

One Night's Mystery.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

Bertie's good looks and Chesterfieldian manners were magnificently praised. Sydney's improved, pretentious eloquently commented on. Then the party became general. They played croquet, they played billiards, and did both with such gay laughter and tumult that they penetrated even to the drawing-room, where the elderly lady sat, raising a smile on their sober faces.

Star Island was proposed as a matter of course, but Bertie Vaughan protested against it. They were very well off as they were—he always believed it was a good maxim to let well enough alone. So the idea was given up, and the difficulty tidied over.

Let us take a walk on the beach, then, said Sydney, who loved the sea; it is an hour now till dinner time and the water does look so calm and lovely.

They all went down—Sydney and the Meers. Sunderland leading the way, Bertie and the Misses Sunderland following. It was lovely; the soft salt waves came lapping to their very feet, a faint breeze rippled the steely surface of the Atlantic, boats floated over like birds, and Star Island lay like a green gem in its blue bosom. The elder Mr. Sunderland had brought a telescope, by the aid of which the revellers could be seen making merry afar off.

They're the theatre people from Wyckcliffe, Mr. Sunderland said, adjusting the glass for Miss Owens. And a lot of young fellows for Miss Owens. That's Dolly De Courcy's school-shawl for a docet, and that's her black plume. It reminds one of the man in the poem—Dolly's school feather is sure to be in the thickest of the fun.

And 'mid the thickest carnage blazed the helmet of Bismarck.

Who's Dolly De Courcy? asked Sydney; and Bertie Vaughan's guilty heart gave a jump, and then stood still.

Oh! a pretty black-eyed actress from New York. Very jolly girl—ah, Vaughan? You know, I think, Mr. Sunderland the elder.

In an instant—how Bertie did curse his fatal complexion in his heart—the red tide of guilt had mounted to his eyes. Both the Sunderlands laughed, a malicious laugh, Sydney looked surprised, and the younger Miss Sunderland, who was only sixteen and didn't know much, said:

Law! look how Bertie's blushing!

I—I know Miss De Courcy—that is, slightly, said Bertie, feeling that everybody was looking at him, and that he was expected to say something. At which answer the two Mr. Sunderlands laughed more than ever, and only stopped short at a warning from Miss Sunderland the elder, and a wondering one from Sydney.

See! they're going home, they're putting off in two boats, cried Miss Susie Sunderland, holding her hand over one eye, and squinting through the glass with the other. Oh, I can see them just as plain! one, two, three, four, oh! a dozen of them. There's the red shawl, and black feather, too, and there's Ben! yes, it is, Ben Ward, Mamie, helping her in. They've—she've sat down, and oh! goodness, he's put his arm around her waist; he, he, he! giggled Miss Susie.

Perhaps you would like to look, Mamie? said the wicked elder brother, taking the glass from Susie and presenting it with much politeness to his elder sister whose turn it had been to redden at Susie's words. For the perfidious Benjamin Ward, Esquire, had been 'paying attention' to Miss Mamie Sunderland, very markedly indeed, before that wicked little fellow of men, Dolly De Courcy, had come along to demoralize him.

No, thank you, Miss Sunderland responded, her eyes slightly flashing, her tone slightly acidulated; the going on of a crowd of actors and actresses don't interest me. Mr. Vaughan, just see those pretty sea-anemones; please get me some.

Mr. Vaughan goes for the sea anemones with her, and Miss Mamie becomes absorbed in them, suspiciously absorbed, indeed, but all the same she covertly watches that coming boat with bitterness of heart. Alarm is mingled with Mr. Vaughan's bitterness, and as the boat draws nearer and nearer, he rather nervously proposes that they shall go back; the wind is blowing chilly; Miss Mamie may take cold.

I never take cold, Miss Mamie answers shortly. I prefer staying here. So they stay, and the boat draws nearer and nearer. Sydney, with an interest she cannot define, watches it through the glass adjusted upon Harry Sunderland's shoulder. They have a glass, too; the gentleman who sits beside the scarlet shawl and black feather fixes it for his companion, and she gazes steadily at the shore.

Still they drew nearer. Does Ben Ward do it (he is steering) with malice prepense? They come within five yards. No need of glasses now. Dolly De Courcy is sitting very close beside Ben Ward, laughing and flirting, and she looks straight at Bertie Vaughan, who takes off his hat, and never sees him. Mr. Ward elevates his chapeau politely to the Misses Sunderland, which salutation Miss Mamie, with freezing dignity, returns.

Pretty Dolly gave you the cut direct, Vaughan? says the elder Sunderland, enjoying largely his discomfiture. Harry Sunderland is a manly fellow himself, and has a thorough-going contempt for insipid dandy Bertie; for else she has suddenly grown shortsighted.

But Bertie is on guard now, and his face tells nothing, as Sydney wonderingly looks at it. For he recognized the handsome, dark girl in the scarlet shawl as the same she encountered walking late last evening with somebody that looked so suspiciously like Bertie.

The water party float away in the distance, Miss De Courcy singing one of her high, sweet stage songs as they go. As it dies out into the sunset distance they turn as by one accord, and go back to the house: two of the crowd thoroughly out of sorts with themselves and all the world. Sydney, who, was rather silent. What did all this mean? she wondered.

Most obedient to her father, she was most willing to marry Bertie Vaughan to please him, without much love on either side. Yet that he cared for her as much as she did for him, was as loyal to her as she was to him, she had never for a second doubted. But now a vague, undefinable feeling of wounded pride and distrust had arisen within her. What was the actress with the black, bold eyes to him, that he should redden and pale at the very sound of her name?

It struck her that she saw walking with her last night, she thought, more and more perturbed. I will ask him; he shall tell me the truth, and that before this time to-morrow!

CHAPTER XIV.

DEARER awaits them. It wants but three minutes to the hour as they struggle in, and Captain Owens sits, watch in hand, stormy weather threatening in his eyes. The signs of the tempest clear away as they enter, and

And still they talk and laughter. Bertie and Mamie Sunderland remain silent and distant victims to the green-eyed monster in his most virulent form, the image of Dolly De Courcy, in her scarlet shawl and black plume, upsetting the digestion of both.

And I really think, my love, says Mrs. Owens, when they arise from the table, that we ought not to linger. These fall nights are cold, and you know the doctors all warn you against exposing yourself to cold.

There is wisdom in the speech, and though on principle Captain Owens contradicts pretty much everything Mrs. Owens may see fit to say, he cannot contradict this. So adieux are made, and the Owens party enter their carriage and are driven home.

It is a perfect autumnal evening—blue, starlit, clear. The wind sighing fitfully through moaning pine woods, the surf thundering dully on the shore below, ring dreamily in Sydney's ears all the way.

She leans forward out of the window, something in the solemn murmurous beauty of the night filling her heart with a thrill akin to pain; and still that dark and dashing actress occupies her thoughts—and the more she thinks the more convinced she is, that last night Bertie was her companion. If so, he has told her a deliberate lie, and the girl's heart contracts with a sudden sharp spasm of almost physical pain and terror. If he has been false here, will he be true in anything? All her life Sydney had been taught to look upon lying words with horror and repulsion.

It is the meanest and most sneaking of all cowardice, her blunt and fearless old father had said to her a hundred times; 'don't ever lie, Sydney, if you die for it.'

It is the most heinous and despicable of all sins, if she's the ghostly directors had taught the child, in later years. 'No goodness can dwell in an untruthful soul.'

And now—was Bertie false? Bertie, whom she was to marry and spend all her life with. I will ask him, she kept repeating; 'his tongue may speak falsely, but his face, his eyes, will tell the truth. And if there is anything between this girl and him—she stopped and caught her breath for a moment—then I will never, never be his wife.'

She looked at him wistfully, but, lying back in his corner, his hands clasped behind his golden head, his face was not to be seen.

How silent you young people are, the squire said at last; 'anything wrong with you puss? A penny for your thoughts, Bertie.'

There was a momentary brightening, but too forced to last. Bertie Vaughan's thoughts would have been worth much more than a penny to the questioner—they were solely and absorbedly of Dolly. He must see her to-night; impossible to wait until to-morrow. Ben Ward had been at her side all day pouring his seductive flatteries into her ears, offering, very likely, to make her mistress of the new red-brick mansion over in Wyckcliffe.

And women are unstable, and gold, and offers of wedding rings, have their charm. He had nothing to offer her but his handsome blue eyes and Raphael face; he had never even mentioned wedding rings in all his love-making. Yes, come what might, he must see the coquettish Dolly before he slept. It was half-past ten when they reached The Place, and the moon was beginning to silver the black trees around it.

The squire was growing uneasy about the cold, and it was a relief to all when they drew up on the front steps, and Bertie and Perkins gave each an arm to the stiff and chill old sailor, and helped him to his room.

Are you going out again, Bertie? Sydney asked, looking at him in surprise as he replaced his hat, and turned to leave the house.

For my usual nocturnal prow and smoke. Couldn't sleep without it, I assure you. Run away to bed, sis, and good night!

He left the house and made straight for the town at a swifling pace. It was almost eleven now—if he could only reach the theatre in time to see Dolly leave.

He was in time. Moonlight and lamplight flooded the little square in front of the play-house, and standing himself in the shadow, Bertie saw the lady of his love come forth in the famous red shawl and black feather, leaning confidently on the arm of Ben Ward. She was in the highest of wild high spirits, too, her clear laugh and loud voice mingling with the deeper tones of his rival.

Awfully late to-night, ain't it? he heard her gaily say; 'I expect you're about tired to death waiting, Ben.'

As if all time would be too long to wait for you, Dolly, responded gallantly and affectionately, Mr. Ben; and the listener gashed his teeth as he listened. It had come to this then—it was Ben and Dolly; and who was to tell him it was not to be Ben and Dolly all their lives.

He followed in their wake, keeping out of sight among the shadows. Keenly sensitive to ridicule, Bertie would not for worlds be seen in the ludicrous role of jealous lover by Ward. They sauntered very slowly, p-als of laughter telling how they were enjoying their late-a-tele. They reached Dolly's cottage-home and paused at the gate. In the shadow of some trees across the moonlit road Vaughan hid and glowered. Mr. Ward seemed disposed to prolong the dialogue even here, but Miss De Courcy, with a loud yawn, which she made no pretence to hide, declared she was 'dead beat,' and must go to bed right away.

So good-night, Ben, cries the actress, opening the gate and holding out the other hand; and thanks, ever so much, for the flowers, and ear-rings, once more!

But not good-night like this, Dolly, exclaimed Mr. Ward, drawing her nearer, and stopping his head; 'not good-night with a cold shake hands, surely!'

But the gate was opened and shut smartly, and Dolly on the other side, had eluded the embrace.

'Not if I know it! There's only one man in the universe I ever mean to kiss, and he isn't you, Mr. Benjamin Ward, I can tell you! Good-night!'

Is it Bertie Vaughan, then I wonder? Pretty Miss Vaughan—the Fair One With The Golden Locks? we fellows call him, who is the one you mean to kiss, my cousin? If it's that milk-sop, Dolly, I'm surprised at your taste, upon my word, and honor, I am!

It's no business of yours, Mr. Ward, who it is, cries out Dolly, her black eyes snapping in the moonlight; 'isn't you, anyhow, be sure of that. And if you think your earnings are thrown away, I'll give 'em back to you. It shall never be said, that Dolly De Courcy took any man's presents under false pretences!'

Oh! d—the ear-rings? said Mr. Ward. I never thought of them; and you know it; but, seriously, Dolly, I think heaps, at you; never saw a girl in all my life, I like so well; and I'll marry you any day, you like—so there! Can I say fairer than that? If so, use your thinking of Miss Vaughan; it isn't, Dolly, upon my soul. He's, booked for her cousin—she isn't his cousin, by-the-by—and has been, ever since he left off petticoats. He hasn't got a red cent but what the old man will give him; and the wedding is fixed to come, off in a month. He's spoony on you, I know, Dolly, but he can't marry you, because he hasn't a rap to live on. Now think over all this, and make up your mind to be

Mrs. Ben Ward, because you'll never get a better offer, no, by George! while your name's Dolly.

Have you got anything more to say? demanded Miss De Courcy, standing at the gate, and with anything but a melting expression, as Mr. Ward poured forth his tender wooing.

'Well, I guess not at present. What do you say, Dolly?'

I say good-night, for the last time, and go home and go to bed! snapped Dolly De Courcy, marching with a majestic Lady Macbeth sort of stride to her own front door.

'All right,' retorted the imperturbable Ben. 'Good-night! Dolly.'

But Dolly was gone, and Mr. Ward laughed a little laugh to himself, struck a match, pulled out a stumpy, black meerschaum, lit it, and went on his homeward way.

It's only a question of time, he said aloud, glancing up at the one lighted window of the cottage; she's a bewitching little devil, and I'm bound to make her Mrs. W. She's soft on 'The Fair One,' at present, but she'll get over that. He must marry little Miss Sydney, and then Dolly will have me, if only for spite.

As he strode away, out from the dark shadows of the pines stalked Bertie, pale and ferocious with jealousy. It was precisely like one of Miss De Courcy's situations on the stage.

'Will she have you if only for spite?' repeated Mr. Vaughan between his teeth in most approved style; 'and she is soft on me at present, is she? Confounded cad! I wonder I didn't come out and knock him down there and then.'

Seeing that sinewy Ben Ward could have taken Bertie by the waist-band and laid him low in the kennel any moment he liked, perhaps after all it was not to be wondered at. He opened the garden gate, swung a handful of loose gravel up at the lighted panes, and waited. There was a momentary pause; then the curtains moved about an inch aside, and in a tone of suppressed fury a voice demanded:

'Is that you, Ben Ward?'

No, Dolly—it's Bertie.

Like a flash the muslin curtain was swept away, and Dolly's eager face, eager and glad, in spite of all her efforts, appeared.

You, Mr. Vaughan! and at this time of night! I may ask what this insult means?'

Oh, nonsense, Dolly. You're not on the stage now. Come down—there's a darling girl—I've something to say to you.'

Mr. Vaughan, it is almost twelve o'clock—midnight! And you ask me to come down! What do you think I am?'

The dearest girl in creation. Come, Dolly, what's the use of that rubbish?'

Miss De Courcy, without more ado, drops the curtain, goes deliberately down stairs, unlocks the door, and stands in the moonlight before her lover.

My darling! He makes an eager step forward, but with chilling dignity Miss De Courcy waves him off.

That will do, Mr. Vaughan! I know what your 'my darlings' are worth. If I told you my opinion of you this moment, you would hardly feel flattered. I hope you enjoyed yourself with your charming cousin to-day.'

The withering scorn of this speech could only have been done by an actress. Miss Dolly in a fine stage attitude, stood and looked down upon Mr. Vaughan.

No, Dolly, I didn't enjoy myself. Was it likely, with you on Star Island with Ben Ward? I had to go. I tried to get out of it—tried my best—and failed. I can't afford to offend my uncle—that is the truth—and at the bare mention of my having an engagement he flew into a passion; and you ought to see the passions he can fly into. No, I did not enjoy myself, but I had to go.

Oh-h! said Miss De Courcy, coldly. 'I always thought you were a grown man, not a little boy, to be ordered about and made do as you are bid. Since you are so afraid of this awful Captain Owens, then, and so dependent upon him, of course the moment he tells you to marry his heiress you'll buy a white tie and go and do it. Have you anything more to say to me, Mr. Vaughan, because even an actress may have a reputation to lose if seen standing here with you after midnight.'

She turned as if to go—then lingered. For he stood silent leaning against a tree, and something in his face and attitude touched her.

'Have you anything more to say?' she repeated holding the door.

No, Dolly, since you take that tone—nothing. What you say is true—it is pitiful in a fellow of twenty-one to be ordered about like a fellow of twelve, and I ought to have held out and braved the old man's displeasure and gone with you. I have nothing to say in my own defence, and I have no right to do anything that will compromise you in the sight of Ben Ward. He's rich and I'm poor, and I suppose you'll marry him, Dolly. I have no right to say anything, but it's rather hard.'

He broke off. The next instant impulsive Dolly was down the steps and by his side, her whole heart (and it was as honest and true a heart as ever beat in its way) in her dark shining eyes.

No right? she cried out. Oh, Bertie! if you care for me you have every right!

If I care for you? the blue eye looks eloquently into the black ones; 'do you doubt that too?'

No! exclaimed Dolly, doubt, anger, jealousy, all swept away in her love for this man. 'You do like me, Bertie! Oh, I know that! You do like me better than her?'

'Than her? Than whom?'

Oh! you know—I've no patience to talk about her, your cousin, the heiress, Miss Owens. She's sweetly pretty, too—but, Bertie, do say it; tell me the real truth, you do like me better than her?'

'If I had a language, I would have cried, and address can be put on the stage as well as on 'Oh, Bertie, I don't doubt me about this. Flore you so well that—her voice actually faltered, tears actually rose to her hard black eyes.'

I won't, Dolly, I swear it! And you—you're very exacting, but how am I to know how many lovers you have behind in New York?—how am I to know you are not engaged even to some fellow there?'

It was a random shot, but it struck home. In the moonlight he saw her start suddenly and turn pale.

'Ha! he said, 'it is true, then? You are engaged?'

'Bertie, she faltered, 'I don't care for a single man on all the earth but you! You believe that?'

But you are engaged in New York?'

'Ye-es—that is, I was. But I'll write and break it off—I will to-morrow morning. Bertie, don't look like that. I never really cared for him, he was too fiery and tyrannical.'

'What is his name?' Vaughan gloomily asked.

'What does it matter about his name? I'll never see him again if I can help it. I'll write and end it all to-morrow. Come, Bertie, don't look so cross; after all, it only makes us even.'

'Yes, it only makes us even,' he repeated, rather bitterly; 'even in duplicity and dishonesty. I'm a villain and a fool too, I dare say, in this business, but I'll see it to the end for all that.'

'A villain and a fool for caring for me, no doubt,' the actress retorted, angrily.

'Yes, Dolly, but I do care for you, you see, and I have never refused myself anything I cared for, and don't mean to begin now. So I shall marry you—how or when I don't quite know yet, but I mean to marry you and you only.'

She nestles close to him, and there's silence. The pale blue moonlight, the whispering wind, the rustling trees, nothing else to see or hear.

'Why didn't you tell me all this sooner?' the girl asks at length. 'Why did you leave it to Ben Ward? Even last night you deceived me—making me think she was a little ugly school girl.'

'Why didn't you tell me about the man in New York? Why hadn't you told him about me? It won't do for you and me to throw stones at each other—we have both been living in glass houses. Let us say quite Dolly, and bury the hatchet. You know all now. You believe I love you, and mean to marry you, and not Miss Owens, and that, I take it, is the main point.'

But Bertie, this can't go on long. She expects you to marry her next month. Her father does—she doesn't. She would very much rather not marry me at all. And next month isn't this. Sufficient unto the day the evil thereof.'

Unconsciously to himself Bertie Vaughan was a profound fatalist, letting his life drift on, a firm believer in the 'Something-to-turn-up' doctrine.

You see, he went on, 'the governor's life hangs on a thread—on a hair. At any moment it may end. His will is made, and I am handsomely remembered in it. He may die suddenly before the wedding-day—in which case I'll destroy that will, turn me out, and disinherit me. Have I not reason enough for silence? Just let things drift on, Dolly—it will do no harm; and if, on the eve of the wedding-day, he is still alive, then I will throw up the sponge to fate, run away with you, turn actor or crossing sweeper, and live happy ever after. There is no programme!'

He passed, Dolly De Courcy stood silent, her athen black eyes fixed thoughtfully upon him. How selfish, how craven, how utterly without heart, generosity, honor or gratitude, this man she loved was! This man who looked like a young Apollo here in the moon's rays. False to the core, how could she expect him to be true to her? Unstable as water, would not the love of wealth prove the stronger in the end? Might he not play her false, and marry Captain Owens's fair young heiress after all?

'No! Dolly cried, inwardly; 'that he shall not! I have his letters—I will go to Owens Place, and show them to this haughty Englishman and his daughter first. He shall never play fast and loose with me.'

'And now, darling, I must be off,' Vaughan said, looking at his watch. 'Ye gods! half-past one. Farewell, Dolly; remember! no more flirtations with Ward. Give him his ear-rings and his conge to-morrow.'

'I'll keep the ear-rings, but I'll give him his conge, replied prudent Dolly. 'Good-night, Bertie. Be as false as you like to all the rest of the world, but be true to me.'

'Loyal je serai durant ma vie!' laughs Bertie Vaughan, and then he is through the little garden gate and away. Dolly stands and watches the slender figure of her lover out of sight, then turns.

'Faithful unto death,' she says to herself. 'Yes you will be that to me, for I shall make you.'

The clocks of Wyckcliffe were striking two as Vaughan came in sight of his home. To his surprise a light burned in Captain Owens's chamber, and figures fitted to and fro. He stopped; a sudden thought—shall he be said hope! sending the blood to his face. Was the squire sick, was he—dead? The rest of the house was unlighted. Perhaps, his absence had not been discovered. He softly inserted his latch-key and opened the door. All was darkness. He closed it and stepped in. As he did so a light appeared on the upper landing, and some one lightly and swiftly began descending the stairs.

'Perkins, is that you?' the soft voice of Sydney asked.

There was no reply. She descended two or three more stairs lamp in hand, wrapped in a white dressing-gown, her yellow hair streaming over her shoulders, and came face to face with Bertie Vaughan.

CHAPTER XV.

TO ONE THING CONSTANT NEVER.

TASAS was an instant's pause—both stand and looked, each other full in the eyes. Then Sydney spoke.

'You, Bertie? she said, in slow wonder.

'Is it, he answered, lightly. 'I have been to Wyckcliffe. The engagement I had to break this morning I kept to-night. But what is the matter? Your father—'

care. And in two or three years some lucky fellow would win her heart and become master of Owens Place. A pang of jealousy and envy shot through him as he thought it. He was prepared to resign both himself, but all the same the idea of that other who would profit by his folly was unbearable to him.

Presently the chamber door opened and Doctor Howard came out, looking jolly and at ease. Sydney sprang up and ran toward him.

'It's all right, my dear, it's all right,' the old doctor said, patting the cold hands she held out to him; 'papa won't leave me yet awhile. He thinks he will, but, bless you, we know better. If he keeps quiet, he's good for a dozen years yet. Now, just run in and kiss him good-night, and then away to bed. Those pretty eyes are too bright to be dimmed by late hours. Ah, Mr. Bertie, good-morning to you, sir.'

Sydney shot off like an arrow, and Bertie went slowly, and with a disgusted frowning, to bed—'Good for a dozen years yet, sir.'

Oh, no doubt, no doubt at all. It is in the nature of rich fathers, and uncles, and guardians to hang to the attenuated thread of life, when they and everybody connected with them would be much more comfortable if they went quietly to their graves.

'No fear of his going to see up before the wedding-day,' thought Mr. Vaughan, bitterly. 'He'll tough it out, as old Howard says, to handle his grandsons, I've no doubt. And then there's nothing left for me but the 'all-for-love and the world-well-lost' sort of thing. Dr. Jove, Dolly will have to work for me as well as for herself when I make her Mrs. Vaughan.'

Next day, by noon, Squire Owens was able to descend to luncheon. A letter from Montreal in a stiff, wiry hand lay beside his plate. It was from Miss Phillis Dormer, and contained a gracious assent to the visit of her niece, Cyrella. That same evening brought a note from Cyrella herself to Sydney:

'PETITE ST. JACQUES, Nov. 8th.

'DEAREST SYD—It is all arranged. Aunt Phill cheerfully consents, and has actually de-vised me—making me think she was a little ugly school girl.'

'Why didn't you tell me about the man in New York? Why hadn't you told him about me? It won't do for you and me to throw stones at each other—we have both been living in glass houses. Let us say quite Dolly, and bury the hatchet. You know all now. You believe I love you, and mean to marry you, and not Miss Owens, and that, I take it, is the main point.'

Two days before, Sydney would have danced with delight, but now she read this note, her color rising, a look of undignified trouble on her face. Everything seemed settled—her trousseau had come, the very bridal veil and wreath were up stairs. Cyrella was coming to be bridesmaid, and Bertie had never spoken one word. She glanced across the table—they were at dinner—to where he sat trifling with a chicken-wing and tasting, with epicurean relish, his glass of Sillery. Was she worth so little, then, that she was not even worth the asking? Less vanity a pretty girl could hardly have than Sydney, but a sharp, mortified pang of wounded feeling went through her now as she looked at him—cool, careless, unconcerned.

'Cypa forces me upon him, and he takes me because he cannot help himself, she thought. 'He is in love with that dark-eyed actress, and he will marry me and be miserable all his life. Oh! if papa had only let us alone, and never attempted this match-making!'

'Bad news, puss?' her father asked. 'You look forlorn. What's the matter, little one? Let me see the letter.'

She hesitated a moment—then passed it over to him reluctantly, and the squire adjusting his double eye-glass, read it sonorously aloud. Sydney's eyes were left the plate, her cheeks tingled; Bertie sat, an indifferent auditor, his whole attention absorbed by his champagne.

Squire Owens laid down the letter and looked straight at his daughter through his glasses.

'Well, petite, that's all right, isn't it? She'll be here in three days—two more; and you and Bertie shall meet her at the station. What's that troubled look for, then? You're fond of this young lady, are you not?'

'Yes, papa, very fond. Dear old Cy!'

'Then what is it? It isn't that you're afraid she'll make love to Bertie—hey? and are jealous beforehand?'

But Sydney has finished her dessert, and jumped up abruptly and ran away. It was little short of maddening to see Bertie sit there, that languid smile of his just dawning, and feel all the cool, self-assured, almost insolent indifference with which he took her without the asking.

The two days passed. Bertie spent a great deal of his time away from The Place, doing home duties at intervals, when it was impossible to shirk it without arousing the quick suspicions of the 'governor.' He drove Sydney and her mother along the country roads together, he rode out twice with Sydney alone, but that conversation had not taken place; the explanation Miss Owens meant to have she had not had as yet. It was one thing to resolve to ask Bertie whether or no he was in love with the actress, to tax him indirectly with falsehood, and another thing to do it. Bertie Vaughan, her old comrade and play-fellow was a man—a gentleman grown; as Peggy says, and every instinct of her womanhood shrank from broaching the subject. It was for him to speak, for her to refuse or accept, as she saw fit. He never did speak—never came within miles of the subject, avoided it, ignored it utterly, as the girl could hardly fail to see. And so the day and the hour of Cyrella's arrival came, and matters matrimonial were in statu quo.

It was a gloomy November afternoon, 'onding on snow, sky and atmosphere steel gray alike, a wild, long, rattled the trees and sent the dead leaves in whirls before it. A few feathery flakes were drifting through the sullen air, giving promise of the first snow-storm of the season, before midnight.

The train came thundering into the lighted station as Sydney and Bertie took their places. Sydney in a velvet jacket, a velvet cap, crowned with an ostrich feather, on her bright, wind-blown hair, and in a state of eager expectation, for Mr. Vaughan, he had not deigned to take much interest in the new comer from the first; judging from Sydney's talk, he was predisposed to dislike her indeed, as a young person inclined to 'chaff.' People inclined to chaff, Bertie had found from experience, generally chafed him, and like most weak men he was acutely sensitive to ridicule.

The train stopped; the passengers, for Wyckcliffe, half a dozen in number, came out. Among them a tall young lady, in a travelling suit of dark-green serge, at sight of whom Sydney uttered a joyous cry and plunged forward straightway into her arms.

Oh, of course, says Bertie cynically, eying the pair; they must have gush. A quarter of an hour of kissing and exclamation points, as though they had not seen each other for a century or so! She's not had looking either—got eyes like Dolly.

She might have eyes like Dolly, but there all resemblance ended. Miss Hendrick's tall, plant figure bore no similarity to Miss De

Oucroy's 'rounded and ripe.' Miss Hendrick