

torted. "I shall complain to the Countess, if you make such impertinent observations again."

"Mamma says you ought to be able to manage me without calling in her authority," said Ida, sullenly.

"I will prove, then, that I can do so," Miss Hill replied, with spirit. "Instead of prolonging our walk, as we intended, you will go with me to our own room, and translate six stanzas of the 'Glorious Emma'."

Holding her pretty head higher than before, Lady Ida stepped daintily along before her governess, too proud to acknowledge that she had been in the wrong, yet swelling with vexation at the thought of exchanging the sunny expanse of the moor for the narrow little chamber and the pages of Tasso.

They had nearly reached the house, when her brother, the heir of Glenaughton—the merry, mischievous, but warm-hearted Viscount Brancough—came in sight, armed with a but-terfly net.

Ida's pride began to give way.

"Oh, Miss Hill, there's Percy with his new net, and you said yesterday I might go with him to get specimens for his case."

"My promise was a conditional one, and depended on your behavior," her governess reminded her.

"But you'll let me go? There mayn't be such a fine day again, and we shall go away soon—very soon. Oh, Miss Hill, do—please do! You know I didn't mean to vex you!"

Miss Hill hesitated, and the child bounded away, her bright hair streaming on the wind. It was no use to call her back. Catching hold of Percy's hand, she had hurried him forward, and they soon appeared like little specks in the distance, moving hither and thither in search of the lovely insects they proposed capturing.

Not at all inclined to follow their erratic course, Miss Hill seated herself on a thymy mound, and opened a book. But very soon her thoughts wandered from its pages to her own secret anxieties. It was very true she had learned to love the quiet, clover vale; she possessed that strength of will in which she was so lamentably deficient, and in all her difficulties with her pupil—and they were many—she was accustomed to refer to him for advice. This he gave her tenderly, delicately, with looks and clasp of her hand, that hinted a deeper feeling than his words conveyed; and Lettice Hill, a poor dissembler herself, had not been able to hide the pleasure with which she received his attentions. The Earl's domestics believed them to be engaged, and joked Wyatt sometimes on his approaching marriage. They did not guess that herein lay Lettice's trouble. She was not to accompany the Glenaughton family to Spain. The Countess had engaged a Parisian to finish Lady Ida's education, and the engagement of Miss Hill—whose friends resided at Southampton—would terminate as soon as they reached that town. Wyatt had sighed when their approaching separation was mentioned; had made her promise to correspond with him; had pathetically wondered how long it would be before they met again; but of matrimony said he never a word.

"Aunt will be cross," thought poor Lettice; "she always declaims against long engagements. She will even insist that this is not one at all, for I have nothing definite to tell her; and yet he loves me, I am sure of it; and it may be that he fears to speak till he has acquired some better position. Yes, that must be the cause of his silence. It would be ungenerous to doubt him."

And having arrived at this decision, Miss Hill wiped away the tears that had gathered in her eyes, and began to consider whether it were not time to recall the children. She rose and looked around; but they were quite out of sight. She called aloud; but her summons elicited no reply, except from absent-minded Mr. Haynes, the Viscount's tutor, who had lain himself on the sward, beneath a thicket, to watch the busy movements of a colony of ants, oblivious that his pupil had left his side long since.

Meanwhile, the brother and sister had followed the zig-zag flight of a splendid Admiral, till they found themselves in one of the prettiest parts of the moor. Here the ground gradually shelved down on all sides, forming a large basin, in the centre of which there was a pond. The sloping sides of the declivity were thickly overgrown with the pretty leaves and fruit of the whortleberry, and there they came upon a lonely child busily engaged in filling a can with the ripest of the berries.

Percy and Ida sat down on some moss, and watched her.

"What berries is she picking?" the latter inquired of her brother. "Are they good to eat? I'm so hungry; call her and tell her we want some of them."

The little Viscount, with all the consequence of a spoiled boy approaching his teens, beckoned to the girl, who had paused in her labors, and was shyly watching them from under her old straw hat.

"Hi! come here, young one! How much do you want for your thing-em-bobs?"

She put the can behind her, thus tacitly intimating that its contents were not for sale; but picking up some fine branches that lay beside her, came forward, holding them towards the children.

Ida drew back haughtily, and signed to her brother to receive them. She did not like coming in contact with people who were ugly or ill-dressed, and, in her fastidious eyes, this girl was both. Her hair was cropped close to her head; her skin was freckled and tanned with

exposure to the weather; her frock had evidently been made for her out of one of Mrs. Price's large-flowered lilac prints, and was repaired with pieces of a different pattern; while the hands, that in delicacy of size and shape might be compared to Ida's own, were deeply stained with the purple juice of the whorts she had been sent to gather.

More courteous, or more indifferent to appearances than his sister, the little Viscount stepped forward to receive her gift. A frolicsome retriever puppy, which, much to his young master's annoyance, Mrs. Price would not suffer in the house, had escaped from his captivity in a wood-shed, and followed the children across the moor, barking and bounding in high glee when they ran on, or gulping off on exploits of his own whenever they did his too noisy attentions and drove him away. He now trotted at his master's heels till they were close to the girl, when he began to leap upon her, and, half in play, half in earnest, seized her skirts in his teeth. At first she tried to control her terror, and calling him "Bad dog," and "Spiteful thing," strove to shake him off; but the creature clung to his hold; the can of whortleberries was upset in the struggle; the print frock sadly rent, and the worried child lost her temper.

"You are a wicked boy, and your dog ought to be killed! I'll ask Owen to shoot him!" she tearfully protested, as, armed with a branch of furze, she stood at bay.

"But I won't have him shot! Let Owen or any one else dare attempt it, and see what I'll do to them!" retorted Percy, who had really been trying his best to put an end to the battle. "You're not hurt a bit!"

She pointed to the torn frock.

"Isn't it said the young aristocrat, contemptuously. "What matters about that old thing? It wasn't worth sixpence."

"And it's horribly ugly," added his sister—"as ugly as you are!"

The girl's face flushed at the taunt, and she drew herself up. "If I had your fine silk dress and long curls, I should be as pretty, and prettier than you!"

Lady Ida laughed derisively, and looked at the tattered figure of the speaker with a scorn that made her wince and turn away. Snatching up her can, she began the weary task of refilling it; for the scattered berries had been trampled on in her efforts to shake off the dog, and she dared not go home without any. By this time the Viscount had found fresh amusement. He was flinging stones into the pond, and inciting the puppy to fetch them out, his sister joining gleefully in the sport. Presently a cry of distress from both children made the girl start up to see what had happened to them. The bottom of the shallow pond was covered by a deposit of clayey mud; and twice, Rover, in obeying his master's commands, had plunged into the thick-est of this, and waded out again with considerable difficulty. The third time that he was sent after a piece of stick, the thoughtless Percy saw with terror that the poor creature could not extricate himself. In vain did the boy call and coax—in vain did Ida second him. Rover yelped and struggled towards them, but only to founder deeper into the sticky soil. He was getting exhausted, and whining most piteously, when the sobs and cries of his repentant master brought the girl Esie to the spot.

"What shall I do? Rover will be drowned, and through me!" the boy exclaimed, as soon as he saw her approach.

The dog, as if he comprehended the words, now gave a long, dismal howl, that made Lady Ida put her fingers in her ears, and begin rushing away as fast as she could. But Esie, with more presence of mind, ran round to the side of the pond where the water was shallowest, and, slipping off her shoes, began to wade towards the sinking Rover. It was a dangerous undertaking, for her own feet sank deeper and deeper at every step; but she fearlessly proceeded till she could grasp the curly coat of the animal, and draw him towards her. In another five minutes they were both safe on the bank, though Rover was so feeble, with his protracted efforts, as to be scarcely able to crawl along.

With the selfishness of pampered childhood, Percy busied himself about his favorite, and forgot the girl altogether. She had quickly fetched her can, and taken the nearest way back to the farm, where she was so unfortunate as to encounter Mrs. Price, before she could change her bespattered and dripping garments.

In the midst of the dame's tempestuous wrath, Lord Glenaughton chanced to come down stairs from his nephew's chamber, and Mrs. Price dragged the culprit towards him.

"There, sir—there, my lord—that's Esther's child! And, now you've seen her, you'll not wonder that I rue the day I took pity on her, and adopted her. I sends her, while the little 'uns was at school, to pick a few berries, and 'stead of doing as she was bid, she's been romping on the moor, and I may wash her and mend her! Look at her! Ain't it enough to sicken anybody of being good-natured?"

The Earl cast one swift glance at the dirty, ragged figure before him, and recoiled in disgust.

"This Esther's child! Good heavens!" With quickened step, he passed on, and Mrs. Price hauled her adopted away, assisting her progress with alaps and cuffs, to which the broken-spirited girl attempted no resistance.

CHAPTER III.

THE WIDOW HAS A SURPRISE.

Before the close of another week the ambassador and his lady had departed; Miss Hill had returned to her friends, cheered a little by a

whispered assurance from Wyatt that she should hear from him; and the Honorable Darcy Lesmere was left in solitary possession of Mrs. Price's apartments.

To one fresh from a public school it was terribly monotonous to be pent up in a secluded farm-house, especially as the lad was still suffering so much from the effects of the accident as to be incapable of any greater exertion than dragging himself, with the help of Wyatt's arm, from the bed to the sofa, and back again. Neither was Mr. Haynes the most cheerful of companions for an invalid. He would declaim Latin verse, or construe Greek, for an hour at a time, but these were subjects his pupil could not enjoy in his weak state. However, Darcy had a fund of amusement in his own active mind, which, like his body, was unusually well developed. He read a great deal, thought as much; and when he grew tired of both, contrived to draw out of an excellent concertina music enough to astonish the rustics, who sometimes loitered beneath his window to listen.

He was lying on his sofa in the twilight one evening, when the air was so balmy that a half-glass door leading to the door stood open, playing at intervals snatches of old Scotch ballads till Wyatt came in. The man had made himself so useful to the lonely boy, that Darcy, who had always nourished a secret dislike of his uncle's obsequious attendant, was learning to feel ashamed of his causeless prejudices.

"Alone, Mr. Darcy? I thought Mr. Haynes was here, or I would not have left you so long."

"It's no matter. I have not been dull," was the good-humored reply. "I've been evoking the oddest echoes you ever heard. Are you superstitious, Wyatt?"

The valet looked perplexed. "Not particularly so. Why do you ask?"

"Because this place is haunted by a fairy with the sweetest voice imaginable," Darcy laughingly responded. "Don't you believe me? Then listen, and judge for yourself."

Very slowly he played the first eight bars of "The Birks of Aberfeldy," then ceasing at once upon his companion he laid down the instrument. In the course of a minute or two the air was repeated, softly, hesitatingly, as if the singer's memory were sometimes at fault, but always in tones replete with a sweet freshness as rare as it was charming.

Darcy looked triumphantly at the listening valet.

"Did I not tell you so? Who can it be? This is not the first time I have heard my notes repeated by the same delicious voice."

"Play again, sir, and I will soon ascertain for you whether your echo is aerial or mortal," Wyatt whispered, as he noiselessly stepped into the door opening into the garden.

Darcy obeyed, then paused as before. The first few bars of the tune were taken up—then there was a terrified cry, a slight scuffle, and Wyatt, who had crept out into the garden, returned, bearing in his arms the diminutive figure of Esie.

Darcy laughed uncontrollably, partly at himself—for he had been weaving quite a romance out of the circumstance—and partly at the droll appearance of the girl, whose closely-cropped head peered out of an old red cloak in which she had wrapped herself, to compensate for a paucity of other garments. His mirth, however, soon gave place to compassion, for Esie sank on the floor as soon as she was released, her teeth chattering, and her eyes dilated with terror.

"Poor little mite! Don't frighten her any more, Wyatt."

"I didn't mean a harm," she panted. "I was only listening. Don't tell her, and I'll never do it no more."

"Tell who? Mrs. Price? Of course I'll not," answered Darcy, extending his hand to her. "Come here, you elf, and sit on this stool beside me. I'll not hurt you. Come here, I say."

With her fleshless arm she made a gesture of dissent, and seemed to be meditating a flight through the window, but this Wyatt prevented by closing it, and Darcy renewed his efforts to soothe her.

"So you came here to listen? Then you are fond of music? I wish we had not disturbed you. Let me make amends by playing the tunes you like best. Which are they?"

She did not reply, but her sobs ceased, and her bright dark eyes began to lose their wild expression, and glanced curiously at the concertina.

Amused with this queer instance of the divine power of melody, Darcy struck some chords. Her hurried breathing was subdued, the color came back to her face, and presently she ventured a step nearer to his sofa.

He pointed to a stool.

"Sit there, you funny child, and I'll play for you as long as you like. It's quite flattering to have such an attentive auditor," he added, to the valet; "and she don't look as if she enjoyed many pleasures, does she?"

With her elbows on her knees, and her chin supported on her hands, the girl sat motionless till the player grew tired and paused. Then the glow faded from her cheek—the eyes that had been fixed on his dropped; and glancing at Wyatt, who leaned against the window frame, a keen though silent observer, she said entreatingly, "Please let me go."

"Not till you have sung for me," Darcy interposed. "Who taught you to warble so sweetly?"

Again the small features brightened, and she asked timidly, "Do I sing well? Would people give me money if I went about the country, and sang at their doors?"

"Why, you'd never do such a wild thing as

that, you little foolish creature!" he exclaimed. "What made you think of it?"

She did not reply, and he went on questioning her.

"You are Esie, aren't you—the young girl I heard my cousin Percy talking about? You saved his dog, didn't you? And only fancy, Wyatt," and he turned with some resentment to the silent valet, "by his own confession, the little rascal barely thanked her for her pains. I must give you something in his name, Esie," he added, kindly. "What shall it be—a book?"

The girl's face crimsoned. "I can't read. Nobody never taught me."

"That's a pity. Shall it be a new frock, then. And pray where is your own?" asked the amused youth. "Do you generally wander about the garden without one?"

Esie drew the old scarlet cloak more closely around her.

"I didn't dare get out o' the window with it on, for fear of tearing it."

"Then you actually crept out at your lattice to gratify your love of harmony!" the laughing Darcy commented. "You queer child, you must not do that again. I'll ask Mrs. Price to let you come here sometimes."

Instead of thanking him, Esie began to exclaim, in terror, "No, no; she'd be so dreadful angry. Don't tell her, and I'll promise never to listen no more!"

Wyatt leaned forward, and examined the thin arm she had extended. There were livid marks upon it.

"Mrs. Price beats you, doesn't she?"

Esie made no answer, but began to slide towards the door. Darcy would have recalled her but for the valet's interposition.

"Beat let her go, sir. Mrs. Price is a woman of violent temper, and would punish her severely if she encountered her."

"You don't mean to say that she ill-uses that fragile little creature?" cried Darcy, indignantly. "We ought not to permit it. You must speak to her about it."

"I will, sir—I'll talk to her to-morrow; and now you had better let me assist you to bed."

Wyatt kept his word so far, that the first time he found the dame in a placable mood he questioned her concerning Esie's parentage; and received the same account—somewhat amplified—that she had given to Lord Glenaughton. He let her exhaust her complaints of her own troubles in connection with the affair before he made any comment upon it.

"It seems strange that you gained no clue to the real name of the artist who took Esie's mother away. Were there no letters, no papers found after the death?"

"Why, where should they be found? Didn't I tell you she came back with nothing but what she stood upright in? There were a little black card-case in her pocket when she died; but there were nothing in it but a couple of trashy love-letters with no name to them, and a few lines in her own handwriting that my master couldn't make nothing out on. Writ in a foreign tongue he said they were, but I'll never believe but what they were gibberish, for where should Esther learn foreign tongues, indeed?"

"Will you show me the contents of this card-case?" asked Wyatt. "It would relieve you from a great burden if the father of this girl could be found; and there might be a clue to him in these letters which you have overlooked."

Mrs. Price grimly answered that her master was as good a scholar as here and there a one; and if he couldn't make nothing out of them, she didn't suppose any one else could.

But Wyatt persisted, and at last won from her a promise that he should see them.

"That is, if I've got 'em still," she added. "They were a knocking about in the cupboard in my room till I got sick o' seeing 'em, and it's likely enough I burnt 'em along wi' a lot more rubbish. Anyhow, if I can come upon the case, you shall see 'em."

But some days elapsed, and still Mrs. Price had not found time to fulfil her promise, and Darcy Lesmere was pronounced sufficiently convalescent to proceed to a watering-place, there to recruit his strength before crossing the sea.

As a matter of course, Mr. Haynes was to accompany him; but Wyatt, on the morning fixed for the young gentleman's departure, with many expressions of regret, resigned his berth in the Earl's family. A brother to whom he was strongly attached was dead, and had left his affairs in great disorder. The rest of the family looked to Wyatt to arrange them; and he had already written to Lord Glenaughton, explaining the reason he was compelled to dismiss himself so abruptly.

Darcy was sorry, and he frankly said so. Wyatt had been very attentive to him, and he was still too weak not to feel the loss of his services. But there was no help for it; and after cordially shaking hands with, and thanking him, Darcy leaned back in the easy carriage provided for his journey, and with Mr. Haynes by his side, was driven away from the old farm-house.

Wyatt stood in the porch, gazing his watch-chain, and brooding over his own thoughts, till long after the vehicle was out of sight. Then he turned, and sought Mrs. Price, who was taking a general survey of the rooms her lodgers had just vacated.

"And now, my good friend," he said, complacently, "I must make my own preparations for leaving you. Your neighbor, the miller, has promised to drive me to the station in his own trap."

"Be ye going to-day, Mr. Wyatt?" Mrs. Price asked, indifferently. "I think I ought to have made a charge for the wear and tear of this