

at Bramley Manor, which was by no means favourable to the latter.

Mrs. Saxelby was still a pretty woman, with a fair smooth skin, and aquiline profile. She held out her hand with a gracious smile in greeting to Clement.

Mabel threw off her bonnet, and, kneeling at her mother's side, began to tell of the accident, and how frightened they had all been at first, and how kindly Mr. Charlewood had given orders for the poor child's comfort. "Oh, mamma," she cried, winding up her somewhat confused recital, "she was such a sweet-looking little creature. I should so like—if I might—to call and ask if I could do anything for her."

"Really," said Clement, quickly, "you mustn't think of it. It wouldn't do at all." Then, checking himself, he turned to Mrs. Saxelby with a half apologetic manner. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Saxelby," he said; "but I assure you the place is not the sort of place for Miss Earnshaw to visit, nor are the people the sort of people for Miss Earnshaw to come in contact with. She could do them no good. I will answer for every necessary care being taken of the little girl."

"Dear Mabel is apt to be a little impulsive," said Mrs. Saxelby, stroking her daughter's hair.

"Mamma, the child's father, Mr. Trescott, is a musician who plays in the orchestra of the theatre," said Mabel, in a low distinct tone.

There was a moment's silence. Mrs. Saxelby's netting had fallen from her hand on to the floor, and had apparently become entangled, for she stooped over it for some seconds without speaking. "How can you persist, Mabel?" she said, still busy with her netting. "You know Mr. Saxelby wouldn't hear of it."

Mabel rose from her knees. "I think it would be right to go and see if I could do the little girl any good," she said, "and I don't suppose, mamma, that you think her father must be wicked because he plays in a theatre." With that she locked her lips into a peculiarly scornful curve, which they had a natural capacity for quickly assuming, and walked out of the open French window into the garden without a glance at Clement.

"I'm afraid," he said, following with his eyes the flutter of Mabel's dress as she slowly paced down the long narrow grass-plot—"I'm afraid Miss Earnshaw is a little displeased with me for venturing to oppose her philanthropic intentions."

"Oh, you must not take offence at her manner, Mr. Charlewood. She is but a child. I shall give her a lecture by-and-by."

"Offence! No indeed. I admire the generous feeling that prompts her. But do you know, Mrs. Saxelby, she seems to me to have some particular tenderness for these theatre people."

How singularly unmanageable Mrs. Saxelby's netting was this afternoon! It had again got itself into a condition which necessitated her stooping over it.

Clement lingered a little, hat in hand. "I must be going," he said, with a glance towards the garden. "Will you say good-bye for me to Miss Earnshaw? and," he added with a smile, "beg her not to think me altogether wanting in Christian charity."

But as he spoke, Mabel returned, and, going up to him, quietly held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said, "and thank you once more."

"Don't thank me, please, but tell me you forgive me."

"I forgive you," she said, with naive gravity, "because you do not know any better."

"You are tremendously uncompromising, Miss Earnshaw, but I am glad to be forgiven by you on any terms. Good-bye. And trust me the pretty little girl shall be well looked after."

"Mamma," said Mabel, when the sound of Clement Charlewood's footsteps had died away along the quiet road, "don't be angry with me. But I cannot bear to hear those things said without protest, it seems like—like bearing false witness."

Her mother drew the girl's head down, and kissed her silently. The autumn twilight seemed

to have filled the room all at once, and she could not see Mabel's face distinctly, but, as she pressed her lips against her child's soft cheek, she felt that it was wet with tears.

CHAPTER IV. NUMBER TWENTY-THREE, NEW BRIDGE-STREET.

"I'm so thirsty."

Poor little Corda Trescott had said these words in a weak plaintive voice four or five times one night before a tall bony woman, who was sitting at the head of the child's bed, roused herself. The woman's gown was dirty, and her sandy hair was rough and unkempt, and she wore it twisted into a meagre wisp, and fastened with a big imitation tortoiseshell comb at the back of her head. She had a glaring red glass brooch at her throat, but no collar; gilt earrings in her ears; and held in her unwashed hands a soiled number of some red-hot romance which was then in course of publication for the sum of one halfpenny weekly.

This was Mrs. Hutchins, the landlady of the house in which the Trescotts lodged, and to whose care the child was necessarily confided during her father's nightly absence at the theatre.

Mr. Hutchins was a hard-working carpenter who earned decent wages. And as they were a childless couple, and as Mrs. Hutchins' domestic duties were consequently not of a nature to absorb her whole time and attention, she was in the habit of letting the two rooms on her first floor and a garret at the top of the house.

More than a week had passed since the accident, and little Corda Trescott was mending rapidly, though she was still weak and helpless. True to his promise to Mabel, and prompted, besides, by a kindly interest in the child, Clement Charlewood had sent to the house such comforts and delicacies as might reasonably be supposed to be beyond the culinary skill of Mrs. Hutchins, and he had called himself at No. 23, New Bridge-street, when business brought him into the neighbourhood. This was not seldom, for there were busy wharves and counting-houses in close proximity to its squalid dwellings, and not a little of the gold that glittered profusely in the suburban villas of Hammerham was dug out of these dingy mines.

On one or two occasions when Clement paid a hasty visit to the little invalid he had heard from an upper chamber the sound of a violin played with remarkable skill and power. Clement had a great love of music, and some knowledge of it. Hammerham people, indeed, mostly praise themselves on their musical knowledge. He was struck by the unexpected finish of style of the unseen player, and asked Corda if it were her father? But the child had answered, "No. Papa can't play like that, though it was papa who first taught Alfred." Alfred, she explained, was her brother. Alfred was a very clever brother, and she was very fond of Alfred. He had a fine tone; didn't Mr. Charlewood think so? Papa said Alfred had a fine tone. Papa said Alfred ought to make a great player. Only—and here Corda's voice was lowered confidentially, and she looked very serious—only he wouldn't practice. Not regularly, that was to say. Sometimes he would take a fit of industry, and practice ten hours a day for a week. But he had promised her that he would work steadily, and she was in daily expectation of his beginning to do so in earnest. Did he, then, do nothing for his living? Oh yes; Alfred was engaged sometimes in the orchestra of the theatre when any extra help was required. He was engaged just now, for an opera company was performing at the theatre, and Alfred could take a first violin, whilst papa could only play second. But papa was very clever too. Mr. Charlewood musn't suppose it was not very difficult indeed to play a good second.

"I'm so thirsty, Mrs. Hutchins."

The little voice came faintly once more out of the poor bed, and the bright feverish eyes looked wistfully at a great earthenware pitcher standing on the mantelpiece.

"Goodness sake, Cordelia," ejaculated Mrs. Hutchins, petulantly, "I hear you. You've said so ten times in a minute." Then glancing at

the patient face on the pillow, her heart was softened, and she got up and poured out a mugful of barley-water from the great pitcher. Approaching the bed, she held the mug to the child's lips while she swallowed a deep draught.

"Ah-h-h! That's good, ain't it?" said Mrs. Hutchins, sympathetically drawing a long breath. Then she smoothed the child's hair back from her heated forehead with a not ungentle hand. But Corda shrank from its touch; for her senses, always delicate in their perceptions, even to fastidiousness, were far from being blunted by illness. And it must be confessed that, without being extraordinary dainty, one might have taken exception to Mrs. Hutchins' hand. But, fortunately, the good lady perceived nothing of the child's shrinking, by reason of her having plunged again into the perils which encompassed "Rosalba of Naples; or, the Priest, the Page, and the Penitent."

"I wonder," said little Corda, after a pause, restlessly turning her hot head on the pillow, "I wonder what o'clock it is?"

Mrs. Hutchins followed Rosalba of Naples into the "deepest dungeon below the castle keep," and heard the massive door locked on her with a "fatal clash," before she answered shortly, "Dunno, I'm sure."

"Because papa said he would come straight home after he had done. It's 'Lucia, to-night. 'Lucia' isn't a long opera. I should think he'd be back by eleven; shouldn't you, Mrs. Hutchins?"

Rosalba, having by this time got her body half way through the narrow loophole looking on to the moat (preparatory to escaping by means of a rope ladder supplied by the page), the situation was too critical to admit of Mrs. Hutchins' having a scrap of attention to spare. So she vaguely murmured, "All right, my dear."

Down in the kitchen a clock was ticking loudly, and some shrill crickets kept up a piercing chorus on the hearth. Black-beetles, fortunately, are silent creatures, or they might have contributed a formidable addition to the noises that fretted the sick child's nerves—Waiting, waiting, waiting! How long the time seemed! Would her father never come home? Suddenly it occurred to her to turn the importunate ticking of the kitchen clock to account. She knew that there were sixty seconds in a minute, and sixty minutes in an hour. She would count the time by the beats of the clock, and that would make it pass quicker. Her father must be home by eleven. She guessed it to be about ten, now. So, she would count for an hour, and at the end of it papa would be here. Tick-tack, tick-tack, one, two, three, four—two, three—one, two—and the small slight fingers that had been tapping on the coverlet relaxed, and were still. The eyelids quivered, drooped, and closed over the lustrous hazel eyes. The breath came regularly from between the parted lips—little Corda was fast asleep.

Almost at the same moment Rosalba succeeded, after various desperate struggles, in wriggling through the loophole, and getting a fair hold of the rope ladder. While she was still "poised with one fairy foot upon its topmost round," the number came to an abrupt termination.

"Lord bless us!" cried Mrs. Hutchins, impatiently, "to think of its leaving off at that there interestin' pint! It's like as if they done it 'e' purpose."

Laying down the story, she refreshed herself with a copious draught from the earthen pitcher.

"Very good barley-water," said Mrs. Hutchins, "though it might ha' been better for a sup o' sherry in it. I s'pose they dussn't put it, 'cos of fever. Uncommon kind of young Charlewood to be so attentive to Cordelia, and send things a'most every day. I never knowed the family was renounced"—Mrs. Hutchins probably meant renowned—"for troubling themselves too much about other folk's wants. Old Luko's a hard old fella. That's about what he is."

Mrs. Hutchins pursued her meditations half aloud before an oval looking-glass hanging over the chimney-piece, which so defied all the recognised laws of gravity and perspective in the reflected image of the room which it presented,