

"Pray look here," said I; "this won't do at all. If you don't cheer up, you will have a fit of illness; we must put that off, at all events, until there is some one with a legitimate right to nurse you. We will go and have a spin the river, cut this place after luncheon, take the two o'clock train to Maidenhead, and have some dinner at old Blanchard's."

"Who is old Blanchard? A friend of yours?"

"Well, yes," I replied; "he keeps a wonderful river-side public—I beg his pardon, hotel—between Maidenhead and Windsor: the great place for resort for Eton boys, and anybody who wants a good and quite dinner. That same good and quiet dinner we will have, and when I bring you back at night, I will guarantee you being fifty per cent, better. Or we will sleep there, for the matter of that; though old Blanchard is so well known, that his rooms are generally full."

No sooner said than done. We caught the two o'clock train, got into one of Bond's boats at Maidenhead Bridge, and pulled to Blanchard's intending just to go ashore, order dinner, and finish our row.

But when we got on the lawn, old Blanchard came out to meet us, and he is by far too an important a man to be dismissed in a hurry. So we had to listen to all his talk, of what sort of a season he had had, and what number of distinguished visitors—called for the most part by their Christian or nick names—had patronized him. "House is full now," "Poss Seymour and Mrs. Poss, Charley Tankerville, Fox Farquhar, Mossop, and Pouter Peyton.

"I suppose the Seymours have got the two little rooms on the ground floor?" said I.

"No, they have not," said Blanchard; "Mrs. Poss wanted them very much, but they were taken. A loving pair came down here early this very day."

"Is she pretty?" asked Piers, mechanically. Poor fellow! he had scarcely spoken since we started.

"Well, that is a matter of taste," said old Blanchard; "there is a good deal of her, there is no denying that; but you will be able to judge for yourselves, they have been out for a row with Sam the waterman, and here they are, just coming back to dinner."

I looked back as he spoke towards the landing-place, and turning quickly round, said to Piers Bulteel, "My boy, you shall marry Miss Marchmont yet."

"How said he, striving to look over my shoulder.

"Leave that to me," said I, facing him about, and purposely obstructing his view.

"Now Blanchard, hand us that bitter ale; I will give you the orders about dinner in a few minutes."

As we were drinking the ale I made some excuse to Piers, left him in the bar talking to old Blanchard, and slipped away. I knew the way to the two little rooms on the ground floor too well to require any guide, so I scuttled down the passage, turned to my left, and opened the door on the right, and was in the sitting-room in an instant; There were two persons seated at the table, engaged in discussing some spring soup; one of them was Mr. Nagpore, of Hampstead, the other was a lady with very large black eyes, and a gacat deal of swarthy flowing hair, a remarkable profile, and a complexion like the back of a looking-glass. I looked hard at her, and my theatrical experience stood me in stead. I recognized Miss Bella Mortimer, of one of the Theatres Royal. The instant Mr. Nagpore set eyes upon me his face fell.