

reads such fearful things in the papers."

"Poor mamma!" and the smile broke over the noble face once more, with a depth of tenderness more often felt than shown. "But you must remember——"

What Lady Elmsdale was to remember cannot be placed on record, for a loud peal of the bell, a noisy rush up the broad stairs, and a shout when the door was flung open of "I say, Fred, this is jolly," put an abrupt termination to her husband's observations.

"My dear, dear boys, you were unexpected, but none the less welcome."

"There, Fred—Harry—pray remember your mother is made of flesh and blood, and that it would be possible to smother her," exclaimed Lord Elmsdale, his voice sounding as if it was trying to reprove, while his look of gratification showed his pleasure at the boys' fondness for their mother.

They were two noble fellows, of whom any father might well be proud. They were twins, but, unlike the generality of twins, there was little resemblance in their personal appearance. The strong mutual bond of attachment, which seems to be an instinct of such relationship, was, however, a marked feature in the character of each. They were rarely seen apart; their hopes and fears were confided to each other without the shadow of reserve. They could scarcely be said to have separate sorrows, or separate joys; their love for their gentle mother had hitherto been the one absorbing passion of their young lives.

But their personal appearance must be carefully noted, for this has an important bearing on the events which are about to be recorded.

It is just midnight now, and a heavy, sudden fall of snow, which had followed the weird blast that had startled Lord and Lady Elmsdale, had prevented them from hearing the carriage which had brought the boys home from the Kingston pier. But the servants had not lost a moment after their arrival, and the old butler now opened the door, and announced that supper was ready for them. Barns had grown gray in the service of the family, and the boys bounded down the long gallery and the marble stairs, which led to the dining room.

Lady Elmsdale followed slowly. Lord Elmsdale rang for his personal atten-

dant, and went to his dressing room.

Fred had already made acquaintance with the contents of a cold grouse pie, when his mother had entered the apartment. Harry was talking to Barns, apparently more interested in the remote prospect of shooting game than in the immediate one of eating it. He was inquiring for Ned Rusheen, and requesting Barns to see that he came up to the castle, as early as possible, next morning.

Harry was very much taller than his brother. For his age—the twins had just passed their fifteenth birthday—he was exceptionally tall; his figure was manly, and his appearance, particularly when the youthful expression of his countenance was rendered indistinct by distance was remarkably like that of his elder brother. You have not heard much of Edward yet, but it takes time to become acquainted with the different members of a family. Harry's complexion was dark, as was Edward's. Fred was fair; he had something of the gentle delicacy of his mother in his appearance as well as in his manner. You might suppose, as he sat quietly at the end of the long dining-table, that he was one who enjoyed the *dolce far niente*, who would rather yield than strive, even if a rich prize was to be the guerdon of his efforts. He looked up to Harry. Even strangers noticed this, after a short acquaintance, yet, as far as twins can have priority of birthright, the priority was on his side, for he had entered this lower world half an hour before his brother.

The boys were not long at the supper table; healthy lads seldom linger over their meals, or care much what their fare may be. It requires training and years to become an epicure.

Fred knelt on the rug beside his mother, his hand clasped in hers. Harry stood leaning carelessly against the mantelpiece; his very attitude, the turn of his head, the bend of his knee, his smile, the way his hair lay in thick masses, thrown back from his high, square forehead, all looked so like his father. The mother seemed to take a mental photograph of the two. Years and years after, when she was an old woman, when her hair was white with the bleaching of sorrow, rather than with the snow of age, she remembered that night.