A GREAT MISTAKE.

Mrs. Ackroyd could not bring herself to believe that her little friend's convalescence would be as pleasant in the small villa in King's Road, where there was already an invalid to absorb the attention of the narrow household, as in her own handsome house, where every one was so eager to make Lucy well and happy. And, though she had promised that Doctor March should not see the patient during her illness, there was of course no reason why George should not now come to Crome as usual when he could find time, to drive, to shoot, to play with the children, to skate.

Meanwhile Lucy put off going down stairs on one excuse or another, professing herself more comfortable in an arm chair by Mrs. Ackroyd's boudoir fire, where she was established every morning with books and work, and the children, and the faithful trio of dogs, and where she was safe from masculine visits, while she wore her old gray wrapper, and was too languid to sit up or to talk very much.

"Doctor March thinks you ought to be quite able now to be moved, dear Lucy," her cousin said one morning when, Mrs. Throgmorton having taken her place by the invalid's sofa in King's Road, Miss Ludlow had gone out to Croome. "I think perhaps you had better see him the next time he comes—he tells me you have been invisible since your illness—and let him decide."

"Must I?" returned Lucy, with visible reluctance. "I am so tired of seeing doctors, Ada!"

"I am afraid Doctor March will be hurt," Miss Ludlow said gently. "You have no reason for wishing to avoid him, have you, Lucy?"

"Reason? Oh, no!" cried Lucy faintly. "I will see him if you wish, of course. It is very good of him to think about me at all."

"He is always good; and"—with a pretty tremble in her voice—"I think of late he has been kinder than ever."

Lucy looked up from her work, startled by something in her cousin's manner.

"Dear Lucy," Miss Ludlow continued, dropping her eyes in some embarrassment, "you remember, don't you, when we spoke to each other, one evening at home, about him and about his feeling for me?"

"Yes."

"And you asked whether a day might not come when I could return it?"

"Yes."

There was a pause; Ada's breath came a little faster; Lucy's great hollow blue eyes were fixed intently on her face.

"I think that day has come dear Lucy," she faltered. "I feel now that my happiness is bound up in George March."

Lucy smiled, a pale and difficult smile; no words would come, though she tried very hard to speak.

"He has not spoken to me," Miss Ludlow went on, quitting her seat now and kneeling down by her cousin's side, but"—hiding her eyes against Lucy's shoulder—"I am sure he will."

"I—I am very glad," came at last from Lucy's stiff cold lips.

"I knew you would sympathize with me." Ada lifted her head and kissed the girl's pale face. "No one else can, quite in the same way, for only you and I know how much depended—besides his happiness and my own—on my being able to give a satisfactory answer to the question you asked me that night. If I were not able to say 'Yes' in my heart to George when he speaks, I should not say it at all of course; and then—I don't know what would become of us."

"I don't understand," Lucy broke in tremulously.

"Dear Lucy, it is the old trouble. We can no longer afford to live in Barlaston. I have known that now for some weeks, and dear mamma has already spoken to me about getting you a situation as governess or companion."

"Ada!"

"We ourselves would have been compelled, I suppose, to take refuge with poor aunt Dorcas."

"No, Ada, don't send me away; pray don't!" cried the child, clinging to her cousin. "I will do anything you like—stay as your servant; but don't send me among strangers!"

"You forget, dear Lucy," said Miss Ludlow soothingly, "that my marriage will change all this. Of course your home will always be with me now. I hope there need be no talk of our parting at all."

"I—I forgot," said Lucy piteously, but relieved too of her greatest dread. "That is why," Ada went on very gently, "I want you to try to overcome the dislike you seem to have taken to Doctor March, and to learn to think of him as a brother. You will do this for my sake, won't you, Lucy?"

"Yes," Lucy said. "I am sorry if—I have been rude."

"I am quite sure you did not mean it. But I am afraid, in the circumstances, people might say unkind things if you were to allow your feeling for Doctor March to be too plainly seen."

"My feeling!" gasped Lucy, catching at the arms of her chair and sitting bolt upright in her painful excitement.

"Yes," answered her cousin softly—"the dislike you seem to have conceived for him. How can I ask him to be your brother, and to make you welcome in our house, if you continue to show it so openly? And I really do not think he deserves it, dear Lucy; he always speaks most generously of you."

Lucy's stiffened attitude relaxed. She sank into a pale little heap again.

"I did not think of that," she said in a faint wretched voice. "But you may be sure, Ada—oh, very sure—that I would rather go away! I would rather live and die among strangers than come between you and your happiness. As soon as I am able, I will get a situation; I will—"

"You will stay with us that love you," urged Miss Ludlow soothingly. "Why should you talk of going away? Do you want me to feel that my engagement drove you from us, instead of uniting us more closely than ever? Lucy, I thought you cared for me a little more than that."

"I will do whatever you wish," said the girl, beginning to cry from excitement and repressed pain. "You know I will! Don't look at me so! I am quite well. My hands tremble because they are weak; but I am strong and happy. And I have said I will do do anything in the world rather than cause you any suffering."

"I know that, dear Lucy," said Ada in a grateful whisper; "and you must try to be happy with us. I am sure George has your interests sincerely at heart."

"Oh he is good and noble and kind!" sobbed Lucy. "You will be very happy with him, Ada. I pray that you may! I would give my life to make you both happy. It would not be very hard, I think to die. It would put an end to all trouble and pain."

"You must not talk of dying," said Ada, bringing her cousin a glass of water and offering her a smelling bottle. "You will stay with us and be our dear little sister and friend. You have promised, remember! So pray, dear Lucy, be kind to George for my sake. Remember, my fate is, in a manner, in your hands."

"I have promised," repeated Lucy; and she fell to sobbing afresh as if her very heart would break.

Chapter XXXVII.

Miss Thrale went down stairs for the first time that evening. The great house was almost empty, even Ted being away, dining in Upper Brunswick street. She laughed at her own foolish dread of leaving her room, and spent two or three quiet happy hours in the drawing room with Mr. and Mrs. Ackroyd, who found the pretty girlish presence a decided relief to their conjugal tete-a-tete.

"To morrow I will go and say good-bye to the dogs and horses, and to all my favorite places in the park," Lucy declared. "And the day after I will be strong enough—you will see, dear Mrs. Ackroyd—to go home."

She did actually contrive to take a little walk next morning in the pale February sunshine, leaning on Ted's kind arm, and holding Pamela by her other hand; but, though she enjoyed it very much and was greatly excited over the finding of a few snowdrops in a sheltered place, the result was that she was too tired almost to move for the rest of the day.

Mrs. Ackroyd was very reluctant to leave her when the pony carriage drove up to the door to take her to the village schools; but Lucy declared that she meant to be very busy, and begged to be provided with some paste and a big pair of scissors, with which and the materials for her work she established herself cosily in the deserted library.

"It is time that I began to work again," the girl thought, as she cut and pasted the pictures and sheets of strong linen, out of which she was composing new books for the Primrose Alley scholars. "I should be utterly spoiled, lazy, and selfish and ridiculous, if I stayed in this dear happy old place much longer. I must make up my mind never to come here again if they ask me. It only makes me discontented with home; and it is terrible to have a feeling of that sort about one's own place and one's own people. No"—Lucy shook her head wisely as she fastened her first book together with a cheerful knot of cherry color ribbon—"such a life as this is not for me, and the sooner I make up my mind to it the better. But I hope, oh, how I hope that I need not go away altogether from Barlaston Regis and from Bee! I am such a coward; and it does seem hard to go now that I have found so many friends. Even Mrs. Throgmorton is kind to me now; and it is so sweet to be loved and trusted! And Ada——"

The scissors fell from Lucy's hands, and she sat staring absently for some minutes into the fire. Her young face wore a troubled expression. Suddenly she sighed, and made a little upward movement of the head.

"I do not understand," she thought, taking up her scissors and going on with her work. "It is all very puzzling; but Ada knows of course, and it must be true. Only I do not understand why he——"

The door opened, and Doctor March came in, pausing abruptly at the sight of the little figure by the fire. Lucy started up nervously, and began to gather her pictures together, forgetting to say anything or to hold out her hand.

"Don't let me frighten you away," the young man said in a pleading voice.

He had not expected to find her there. He hardly knew what he was saying. Even in that uncertain light he could see the change in the sweet face, the pallor, the altered lines, the wistful quivering of the muscles about the mouth; and his heart melted utterly within him.

"I am so glad to see you down stairs again," he said, crossing the room to her side. I have been very anxious about you."

"Thank you," Lucy answered simply; but she was trembling all over, and could hardly stand.

"Sit down," George went on in a tone of gentle authority, taking her two little weak hands in his and putting her back into her chair. "I am afraid, my child, you are still in want of nursing."

The yearning words sank down into Lucy's heart. It was not at all in this way that he had intended to speak to her at their first meeting; but his sensible resolutions vanished into air at sight of her weakness and her visible agitation. A little creeping fire was warming the girl's veins now and reddening her cheeks; but she went on quietly enough with her work.

"I am quite strong again," she declared. "I am going home to-morrow, Doctor March. Mrs. Ackroyd says I may."

George walked away from her, and stood leaning against the tall chimney piece, with one heel on the fender and his hands thrust into his pockets. His tall figure was all in shadow; the fire shone full on Lucy's bright downcast head and trembling hands, on which his eyes were fixed.

He did not speak. He could have stood so for ever, he thought; but the pause was felt by Lucy to be terribly long and oppressive. She was pasting her pictures upside down on the linen.

"How is aunt Letitia? When did you see Ada?" she began hurriedly. "We found some snowdrops to-day in the rhododendron walk. I shall take them to Maria." The sci-sors tremblingly beheaded the Duchess of Edinburgh as she spoke; but she went on assiduously cutting out the body of that illustrious lady.

George answered something, he did not know what; and another long uneasy pause ensued. A great joy was awaking in the young man's heart. A great triumph filled him when he saw that the girl could not look at him as she spoke, but kept her eyes fixed on her work. He was beginning to think joyfully that he had been a fool to fret and worry over the change that had taken place in her manner to him on the day before her illness. Were not this tremor and shrinking sweeter to witness than the pretty frankness of earlier days; and could they have any meaning but one?

"It is too delicious—too great a happiness almost to be true," he was thinking, while he leant back in the shade, and the light still caught at Lucy's bright hair and glorified it. "I have done nothing to deserve that it should be true, but—"

"I—I think I must go; the fire is scorching me," Lucy murmured desperately at last, finding that he did not speak. And she stood up and tried to push back the great chair, so as not to pass him in going. Her fair head lost the glow of the fireshine, and the room seemed to grow suddenly darker.

"Let me," said George, taking a great stride to her. "You are not strong enough."

But, instead of helping her, he only stood and looked down at her as before.

Lucy looked round her with the pretty helpless gesture he had seen once before, and tried to pass him.

"I must go," she said pleadingly; and she laid her hand timidly on his sleeve.

A curious pang shot through him at the light touch. In a moment he had caught her in his arms.

"Lucy!" he whispered hoarsely; and he laid his face down on her head and held her close against him.

He did not know how long they so stood together. It seemed an age—a second; but then he felt that the girl was struggling out of his clasp, that she was appealing to him in a frightened panting whisper to let her go.

"Do you want to leave me?" he said, holding her a little from him, and looking down into the white upturned face at his breast. "Lucy, do you want to leave me now?"

"Yes," she answered, meeting his gaze with eyes full of anguish and putting her two palms against his breast to keep him away. "Let me go."

"No—no!" he said absently, half dazed by his own passion, and closing his eyes with an inarticulate exclamation of delight. "How can I let you go? I love you!"

He drew her close to him again; but Lucy burst into a sudden storm of tears and covered her face with her wasted fingers.

Instantly the young man released her, passing his hand across his forehead like one awakening from a dream, and uttering some rapid words of self contempt.

"Forgive me," he said brokenly; "I am awfully selfish. I forgot that you have been ill, and I frightened you. Forgive me, Lucy!"

But she sobbed on in utter abandonment, sinking down upon her knees by the great carved chair, and burying her head on her arms.

George stood and watched her for a few moments in puzzled silence. The fierce emotion that filled his breast was slowly ebbing away; he was hardly master of himself yet; but he waited as calmly as he could until the storm should wear itself out.

But it seemed as if Lucy too had lost all control over herself. So much long pent up pain and doubt and repression were finding vent at last in her sobs and tears that there was no checking them.

"Lucy," the young man whispered at last bending down and trying to lift her from the ground, "I cannot allow this, my child!"

She shrank away from his touch; but he passed his arm resolutely around her and lifted her up.

"Sit there," he said, very firmly for a man so much in love; "and drink this. Yes! You must be a good girl now, and not cry any more."

The authority in his voice calmed her as no entreaties could have done. In a few moments she had stopped sobbing, and had taken the glass of water he had brought her. And then George knelt down beside her, bringing his kind adoring face on a level with hers, all flushed and tear stained, and told her that he was a brute and selfish fellow and that he would not say another word until she was strong enough to bear it.

"I tried not to speak," he pleaded; "but I could not help it."

Lucy's lips began to quiver again. She looked straight before her into the fire, avoiding his eager eyes.

"Give me your hand, darling," the young man urged, "just as a sign that you are not angry with me for being such a blundering fellow, Lucy—Lucy!"

But Lucy kept her two hands tightly locked together. And tears were brimming in her eyes and dropping into her lap

"Very well," George sighed, lifting himself up and drawing back a pace or two. "I will go away, dear, and leave you to rest. Only remember I am leaving my life in your hands. Don't keep me too long in suspense."

He had reached the door, when Lucy, starting up, spoke his name.

"Please don't go, she said, trying to steady her trembling lips and hastily drying her eyes. "I must give you my answer now, and then we need never speak of this again."

George changed color.

"Never speak of this again?" he repeated mechanically, coming back to the fire. "You are not"—a sudden terror rang in his voice—"you are not going to refuse me, Lucy?"

She bowed her head.

"I must," she answered huskily.

George passed his hands in a bewildered way through his hair; he looked round the room, and back at the girl's trembling figure.

"You—you do not love me?" he said in a dull voice.

"No."

There was a long unhappy pause; Lucy's heart almost stood still.

"I have no right to appeal against that word," George March said them in a rough and unsteady voice. "But—I am a fool about such things perhaps—I have never thought about them until now—but, oh, Lucy, it has seemed to me that you did care for me a little—not as I love you—how should that be possible just yet?—but enough to make me hope that one day——"

"You were mistaken," Lucy hurriedly interrupted. "I never said anything to make you think so—" she added, with a kind of anxious defiance—"you know I did not."

"Never," the young man assented wretchedly. "I have been a fool, that is all; and I must only go back to the empty house where for so many happy weeks you have sat with me at my meals, and by my fire, and shared my life, where I dreamed of seeing you as my wife, and—"

His voice broke, and, at the sound, Lucy started, uttering a faint inarticulate cry. Then George came a few steps nearer and seized her hands once more. He could not make it out. The girl's face and her words seemed to be contradicting each other.

"Lucy," he pleaded, in a hurried whisper, "if you were happy—loved—cared for, I would go away, and be man enough never to say another word about this. But how can I bear to let you go back to that melancholy house? Do you think, because I have not spoken of it, that I have not felt what you have been suffering there? Oh, Lucy, my darling, would it be so hard to like me a little, and let me take care of you? It would be such a joy to me; and I will ask you for so little—for nothing—in return, until I have honestly won your love—until you can give it freely! Lucy, have you nothing to say to me?"

George's words, spoken in a passionate manly voice that trembled with eagerness and pain, were touching enough. And the poor child who listened to them had such a craving for love. To be protected and cherished and taken care of—to have her cold vacant life made warm and sweet, and filled with a woman's delights and duties—that was Lucy's heaven. She could love, no doubt, and sacrifice much to her love if needs were; but she was only a faulty clinging little creature, with a childish and undisciplined heart; and, as yet, it seemed sweetest to be loved. And now George March was offering her that which was as her very life to her—George March, with his kind strong face and gentle ways with women and children—the best liked man in all her small world—the man who could make her happy and envied among his friends, and from whose wife the sneers and cold looks of disappointed women would glance harmlessly, powerless to hurt her in the shelter of his arms—George March, who would help her to be true and strong and to do good, whom she, as she felt with a quick pang of mingled pain and pride, could make her happy in return.

Her lover's touch was yet thrilling and subduing her. The pressure of his bearded face burnt still upon her soft little throat and ear. She had never been clasped in a man's arms before, and, in the midst of her trouble, she was recalling with a curious breathless pleasure the rough feel of his tweed coat when he had held her head down on his shoulder with his strong tender hand. Oh, if she could only let that tired and aching little head rest there for ever! If she could stop suffering and struggling and denying, and take this great joy which George was offering her

But Ada, and her promise, and the past two years of misery which she had been taught to consider as her fault, and kind Mrs. Throgmorton's newly won approbation?

Would not every one believe, if she did this thing, that it had all been true about Lord Meldrum, since she would be for the second time robbing her cousin of her happiness? would not the thoughts of Ada's disappointment and loneliness turn her selfish delight to bitterness?

To George, hanging breathlessly on her lips for an answer, the short pause seemed a year until Lucy spoke; and then he knew by her voice alone that there was no hope for him.

"I am sorry," she faltered, involuntarily getting behind the tall oak chair, so as to put it between her and her lover; "but I am quite sure that—that I can never care for you, and that you had better marry some one else, and——"

"So here you are, Doctor," said Mrs. Ackroyd, opening the door with a cheerful bustle, and coming in, followed by the children. "I hope you have been telling Lucy that she is not to think of going home to morrow. She does not look it, but, do you know, I am afraid she is an obstinate little creature?"

"Oh Oppity," cried Pamela solemnly, "Lucy is crying! Have you been scolding her? She is never naughty!"

"Crying indeed!" said Lucy, with an hysterical laugh. "Don't you know that big girls never cry, Pamela? They never have anything to cry for; so why should they?"

"But you laugh as if you wanted to cry," persisted the little girl, puzzled, and clinging to Miss Thrale's gown.

"Shall I love you, Lucy, or shall Oppity kiss you and make you well?"

Doctor March broke out into bitter laughter; and Miss Thrale, turning very pale, ran from the room.

Chapter XXXVIII.

Doctor March's happy visions had all vanished, like the smoke of the cigarette he had consumed over them. His peaceful bachelor house seemed painfully large and empty when he returned to it; the sight of the chair he had called Lucy's in his study filled him with unspeakable depression.

He had so unnerved himself to think of her as safely belonging to him in some happy future, perhaps a year or two distant, that he could not for some time realize the fact that she herself had told him that there was no such future awaiting him.

His had been the security of unbounded love, which feels that it must of necessity compel a return—not the security of self-esteem; and yet, lurking now somewhere in the corners of his heart, there was a certain feeling of mortification that this lonely girl found it so easy to reject what he had hitherto found it impossible to offer to any woman—what women had more than once made clear to him would not have been so offered in vain.

If George March had been before inclined—being no nearer perfection than the rest of his sex—to be a little hard and intolerant of weakness in others, and if he had felt somewhat too secure of his position with Lucy, the little girl whom he had lectured and looked after and gently patronized, and to whom he could bring so much in exchange for the one gift of her love, he hung his head humbly enough now, acknowledging his fault, and worshipping the perfect simplicity which set so little store by his "position," and concerned itself only with the one vital question of feeling.

"She never can care for me." He often repeated poor Lucy's words to him. He was in no danger of forgetting them.

But, no matter how much in love he might be, or how unhappy, Doctor March had still his patients to attend to and his professional studies to pursue at home and abroad; there were of course long hours when all thought of Lucy was banished from his mind.

A man cannot always be railing at fate who has his work to do; and Lucy, at home again now in the little villa, round which the spring was already peeping greenly, began to feel that he was forgetting his fancy for her.

They rarely met, and never at her aunt's house; if by accident the Doctor came into the brown room, where, since her return, she had been made welcome by Mrs. Throgmorton, Lucy never took any notice of him. It seemed as if she hardly remembered that he was in the room, unless he spoke to her. She clung more and more to Bee, and was eager to please Mrs. Throgmorton. She always appeared cheerful; but the young man saw with a great deal of uneasiness that she was beginning to look languid and pale under all her pretty smiles, and that her fair round arms no longer seemed to fill the tight sleeves of her gown.

Once—it was some weeks after her return to Barlaston—he did contrive to say to her that he was afraid she sat up too late writing, and to ask her whether she had no more messages for his friend the editor; but Lucy answered that she had given up her stories as well as her visits to Primrose Alley, and that she found plenty to do at home.

"Ada has been so good to me," she added and the tears sprang to her eyes as she lifted them for a moment to George's dark haggard face. "I can never do much in return, but I like to spare her all the trouble I can while I am with her."

"While you are with her?" George interrogated. "Is there any talk of your going away?"

"Yes" she answered very quietly. "I am going out as governess soon."

These words, and the girl's face as she spoke them, haunted the Doctor vaguely all day. When he got home, and was free to lock himself into his study, and to think of his own troubles instead of other people's, they returned with sharper insistance to his memory, and his half-healed pain began to throb and ache again.

"Poor little motherless girl!" he thought, an immense yearning filling his strong heart "She is not fit to go out into the world alone. She is too shy and sensitive and young. And she is but a frail little creature physically; she needs the greatest care. Good Heaven, it is cruel to feel how helpless I am—I who would lay down my life for her! I am not much of a fellow, I know, outside of my profession; but I think I could have made her very happy. Ah, what is the use of such thoughts now? She does not care for me. What a blind blundering idiot I was to think she did! Was it likely she should? Why, those pretty looks and blushes meant no more for me than for all the other men that used to crowd round her admiring her sweet face; I forsooth must imagine that she——"

The young man flung his head down upon his arms, which were folded on the great book he had spread before him on the table, wrestling in silence with his misery, his baffled hopes and desires.

He looked very pale when presently he stood up, pushing back his chair with a short fierce sigh, and fell into his old trance on the study-floor.

"They must not find her away," he muttered, putting the damp and ruffled hair off his forehead. "That must be prevented somehow."

Long and late he walked up and down that night, revolving plan after plan in his mind, and rejecting them all. He felt that his hands were tied, that he had no right to interfere in Lucy's behalf, that his overtures on the subject were not likely to be received with much favor by her family, or even by kind Mary Throgmorton, who was so entirely bound up in the Ludlow faction.

"If Lucy would only listen to me!" he thought feverishly, waking out of his reverie to find the fire almost out, and the clock pointing to the hour of three. "If she would only listen to me! She is such a child. I dare say I frightened her horribly that evening with my rough words and ways; and we were interrupted.—I had no time to explain or to make her understand that, if she would only consent to an engagement between us, so that I should have a voice in all that concerns her, I would wait as long as she wished—I would not bother her about our marriage. It would be joy enough to know that she could trust me, and that I might teach her in time to love me.

He paused before the little chair which was to have been hers. He pictured her again as he had so often done before, sitting there with her pretty chestnut head lying back against the somber cushions, her little feet cosily turned to the fire, her blue eyes laughing up at him, or looking fondly down at a little nestling face on her lap.

"I must see her again!" he cried, putting his hand over his eyes with a passionate gesture and exclamation. "I cannot believe that I am to live all my life without her!"

He called at the Tower House the next day: but the only result of this step was an interview with Miss Ludlow, who told him that her cousin was lying down with a headache.

His next attempt—a day or two later—was equally unsuccessful. Lucy was at home, Miss Ludlow admitted, and was quite well again; but she would not come down stairs, though Ada herself went in search of her.

Without a word the Doctor went back to his work. On the following Sunday he was at St. Mark's for morning service, and again in the evening, but no Lucy appeared.

Then he took to haunting the brown room for a week in the hope of meeting her there.

"You don't see as much of Miss Thrale lately," he said to Bee one day, with carefully acted carelessness. "Has she given up all interest in the school?"

"No, indeed!" declared Bee warmly. "She is always working at something for the children, and she keeps the accounts and makes the rules; but she cannot find time any longer, she says, to go with me, or to come here any more. I don't think she is at all strong, Doctor March. I wish you would speak to Mrs. Ludlow about it."

George's heart sank within him.

She is deliberately avoiding me—that is evident," he thought. "I am only wasting time; and they may come and tell me any day that she has gone away. I will not wait to see her; I will write."

But to his letter there came no answer though he waited patiently for several days.

"Can there be any influence at work with the poor child which I do not understand?" he cried, a sudden flame of anger leaping up within him. "If there be it is as well that I should know it. I am not a boy to be trifled with in this manner. I will see Lucy to-day by fair means or by foul!"

It was yet early in the afternoon, a true spring afternoon. Already the almond trees in the old square were pink with blossoms; a woman was crying violets along the sunshiny street; there was a twittering and a piping of birds among the budding trees in Beaudesert Gardens as the young man came out of his house, a sweet half melancholy thrill of life and hopefulness in his veins.

Fortune favors the bold. As the Doctor turned into King's Road, he met the Upper Brunswick carriage driving towards the town, and saw that it contained the widow and her daughter, as well as Mrs. Throgmorton and Bee.

"My darling is alone!" he thought eagerly, "Let them keep me from her now if they can."

He kept on his way unseen. He did not heed Susan's assurance that the ladies were all out. The door at the other end of the hall was open, showing a green glimpse of the garden. George walked towards it with admirable coolness.

"I have a word to say to Miss Thrale," he said. "No doubt I shall find her here."

But at the door he paused. His heart was beating furiously. He could see that Lucy was there.

She seemed to have been at work among her flowers; but now she stood leaning against the wall, with her hands clasped languidly behind her head. She were the pretty old blue gown he remembered, the gown with the long straight skirt and tight sleeves; and above it in the fair bloom of her face and the gold of her rough hair shone with a quaint vividness against the background of russet bricks and wandering vine branches. In the brown beds at her feet a few pale primroses were already peeping. High up overhead each separate ivy leaf on the old church tower stood out distinct and dark against the faint blue sky. Standing about, and lying overturned near the hem of her gown, were great red pots of early flowers—primulas, cyclamen, lilies of the valley, flaunting yellow daffodils, narcissus on its pale stiff stalks. George could smell their vague odors as he stood at the door, afraid to speak and break up the pretty picture.

For a minute or two he waited, and then—clang went the church clock overhead, striking the half hour and startling a little colony of chirping birds out of the ivy.

And, as the clock struck and the birds flew about, Lucy turned her head and saw the young man standing there and looking at her.

Instantly a divine red blush covered her face and throat, though she did her best to hide it by stooping down to replace a fallen pot of violets and to grasp with great energy the handle of her neglected rake.

"May I come and help you?" said George.

It was so hard to believe on that fresh spring day, when the new green of the trees was bursting forth above the old garden wall, and when all the world seemed to be laughing with life and hope and youth, that his trouble could be lasting, and that he was to be doomed to live a dull aimless existence, without Lucy, without love.

"May I come out and help you?" he said; and then, while Lucy was trying to smile back at him and to seem perfectly at her ease, he walked down the trim gravel path and came and stood by her side.

It was very still and sweet in the old suburban garden; only the chirping of the sparrows and the rustle of a light breeze in the ivy were to be heard, besides the distant murmur of the town that lay beyond its walls and the occasional melancholy crowing of a cock in some neighboring yard.

And Lucy was there, blushing in the spring sunshine, and pretending, with a pretty tremor that did not escape her lover's eyes, to be very busy.

"They are all out, Doctor March," she said, working away intently, and keeping her eyes steadily down on the brown mould.

"I know," he said dreamily, as he watched the blush fade away.

"Then I wish you would not come in when my aunt and Ada are not at home," the girl returned curtly.

"I did not want to see them," George said gravely. "I came on purpose to see you, and think you know why."

"But I do not"—coldly, and stooping to shake the earth from the long leaves of her daffodils. "And I don't want to see any one. Susan ought to know that. I hope you will go away, Doctor March. I—you know I don't mean to be rude, but I must go in—I am busy—I——"

"Don't go yet," George urged in a low voice, laying his great brown hand on the little white one that looked so thin and fair on the dingy handle of the old rake. "I must know—you will tell me, I am sure—why you have not answered my letter."

"Your letter!" Lucy looked at him for a moment, shading her eyes from the sun with her hand, and searching with a startled gaze the young man's kind and haggard face.

"Do not pretend that you have forgotten it," he answered rather sternly. "Why did not you answer it?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders and went on raking. Her very lips were blanched by a sudden pallor that spread over her delicate face.

"What was there to answer?" she asked, with cold indifference. "I have said all I had to say."

"Don't say that, Lucy," pleaded George. "I must speak to you once more. I cannot bear to believe that you meant what you told me that day." Again he would have taken the hand and the rake.

"But I did," Lucy answered shortly, letting the rake fall across the bed, and putting both hands hastily behind her back. "Why should you think I did not?"

Lucy laughed a little dreary. "Other people have been in love, I suppose, and have been refused. It is nothing so very strange it seems to me."

"Lucy!"

The girl drew herself up at the word, spoken with so much passionate reproach.

"My name is Miss Thrale," she said, leaning back against the wall again, with her hands still behind her, and digging a pebble from the mound with the tip of her shoe. "You must not call me that."

George looked at her, dumb for some moments with grief and pain. Could it indeed be Lucy Thrale, the sensitive clinging child he had so often pitied, who stood there looking so unconcerned and answering a man's honest appeal with such hard and indifferent words.

"Why do you speak to me so?" he asked; and his strong face was changed and distorted by pain. "It is not you who speak. You have been prompted to this; you could never treat me so cruelly of your own accord."

A little passing shiver ran over the girl's figure, but she shrugged her shoulders again and broke into a laugh.

"That is just like a man's conceit," she said flippantly. "How many times more do you want me to tell you that—that I don't care for you one bit?"

"Heaven knows once ought to have been enough?" George answered bitterly. "And, if you had told me so with the sweet pity that is natural to you, I would not have complained, I think. But—laugh at me, if you like—I do not feel that you are telling me the truth. You may call it manly conceit if you choose; but I do not, Lucy. For Heaven's sake be candid with me, my dear! Who is coming between us at such a sacred moment in both our lives? Why won't you trust me and tell me the truth?"

Lucy's head had been drooping lower and lower as the young man spoke. She was tearing up a flower between her fingers; her breath came short and fast.

"Lucy," he urged—and his kind voice was roughened—and broken by passion—"if I gave you time—there should be no present talk of our marriage at all—not for a year or two, even—would you listen to me then, and give me the right to take care of you, and to say that you must not leave your home until you are stronger?"

"What is the use of all this, Doctor March?" the girl panted out breathlessly; and again she turned pale, as pale as the white flower she held in her hand. "I have given you my answer before. I have nothing more to say."

"But you are going away—they are sending you from me! How can I bear that when I know how delicate you are."

He spoke with the tenderest reproach, as if appealing against some wilful injury inflicted by a beloved hand.

"They are not sending me," Lucy returned quietly. "It is my own wish to go away At first I was a little frightened, and wanted to stop at home. But now I would rather go."

"Rather than stay here with Bee, and be loved and taken care of, Lucy? Is it my little truth telling friend who wants to persuade me into believing that?"

"I am telling the truth," returned Lucy rather doggedly. "And I wish you would not keep on calling me 'Lucy.' I shall go away as soon as ever I can find a situation."

"Then," George said, with sudden authority, "I shall feel it only right to speak to your aunt and tell her you are not fit to go. Your health is the first consideration."

Lucy started, and looked up at him quickly, her blue eyes blazing with anger.

"My aunt has nothing to do with it!" she declared.

"Your cousin, then," responded the Doctor firmly.

"Nor Ada either! Why do you drag other people into our quarrel?"

"There can be no objection to my speaking to Miss Ludlow."

"But there is the strongest objection!" Lucy exclaimed, almost crying. "Oh, why won't you go away, and let me alone?"

She was in strong excitement. She ran across the moist brown earth of the bed, crushing the flowers with her shoes and her long gown as she spoke, and began to walk quickly along the path under the church tower.

George followed her wearily. He could not understand the fate that had befallen him. He was only conscious that he loved the wilful April faced girl who had refused him so scornfully—loved her the more passionately for her very scorn, as men do.

Delicate breezes were stirring the flowers and carrying their scents away in fleeting waffs. The great clock struck again overhead. He had been half an hour in the garden.

Lucy had almost reached the house, when she turned and saw him standing moody and distraught, with the pained look on his face which she dreaded to see.

She went back to him and made a half-frightened gesture of appeal or persuasion.

"Promise me that you will not say a word to aunt Letitia or Ada," she began rapidly, and without meeting his eye, "and I will tell you the reason why I—I don't care for you."

"There is reason then?" he demanded eagerly. "You would not send me away if——"

"No—no—no!" she cried desperately. "It is not that—why won't you understand? I don't care for you because——"

"Because what?" the young man asked in a dull voice. He hardly cared to know. There was an air of juggling and mystery about it all that sickened him.

"Because——" Lucy's voice sank, and she half turned from him. "Because you came too late," she said.

George felt as if he had received a blow in the face.

"You love some one else?" he cried hoarsely, looking with incredulous dismay at the sweet girlish shape before him. This was a solution of the puzzle which had never occurred to him. She was so young—she had seemed so innocent of all such feeling.

"You love some one else?" he repeated; and she answered in a dogged way, and through her set teeth——

"Yes."

He drew a long breath, and passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"Heaven bless you, my child!" he said very gently. "I have no more to say if that be so."

They turned in silence and walked back together to the house.

"Good-bye," Lucy said, giving him her hand as they stood in the narrow hall. "Do not mind what I said in the garden—the rude things I mean—I am sorry. I did not mean to be unkind."

She turned away into the sunshiny back drawing room, where the cool noon breezes were fluttering the curtains at the open windows.

George had not taken her offered hand or returned her good-bye. He followed her into the room, and over to the bay-window, where she stood leaning her head against the frame and looking very wan and tired.

"Before I go, I want you to promise me something. Let me be your friend again, Lucy, since I can be nothing more. You shall never hear another word from me that can pain you; but I will do all that is in my power to help you to be happy—you and him."

"You are very good," said Lucy shortly, without any change of attitude.

Her eyes were fixed on the motionless weather cock on the church tower, her lips were pale and tightly shut.

"It is that London man—that Captain, I suppose?" asked the Doctor in a low voice.

"It is not Captain Sugden," declared Lucy, still intent on her weather cock. "It is not any one you would be likely to think of, so you need not try to guess."

"You loved him before you came here then—before you went back to the convent?" the young man said, bewildered. "Why, you were a child—a little girl!"

"I was sixteen"—coldly.

A look of sad comprehension flashed into George's dark face.

"And so you did care for that Lord fellow after all?" he asked gently. "I see now of course that it was he."

"You are not good at guessing?" cried Lucy, breaking into a miserable impatient laugh and leaving the window for a big chair, into which she flung herself, sighing wearily. "If I had been in love with Lord Meldrum, I should have married him, I suppose."

"But he was engaged to your cousin."

"Oh, people here say that I did not mind that, and perhaps I did not; but I did not marry him, you see. I shall never marry any one!"

"Then," said George compassionately, "you are in love, as I am, without any hope?"

"Without any hope," see replied briefly.

"And yet you will not forget him?"

"No."

The young man turned away with a short groan. Lucy started up, uttering a wistful little sound, and made as if she would have gone to him. Then she sank back again, hiding her wretched little face in both her hands; and in a moment more Doctor March was gone.

Chapter XXXIX.

So the days went by. Doctor March saw no more of Lucy than he had seen before; but, as Mrs. Ludlow's health was improving considerably under his care, Ada began to go out a good deal just then, and it followed that George met her very often, in Upper Brunswick street particularly.

"Why doesn't he speak?" Mrs. Throgmorton wondered a little anxiously. "What can he be waiting for; and why does he look so absent and moody of late?"

George himself, when questioned by his friend as to the cause of his evident low spirits, declared that he was somewhat worried about money matters—that his step mother, who had lately set up a school in Brussels, had been making rather heavy demands upon him, and that he was generally a little tired and out of sorts. And, as he seemed as pleased as ever to find himself in Miss Ludlow's society—Ada was not the rose, but she lived near it—Mary Throgmorton was fain to be satisfied with this explanation.

"When he is a little easier in his mind he will speak," she said.

It was only Jack who sneered at the least mention of a marriage between Doctor March and Miss Ludlow. The boy had come home as suddenly as he had gone away, unchanged save for the increased growth of his little dark moustache, and a supply of very well made coats, in which he looked extremely handsome as he haunted King's Road after business hours.

"The idea of a girl like that being buried alive in such a place as Barlastan Regis," he would exclaim scornfully—"a girl who is fit to shine in any society—who, if she had her rights now, would be paragraphed in every society paper as a beauty, and would drive London wild."

"A very unpleasant position to be placed in, I should think," responded Bee quietly. "And why did not all this happen when Ada was in London? She had every opportunity for displaying her charms, I believe."

"Because a girl can't afford to be talked about," cried Jack with impatience. "If she had married, it would have been very different. Lady Meldrum could have many things that were impossible to Miss Ludlow."

TO BE CONTINUED.

WESTERN MEN.

Peculiarities of the Chicago, the St Louis, and the Cincinnati Men.

(New York Tribune.)

There are certain characteristics which distinguish the natives of various cities of the West. These formed the subject of conversation in a Broadway office recently. The conversation was startled by the sudden entrance of a young man. He was dressed in a very light and showy suit, in which a violent plaid was conspicuous. A small white Derby hung rakishly over his left ear. The hues of the rainbow appeared in his colored shirt, the collar of which sawed his ears, and in his variegated scarf. There was a diamond in his scarf ring and another on his little finger of his left hand. His mustache was waxed, his shoes were pointed of the toothpick variety, and his first words were, "I'm just on from Chicago." His errand was purely on business, but in the course of a few minutes' talk, he took occasion to inform those present that he had been "running a house uptown," the nature of which he did not explain, and he ended by inviting every one to drink with him. Then he waved the finger bearing the diamond in the air, gurgled "Ta ta" and pirouetted out.

"That," said one of the railroad men, "is a very good example of the young Chicago business man. He is an unrevised edition of the young New York broker, with his fastness and loudness, except that the broker really knows the world, and the Chicago man only pretends he does. This man, you may have noticed, was not at ease. He was putting on an exaggerated tone of fastness in order to gain respect as a man of the world. Therefore he was offensive, as the Chicago man is apt to be."

"The St. Louis man is quite different," said another member of the party. "He is slower, more sedate and old foggish. He exhibits somewhat the gravity of demeanor peculiar to the Kentuckian. St. Louis is a city of solid wealth but slow progress. With the St. Louis man begins the noble procession of Western whiskey drinkers. He drinks his whiskey straight, and a great deal of it. When he drinks with his friends he bows in a dignified manner and proposes a serious toast."

"The Cincinnatian is an unregenerate Bostonian," said the third. "He is neither fish, flesh nor fowl despite his pork. He wears good clothes, and