lounge, and we couldn't [illegible] the Major. "Never mind, my man. [illegible] trinity of patienes are excellent dues; [illegible] restless persons like my friend. Who knows but that pretty nutmeg amongst the trees?"

"The doctor, sir—Doctor Biggs."

"Ha! I've seen him, I think. A little man with a long nose. His box is decidedly more hasty than his pills. And whose is that huge red-brick house, with such high walls round it?"

"Madame Flippy's finishin' 'stablishment for young ladies,' the porter replied. "Women grown some of 'em be, and they do say the re's a real lord's daughter among 'em."

"Do you hear that, Trevilian?" asked the Major. "Now what you lost by not properly exploring the country. We might have met the whole bevy of beauties in their promenades. Why don't you look up the moments that you call so tedious, with a stroll to Minerva House, and a peep through the iron railings? You might see a pretty face or two for your pains."

"Thanks!" the Baronet retorted. "But I'm not sufficiently jaded to breed mud-luttier mirrors. I know what I will do; I'll go and give that worst-of-a-cottage was burned down a few nights ago the money I won from you last evening. It will do more good with it than I should."

The Major, who was directing the groom how to place the chaise from the tilbury, and some ordnary wrappers so as to convert the hard wooden seat into a tolerable resting place for a comfortable seat, incidentally replied: "Don't hurry back, there's a dear fellow. It will be so deliciously tranquil here when you are gone."

Sir Charles came back presently in high spirits. He was of a generous disposition, and the glad announcement of the woman, as he dropped the gold into her palm, had pleasantly affected him. His friend was no longer the sole recipient of the platitude, for, as he stepped on to it, a very little lady in a ready black silk dress, with a pinched face, surmounted by a tonsle-cut bonnet, passed through the swing-door with such impetuous haste, that she came in forcible contact with the Baronet, and but for his ready help must have been thrown to the ground with great violence.

Politely hoping that she was not hurt, Sir Charles would have led her to a seat, but, disengaging herself with a prim air of shocked modesty, she drew back, saying, in mincing accents: "I am not seriously hurt, sir, thank you. Good-day. No more apologies, I beg; the fault was mine."

She wheeled sharply round, and slid her arm through a young lady's, whom, till this moment, Sir Charles had not perceived; whispering to her in agitated, that every word reached his ear.

"A handsome man, my dear, but young people should always be careful not to enter into conversation with strangers. I hope this adventure will not reach Madame. How shocked she would be to know that I fell into a gentleman's arms, and in such a public place! She has always praised me so highly for the propriety of my demeanour."

Her companion's only reply was a low musical laugh, as if the absurdity of the little woman's speeches proved irresistibly amusing—a laugh so sweet, that Sir Charles, who was stepping briskly towards the Major, stopped short and looked back.

He was rewarded by a glimpse of a face that was destined to haunt his dreams. He had seen women more perfectly beautiful than the tall, graceful girl at whom he was gazing, but never a fairer or more bewitching one. The rosy mouth, the little dimpled chin, the well-shaped nose, were neither of them faultless; but the rich creamy tint of the complexion, over which the delicate colouring of the blush-rose stole at every change of emotion; the brown eyes, that were sparkling with fun—eyes in whose depths there lurked feelings and passions hitherto unstirred—were rare amongst the pale, listless faces of the fair aristocrats of the circle in which the wealthy Baronet moved.

On pretence of lighting his cigar, he continued to linger close to the ladies, taking in every detail of the fashionable travelling costume of the younger, and watching the fussy movements of her duenna, who was overlooking the porter, as he leisurely labelled a couple of trunks.

"And you are quite sure, Mr. Porter, that there will not be any mistake made about this luggage? I shall be extremely angry with you if there is!"

"I shall put it into the guard's van, mum, and you can see me if you like," the man bluffly replied. "After that, I hain't no more to do with it."

"Ah! but you know it will be excessively annoying for my young friend if she is put to any inconvenience about it, especially if she has to travel alone. My dear," she added, addressing the young lady abruptly, "are you really going alone? Madame hurried me off before I had time to collect myself sufficiently to know what she intended me to do. Dear, dear me! what was it she said? If I could but remember precisely the words she used!"

"It is of very little consequence," was the quiet reply. "I saw the necessity of my hastening to town, and Madame was assist me in my preparations for such a hurried journey; that was all."

"Oh, but my dear, I am dreadfully perplexed!" cried the little woman; "for Madame Felippe instructions were not properly defined, and I quite forgot to ask her whether I was to accompany you to London. What do you think she meant? What would you advise me to do under the circumstances?"

"My dear Miss Milliton, I am not afraid to travel alone; and you also see how the Frenchwoman convinces Madame so much, that I cannot think of letting you proceed any further."

Miss Milliton puckered up her mouth, and meditated awhile. She stood in great awe of the lady principal of the finishing establishment in which she held the post of English governess; and, in her utmost concerning her displeasure, she grew more fidgety than before.

"If I could but be certain what Madame meant—if I could but learn her wishes! Is it too late? Could I not run back? But no; Madame would consider it undignified to see me running along the high road, too! And yet I feel so badly perplexed! Nothing would make her more angry than my going to town with you, you dear child, how sorry we all feel to lose such a promising pupil!—if she did not intend me to do so, except my leaving you to go alone, it she meant me to be your escort. It's a most unpleasant dilemma to be in, really it is! How do you think I had better act?"

"Can't you lay the blame on me, dear Miss Milliton? Say I would not let you go any further. Madame knows I am somewhat self-willed."

Miss Milliton hemmed, and looked doubtful. "It would be more satisfactory if I could learn Madame's wishes. A good thought; I'll despatch a note to her."

A smile played for a moment round the rosy lips of her companion.

"And who will take it?"

Miss Milliton looked round helplessly.

"The porter, my dear—the porter must find me a messenger. If you will sit down out of the draught, I'll go and consult him."

The young lady assented, and became so deeply engrossed in the abstruse pages of her "Railway Guide," as to be unconscious of the admiration bestowed upon her by the gentlemen who were now lounging about the other end of the platform.

"If that be a fair specimen of Madame—what did the porter call her?—*Flippy's conservatory*, I must confess that I don't share your distaste for misses of the bread-and-butter age," Major Gollyer observed.

"She is a very charming girl," warmly responded Sir Charles. "Her eyes are superb! I wish she would turn them this way. Did you hear her speak? She has a liquid voice, soft, low, and sweet as——"

"Oh, don't—*pray* don't!" interrupted the Major. "I have heard your rhapsodies till they are positive infirmities. I know all you want to say. She is an angel, and Charley Trevilian—the biggest male fool in existence—will not be content till he has won her heart, if she has one, and played with it till he tires of such a useless possession. Consider it said, and let me finish my smoke in peace."

"If you were not so fond of hearing yourself talk, I should have had time to tell you you are a bore with your disagreeable remarks. But never mind, either! I have saw a latest specimen of your pretty, country women. She is a beauty, I confess, is she not? How shall I get an introduction to her?"

"I'm [illegible] sure I don't know. [illegible] pathy [illegible]"

"I don't [illegible] I saw it on her bonnet. Do you know any families of that name?"

"Yes, one—a wealthy and [illegible] family; in fact, my [illegible], though I am sorry to say, he is [illegible] from business."

"Pshaw," cried Sir Charles; "you have jested sufficiently at my expense, and you owe me a good turn or two. Tell me how I shall make the acquaintance of this pretty creature? She looks so modestly dignified, that I am afraid to address her."

Major Gollyer threw away the remains of his cigar.

"My dear fellow, at the next station you will see half-a-dozen faces fair enough to make you forget this one."

"I doubt it. You may laugh as much as you like, but there was something electric in the glance she gave me, and I will see more of her."

"Go and stand opposite to *her* till she turns her head away in confusion. If she is a true school-girl, she will either be delighted at being looked at, or make a grimace that will disenchant you."

"I wonder whether that little fellow is going to travel with her?" exclaimed Sir Charles, ignoring his friend's last speech. "By Jove! the train will be here directly; at any rate, we can contrive to sit in the same carriage with her."

"Not if you are going to set about it with your usual impetuosity. Let the ladies take their places first, and don't follow them till the last moment."

Sir Charles nodded, and walked away, to chaffer with an itinerant vendor of cheap jewellery until the long-looked-for train had puffed its way into the station, and stopped to take up the very few passengers who were in waiting.

Miss Milliton was now in an amusing state of excitement.

"This way, dear Miss Dalton! My messenger has not returned, and I've just recollected that I forgot to pack myself a bag, so that going with you is impossible! I could not travel without a few necessaries, could I, even if Madame sent me word to do so? Guard!—where's the guard? I must put you under his charge!"

"No, no; you treat me as though I were a child!" the young lady haughtily replied. "I can take care of myself."

"But don't you think that Madame will expect me to do so? Get in here, my dear—an empty compartment, so nice for you! You're sure there's no mistake about this train? Porter!"—and now her shrill call enforced the attention of that busy functionary—"this young lady wishes to go to London. Is there any danger of her being taken somewhere else instead? And her luggage? Are you quite sure?"

But the rest was lost in the shrill whistle of the steam, and she was obliged to content herself with frantically waving and kissing her hands to the fair girl who was suddenly withdrawn from Madame Felippa's finishing establishment.

At the last moment Sir Charles Trevilian and the Major had quietly and rapidly stepped into the carriage in which Miss Dalton was seated. As they moved towards it, the Baronet's crafty friend, who but too frequently played the Mephistopheles to his Faust, whispered half a dozen words in his ear.

"I owe you a good turn, you say? *Eh bien*, I'll be impertinent to the young lady, and you shall come to her rescue. Do you comprehend me?"

A nod—an expressive glance—and he was answered.

(To be continued.)

CASTAWAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BLACK SHEEP," "WRECKED IN PORT," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XI.

CONFRONTED.

THE room into which Madge was shown was a good specimen of that apartment which is called the library, and which is to be found in the houses of all mushroom men of means, though the use to which it is put is extremely limited. There was a large and very handsome bookcase in polished mahogany with plate-glass doors filled with standard works gorgeously bound and symmetrically arranged. The latest edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica was not too heavy, the new, a high-priced novel, too slight for the taste of the bookseller, to whom the charge of furnishing this collection had been committed. Mr. Kaulbach, the Anglicised German Jew, to whom the villa belonged, knew nothing of literature, which was but natural, as almost from the time when he could run alone in the Judengasse of Frankfort, to the present moment when his "operations" were eagerly watched by the brokers of the principal exchanges of the world, he had been engaged in commerce; but he bought his books as he bought his wines, horses, pictures, furniture, and other articles of luxury from the man with the best name in the trade, and as he paid a good price, concluded he had been supplied with a good article. There was a large writing-table, also of mahogany, with a blue morocco leather top, guiltless of scratch or stain, an inkstand holding, on a moderate calculation, half a pint of ink, a sheaf of quill pens, and a stand of pen-holders of all kinds, odd little nick-nacks for holding matches and wax, silver owls with red glass eyes, gilt dogs heads for paper-weights, gilt ducks' head with opening bills of letter-clips, and underneath the table, and by the side of the heavy oak chair, a tiny dainty little basket, presumably intended for waste paper. It was altogether obviously a place for show rather than use, and not one where anything like real work could be done. Mr. Kaulbach never proposed to himself to do any work in it. All his writing was carried on in a dingy little office, in a black little square out of Mincing-lane, on a high-shouldered, blacked, and ink-blotched desk where he reviewed his cramped memoranda and smeary calculations, with the aid of a broken inkstand and a corroded pen.

Madge looked about her with a certain amount of interest. Assuredly Philip Vane must have progressed in the world, as his present quarters were infinitely better than any which he had inhabited during her acquaintance with him. She had a kind of idea that Mr. Drage's notion might be correct, and that both Philip Vane and the lady, his engagement to whom had been publicly announced, were staying at the same country house together, and in another minute she would see him. He would be called away from the side of the rich prize he had recently won to the presence of the woman whom he had so basely deserted. How would he bear the meeting, she wondered. He would be savage when he saw her, more savage when he knew the purpose for which she had come. Office-boy at the old days she had thought that she could better have borne blame from him than the scathing taunts of his tongue; but that was long ago when she was younger and stronger. Now she began to tremble at the mere idea of personal violence. She wished she had allowed Mr. Drage to accompany her; his presence would at least have prevented Philip Vane from indulging in any excessive outburst of wrath. The servants were moving about in the hall and the doors of the room where the company were still evidently assembled at dinner were open; that was a point in her favour Madge thought; from a sheer sense of decency Philip Vane would be compelled to put some curb upon his rage.

Who would he imagine was his visitor? The name which Madge had given to the servant was hers by right, but she had never seen it, and so long and so completely had they been estranged that her husband would probably not think of her in connection with it. Upon that utter oblivion of her, or if that were wanting, upon his fear of creating a disturbance in his friend's house, Madge relied for her interview with her husband. The seeking of that interview was voluntary on her part, had not been decided upon until after full consideration and discussion, and must be gone through with now, even when she heard his step approaching the door.

Not his footstep alone, but by its lightness and its firmness, a woman's. Next moment the door opened and a woman entered the room. A woman of middle height, but full and rounded figure, set off with flowing draperies and clouds of delicate lace. Queenly in her walk and movements, and of flushing and disdainful cut aquiline profile, mouth undoubtedly small, but yet with full and sensuous lips, and a mass of lustrous black hair twisted into a coronet on her head. She swept into the room arranging the train of her dress with one hand and with the other motioning to Madge, who had risen, to resume her chair.

"Pray be seated," said the lady, with a pleasant smile, which showed her brilliant teeth, and in a rich full voice, "You asked to see Mr. Vane, I believe?"

"I—I did," said Madge, nervous with surprise, and with the intuition of the identity of the person addressing her.

There was a singular contrast between the women. Madge pale as death, neatly almost primly dressed, nervous and ill at ease; the other with a glowing complexion, richly and tastefully attired, and perfectly self-composed.

"I am sorry," she said, "that you should have been misled by the stupid blunder of a servant. You were told that Mr. Vane was stopping in this house, but the fact is that he left here yesterday morning, having been summoned away by a telegram on business of importance."

"Is this true?" said Madge, half involuntarily.

The lady started, and look amazed, but said nothing.

"I beg your pardon," said Madge, quickly. "I did not mean to say that, I had no right to say it. Will Mr. Vane be long away?"

"I cannot say," said the lady, in an altered tone, "nor can I continue to answer questions, or, indeed, to hold a conversation with one who is a perfect stranger to me! Perhaps" she continued, rising, "perhaps you will leave your card, that Mr. Vane may have it on his return?"

"I have no card," said Madge, firmly, "but I gave my name to the servant, who showed me into this room.

"The man made a worse blunder than when he told you that Mr. Vane was staying here," said the lady, with curling lip, for he announced you as Mrs. Vane."

"He delivered his message correctly in this instance, at least," said Madge, "for that was the name I gave him."

"You are a connexion of Mr. Vane's, I suppose?"

"I am."

"May I ask what connexion? Mr. Vane has no brothers nor cousins that I know of?"

"I am Philip Vane's wife."

Madge had steadied her voice for this announcement, and spoke very quietly, without the smallest trace of theatrical intonation, without the slightest gesture, each word slipping clearly and distinctly out of her lips.

The words thus quietly pronounced were not, however, without their due effect; the lady who heard them seemed to reel, and leaned heavily against the mantel-piece, before which she had been standing. For an instant she looked fixedly at Madge dreamily, and with [illegible], repeating the word she had heard [illegible] in a quick, low tone, "His wife! did you say, Philip Vane's wife?"

"I am Philip Vane's wife," repeated Madge, in the same clear, merciless tone. "You, I conclude, are Mrs. Bendixen, the lady to whom, as the newspapers announced, my husband is about to be married. I am sorry," continued Madge, changing her tone, "to be compelled to interfere with your intended arrangements, but you will see that the step which you contemplated is impossible. I am Mrs. Philip Vane, and however poor my opinion may be of that position, I intend to claim and hold it for my own."

As she spoke she drew herself to her full height, stamped her foot, and threw out her hand with a gesture which was familiar to her, and at which Philip Vane had so often sneered. There was defiance in that action, defiance in her kindling eyes, defiance in her ringing voice. Mrs. Bendixen, now throughly roused, leaned forward, looking eagerly at her visitor, but she had miscalculated the quality of the defiance hurled at her, and the nature of the woman with whom she had to deal, for she said, half querulously, half fiercely:

"How dare you speak to me in this way! How dare you come into my presence! I know what the world is, and what sort of lives men lead, and I daresay you have been accustomed to call yourself Mrs. Vane, and imagine you have a kind of right to do so; but of course there must be an end of that sort of thing now. What do you look at me for in that way? Do you mean to say that you don't understand me?"

"I mean to say," said Madge, who had lapsed into tone again, and sat with her steady, cold, pitiless gaze on the other woman's face, "I mean to say you are talking in riddles, and that if you want me to compute to you, you must speak more plainly."

"Then I tell you," said Mrs. Bendixen, in a loud and shrill tone, which she moderated, when she recollected the proximity of the hall, where the servants were still engaged, "then I tell you that I dare say you may have called yourself Mrs. Vane, because you were M.—Mr. Vane's mistress, that he gave you money, and perhaps kept a house for you, and—and was fond of you! I know such things go on, but," she added, the colour rising in her cheeks, and her eyes flashing, "there must be an end to all that! You have doubtless come here to ask for money? If so, you shall have it. I will take care of that, but you must not see Mr. Vane again, for fear of yourself as his wife. You must not repeat that wicked lie!"

She paused and leaned forward eagerly to see the effect which her words had created. There was anxiety in her eyes, in the manner which from time to time she moistened her lips, in the impatient fluttering motion of the hands which lay in her lap before her. By her words she had tried to impress on her visitor her own conviction of the truth of her statement; but her look and her involuntary action had the opposite effect.

"What I have said," said Madge, still looking her with her eyes, "is no lie, but God's truth! The position which you have ascribed to me will be your own in a few days if you do not profit by my warning. The lies which have been told you in this matter have come from him, not from me! I am Philip Vane's awful wedded wife! Of that fact I can give you proof—but there is no need of that," she said, suddenly changing her tone, "I see you know it now, as you listen to me. Look at me! If you really have such a knowledge of the world as you profess, you will recognise at once that I am not of the stuff of which mistresses are made. I am Philip Vane's wife! Do you believe me?"

"I—I cannot [illegible] do," said Mrs. Bendixen, still leaning forward in her chair, and gazing in a rapt and fascinated fashion at the pale, grave face and neat figure before her.

"It matters little to me whether you do or do not," said Madge, with a slight curl of her lips, "the fact remains, and can be proved at any moment. Now, listen! When you tried to persuade yourself that my assertion was a lie, and that I was—what you said—you pretended to think that I had come here for money to ask a price for my silence and my absence. What do you think, now, is the motive of my visit?"

"I cannot tell," stammered Mrs. Bendixen, "unless it be revenge. You seem a dreadfully determined woman."

"For?" said Madge, as the faint glimmer of a contemptuous smile passed across her face. "I do not think that I am dreadfully determined; I am perfectly sure that I have no desire for revenge. Revenge on whom? On you? You have been passive in this matter; your part has been merely that of the dupe! On Philip Vane? One cannot be revenged on the dead, and Philip Vane is as dead as if I had seen him in his shroud."

"Oh, don't talk in that dreadful manner," cried Mrs. Bendixen, with a moan, then covering her face with her hands, she added, "Oh, what do you want? why did you come here?"

"To save you from a worse fate even than that which has befallen me. Not that I care for you individually one straw; you are nothing to me, as he is nothing to me, and so far as I am concerned, you might both of you have gone on your combined way unchecked and unwarned, but I do not choose to see this great crime committed while I have the power of stopping it, and if it be stopped, Philip Vane will have his vanity to thank, and nothing else. That vanity is overwerting, it led him to make public his conquest. I dare say he had forgotten my very existence, for such men live but in the present, and imagine that whatever they are mixed up in lives but with their interest in it, and expires when that interest ceases. He announced publicly that he was engaged to be married to you, and thus I heard of it."

"I don't see what there was to induce Mr. Vane to put it in the newspapers?" mutered Mrs. Bendixen.

"Don't you?" said Madge. "I do. Your name, your position, and your attractions are well known in the world to which Philip Vane now belongs, and the fact of having secured them would tell undoubtedly in his favour. He meant to marry you as he had previously married me, for the sake of living upon you. But his last marriage would have proved infinitely more successful than his first. You were something to win, your beauty is self-evident, your wealth and position generally acknowledged. When he married me, I was a poor actress in a country theatre with sufficient good looks to win his eye, and a sufficient salary to keep him in tolerable comfort. They must have been poor enough, my appearance and my earnings, for which he had once possessed himself of both they had not enough attraction to induce him to acknowledge me as his wife, and so soon as he saw his way to eventually ridding himself of me, he deserted me; the ladder had served its purpose, he could afford to kick it down."

"I am sure you judge Mr. Vane most unjustly," said Mrs. Bendixen, raising her face from her hands. "He is the most generous of men. His affection for me is quite disinterested, and it is too cruel to speak of him in this way."

"When you have known him as long as I have known him, I will ask you for your verdict on his character," said Madge, quietly; "not that I expect that even then you would say of him what I say, for you would not have the cause."

"You allow that," cried Mrs. Bendixen; "that shows that he was not entirely to blame."

"It shows simply that you from your plenty can give him all he longs for, wealth, ease, luxury, the position in the eyes both of men and women to which he has aspired; while I from my poverty could only lend off hunger and cold, could only bar the door against the wolf, could only find the platform whence he should spring into competence, leaving me behind him. He deserted me because I could do so little, he will hold to you since you can do so much."

"And he shall hold to me," cried Mrs. Bendixen, springing to her feet; "your last words have thoroughly determined me. See here, woman, I believe all you say. There is something in your voice, in your manner, in your very look which prevents my disbelieving it, much as I wish to do so. But I tell you I love Philip Vane, love him with a fervour which you, with your pale puny passion, cannot for an instant imagine. He has become essential to my life, and I have never yet known what it was to have one aspiration checked, one wish thwarted. I have been married before, you know that. The man who took me from a boarding school to be his wife gave me all that I then thought the world contained, power, riches, admiration. But it was not until after his death, it was not until I met Mr. Vane, that I knew the happiness of loving and being loved." "Ah! do not take that happiness from me; do not. I implore you, dissipate that dream. You speak of yourself as one to whom the pleasures of life are at an end, but in your time you have enjoyed that greatest joy of all. Why then grudge it to me?"

"You are talking at random," said Madge, coldly, "and I am unable to follow you. What influence can I have over your future beyond pointing out to you the impossibility of the course you propose to yourself to pursue? What would you wish me to do?"

"To go away, anywhere, in any country, to hide yourself and never come near me again. The good luck which has attended me throughout my absence has prevented your seeing Mr. Vane's name. The dreadful secret which you have just uttered is known to us alone. It must never go further, say more than that, he must never know that I am aware of its existence, never be reminded of it himself. I will buy it of you at any price. You have only to name the sum and it is yours."

"Supposing I were to do as you ask, how would your position be improved? You, with the gratified desires, and the unchecked wishes of which you have boasted, have purchased Philip Vane's love, or what is equivalent to it; and now wish to purchase my silence! Suppose I agree, how is your position improved? The world will believe you to be Philip Vane's wife, but you will know yourself——"

"Do you think I care what the world thinks of me or what I think of myself?" cried Mrs. Bendixen. "I tell you I love the man, and that I will not have him taken from me. Have you no understanding, have you no compassion?"

"I have to patience to listen to raving which would be wearisome from a loved lips, but which are contemptible in a woman. I did not seek to be Philip Vane's judge, but fate seems to have appointed me to be his executioner. I have given you the warning, and I resolve myself if you choose to share his fate. Now let me pass. I will leave this place."

And she rose and stepped [illegible] and drew her mantle round her.

"Stay!" said Mrs. Bendixen. "You must not leave in this manner. You have said that you care no longer for Philip Vane; that you regard him as every one else does, as dead to you, and yet you will not [illegible] him a spare him. I implore you! [illegible] forward so eagerly to the time when [illegible] wife, I have made no [illegible] a love which to the [illegible] to evoke, that if he [illegible] from me [illegible] Oh, see me at your feet and spare me."

As she uttered these words she dropped from her chair on to her knees, and [illegible] in supplication. The large tears [illegible] into her upturned eyes, and her hair [illegible] fastened, hung about her pale face.

"It is a pretty picture," said Madge [illegible], looking down on the woman at her feet, "and devotion such as this is certainly thrown away on an object. Come, madam," she cried, "rouse yourself, and let us put an end to this scene. You seek me to let your marriage with my husband take place without opposition; even if I would, I am powerless to do so. The secret is not mine alone, but is in the keeping of those who have a greater regard for my position than I have myself, and who are determined that it shall not be lead wantonly outraged."

"You are implacable then?" said Mrs. Bendixen, rising and throwing back her hair.

"I am merely indifferent," said Madge, coldly. "As indifferent to your fate as to his. I came here to warn him of the consequences of the act he contemplated, and I found you in his place. As those consequences you are equally interested, and my warning has been given to you. My duty is done. Let me pass!"

"One moment yet," cried Mrs. Bendixen. "Will the fact that you have given this warning to me content you? Will you swear that you will seek no further opportunity of letting him know your intentions towards him?"

"I see your meaning now," said Madge, looking straight at her with cold imparting eyes. "Your passion for this man has so demented you, that you would hurry on this marriage, which will be no marriage, and accept yourself the position which you imputed to me at the commencement of our interview. Is not that so?"

"I do not deny it," said Mrs. Bendixen, eagerly. "I have set my mind upon it, and I will carry it through. I should glory in——"

"You are mad!" interrupted Madge. "Do you not see that if you were married to Philip Vane, and that marriage were proved a fraud, he would be a convicted felon? Or even suppose he evaded the law, his position would be lost, his power and prestige, all that make life pleasant to him, gone for ever! You have romantic dreams, I suppose, of some sunny paradise in the great seas of the Indian Ocean, where you and he could live and love for ever. He would weary of you in a month, and when he found that you had been warned in time of the impending danger, and had rejected it, I seem to think he would hail you!"

"He might," said Mrs. Bendixen, [illegible] he might do so, at least I should have known his love."

"And with that charming sentiment I will close the discussion," said Madge, [illegible] her shoulder. "Hear my last words, for we shall never meet again. The man whom you are sacrificing yourself is treacherous and base, mean and cowardly. He has not even the one redeeming virtue of independence, but so soon as he gets the opportunity he will live on you as he lived on me, and as he abandoned me he will, should it so suit his purpose, abandon you. I was young and inexperienced when I became his victim, you are a mature woman of the world, and have, besides, my example before you, and I warn you to profit by it. If you fail it will be with your eyes open, and in defiance of the hands spread forth to lead you back. But you will fail, for you are a woman and infatuated!"

She turned the handle of the door as she uttered these last words, and let herself out. Mrs. Bendixen made a faint effort to detain her, but Madge drew her clinging dress more closely round her, and with the slightest inclination of her head, passed by. The hall was empty now, so she could see through the open door, was the dining-room. On the croquet-lawn a few players were idly knocking about the balls, and under the verandah, immediately outside the hall-door, some gentlemen were seated in lounging chairs, smoking and drinking. One or two of them raised their hats as she passed by, and each of them honoured her with a hearty stare. The fact that she was a pretty woman, and their knowledge that she had asked for Mr. Vane, imparted a flavour to their conversation, which, like so many other things apparently, can be more easily imagined than described, at least, in these pages.

Madge passed steadily on, outwardly calm and grave, inwardly perturbed and excited.

"It is over," she said to herself. "I have discharged my duty, satisfied the promptings of my conscience, and obeyed the bidding of Mr. Drage. What has been gained by so doing is another matter, little enough, I should imagine. That woman, ignorant, unschooled, and impulsive, is madly in love, and will allow nothing to come between her and her object. Strange that I should have seen her, and that he—called away suddenly, she said he was, called away by telegram on important business. By telegram! that must have been the message, a copy of