

course you know best—but still I can't help thinking—

"What?—what?" he interrupts impatiently.

"That if you were to tell her—"

"Irene!"—the color fades out of Colonel Mordaunt's face at the bare idea—"to tell Irene? Why, Isabella, you must be mad to think of it!"

They are engaged out to a dinner-party that evening; a very grand dinner-party given by Sir Samuel and Lady Grimstone, who live at Calverley Park, about twelve miles from Priestly and consider themselves of so much importance that they never even left their cards at Fen Court until they heard that the owner had brought home a wife to do the honors there. For, although Colonel Mordaunt, as master of the Priestly foxhounds, holds an important position in the county, and is on visiting terms with the best houses in the neighborhood, his poor meek sister has hitherto been completely overlooked.

"A single woman my dear!"—as Lady Grimstone remarked, when giving lessons on the inexpediency of forming useless acquaintances, to her newly-married daughter, Mrs. Eustace Lennox Jones—"a single woman, in order to gain a passport to society, should be either beautiful, accomplished, or clever. If she can look handsome, or sing well, or talk smartly, she amuses your other guests; if not, she only fills up the place of a better person. Nothing is to be had for nothing in this world; and we must work for social as well as our daily bread."

"But, why then, mamma," demanded on that occasion, Mrs. Eustace Lennox Jones, "do you invite Lady Arabella Vane? I am sure she is neither young, beautiful, nor witty; and yet you made up a party expressly for her last time she was in Priestly."

"Oh, my dear! you forget how wealthy she is, and how well connected. With three unmarried girls on my hands, I could never afford to give up the *entrée* of her house in town. Besides, she has brothers! No, my dear Everilda, learn where to draw the line. The great secret of success in forming an agreeable circle of acquaintances is to exclude the useless of either sex."

And so poor Miss Mordaunt has been excluded hitherto as utterly useless, as in good truth she is; but my Lady Grimstone has been obliged to include her in the invitation to the bride and bridegroom. A young and pretty bride, fresh from the hands of the best society and a first-rate milliner, is no mean acquisition at a country dinner-table; better than if she were unmarried, especially where there are three daughters still to dispose of. And the useless single woman must needs come in her train. It is a great event to Isabella, though she is almost too shy to enjoy the prospect, and the kindness with which Irene has helped and advised her concerning her dress for the occasion has made her feel more inwardly indignant against Mrs. Quekett, and more afraid of that animal creature's tongue than she has ever been before. Colonel Mordaunt, too, who expects to meet several influential supporters of his favorite pursuit, has been looking forward to the evening with unusual pleasure and with great pride, at the thought of introducing his young wife to his old friend; he is all the more disappointed, therefore, when, after a long day spent in the harvest fields, he returns home to find Irene lying down with a face as white as chalk, and a pain in her head so acute that she cannot open her eyes to the light, no speak beyond a few words at a time.

"It is so stupid of me," she murmurs, in reply to his expressions of concern; "but I am sure it will go off by-and-by."

Isabella brings her strong tea, and she sits up and forces herself to swallow it, and feels as though her head would burst before the feat were accomplished.

"I think it must be the sun," she says, in explanation to her husband. "I felt it very hot upon my head this afternoon, and the pain came on directly afterwards. Don't worry yourself about it, Philip; we need not start till six. I have a full hour in which to rest myself, and I am sure to be better before it is time to dress."

When that important moment arrives, she staggers to her feet, and attempts to go through the process of adornment; but her heart is stouter than her limbs; before it is half-completed, she is seized with a deadly sickness and faintness, which prove beyond doubt that she is quite unfit for any further exertion that night; and reluctantly she is obliged to confess that she thinks she had better remain at home.

"How I wish I could stay with you!" says her husband, who is quite put out of conceit with the coming entertainment by the knowledge that she cannot accompany him; "but I suppose it would never do for us all to turn defaulters."

"Assuredly not," says Irene. "You will enjoy it when you get there, Philip, and I shall do very well here, lying on the sofa with Phoebe to look after me, and most likely be quite recovered by the time you return. That is the annoying part of these sudden attacks. You generally begin to revive at the very moment when it is too late to do so."

"Anyway, I couldn't take you as you are now," replies Colonel Mordaunt, "for you look perfectly ghastly. Well, I suppose it is time we should be off. Both these stupid dinners! Isabella, are you ready? Phoebe, take good care of your mistress. *Au revoir*, my darling." And with that he steps into the carriage with his sister,

and they drive away to Calverley. So my Lady Grimstone, in touch to her ladyship's disgust, only gets her, "useless single woman," after all.

"I am much better," says Irene, two hours after, as she opens her eyes at the entrance of her maid. "What o'clock is it, Phoebe? have I been asleep?"

"It's close upon half-past seven, ma'am; and you've been asleep for more than two hours. I was that pleased when I heard you snore: I was sure it would do you good."

"How romantic!" laughs her mistress; "but I suppose one may be excited for snoring, when one's head is a mass of pain and buried under three sofa cushions. What a tumbled heap I have been lying in; and I feel as confused as though I had been asleep, like Rip Van Winkle, for a hundred years. What is that you have there, Phoebe? Coffee! Give it me without milk or sugar. It is the very thing I wanted. And throw that window wide open. Ah! what a heavenly coolness! It is like breathing new life."

"Let me fetch your brush, ma'am, and brush through your hair. You'll feel ever so much better after that! I know so well what these headaches as come from the sun are. Your head is just bursting for an hour or two, and you feel as sick as sick; and then of a sudden it all goes off and leaves you weak like; but well—"

"That is just it, Phoebe," says Irene, smiling at the graphic description; "and all that I want to set me up again is a little fresh air. Make me tidy, and give me my hat, and I will try what a turn in the garden will do for me. No; don't attempt to put it up; my head is far too tender for that; and I shall see no one."

So, robed in a soft muslin dress, with her fair hair floating over her shoulders, and her garden-hat swinging in her hand, Irene goes down the staircase, rather staggeringly at first, but feeling less giddy with each step she takes, and out into the Fen Court garden. She turns towards the shrubbery, partly because it is sequestered, and partly because there are benches there on which she loves to sit and listen to the nightingales singing in the plantation beyond.

It is a very still evening; although the sun has so long gone down. Scarcely the voice of bird or insect is to be heard, and the rich August flowers hang their heads as though the heat had burned all their sweetness out of them, and they had no power left wherewith to scent the air. But to Irene, risen from a feverish couch, the stillness and the calm seem doubly grateful; and as she saunters along, silently and slowly, for she feels unequal to making much exertion, her footsteps leave no sound behind them.

She enters the shrubbery, which is thick and situated at some little distance from the house, and walks towards her favorite tree, an aged holly, which shelters a very comfortable modern bench of iron. What is her surprise, on reaching the spot, to find it not at her disposal? The figure of a man, with the back of his head towards her, is stretched very comfortably the length of the seat, whilst he pours forth volumes of smoke from a meerschaum in front.

Irene's first thought is to beat a retreat: is not her back hair glistening with ribbon, net, or comb? But the surprise occasioned by encountering a stranger where she least expected to do so has elicited a little "Oh!" from her, which has caught his ear. He looks round, leaps off the seat, and in another moment is standing before her, very red in the face, with his wide-awake in his hand, and his meerschaum smoking away all by itself on the shrubbery bench.

Both feel they ought to say something, and neither knows which should begin first. As usual, in most cases of difficulty, Woman wins the day.

"Pray don't let me disturb you," she commences, though without the least idea if he has any right there. "I am only taking a little walk through the shrubbery; you need not move!"

"It is I that should apologise for trespassing, although I am not aware to whom I have the pleasure of speaking," he answers, and then stops, waiting for a clue to her identity. He is a good, honest-looking young fellow, of three or four and twenty, with bright, blue eyes, and hair of the color usually called "sandy;" not very distinguished in appearance, perhaps, which idea is strengthened, at first sight, by the rough style of dress in which he is attired, and the "horsey" look about his breast-pin, tie, and watch-chain. And yet there is something in the face that is turned towards her (notwithstanding that an inflamed look about the eyes and cheekbones tells tales of a fast life); something of respectful admiration for herself, and delicacy lest he should have offended by his presence, that wins Irene's liking, even at this very early stage of her acquaintance with him.

"Perhaps you know Colonel Mordaunt, or were waiting here to see him," she goes on somewhat hurriedly; "but he is not at home this evening."

"I do know Colonel Mordaunt," replies the stranger, "and that he is from home. But, excuse me, is it possible I can be addressing Mrs. Mordaunt?"

"I am Mrs. Mordaunt," says Irene, simply.

"Your uncle! Is my husband your uncle?" In her surprise she moves a few steps nearer him. "But what, then, is your name?"

"Oliver Ralston; is your service, madam," he answers, laughing.

"Ralston! oh, of course, I have heard Philip speak of you. I remember it distinctly now;

but it was some time ago. I am very glad to see you. How do you do?"

And then they shake hands and say "How do you do?" to each other in the absurd and aimless manner we are wont to use on meeting, although we know quite well how each one "does" before our mouths are opened.

"But why did you not come to the house, Mr. Ralston?" continues Irene presently. "I do not think Colonel Mordaunt had any idea of your arrival. He has gone with his sister to dine at the Grimstones. I should have gone too, except for a racking headache."

"It is evident you have not heard much about me, Mrs. Mordaunt, or you would be aware that I have not the free run of Fen Court that you seem to imagine."

"Of your own uncle's house! What nonsense! I never could believe that. But, why, then, are you in the shrubbery?"

"I will tell you frankly, if you will permit me. I am an orphan, and have been under the guardianship of my uncle ever since I was a baby. I am a medical student, also, and have held the post of house surgeon at one of the London hospitals for some time. London doesn't agree with me, morally or physically, and I have a great desire to get some practice in the country. I heard of something that might suit me near Priestley, yesterday, and wrote to my uncle concerning it. Afterwards I was told, if I wished for success, I must lose no time in looking after the business myself. So I ran down this morning and put up at the "Dog and Fox," and, as I heard the Fen Court people were all going out to Calverley Park to dinner (indeed, the carriage passed me as I was loitering about the lanes, some two hours since), I thought I might venture to intrude so far as to smoke my pipe on one of the shrubbery benches. This is a true and particular confession, Mrs. Mordaunt, and I hope, after hearing it, that you will acquit the prisoner of malice prepense in intruding on your solitude."

But she is not listening to him.

"At the 'Dog and Fox!'" she answers; "that horridly low little place in the middle of the village! And for Colonel Mordaunt's nephew! I never heard of such a thing. I am sure your uncle will be exceedingly vexed when you tell him. And Fen Court with a dozen bedrooms—why, it is enough to make all Priestley talk."

"Indeed, it was the best thing I could do—my uncle had not invited me here; and, as I told you before, I am not sufficiently a favorite to be able to run in and out just as I choose."

"Then I invite you, Mr. Ralston—I am mistress of Fen Court; and in the absence of my husband I beg you will consider yourself as my guest. We will go back to the house together."

"But, Mrs. Mordaunt, you are too good—but you do not know—you do not understand—I am afraid my uncle will be vexed—"

"He will not be vexed with anything I choose to do, Mr. Ralston; but if he is vexed at this, I am quite sure I shall be vexed with him. Come, at all events, and have some supper, and wait up with me for his return. Come!"

She beckons him with an inclination of her head as she utters the word, and he is fain to follow her. They pass through the shrubberies and garden, and take a turn or two down the drive, and have grown quite friendly and familiar with one another (as young people brought together, with any excuse to be so, soon become) by the time they reach the house again.

"Of course I am your aunt!" Irene is saying, as the porch comes in view; "and you must call me so. I feel quite proud of having such a big nephew. I shall degenerate into an old twaddler by-and-by, like poor Miss Higgins, who is always talking of "my neevy the captain"—my neevy the doctor" will sound very well, won't it? particularly if you'll promise to be a real one, with M.D. after your name."

"If anything could induce me to shake myself free of the natural indolence that encumbers me," he is answering, and rather gravely, "it would be the belief that some one like yourself was good enough to take an interest in my career—"

"When, straight in the path before them, they encounter Mrs. Quekett, who, with a light shawl cast over her cap, has come out to enjoy the evening air."

Irene is passing on, without so much as a smile or an inclination of her head by way of recognition. She has received so much covert impertinence at Mrs. Quekett's hands, that she is not disposed to place herself in the way of more; and the very sight of the house-keeper is obnoxious to her. But Mrs. Quekett has no intention of permitting herself to be so slighted. At the first sight of Oliver Ralston she started, but by the time they meet upon the gravelled path she has laid her plans.

"Good evening, ma'am!" she commences, with forced courtesy to her so-called mistress, and then turns to her companion. "Well, Master Oliver! who would have thought of seeing you here? I am sure the Colonel has no expectations of your coming."

"I dare say not, Mrs. Quekett; he could hardly have, considering I had not time to write and inform him of my arrival."

"And how will he like it, Master Oliver, when he does hear it, eh? He's not over-pleased in general to be taken by surprise."

Here Irene, who cannot help saying what she feels, injudiciously puts in her oar.

"It can be no concern of yours, Quekett, what Colonel Mordaunt thinks or does not think, nor can your opinion, I imagine, be of much value to Mr. Ralston. He will sleep here to-night; see that the Green Room is prepared for him."

"When the Colonel gives orders for it I will, ma'am; but you will excuse me for saying that

Mr. Oliver has never been put in the Green Room yet, and I don't expect that he will be."

"You will excuse me for saying, Mrs. Quekett," retorts Irene, now fairly roused, "that, as I am mistress of Fen Court, and you are the house-keeper, you will prepare any room for my guests that I may choose to select for their accommodation."

"I take my orders from the Colonel," replies woman, in a quietly insolent manner; "and as for the Green Room, it was always kept for gentlemen in my time, and I don't expect that the Colonel will choose to make any alterations now to what it was then." And so stumped past them.

Irene is violently agitated—her face grows livid—her hands turn cold. She drags Oliver after her into the Fen Court dining-room, and there turns round on him with a vehemence that alarms him, lest they should be overheard.

"Mr. Ralston!—you know this place—you know your uncle—you have known them all for years. Tell me, for Heaven's sake, what is the reason that that woman is permitted to behave towards us as she does."

(To be continued.)

THE CABMAN'S STRATEGY.

A TRUE STORY.

It was on a cold, gloomy, rainy afternoon, in the month of November, 186—, that Mr. Septimus Glock, a retired German biscuit-baker, took a cab from the rank in the Bayswater road. He lived in the immediate neighborhood; and as he was about to be married on the following day, he had made up his mind to treat his bride to a wedding breakfast at the "Crown and Sceptre," at Greenwich. He was now going down to that renowned and somewhat expensive, though excellent hostelry, to give the order for it, and also to command the especial preparation of certain little toothsome, succulent dainties of Vater-land in which his soul delighted.

While looking out for the best horse and vehicle on the stand, he did not observe that one of the drivers gazed at him very markedly, strangely, and sharply, and then immediately pulled eagerly out of the rank to the footpath, with even more than a cabman's usual energy; but nevertheless such was the fact; and as this man's "turn-out"—a remarkably well appointed hansom—seemed to be in all respects suitable, he got into it without the slightest hesitation, snugly ensconced himself in one corner of the very comfortable seat, gave the order "Crown and Sceptre, Greenwich," dropped the blind, to keep out the driving sleet, and then, as he found himself bowled smoothly along towards his destination at a good round pace, lay back at his ease, resolving to take a pleasant little nap during the journey.

When Mr. Glock awoke, he found, to his surprise, that it was getting dark. He looked very hastily out of the window, and became still more astonished to see that he was travelling, at the rate of at least ten miles an hour, among a lonely country road, without the vestige of a house in sight. "Good gracious!" said he to himself: "what does all this mean? I'm sure I gave the direction plainly enough; the man must be drunk!" So, throwing up the little trap door in the roof, he bawled out, "Hi! hi! cabman; you're going the wrong road! Stop—pull up your horse!"

To this appeal, a powerful, rich, mellow voice, replied, in commanding accents, "Pull up your tongue, be quiet, or you're a dead man!" And at the same moment, a hand, grasping a six-barrelled revolver, made its appearance through the opening, and took up its position within six inches of Mr. Glock's head.

We need scarcely say that this powerful persuasive was not without its effect. The terrified biscuit-baker became perfectly quiet, and the armed hand was, after a moment, withdrawn.

Meantime the horse was urged into a sharp gallop, the cab rattled on at an accelerated pace, and after turning down a narrow lane, drew up at a retired cottage which stood in a court-yard a little back from the road, and was completely hidden from view by an unusually thick and high blackthorn hedge.

The cabman, in a leisurely manner, descended from his seat, and with a stern, sharp, deceive "Come along," assisted his bewildered fare to alight; then, taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked the outer door of the cottage, and ushered the trembling Mr. Glock into a well furnished apartment on the first floor.

When this had been accomplished with some difficulty, and a few bruises on the poor biscuit-baker's shins, owing to the darkness of the passage and the winding of the awkward, old-fashioned narrow stairs, the mysterious Jehu produced a box of lucifers, and lighted a pair of candles which stood on the mantelpiece. Next he brought forth the six-chambered revolver, and placed it on the table. Then he handed his affrighted guest a chair, and politely requested him, with a strong spice of grim humor, to be seated and make himself as comfortable as possible, while they had a little business conversation together.

"Thank ye," said the trembling Mr. Glock, as he sat himself down.

"And, now," proceeded the cabman, "oblige me with your hat—your watch and chain—those rings I see on your fingers—your purse—and any other little valuables which you may chance to have about you."