

UNCLE MAX.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

I tried to keep my attention to my own devotion, but every now and then my eyes would stray to the lovely face before me. Mr. Hamilton's behavior was irreproachable. I could hear his voice following all the responses, and he sang the hymns very heartily.

I think he knew I was behind him for he handed me a hymn-book, with a slight smile, when I was offering to sing mine with a young woman. Miss Darrell gave me a curiously penetrating look when she came out that did not quite please me, but the girl who followed her did not seem to notice my presence. I sat still in my place for a minute, as I did not wish to encounter them in the porch. I had lingered so long that the congregation had quite dispersed when I got out, but, to my surprise, I could see the three walking very slowly down the road. Could they have been waiting for me? I wondered; but I dismissed this idea as absurd.

But I could not forget the face that had so interested me; and when I encountered Uncle Max on his way to the children's service I questioned him at once about the two ladies.

"Yes, you are right, Ursula," he said, a little absently. "The one with fair hair was Miss Gladys; her cousin, Miss Darrell, sat by Hamilton."

"But you never told me how beautiful she was," I replied, in rather an injured voice. "She has a perfect face only it is so worn and unattractive looking."

"You must not keep me," observed Max, hurriedly; "Miss Darrell wants to speak to me before service. And he rushed off, leaving me standing in the middle of the path rather wondering at his abruptness, for the bell had not commenced.

A little farther on, I came face to face with Miss Darrell; she was walking with Mr. Tudor, and seemed talking to him with much animation.

She bowed slightly, as he took off his hat to me, in a graceful well-bred manner, but her face prepossessed me even less than it had done in the morning. She had been, dark eyes like Mr. Hamilton's, only they somehow repelled me. I was somewhat quick with my likes and dislikes, as I had proved by the dislike I had taken to Mr. Hamilton. This feeling was wearing off, and I was no longer so strongly prejudiced against him. I might even find Miss Darrell less repelling when I spoke to her. She was evidently a gentle woman; her movements were quiet and graceful, and she had a good carriage.

I was somewhat surprised on reaching the cottage to find Mr. Hamilton sitting by my patient. He had Janie on his knee, and seemed as though he had been there for some time, but he rose at once when he saw me.

"I was waiting for you, Miss Garston," he said, quietly. "I wanted to give you some directions about Mrs. Marshall," and when he had finished, he said, a little abruptly, "What made you so long coming out of church this morning? I was waiting to introduce my sister and cousin to you, but you were determined to disappoint me."

"I was a little confused by this."

"Did you recognize me?" I asked, rather tamely.

"No,—not in that smart bonnet," was the unexpected reply. "I did not identify the wearer with the village nurse until I heard your voice in the Te Deum; you can hardly disguise your voice, Miss Garston; my cousin Etta picked up her ears when she heard it. And then, as I made no answer, he picked up his hat with rather an amused air and wished me good-by."

I was rather offended at the mention of my bonnet; the little gray wing that relieved its sombre black trimmings could hardly be called smart,—a word I abhorred,—but he probably said it to tease me.

"Ay, the doctor has been telling us you have a voice like a skylark," Elsiebeth, "but I have been thinking it may be more like an angel's voice, since you mostly use it to sing the Lord's praises, and to cheer the sick folk round you; that is more than a skylark does."

"So he had been praising my voice. What an odd man?"

I stayed at the cottage about two hours, and read a little to the children and Elsiebeth, and then I started for the school.

Kitty clapped her hands when she heard she was to go to church with her aunt Susan. I found out afterwards the child had always gone alone.

Phoebe was evidently expecting me, for her eyes were fixed on the door as I entered, and the same shadowy smile I had seen once before swept over her face as she saw me. She seemed ready and eager to talk, but I adhered to my usual programme. I was rather afraid that our conversation would excite her, so I wanted to quiet her first. I sang a few of my favorite hymns, and then read the evening psalms. She heard me somewhat reluctantly, but when I had finished her face cleared, and without any preamble she commenced her story.

I never remember that recital without pain. It positively wrung my heart to listen to her. I had heard the outline of her sad story from her sister's lips, but it lacked color; it had been a simple statement of facts and no more.

But now Phoebe's passionate words seemed to clothe it with power; the very sight of the ghastly and almost distracted face on the pillow gave a miserable pathos to the story. It was in vain to check excitement while the unhappy creature poured out the history of her wrongs; the old, old story of a credulous woman's heart being trampled upon by an unworthy lover was enacted again before me.

"I just worshipped the ground he walked on, and he threw me aside like a broken toy," she said over and over again. "And the worst of it is that, villain as he is, I cannot unlove him, though I am that made with him sometimes that I could almost murder him."

"Love is strong as death, and jealousy is cruel as the grave," I muttered, half to myself, but she overheard me.

"Ay, that is just true," she returned, eagerly; "there are times when I hate Robert and Nancy, and would like to haunt them. Did I not tell you, Miss Garston, that bell had begun with me already? I was never a good woman,—never, not even when I was happy and Robert loved me. I was just full of him, and wanted nothing else in heaven and earth; and when the trouble came, and father and mother died, and I lay here like a log,—only a log has not got a living heart beat,—I seemed to go mad with the anger and unhappiness, and I felt 'the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.'"

I stooped over and wiped her poor lips and poor head, for she was fearfully exhausted, and then in a perfect passion of pity closed her face between my hands and bade God bless her.

"What do you mean?" she said, staring at me; but her voice trembled. "Have I been telling you how wicked I am? Do you think that is a reason for his blessing me?"

"I think his blessing has always been with you, my poor Phoebe, like the sunlight that you try to shut out from your windows."

You hide yourself in your own darkness, and pretend that the all-embracing love is not for you. Well, may you call your present existence a tomb; but you must not wrong your Almighty Father. Not he, but your self, have walled yourself with your own sinful hands, and then you wonder at the weight that lies upon your heart."

"Can I forget my trouble when I am not able to move?" she said, bitterly. "And it was sad to see how her hands beat upon the bed-clothes. But I held them in mine. They were cold. The action seemed to calm her frenzy."

"You cannot forget," I returned, quietly; "but all this time, all these weary years, you might have learned to forgive Robert."

"Nay, I will have nothing to do with forgiving," was the hard answer.

"And you say you love him, Phoebe. Why, the very devil would laugh at such a notion of love."

"Didn't I say I both loved and hated him?" very fiercely.

"Speak the truth, and say you hate him, and God forgive you your sin. But it is a greater one than Robert has committed against you."

"How dare you say such things to me, Miss Garston?" trying to free her hands; but still he held them fast. "You will make me hate you next. I am not a pleasant-tempered woman."

"If you do, I will promise you forgiveness beforehand. Why, you poor creature, do you think I could ever be hard on you?"

The fierce light in her eyes softened. "Nay, I did not mean what I said; but you excite me with your talk. How can you know what I feel about these things? You cannot put yourself in my place."

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness, Phoebe; and it may be that in your place I should fail utterly to patience; but if I will not lie still under His hand, and leave the lesson He would fain teach me, it may be that fresh trials may be sent to humble me."

"Do you think things could be much worse with me?" becoming excited again; but I steadied her hand, and begged her gently to let me finish my speech.

"Phoebe, as you lie there on your cross, the whole Church throughout the world is praying for you Sunday after Sunday when the prayer goes up for those who are desolate and oppressed. And who so desolate and oppressed as you?"

"True, most true," she murmured.

"You are cradled in the supplications of the faithful. A thousand hearts are hearing your sorrows, and yet you say impulsively that you are on the border-land of hell; but no, you will never go there. There are too many marks of His love upon you. All this suffering has more meaning than that."

It is impossible to describe the look she gave me; astonishment, incredulity, and something like dawning hope were blended in it; but she remained silent.

"You have missed your vocation, that is true. You were set apart here to do most divine work; but you have failed over it. Still, you may be forgiven. How many prayers you might have prayed for Robert! You might have been an invisible shield between him and temptation. There is so much power in the prayers of unselfish love. This room, which you describe as a tomb, or an antechamber of hell, might have been an inner sanctuary, from which blessings might flow out over the whole neighborhood. Silent lessons of patience might have been preached here. Your sister's weary hands might have been strengthened. You could have mutually consoled each other; now—"

I paused, for her conscience completed the sentence. I saw a tear steal under her eyelid, and then course slowly down her face.

"I have made a miserable, I know that; and I am never impatient with me if I am ever so cross with her. Ah, I deserve my punishment, for I have been a selfish, hateful creature all my life. I do think sometimes that an evil spirit lives in me."

"There is One who can cast it out; but you must ask him, Phoebe. Such a few words will do: 'Lord, help me.' Now we have talked enough, and Susan will be coming back from church. I mean to sing you the evening hymn, and then I must go." And, almost before I had finished the last line, Phoebe, exhausted with emotion, had sunk into a refreshing sleep, and I crept softly out of the room to watch for Susan's return.

I felt strangely weary as I walked home. It was almost as though I had witnessed a human soul struggling in the grasp of some evil spirit. It was the first time I had ever ministered to mental disease. Never before had I realized what self-will, unchastened by sorrow and untaught by religion, can bring a woman to. Once or twice that evening I had doubted whether the brain were really unhinged; but I had come to the conclusion that it was only excess of morbid excitement.

My way home led me past the vicarage. Just as I was in sight of it, two figures came out of the gate and waited to let me pass. One of them was the churchwarden, Mr. Townsend, and the other was Mr. Hamilton. It was impossible to avoid recognition in the bright moonlight; but I was rather amazed when I heard Mr. Hamilton bid Mr. Townsend good-night, and a moment after he overtook me.

"You are out late to-night, Miss Garston. Do you always mean to play truant from evening service?"

I told him how I had spent my time, but I suppose my voice betrayed inward fatigue, for he said, rather kindly,—

"This sort of work does not suit you; you are looking quite pale this evening. You must not let your feelings exhaust you. I am sorry for Phoebe myself, but she is a very tiresome patient. Do you think you have made any impression on her?"

He seemed rather astonished when I briefly mentioned the subject of our talk.

"Did she tell you about herself? Come, you have made great progress. Let her get rid of some of the poison that seems to choke her, and then there will be some chance of doing her good. She has taken a great fancy to you, that is evident; and, if you allow me to say so, I think you are just the person to influence her."

"It is a very difficult piece of work," I returned; but he changed the subject so abruptly that I felt convinced that he knew how utterly jaded I was. He told me a humorous anecdote about a child that made me laugh, and when we reached the gate of the cottage he bade me, rather peremptorily, put away all worrying thoughts and to go to bed, which piece of advice I followed as meekly as possible, after first reading a passage out of my favorite "Thomas à Kempis"; but I thought of Phoebe all the time I was reading it.

"The cross, therefore, is always ready, and everywhere waits for thee. Thou canst not escape it wheresoever thou comest; for whosoever thou comest, thou findest thyself with the cross and shall never find thyself. If thou bear the cross cheerfully, it will bear thee, and lead thee to the desired end, namely, where there shall be an end of suffering, though here there shall not be. If thou bear it unwillingly, thou makest for thyself a

(new) burden, and increasest thy load, and yet, notwithstanding, thou must bear it."

CHAPTER XIII.
LADY BETTY.

The next evening I was refused admittance to Phoebe's room. Miss Locke met me at the door, looking more depressed than usual, and asked me to follow her into the kitchen, where we found Kitty in the rocking-chair by the hearth, dressing her new doll.

"It is just as she threatened," Miss Locke said, "she had a beautiful night, and slept like a baby, and when I took her breakfast to-day she put her arms round my neck and asked me to kiss her,—a thing she has not done for a year or more; and she went on for a long time about how bad she had been to me, and wanting me to forgive her and make it up with me."

"Well," I demanded, rather impatiently, as Susan wiped her patient eyes and took up her sewing.

"Well, poor lamb! I told her I would forgive her anything and everything if she would only let me go on with my work, for I had Mrs. Drue's mourning to finish; but she would not let me stir for a long time, and cried so bitterly,—though she says she never can cry,—that I thought of sending for you or Dr. Hamilton. But she said, 'No, she would not see you; you had said her more miserable than she was before; and she made me promise to send you away if you came this evening, which I am loath to do after all you have done to her.'"

I have brought her some fresh flowers this evening," was my reply. "Do not distress yourself, Miss Locke; we must expect Phoebe to be contrary sometimes." And the words came to my mind, "And oftentimes it catcheth him into the fire, and oft into the water."

"You have discharged your duty, but I am not going just yet. Let me help you with that work. I am very fond of sewing and that is a nice easy piece. Shall you mind if I sing to you and Kitty a little?"

I need not have asked the question when I saw the fretted look pass from Miss Locke's face.

"It is the greatest pleasure Kitty and I have, next to going to church," she said, humbly. "Your voice does sound so sweet, it soothes like a lullaby. It is my belief, it soothes like a lullaby, that the child speaking under her breath so just trying to punish herself by sending you away."

I thought perhaps this might be the case, for who could understand all the perversities of a diseased mind? But if Phoebe's will was stronger still to overcome her for her own good, I was determined on two things: first, that I would not leave the house without seeing her; and, secondly, that nothing should induce me to stay with her until after this reception. She must be disciplined to civility at all costs. Max had been wrong to yield to her sick whims.

I must have sung for a long time, to judge by the amount of work I contrived to do, and if I had sung like a whole nestful of skylarks I could not have pleased my audience more. I was sorry to see Miss Locke's tears flowing, because it hindered her work; tears are such a simple luxury, but poor folk cannot always afford to indulge in them.

I had just commenced that beautiful song, "Wait for me, angels, through the air," when the impatient thumping of a stick on the floor arrested me; it came from Phoebe's room.

"I will go to her," I said, waving Miss Locke back and picking up my flowers. "Do not look so scared; she means those knocks for me." And I was right in my surmise. I found her trying very quietly, with the traces of tears still on her face; she addressed me quite gently.

"Do not sing any more, please; I cannot bear it; it makes my heart ache too much to night."

"Very well," I returned, cheerfully. "I will just mend your fire, for it is getting low, and put these flowers in water, and then I will bid you good-night."

"You are vexed with me for being rude," she said, almost timidly. "I told Susan to send you away, because I could not bear any more talk. You made me so unhappy yesterday, Miss Garston."

I was cruel enough to tell her that I was glad to hear it, and I must have looked as though I meant it.

"Oh, don't," she said, shrinking as though I had dealt her a blow. "I want you to say those words: they pierce me like thorns. Please tell me you did not mean them."

"How can I know to what you are alluding?" I replied in rather an unsympathetic tone; but I did not intend to be soft with her to-day; she had treated me badly and must repent her ingratitude. "I certainly meant every word I said yesterday."

To my great surprise she burst into tears, and repeated word for word a fragment of a sentence that I had said.

"I thought me, Miss Garston, and frightens me somehow. I have been saying it over and over in my dreams,—that is what upset me to-day: 'if we will not lie under His hand,—yes, you said that, knowing I have never lain still for a moment,—and if we will not learn the lesson He would fain teach us, it may be that fresh trials may be sent to humble us.'"

Pity kept me silent for a moment, but I knew that I must not shrink my work.

"I am sorry if the truth pains you, Phoebe, but it is no less the truth. How am I to look at you and think that God has finished His work?"

She put up both her hands and motioned me away with almost a face of horror, but I took no notice. I arranged the flowers and tended the fire, and then offered her some cooling drink, which she did not refuse, and then I bade her good-night.

"What?" she exclaimed. "Are you going to leave me like that, and not a word to soothe me, after making me so unhappy? Think of the long night I have to go through!"

Never mind the length of the night, if only you can hear His voice in the darkness. You wanted to send me away, Phoebe; well, to-morrow I shall not come; I shall stay at home and rest myself. You can send me away, and little harm will happen; but take care you do not send Him away." And I left the room.

When I told Miss Locke that I was not coming the next evening she looked frightened. "Has my poor Phoebe offended you so badly, then?" she asked, tremulously.

"I am not offended at all," I replied; "but Phoebe has need to learn all sorts of painful lessons. I shall have all the warmer welcome on Wednesday, after leaving her to herself a little." But Miss Locke only shook her head at this.

The next day was so lovely that I promised myself the indulgence of a long country walk; there was a pretty village about two miles from Heathfield that I longed to see again. But my little plan was frustrated, for just as I was starting I heard Tinker bark furiously; a moment afterwards there was a rush and scuffle, followed by a shriek in a girlish treble; in another moment I had seized my umbrella and flown to the door. There was a fight going on between Tinker and a large

black retriever, and a little lady in brown was wandering round them, helplessly wringing her hands, and crying, "Oh, Nap! poor Nap!"

I took her for a child the first moment, she was so very small. "Do not be frightened, my dear," I said, soothingly. "I will make Tinker behave himself." And a well-aimed blow from my umbrella made him draw off growling. In another moment I had him by the collar, and by dint of threats and coaxing contrived to shut him up into the kitchen. He was not a quarrelsome dog generally, but as I heard afterwards, Nap was an old antagonist; they had once taken a fight about Peter, and have never been friends since.

I found the little brown girl sitting in the porch with her arms round the retriever's neck; she was kissing his black face, and begging him to forget the insult he had received from that horrid Barton dog.

"Poor old Tinker is not so bad at all, I assure you," I said, laughing; "he is a dear fellow, and I am already very fond of him."

"But he nearly killed Nap," she returned, with a little frown; "he is worse than a savage, for he has no notion of hospitality. Nap and I came to call," rising with an air of great dignity. "I suppose you are Miss Garston. I am Lady Betty."

I had never heard of such a person in Heathfield; but of course Uncle Max would enlighten me. As I looked at her more closely I saw my mistake in thinking she was a child; little brown thing as she was, she was fully grown up, and, though not in the least pretty, had a right plump face, a neat reticulated dress, and a pair of mischievous eyes, as if she were dressed rather extravagantly in a brown velvet walking-dress, with an absurd little hat, that would have fitted a child, on the top of her dark wavy hair; she only wanted a touch of red about her to look like a magnified robin-redbreast.

"Well," she said, impatiently, as I hesitated a moment in my surprise, "I have told you we have come for a call, Nap and I; but if you are going out—"

"Oh, that is not the least consequence," I returned, waking up to a sense of my duty. "I am very pleased to see you and Nap; but you must not stop any longer in this cold porch; the wind is rather cutting. There is a nice fire in my parlor." And I led the way in.

I was rather puzzled about Nap, for I seemed to recognize his sleek head and mild brown eyes; and yet where could I have seen him? He trotted in contentedly after his mistress, and stretched himself out on the rug Tinker's fashion; but Lady Betty, instead of seating herself, began to walk round the room and inspect my bookshelves and china, making remarks upon everything in a brisk voice, and questioning me in rather an inquisitive manner about sundry things that attracted her notice; but, to my great surprise and relief, she passed Charles's picture without remark or comment,—only I saw her glancing at it now and then from under her long lashes. This mystified me a little; but I thought her whole behavior a little peculiar. I had never before seen callers on their first visit perambulating the room like polar bears or throwing out curious feelers everywhere. As a rule, they sat up stiffly enough and discussed the weather.

Lady Betty was evidently a character; most likely she prided herself on being unlike other people. I was just beginning to wish that she would sit down and let me question her in my turn, when she suddenly put up her eye-glasses and burst into a most comical little laugh.

"Oh, do come here, Miss Garston; this is too amusing! There goes her majesty Gladys of Gladwyn, accompanied by her prime minister. Don't they look as though they were walking in the House of Lords? Everything in perfect trim! They are coming to call,—yes!—no!—They are going to the Cockaigne first. What an escape! My dear creature, if they come here I shall fly to Mrs. Barton. The prime minister's airs will be too much for my gravity."

I gave her a very divided attention, for I was watching Miss Hamilton and her companion with much interest. I could see that Miss Darrell was chatting volubly; but Miss Hamilton's face looked as grave and impassive as it had looked on Sunday. When they had passed out of sight I turned to Lady Betty rather eagerly; she had dropped her eye-glasses, but an amused smile still played about her lips.

"La belle cousin is improving the occasion as usual. Poor Gladys, how bored she looks! but there is no escape for her this afternoon, for the prime minister has her in tow. I wonder from what text she is preaching. Ezekiel's dry bones, I should think, from Her Majesty's face. Don't you know the Hamiltons of Gladwyn were formerly?" I asked, innocently; but I grew rather out of patience when Lady Betty first lifted her eye-glasses and stared at me, with the air of a non-comprehending kitten, and then buried her face in a very fluffy muff in a fit of uncontrolled merriment.

I was provoked by this, and determined not to say a word. So presently she came out of her muff and asked me, with mischievous eyes, for whom I took her.

"You are Lady Betty, I understood," was my stiff response.

"Yes, of course; every one calls me that, except the vicar, who will address me as Miss Elizabeth. I never will answer to that name; I hate it so. The servants up at Gladwyn never dare to use it. I would get it to be demissed if they did. Is it not a shame that people should not have a voice in the matter of their name,—that helpless infants should be abandoned to the tender mercies of some old fogey of a sponsor? Miss Garston, if I were ever to hear you address me by that name, it would be the death-warrant to our friendship."

"Let me know who you really are first, and then I will promise not to offend your peculiar prejudices."

"Dear me!" she answered, pettishly, "you talk just like Giles. He often laughs at me and makes himself very unpleasant. But then, as I often tell him, philanthropists are not pleasant people with whom to live; a man with a hobby is always odious. Well, Miss Garston, if you will be so prying, my name is Elizabeth Grant Hamilton; only from a baby I have been called Lady Betty."

"I shall remember," I replied, quietly, for really the little thing seemed quite ruffled. This was evidently more than a whim on her part. "It would have seemed to me a liberty to use a family pet name. But of course if you wish me to do so—"

"I do wish it," rather peremptorily.

"That is partly why Mr. Cunliffe and I are not good friends,—that, and other reasons."

"Oh, I am sorry you do not like Uncle Max," I said, rather impulsively; but she drew herself up after the manner of an aggrieved pigeon. She was rather like a bright-eyed bird, with her fluffy hair and quick movements.

"Oh, I like him well enough, but I do not understand him. Men are not easy to understand. He is quiet, but he is disappointing. We must not expect perfection in this world," finished the little lady, sententiously.

"I have never met any one half as good as Uncle Max," was my warm retort. "He is the most unselfish of men."

"Unselfish men make mistakes sometimes," she returned, dryly. "Giles and he

are great friends. He is up at Gladwyn a great deal; so is Mr. Tudor. Mr. Tudor is not a finished character, but he has good points,—and one intolerable him. There, how vexing, we were just beginning to talk comfortably, and I see the shadow of her majesty going to the gate. Come, then, we must try to be brief. Barton, for religion, at least, is a great deal better than the other. I have followed by the obedient dog."

My pulses quickened a little at the prospect of seeing the beautiful face of Gladys Hamilton in my little room; but it was not she who entered. It was Miss Darrell, whose pale, sensitive face had taken in every detail of all my surroundings, before her faint, less-given hand had released mine; and even when I turned to greet Miss Hamilton, her peculiar, and somewhat toneless voice claimed my attention.

"How very fortunate," she began, seating herself with elaborate caution with her back to the light. "We hardly hoped to find you at home, Miss Garston. My cousin Giles informed us how much engaged you were. We have been so interesting in what Mr. Cunliffe told us about it. It is such a romantic scheme, and, as I am a very romantic person, you may be sure of my sympathy. Gladys, dear, is this not a charming room? Positively you have so altered and beautified it that I can hardly believe it is the same room. I told a friend of ours, Mrs. Saunders, that it would never suit her, as it was such a shabby little place."

"It is very nice," returned Miss Hamilton, quietly. "I hope," fixing her large, beautiful eyes on me, "that you are comfortable here? We thought perhaps you might be a little dull."

"I have no time to be dull," I returned, smiling, but Miss Darrell interrupted me.

"No, of course not; busy people are never dull. I told you so, Gladys, as we walked up the road. Depend upon it, I said, Miss Garston will hardly have a minute to give to our idle chatter. She will be wanting to get to her sick people, and wish us at Hanover. Still, as my cousin Giles said, we must do the right thing and call, though I am sure you are not a conventional person, neither am I. Oh, we are quite kindred souls here."

I tried to receive this speech in good part, but I certainly protested inwardly against the notion that Miss Darrell and I would ever be kindred souls. I felt an instinctive repugnance to her voice; its want of tone jarred on me; and all the time she talked, her hard, bright eyes seemed to dart restlessly from Miss Hamilton to me. I felt sure that nothing could escape their scrutiny, but now and then, when one looked at her in return, she seemed to veil them most curiously under the long curling plaits.

She was then an elegant-looking woman, but her face was decidedly plain. She had thin lips and rather a square jaw, and her shallow complexion lacked color. One could not guess her age exactly, but she might have been three or four-and-thirty. I heard her spoken of afterwards as a very interesting-looking person; certainly her figure was fine, and she knew how to dress herself,—a very useful art when women have no claim to beauty.

Miss Darrell's voluble tongue seemed to touch on every subject. Miss Hamilton sat perfectly silent, and I had not a chance of addressing her. Once, when I looked at her, I could see her eyes were fixed on my darling's picture. She was gazing at it with an air of absorbed melancholy; her lips were firmly closed, and her hands lay folded in her lap.

"That is the picture of my twin brother," I said, softly, to arouse her.

To my surprise, she turned paler than ever, and her lips quivered.

"Your twin brother, yes; and you have lost him?" But here Miss Darrell chimed in again:

"How very interesting! What a blessing photography is, to be sure! Do you take well, Miss Garston? They make me a perfect fright. I tell my cousins that nothing on earth will induce me to try another sitting. Why should I endure such a martyrdom, if it be not to give pleasure to my friends?"

To my surprise, Miss Hamilton's voice interrupted her; it was a little like her step-brother's voice, and had a slight hesitation that was not in the least unpleasant. She spoke rather slowly; at least it seemed so by comparison with Miss Darrell's quick sentences.

"Etta, we have not done what Giles told us. We hope you will come and dine with us to-morrow, Miss Garston, without any ceremony."

"Dear me, how careless of me?" broke in Miss Darrell, but her forehead contracted a little, as though her cousin's speech annoyed her. "Giles gave the message to me, and we were talking so fast that I wrote forget it. My cousin will have it that you are dull, and our society may cheer you up. I do not hold with Giles. I think you are far too superior a person to be afraid of a little solitude; strong-minded people like you are generally fond of their own society; but all the same I hope you do not mean to be quite a recluse."

"We dine at seven, but I hope you will come as much earlier as you like," interposed Miss Hamilton. "No one will be with us but Mr. Tudor."

"You forget Mr. Cunliffe, Gladys," observed Miss Darrell in rather a sharp voice. "I am sure I do not know what the poor man has done to offend you; but ever since last summer—" But here Miss Hamilton rose with a gesture that was almost queenly, and her impassive face looked graver than ever.

I did not know you had invited Mr. Cunliffe, Etta, or I should certainly have mentioned him. Good-bye, Miss Garston; we shall look for you soon after six."

There was something wistful in her expression; it seemed as though she wanted me to come, yet I was a complete stranger to her. I felt very reluctant to dine at Gladwyn, but that look overruled me.

"I will try to come early," was my answer, and then I drew back to let them pass.

Miss Darrell bade me good-by with a little stiffness; something had evidently put her out; as they went down the narrow garden path I could see she was speaking to Miss Hamilton rather angrily, but Miss Hamilton seemed to take no notice.

What did it all mean? I wondered; and then I suddenly bethought myself of my existence in my interest in her beautiful sister. What had become of Lady Betty?

CHAPTER XIV.
LADY BETTY LEAVES HER MUFF.

The question was speedily answered. The gate had scarcely closed behind my visitors when I heard a gay little laugh behind me, and Lady Betty tripped across the passage and took possession of the easy-chair in the friendliest way.

"Now we can have a chat and be cozy all by ourselves," she said, with a childish glee; and then she snuggled and looked at me, and her rosy little mouth began to pout, and a sort of baby frown came to her forehead.

"You don't seem pleased to see me again. Shall I go away? Are you busy, or tired, or is there anything the matter?" asked Lady Betty, in an extremely fractious voice.

"There is nothing the matter, and I am de-

lighted to see you, and,"—with a sudden inspiration—"if you will, be good enough to stay and have tea with me. I will ask a Mrs. Barton to send in one of her excellent teas."

This was evidently what Lady Betty wanted, for she nodded and took off her hat, and began to unbutton her long, tan-colored gloves in a cool, business-like way that amused me. I ran across to the kitchen, and gave Mrs. Barton a carte blanche for a sumptuous tea; and when I returned I found Lady Betty quite divested of her hair-dressing, and patting her dark fluffy hair to reduce it to some degree of smoothness. She had a pretty little head, and it was covered by a mass of short curly hair that nothing would reduce to order.

"This is just what I like," she said, promptly. "When Giles told us about you, and I made up my mind to call, I hoped you would ask me to stay. I hope you mean to be friends with us, Miss Garston, for I have taken rather a fancy to you, in spite of your grave looks. Dear me! do you always look so grave?"

"Oh, no," I returned, laughingly.

"That is right," with an approving nod; "you look ever so much nicer and younger when you smile. Well, what did the prime minister say? Was she very gushing and sympathetic? Did she patronize you in a lady-like way, and put you on the head metaphorically, until you felt ready to box her ears? Ah! I know la belle cousin's little ways."

This was so exact a description of my conversation with Mr. Darrell that I laughed in a rather guilty fashion. Lady Betty clapped her hands delightedly.

"Oh, I have found you out. You are not a bit solemn, really, only you put on the airs of a Sister of Mercy. So you don't like Etta; you need not be afraid of telling me so; she is the greatest humbug in the world, only Giles is so foolish as to believe in her. I call her a humbug because she pretends to be what she is not; she is really a most prosaic sort of person, and she wants to make people believe that she is a soft romantic body."

"You are not very charitable in your estimate of your cousin, Lady Betty."

"Then she should not lead Gladys such a life. Poor dear Gladys, to be ruled by her prime minister! I should like to see Etta try to dictate to me. Why, I should laugh in her face. She would not attempt it again. I can't think how it is," looking a little grave, "that she has Gladys so completely under her thumb. Gladys is too proud to own that she is afraid of her, but all the same she never dares to act in opposition to Etta."

Lady Betty's confidence was rather embarrassing, but I hardly knew how to check it. I began to think the household at Gladwyn must be a very quiet one. Uncle Max had already hinted at a want of harmony between Dr. Hamilton and his step-sisters, and Miss Darrell seemed hardly a favorite with him, although he was too kind-hearted to say so openly.

"Has your cousin lived long with you?" I ventured to ask.

"Oh, yes; ever since Gladys and I were little things; before mamma died. Auntie lived with us too; poor auntie, we were very fond of her, but she was a sad invalid; she died about three years ago. Etta has managed everything ever since."

"Do you mean that Miss Darrell is housekeeper? I should have thought that would have been your sister's place."

"Oh, Gladys is called the mistress of her house, and none of the servants go to her for orders. It is she gives any, Etta is sure to countermand them."

"It is partly Gladys's fault," went on Lady Betty, in her frank outspoken way. "She tried for a little while to manage things; but Etta undermined her influence in the house; everything went wrong, and Giles got so angry,—and you know, when the dear creature's comforts are invaded, she was a great fuss, and Gladys gave it up; and now the prime minister manages the finances, and gives out orders, and, though I hate to say it, things never went more smoothly than they do now. Giles is scarcely ever vexed."

I am ashamed to say how much I was interested in Lady Betty's childish talk, and yet I knew it was wrong not to check her. What would Miss Hamilton say if she were to hear of our conversation? It was rather a reckless talker, but she was nothing compared with this daring little creature. Lady Betty told me afterwards, when we were better acquainted, that it had amused her so to see how widely I could open my eyes when I was surprised. I believe she did it out of pure mischief.

Our talk was happily interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Barton and the tea-tray, which at once turned Lady Betty's thoughts into a new channel.

There was so much to do. First she must help to arrange the table, and, as no one else could cut such thin bread-and-butter, she must try her hand at that. Then Nap must have his tea before we touched ours; and when at last we did sit down she was praising the cake, and jumping up for the kettle, and waiting upon me "because I was a dear good thing, and waited on poor people," and coaxing me to take this or that as though I were her guest, and every now and then she paused to say "how nice and cozy it was," and how she was enjoying herself, and how glad she felt to miss that stupid dinner at Gladwyn, where no one talked but Giles and Etta, and Gladys was as though she were half asleep, until she, Lady Betty, felt inclined to pinch them all.

We were approaching the dangerous subject again, but I varded it off by asking how she and her sister employed their time.

She mentioned a little face at me, as though the question bothered her. "Oh, I do things, and Gladys—does things," rather lucidly.

"Well, but what things, may I ask?"

"Why do you want to know?" was the unexpected reply. "I don't question you, do I? Giles says women are dreadfully curious."

"I think you are dreadfully mysterious; but, as you are evidently ashamed of your occupations, I will withdraw my questions."

"I do not believe you are cross, Miss Garston; you are not a saint, after all, though Giles says you sing like a cherub; I don't know where he ever heard one, but that is his affair. Well, as you choose to get pettish over it, I will be amiable, and tell you what we do. Etta says we waste our time dreadfully, but as it is our time and not hers, it is none of her business."

I thought it prudent to remain silent; she wrinkled her brows and looked perplexed.

(To be continued.)

OFF WORK.

"For two years I was not able to work, being troubled with dyspepsia. One bottle of Burdock Blood Purifiers relieved me; three bottles cured me as well as ever." John A. Rappell, of Farmersville, Leeds Co., Ont.

Wife (head out of a second story window): Is that you, John Smith? Husband (at the front door): Yeah, dear. Wife: Well, say chrysanthemums or you don't get into this house to-night. Husband (heroically): Chrysanthemums, my dear. Wife (hanging down the window): Good-night.