

with an unusual amount of kindness in her tone, going up to the couch and taking his hand in both hers.

"It is more than good of you to come to me," says Dugdale, raising himself on his elbow. "You must forgive me that I cannot rise to receive you." As he speaks he smiles, but it is a smile that saddens one. Even as their voices sound in each other's ears both he and Mrs. Tremaine remember the hour when last they met. They see the brilliant ball-room, the glowing flowers, the pretty faces, and all the *piquante* crowd that had courted and petted and smiled their sweetest upon poor "beauty" Dugdale.

Involuntarily Mrs. Tremaine stoops and presses her lips to his forehead. A sympathy that is almost motherly stirs her breast. Had he been in good health her greeting in all probability would have been cold, but now in his affliction he seems very nearly dear to her.

"Of course I would come to see you," she says, gently, "and I have brought Gretchen with me. I suppose you and she hardly remember each other." She moves a little to one side, and Gretchen, coming nearer, lays her hand in his.

"I recollect Mr. Dugdale," she says, half to her mother, while smiling kindly upon Kenneth; "I seldom forget a face, and you are not so greatly changed. But you were only a big boy then, and I was a little child. It is very long ago."

"I don't remember you," Kenneth answers, reluctantly, shaking his head. "Your face is strange to me; and yet—how could I have forgotten it? It does not say much for my memory, does it? Is your sister quite well?"

"Kitty? Yes, thank you."

"I am so very glad you have come down," says Mrs. Tremaine. "I am sure the fresh air will do you good."

"Will it?" says Dugdale, in a peculiar tone and with a slight contraction of the brows; then, though ashamed of his curtness, he goes on quickly: "Perhaps so. At all events I rather fancy the country just at this time, and the view from the windows here is perfect. It was Maudie's room, you know. One can see where she had the trees cut down to give her a glimpse of the ocean."

"It is charming,—quite too lovely," returns Mrs. Tremaine, who in reality thinks it a little bleak, and has a rooted objection to the sea. "How is dear Maud? Have you heard from her lately?"

"Yes. Last Monday. She is very happy, and seems to be enjoying herself tremendously. They have gone pretty well up in the country, and appear to have fallen in with rather a nice lot. She says the life suits her, and she likes it. She would, you know. She was always a lazy child,—fond of lying in the sun, and that."

"Maudie and I were great friends," says Gretchen, turning from the open window where she has been standing, looking like a picture framed in the drooping ivy and the clustering roses. "How pretty she was, and how full of *verve*! I was more sorry than I can tell you when Major Scarlett married her and took her away from us."

"Every one liked her, dear little thing," says Dugdale.

"I have not been here since she left; and this room reminds me of her so forcibly," says Gretchen, with some regret in her tone. "I can almost imagine I see her over there at that easel bending her sleek head above her paintings,—which were always quite impossible."

"She certainly wasn't a young Turner," Kenneth says with a faint laugh.

"No," echoing the laugh gayly. "I used to wonder how she kept her hair so smooth. Dear Maudie! everything here recalls her so vividly."

"I like this room," says Dugdale, looking round him. "It is small, that is one comfort. When a fellow has knocked about a good deal in barracks he gets an affection for his walls and likes to have them near him. All the other rooms are so vast they make one almost lose sight of one's own identity. Though, perhaps,—slowly and with a sudden accession of gloom,—there might be worse faults than that."

"There is one fault even in this your favourite room," says Gretchen, hastily, anxious to turn his thoughts from their present unhappy channel.

"And this is?" asks he, with some animation.

"You have flowers, but no roses," says Gretchen, nodding her pretty head disdainfully at all the china bowls full of flowers that are sweet but ill-chosen; "and what is a bunch of flowers without a rose?"

"A mere mockery," replies he, catching her humour; "yes, of course you would notice that. But you must pardon my want of taste. Remember, I have no one to gather them for me."

"I shall do it this moment. I can see some tempting ones just below me," says Gretchen, craning her neck over the balcony. "May I?"

"Oh! thank you," exclaims the young man, gratefully, a little colour coming into his pale face. And then he watches her as she crosses the balcony and descends the steps, her long dove-gray skirts trailing behind her,—watches her musingly as she moves with unstudied grace from tree to tree, a fairer flower herself than any she can gather,—a veritable symphony in gray,—while Mrs. Tremaine talks on, and succeeds, as she always does, in making herself intensely agreeable.

Then Gretchen returns with the roses, and going up to him, puts them softly to his face.

"Are they not sweet?" she says; and he answers her back again,—

"They are indeed," gratitude in his face and voice.

"They will die, darling. Ring for some water and arrange them in one of those Wedgwood bowls," says Mrs. Tremaine.

"If I may have them here beside me just as Miss Tremaine has brought them in, without water and without arrangement, I think I should prefer it," says Dugdale; whereupon Gretchen, feeling pleased, she hardly knows why, brings them back to him and lays them on the small table near him.

Then Mrs. Tremaine rises and tells him they must really go.

"Must you?" says Dugdale, regretfully, and wonders vaguely how he could have felt so bored half an hour ago at the mere thought of having to entertain them.

"Thank you a thousand times for coming," he says, earnestly. "Do you know I never realized how lonely I was until you came?"

"Then I am afraid we have done you more harm than good," says Gretchen, mischievously glancing at him over her mother's shoulder, with a kind little smile.

"Oh, no, you must not say that. On the contrary, you have given me something pleasant to think of. I shall now live in the hope that you will come again," returns Dugdale, this time addressing Gretchen rather than her mother.

"It is quite dreadful your being so much alone,—so disheartening," says Mrs. Tremaine thoughtfully. "Well, we must see—we must see; oh, yes, of course we shall come again, and soon, very soon. Good-by, my dear Kenneth; and pray do not keep those roses so close to you. Flowers are always unwholesome,—so full of midges, and flies, and other unpleasant things."

"I don't believe there is anything unpleasant in these flowers," Kenneth replies, with conviction, letting his glance rest on Gretchen for one moment as she bids him farewell. Her clear eyes look calmly into his; his hand closes round hers. This visit, so unlooked for, has proved inexpressibly sweet to him, has linked him once more with the old world on which he has so resolutely turned his back, refusing to be comforted, and yet for which he has never ceased to pine daily, hourly.

There is a colour on his lips, now, a warmth at his heart, that ever since his sad accident has been unknown to it. He holds Gretchen's hand closely, as though loath to let her go; and she, being quick to notice the signs of grief or longing in those around her, returns the pressure faintly, and says "Good-by" in her gentlest tones. It seems to him there is a hope, a promise in her voice that sustains him. Yes, she will surely come again. The thought almost reconciles him to the weary days that lie before him, in which life, in its fullest sense, must be denied him. He has so long been a recluse, has so long brooded in solitude over his own misfortunes, that now to hold sudden converse with his fellow-creatures seems strange to him, and good as strange. He watches the girl's departing figure, as she follows her mother from the room, with a wistful gaze. At the door she pauses, and looking back at him again, bestows upon him a last little friendly smile and bow, after which she vanishes.

To Dugdale it seems as though the sunshine had gone with her. He sighs impatiently, and with a gesture of distaste closes the book he had thought so interesting half an hour before and flings it from him. A gloomy expression falls into his eyes, and the old look of heavy discontent settles round his lips; he raises his hand, and by chance it falls upon the roses at his side. His face softens. Lifting them, he separates them slowly and examines them one by one.

CHAPTER IV.

"Well, what did you think of him, Gretchen?" asks Kitty.

It is many hours later, and dinner is almost at an end. The servants have departed to a more congenial though a lower world, and Brandy and Flora have brought to a successful termination the mild but vigorous dispute that has endured through every course.

"I thought him handsome—particularly handsome,—but sad," says Gretchen, a little absently. She has been somewhat silent since her return home, and apparently full of thought.

"Quite depressing," remarks Mrs. Tremaine: "one hardly knew what to say to him, poor fellow. Really, but for Gretchen I don't know how I should have sustained conversation. She cheered him a good deal, I fancied. Yet he is not emaciated in appearance. He is pale, of course, but really looks wonderfully well; only melancholy, you know, and—hopeless, it struck me."

"Yes, hopeless," repeats Gretchen, quietly.

"He evidently depressed Gretchen too," says Brandy, screwing a most unnecessary glass into his eye; "she looks as if holding up one's finger would make her weep. I have been lost in admiration of her charming face ever since dinner began. That pensive expression suits her down to the ground. The general effect, however, was spoiled by her appetite, which was most objectionably healthy. You ought to do the thing thoroughly, my dear Gretchen,—artistically,—when you go about it at all. Have some more ginger? You appear to like it."

"I think he is lonely," says Gretchen, suddenly. "I glanced back as I was leaving the room, and found him gazing after us with a terribly wistful look in his eyes. I am sure he was thinking he would have no one to speak to him all the rest of the long evening."

"You should have gone back and offered your services," says Brandy, severely: "I hate half-hearted charity. I don't know how you can enjoy your dessert with such an evident sense of gratification when you picture to yourself that poor young man absolutely pining for you. Do have some more ginger. I know you love it."

"Well, I will, then," says Gretchen, with a little grimace, letting him help her.

"But this is a most miserable state of affairs," exclaims Mr. Tremaine, anxiously. "It is most unneighbourly and inhospitable to think of his being there all alone, where perhaps he would like to be here. It is sufficient to drive him melancholy mad lying there all day long brooding over his misfortunes."

"You are going to propose something, Harry," says Mrs. Tremaine, with a smile.

"And you guess what it is?" with an answering smile.

"Yes. I think we ought to invite him here: poor Mary Spencer's son: is that it? You see I always know your thoughts."

"Ah! that is just what was in my heart," Gretchen breaks in, eagerly. "How thoughtful you are, papa! I am sure he would be happier here. Brandy may laugh at me, but when I was leaving his room to-day I would have given almost anything to be able to go back again, to have got a book and drawn my chair close to his and read to him for an hour or so. It seemed cruel to be so strong and healthy, when he was so afflicted."

"Your sister Gretchen's fate will be a Methodist parson," says Brandy, *sotto voce*, to Flora, who, indignantly repudiating the idea, at once opens up another exhaustive argument, that lasts on and off till bed-hour.

"The library would be a charming place for him to lie in all day," says Kitty, with animation. "It is such a pretty room, and we occupy it so much during the morning, and nearly all the evening."