OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

I sat by the fire last night,
And the flames were flickering low;
The shadows that glanced on the chamber wall
Grew paler and softer, and faded all
In the ashy glow;
And the sober bill like a funeral pall
That is white with Winter's snow.

I thought of the years long faded,
Of the love which had burned so brightly,
Which had glowed with a flame so bright and strong,
It had blinded and dazzled my grasp at song,
And flooded the world in light;
Which I thought—Ah, fool!—would endure so long
And crumbled to dust in a night.

I thought of the lonely withdrawal,
Of the long and sunless years of pain;
Of the bold brow darkened which once was fair;
Of the tresses I had been so proud to wear;
Of that form—I had been proud to stain,
Of the heart of black despair.

And forgiveness given in vain.

I thought of the baby branches,
Of the soft cheek nestled to mine,
Of the dear little feet that knew no rest,
And the drowsy coolings on mother's breast,
And the eyes whose liquid shine
Had melted their hale as the velvet lips preat
To the passionate pain of mine.

And up in my heart's great silence
Rose a terrible cry: "Alone!
Not only today, but evermore
Till thy lees have struck the Eternal shore,
And I think the hurry of life is done,
And the cross that Jesus carried before,
Is laid at the foot of the throne."

And gazing out in the moonlight
Where the graves of my loved ones lay,
I thought how far in the divine of God's holy angels were watching there;
And a whisper seemed to say,
"What he hath taken beyond thy care
Was in mercy taken away.

"If thou, His child, hast forgiven
Through the sacrament of thy love,
Think, whose mercy is perfect, how much more
All the wrongs are deeper than thy wrongs are,
That mercy is ready to pardon
For the white lambs and the fallen star
As His treasures calls to shore.

—*Then. Gift, in Cassell's Magazine.*

A STRANGE WORLD

By MISS BRADDON.

CHAPTER III.

GLAMOUR.

The supper at the Waterfowl was a success. Everyone, except perhaps Clissold, was in the humour to be pleased with everything, and even Clissold could not find it in his heart to make himself unkeasingly disagreeable amidst such a harmless, gaysey as childishly simple. To an actor supper after the play is just the one evening delight of life—that glimpse of paradise upon earth which we all get in some shape or other—a supper at a comfortable lodging like the Waterfowl, where the landlord knew how to do things in good style for a customer who could pay the piper. In this northern district there was a liberal plenty, a bounteous wealth of provisions hardly known elsewhere. Tea at Horsham meant dinner and supper and breakfast rolled into one. Supper at Eborsham, meant alderman's turtle-fowls, and a smoking hecatomb of roast beef, and a smoking hecatomb of sa, lobsters smelling among crisp green lettuces, pigeon-pie, cucumbers, tarts, and, last these lobster-pies should fall to satisfy appetite, a lordly cold sirloin by way of *corpse* to the feast, and a stiff jug of foaming bitter like Bincher at Waterloo.

Mr. Bumpson made himself the life of the party. The small melancholy man who had bewailed the decline of the drama vanished altogether at sight of that plentifully furnished supper-table, and in his place appeared a jovial man, the first waiter—as James Pewyn thought, at any rate, as he laughed "with youth's silver-clear laughter," at the low comedian's jokes. Even Miss Pewyn was sprightly, though she had a worm lodged in her heart, and a sharp pang in her breast—the pang of a woman who has loved, and knows that her love is unrequited, and feels that the man she loves is not worth the pang she feels for him. Clissold, tall and straight and severe-looking.

"I heard the cathedral clock a few minutes ago, as we came along, and it was time. If Mr. Elgood wants his daughter, he can come for her himself," replied James.

Mr. Pewyn was sitting at the table opposite his mentor, and he felt that now was the time for boldness.

Mr. Elgood and Mr. Dempson came stroling out into the garden, cigars in their mouths, and Mr. Pewyn's daughter was instantly sacrificed at the altar of hospitality.

"Julia, my dear, Mr. Dempson has asked the heavy father, with accents that had a bugle sound—one syllable gilding gentle into mellow—and Julia, with a blush, a sweetness and affection, though indication.

"Yes, Papa," she replied, with a sigh, innocently. "It's so beautiful out here."

"Beautiful!" echoed the father, thickly. "Look how that flow of heaven is all of a twinkle with—what's its name—of bright gold. Come, Jemmy—Jemmy—where's my hat and shawl. Mrs. Dempson has been fast asleep for the last half hour. But look! the moon, the moon, is rising over the roofs of the *dew* of you high eastern hill, which reminds me that we have nearly a mile to walk before we get home.

"I'll go with you," said James. "I want to arrange about lessons—I mean I want to say a jolly party for the coach. I'll get a coach-and-six, and we'll all go."

"I haven't seen a race in any thing like comfort for the last fifteen years," responded Mr. Elgood.

"We'll make a day of it; Clissold and I will come down overnight, in the evening."

"Make your own engagements, if you please, James, and allow me to make mine," said Mr. Dempson, with a frown. "I shall not race to-morrow—or if I do, it will be by myself, and on Sunday. I shall not go to the theatre in the evening."

"Please yourself," answered James, offhand.

They were all ready by this time. Mrs. Dempson had been awakened, and shaken out of the delusion that she had been sitting on the sofa in her own lodgings, and assured that supper was ready, and that she had a mile or so to walk before she could obtain refreshment. Mrs. Dempson had had finished his cigar, and accepted a few dollars during the homeward walk. Julia had put on her hat, and looked her best; and James was in the best of spirits.

The party broke at the door of Humphrey Clissold, who was but one stage from Pewyn's, and cut with them, and gave his hand to James, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. They walked on in front, the other three straggling after them—walked arm-in-arm, and talked in the moonlight, the long murmur of the river sounding near, the stream shining in the moon, and when Madge Bellingham sat before it, girl and piano made a cabinet picture of the highest order.

"People know we are out at allows," Madge said to her father, when they reached housekeeping in Cavendish Row. "If we have expensive furniture, every one will be sure we have paid for it, and if we just we carry out my lease, the bills will be so much that you can pay them at your ease.

"I can give the fellows something on account, at any rate," replied Sir Nugent.

Lady Bellingham was the mother of Madge of Viola, the second daughter, and Sir Nugent lived the life of a bachelor, for the most part in other people's houses, while his girls were in his sister's nursery or at school. Very thin and pale, Madge was, but a very lovely womanhood—for good looks were hereditary in the Bellingham family—Sir Nugent loved his children upon him to provide them with a home; so he took the house in Cavendish Row, and brought home the Bellingham bric-a-brac, which had been left him by the aforesaid aunts and uncles, and lodged at the Pantechicon pending his settlement in the world. Madge housekeeping at five-and-forty years of age, and gave his little dinners in the drawing-room, instead of at one or other of his clubs, and cherished high hopes of seeing his daughters handsomely married off before by.

"I think you have seen enough of what it is to be tormented by a set of hairpins to teach you the value of money, Madge," said Sir Nugent one morning, pointing to a small heap of letters which he had just now opened and dismissed with a glance. The tenor ies in question were his creditors, who expressed an unwarrantable eagerness for something more "on account."

"With your knowledge of life, you are not likely to marry a pauper," pursued Sir Nugent, dipping into a Strasburg pie.

"No, papa, not with my knowledge of life," answered Madge, with over so slight an upward curl of the firm lip. Miss Bellingham frodily loved her father, but it is possible that respect may have been somewhat lessened by her experience of that financial mind, in which she like to speak.

Two or three evenings before the night which made James Pewyn acquainted with the behind the scenes of a small provincial theatre, Sir Nugent Bellingham gave one of his snug little dinners—a dinner of eight—a dinner of eight, including his sister, Lady Cheshunt, one of the most exalted matrons in the great world, kept the Mases Bellingham from boarding-school, and their pet protegee, whose praises she was never tired of sounding among the angels of the earth. Mr. Albert Noyce, a distinguished art and literature, supplied the salt of the banquet. He was a small, mild-looking man, with a pretty, unoffending wife, and lived on reputation gained during the London season. Mr. Shinobar, the famous barrister, made a fourth; Lord George Balcrom, a West of England man, a gourmand, and, in so far as after-dinner talk went, a mighty hunter, was the fifth; and Sir Nugent and his two daughters completed the circle.

After dinner there was to be an evening party, and before the small hours of the morning a great many famous people would have dropped in at the corner house in Cavendish Row.

The ladies have retired, leaving Sir Nugent and his dinner friends to talk about law, and horses, and the last new burlesque actress, as they draw closer in to the dainty round table, where the glass sparkles and the deep-hued bloomers brighten under the flame of wax-lights in the centre chandelier.

Viola and Lady Cheshunt go up stairs arm in arm, the girl nestling affectionately against the substantial shoulder of the portly matron. Mrs. Noyce trips lightly after these two, and Madge follows alone, with a grave brow, and that lofty air which so well becomes Sir Nugent Bellingham's elder daughter.

Madge have sisters been less alike than these two. Viola is a blonde, a delicate alabaster, hair the colour of raw silk—pleasant flaxen hair—which Nature has given to a crown of pale gold upon the top of her small head; eyes of liquid turquoise blue; a figure a thought too slim, but full perfect in of grace in every movement and attitude; look and bearing that unconsciously either gather a girl to be put under a glass case, or should admire the younger Miss Bellingham upon the Lady Cheshunt's "young ladies." Madge, one of the magnates of society, is a brunette; hair almost black, and with a natural ripple; complexion a rich olive, through which the warm Italian blood with nature's peerless carmine; eyes darker than Viola's, and with a dreamy look, which clearly out as a profile on an old Roman medal; figure tall and commanding—a woman to the manner born, and with the outward, a woman with the stuff in her to make a general, Sir Nugent was wont to boast. But although of a hotter temper than the generality of women, there was no hardness about Madge Bellingham. Her love or her anger was alike strong. For habs she was too noble.

The rooms were deliciously cool, the light somewhat subdued, the windows open to the moonlight and perfume. There was light enough in the small front drawing-room to make it an in-door garden.

The dowager seated herself upon the most comfortable sofa in this room, a capacious, square-backed sofa, in a dark corner, and faced off and sheltered by a well-filled *jardiniere*.

"Come here, Madge," she cried, with good-natured imperiousness; "I want to talk to you. Sit there, child, and amuse yourself with Mrs. Noyce. Show her your photograph album, or *parlez chiffons*. I want to talk to your father."

Madge obeyed without a word, and squeezed herself into the corner of the sofa, which Lady Cheshunt and Lady Cheshunt's dress almost filled.

"Now, my dear, I want to speak to you, and receive them, and leave me in my corner. Mr. Pewyn is to be here, I've no doubt.

"I don't know. He knows that Saturday is our night.

"Mr. Charcelli Pewyn," announced a footman at the door of the large room.

"I thought so," said Lady Cheshunt; "and the first to arrive, too. That looks suspicious."

CHAPTER V.

CHURCHILL PEWYN.

Churchill Pewyn was one of those men who are sure to obtain a certain amount of notoriety wherever they appear. He was a man upon whom the stamp of good blood and good breeding was set in the clear and palpable manner; a man who had no fear of self-assertion.

It would have been difficult for any one to state in what the direction lay. He was not particularly good-looking. Intellect rather than regularity of feature was the leading characteristic of his countenance. Already, though he was still on the sunward side of his thirtieth birthday, the dark brown hair grew thinly upon the broad high brow, showing signs of premature baldness. His features were sharp-cut, but by no means faultless, the mouth somewhat sensual, the lips thin. His light gray eyes had a keen, cold lustre—only those who saw Churchill Pewyn in some rare moment of softer feeling knew that those nerves onto could be beautiful. Mr. Pewyn was a barrister, still in the subsill stage of his career. He got an occasional brief, went the circuit assiduously, and did a little in the literature of politics—a hard, dry kind of literature, but fairly remunerative when he got it to do it. He had contributed hard-headed statistical papers to the *Edinburgh* and the *Westminster*, and knew a good deal about the condition of the operative classes. He had lectured in some of the northern manufacturing towns, and knew the Black Country by heart. People talked of him as a young man who was sure to make his mark by-and-by; but by-and-by might be a long way off. He would be fifty years of age, perhaps, before he had worked his way to the front.

Churchill Pewyn went a great deal into society, when it is considered how hard and how laboriously he worked; but the house in which he was to be found was always house affected by the best people. He was a man wanted himself among second-rate circles. He was too intellectual—too much inclined to doubt the truth of all it cleverly, though he had hardly the faculty of distinguishing one from from another; and his lips were always rode like a centaur; spoke three Continental languages perfectly. It was his misfortune that no man should presume to enter society who could not do everything that society expected him to do. Society expected very little in itself, according to Churchill Pewyn, but it did expect that it to himself to be admired and respected.

"I see a good many men who go into the world to amuse themselves and amuse others," said Churchill. "If I couldn't do my share of amusing, I should spend my evenings in my own den."

Churchill Pewyn went into the gay world because it was the fashion for a man of his family and position to do so. Society was his element, and he was a man who must be needed to be happy. He was never in a hurry. He was never in a hurry. He was never in a hurry