of her own hypocrisy, in order to precipitate an engagement?

She was seated in a great easy chair of crimson velvet, in which she looked every inch a queen, one particular evening of which I am now writing. Cecil stood near her, bending down every now and then to smile into her face, or say some endearing word, for he was very proud of his mother, when the door suddenly opened and a petite, girlish figure flitted in, like a spirit, and stood before them.

A fairy-like figure it was, with a round, bright piquant face, all pick-and-white save the almond-shaped eyes of turquoise blue. Shining yellow hair, soft as floss-silk, fell in rippling curls about her shoulders, and her dress looked like a fleecy cloud that had caught and retained the red rose tints of a lovely sunset.

On seeing this bewitching vision Cecil stood staring, as if not quite certain whether or not he had been suddenly bereft of his senses; and Mrs. Vaughan straightened herself on her chair with a little shriek of dismay.

"Good gracious! It can never be Rose Varian!"

The pretty fairy-like creature laughed softly, and putting out her pretty, dimpled arms, twined them about Mrs. Vaughan's neck.

"Yes, dear old auntie," she said, kissing her rapturously, "it is your own Rose."

Mrs. Vaughan drew back with a gasp.

"I—I—thought that you were safe at school."

"School!" echoed the beauty. "Humph! I'm tired of always being kept at school. And so I've come back to you, like a bad penny."

The haughty lady's face grew stern and cold. She could not wholly conceal her dismay. Putting off those clinging arms, she said, faintly:

"My vinaigrette, Cecil! These surprises quite upset me."

Cecil brought it from the mantel, scarcely taking his bewildered eyes off the lovely creature who seemed to have dropped from the skies so suddenly. She was bright and piquant and, man-like, he could not help admiring her very much indeed.

Mrs. Vaughan detected his admiration, and grew whiter and sterner than ever. After toying with her vinaigrette for some minutes she turned and said to Miss Varian:

"I did not expect you, Rose. Why didn't you send word you were coming?"

The little beauty tossed her head.

"I didn't know it myself very long before-hand, auntie. The fact is, I quarrelled with Miss Garth, the lady principal—she said I was saucy and impudent, but that isn't true—and so I took French leave, as the saying is—came away without asking leave or licence."

Mrs. Vaughan frowned.

"Oh, you foolish child! such things are so disgraceful. You must go back to-morrow and beg Miss Garth's pardon."

"I shall not go back, and I shall never beg Miss Garth's pardon," returned Rose, an expression not wholly amiable coming into her turquoise eyes.

Mrs. Vaughan sighed and knitted her brows. She scarcely knew what to say to this daring little rebel. Besides, there stood Cecil, staring at her still, with a half-amused expression on his handsome face.

"Mother," he said, by way of interruption, "I beg your pardon. But this scene is quite inexplicable to me. Will you do me the honor to present me to this young lady?"

"Humph! I thought you knew her."

This was not true. But Mrs. Vaughan felt very angry, very much out of sorts, and did not consider her words at all.

"I have not that pleasure—as yet."

"Then let me introduce you. My son, Cecil, Miss Rose Varian."

The young man bowed low over the pretty slender hand she extended. For an instant he caught the flash of a pair of eyes bewilderingly bright and dangerous.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Vaughan," Rose murmured, sweetly.

Cecil said something in response that called a vivid blush to her cheek, and then turned once more to his mother.

"I don't like half explanations."

She understood him.

"Cecil, how silly you are getting to be," she said, pettishly. "Did I not write to you all about Rose, while you were on the Continent?"

"I'm sure you never mentioned her name."

"It must have been an oversight. Her father died something more than a year ago, and left her in my charge. I stand to her very much in the light of a guardian. That is all there is to tell; and now I hope you are satisfied."

"It is strange you never spoke of her before."

"Very strange," echoed Rose herself, those liquid blue eyes twinkling. "I do not feel flattered at being considered of so little importance."

"I tell you it was an oversight," Mrs. Vaughan said, sharply.

Rose knew better. She was a shrewd little body, and thought she could understand the real reason well enough.

"Auntie knows I am pretty," she thought. She always called Mrs. Vaughan "Auntie," though no such relationship really existed. "she meant to keep me safely hidden away from her handsome son for some time to come. Dear me! but he is handsome. It's fortunate, after all, that I had that little falling out with Miss Garth."

She smiled and shook her pretty head until every shining curl seemed to be dancing a jig. Already the sly minx was beginning to lay her plans for the future.

Cecil had scarcely released that slender, dimpled hand when there came a soft rustling of silk through the hall, and Bertha Kenyon entered.

She was a very handsome woman—tall and stately, with shining dark eyes, a pale, high-bred face, a sweet, tender mouth, and a graceful ease, so to speak—rather an innate refinement, that might have done honor to one of royal blood.

Her dark eyes opened a little wider than usual at the sight of a strange face, and one so infinitely charming, but she was too well-bred to manifest her surprise more openly.

Mrs. Vaughan stumbled a little over the introductions. She still felt angry, annoyed, and mentally wished Rose Varian in the antipodes at that particular time.

"Her coming couldn't have been more inopportune," she said to herself. "Cecil is sure to be charmed with her—men always are with these pink-and-white faces. Faugh! As if one wanted a wax doll for a wife. But Rose had better take care how she comes between Bertha Kenyon and my son. I couldn't brook that sort of thing."

Miss Kenyon was very pleasant and gracious to the new-comer. It was her way to have a smile and a kind word for everybody. But she could not help thinking her own thoughts, and Mrs. Vaughan seemed to read some of them, for she said, presently, pointing to the cloud of rosy drapery Rose had on:

"I don't understand why you should come here dressed in that fashion. One would imagine you had just returned from a fancy ball."

Rose laughed carelessly.

"Please, auntie, do not criticize my dress. I had been doing wrong, you know, and must make confession directly I arrived, and, girlish-like, it seemed as if I must make myself as pretty as possible, and disarm you of all resentment in that way."

Cecil heard both question and answer, and glanced up quickly. This girl was very artful, or very innocent. Which was it?

Mrs. Vaughan could have told well enough. She opened her eyes incredulously.

"Humph! You should have given me credit for better sense than to have had my head turned by any such folly."

"I see it now," Rose returned, good-humouredly. "However, we all make errors sometimes. But, indeed, I was very anxious to please you. I tumbled off my ugly wraps, though, of course, I expected to find you alone. But they are so disfiguring."

Rose told little fibs, on occasion, and this was one of them. She had peeped in at the drawing-room window, in passing, and knew very well there was a gentleman, and that he was quite young enough and distinguished-looking enough to be made the target for her coquettish little arrows.

Presently the young people withdrew to the piano. Mrs. Vaughan sat watching them for a long time afterwards, a slight frown contracting her fair white brow.

There was a little music, and a good deal of gay, animated talk, the greater part of both being done by Rose. Mrs. Vaughan could not help seeing that a shade of penitiveness settled upon Bertha Kenyon's face presently. She became paler than her wont, and a dreamy, far-away look came into her pretty dark eyes.

But Rose more than made up for Bertha's silence. She did nothing but prattle and laugh, and lift her turquoise orbs to Cecil's with glances at once shy and enticing. It was enough to turn any man's head—the looks she gave him.

"What an arch hypocrite," sighed the watchful mother, quite wrathfully. "I believe that quarrel with Miss Garth was all a fiction, and Rose knew Cecil was here, and came on purpose to make a fool of him. She is quite equal to a cunning game of that sort. She knows Cecil has money, plenty of it, while she has very little. The minx understands perfectly well on which side her bread is buttered."

Not a very elegant way of putting it, but Mrs. Vaughan was nearer right than she might have been. With whatever plans Rose Varian might have entered the house, it was now quite evident she would not be averse to bringing Cecil to her feet.

When Mrs. Vaughan's patience was quite exhausted by Rose's coquettish whiles, happening to catch her son's eye, she signed for him to approach.

"Come here, Cecil, I have something to say to you."

He approached, and leaning over her chair, softly kissed her cheek.

"What is it, ma mère?"

Mrs. Vaughan coloured, and began to cough.

When she beckoned to her son she had suddenly made up her mind to tell him her wishes, let the consequences be what they might. Anything was better than to see him drift blindfold into the snare Rose had set for him.

But the topic was a very embarrassing one. She could scarcely find fitting words with which to express herself. So, after a moment's dead silence, she said, quite abruptly:

"Cecil, I would like to hear your opinion of Bertha Kenyon. Charming, isn't she?"

He reddened, and looked away in some confusion.

"Very, ma mère. I don't think I ever met her equal, in some respects, and I have seen a great many beautiful women."

This was candid, at any rate. Mrs. Vaughan took heart of grace. Smiling fondly, she said, in her softest, sweetest tones:

"I am glad you admire her so much. I hope she may be mistress in this house, when I am dead and gone."

Cecil could not pretend to misunderstand her. He shifted uneasily, glanced one or twice at the two lovely figures still lingering at the piano, and thought dreamily how glad these words might have made him a few hours earlier—before Rose Varian came.

"I knew you were fond of Miss Kenyon," he faltered, after a pause.

"I couldn't love a daughter any better, Cecil," laying her soft hand upon his. "It would please me very much indeed if you would speak and decide your fate to-night."

He started, and the hot blood reddened his brow again.

"I will make the attempt," he said rather reluctantly.

"I will take care that you have the opportunity,"

She was as good as her word. By-and-by, when Rose left the piano, and threw herself upon a cushion at their feet, in an attitude of unstudied grace the young man's artistic eye fully appreciated, Mrs. Vaughan gave him a significant glance.

"Rose," said she, "I want you tell me all about your difficulties at the seminary. Cecil, do you join Miss Kenyon. It is not at all befitting you should be a listener to this conversation."

The young man bowed, and moved away. Rose's turquoise eyes flashed angrily, but she felt herself powerless to interrupt the tête-à-tête that she now saw was inevitable.

The conservatory was lighted, and Cecil drew Bertha into its cool dusk and sylvan quiet. It seemed a scene of fairy-like beauty at that moment—tropical plants and tropical perfumes everywhere, and the soft silvery plash of fountains in their marble basins. It was like a glimpse of Eden.

Cecil quite forgot Rose's bewitching face and turquoise blue eyes, under the enchanted spell that at once enwrapped his senses. At one time he had been quite sure he loved Bertha, and now the old feeling came back as strong as ever. He grew cooler and calmer, and his whole soul made confession that this was the woman of all the world to guide and shape his future.

Bertha seemed to have an intuitive sense of what was coming. She had banished the dreadful fear and jealousy that had beset her while Rose was with them, and eyes and face were lustrous, while the loveliest blushes imaginable chased each other over her pretty cheeks.

Cecil talked of other things, in an absent, dreamy way, for a long while; but suddenly he leaned over her, his whole heart in his eyes.

"Bertha," he whispered.

She glanced up shyly, as if her name spoken in that tone thrilled her through and through.

"Bertha," he murmured, very softly, "you must guess what it is I wish to say to you. For days and days a confession has been at my tongue's end. Let me speak to-night; let me tell you—"

He stopped abruptly, and the sentence was never finished, for Rose Varian came tripping into the conservatory, bright, smiling, irresistible. She had managed at last to break away from Mrs. Vaughan.

"You here?" she cried, lifting her pretty slender hands in well-simulated dismay. "I thought the conservatory quite deserted, and ran in to hide away from dear old auntie. She had been giving me a dreadful lecture."

Bertha turned very pale at the interruption, and could not speak.

Cecil himself felt slightly confused.

"I hope you didn't deserve it, he stammered.

"I don't know," laughed Rose, carelessly. "I daresay I did, for I was always getting into scrapes, and doing improper things. I believe I kept up a continual uproar in Miss Garth's school; she will be delighted to have me away."

Cecil smiled. To him the girl seemed simply artless and unconventional. But Bertha held quite a different opinion. She thought her coarse and sly and cunning.

"I wonder that he can admire her so much," she thought, as she stood, pale and silent, listening to Rose's silly prattle, and seeing how often Cecil turned intoxicated glances upon her face. "I suppose men are never keen-sighted where our sex are concerned. A woman would have read her in five minutes."

They all went back to the drawing-room together, and Rose could not resist the impulse to send a triumphant flash of her eyes in Mrs. Vaughan's direction as they entered.

Later, when they had gone upstairs Rose knocked at Miss Kenyon's door, and went in for a few moments.