

hand to her. Probably in the half-light Gretchen did not see it, for she made no responding movement.

"Still," she continued gently, "it is a pity such a lovely woman as Mrs. Travers should always go out without her husband, alone—or with other men."

"Do not lecture me, Gretchen; I came here to be consoled, and not scolded. I am so fortunate in finding you at home, too."

"I shall not be able to stop long, I am afraid. I shall have to go and dress very soon. I am going out to a musical party. Is it nine o'clock yet?"

"Twenty minutes to—there's lots of time; don't be running away just yet. My life is very lonely, and it does me good to talk to you. Juliet has her friends and her parties; she does not care a farthing what becomes of me. She never did care in the least about me—never from the first," added Cis, with irritation.

Gretchen made no answer; the fingers of her left hand ran lightly over the keys of the piano, and her lip quivered, unseen, in the darkening twilight. It was very sad to her to hear Cis talk like that. Although she had always loved this man, with all his weaknesses and follies, to which she was by no means blind, it gave her no pleasure to hear that he was not happy, and that the love he had once felt for his beautiful wife was turned into bitterness and peevish discontent.

Gretchen had one of those pure and unselfish natures that love goodness for its own sake. She would far rather have heard that Cis was perfectly happy in his domestic relations than have had to listen to all the miserable complaints which testified to such flattering confidence in herself.

"Do you remember," continued Cis presently, "do you remember the old days when I used to meet you in Wignore Street, and we walked together to Bloomsbury Square?"

"I remember very well," answered Gretchen, to whom every one of those interviews was as distinctly present as if they had happened only yesterday.

"I think I was a fool in those days!" said Cis with a sigh; "I imagined myself violently in love with a woman who has done nothing but scorn me all my life, and all the while there was an affectionate little heart close by which I might have had for the asking, I believe—eh, Gretchen?"

"What rubbish you are talking!" cried

Gretchen, jumping up so hurriedly that she upset the music-stool, and shutting up the piano with a slam. It was a mercy that there was too little light to see how scarlet her cheeks had turned.

Cis was accustomed to give way to these little flights of sentimentalism at times; and Gretchen, who knew how little he had really cared about her in those "old days," of which he was wont now to make so much, found such speeches particularly trying to bear.

"I must go and dress," she said, striking a match and lighting the candles, lest Cis should relapse into the "twilight mood."

"Wait one minute; I have really something to ask of you," said Cis, sitting upright on the sofa.

"Well, make haste," said Gretchen, in the most practical voice; adding immediately, lest he should think her unkind, "I shall be so glad to do anything for you, as you know well."

"My wife is going to give a musical party—will you come and play at it?" said Cis.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Gretchen in sudden dismay, while her blue eyes looked at him with a sort of horror; for what woman can bear the thought of meeting face to face that other more successful woman who fills the place she has wished to occupy herself? "I cannot do that—pray don't ask me."

"Why not? It is not I who ask you—she will. She was talking of whom she should get to perform at this party to-night at dinner, and some one recommended you. I think it was Lady Caroline Skinflint."

"Lady Caroline is a very kind friend to me, but do not ask me to go to your wife's house. I—I should not like it," she said, hesitatingly.

"But I should like it so much, Gretchen," pleaded Cis, whose vanity, always a weak point with him, was flattered by her evident distress. "Do go, to please me."

"I will think it over, but I had much rather not. I do not see why you want me to go—you can always come and see me here; and now I must go—good night." She held out her hand to him for an instant, and left him, and Cis sauntered down idly to his club.

He was not exactly in love with Gretchen, but it pleased him to think that she was very fond of him. And just as in old times, from sheer idleness and insouciance,