

If it had not been for Mr.—that is, for two young gentlemen from the College—matters might have been much worse.”

Mrs. Ray gave a little sigh. She had applied that argument—or had had it applied for her—of comparative degrees of evil, much too often to derive comfort from it. Another philosophic remark that “when things are at their worst they must needs mend,” was also inefficacious in her case. Perhaps it was because her powers of perception were dull.

“Change your dress as soon as you can, Gracie, dear, and then tell me all about it. If your papa comes in, and sees you in such a state, oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!” and again she wrung her hands. There was a similitude in the poor lady’s speech and action to those of Mr. Punch, when in dread expectation of the policeman, but “the pity of it” prevented the smile that they would have otherwise provoked. Her policeman was a reality, and she, alas! had no stick wherewith to knock him over the head, to the enjoyment of all beholders.

When Gracie, however, presently re-appeared in a dress, less splendid indeed than that which had met with such mischance, but very neat and becoming, it was plain that there was some happiness for the invalid yet. Her daughter looked so blooming that she persuaded herself “dear Alexander,” would not “have the heart” to scold her, and having laid that flattering unction to her soul, she was at liberty to take pride and pleasure in the girl’s beauty. In telling her story, Gracie had this difficulty: she had to be careful not to alarm her mother by the account of her own peril, and at the same time not to underrate the services of Mr. Darall, who seemed to her a Paladin. Mrs. Ray listened to his exploits with the attention that the crippled always pay to the recital of any physical conflict. “He must be a very brave and kindhearted young man, that Mr. Darall,” said she, when it was concluded, “and his friend also.”

“Yes, mamma, he was most kind. It was not his fault that he didn’t see us home, as the other did; but it appears that he runs great risk of getting into trouble for having been at the fair at all.”

“But does not his friend run the same risk?”

“Well, no; or, at least, if he did it does not signify, because he is very rich; if he was sent away from the Academy to-morrow, it would make no difference to his prospects, it seems, while poor Mr. Darall is—poor.”

Mrs. Ray sighed again: perhaps she had permitted herself to entertain the “low beginnings” of a romance for Gracie, and now they were ruthlessly trodden down. Gracie understood the sigh quite well: there was no concealment in that household as regarded such matters. She had been told a dozen times by her father that her future prospects