

example and find some patrician, even if penniless bride, all would be as she herself would have planned it.

But John, though so good and gentle and thoughtful for his mother's comfort, was obstinate, quietly though positively so, and though he listened patiently enough to her plans, utterly declined on so important a matter to himself to execute them.

It may therefore be supposed what a terrible blow it had been to her pride when the engagement between her son and Lady Helen was broken off, and how she had vainly tried to mend or patch it up again.

With the lady and her family positive and unbending and her son glad of his release, her self-imposed task was of course an impossible one, and she was at length obliged to relinquish it in despair.

Still there had been hope, if not of this alliance, at least that her son might make another in all respects equally to her satisfaction.

And with this hope she had tried to console herself.

But now all her airy fabrics were dashed to the ground, that is, supposing the news to be true.

Was it true?

There was the question.

Frank had not been home or slept at home for several days past; he might perchance come that very night, but she could not remain quiet on the mere possibility of his doing so, and she determined to go to the mill at once, speak to him upon the subject, and, if need be, expostulate most strongly upon the madness of his conduct.

So the carriage was ordered and her maid dressed her, for of course the *de-demi* innkeeper's daughter could not be expected to dress herself; and as she swept down the stairs and through the fine hall to the brougham awaiting her, she felt capable of crushing with a glance, or one step of her proud foot, the daring and low-born aspirant to be the sharer of her son's name and position.

When the carriage in which she was seated drove up to the door of the counting-house and private entrance to the mill, she was informed that the master was out—gone into Manchester, the clerk who came to the door thought, and of course the man could not, with any degree of certainty, say when his master would return.

Mrs. Gresham hesitated.

It was beneath her dignity, of course, to question this man about her son's habits and proceedings, yet at the same time her impetuous anger and not too careful training in her youth urged her to do what a more noble and upright-minded woman would have spurned with scorn and disdain.

"There is a young woman that my son's name has been mentioned in connection with," she said, her cheek meanwhile flushing with shame at her own meanness.

"One that used to work in the mill," she added; "perhaps does so now; do you know where she lives?"

Now the man knew perfectly well not only who she meant, but also where Florence Carr resided.

He likewise knew his master's violent temper, and needed no assurance to convince him that if he gave Mrs. Gresham the information she required, his own situation, if it came to Frank Gresham's ears, would not be worth a day's purchase.

The only refuge open to him, therefore, was the plea of ignorance, which, too, he stoutly maintained, adding, as an additional plea—

"You see, mum, there's so many young women comes to the mill, and I don't know any of them."

"Of course you don't, but this girl's name is Carr—Florence Carr—I should think you have heard of it."

"I may have done, though I don't remember; but shall I call the foreman, mum?—since you know her name, her address will be sure to be in his books."

"Couldn't you get to look at them without asking him?" inquired the great lady, feeling, it is to be hoped, a little ashamed of herself.

But the man was too wary; he had heard far too much of Mrs. Gresham's character to think of placing his present position and future prospects at her mercy, or dependent upon her discretion, justice, or gratitude.

So he replied in the negative, starting off almost before he was told to do so for the foreman, glad enough to shift the responsibility of satisfying the imperious lady upon him.

Scarcely had he left the carriage door in obedience to Mrs. Gresham's order when a small, deformed and crippled girl hobbled to the side of the carriage, by which indeed she had for the last few minutes been standing, and asked, in a cracked voice—

"Be it Florence Carr whom yo' want?"

"Yes."

"Eigh, I'll tell 'ee where 'Us. Thee'll find her at the first o' Gretty's Cottages in Mud Lane."

"Tell the coachman, and that's for yourself."

So saying Mrs. Gresham threw the cripple a shilling and leaned back in her carriage, glad to have got what she was in search of without an appeal to the foreman, for that worthy man was neither the most pliable or manageable person in the world.

Consequently when the foreman came down to the yard, the carriage and Mrs. Gresham had alike disappeared, somewhat, it must be confessed, to his relief.

"Aw thinks aw've done her a turn," muttered the girl who had volunteered the information, and whom you have no doubt recognized as Jem, Moll Arkshaw's late servant.

"Meary o' Swiney's be in a fluster, and she'll gie Florence such a dusting as she'll na forget in a day."

"To think," she went on, after a pause, "o' that lass being a rich woman and having her carriage to ride in and her silks to wear, she as I remembers white as a 'boggart and ready to die wi' being clemmed. There were summat queer about her as I never quite maked out. I wish I could find it out, for, oh, I hates her like pison!"

More than pison, I should imagine, especially if the dose were to be swallowed by an enemy.

And Jem trudged off homewards.

In no hurry to get there, if one may judge from the way in which she loitered about.

Indeed Jem had been out looking for work—uselessly looking for it—up to this time, at least, and her grandmother, the white witch, was apt to express her opinions pretty freely upon those who would eat and not work.

Consequently Jem was in no great hurry to get home, and she trudged along thoughtfully with something resting like a heavy weight upon her mind, which she was too cautious even to frame in words to herself.

What it was that she brooded upon so intently it would be premature to say, though it was destined to influence the lives of more than one person connected with this narrative.

When she reached her grandmother's house, it was to find that amiable woman in close and deep conversation with John Barker, William Bolton's cousin.

Both started, the crone with an expression of anger and her companion with a look of relief, as the girl entered the room in which they were sitting.

"More mischief," thought the girl, though she seemed more heavy-eyed and dull than usual.

She noticed, too, that John appeared to cower and shiver, even while there was a gleam of defiance in his eye, as though the hag was compelling him to do something he was averse to and dreaded, or refusing him some request which he was anxiously preferring.

"Another kettle o' fish boiling," thought the girl again.

But she made no comment, and only answered her grandmother's savage question as to whether or not she had obtained work by a meek negative.

"Then what's ye bin doin' wi' yoursen?" was the next imperative demand.

The girl hesitated, then said, with something like defiance, though her sharp eyes watched the faces of her listeners keenly—

"Aw saw Meary o' Swiney's, the spinner's mother, at the mill, axing where Florence Carr lived, and they would na tell her, for Frank's in Manchester, and they're feared on him, I s'pose, so I up and told her, and she's gone off in her carriage to see her new daughter, but she do na look lovin' no how."

And the cripple broke into a harsh, malicious laugh, while her companion started and involuntarily glanced at each other.

"An' thee thinks she's going to rate the lass?" asked the fortune teller, eagerly.

"Aye, folks do na go to make love wi' such a look as Gresham's mother's got on her face," was the positive reply. "She's got murder in her eyes, if she could get it out."

"Eigh, weel, lass. It be her business and none o' ours; thee mun be nigh clemmed; here, go to the butcher's and get theeseen summut for thee tea; thou'lt had no dinner, 'ave ye?"

"Noe," was the reply, "and I be nigh clemmed."

And so saying, she took the few copper coins and left the room.

She did not go direct to the butcher's shop, however.

On the contrary, she did not leave the house, but going to the front door, she opened and closed it noisily herself on the inside; and then, creeping like a cat, she made her way into the small kitchen or washhouse behind the room in which the two worthies were sitting, and, opening a large cupboard here, she entered it, and applying eyes and ears to an aperture in the wall formed by the removal of two or three bricks, was enabled not only to hear, but to see what was taking place in the room beyond.

Little did the two plotters dream how they were being overreached by this seemingly half-witted girl.

Had they known of her cunning trick, her life would certainly not have been worth a dozen hours' purchase.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A COUPLE OF CATS.

"Does a young woman named Florence Carr live here?"

The question was asked in a loud, imperative tone, and Mrs. Gresham, who had stepped from her carriage and stood there with her rich silk dress ostentatiously trailing on the door step, seemed to lower over and to a great extent overhalm poor Mrs. Bolton, who had answered her imperious knock.

"Yes, ma'am; will you walk in?"

And the woman who had been robbed of her only child by the villainy of the son of the fine lady before her stood aside for the visitor to enter.

Florence was in the room, sitting by a small table, working upon some pretty trifle of lace, cambric and ribbon, preparing, no doubt, for her wedding day.

For Frank Gresham was in a hurry to call her his own, and had insisted upon her discontinuing at once her work at the mill.

Very simple, pretty, and ladylike she looked this afternoon, like some strange and rare bird in an unsuitable and common cage, and, had Mrs. Gresham been one whit more polished and refined herself, she would have admitted it and shrunk from the scene she had come prepared and determined to make.

Had she known too what a match this girl was for her with her precocious worldly wisdom, her keen, unscrupulous intellect, and thorough knowledge of much that she herself was ignorant of, she would have shrunk from the encounter, or at least have thought twice before engaging in it.

As it was, indeed, for a moment she paused and hesitated.

She was not prepared for so much conscious dignity and quiet refinement as that which seemed natural to this girl.

The utmost simplicity characterized the girl's dress.

There was none of the glaring, flaunting combination of colors sufficient to make one's eyes ache and set one's teeth on edge that was even visible in Mrs. Gresham's own attire.

A black merino dress, destitute of trimming, but fitting a figure which needed no assistance from art to add to its perfect proportions.

Just a frill of soft, white lace round the neck and cuffs, and a small gold brooch, was all the ornament she wore.

No; I was wrong, for a diamond ring glittered on the engaged finger, dislodging, though it did not banish, the plain one enclosed in the valentine, since that was transferred to the other hand.

Instinctively the girl felt that this was no friendly visit, and she rose to her feet, calmly and proudly, to receive her visitor in the same spirit as that in which she came.

There are many quiet fights and contentions as deadly in their feelings and intensity as if fought with swords and pistols, although only women's voices are the weapons.

One glance at Mrs. Gresham's face convinced Florence that between them there could be no peace—nay, not even a truce, and that the conflict would clearly be death or victory.

I think the consciousness of this armed the girl, and gave her courage.

It was a novelty; a little excitement.

There had been too much sameness in Frank Gresham's courtship.

But here was opposition.

Determined, positive opposition.

"You wished to see me?" she asked with the calm grace and self-possession which a duchess might have assumed in receiving a doubtful guest.

"I did," was the fierce and somewhat tragic reply.

"Pardon me, but I have not the pleasure of knowing you."

"No; but you know my son."

"Possibly, but as I do not know who your son may be, I am scarcely anything the wiser."

This was said with such a provokingly sweet, easy, even patronising manner, that the visitor felt both slightly snubbed and greatly irritated.

"I am Mrs. Gresham," she said, as though announcing herself to be Queen of England.

But the girl she was addressing seemed by no means impressed by the announcement, and she simply said, with a slight bend of the head—

"Indeed; I am happy to see y. Won't you take a seat?"

"No?"

The tone of voice in which this little word of two letters was uttered baffled description.

Poor Mrs. Bolton, who had been standing meekly by, gave a decided jump of fear and surprise.

The coachman, waiting with the carriage in the lane heard it, and remarked to the footman, with a sly wink, that the wind was rising.

They all knew at Bankside what Mrs. Gresham's voice in that tone portended.

Indeed, the only person unmoved by it was the very one whom it was expected to frighten.

Instead of being alarmed, Florence only smiled, and remarked—

"I daresay you are tired of sitting with coming in a carriage, but you will, I hope, excuse me."

And so saying, she resumed her seat at the table, and took up the lace upon which she had been working.

"Insolence!" exclaimed Mrs. Gresham, literally exploding with fury.

The black eyebrows which shaded those deep blue eyes were deliberately elevated.

There might even have been a shrug of the rounded shoulders to accompany them.

But the voice was calm, and cold, and cutting which said—

"I did not say so. Pray, do not be so hasty in stigmatising your own conduct."

This was too much for Mrs. Gresham.

She must either have flown at the object of her fury and torn her to pieces—at least, have attempted it—or given way and sunk down, overwhelmed by horror and disgust.

Being somewhat stout and portly, as well as tall, and doubtful as to the success of an attempt at the value of physical strength, the mill owner's mother sank into a chair.

"I want to know," she said, as soon as she could recover breath and overcome her indignation, "if the ridiculous tale I have heard is true—that my son Frank, your master"—and she sneered as she emphasized the word—"is going to marry you?"

"Since you are so interested in the subject," replied the girl, with a sneer, which was quite

equal in intensity to that of her visitor, "I would advise you to question your son. It will then be quite time enough to come here and catechise me."

"Then you deny it?"

"On the contrary, I decline to discuss it."

"But I insist upon knowing."

"You can insist upon whatever you like, but I suppose your son is of age, is he not?"

"Of age; yes, he is of age, and old enough to make a fool of himself with a painted doll like you."

But Florence only laughed a low, musical laugh, as she said, derisively—

"Then you don't admire his taste?"

"Admire his taste," exclaimed the woman, getting really venomous in her passion. "If you were an honest woman, it would be different, but you, who are—"

"You had better be careful," said Florence, warningly, and holding up her hand, on which glittered the diamonds.

"Your words may be actionable," she went on. "Mrs. Bolton is there as a witness, and be assured that I never receive an insult without making the giver pay for it."

(To be continued.)

## AN APRIL-FOOL.

BY MARY KYLE DALLAS.

"I don't know about it," said Lucy Pengare to herself. "It is very dull here, of course, and it is very gay at the Malcoms"; but then I'm dull too. I am not like those gay folks, and I'd better not go. Still, somehow Bessie writes so kindly."

She opened the little pink note, in which the traces of some delicate perfume yet lingered, and read it over to herself, in a murmuring tone:

"DEAR LUCY: You half promised to end this week with me, and I hold you to your word. I should not be happy without you. Miss Montclair is very nice, but we are not such close friends as you and I have been, and you will help me entertain them all. Charlie told me that I must not let you off."

Yours as ever,

HESSIE MALCOM."

"I wonder whether Charlie Malcom did say that," said Lucy. "It was out of kindness, if he did. I know he likes Miss Montclair. He pays her so much attention, and of course I don't care enough for him to be jealous; but we've been such friends. One likes to have friends, and he sent me bunches of roses and books when I was ill, and I'd like to think he did say that. Bessie tells the truth about other things. Why should she fib about this. Perhaps he would like to have me come. I think I'll go after all. Of course I shall be a little brown sparrow among those fine birds, but I'll go, if Miss Merlin only will finish my dress in time, and grandma is well enough to spare me."

The fates were propitious to Lucy's visit. She got off at last, and was set down, trunk and all, at the Malcoms' gate, one windy March night—a night that suddenly seemed brighter than any in the month of June, when a figure just dimly seen in the dusky evening opened the gate and came out, and a voice that she knew to be Charlie Malcom's said:

"I have been waiting here over since I saw the stage lamp down the road yonder. I felt sure you were coming in it. Give me your little basket. Jack, attend to Miss Pengare's trunk. This way, Lucy."

He kept her hand in his a moment before he left her arm. He looked into her face as he spoke, bending his head a little to bring his face closer to hers.

Poor little Lucy! She did like Charlie Malcom so very much. If only that five minute walk along the smooth path under the tall trees, could have lasted forever, she would have asked no more.

Bessie met her friend at the gate, and took her at once to her own room to take her things off. She was the only lady of the house, the bright Bessie, and she was called away by an angry-faced cook the next moment, and there were two ladies in the room who were strangers to Lucy, who were evidently enjoying themselves up before dinner, and who talked hard and fast to each other the while.

"Miss Montclair is handsome," said one.

"Nothing so very wonderful," said the other "as far as I can see; but she's showy and musical, and all that, and he can't do better. She's of a good old family."

"Excellent," said the first. "I presume it is settled. They are always paired off together, somehow. Rich men always marry rich girls. People like to lay money in a warm nest, you know. That was a saying in my part of the world when I was a girl, and it is true every where. It's not a bad match for Charlie Malcom."

Then they flattered out of the room together, and left the glass to Lucy. She did not care much for it now. Life looked very tall to her, and her own face very plain—a dispirited little face, with all the color gone from it, and with a playful sort of quiver in the chin that she could not help for her life. Lucy always began to cry with her chin, as babies do.

"I won't," she said, pressing her palms against her eyelids. "I won't. I ought to be