

by way of farewell, but Frances turned along the path with him. Ellen sat down on a garden chair and waited. The voices from the house came distinctly to her ear in the quiet night.

'They will be in directly,' Mrs. Chavasse was saying. 'Mr. Castonel is with them.—He and Frances grow greater friends than ever.'

'Beware of that friendship,' interrupted Mr. Leicester. 'It may lead to something more.'

'And what if it should?' asked Mrs. Chavasse.

The rector paused, as if in surprise. 'Do I understand you rightly, Mrs. Chavasse—that you would suffer Frances to become his wife?'

'Who is going to marry Frances?' inquired Mr. Chavasse, entering, and hearing the last words.

'Nobody,' answered his wife. 'We were speculating on Mr. Castonel's attention to her becoming more particular. I'm sure anybody might be proud to have him; he must be earning a large income.'

'My objection to Mr. Castonel is to his character,' returned the clergyman. 'He is a bad man, living an irregular life. The world may call it gallantry: I call it sin.'

'You alluded to that mysterious girl who followed him down here,' said Mrs. Chavasse. 'You know what he told Mr. Winton—that it was a relation, a lady of family and character. Of course it is singular, her living on here in the way she does, but it may be quite right for all that.'

'I saw him stealing off there last night as I came home,' observed the rector. 'But I do not allude only to that. There are other things I could tell you of: some that happened during the lifetime of his wife.'

'Then I'll tell you what,' interrupted Mr. Chavasse, in his bluff, hearty manner, 'a man of that sort should never have a daughter of mine. So mind what you and Frances are about, Mrs. Chavasse.'

'That's just like papa,' whispered Frances, who had returned to Ellen Leicester.—'Speaking fiercely one minute, eating his words the next. Mamma always turns him round with her little finger.'

'As you value your daughter's happiness, keep her from Mr. Castonel,' resumed the minister. 'I doubt him in more ways than one.'

'Do listen to your papa, Ellen,' again whispered Frances. 'How prejudiced he is against Mr. Castonel.'

'My dear father is prejudiced against him,' was Ellen's thought. 'He says he met him stealing off to her house last night—if he did but know he was stealing back from bringing me home.'

Ellen was mistaken. It was later that the rector had met Mr. Castonel.

'Must I give him up,' she went on in mental anguish. 'It will cost me the greatest of all earthly misery: perhaps even my life. But I cannot have the curse of disobedience on my soul. I must, I will give him up.'

'Ah, Ellen Leicester! you little know how such good resolutions fail when one is present with you to combat them! However, nourish your intention for the present, if you will. It will come to the same.'

'Ellen, Isay,' Frances continued to whisper, 'what is it that prejudices your papa against Mr. Castonel? Caroline told me herself, after her marriage, that that person was a relative of his, one almost like a sister. You heard her say so.'

Ellen Leicester did not answer, and Frances turned towards her. It may have been the effect of the moon-light, but her face looked cold and white as the snow in winter.

#### CHAPTER IX.

MR. CASTONEL ASTONISHES HIS HOUSEKEEPER WITH A COMMUNICATION, BUT ASTONISHES MR. LEICESTER STILL MORE WITHOUT ONE.

It was a fine evening in October. Mr. Castonel had dined, and the tiger lighted the lamp, and placed it, with the port-wine, on the table before him. Mr. Castonel was particularly fond of a glass of good port; but he let it remain untouched on this day, for he was buried in thought. He was a slight-made man, neither handsome nor plain, and his unfathomable gray eyes never looked you in the face. He rang the bell, and the tiger answered it.

'Send Mrs. Muff to me. And, John, do not leave the house. I shall want you.'

The housekeeper came in, closed the door and came towards him. He was then pouring out his first glass of wine.

'Muff,' he began, 'there's a small black

portmanteau somewhere about the house.—A hand portmanteau.'

'Yes sir. It is in the closet by John's room.'

'Get it out, and put a week's change of linen into it. Did the tailor send home some new clothes to-day?'

'He did sir, and I ordered Hannah to take them up-stairs.'

'They must be put in. And my shaving tackle, and such things. I am going out for a few days.'

Mrs. Muff was thunder struck. She had never known Mr. Castonel to leave Ebury since he had settled in it, except on the occasion of his marriage.

'You have given me a surprise, sir,' she said, 'but I'll see to the things. Do you want them for to-morrow?'

'For this evening.'

Mrs. Muff thought that her ears must have deceived her. The last coach for the distant railway station had left. Besides, she had heard Mr. Castonel make an appointment at Ebury for the following day at twelve. 'This evening, sir?' she repeated. 'The coaches have all gone. The last drove by as John was bringing out the dinner-tray.'

'For this evening,' repeated Mr. Castonel without further comment. 'In half an hour's time. And, Muff, you must get the house cleaned and put thoroughly in order while I am away. Let the dressing-room adjoining my bed-chamber be made ready for use, the scent bottles and trumpery put on the dressing-table, as it was in—in the time of Mrs. Castonel.'

This was the climax. Mrs. Muff's speech failed her.

'This is Tuesday. I intend to be home on Monday next. I shall probably bring a—a person—a companion with me.'

'A what, sir?' demanded Mrs. Muff.

'A friend will accompany me, I say.'

'Very well, sir, which room shall I get ready?'



EARL DE GREY AND RIPON, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR.

'Room! What for?'

Mrs. Muff was growing bewildered. 'I thought you said a gentleman was returning with you, sir. I asked which bed-chamber I should prepare for him.'

'My own.'

'Certainly, sir,' answered the housekeeper, hesitatingly. 'And, in that case, which room shall I prepare for you?'

Mr. Castonel laughed; such a strange laugh. 'I will tell you then,' he replied.—'You must also send for the gardener, and get the garden done up. Send to-morrow morning, and let him begin. John can help him: he will not have much to do while I am away.'

'Except mischief,' added the housekeeper. 'I'll keep him to it, sir.'

'And, Muff, if anybody comes after me to-night, no matter who, or how late, say I am gone to an urgent case in the country, and send them to Mr. Rice. You remember, now, no matter who. You may tell the whole town to-morrow, and the devil besides, for all it can signify then.'

'Tell what, sir?'

'That I am gone out for a week's holiday.'

Mrs. Muff withdrew, utterly stupified.—She thought that she was beside herself, or else that Mr. Castonel was.

That same evening, not very long after, Ellen Leicester, attended by a maid, left her home, for she had promised to take tea with Mrs. Chavasse. In passing a lonely part of the road, where they branched off to the railroad, they came upon Mr. Castonel. He shook hands with Miss Leicester, and gave her his arm, saying that he was also bound for Mrs. Chavasse's. 'I will take charge of you now,' he added; 'you need not trouble your maid to come further.'

'Very true,' murmured Ellen. 'Martha,' she said, turning to the servant, 'if you would like two or three hours for yourself to-night, you may have them. Perhaps you would like to go home and see your mother.'

The girl thanked her, and departed cheerfully towards the village. Could she have

peered beyond a turning in the way, she might have seen a post-carriage drawn up, evidently waiting for travellers.

The time went on to nine. The rector and his wife sat over the fire, the former shivering, for he had caught a bad cold.—'I suppose you have some nitre in the house?' he suddenly observed.

'Really—I fear not,' answered Mrs. Leicester. 'But I can send for some. Will you touch the bell?'

'Is Benjamin in?' demanded Mrs. Leicester. 'The maid who answered it.'

'No, ma'am. Master said he was to go and see how Thomas Shipley was, and he is gone.'

'Then tell Martha to put her bonnet on. She must fetch some nitre.'

'Martha is not come in, ma'am, since she went out to take Miss Leicester.'

'No!' uttered Mrs. Leicester, in surprise. 'Why, that was at six o'clock. I wonder where she is stopping.'

Benjamin came in, and was sent for the nitre, and soon Martha's voice was heard in the kitchen. Mrs. Leicester ordered her in.

'Martha, what did you mean by stopping out without leave?'

'Betsy has been at me about it in the kitchen,' was the girl's reply. 'But it is Miss Ellen's fault. She told me I might have a few hours for myself.'

'When did she tell you that?' demanded Mrs. Leicester, doubting if Ellen had said it.

'When we came to Piebald Corner. Mr. Castonel was standing there, and he said he would see Miss Ellen safe to Mrs. Chavasse's and it was then she told me.'

The rector looked up, anger on his face.

'Did you leave her with Mr. Castonel?'

'Yes, sir, I did.'

'Then understand, Martha, for the future. If you go out to attend Miss Leicester, you are to attend her. You have done wrong. It is not seemly for Miss Leicester to be abroad in the evening; without one of her own attendants.'

TO BE CONTINUED.