

"He's doing good," Harry said, turning to the net, who seemed Ishmaelitish in his desire to turn his hand against every man that evening.

"Reading for the law," I think he said, answered Rod.

"Reading for the law!" repeated Sir Harry, sarcastically. A very profitable employment, no doubt. Well, he'll make a lawyer, perhaps, better than anything else. He's sharper than most of the family.

"He seems a good sort of fellow," said Roderick, boldly.

"It all depends upon what you consider a good fellow," retorted Sir Harry. "It seems to me that it is very easy to be a good fellow now-a-days.

One need only be able to color meerschaums, talk a hideous slang that no gentleman can understand, and sneer at a woman to win the title. It used to be different in the old times."

Roderick laughed shortly.

"I think you said the times were altered, this morning, sir," he replied, eyeing the epergne again with a flash of the eyes.

"They are, indeed, sir," said Sir Harry, sharply, rising at the same moment, and Roderick, emptying his glass, followed his father into the drawing-room.

Lady Mary was comfortably ensconced in an easy chair, whose light blue satin and gold embroidery well set off her delicate features.

Ida Valor was standing by the oriel window watching the sunset and holding a volume of Tennyson open between her finger and thumb—strictly the prettiest markers he ever had—the wax tapers of candle Sir Harry allowed gased a soft and mellow light upon the magnificent apartment, and set the diamonds glistening in Ida's hair. Roderick sat hunched until they rivalled her eyes.

She looked over her shoulder as the gentlemen came in.

"Sir Harry, as you and I look at this house, it has got shut in the corner, and looks so miserable and absurd."

"It is not so bad," said Rod, walking to the window with a smile that grew into a frown when he saw that one of the ladies had been hit up among his front flowers, and was running over the beds with occasional looks of anxiety and considerably jeopardizing the plants.

"It is a pity that Summers," he said, angrily, "has left the time that the dogs have rather the roses. There look down those that standard."

Hearing his voice raised angrily, Rod sauntered up the window. His hands placed behind his back, his well-proportioned frame showing to advantage in his black evening dress.

"A Be-Dee!" he exclaimed, "there's Ted in the nursery, and commenced opening the window."

"Ted?" repeated the baronet, turning upon him sharply, "why that's that dog of yours, Roderick," he said, frowning. "May I beg of you to request Summers to keep him in the stable? The brute is ruining the flowers."

"The dog is not quite Summers' fault," said Rod, quietly, throwing open the window, and stepping on to the balcony. "I took him for a run and forgot to fasten him up."

"I might have guessed it," he said, sharply, walking to the bell.

"I shall have got him before Summers can get round," and he laid his hand upon the balcony.

"Oh, Rod," exclaimed Miss Valor, in a low voice, stepping forward anxiously, "you are not going to jump over?"

"Not exactly, cling and drop," replied Rod, with an easy smile, and stepping over the same instant, he clung and dropped, as he had promised. Over and the next moment had unfastened the wire gate and whistled the dog away.

Lady Edgcombe, who had hastened to the window, sighed anxiously: "Rod will break his neck some day," she said, piteously, "he is so wild."

"Wild, madam!" retorted Sir Harry, "he is a fool!"

Lady Edgcombe flushed timidly and sank into the chair again, saying nothing, and Ida turned sharply, and shot a glance of reproach at the baronet, but likewise said nothing, contenting herself with leaning over the balcony and shuddering at the drop which the "fool" had made so light of. In a few minutes Rod re-entered the room with a smile upon his face.

"Not much harm done, my lady," he said. "She will not break out again, sir," he added to Sir Harry.

"I am glad to hear it," was the curt response, and Roderick, with a contraction of the eyebrows, walked over to his cousin.

"Sing, Rod, dear," said his mother.

He looked at the piano, lazily.

"Yes, do," said his cousin, in a low voice.

"No, I won't now, until after you have sung."

"Will you sing then?" she said, gliding from his side slowly; he nodded, and she went to the piano, and sang one of Moore's melodies.

Now it was singular that Rod, who was so ignorant, so confoundedly stupid in everything else, should have the gift of music in the high degree he had. He could play with a skill and feeling that nearly approached perfection. His voice, too, was inexpressibly beautiful, and often, those who had heard him sing, would wonder that a gift so generally confined to the mild and gentle among men, should have been bestowed upon the youth whose wildness and strength were by-words wherever his name was known.

"Now, come," said his cousin, walking towards him, and he sauntered to the piano, and seating himself carelessly, almost half sideways, struck the notes, and commenced that beautiful song of the Laureates—Home she brought her warrior dead."

His mother's eyes filled with tears that dried up in a glance of love and pride, and Ida Valor's face grew flushed, then pale, and her eyes large and moist, as his voice dwelt upon the words and filled the room with its exquisite music.

Sir Harry had left the room. Rod turned round upon the music stool, and then rose.

"Thanks, Rod, dear," said his mother, laying her hand upon his arm, and stroking it fondly as he passed. His cousin said nothing.

"Are you really grateful, mother?" he said, with a quizzing smile. She nodded.

"Then don't ask me to sing again," he said, "for I'm lazy to-night." He looked round, and added, "If Sir Harry were here he would say that was nothing unusual."