

"Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady."

"A hat of last year's fashion!"
 "But her eyes were like gray stars."
 "And her manner dreadfully quick and decided."
 "Bright and sparkling, I should call it."

"My dear Richard, you are really absurd. The girl is a hospital nurse, and what woman with any refinement or delicacy would take up such a profession as that? It shows she can't be nice."

"Ladies do such things nowadays"—less defiantly.

"Now you know you're only saying so because she's pretty. Of course, ladies do queer things nowadays, but that doesn't excuse all unwomanly feeling. Besides, she's only a solicitor's daughter. I shan't ask mamma to call."

"But don't you think common civility—"

"No, I don't. She's only staying at the rectory, and we're not forced to call on everyone's friends. Besides, Captain Hardwicke is expected home, and it would make it awkward. What would one of Lord Belmont's people say if we asked them to meet a girl like Miss Travers?"

"All the same, she's as pretty and ladylike as anyone I ever met in these parts."

"Very likely, but she's not in our set. Now, Richard, if you say any more I shall begin to think you're falling in love with her, if the idea is not too absurd."

But Richard had closed the drawing-room door upon his six sisters' languid voices, and was half way across the wide lawn with its brilliant parterres of summer flowers. Poor Richard Allerdycce! only son of the richest banker in Chellowdean, people of good family, but with just that uncertainty of social position which made them afraid of overstepping any boundaries, rather gratified at being on intimate terms with Lord Belmont and the Hardwicke, he was of divided mind this summer afternoon. He had been greatly taken by that sweet face and slight figure in the rectory pew last Sunday; was sensible of a thrill of more than civil interest when he met their owner walking home with the good old rector after service, and was introduced to "Miss Travers," while the eyes "like gray stars" were suddenly raised to his; and he had ever since spent a larger portion of his time than was strictly needful in walking past the rectory's rose-covered garden-gate. But on the other side, his sisters' words had certainly struck home.

Brought up, as the Allerdycce were, like hot-house plants, sheltered from every breath of frosty air, it was not strange that Richard at 25, though a big, burly enough young Englishman to look at, was but little of a man in mind or heart. Knowledge of the world had been carefully kept from him, as from his sisters, lest they should learn evil; but their very ignorance had cost him the loss of power to choose between evil and good, and had given them weak prejudices and quelled opinionativeness, instead of a mind able to discern and prefer the right.

Richard's handsome face was overcast as he swung out of the lodge gates and down the road. Miss Travers a hospital nurse! certainly it was a shock. Not only did it seem to him unwomanly for a woman to work at all, but infinitely more so to do menial work. And then the awful thought of what his mother and sisters would say, were they asked to receive a hospital nurse as his future wife! For it had gone as far as that, in Richard's susceptible mind, even in these three short days. All at once his thoughts broke off, as Miss Travers herself, sweet and bright as ever, in her black dress, came out from the rectory gate, the great rectory mastiff pacing behind her.

Now, Richard's own collie was at his master's heels, and there was a border feud of long standing between these two faithful followers. There was one angry

growl, a heavy rush, a thud, and then a brown body and a black rolled together in the dust in a manner suggestive of a dog's funeral on one side or the other. Richard, who was actually staggered by the suddenness of all, could not for a moment regain his senses; and when he did, it was to find Miss Travers, both white hands locked in the hair of Rollo's shaggy neck, pulling him from his foe with all her strength, and calling to "Mr. Allerdycce" to "take hold of his dog and pull him off."

She was being whirled round in the cloud of dust by the frantic waltzers before Richard could quite settle where to "take hold," but that task was performed for him by a gentleman in tweed knickerbockers, who started out of the "White Hart," a few rods away, and ran to the rescue. Between Miss Travers and himself the combatants were separated, each carrying away a few fragments of the other's person; and Miss Travers, flushed, panting, covered with dust, but looking lovelier than Richard had ever seen woman look before, sank back against the rectory wall and tried to laugh. The stranger lifted his hat, looking straight at her with a pair of piercing brown eyes.

"Excuse me, Miss Travers!" he said, in rather an off-hand manner, "but that was about as rash a thing as anyone could possibly do. The dogs might have both turned on you and bitten you badly."

"Thank you, Capt. Hardwicke, I had not the least fear," was her only response, given with a little haughtiness; and the gentleman, with a nod to Richard, turned and strode away as rapidly as he had come.

"Miss Travers are you hurt," Richard was able to articulate at last. "You never should have done a thing like that. Hardwicke was right, it was awfully rash! By the way, you know Hardwicke?"

"No, I'm not hurt a bit," the wonderful gray eyes were dancing with fun now. "Don't scold me please, I know it was a silly thing to do, but I didn't stop to think. Pray don't look so horrified!"

"But if you had been bitten?"

"Well, I wasn't." And her face dimpled with a friendly smile at his shocked look.

"But you know Hardwicke?" he persisted, unable to get over his surprise in that quarter.

"O yes." Her face grew cold instantly. "Capt. Hardwicke was in hospital with an accident some months ago—my hospital. I had charge of him there, that's all." And she pulled a rose so sharply from the hedge that it fell to pieces in her hands.

"Look here!" she laughed, showering the petals on the ground before her; "let us cover over the battle-field with flowers," and she laughed again.

Richard went home more thoughtful than ever. Surely this woman was a novel thing in his experience of men and manners. She acted with the skill and daring of a man; and yet he would rather not think what his sister's faces would be like had they but seen it. Was it actually lady-like? or should not she not rather have fled from the scene of conflict, or even have screamed and fainted? To be sure, she had looked as beautiful as an avenging Amazon; but was it quite correct conduct for a girl? And Capt. Hardwicke's manner, so abrupt and dictatorial: he seemed to show her the difference in social position between a nobleman's nephew and a hospital nurse. It must have been an awkward meeting as his sister's had said. And then a cold shiver came over him, as he thought of Miss Travers introduced as Mrs. Richard Allerdycce at Belmont castle and Capt. Hardwicke's stony look of surprise. And yet—and yet—she was so beautiful!

Nearly three weeks since the dog episode, and Richard's courage still wavered in the balance. He had grown to know Miss Travers well in those three weeks, and to know her well was to love her

better. There never was a woman so sweet, so clever, so sympathetic, so beautiful—he was certain of that—no woman he more ardently longed to have for his own; and yet—and yet! That terrible strength of character, that profession, that rectory garden, he had almost flung all prudence to the winds, she had been so dangerously, fatally sweet (she was always especially kind to him), but he reeled back from the gift just in time when she mentioned casually, without a change of voice or countenance that she had an uncle who was a chemist in Rochester. "A chemist! Shades of my ancestors protect me!" Richard recoiled again as he thought of it, and fancied Hardwicke's look if he could have heard her. For Capt. Hardwicke was still at the "White Hart," and perhaps his presence, and the atmosphere of exalted society about him, had been one of Richard's restraining though unconscious influences. Now, as he slowly worked his way up the steepest hill in the neighborhood, on his new tricycle, he was pondering the old question in his mind. Could he take the plunge or was it too costly?

A trim, graceful figure on the road before him, as at last he gained the summit, drove all else to the four winds; and in an instant he had overtaken the object of his cogitations, and sprung to the ground beside her.

"Mr. Allerdycce!" she said turning with her own bright look to shake hands; "how like a ghost you stole upon me! Oh, I see, it was on a tricycle, and what a beauty! Do let me look at it." And Richard, nothing loath, began to display his new toy—a perfect thing in build and finish—the Allerdycce's possessions always were the most perfect of their kind.

He began to explain it to her, forgetting all about the chemist uncle, but she interrupted him.

"Yes, I know all about them, thanks. I see, it is a regular bit of perfection. I should so like to try it; may I?"

Once more Richard was dumb with surprise. A lady on a tricycle was as yet an unheard of thing in rustic Chellowdean, and it seemed an outrageous idea to him.

"I really don't think you could," he faltered. "My sisters never have done such a thing."

"Your sisters? Oh, perhaps not," with a little smile at the idea. "But I am quite used to tricycles. I ride one whenever I can get a chance."

Further blow for Richard; but there was no knowing how to refuse her, and he stood aside. She took her place like one who was thoroughly used to tricycles, and he could not but admit she adorned her position.

"What a delicious hill to run down!" she said, with a happy little laugh, as she placed her dainty feet on the treadles. "I really must try it."

"Pray, pray don't attempt it!" was Richard's horrified remonstrance, for the hill stretched down even more abruptly than on the side he had ascended, and near the bottom there was a sudden sharp turn, with the railway line running just below—the nastiest bit of road for miles around. Perhaps even Agatha Travers would have hesitated to hazard it had it not been for the consternation in Richard's face.

"Mr. Allerdycce, you are faint-hearted," she said gayly, as she started on her downward course—a little more rapidly than she had at first intended, but Richard's new tricycle ran smoothly. His heart was in his mouth as the country folk say, as she began to glide rapidly off. She turned her head and flashed back a merry defiance. "My uncle, the chemist at Rochester used to say"—Then the wicked sparkle faded suddenly, and she called quick and clear: "Can you stop me please? The brake is stiff: I can't make it work; it's running away."

Poor Richard of the faint heart! It seemed to die within him. The next second he darted forward, but it was just

one second too late. The check she had been able to put on the heavy machine with the treadles ceased to keep it back, and faster and faster it tore down the perilous road.

In all his life to come Richard will never know any minute so long as that next, while the straight, slight figure flying through space seemed to swim before his eyes, and his knees knocked together as he stood.

On, on—faster, faster! She managed somehow to cling to the steering handle and keep the machine in the middle of the road, but the mad pace grew more desperate. She could never turn that fatal corner by the railway embankment; over it she must go. And it was just then that Richard and she both together saw the puff of snow-white smoke from the hillside, that told them the evening express was out of the tunnel, and thundering down that very bit of line.

It all flashed over Agatha in one rush; would the fall kill her, or would it be the train? It must be one or the other: the next second or two would settle that; and a swift prayer was on her lips, but what, she never quite knew, for even as she breathed it someone or something in brown tweed knickerbockers hurled itself over the roadside before her, a stout stick darted into the flying wheel, and with one quick swerve the tricycle crashed into the ditch, and lay there, a confused mass of spinning spokes and mutilated tires, while Agatha flew out from its midst like a ball, and alighted on a grassy bank a yard or two away; and the express rushed past with a wild yell on the line just below, and vanished round a sharp curve that matched the road above it.

Then, and then alone, did Richard's legs regain their powers of motion, and he set off as fast as they could carry him to where the little black figure lay. Somehow it took longer to run down that hill than the last descent would have led one to think, for when Richard, panting and breathless, reached the scene of the accident, the little black figure, very much out of its usual trim neatness, was seated on the grassy tangle that broke her fall, busily binding up with her own small handkerchief a deep gash in the hand of the knickerbockered person who knelt at her side. It was a very pale face that looked up at Richard's with the sort of awe that any human creature must wear who has just been face to face with death, but her gray eyes had a wonder-flushing light in them.

"That poor tricycle!" she said. "I am so sorry, is it very badly hurt?" And, in the fervor of his relief and gladness, Richard could find words for nothing but:

"Bother the tricycle!"

He was ready enough to say something, however, presently, when he found himself obliged to stop and see its remains decently cared for, while Capt. Hardwicke took charge of Miss Travers' return to the rectory. She said she was none the worse for her fall, but perhaps she was a little shaken; but Capt. Hardwicke kindly offered her his arm, and she took it. Richard hurried after them before long, his whole heart aglow. That awful minute this afternoon had taught him that life without Agatha Travers would seem a poor and worthless thing, were she a factory-girl. He hurried after them, therefore, and came in sight of the rectory gate as two hands, one very neatly bandaged, unclasped over it, and a small dark head raised itself swiftly from a brown tweed shoulder, where it seemed to have been resting.

"Good gracious!" was all that Richard could utter, as Agatha vanished, and Capt. Hardwicke, looking oddly radiant, sauntered towards him.

"Ah, ah, Allerdycce, old fellow, caught us, have you? Then I may as well tell you all my tremendous good luck at once, and take your congratulations. Perhaps you've heard how Miss Travers' nursing saved my life last year, and when, of course I fell in love with her,