

apartment depressed and apprehensive. If the folding-doors had been closed she might have gone into the back drawing-room and listened; but the folding-doors were open. Miss Glenlyne liked a palm-house atmosphere, but she liked space for an occasional constitutional promenade, so the back drawing-room was never shut off. Miss Spilling lingered a little by the landing door, but heard only indistinct murmurs, and feared to loiter long, lest she should be caught in the act by the parlour-maid Susan who was fleet of foot.

"This is a very curious story," said Miss Glenlyne, when the door had closed upon her companion; "I hardly know how to believe it. A marriage between my nephew Henry and Félicie Dumarques! It seems hardly credible."

"The record in the parish register proves it to be a fact nevertheless," said Lucius quietly. "So Mr. Pullman tells me. Félicie left me to go to Rouen, she said, summoned home by illness in her family. And now it seems she stole away to marry my nephew. She must have been an artful treacherous girl."

Lucille rose hastily from her seat near Miss Glenlyne. "You forget, Miss Glenlyne, that she was my mother," she said firmly; "I cannot stay to hear her contemned."

"Nonsense, child," cried the old lady, not unkindly; "sit down. The truth must be told even if she was your mother. She treated me very badly. I was so fond of that girl. She was the only person I ever had about me who suited me thoroughly. She would have been amply provided for after my death if she had stayed and been faithful to me. I never treated her as a servant, or thought of her as a servant; indeed it would have been difficult for any one to do so, for she had the manners and instincts of a lady. Yet she deceived me, and left me with a lie."

"Love is a powerful influence," said Lucille softly; "she was persuaded to that wrong act by one she fondly loved, one for whom she willingly sacrificed her own happiness, and who rewarded her at the last by desertion."

"My nephew was always selfish," said Miss Glenlyne; "he was brought up by a foolish mother, who taught him to count upon inheriting his uncle's money, and never taught him higher duty than to seek his own pleasure, so far as he could gratify himself without offending his uncle. She taught him to flatter and tell lies before he could speak plain. He was not altogether bad, and might have been a much better man if he had been differently trained. Well, well, I daresay he was most to blame throughout the business. I'll say no more against poor Félicie; only it was not kind of her to leave an invalid mistress who had shown her a good deal of affection."

"Whatever error she committed she suffered deeply for it," said Lucille. "The sin was chiefly another's, but the sorrow was all hers."

"Ah, my dear, that's the usual distribution between a man and a woman," replied Miss Glenlyne, considerably softened by this time.

She turned and scrutinised Lucille's candid countenance—took the pale interesting face between her hands and held it near her.

"Yes," she said at last, "you have Félicie's eyes and Félicie's mouth. I can readily believe that you are her daughter. And pray, Mr. Davoren, what is your interest in this young lady?"

"We are engaged to be married," answered Lucius.

"Indeed! Not in an underhand way, I hope, like Félicie and my nephew, who must have been making love by some secret code before my very face, when I hadn't a suspicion of any such thing."

"We are engaged with the full consent of Lucille's adopted father—her only friend," answered Lucius.

"I am glad of that. And what put it into your head to come to me?"

"Because I thought you might be able to assist Lucille in establishing her claim to any heritage to which she may be entitled."

"If she is the legitimate and only child of Henry Glenlyne, she is entitled to a very fine estate, which is now enjoyed by a man my brother never intended to benefit by. He was doatingly fond of his brother's son Henry; and although the young man disappointed him in many things, that love was never seriously diminished. He left Henry the bulk of his fortune, with reversion to any child or children that might be born to him. He knew that I had an income more than enough for my wants, so he left almost all to his nephew. Spalding Glenlyne's name was put in at the suggestion of Mr. Pullman, but it was never supposed that he would inherit the estate."

Once set going, Miss Glenlyne was quite willing to relate all she could remember about her brother Reginald, her nephew Henry, and Félicie Dumarques. She spoke of the Spalding Glenlynes with rancour, and declared her readiness to assist Lucille, so far as lay in her power, in the assertion of her claim to the Glenlyne estate, which consisted of various lands and tenements in Norfolk, and though yielding the usual low rate of interest, produced between three and four thousand a year.

Before taking her chicken-broth, Miss Glenlyne ordered an impromptu dinner of mutton-chops to be prepared for her visitors, and, when Lucius mentioned his sister Janet as a reason for declining this proffered hospitality, insisted that he should go instantly and fetch that young lady. Lucius dutifully obeyed, and while he was gone Miss Glenlyne opened her heart more and more to Lucille, moved by the recollection of that gentle girl who had ministered to her frivolous and innumerable wants with such unwearying solicitude.

"It makes me feel twenty years younger to have you with me," said the old lady. "I like young faces and pretty looks and gentle manners. Spilling, my maid, whom you saw just now, is good and devoted, but she is elderly and uncultivated and not pleasant to look at. She knows I like quiet, of course, at my age and with my weak health. I have had bad health all my life, my dear; quiet is essential. But Spilling is over-anxious on this point, and keeps every one away from me. I am shut up in this drawing-room like a jewel that is kept in cotton-wool and never taken out to be worn. Spilling is extremely attentive—never lets my fire get low, or forgets the correct time for my beef-tea and chicken-broth. But I feel the solitude depressing sometimes. A little youthful society, a little music, would be quite cheering. You play and sing now, I daresay?"

"Very little, though I am fond of music," answered Lucille; "but Janet, Mr. Davoren's sister, sings beautifully."

"I should like to hear her. Félicie used to sing to me of an evening, while I sat in the dusk to save my poor eyes, such pretty simple French chansons. How I wish you could come here and stay with me!"

"You are very kind to think of it, Miss Glenlyne," answered Lucille, thinking what a curious life it would be with this old lady, who seemed half a century older than the energetic unconquerable Homer Sivewright, "but I'm afraid I couldn't leave my grandfather."

"Your grandfather?"

"He is not really my grandfather, though I believed that he was till very lately; but he has been good to me and brought me up. I owe him everything."

Miss Glenlyne questioned Lucille a good deal about her past life, its early years and so on, and seemed warmly interested. She was not an old lady who poured out her spare affections upon more or less deserving members of the animal kingdom, and she had been of late years almost cut off from communion with humanity. Her heart opened unawares to receive Lucille.

"If you are my nephew's daughter, it stands to reason that I am your great-aunt," she said; "and I shall expect you to pay me some duty. You must come to stay with me as soon as this adopted grandfather is well enough to do without you."

"Dear Miss Glenlyne, I shall be most happy to come. I am more glad than I can tell you to find some one who is really related to me."

"Don't call me Miss Glenlyne, then, but Aunt Glenlyne," said the old lady authoritatively.

Miss Spilling felt as if she could have fallen to the ground in a swoon when she came into the drawing-room five minutes afterwards and heard the strange young person call her mistress "Aunt Glenlyne."

"How you stare, Spilling!" cried the old lady. "This young lady is my grandniece, Miss Lucille Glenlyne."

After this Spilling stared with an almost apoplectic intensity of gaze.

"Lor, Miss Glenlyne, that must be one of your jokes," she exclaimed. "You wouldn't call one of the Spalding Glenlynes your niece, and I know you've no other."

"I never make a joke," answered her mistress with dignity; "and I beg that you will show Miss Lucille Glenlyne all possible respect, now, and on every other occasion. I have ordered a hurried dinner to be prepared for Miss Lucille and her friends, who, I am sorry to say, have to return to London this evening. They will dine in the back drawing-room, so that I may take my own simple meal with them."

Miss Spilling felt as if the universe had suddenly begun to crumble around her. Her hold upon that sense of identity which sustains mankind amidst the mysteries of an unexplainable world seemed to waver. Dinner ordered and without prior consultation with her—a new era of waste and rioting set in while her back was turned! She fumbled in an ancient beaded reticule, produced a green glass bottle of weak salts, and sniffed vehemently.

"Sit down, and be quiet, Spilling," said Miss Glenlyne. "I daresay you and my niece will get on very well together. And her arrival won't make any difference in what I intended to do for you."

"What I intended to do," sounded vague. Miss Spilling had hoped the intention was long ago set down in black and white—made as much a fact as it could be before Miss Glenlyne's decease. She gave another sniff at her salt-bottle, and sat down, meek but not hopeful. This liking for youthful faces was one of her employer's weaknesses, against which she had brought to bear all the art she knew. For fifteen years she had contrived to keep pleasant people and youthful faces for the most part outside any house occupied by Miss Glenlyne. That lady had descended the vale of years in company with pilgrims almost as travel-worn and as near the end of the journey as herself: no reflected light from the countenances of younger travellers had been permitted to shine upon her. Kensal-green and Doctors'-common—all images that symbolise approaching death—had been kept rigorously before her. Youth had been represented to her as the period of deceit and ingratitude. If any young person, by some fortuitous means, did ever penetrate her seclusion, Miss Spilling immediately discovered that young person to be a viper in disguise—a reptile which would warm itself at Miss Glenlyne's hearth, only to sting its benefactress. And Miss Glenlyne, always unconsciously conscious that she had money to bequeath, and that humanity is sometimes mercenary, had discarded one acquaintance after another, at the counsel of Miss Spilling, until she found herself in extreme old age with no

companionship save the somewhat doleful society of her counsellor.

It was wonderful how brisk and light the old lady became in her niece's company. She made Lucille sit next her, and patted the girl's hand with her withered fingers, on which the rings rattled loosely, and asked her all manner of questions about her childhood and her school-days, her accomplishments, her vague memory of mother and father.

"I've a portrait of your father in the dining-room," she said; "you shall go down and look at it by and by."

Lucius returned with Janet, whom Miss Glenlyne welcomed with much cordiality, evidently struck by the beauty of that noble face which had beguiled Geoffrey Hossack into that not-uncommon folly called love at first sight. The little dinner in the back drawing-room was a most cheerful banquet, in spite of Miss Spilling, who presided grimly over the dish of chops, and looked the daggers which she dared not use. Miss Glenlyne even called for a bottle of champagne, whereupon Miss Spilling reluctantly withdrew to fetch that wine from the cellaret in the dining-room. Unwelcome as was the task, she was glad of the opportunity to retire, that she might vent her grief and indignation in series of sniffs, groans and snorts, which seemed to afford her burdened spirit some relief.

After dinner Miss Glenlyne asked Janet to sing, and they all sat in the firelight listening to those old Italian airs which seem so full of the memory of youth; and warmed by these familiar melodies—rich and strong as old wine—Miss Glenlyne discoursed of her girlhood and the singers she had heard at His Majesty's Theatre.

"I have heard Pasta, my dear, and Catalini, and I remember Malibran's *début*. Ah, those were grand days for opera! You have no such singers nowadays," said Miss Glenlyne, with the placid conviction which is sustained by ignorance.

"You ought to hear some of our modern singers, Miss Glenlyne," replied Lucius; "all the great people come to Brighton to sing nowadays."

"I never go out except for an hour in my bath-chair, and I am sure you have no one like Pasta. Your sister has a lovely voice, Mr. Davoren, and a charming style, quite the old school. She reminds me of Kitty Stephens. But as to your having any opera-singer like those I heard in my youth, I can't believe it."

When the time drew near for her guests to depart, Miss Glenlyne grew quite melancholy.

"You have cheered me up so, my dear," she said to Lucille. "I can't bear to lose you so quickly. I never took such a fancy to any one—since I lost your mother," she added in a whisper.

"Lor, Miss Glenlyne," exclaimed Miss Spilling, unable to command her indignation. "you're always taking fancies to people."

"And you're always trying to set me against them," answered her mistress; "but this young lady is my own flesh and blood—I'm not going to be turned against her."

"I'm sure I've always spoken from a sense of duty, Miss Glenlyne."

"I suppose you have. But it is your duty to respect my niece. I am an old woman, Mr. Davoren, and I don't often ask favours," continued Miss Glenlyne, appealing to Lucius. "I think you ought to indulge my fancy, if you can possibly do so without injury to any one else."

"What is your fancy, Miss Glenlyne?"

"I want Lucille to stay with me a little while—till we have learnt to know each other quite well. I am the only near relation she has, and my time cannot be very long now. If she doesn't gratify her old aunt on this occasion, she may never have the opportunity again. Who can tell how soon I may be called away?"

This from one who was between seventy and eighty was a forcible appeal. Lucius looked at Lucille with an interrogative glance.

"I should like very much to stay," said Lucille, answering the mute question, "if you think grandpapa would not be offended or inconvenienced."

"I think I could explain everything to Mr. Sivewright, and that he could hardly object to your stopping here for a few days," replied Lucius. "Then she shall stay!" exclaimed Miss Glenlyne, delighted. "Spilling, tell Mary to get a room ready for Miss Lucille—the room opening out of mine."

Spilling, with a visage gloomy as Cassandra's, retired to obey. It was nearly the time for Janet and Lucius to depart, in order to catch a convenient train for their return. Lucille wrote a little note to Mrs. Milderson, asking for a small portmanteau of necessities to be sent to her; and then with a tender hand-press, and a kiss on the landing outside the drawing-room, the lovers parted for a little while, and Lucille was left alone with her great-aunt. It was a strangely sudden business, yet there was something in the old lady's clinging affectionateness that attached the girl to her already. She seemed like some one who had long pined for some creature to love, and who had found her desire in Lucille.

Miss Spilling retired to the housekeeper's room—a snug little apartment in the basement—and sat with her feet on the fender, consuming buttered toast and strong tea, and talking over this new state of affairs with the cook, while Lucille and Miss Glenlyne had the drawing-room all to themselves.

"Do you really believe as how she is missus's niece?" asked the cook, when she had heard Miss Spilling's recital.

"No more than you are, Martha," answered the indignant Spilling. "Only she's more artful

than the common run of impostors, and she's backed up by that letter of Mr. Pullman's. We all know what lawyers are, and that they'll swear to anything."

"But what would Mr. Pullman gain by it, miss?"

"Who knows? That's his secret. There's some plot hatching between 'em all, and Mr. Pullman lends himself to it, and wants Miss Glenlyne to leave her money to this young woman—and he's to get half of it, I daresay."

"Ah," said the cook sententiously, "it's a wicked world!"

And then Miss Spilling and the cook began to talk of Miss Glenlyne's will—a subject which they had worn threadbare long ago, but to which they always returned with equal avidity.

## CHAPTER IX.

### GEOFFREY HAS THOUGHTS OF SHANGHAI.

Cheered and sustained by the hope of another happy afternoon with Janet in the little cottage parlour, Geoffrey Hossack made himself wonderfully agreeable to his cousins Belle and Jessie, and shot the game on his uncle's estate, and on the estates of his uncle's neighbours, with a good will. He was always popular, and in this part of Hampshire he was accepted as a product of the soil, and cherished accordingly. His father has been liked before him, and people expressed their regret that an alien trader should occupy the house where that gentleman had once dispensed what our ancestors were wont to call an elegant hospitality.

"O, I mean to marry, and turn out the sugar-broker some day," Geoffrey would reply in answer to these friendly speeches. Whereat Belle and Jessie would both blush, and look at each other, and then at the carpet. So bright a spot had that rustic tea-drinking made in the life of this infatuated gentleman, that the sunshine lingered after the event, and the mere memory of that one happy hour with Janet made life pleasant to him for a long time. Belle and Jessie noticed his high spirits, and each flattered herself with the idea that it was her society which gladdened him. And when they "talked him over," as they called it, at hair-brushing time, they in a manner congratulated each other upon his "niceness," just as if he were a kind of common property, and could marry both of them. He had still one tiresome trick, and that was a habit of rambling off for long solitary walks, in what the sisters considered a most unsocial spirit.

"It's about the only thing I can do on my own hook," this unpollite young man answered upon being remonstrated with. "If I go out shooting, you go too; if I go on the water, you pull a better stroke than I do; if I play bowls you play bowls. You don't smoke, but you are kind enough to come and sit with me in the smoking-room. So my only chance of doing a little thinking is a solitary walk. I suppose you don't pedestrianise? Twenty miles a day may be too much for you."

"O no, it wouldn't," replied these thoroughbred dandies. "We're going for a walking tour in the Isle of Wight next spring, if papa will take us. It seems absurd that two girls can't walk alone, but I suppose it might be thought odd if we went by ourselves."

Geoffrey uttered a faint groan; but spoke no word. He was counting the days that must elapse before he could pay a second visit to Foxley, without stretching the license Mrs. Bertram had accorded him. His lonely walks had taken him through Foxley more than once, and he had lingered a little on the village-green, and looked at the windows of old Sally's cottage, and had longed in vain for but a glimpse of the face he loved. Fortune did not favour these surreptitious pilgrimages. Just as he began to think that the time had come when he might pay his second visit, and demand that promised cup of orange pekoe, Lucius Davoren's letter reached him, and he learned that Janet's husband was alive and in England. The news was a death-blow to his hopes. The man alive whose death he had vowed for! Alive, and with as good a life as his own perhaps!

What would Janet think of him should she come to know this? What could she think, save that he had deliberately attempted to deceive her? His honest heart sank at the thought that she might deem him guilty of such baseness.

What should he do? Go straightway to her, and tell her that he had been deceived; that if her marriage was indeed legal, his love was hopeless. Yes, he would do that. Anything would be better than to hazard being scorned by her. He would go to her, and tell her the bitter truth, so far as the one fact that her husband was alive. The details of the story—all that concerned the villain's supposed death in the American forest—must remain untold till he had Lucius's permission to reveal it.

He set off upon his lonely walk to Foxley with a heavy heart—a soul which the varied beauty of autumnal woods, the shifting lights and shadows upon the undulating stubble, could not gladden. His case had seemed hopeless enough a little while ago, so that fast was Janet's determination to hear no word of a second marriage till she had convincing proof that Death had cancelled the first; but it seemed ever so much more hopeless now, after this assurance from Lucius that the man was alive. And as a mere basis for speculation, where ages are equal, one man's life is a good as another.

"I daresay that beggar's ten years my senior," pondered Geoffrey as he strode along the rustic lanes, where ripening blackberries hung between him and the sharp clear air; "but for