

resuming her performance, 'something odd here. The end is not yet. Your wife is not in Cornwall yet awhile, Sir Vane Valentine.'

'How long do you stay with us?' she asks him, aloud.

'Until to-morrow only. Apart from this affair, my presence is necessary there. By being on the spot I save no end of money, and hurry on the work. You, and Dorothy, and Dolores will follow—say in two days. I suppose it would look a trifle abrupt to hurry you off with me to-morrow. Meanwhile, watch her; no more secret meetings with Macdonald, if you can by any means prevent them. Come to Flintbarrow without fail on the third day.'

'I will come,' responds Miss Routh. 'But whether your wife will accompany me or not, cousin mine,' she adds, inwardly, 'that third day only will tell.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

### 'ADrift AS A LEAF IN THE STORM.'

Next morning, by the earliest train, Sir Vane Valentine goes back to Cornwall.

His sister alone sits and pours out his coffee at the hurried early breakfast that precedes departure. Miss Routh is not an early bird, and Lady Valentine usually up as early as Dorothy herself, does not appear.

Sir Vane does not seek her to say good-by. He is nervous and ill at ease, and has no appetite. This 'fraudulent plot,' this 'trumped-up conspiracy,' disturbs him more than he cares to show. If they persist in it and drag it before the world, a horrible exposure will be the result. And even if their defeat is ultimately secured, the legal expenses will be something he shudders to contemplate. With what it feeds on Sir Vane's love of wealth grows. If their defeat should not be secured—but even in thought he cannot imagine so wild a possibility as that. Once let him get his credulous, romantic wife out of the way, safely down in the lonely, seagirt seclusion of Flintbarrow, and the first step toward safety will have been taken. She is as wild and shy as a partridge—as ready to take flight. He will not disturb her this morning; she will come the more readily and unsuspectingly with his sister and cousin, if he does not seem too eager. After that he will know how to deal with M. Rene Macdonald.

Silence reigns at this hasty meal. Miss Valentine is pleased at the invitation to return to her native Cornish wilds for a little, but Miss Valentine is not diffusive by nature, and sits grimly and silently behind the

coffee-pot. Desolate, lonely, shut out from the world by far stretching moors and leagues of dark and stormy sea, she yet loves those 'thundering shores of Bude and Boes,' and would willingly resign her position as house-keeper of Manor Valentine to return thither to her peaceful life. But Vane rules it otherwise, and Vane's will has ever been her law.

'You think your wife will be willing to go, Vane?' she asks, rather abruptly, just before he departs.

'Certainly; why not?' he returns, sharply. 'A wife's place is beside her husband. She needs a change, too, and bracing air—the visit will do her good. Sea air is native air to her; she was brought up on an island.'

'Yes,' Miss Dorothy assents, thoughtfully, 'she looks as if she needed a change. She eats nothing, and fails away to a shadow. Still, I doubt if Flintbarrow will help her, or if she will like the place. It is a gloomy spot, you must admit, for a young girl like her, brother Vane.'

'She will have to accustom herself to its gloom. I shall be there to bear her company. Do you wish to leave her behind to amuse herself flirting with Deering, Dorothy? Be kind enough not to be a fool. Here is the trap—good-by: I shall expect you all without fail, remember, on Friday afternoon.'

He leaves the room, banging the doors angrily after him, jumps into the waiting trap; the groom gathers up the reins, and they drive off.

Three pairs of feminine eyes watch the departure, with very different looks—Miss Dorothy Valentine, grimly, through her glasses: Miss Routh, with an inexplicable smile, and two sombre blue eyes, dark and heavy-lidded from a sleepless night.

Miss Routh, in the freshest and crispest of morning toilets, indulges in a stroll through the village before luncheon, and makes a call, in her gracious way, on the hostess of the Ratherripe Arms. As she sits by the open parlour window, framed in woodbine and roses, Mr. Macdonald, sketch-book in hand, the inevitable cigar between his lips, passes, and glances in. So! he lingers still then! She must watch well, and discover whether another secret interview takes place before the departure for Cornwall. She hastens home and makes inquiries. Her maid, instructed for the purpose, has kept an eye on my lady's doings. But there is little to report. My lady has not appeared at all, some tea and toast have been taken up to her, and she has declined to receive a call from Miss Valentine, under the plea of a headache. The maid is positive my lady