THE RECTOR'S DAUGHTER.

Strathspey returned to the Coombe one evening, after a few hours' absence, to find her ladyship seated at her desk, writing a letter. He was not in the most cheerful of humors, and he scarcely remarked it at first; but, after a few moments' silence, she raised her head.

"I am writing to Gwendoline Framley, Angus," she said. "I believe I forgot to mention to you that I received a letter from her yesterday, in which she speaks of coming to Coombe-Ashley. Here it is—read it." And she handed him a double sheet of thick cream-colored paper, crossed and recrossed with delicate, flowing chirography, perfumed faintly with wood-violets, and stamped with a pretty monogram.

Strathspey opened it with a slightly heightened color. He remembered the young lady, well, as a superb, fair girl, with whom he had spent the pleasantest month of his life one summer a few years before, when he had chanced to meet her party at a wonderful little, many-balconied hotel, on the shores of Lake Geneva. She was a beautiful young creature, the belle of her first season then, as she had been the belle of the two seasons since; and, in spite of his claim of a distant relationship, Strathspey had only been one of a dozen others who were ready to fall at her dainty feet and worship. Still he could not help feeling a slight thrill, as the faint odor of wood-violets floated up to him, for he remembered she had been very fond of wood-violets, and had sentimentalized over them in a very pretty, girlish way.

It was a very charming letter; graceful, full of pretty phrases, and nice little turns of speech; lady-like, elegant—all that could be desired, and withal, tinged with a little spirit of delicate satire, which gave it a piquant sort of flavor.

"I am weary of amusing stupid people, and being stupidly amused, dear Lady Strathspey," she wrote, "and I believe that a visit to Coombe-Ashley would be a means of recruiting me for next season's exertions. Even debutantes are allowed a few weeks' rest from their difficult labor of charming and being charmed, and I am not a debutante, you know. Pray do be good enough to invite me to spend a month among the bracken with you."

"I am writing to repeat my old invitation," said her ladyship, carelessly, as Strathspey returned the missive to her. "I shall be very much pleased to see her. She is a very charming girl, I believe, though I only remember her as a child."

Nothing more was said at the time. She finished her letter, and the next day it was on its way to England; but regarded, as a stroke of diplomacy, the double sheet of cream-colored paper, with its soft fragrance of wood-violets had been a success. For a moment it had blotted out the innocent face and tender eyes, the winter evenings spent in the rectory parlor were forgotten, the rector's daughter was a myth, and Strathspey had gone back to the time when he sauntered on the shores of Lake Geneva, talking graceful nonsense to Gwendoline Framley, and carrying her dainty parasol.

But still the impression was not strong enough to destroy the older fancy completely, and in the course of a few days, he was at the rectory again.

CHAPTER VI.

"We are going to have a visitor at the Coombe," he said to Prue, during the evening. "You must come and see her, Miss Prue. She is a belle and a beauty; as great a belle as any of the heroines of the stories I tell you sometimes. I dare say she has even been presented at court," with a light laugh, "and broken as many hearts as there are buttons on that pretty dress of yours."

The brown eyes softened into that sober gravity which was so quaintly natural of them.

"I think I should be afraid of her," said Prue, staidly. "I am not accustomed to grand people, and I am always afraid of them."

"So am I," said Strathspey, laughing again. "It is quite natural, Miss Prue."

It was a lovely evening. To this poor, ignorant child it was the loveliest she had ever known; certainly it was the last in which she experienced unalloyed happiness. She sat in a low basket-chair before the open window, the moonlight streaming in upon her white dress and fair face—a face so very fair and pure, contrasted in the mystic light with her great soft eyes, that watching her, Strathspey forgot himself, forget the world, forgot even Gwendoline Framley, and spoke to her as men will often speak under the influence of a fair face and a sweet voice.

She listened to him with a wild thrill of happiness, her great, innocent eyes lifted up to his, as he leaned against the window, and looked down at her, more perfect and glorious, she thought, than he had ever seemed before. She looked forward to nothing—the future was nothing; it was quite enough to sit in the moonlight, and thrill at every word he uttered.

There was a box of mignonette on the window-sill, and as he was going away, he bent and broke a spray from it.

"Do you know what it means?" he asked.

He had just bidden her good-night then, and she was standing at his side, a quiet little ghost of a white-robed figure, with a fair, believing face.

"No," the sweet, serious voice answered him.

"It means 'my little darling,'" he said softly. "Stay; let me fasten it in that ribbon at your throat."

He bent to secure it, and she raised her face a little—the fair girl's face, tender, innocent, truthful; and as the moonshine fell upon its pure gravity, it thrilled him so that everything else was lost to him. He stooped a shade lower; the big, golden mustache brushed her lips—he had kissed her once, twice, thrice.

"Forgive me, little Puritan angel," he whispered; "your sweet eyes were too much for me. Good-night."

And in a minute more she was standing alone, watching his tall, slender form, as he strode down the road, her heart beating in great slow throbs of tremulous happiness and pain.

She carried her mignonette up stairs to the little white bed-room, and laid it between the leaves of her Bible, as if it had been some sacred thing, and then she knelt down in the moonlight, and prayed a tender, girl-like prayer. There was no single doubt or fear in her pure trustfulness.

His sudden, tender kisses could mean only one thing to this young creature, with her quiet life—he loved her—he loved her!

As to Strathspey, he went home with a slight sense of discomfort upon him. Possibly he had made a fool of himself, he began to think, after a few minutes' deliberation. The temptation had been a great one; but, perhaps, after all, it had been rather an indiscreet thing to give way to it. He was not an absolute villain, of course; and the idea that he had probably gone somewhat too far had made him feel slightly uncomfortable.

It was not an impression likely to last long, but still it was there for the time being.

Once or twice during his acquaintance with his rector's daughter, he had actually found himself almost unwisely in earnest; and that he had been unwisely in earnest to-night, cool reflection showed him. A vision of Lady Strathspey rose in his mind, and then—shall I acknowledge it—came the remembrance of the cream-colored letter, with its odor of wood-violets. It was odd how, as this recollection became stronger, his thoughts veered and faltered. Perhaps a few minutes before he had been nearer the dangerous weakness of doing something absurd and romantic, as Lady Strathspey put it, than he had ever been before; but the memory of the odor of wood-violets brought him back to the world of realities. This little creature, with her gentle Puritan ways, was not the woman to be Lady Strathspey, fair and pure as she might be; but Gwendoline Framley was another person. "I am afraid of grand people," Prue had said. Gwendoline would have "cut" the Dowager Duchess of Buccleugh herself, if she had deemed it necessary, as calmly as she would have ignored Mrs. John Smith at a charity ball.

The windows of the Coombe were brightly lighted, he saw, on reaching the lodge-gates, and, on entering the house, he suddenly remembered that his mother had told him that her guest would be likely to arrive at a late hour. It was quite possible that she had arrived a day or so earlier than anticipated. He crossed the hall with a quick sense of expectation, and opened the door.

Yes, she had come. She was standing near a table, turning over a portifolio of engravings, the light shining upon her hand and delicate profile, even the simple posture which she had fallen into showing the perfection of thorough-bred grace, from the turn of sloping shoulders to the sweep of her light dress.

She had been beautiful as a girl of seventeen, he remembered; but at twenty, her beauty had more than fulfilled its promise. Her delicate face had mere repose; every feature was as clear cut as a cameo; her blue-gray, velvet eyes, under their thick lashes, had that almost translucent darkness which no other eyes ever have.

She looked up as he approached, uncertain a moment, and then her face lighted as only a pretty, graceful girl's can.

"I don't think it would be easy for us to have forgotten each other," she said, answering his welcome, by giving him her slender hand. "That month on Lake Geneva would be hard to forget."

It was nothing more than a graceful, idle, girlish speech; but the translucent eyes, and the patrician face made it worth the remembering. Gwendoline Framley belonged to this world of his, which he feared so much, and probably, the first sound of her clear, musical, thorough-bred voice, sealed the fate of the rector's daughter.

He did not call at the Renfrews again that week. As Lady Strathspey had expected, Gwendoline Framley filled his time, and, in a certain graceful fashion, held him at her side. Time did not hang so heavily at the Coombe, after her arrival, he found. A morning spent in the great parlor, with the windows thrown open, the breeze from the sea coming over the hills fresh with an added scent of heather, and the fair face bending over some pretty work, as he read aloud, was not so wearing after all. Gwendoline was possessed of the wonderful gift of listening well—possibly it had been a part of her young ladylike training; but however that was, she certainly acquired the art to perfection. She never spoke at the wrong time, never made remarks unadvisedly, always looked interested, never indifferent. Her interest was a graceful, well-trained, well-cultivated interest, and even when assumed, as in the course of her experience had frequently been unavoidable, it had never betrayed itself. Since she had been "out" she had listened to men who had bored her, and men who bored themselves; but she had always listened well: and now that she had encountered a man who was in no danger of proving tedious, she was naturally very charming. Strathspey found her so in more ways than one. Even the perfect, elaborate toilets, which appeared so adaptedly at all times, with their flower-like freshness, were an additional charm to him. Prue had pleased and amused him. Gwendoline ruled him with her conscious, in-born self-possession; and when such a man is so ruled, by such a woman, his fate is sealed for him. There was no fear of the world's opinion in this case. Gwendoline Framley held her place from her childhood among the very people whom he feared. She had been the most popular belle of her season, and the men who would have snarled at the romance of a marriage with his rector's daughter, would envy him, almost savagely, if he won her for his wife. He was less a hero than anything else, I believe I have said already; and so, letting all these things drift before him idly, he forgot his uncomfortable sense of having done a wrong, and remained at the Coombe, playing the pleasant role of cavalier to his mother's guest, while Prue waited patiently for his coming, and her patient waiting was in vain.

She had heard of the arrival of the expected guest, and made it his excuse. Lady Strathspey would wish him to remain with them, she told herself, and it was but right that he should remain; but still she could not restrain a soft little sigh, at the remembrance of the quietly happy days, when there had been no one to come between them.

She was half afraid, when Sunday morning arrived, at the prospect of meeting this beautiful new comer, and she dressed herself with no small amount of trepidation. The Strathspey pew was not filled when she entered the church; but it was not long before the party from the Coombe made their appearance, and the quiet little figure in the square pew near the pulpit was the first object which met Gwendoline Framley's glance. Prue looked up, and saw her as she followed Lady Strathspey up the aisle, and her first glance at the fair, reposeful face, and transiucent eyes, struck her with a sudden, strange pang, so unlike her usual quiet, that she was almost frightened at it.

The sweet voice was not so clearly ready with the responses this morning, and the sweet face was not so bright. A faint, presageful shadow had fallen upon it. She looked across the church at the beautiful figure, in its rich, elaborate dress, and her heart felt the gulf which lay between their two girlish loves was so wide a one.

She passed out of the little stone porch, just as Strathspey handed his mother's guest into their carriage, and perhaps her first doubt came upon her at that moment. There was something of scarcely to be defined admiration in his eyes, as the girl smiled her grateful thanks—a something Prue had never seen before, and the faint presageful shadow grew deeper, and fell upon her sadly as she turned away.

CHAPTER VII.

The quiet young figure of the rector's daughter stood at the rectory parlor-window, with folded hands, the quiet, young face looking steadily at the hills, fast growing purple in the deepening twilight.

It was not the face which had smiled up at Lord Strathspey, on the Brae, a few months before. There was a slight pallor upon it, the sweet serious mouth had a listless droop, the brown eyes were strained and sad, the fresh untried look was gone.

It was only two months since Strathspey had left her standing in the moonlight, with his kisses on her lips, and yet, in these two short months the curtain had swung slowly upward, and the old, helpless, worn-out tragedy which has been played so often and so cruelly, was beginning to act itself out once more.

There was novel or dramatic in her dawning sorrow. It was only a helpless, vague one—only the skeleton of a plot, without any stage accompaniments to make it startling. It had made no change in her life as yet; there were the same things to be done, and she did them as conscientiously as ever; the same quiet, domestic duties to be performed, and not one of them were neglected; but her contentment in their management was gone. She went about the house with the same gentle attention to the everyday wants, but oftentimes Marjory looked up to see her standing silent and dreamy, faint little lines showing themselves on her white forehead, and her brown eyes fixed [illegible] away.

"I don't think I am very w[illegible], Marjory," she had said once or twice; but she had never acknowledged, even to herself, that there was any cause for the change which had come over her.

She had waited, with trustful patience, at first, not understanding its being possible, that what had seemed the realization of her happiness could be a mockery. She could not believe it in her ignorance, and no shadow of the truth crossed her mind. She had seen Strathspey once or twice since Gwendoline Framley had come to the Coombe; but their short meetings had only left her bewildered, stricken, and wondering. He had called at the rectory, if the truth must be told, in the hopes of stifling an occasional twinge of conscience; but not finding the visits satisfactory, they became fewer and farther between, and in the end, dropped almost entirely. "It must come to an end sometime," he told himself, with a slight recurrence of the sense of discomfort, "and why not now, when there was a not too palpable apology." Every day, with the help of his new enchantment, led him farther away from the memory of the kisses he had stolen from the pure, girlish lips, in the moonlight; and with such a man, the fading of the strongest impression life can leave, is only a question of time. Perhaps she had thought as lightly of them as he had, he tried to persuade himself, and with constant repetition, the argument became sufficiently plausible to be almost believed. "Almost," I say, not quite. So weeks passed, and Prue saw nothing of him, unless with his mother and Gwendoline Framley at church, or driving through the village, and day by day found her awakening to a new dread. She had never dreamed until now that it was very possible that the kisses and tender words had held no meaning, but that the time had passed slowly with him, and that her ignorance and trust had helped it onward. She had made every excuse for his absence which faith could suggest; she had even tried to believe in the old palliation, that it was right that his mother's guest should occupy his time and attention; but now a new feeling was dawning upon her, which as yet she was unable to grasp in all its magnitude.

She was pondering over it, as she waited for her father, this evening. He had gone to the Coombe, a few hours before, at Lady Strathspey's request, on a matter of business, and now Prue was waiting for his return, with an expectation that was almost pain. She scarcely knew why she expected him so eagerly. He knew nothing of her trouble, she fancied, and could tell her nothing; but the fact that he had perhaps heard the careless, indolent voice, and seen the careless face, was enough to thrill her from head to foot.

She waited so eagerly, and with so much of vague anticipation, that when at last the door opened, and her father entered, the face she turned to him was almost feverish in its expectant anxiety.

"I thought you were never coming," she said, with a little flutter in her voice. "Tea has been waiting for an hour, papa."

She was at his side in a moment, ready with the slippers and dressing-gown, with which she never failed. She helped him to put them on as usual, and drew his easy-chair to the fire; but her hand trembled a little as she assisted him to remove his coat, and there was a hot spot of color on her cheek, as she took her place behind the tea-service.

There was never any alteration in her affectionate manner toward him, and she never forgot one thing which might add to his comfort; it would not have been like her to let her trouble reveal itself; but still, in these days, there was a faint, sad feeling of restraint between them. Perhaps it had arisen from their mutual desire to ignore the truth, or perhaps, from their mutual pain; but it was there nevertheless, and in spite of their endeavors to conceal it, ruled them. The innocent childhood was a thing of the past, at least, and each felt it to be so.

The deep lines on the rector's face were deeper this evening than they had ever been, and his grave, resolute mouth had a sadder gravity. Lady Strathspey was a thorough diplomatist, woman as she was, and had known very well what she was saying, when she made her visitor partly her confidant on the subject which was nearest to her heart.

"Coombe-Ashley will scarcely be neglected again, I fancy," she had carelessly said. "If Angus is married, as soon as I hope he will be, I have no doubt he will make it his home, and then of course he will feel his responsibilities."

Her confidence had merely appeared accidental; but it had been sufficiently well arranged, and had at least conveyed that information she intended it should, namely, that her desires were likely to be consummated.

The rector thought over it, as he drank his tea, and glanced at the slight figure before him. He knew enough of the world to understand what her ladyship's speech had meant, and he was thinking of what it might mean to his daughter.

Prue sat at the head of the table, with the spot of color burning on either cheek, and an eager shadow in her eyes. She could not ask him anything. What could she ask? So she waited, with a feverish pain, to hear if he would speak of what he had seen. But when the meal had ended, and he had said nothing, her restlessness grew too much for her.

She went out to Marjory to the kitchen, and gave her orders for the night, and then lingered for a few minutes, half fearing to return to the room. She did not know, poor child, that he feared to see her come.

She went back to the parlor at last, and found her father sitting there in silence, and almost darkness. He had taken his summer seat in the deep old mullioned window, and was watching in the shadowy darkness for the rising of the moon. She went and stood near him, looking out for a few moments in silence, but at last she spoke to him.

"Did you see Miss Framley, papa?" she asked. She did not look at him as she spoke, and the little flutter in her voice made it sound strangely low and unsteady; that it gave her hearer a dull pang.

"Yes," he answered, "and Strathspey, too, Prue."

Her heart beat heavily. It always did beat at the sound of that name; but now its echo forced it to a stronger throb.

In the pause that followed the rector pondered gravely. If she was clinging to any hope, she must be undeceived, and who but himself could undeceive her. She was too young to feel the pain long, after the first wrench was over; but it had been her first young dream, and the pang must be a strong one which tore it from her. He did not understand that, young as she was, this quiet girlish romance of hers might be as hard to kill as the romance of a woman. He pitied her; but he pitied her as the innocent child he had loved, whose childhood was now lo t to her. He had not wakened to the full truth yet. "Poor little bairn," he said to himself, and then glanced upward at the slight figure in the shadow, with its face to the window.

"She is a very beautiful girl, this Miss Framley, Prue," he said, at last.

"Yes, papa," she answered, without moving.

"Lady Strathspey was telling me to-night," he went on steadily, "t[illegible] she had hopes that she would hold his lordship at Coombe-Ashley. I have no doubt she will, when they are married, as I think they will be."

The slender figure stirred faintly, but very faintly, and then Prue made her reply.

"It will be better for Coombe-Ashley," she said, slowly.

He had not anticipated that she would display any great emotion, but he had expected to see more than this. It almost relieved him, and his fancy that her youth would make her pain lighter for her, returned to him with more of reassurance than it had offered before, and made him speak more cheerfully.

"Yes," he said. "It will be better for Coombe-Ashley, and better for all of us. Miss Framley is a very fitting Lady Strathspey."

Prue made no reply. She stood silently watching the clouds brighten above the hill-tops as the moon rose. She was thinking steadily of the one thing.

The rector rose from his seat at last. It would be best to leave her alone, he thought.

"I have some work to do," he said to her, "so I must go to my room. Good-night, Prue."

"Good-night, papa," she answered steadily, and then he left her.

She did not stir after he was gone, and she found herself alone. The moon was just flooding the rowan-trees with its shining light, and she watched it movelessly, and in silence.

Men had amused themselves with women often before, as women had amused themselves with men; other women had awakened from foolish, tender, delicious dreams of happiness; but few women had ever awakened with such a shock, leaving behind in the past so much of innocent faith and ignorant trust as this poor little desolate Prue. Until she morning she had met Gwendoline Framley in church, she had never dreamed that the wide difference between herself and her lover could be an obstacle; she had thought of nothing but her love, and this love had been so girlish, so trusting, so pure. She saw it all now. She had been led on blindly to this end, while he—she stopped here, remembering the handsome, careless face, and the eyes which had smiled her down. Her heart began to beat wildly; it was only a girl's heart, and the handsome face and smiling eyes had won it from the first. She could not blame him yet—a woman might have done so, a girl never. I almost think that if it had been possible to blot out all the remembrance, with all its present and uture pain, she would have chosen to keep the memory, rather than stand where she had stood twelve months before, losing the recollection of the blonde, cavalier face, and the great thrills of foolish bliss it had brought her. There were so many memories. There, upon the hearth, he had kissed her hand the night she wore the white fuchsias in her hair; here, at this window, she had waited a hundred times, only to see him pass by with his gun over his shoulder; the box of mignonette still bloomed upon the sill; the faded, little brown sprig lay between the leaves of her Bible up stairs, and this moment she felt the touch of the great golden mustache upon her lips, and heard his footfall ring upon the walk as he passed out in the moonlight. Would he never come back again. Perhaps not. She found herself imagining blindly how the old life would seem when she returned to it, and looking forward, with a great shuddering pang, to the time when Miss Framley would come to the Coombe as Lady Strathspey, and sit in the velvet-hassocked pew, week after week. She could go no farther than that, without the wild heart-beating, and she slipped upon her knees before the empty basket-chair, flinging up her arms—she was so crushed, so stricken.

The shadow of the trouble had been upon her so long, with its constant torture of changing hopes and fears, that she was too weak to bear it. Now it was becoming more than a shadow, and she felt her strength drifting away from her, so she knelt. The helpless, hopeless wearing had been too much for her.

She rose at last. It would not do to remain there any longer, she told herself, and she must go to her room. She heard Marjory moving about in the kitchen for an hour, making preparations for retiring, and she went out to her, as she always did, to bid her good-night.

But at the kitchen door she paused, strangely dazzled by the light, and Marjory looked up at her to see her wavering, with white lips.

"Don't call papa, Marjory," she said, helplessly. "Please don't call papa;" and the next instant Marjory had caught her as she fell.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Strathspey sat in one of the parlors of the Coombe with a faint shadow of anxiety on her handsome, well-preserved features. She had just returned from church with her son and their visitor, and she was pondering, one might have fancied from her expression, upon a subject which caused her some misgivings. She was a worldly woman, this Lady Strathspey, but at her coldest and worldliest, she was never a hard-hearted one; and for the last few weeks something of distrust had been creeping over her before perfect contentment. It was a shade deeper than usual this morning, and it showed itself in her handsome eyes, and in her handsome Strathspey face, with its patrician Saxon features, and last it reached—

"Did you notice little Miss Renfew this morning, Gwendoline?" she asked.

Gwendoline was interested at once. She always did notice little Miss Renfrew, and had always noticed her from the first; the brown-eyed face of the rector's daughter had touched her heart the morning she had caught sight of it under the plain little straw hat in the square pew, and she had a girl's sympathy for it.

"Yes," she answered. "How pale she was, Lady Strathspey. She looked positively ill, I thought, poor little creature."

"She looked very ill," said her ladyship, decidedly, the shadow deepening upon her countenance. "I must go and see her."

She had been watching the rector's daughter keenly during the last month or so, and the result of her scrutiny was not very satisfactory. Naturally, she had told herself, the girlish face would lose something of its brightness under the dispelling of this first romance. She had seen girls grow pale before now, when an unpractical fancy had been overruled by wiser and more matronly heads; but in her experience the fancy had always died away in no great length of time, and in the end its death had come to be regarded as a natural and fortunate result. But here was something new—something new enough to trouble her. The shadowy sadness in the girl's face was deeper than she cared to see; and there was nothing of the atmosphere of girlish sentiment about it which, in most cases, with its slight tinge of love-lorn ludicrousness, generally counteracts the outsider's sympathy. In their drives they often met her carrying the little basket and the well-worn Bible which the pensioners knew so well; and she always returned their greeting with the sweet gravity which was naturally her own; but the faint pallor was a faint one no longer, and the slender fingure looked a thought more slender; and as the summer advanced, Lady Strathspey found herself feeling strangely anxious.

She was not a hard-hearted woman, as I have said, in spite of her very natural weaknesses, and Prue had always possessed a great attraction for her. She had liked her simple, innocent ways, and had warmly admired the unfailing sweetness which made the girl such a favorite with the poorer class. Her childlike faithfulness to her duty had touched her ladyship's heart, and her constant care and affection for her father had often drawn a sigh form her in its contrast with her own idol's amiable indifference. In fact, she had come as near cherishing a sort of well-trained affection for her as was in accordance with her nature.

This morning she had been almost startled, the face under the little straw hat had looked so worn, and, contrasted with the great dark eyes, so strange in its pure pallor. Was it possible that the consequences of her discreet diplomacy were to be more serious than she had imagained? Of course, she could not have acted otherwise than she had done under the circumstances, but she did not like to encounter such a probability.

Accordingly, the next day found her full of her resolution of paying a visit to the Rectory.

"If there is really as much harm done as I can't help fearing," she said to herself as she entered the carriage, "I may possibly repair it somewhat by sending Angus away. Girls always forget in time, and absence will work wonders."

She did not find either Prue or the rector at home, but as there was some probability that their absence would not be a long one, she decided to wait a short time. Marjory was there at least, and might possibly serve her purpose even better than any one else, and in some sort she did.

But Marjory was not fond of Lady Strathspey at the best of times, and she was less partial to her than ever in these days. She was quick enough, in her Scotch shrewdness, to understand that the delicate immaculately-gloved hand, which rested on the table as her visitor talked to her, had not been wholly idle in the final turn of the game, and the knowledge did not detract from her naturally uncompromising manner. She had watched every new shade of pallor on the pretty, quiet face she had held against her faithful bosom in its babyhood; she had understood the dreamy listlessness which had settled upon it, and she had understood also what its beginning had been, and where its end would drift to. So she did not prove very sparing, as she thought over the matter, and replied to her visitor's well-bred sympathetic questions.

"I was sorry to see that your young mistress did not look very well yesterday, Marjory," her ladyship said, at length.

"She was na weel, my leddy," answered Marjory, unbendingly. "I canna say she often is weel now, puir young thing!"

"I hope it is nothing serious," said Lady Strathspey. "I should be sorry to believe that Miss Renfrew is a dear little thing and we cannot afford to lose her."

"Her father canna afford to lose her, my leddy," Marjory replied, with an uncompromising face; but if she dinna mend, I'm e'en of the mind he will. Her mither lies in the kirk-yard. She was na much aulder than Prue, an' she was happy wi' the man she luved. There's a taint o' consumption in the Renfrew bluid, your leddyship, and sorrow aye helps it to its work."

The immaculately-gloved hand was drawn from the table with a slight start.

"You surely do not mean it is so bad as that!" her ladyship exclaimed.

"I mean naething else," returned Marjory, sternly. "Prue Renfrew's heart is broken, your leddyship, and Angus, Laird Strathspey, has broken it. I'm but a puir body, but I speak my mind in that."

There was no use in diplomacy now. This straight-forward strong Scotchwoman, a hireling as she was, had gone to the point at once, and her ladyship was fain to follow. She had not intended doing so, it is true, but she was a sensible woman, her pride to the contrary, and since her difficulty had faced her, she met it in a matter-of-fact way.

She waved her gloved hand to Marjory with quiet decision.

"Sit down," she said, practically. "I am anxious to talk to you about that. I have feared this before."

"I can stan' as weel, my leddy," was the good woman's dry reply; so her visitor was obliged to pursue her conversation, looking up at the square figure and square face as her listener stood before her.

"I have feared this," she said again. "I have feared it from the first, and I tried to prevent it. How long has it been going on?"

"From the first week that Lord Strathspey came to Coombe-Ashley," grimly. "He wasted no time."

"And you think that this is the cause of your young lady's illness?"

"I did na say I thought it was."

"You are sure, then," said Lady Strathspey, a trifle impatiently. "I regret to hear it—extremely; but I hope you are mistaken in supposing the consequences to be so serious. It is very natural you should be anxious. I am anxious myself. My son has acted imprudently, of course; but men are not apt to be cautious. I only see one way out of the difficulty. He has thought of returning to London with Miss Framley—and I dare say that it is best that he should do so. I shall certainly encourage the idea, and after that we can only hope for the best. Miss Renfrew is very young, and I have no doubt she will get over it." (Observe, my readers, that her ladyship was not exempt from the popular belief that grief may be got over.)

Still, in spite of this belief, her face was not quite clear when her call had ended, and the footman closed her carriage-door upon her. The square, uncompromising form and dry voice had shaken her self-possession somewhat, though she did not deign to acknowledge it.

She sent for her son shortly after reaching the Coombe, and he came to her morning-room to find her standing by the low marble mantel-piece, resting a full, shapely arm upon it, and looking both disturbed and annoyed.

To tell the truth, her ladyship had had a love affair herself a score of years ago or so—a very romantic love affair, with a handsome, empty-pocketed, titileless "detrimental," who, but for discreet maternal interposition, might have carried the day; and though this love affair ended as most of such romances do, she had still a recollection of its ephemeral sadness, which softened her heart toward this girl, who was undergoing a like experience.

She turned her head slightly as Strathspey came in, and motioned him to a chair.

"I want to talk to you, Angus," she said, "sit down, if you please."

CHAPTER IX.

He threw himself in a chair, carelessly, in his usual indolent, yet graceful fashion. It was characteristic of the man that he could not look ungraceful.

"Gwendoline is alone," he said, half smiling, "You will excuse me for mentioning it."

But her ladyship did not smile.

"I want to speak seriously to you, she began. "I am rather anxious this morning—I have been to the Rectory."

He looked up, coloring a little.

"I—don't understand you," he said, a trifle confusedly

"I ask pardon for contradicting you, Angus," said her ladyship, drily, "but I think you do. There is no need for attempting to ignore this matter now. It has gone too far. You have done an absurd thing, and its consequences are more serious than you anticipated."

His color deepened almost to scarlet.

"Is that what your visit to the Rectory has taught you?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "I have been watching the affair for weeks, and this morning I went to the Rectory to inquire into it, as well as I could. No one was at home but the old servant,—rather a presuming old creature, by the way, faithful as she is,—and I discovered that my fears were not groundless. The girl's health is suffering. Of course, it is out of the question to suppose that you could have married her, Angus—and you were fully cognizant of it. Why did you not take my advice? She was a good little thing, and contented and happy enough before."

His thoughts went back to the innocent brown eyes, which had been upraised to his that first morning on the hill-side, and he he flung himself from his seat, and came to the mantel with a gloomy expression.

"If it were not for Gwendoline, I would marry her now," he said, half savagely. "I have made a rascal of myself, I admit, but I was bored into it. Confound Coombe-Ashley!"

"If it were not for Gwendoline you would do no such thing," said his mother, with a clear decisiveness. "There is one thing you can do, however. You can go away. I am sorry for the girl, and I blame you strongly. If a woman had committed herself in the manner you have done, the whole world would have been up in arms at her reckless folly. I don't want any scandal to arise; and I think it would be better for all parties concerned, if you returned to London with Gwendoline. Girls outlive these sort of things; and I have no doubt this one will overcome herself in time."

It was an easy way out of a difficulty certainly, and not an unpleasant one. Even Coombe-Ashley had been rendered bearable with Gwendoline Framley's assistance, and surely London would be worth the trying at her side. She had overruled his fickle fancy for the rector's daughter; she had, now and then, almost overruled his remembrance of her, so he found it not so difficult a matter to persuade himself that his mother was right in saying that Prue would live her girlish trouble down. Besides, he was in earnest now, and was desirous of having his fate decided.

To be continued.

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Consumers' Gas Company—Cellar floor and roof (see testimonial).
Dr. Larratt Smith—Stable and coach-house.
W. H. Pearson, Esq., Manager of Consumers' Gas Company's Works, Sherbourne-street—Stable and coach-house.
The Corporation, City of Toronto—About 12 miles of sidewalk.
Queen-street, north side, west of subway.
Horticultural Gardens.
Mrs. Dorsay, 153 York-street—Sidewalk and cellar.
Mr. Murphy, N.E. corner King and Power-streets—Sidewalk.
Opposite 278-282 King-street east—Sidewalk.
Toronto Fire Department, No. 1 Fire Hall, Lombard-street—Stable floors.
Osgoode Hall Grounds—Sidewalks and court yard, superintended by H. G. Storm, Esq., Architect.
Davis Brewery Company—Cellar floor and driving-shed.
O'Keefe & Co.—Watertight floors, etc.
D. Roberts, Esq., Architect—Stable and court yards.
H. H. Williams, Esq.—Cellar and billiard room floor.
Robert Gilray, Esq., Spencer-avenue—Cellar.
Ald. Goulnlock—Cellar.
Mr. Jones, Engineer's Department, City Hall—Cellar.
Mr. Anderson, Medical Body Rooms—Cellar.
Mr. Cook, Druggist, Yonge-street—Cellar.
Ex-Ald. Dafoe, Dundas-street—Sidewalk.
Smith & Gemmel, Architects—Coach-house and stable.
D. B. Dick, Esq., Architect—Coach-house and stable.
Kennedy & Hewland, Architects—Cellar floor and sidewalks.
Rice, Lewis & Son, Toronto-street—Sidewalk.
Elliott House, corner Church and Shuter-streets—Sidewalk and cellar.
And many other names too numerous to mention.

What the Consumers' Gas Company Say About It.

TORONTO, March 20, 1889

Messrs. Bryce Bros., Toronto:
Dear Sirs:
Replying to your favor of the 19th inst., I have pleasure in stating that the "Bryce's Patent Asphalt Pavement" laid by you in this Company's Purifying House at the Works, and in the yard and cellar at the Company's offices, Toronto-street, in December last, has given entire satisfaction. That laid in the yard has been exposed to the rain, snow and frost during the winter and has not cracked at all, and seems to be quite as good as when laid down. This pavement is also laid above the cellar and has proved perfectly water-tight, not allowing any moisture whatever to penetrate through into the cellar, although wet snow has been allowed to remain on it for a considerable time.
Yours truly,
W. H. PEARSON,
General Manager and Secretary.

What Dr. Strange Says About It.

218 SIMCOE-STREET, TORONTO, May 16, 1889.

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Gentlemen,
The Asphalt flooring laid by your firm last year in my stables and coach-house has given me great satisfaction. It appears to be perfectly durable, does not absorb fluids and in consequently always sweet and clean. Another good feature it possesses is that it never becomes slippery. I do not see how it is possible to have a more satisfactory flooring for stables.
Yours very truly,
FREDERICK W. STRANGE.

What Architect D. B. Dick Says About It.

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Dear Sirs,
Replying to yours of yesterday in reference to the stable floor which you laid for me some time ago with your pavement, I have pleasure in saying that when I last saw it—which was after it had been in use about four months—it appeared to be standing very well indeed, even the sharp winter calks having made very little impression on it.
Yours truly,
D. B. DICK, Architect.

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