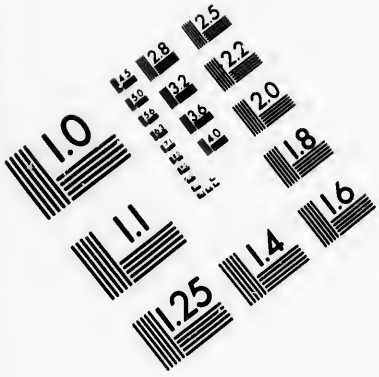

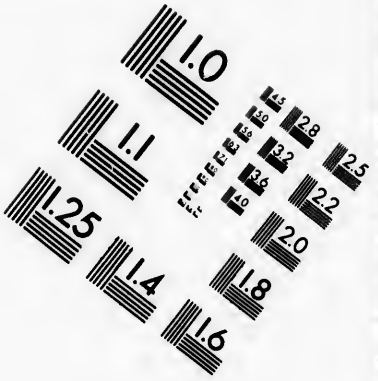

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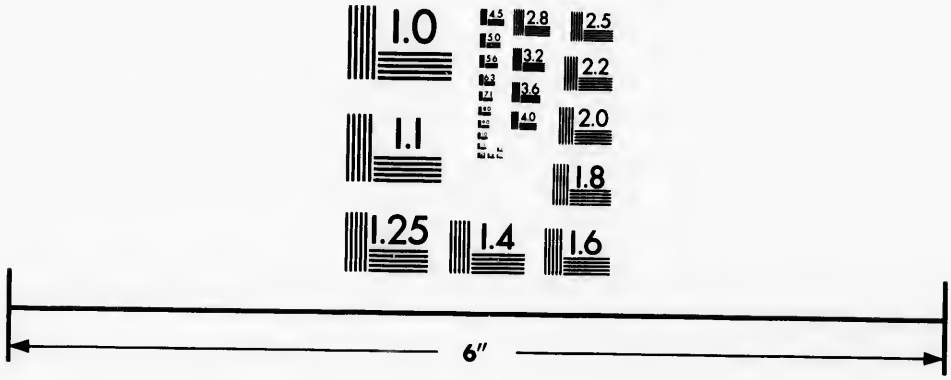

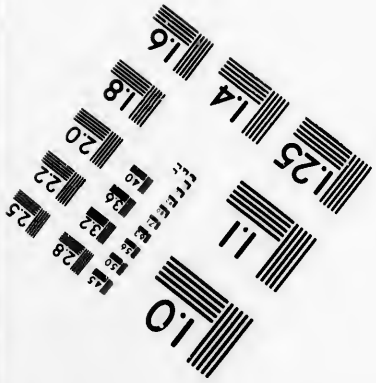

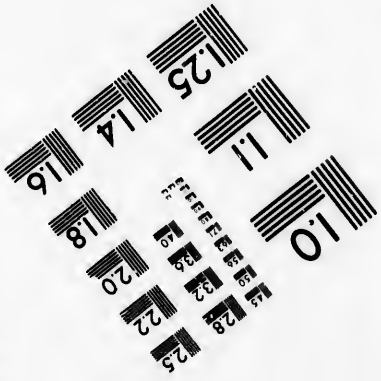

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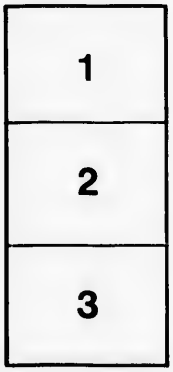

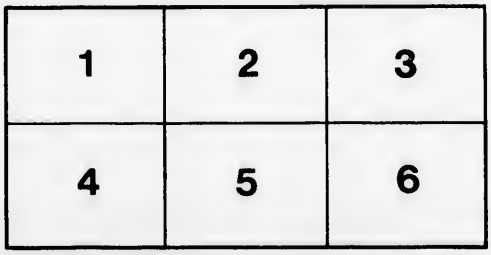

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CHAPTER I.

SHADOWS RISING.

THE crowded court was hushed and quiet—not a soul moved so much as a finger. The judge, grave and stern, sat motionless—keen-eyed counsel were on the alert—fashionable ladies held their breath, while in some lovely eyes the scalding tears rose and fell fast over lovely cheeks out of pity for the unspeakable anguish on the face of the fair girl at the barrister's table below.

The awful stillness lasted but for a moment, and as the jury began to file into their box, a sound between a shiver and a sob crept through the court, and all eyes turned toward those who had come to bring the verdict which, to three lives in that place, would be of far graver import than if it were one of life or death,

And oh! what agonized faces did the three principal actors in the drama turn in the direction of the jury—the wife and husband, and he who had been the chosen friend of both! The wife but a couple of hours ago had stood forth and, denying the charges against her, had in a choking voice declared that she had never in all her life given word or thought of love to any man except her husband; the husband had given his evidence unwillingly enough, yet his very hesitation had carried conviction with it to more than one half-sympathetic heart, conviction of the wife's guilt, that is.

After her had come the third actor in the pitiful drama, and he had stood up like a man, hotly denying that he had ever wronged his friend or his friend's wife by a look, by a word, by a thought, and had boldly declared that the fatal letter which his friend had opened had not been written to Mrs. Adair at all, but to another lady—the lady, in fact, whom he hoped would ultimately become his wife—and how it had come to be addressed to Mrs. Adair he did not know. Yes, he did sometimes write to Mrs. Adair, mere notes, answers to invitations or such trifling matters, but never as a secret from her husband, never on his word of honor as a gentleman.

No, he did not think it possible that he could

have put it in the wrong envelope because he had not written to Mrs. Adair at all during that week—therefore he could not conjecture how it had happened.

He had been asked whether he denied that the handwriting of the envelope was his? No, he replied that it looked uncommonly like his, and admitted that if he had been shown the envelope casually he should have said that it was his handwriting. But he would positively swear that he had never written that letter to Mrs. Adair, and that he had never in all his life written or spoken one word to her which all the world, especially her husband, might not have seen and heard.

So, with some additional evidence from Mrs. Adair's own maid, the case stood when the jury returned into court to give their verdict, and a death-like silence fell upon the persons therein assembled.

It was broken by the solemn questions put to and answered by the foreman of the jury—and after he had spoken it lasted for full two minutes longer, two minutes that seemed like hours.

The great counsel who had defended Mrs. Adair uttered an exclamation of disgust and turned to speak to his client—"I shall give notice of appeal when the time comes," he said in a vexed undertone—"you never know what

clowns like these—" with a slight gesture towards the jury—" may or may not do. We must appeal."

" Appeal——" Mrs. Adair echoed ; she looked at him with wild and vacant eyes —" Appeal—what is that ? "

" It's the only chance we have of upsetting this blundering verdict," he answered, " but I will see you in a day or two, Mrs. Adair, and go into it all with you."

But Mrs. Adair shook her head resolutely. " No," she said in a pained voice, " all the appeals in the world could not undo what has been done. Let it all go ! I could not go through another day like this—I would rather die. I—I will go—away." She had been on the point of saying " home," but checked herself and substituted the other word for that tender one to which henceforward she would be a stranger. " You have done your best for me, and I thank you. And, Sir John—" more hesitatingly than before—" *if* you *can* believe that I am innocent, I would like you to do so. Whatever happens, it will always comfort me to think that you believed in me, that *any* one believed in me—" with a wild sob in her throat.

The great counsel had something very like tears in his eyes as he took her hand. " My dear lady—" he said with a sincerity that was

unmistakable—"I believe in your innocence implicitly—*implicitly*. But, let me see you safely through the crowd and into your carriage. God knows," he added under his breath, "that I would do much more than that to help you, my poor child, if I could."

"You have been very good," she murmured in a dull hopeless tone. "Nay, you *are* very good. It will all come back to you some day. God bless you, Sir John. Good-bye."

By this time they had reached the busy street, and the great counsel looked in vain for Mrs. Adair's brougham. She saw the look and answered it. "No, a cab please. I did not care to keep the carriage waiting."

He hailed a cab and helped her into it, then leant forward after he had shut the doors and asked her a question.

"What are you going to do—when can I come and see you?"

She looked at him with her sad eyes and shook her head vaguely, hopelessly. "I don't know what I shall do; I don't know yet what will become of me," she said, "and why should I trouble you any more? You have done all that you could do for me, and I am grateful, oh! so grateful. But you and I have nothing in common now. Good-bye."

She held out her hand to him and he leant yet nearer towards her. "Mrs. Adair," he said, "you told me that you had no money of your own—what will you do?"

"I did not mean that I was quite penniless," she answered with a wan smile. "I have about a hundred pounds left quite of my own. That will tide me over the immediate future. For the rest I cannot tell you, for I do not know myself what I am going to do."

"But in the time to come if you should want help of *any* kind," said Sir John earnestly, "you will come to me. Promise me that you will. My poor child, you have never known what it is to battle with the hard world—you will find it so much easier and lighter if you have a friend that you can trust. You will come to me if you are in any kind of difficulty, won't you? You will let me know where you are—what you are doing? There are so many ways in which a man can help a woman."

She looked away over the horse's head as if she was trying to look into the future. "Yes," she said at last, "when I have found a resting-place I will let you know it. I can't say any more now, and—and I must go back to Grosvenor Street, please."

He released her hand, stepped back, gave the address to the cabman and waved his hand

to her as the horse moved forward. Then he turned and went back into the building again, too pressed with work to have more than five minutes to spare, even for the woman whose case and whose personality had interested him more than he had ever been interested in all his life before. But he went back to his work with head and heart both full of the girl who had just lost the day.

"Heaven help that poor little woman," he said to himself, "and d—n the fool of a husband for his suspicions! He looked cut up enough when those blockheads gave their verdict—the greater ass he for putting it in their power to give a verdict at all."

Mrs. Adair, meantime, was driving along the Strand, that street of all others so full of busy human life, of men and women all hurrying along, none of them seeming to have time to give a word or thought of sympathy to the ruined hearts and hopes that they meet by the way. She was very wretched! She felt so old and worn, and she was still so young, only three-and-twenty two months ago!

Her thoughts went back to Sir John Wigram. "That is a good man—a good man," she said to herself, "and so kind, so considerate. I wonder what sort of a wife he has? I think she must be a happy woman."

She was still thinking of him when she drove up, for the last time, to the house which had been her happy home for five years, five happy years and two weary and wretched months. The servant who opened the door looked at her with respectful enquiry, and she answered the mute question in his eyes at once.

"I am going away in half-an-hour, Jenkins," she said in a strange hushed voice—"and I shall not come back here at all. To-morrow I daresay your master will come—he will settle everything with you and make arrangements for the house and so on."

She turned to go up the stairs, but the man followed her a step or two and coughed apologetically. "May I say, ma'am," he said, "that I am grieved—that we are all deeply grieved to lose so kind a mistress. We were hoping it might be otherwise, ma'am."

The man's tone touched her, she turned back with her hand on the oaken stair-rail. "And I also, Jenkins—" she sighed—"and I also. Well—" sighing again and with a hopeless gesture—"it was not to be. I hope you will get on well, all of you, you have been good servants to me, and I—I can do nothing for any of you, I cannot even give you a character now."

Her voice broke piteously, she turned and went quickly up the wide stairs, the steps up

and down which she and Dick had gone hand in hand so many times together, with gay laughter and fond looks which were all over now, gone for ever into the past which was agony and anguish to remember had ever been.

They tell us that the English are stiff and cold, that nothing ever rouses the ordinary Englishman out of his decorous reserve. Perhaps it is so, but I know that Jenkins the plain serving-man, who was no longer young and had never been troubled by even the very smallest touch of romance in all his life, who was staid and old-fashioned to a degree, I do know that, as soon as his young mistress was out of sight, he bent down and kissed the handrail just where her little cold hand had rested. Then, as if ashamed of his little exhibition of feeling, he hurried away to his pantry, where he stood shaking his head at the rows of glasses, and muttering darkly —"Oh! Master Richard—Master Richard, you've done this day what you will rue to the end of time—oh, Master Richard, how could you do it—how could you do it?"

In less than half-an-hour he heard Mrs. Adair coming downstairs, and he went into the hall to meet her. "I have set tea in the boudoir, ma'am," he said in an everyday respectful tone, as if he had never given way to a burst of feeling in all his life, and she was but going out to

pay an afternoon visit and would assuredly be back by dinner-time.

"Thank you, Jenkins," she said, "but I cannot wait for it. Call me a cab, if you please."

"But you will take something, ma'am, before you go out," he urged, laying aside his deference in his anxiety.

"No, Jenkins, thank you—I would rather not have anything here. Yes, a cab at once please—Thanks."

Her tone admitted of no delay, of no remonstrance, and Jenkins went out into the fast-fading day and whistled sharply. A moment later Mrs. Adair had looked her last on her home, and as she passed out of the door, her maid came running down with a small portmanteau and a rather shabby little dressing-bag. "Give them to Jenkins," Mrs. Adair said—"and go straight in doors, Marie—no need to make your cold worse—Good-bye—" then she stopped and held out her hand to Jenkins.

"You will say good-bye to all the others for me, Jenkins," she said—"I could not bear to see them all—I have left a remembrance for each of you with Marie—Good-bye, Jenkins, good-bye."

She pressed a bit of rustling paper into his hand and got quickly into the cab—"Drive to No. 00 Jermyn Street," she said; and then the

driver gave a jerk to the reins, and the next moment Jenkins was standing alone on the doorstep, looking after the retreating vehicle.

"No. 00 Jermyn Street," he repeated—"She's going to see *him!* Well, Master Richard, I've never been afraid of man, woman nor child in all my life yet, but I'd rather that you had to face her than me, that's all. And if ever I gets hold of Rosalie Vallin there'll be a heavy reckoning to settle, and I mean to settle it."

CHAPTER II.

GOOD-BYE TO SUMMER!

In less than ten minutes the cab stopped at the door of No. 00 Jermyn Street, the house where Richard Adair had taken chambers after leaving his own home in Grosvenor Street.

"Can you wait for me?" Mrs. Adair asked —"I shall not be long—not many minutes."

"Oh! yes, lady," he answered cheerfully, "as long as ever you like."

She rang the bell and the summons was answered by a quiet-looking young man.

"Is Mr. Adair here?" she asked.

The young man hesitated. "Well, ma'am," he answered, "Mr. Adair is at home; but I don't think he will see any one to-day."

"I think he will see me. I come on business," she said coldly. "Stay, I will write a line to him."

She went into the house and scribbled a few words on a leaf of her pocket-book which she tore out and twisted into a semblance of a note. "Give that to Mr. Adair," she said, "I will wait here."

The young man departed quickly on his mission, returning almost immediately, saying—"Mr. Adair will see you, ma'am, if you will walk this way."

She followed him with an outward appearance of calmness although her limbs were shaking under her and her face was ashen white. She walked into the room, a handsome room flooded with rich light from the fire and from two red-shaded lamps. She was conscious that the door had been closed behind her, and that she was alone with the man who had been her husband, and whom, God help her, she loved still with all her heart and soul.

The supreme misery of the moment almost overwhelmed her—she tottered and would have fallen if she had not caught at a heavy chair by which to steady herself.

"Won't you sit down?" Adair asked very politely.

She shook her head. "I don't want to sit down," she said in an almost inaudible voice. "I—I—daresay you are surprised to see me."

He made a gesture deprecating and vague, as he might have done to a stranger whom he wished to set at ease. Mrs. Adair went on, more bravely this time.

"First, I have brought you the keys of the safe and of my desk," she said. "I have taken

away nothing that you gave me—only the few trinkets I had before—before I ever saw you. You will perhaps go to Grosvenor Street and see the servants—and tell them what to do."

"But you have not left the house," he cried. "What are you going to do? Where are you going to live?"

She looked up at him steadily enough. "That is no longer any concern of yours," she said coldly. "It is sufficient for you that I am not going to live on the money of a man who believes me to be what you have made me in the eyes of all the world to-day. I came—and perhaps I was a fool to do it—because I wanted to tell you, though it is too late now to undo what you have done——"

"What *I* have done," he echoed bitterly.

She drew a step nearer to him. "Dick," she said, in just the same old tender voice, the voice which still thrilled him through and through, "it is too late now to undo *any* thing, and you may never learn the truth in this world, but I swear to you solemnly that you have wronged me utterly and absolutely. Every word I spoke in the Court to-day was true, wholly true."

"And the letter," he broke in. "How do you explain that?"

"I cannot explain it," she answered, "it is

all a mystery to me; but I swear to you, Dick, on the word of a woman, who is heart-broken beyond the need or desire of lying, that Captain St. John never said one word of love to me in all his life; he is no more to me than"—she looked round for some simile by which to express her indifference—"than—than this table! Think! Do you suppose that I should have written to you day after day protesting my innocence—praying, begging, imploring you not to do this thing, if I had been the guilty woman you thought me—that"—bitterly—"you think me still? Just think a moment if you have not thought of it before. If I had loved him better than you, why should I have cared if the whole world knew the truth? I have no children to hold back half my heart while the other half was pining to be away—what then was there to keep me? Not money—he is far richer than you are! My good name? Do you think I should have valued that so highly if my heart was black enough to betray you? Oh! Dick, think!"

But Adair was in no wise touched by her passion. "It sounds all likely and plausible enough," he said, sneering a little—"but you have been found guilty by a jury of impartial men, and——"

"Are men *ever* impartial to women?" she

cried. "No, a thousand times no; they were all against me, judge, jury, lawyers, all excepting Sir John Wigram——"

"Who was paid for thinking otherwise," Adair put in bitterly.

"Oh! Dick"—she burst out—"Oh! Dick, for shame, for shame, it is not like you! Three months ago——"

"Three months ago"—he broke in pitilessly—"I *believed* in you. I am not the same man I was three months ago."

She was silent for a moment struggling to keep back her tears. "It seems hard that after believing in me for five years, you should be turned utterly against me by the evidence of such a woman as Rosalie——"

"Not at all on Rosalie's evidence," he broke in sharply, "but on the evidence of a letter addressed to you which I opened with my own hand."

"And at whose instigation?" she asked.

He put out his hand with a gesture of admission to the implied point. "That is all beside the question," he said. "St. John wrote the letter, and——"

"He denied it——"

"Oh! yes."

"Dick, he gave you his solemn word, his word of honor," she exclaimed.

"Oh! yes—but the word of the most honorable man does not count for much when it concerns divorce questions," he said more bitterly than ever.

She looked at him with all her heart in her eyes and he went on speaking.

"You said just now that I was not like myself—well, I am not myself. I am a new Richard Adair, a miserable devil without a hope in the world or faith in any man or woman. My new experience has done it, and I do not relish the new state of things at all. It is your work, Hope, all your work, and you need not be surprised that I am not as smooth and complacent as I should be if I were in the blind paradise of my ignorance. Few men, I fancy, would be just the same if they had had my change of circumstances—I am not going to pretend that I am so."

She looked at him steadfastly, a whole world of love, yearning, hungering love in her face. "I will go," she said, "I have said all that I came to say. Some day, Dick, you may find out the truth, and this will all come back to you. God help you then, Dick, when you realize what you have done."

She turned away half-blinded by her tears—her only desire at that moment was to get out of the room, out of the house, without breaking

down and showing the full extent of her weakness; he opened the door for her ceremoniously enough. "Have you a carriage? Allow me to take you down to it."

"No," she said coldly—"oblige me by remaining here"

So he held open the door until she had passed out of sight—and then he went back to his chair before the fire, where he sat till the glowing embers sank down and down until not a single spark of life remained therein.

And oh! what hard and bitter thoughts the man had! A vision came to him of how he saw her first, walking along a flower-bordered lane in her father's Devonshire parish—he recalled the simple white gown she wore and the innocent shining eyes and brilliant coloring shaded by a large hat, and he sickened as he reminded himself that the eyes were innocent no longer, and that the brilliant tints had faded in the fierce glare of discovery.

It was well that the old rector was dead, more than well; but what a wooing his had been, with never a tiny cloud to mar its sunshine—he groaned aloud as he thought of that glad golden summer-time.

"If only she had been honest," he cried—"if only she had been true enough to be honest with me—to say 'Dick, I was tempted—for-

give me—take me away and help me to be better.' But no, she was false all through, false to the very end—beyond the very end."

But Adair was wrong there—he was not the man to forgive such a wrong, though at that moment he thought truly enough that he could and would have done so, nor dreamed that the end would have been just the same as it had been that same cruel winter day, when he had let his wife—his wife who had been—go out into the darkness alone, without so much as a single word of parting.

CHAPTER III.

LINES OF WHITE.

WELL, it was all over! As Adair sat by the burnt-out fire in his lonely room that dismal night, he said those forlorn words over and over again—it was all over, Hope and he were no longer one but two now, and the happy time of his life had come to a miserable and shameful end.

For thirty years he had lived in the sunshine of what had seemed to be unending good fortune. He had had neither cloud nor care, excepting that the two little children who had been born to them had been so frail in their hold upon life, that they had quietly faded out of the world but a few hours after they had struggled into it. And now—now he was quite alone; he might go on living for twenty, thirty, nay even for forty years before he reached his allotted span—and his was not a short-lived race. What wonder that the man groaned as he sat before the empty grate!

At last the quiet young man who had conducted Mrs. Adair upstairs knocked gently at

the door, and receiving no answer, knocked again and finally opened it. He did not usually knock at all, but like all the rest of the world he knew what had happened to Adair earlier in the day, and he felt a certain delicacy in entering the room without some warning, for he pitied the crushed and lonely figure in the big chair with all his heart.

He had a little tray with a letter lying on it which he offered to Adair, and as he took it he asked—"Will you dine here to-night, sir?"

"No—I'll dine at the club," Adair answered—not that he meant to dine anywhere.

"Shall I light the fire again, sir," the young man asked.

"Presently, presently—I am going out after a while—light it then," Adair answered irritably.

He waited until he was alone again before he looked at the letter which he held in his hand—oh, yes, he had seen by a glance from whom it came; he knew Hugh St. John's big bold hand-writing as well as he knew his own.

But he did not open it at once—indeed he had more than half a mind not to open it at all, but to send it back with a curt line written across the cover to the effect that

there neither could nor should be any communication between them.

"I suppose he will marry Hope now—as soon as he can," his bitter thoughts ran. "He thought to blind me with his cock and bull story of a letter written to another woman, the lady he hoped to make his wife—and yet—yet—he refused to give the name in court, because the engagement had not been made public, owing to the unfortunate mistake which had been made with Mrs. Adair—aye, the mistake of being found out."

But should he open that letter or not? There might be explanations in it, some word, even if it were only an admission of the truth, which would set his mind at rest, so far as it ever could be set at rest after all that had happened. Yes, he would open it—it would be easy enough to send it back, perhaps torn across the better to express his contempt for the writer.

In another moment he had broken the seal and had drawn the letter from its envelope. It was without prefix and ran thus—"God forgive you, Adair, for what you have done this day. It is a fine piece of work truly, one for a man to be proud of. You have blasted your wife's innocent life, and mine is ruined as completely as it is possible for a man's life to be. We have been close friends for many years, you and I,

and I would like you to ask yourself now that all is over, have you ever known me do a dirty trick in my life to any friend, to any enemy for the matter of that? Look back over the years that you have known me—do you think if I had wanted to make love to your wife that I would have conducted myself like an area-sneak? No, a thousand times, no. If I had wanted her to go away with me and she would have gone (which she never would have done, for, God help her, poor child, there was only one man in the world for her, and he was a fair-weather lover who hadn't heart enough to trust either wife or friend)—do you think I would have been content to see her now and again *on the sly?* No, Adair, and when you are calm enough to think reasonably about it, your heart will tell you that whatever sins I may have, that particular sin is not one of them.

"I saw you sneer in the court to-day because I would not give a lady's name to the public—*you*, I daresay, who have not hesitated to drag your wife's name and your own through the mire, will hardly understand my wish to spare a woman the pain of having her name brought into a case like this. Well, I can tell you now and I will, believing that you have still a sufficient sense of honor left to let it go no further. The lady to whom that letter was written was

Miss Maturin—and an hour ago she wrote to me definitely refusing to fulfil her engagement to me, or to have it made public in any way—she positively refuses to see me or to have any explanation from me—she even forbids me to write to her, saying that, if I do so, she will return the letter unopened. Now, Adair, when I tell you that this lady possesses every vestige of my affection, that for many months past the sole aim and object of my life has been to win her for my wife, you will perhaps understand how I feel towards you at this moment.

"As to the unhappy girl whose stricken face to-day ought to have carried conviction of her innocence to any but a heart of stone, what you have done is, of course, a matter for your own conscience, a burden which I, with all my disappointment and trouble, thank God is not mine to carry. For the last time I protest to you that your suspicions against your wife's honor are absolutely unfounded—would that all other women were as pure and true, although, poor child, her purity and truth have not availed her much—or I should say have not availed her at all, against what at best was a mistake, or at worst a cruel trick to bring about her downfall.

"HUGH ST. JOHN."

When Adair got to the end of the letter he

had no longer any idea of sending it back to Hugh St. John. He felt that it was manly and brave in tone, and that it was hard on him to have his engagement to Miss Maturin brought to an end in that way. He had no longer any doubt that St. John had been engaged to some one, and now like a flash of lightning there came back to his memory the many occasions on which he had seen him in attendance upon Miss Maturin—yet he was none the less convinced of his wife's guilt and of his friend's treachery.

"It's a manly letter, evidently written in a boiling passion," he told himself—"and it's a clever letter too—but false, every word of it that concerns Hope. All the better for Miss Maturin that she has found it out before marriage instead of afterwards, she ought to be thankful to me, though I daresay she isn't. But she will be some day—some day! And I! Shall I be thankful too? My God, no! If only I had let it pass—if only I had let sleeping dogs lie—and they were sleeping—there would have been no scandal, no fuss, nobody would have known. I could never have been so happy again, but I should not have been so supremely wretched as I am now."

An hour went by! The quiet young man came twice and listened at the door, and the

second time all was so still that he opened it softly and ventured to look into the room—"And I come out quiet-like," he explained to his wife when he went downstairs again—"so as he shouldn't hear me. Pore gentleman, he do seem to take it to heart."

"What was he doing?" his wife asked curiously.

"Nothing—he was just leaning his head on his arms and never moved nor spoke. I should say as he didn't hear me, so I come out quiet-like and shut the door."

"He's had naught to eat all day," remarked the lady, who was interested in the cooking department of the establishment, "I wonder if he'd take a cup of beef-tea."

"Ah!" sighed the young man—"beef-tea's poor consolation when your heart's broke."

"There's something in that," remarked Mrs. Smith feelingly. "I know when I thought you was going to take up with that Ann Timmins, never a bite passed my lips for nearly a week except what I had to taste in the way of cooking. I couldn't have sat down to a reg'lar meal not for a king's ransom, that I couldn't."

"Ann Timmins wasn't worth troubling yourself about, Jenny," returned Mr. Smith disdainfully—there had been a time when his feelings had hung trembling as in a balance between

the two ladies, but he had ended by marrying Jenny, and was eminently satisfied with his partner in every way.

"Perhaps not—and perhaps you wasn't worth it neither, Smith," said she quickly—having made her establishment in life Mrs. Smith had no notion of allowing her better half to what she called "get above himself."

But Mr. Smith was equal to the occasion—"Which I never was one to butter myself, Jenny," he remarked with dignity—"but all the same, I hope I always respected myself better than to run after Ann Timmins anyway."

"There's many a marriage comes about without any intention on the man's part," said Mrs. Smith rather sententiously—"and Ann Timmins isn't the one to remain in a single state for want of encouragement on *'er* side, that's certain! Eh! but, Smith, my heart do bleed for the pore gentleman upstairs. I wonder if he'd manage to eat a few oysters if I sent 'em up without saying anything about 'em."

"Best leave him alone," Smith replied.

"Perhaps. But he's had one visitor you say."

"Yes! And, Jenny—Why—it was *her!*"

"*Her*—what her?"

"Why, his wife, of course. I thought she looked white and scared-like. By——, but she's a pretty creature—no wonder he give such a sigh when he read the note."

"What was she like? What sort of a way had she with her?" Mrs. Smith asked curiously.

"She was very white-looking—and I noticed that she'd very blue eyes—and she was quietly dressed and a lady every inch of her. She had a commanding way, too, but a very gentle voice, and she gave me a shilling when I helped her into the cab. 'Thank you,' she said, 'I am much obliged.'"

"Where did she go?"

"To Albert Gate," Smith replied. "I daresay she'd give him directions when she got there."

"Ah! well—she should have behaved herself and then she'd be in her comfortable house still and we should be one gentleman the less—not that I should mind that, pore thing. I never was one to fatten on the troubles of others. Well, Smith, I'm going to do something unusual. I'm going upstairs to see Mr. Adair, and ask him if he'll oblige me by eating something."

"Do as you like, Jenny—but you'll take the consequences if he's offended about it?"

"Oh! yes," she responded readily enough.

She was a comely young woman, neatly dressed in black with a large white apron with a bib to it. She glanced at herself in the glass, then went straight upstairs to the drawing-

room door, at which she knocked. There was no reply and she knocked again, after which she went in only to find the room empty—Adair had gone.

"I wonder where he is," she said anxiously to herself—"please Heaven he comes to no harm—it's a bitter night."

It was a bitter night, and at that moment Adair was tearing along the Embankment as if ten thousand fiends were after him. The icy wind whistled about his ears, but he felt it not because of the passionate fires burning in his heart. As he passed by Charing Cross Station a man who knew him well almost ran against him, but avoided speaking to him from an instinctive feeling that he would rather be left alone—a little further on a painted woman caught hold of his arm only to be shaken off with an oath—so he sped on and on through the dark night until at last he reached a lonely spot where he came to a standstill, and there he stayed leaning his arms on the stone parapet. For a long time he stood there looking across the dark river and over his own desolate future. In his heart a terrible question fought fiercely—with the knowledge that a jury of impartial men had found guilt in the man and woman whose denials had been so full of indignation and of warning. *If* his wife and his friend were innocent of offence

after all, and he had in his anger—"Oh, God! oh, God!—" he cried to the fierce night, and for answer there was only the sound of his own sobs and the scalding pain of his own bitter tears as they fell upon his clay-cold hands below.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE LINK MUST BREAK."

For a few days Adair remained in his rooms in Jermyn Street, seeing nobody, not going out of doors during the day, eating next to nothing, and then, after the dusk had fallen, spending hours tearing up and down the almost deserted Embankment, or standing resting his arm on the stone parapet and staring wretchedly at the dark sullen water below.

At last on the third night after the dreadful day in the court, when he had been standing motionless for nearly an hour, a policeman came up and touched him on the shoulder.

Adair looked up. "Well—what is it?" he asked.

The policeman coughed apologetically. If Adair had been in rags instead of the good clothes of a rich man, he would have taken him by the arm with a rough, even though it might be kindly—"Come, young man, you'll get no comfort staring at that 'ere water—you'd best move on." As it was he coughed—"I've seen

you hereabouts for several evenings, sir. I—I thought—I'm afraid you're in trouble, sir."

"Yes," answered Adair briefly.

"Well, sir—people in trouble do desperate things sometimes, and it's our business to stop them if we can. I wouldn't get looking too long at the water if I were you—it seems to draw you like."

Adair laughed, a harsh laugh without a trace of mirth about it. "My good fellow," he said, "I haven't the very smallest intention of going over there,"—pointing to the water gleaming here and there as it was touched by the lamp-light—"if I had had any inclination that way I should have done it several days ago. But I'm obliged to you, policeman, all the same."

The policeman looked, as he felt, rather sceptical. "You'll excuse me, sir, but I don't like to leave you here. You look desperate bad—hadn't you better be going home?"

"Home,"—echoed the other bitterly—then remembered that the man knew nothing of him or his story. "Look here, policeman," he said suddenly changing his tone—"you're a good fellow—here's a sovereign for you—I'll walk as far as Charing Cross with you if you're going that way. Policeman—I hadn't any intention of putting myself in the water, that's not my form at all. But I doubt if there's a more miserable devil in the three kingdoms than I am."

"I'm sorry for that, sir," said the policeman sympathetically—and in truth he thought that Adair was out of his mind more or less—"and I hope you'll understand that I meant no offence at all in speaking to you. You see, sir, a good many poor things get into the water somehow, and if they're in a position to give their account afterwards, they generally say as they didn't know how it happened. For my part I'm always more easy in my mind when them that's in trouble is out o' sound of the river."

They walked on a few steps further, and then Adair suddenly stopped in the full light of a gas-lamp. "You've heard of the Adair case?" he asked. "Yes! Well—I am Adair. Now you'll be able to understand why I find the dark Embankment more pleasant than my club, and that my home has not much attraction for me."

"I see, sir," replied the policeman, now thoroughly surprised—"I've thought it very 'ard lines on you, sir, all along. But I wouldn't loiter about—thoughts may come into your head that'll be 'ard to drive out, and it's a bitter night, too. You'll get over it after a bit, sir—p'raps there's better times in store."

Something in the man's tone made Adair pull himself together in a minute. "Ah! well,

I was bound to satisfy you, policeman, and I'm obliged to you. Good-night."

He hailed a passing cab and got into it. "No. 00 Jermyn Street," he said, and the next moment the policeman was alone on the wind-swept pavement. "H'm," he muttered—"there's another of 'em gone wrong through a hussy of a woman. Aye, but the women have a lot to answer for. And as for that one, if a fine handsome young feller like '*im* did not satisfy her, she ought to be trounced, that's all."

And Adair in the course of a few minutes reached his chambers and went straight upstairs, and as he flung open the door of his sitting-room, a man who was sitting near the table got up and said "Good-evening, sir," in a quiet respectful tone.

Adair started and looked at him more closely by the dim light of the shaded lamp. "Oh! it's you, Jenkins, is it?" he exclaimed. "Well, what brings you here? Is anything wrong?"

Jenkins coughed behind his hat. "I have had no proper orders, sir," he replied. "When Mrs. Adair left on Tuesday immediately after the—the——" he hesitated for a word and Adair made an impatient gesture to signify that he understood.

"Well?" he said. "Go on."

"When the mistress left, sir, she told me that

I was to wait for your orders, and that she thought you would probably be coming the next day. We should like to know——"

"What I'm going to do?" interposed Adair harshly. "Then you'll all have to do without knowing. I don't know myself, Jenkins, so I cannot tell you. You can go on very well as you are."

"Excuse me, sir," returned Jenkins with studied politeness—"but if you would be so kind as to look over the plate and the valuables I should be more easy in my mind. And—and I should be glad to give you my notice——"

"Your notice," cried Adair, more thoroughly astonished than he had ever been in all his life before—"your notice, Jenkins! Why—what on earth are you talking about, man?"

Jenkins drew himself up. "Well, Master Richard," he said, unconsciously reverting to the way in which he had been used to address him twenty years before—"Well, Master Richard, I daresay you will think that it's no business of mine, and that a servant, even an old one like me, that's been in the family man and boy for over thirty years, ought to have no feelings of any kind, but the truth is I am deeply attached to the young mistress, and I can't get over the feeling that wrong's been done. And she has been wronged, Master Richard, as sure as

you and I are stood here together at this moment."

But Adair shook his head. "No, Jenkins, no—she had the cleverest lawyers in England to try and prove her innocent and they couldn't do it."

"Who could prove anything when they had to deal with a liar like Rosalie Vallin?" Jenkins asked sturdily. "You may believe me, Master Richard, I didn't live in the same house with Rosalie Vallin for three years without knowing her well, and being able to read her through and through like a book. I knew her better than the others did, far better, for she had an idea at one time that we might do together better than we were likely to do apart. I believe she flew as high as Arlington Street and three sets of titled lodgers. But not for me—no, Master Richard, if ever old Jenkins makes such an hass of himself as marrying it'll not be to Rosalie Vallin, nor any other French hussy that finds her own country too hot to hold her. But I got to know her well—and I have my own opinion as to what her behavior to Mrs. Adair means——"

"She always behaved well enough. I never heard Mrs. Adair blame her in my life," Adair said.

"But you didn't expect, sir, that the mis-

tress' own maid would be the one to turn round and ruin her, did *you?* It was Rosalie that brought you that letter—it was Rosalie's manner that made you open it—it was somehow or other through Rosalie that the letter ever came to be there at all."

"Rubbish!" cried Adair quickly.

But Jenkins shook his head. "Well, sir, I've had nothing to say about it so far, out of obedience to the mistress' wishes, and when the lawyers came and asked to see me she said, 'No, if my character to the world is not good enough to refute this charge, I would rather not refute it by bringing my own servants to give me a reference. Those that are against me can go and give their false evidence against me—those that wish to please me will please me best by remaining perfectly silent on the subject.' So until the trial was over we upper servants kept silent; but now that it is done with, I feel able to express to certain persons exactly what I have felt about it all along."

"And you have felt—" asked Adair.

"That Rosalie Vallin had a motive in arranging the whole thing," said Jenkins bluntly.

"Nonsense—what motive could she have? She was greatly attached to Mrs. Adair—she gave her evidence most unwilling and with tears——"

"Ah! she was always a dab hand at that," muttered Jenkins drily. "But she was paid for it all, and likely enough the tears was an extra."

"But who could or would pay her to do anything of the sort?" Adair cried. "You forget, Jenkins, all this is not a story-book—it is hard, sober, solemn, damnable fact. You'll say next that *I* paid Rosalie."

"No—no, Master Richard," said Jenkins in a wise tone—"but I do think you might have bought the truth of her if you had bid high enough."

"Pooh! The woman who would lie on one side would lie on the other side. Besides she was a perfectly respectable young woman, and came to Mrs. Adair with an excellent character, a long character, too, from a lady of the highest position. As a matter of fact I opened that letter by the merest chance, and simply because I wanted to know what Captain St. John was doing before I went out. I had no thought that Mrs. Adair would mind—she opened my letters often enough and I hers. I had *no* suspicion until I was made suspicious, more than suspicious, by Captain St. John's own words. And even then—why the devil didn't you come and tell me all this at first?"

"I obeyed Mrs. Adair's orders, Master Richard," Jenkins said promptly. "And as you

went away out of the house I supposed you wished me to do so. Besides I did not know for certain, sir, but that you wished to——"

But Adair was fast losing patience. "Good heavens, man, don't you know that I would rather have had her proved innocent than guilty? Don't you understand that the whole affair has been more bitter than death to me? Don't you see that I am thoroughly crushed with all that I have gone through? Look at me, Jenkins, do I look like a man who is glad to get rid of his wife?"

"You look mortal bad, Master Richard," Jenkins admitted, "but the poor young mistress if you'd seen her——"

"Oh! for God's sake stop," Adair cried passionately; "it's bad enough as it is, desolate enough, wretched enough. I don't want to hear any more. I thought you were as fixed in Grosvenor Street as the poles—but now the sooner you and I see the last of one another the better. As to the house, I'll see Mr. Froggart about it to-morrow—it will be sold, or—anyway he will see about it. There, go. Good-night, Jenkins. Good-bye."

So Adair was left alone but with a new idea, for a little frail tender hope had sprung up in his mind, that perhaps, if his wife appealed against the verdict, a fresh light might be

brought to bear upon the character of Rosalie Vallin, and that the testimony of Jenkins and the other old servants in Grosvenor Street might be brought forward in their mistress' favor. Then who knows what might happen—Hope and he—— But no—Hope was false, and they could never come together again now, not together in reality as they had been once, even though the verdict might be reversed and the impossible made possible.

CHAPTER V.

"WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"

But Richard Adair did not break up the house in Grosvenor Street, although as early as was practicable the next morning he went to his lawyer's office and announced that such was his intention.

"Sell everything," repeated the lawyer, looking at him over his spectacles—"H'm—that seems a great pity."

"I know it's a pity," Adair burst out irritably—"it's *all* a pity, but I can't—at least I won't live in that house by myself—I'd as soon live in my grave."

"You may not always wish to live in it by yourself," remarked the lawyer meaningly.

Adair moved restlessly on his chair. "That's as may be," he answered brusquely. "At present I don't feel like running the risk. I shall never believe in anyone again, Froggart."

Mr. Froggart looked at him over the spectacles again. "H'm!" he said drily.

Adair looked up—"What do you mean by that?" he asked abruptly.

The lawyer, who had known Adair from a boy, shrugged his shoulders. "You would not be persuaded to stay proceedings or to give your wife another chance, my dear sir. You seemed most eager to get a divorce, and now that you have got it——"

"There isn't a more miserable devil than I on earth," Adair interrupted promptly—"you're quite right, Froggart, quite right. But what is to be done about it?"

"Nothing can be done, Mr. Adair," replied the lawyer, in a tone which utterly extinguished the little ray of hope that had, in spite of all, still lingered in the unhappy young man's breast. "*Nothing* can be done from our side. Mrs. Adair may appeal, that is if she has any fresh evidence she may produce it when the case comes on again for the decree to be made absolute. Or she may do so during the time fixed by the judge, it may be a week more or less. If she has anything fresh to say, she will be given a chance of saying it. But Mrs. Adair has no intention of questioning the verdict—she simply accepts it."

"How do you know?" Adair cried eagerly.

"I was told so yesterday on authority which I believe to be good. The exact words were that all the appeals in the world could not undo what has been done, and that she would rather

die than go through another day in court. In one respect she is right—nothing can undo what has been done! I begged you to think of that when you first consulted me on the subject."

Adair said nothing, but sat with his eyes fixed on space, a fine handsome young man with every line of face and figure stamped with misery. The dry-as-dust old lawyer did not pity him one bit.

"She is still in Grosvenor Street, I suppose," he said after a minute or two, finding that his client was still silent.

"She has left it," replied Adair briefly.

"And gone——?"

"I do not know."

"And her means of living—there were settlements."

"I believe that she has gone absolutely away. I believe that she will never touch one penny of that money—it was eight hundred a year. Look here, Froggart, on Tuesday night she came to see me. She—she brought me the keys of the safe and of her desk. She still swears that she is innocent, and—and—I have had a letter from St. John—I—I—Froggart, I wish to God I had never begun this business. I—I'd take her back to-morrow, innocent or not, if she'd come."

The lawyer's next words acted like a douche

of cold water upon the heat of his passion. "Is she with St. John?" he inquired, with an appearance of interest which made Adair long wildly to knock him down.

"I think not—I feel sure not. I met him just now in Pall Mall."

Adair did not add that Captain St. John had looked, or seemed to look, right through him as if he were a mist or a blank, and that so far from feeling the outraged and wronged one of the two, he had never felt so small or so mean in all his life—and Adair was not a small man by any means, for he stood just over six feet, and was nearly three inches taller than the man who had once been his best friend.

"H'm. And you think of getting rid of the house in Grosvenor Street," Mr. Froggart remarked. "*I* wouldn't if I were you. For one thing you would lose tremendously over it—every one loses at sales. Why shouldn't you let the house for the season as it stands? You will be more decided in your mind about it later on."

Adair rose to his feet. "Well, Froggart," he said, "I don't in the least care what you do with it. I'll give you the keys and you can put the diamonds and the plate into the bank—you have the lists of both. For the rest, let it or sell it as you think fit, only don't bother me

about it. I am going abroad at once—I am going to—well, Froggart, I don't know where I am going—somewhere, anywhere out of the way of people I know. After a while I daresay I shall get over all this—as it is, I can't stand what my friends have to say about it and still worse what they *look* about it. Only yesterday I met a man in St. James' Street who stopped and shook my hand as if it was a pump-handle and he wanted to work the sympathy up. 'How are you, old chap?' he said in what he meant to be a sympathetic tone. D—n him, I hated him. I'd liked to have knocked him down," he ended irritably.

"It must be very painful for you," remarked Mr. Froggart with a dry sniff.

I have said that Mr. Froggart did not feel any sympathy whatever for his client, nor did he pretend to do so. He had not thought, on first hearing of Adair's determination to go in for a divorce, that his case was a very strong one. He had, in fact, put before him all the *disadvantages* of his taking that course whatever the verdict might happen to be, and as he had forcibly put it, in all such cases "the verdict is more or less a toss-up."

As strongly as he could he had urged the desirability of condoning the somewhat doubtful offence; but Adair had been unbending and

unyielding, he had talked a good deal of his outraged honor, had insisted on going in for a divorce, and therefore Mr. Froggart had done his best to get it for him, succeeding easily and altogether beyond his own expectations. And now that all was over, and Adair had no choice but to face the fact that his wife was his wife no longer, and that he would have to live out the rest of his life without her, Mr. Froggart had but very little patience with the unhappiness and dissatisfaction which he showed so plainly.

"I think," he continued in a calm judicial tone, "that you are doing very wisely to go abroad for a time—it is wonderful in London what short memories people have, and the greatest scandal is over and forgotten in a few days. But about the house—it is practically a necessity for you to go over it at least once."

"No, Froggart, you can do it very well," Adair replied.

But Mr. Froggart had no intention of letting his headstrong young client so easily off the consequences and duties which had been brought about entirely by his own course of action. He had done his best to stave off the divorce suit, and Adair would have none of his wisdom; so now he would not spare him any of the many unpleasantnesses which had naturally followed in its train.

"My dear sir," he said quietly, "there are diamonds and plate, family diamonds and family plate of which I have lists. But there are also to my certain knowledge a good many jewels both of your mother's and your wife's and also much silver of which there is no list. For the sake of the poor lady whose home the house has been for five years, it is absolutely necessary that you should be satisfied that she has taken nothing away with her. It is due also to my old friend, Jenkins, that you should see that everything is right before you leave the country."

"Very well," Adair returned, seeing that he could not well get out of what he knew would be the most unpalatable task of all—"since you put it in that way, Froggart, of course I must go. When will you go—to-day—to-morrow?"

"To-morrow I am busy all day—I have six or seven appointments," Mr. Froggart replied —"I shall be free at five o'clock this afternoon if you are anxious to get it over."

"I am—I'll be there at five," Adair said, moving to the door. "By-the-bye, Froggart, Jenkins has given me the sack," with a hard laugh at the make-believe joke.

"Jenkins—given you notice," echoed the lawyer—"and why?"

"His ostensible reason was his deep attach-

tachment to his mistress and his sense of the wrong that *I* have done her," answered the other bitterly.

"Ah! well, of course if he feels like *that*, he is quite right to leave you," Mr. Froggart remarked—"I must say Jenkins is a man for whom I have always entertained a great respect—a great respect——" but Adair had not waited to hear the end of the sentence, and Mr. Froggart sat down again at his desk, alternately shaking his head and nodding wisely at nothing.

CHAPTER VI.

GOOD-BYE TO HOPE!

ADAIR's first act after leaving the lawyer's office was to go into the nearest telegraph office and send a message to Jenkins which would let him know that he would be in Grosvenor Street at five o'clock. This done he had to get through the day as best he could; but, although he went to one or two shops, and even forced himself to go into his club and make a pretence of eating some lunch, the hours dragged heavily away, and he was punctual to the very moment, when he drove up to the house in Grosvenor Street.

It was a large and handsome house, rich in fine ceilings and large heavy doors which swung back with a great sweep almost flat against the walls in which they stood. The hall was large and spacious, with red and blue Turkey carpets spread upon it and upon the wide shallow stairs which led to the upper part of the house.

There were pictures and china and quaint curiosities everywhere, which gave the place an appearance of luxury and culture. Adair looked round the hall—which he had not seen for more

than three months—with eager yet sad eyes. Oh! it was a hard wrench to force himself to look once more upon the dainty nest which he had made with such lavish cost and care for his love, his false love, as he reminded himself bitterly.

"Is Mr. Froggart here—has he come?" he asked of Jenkins.

"Mr. Froggart is in the library, sir," Jenkins answered, in the every-day unmoved voice which he always wore officially.

Adair went to the library without another word; he found Mr. Froggart sitting comfortably before a good fire which Jenkins had lighted as soon as he received his master's telegram.

"You are here before me, Froggart," Adair said civilly—"I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"Not at all. I have only been here a few minutes," the lawyer replied.

"Can I offer you anything?"

"Nothing at all, thanks. I am ready to begin whenever you like."

But Adair had, apparently, no desire to hurry. He got up from the chair on which he had scarcely sat for a minute and wandered once or twice round the room, opening a book here, touching a little ornament there. "She used to

like this room," he said at last, half under his breath—"she often used to sit here with me when she was—but there, what's the good of thinking of that? It's all over and done with now—I suppose she'll go and sit in St. John's study now. Well"—turning round to Mr. Froggart with a stifled sigh—"I suppose we needn't go over the chairs and tables! Any auctioneer's man can do that, and Jenkins is as honest as the day. What is it you want me to see?"

"First of all," said the lawyer in a dry tone, "to see that all papers are locked up. Or did you clear them all out when—when you left home?"

"I touched nothing—took nothing but my cheque-book," Adair replied bitterly—"I cleared myself out, that was all. I let all the rest slide."

"Then they should all be looked over, rubbish should be destroyed and anything of importance preserved," said Mr. Froggart.

"It will take hours," exclaimed Adair feverishly. "Froggart, I really cannot and will not do it. You can come and sort them over at your leisure—you know better than I what to do with them."

"Yes—I could do the ordinary papers, and will if you wish it," Mr. Froggart answered dispassionately—"but the more private ones, I

cannot. You must have some private papers—letters for instance—which you would not wish even me to meddle with."

For a moment Adair stood irresolute. "Yes," he said, in a strangled voice—"I have all *her* letters in that drawer—but—but they can stop there."

"Not if you let the house—it will be best—"

Adair did not wait for him to finish the sentence—"I'll put them all in the fire," he said roughly, and taking a small bunch of keys from his waistcoat pocket, he unlocked the drawer and pulled it open.

There were several thick packets of letters, each tied up with a bit of narrow ribbon. Adair took out the one nearest to him and looked at it. He had destroyed all the envelopes, and his eyes fell upon the beginning of a letter dated three years back. "Darling Dick"—it began—"don't wait in for me. I have had a note from Madame Georgine asking me to go there at once about my drawing-room gown. I——" and there the letter was folded and the sentence was broken.

For a moment he stood irresolute, staring at the words, the tender words, which he had kept as he had kept every scrap of writing she had ever sent him—then he flung it back into its place and locked the drawer again.

"It's no good, Froggart, I haven't got the heart to burn them, and I won't let the house at all," he cried. "It's been my home for five years—my God, what happy years—and I won't sully it by putting a commercial value upon it. I'll send for Mrs. Potter; she was my nurse once, you know. Mrs. Potter will take charge of everything, and you pay the wages—she must have a couple of maids, and you can hand over three or four pounds a week for them to live on. Then nothing need be touched, and if I'm ill or anything, I shall have a place of my own to come to."

"As you like best," replied Mr. Froggart. "Then we will look over the plate and the jewellery and leave all the rest."

As Adair agreed to this they went next to Jenkins' pantry, where he produced the book containing the list of plate and brought out and counted everything before them.

"Never mind putting them back now," said Adair impatiently. "You can do that when we're gone."

"Don't you want the keys, sir?" Jenkins asked.

"The keys—why, what the devil should I do with them?" Adair burst out irritably. "Am I suddenly to find out that I can't trust you, after all these years? What are you talk-

ing about, man? To-morrow you will have to take it all into the bank—you can leave out enough spoons and forks for two persons' use."

"Very good, sir. Then there is all that old silver in the boudoir—that in the two little glass-topped tables. There has never been a list of that, except what I have made out this week."

"Very well—it can go with the rest of the silver to the bank," Adair replied.

"Perhaps you will just look over it, sir"—Jenkins asked.

"Very well—very well. Then, Froggart, we'll go upstairs and get that over at once, eh?"

"As you wish," with a gesture of assent.

Adair therefore promptly marched upstairs and went into the lovely yellow and white boudoir which his wife had been used to call "the Nest." It was such a dainty and charming room, and oh! what a pang it cost him to go in and look round it. There were two old Dutch inlaid tables with glass tops and a well lined with deep red velvet, the better to show off the pretty silver trifles which lay within.

Jenkins got to business at once with a stolid air of indifference which he was in reality very far from feeling. He opened the lid of the first case and reading out from the list he had brought with him, he pointed out one bit of silver after another to his master, while Mr.

Froggart stood by, silent and vigilant, watching Adair's fast whitening face and wild haggard eyes.

"Three muffineers—date of Cromwell," Jenkins read out—"Silver box with crest and monogram F. H., date 1720—silver box, mother-o'-pearl lining, date 1760—silver pail, modern—silver pen, modern—silver snuff-box, date 1802—silver snuff-box, with agate in lid, initials N. L., date 1723—silver figure of Bacchus, antique—silver salts, date Charles First—silver shoe buckles—silver sweetmeat box, date 1747—small silver platter, date of Cromwell."

"Yes, all right," said Adair—"and the other."

In truth the man's nerves were strung up to such a pitch that he scarcely knew how to get through that part of the task which still remained before him. For every little trifle that lay in the little case brought with it a crowd of bitter memories, bitter because until now they had been so bright. Hope's fancy for gathering a collection of quaint old silver together had been quite a new one, and she had been very judicious in her way of gratifying it. She had not been unduly keen to fill her little tables, but had picked up a piece here and another there when she had happened to come across them. And many a pilgrimage had he made with her down unfrequented streets and even

into pawnbrokers' shops in quest of some quaint toy or small box of the precious metal with which to enrich her small collection.

And the second table was still more fraught with memories, for it was not devoted exclusively to treasures of silver. There was a small ivory figure from Herculaneum, a marriage medal of Napoleon and Marie-Louise of Austria, and a commemoration medal of Charles the First, the Martyr King, which had in its time been worn round the neck of some faithful cavalier. There were one or two carved ivory pins which had graced the head of some Roman matron or maid in ancient times, and there were half-a-dozen miniatures which they had picked up in different places, and had meant to have mounted on a velvet shield when they had gathered a dozen together. Besides these there were some toys in silver which they had acquired in the Low Countries, some fine Italian cameos without setting, and also various specimens of Indian filigree-work. And to see them all now was, to Adair, like tearing his heart out by the roots.

He turned abruptly away as Jenkins read out the last item.

"Now there's only the jewellery," he said impatiently. "That will do, Jenkins. We shall not want you any more."

"Very good, sir," replied Jenkins, who was almost as thankful to get the business over as his master.

"Will you come up with me at once?" Adair said to Mr. Froggart.

"Certainly," said the lawyer.

So he led the way upstairs to the room which had been his dressing-room.

"I quite thought the safe was in here," said Mr. Froggart looking round the room.

"Yes, so it is—but we hid it," Adair replied.

He opened the door of a cupboard as he spoke, then swung back the heavy iron door of the safe and shewed all its valuable contents protected by leather cases. It was a long list, but they soon got through it. Mr. Froggart read it over and Adair pointed out each article.

"Now, is there anything else?" the lawyer asked.

"I don't think so."

"Hadn't we better look into the bedroom and see what may be left there?" Mr. Froggart suggested.

"Oh! I don't think so—but you can go in if you like," Adair added.

"Oh, you had better just look round," returned the lawyer with mild persistence—"per-

haps there is nothing there at all. Come now, my dear sir, you will be better when you have got it over."

But Adair was obstinate. "No, Froggart, I don't *want* to go in there, though if it's necessary I'll do it. *You* look round yourself, and then if you think I must come, I will."

With that Mr. Froggart was obliged to be contented, so he went on his errand and Adair wandered restlessly up and down the room. It was not a very small one, and was luxuriously fitted with a marble bath in an alcove and many pictures on the walls—nothing of value, but the greater part of those which had adorned his rooms at Oxford, and many photographs which he had become possessed of since those happy and careless days. Among them was one beautiful picture of his wife, Hope. It was only a photograph, but although she had been done in more costly ways several times, in oils for the Academy and in pastels for the Grosvenor, this was the one of all which had always pleased him the best. He stood now looking at it with all his love-torn soul in his eyes—"Oh! Hope—Hope—Hope—How could you?" he burst out. But the sweet smiling eyes smiled at him still; there was no change, no answer, it was only a picture, the outer husk of what she, his wife, had once been to him!

"My dear Mr. Adair——" said the lawyer coming in again, but Adair turned to him with blinded eyes and a quivering mouth.

"Froggart," he said—"it's not necessary for you to call me *Mister* Adair—I was too many years just Dick to you for you to be so formal now; it makes me feel so lonely, so—so much an outcast."

The dry old lawyer melted a little towards him. "It scarcely sounds the thing for a lawyer to be calling his—his—er client *Dick;* but if you wish it, we will drop the prefix. I'll call you Adair in the future."

"That's better," Adair said, trying hard to choke down that weak womanly something in his throat which seemed to get bigger and more inconvenient every minute.

"I think, Adair," Mr. Froggart said, "that you'll be obliged to just glance over the drawers and wardrobes. Mrs. Adair seems to have taken little or nothing with her—there are all her gowns hanging up and her furs, everything apparently just as she left them."

"What—hasn't she even taken her clothes?" Adair cried.

"Very few, if any," Mr. Froggart replied.

Adair turned away to the window. "I—I can't think of Hope without all the pretty things she was so fond of. Froggart," he added passionately—"I hope to Heaven she has gone to St.

John—she's not fit to live alone, she was never made for it. If—if—he ever ill-uses her, I'll kill him—I swear I will."

"Hush—hush! Such things are best left unsaid," murmured the lawyer soothingly. "Come, let us get our work done and go away. You will lock the door of the safe, eh? Why, what's that?" pointing to something on the floor of the cupboard.

"It is her dressing-bag—I gave it to her the day we were married," Adair answered bitterly. "She has indeed shaken the very dust of my belongings off her feet."

"You could not expect or indeed wish anything else," remarked the lawyer, whose tone at once became dry and business-like in correspondence to the bitterness in Adair's. "Is there anything in it? I mean besides its fittings."

"Oh! I should think not. It can go with the rest of the things," Adair said.

And then he opened it, seeing at a glance that there was nothing within but its legitimate contents excepting an envelope addressed to himself. He hesitated for an instant, but he broke the seal then and took out something wrapped in a bit of cotton-wool and a sheet of soft paper. And when he opened those, there slipped into the palm of his hand the great half-hoop of rubies which had been Hope Deering's engagement ring.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

In course of time the decree to dissolve the marriage between Richard Adair and his wife, Hope, was made absolute, and each was as free as air to marry or not as they chose, or to take what path in life they thought most fit.

Mrs. Adair did not appear, but her lawyers intimated that she had neither the desire nor intention to show cause why the decree should not be made absolute; and Adair's heart seemed to turn to water within him as he heard. He had only returned to England a few days previous to the case being called. He came back full of life and in the best of spirits, if the truth be told as gay as any boy at the mere thought of seeing Hope again if only for a moment in court or chambers and in the fierce light of enmity. But when the day came there was no Hope, she made neither word nor sign, except in that, through her lawyers, she quietly accepted the verdict.

Against all etiquette, he impetuously began to question her lawyer, meeting with a steady

and icy refusal to give him any information whatever. Then he set Mr. Froggart the task of finding out something, anything, about her if he could.

Naturally Mr. Froggart was more successful than he had been; but at the same time, he brought him no actual news.

Her lawyers, he told him, did not know her address and had received their instructions immediately after the first hearing. Mrs. Adair they had not seen, and Mr. Froggart was not able to find anyone who had seen her since the day on which the decree nisi was pronounced; so far indeed as Adair was concerned she had apparently passed out of his life on the evening that she bade him good-bye in Jermyn Street, she had vanished as completely as if she had been swallowed up by the dark night.

I think that the blank disappointment of not seeing her was the most bitter trial that Adair had yet undergone. For months past he had looked forward to that day as if everything was bound to come right then; as the days went by he had thought about her more instead of less, he had hungered and longed for her until the future seemed only a desolate and dreary blank, the present an arid and weary waste. Almost beyond the shadow of a doubt, if he had seen her at that time he would have asked her to

let the doubts and troubles of the past slide into oblivion and begin life anew together, for he had found that, faithful or unfaithful, he could not live without her. Yet when the day came there was no Hope, not one word or sign to show even whether she was alive or dead.

It was then June, the very height of a gay London season. Adair remained in town with a vague idea that he would meet Hope somewhere or other; but instead of meeting Hope he met every day one or other of his old friends, who each and all welcomed him back with effusion to his old haunts, and insisted on feasting him after the true British fashion which tries to heal all wounds with meat and drink.

"Not going out much now," one gracious lady repeated after him. "Oh! but my dear Mr. Adair, why shut yourself up *now*. You must not let yourself grow misanthropic, it's such shocking form, you know, and so uncomfortable for all your friends. And you will be old before your time."

Adair thought grimly that Mrs. Ponsonby would never be open to a like charge herself, but before he could speak she had rattled on. "And what is there to be gained by shutting yourself up from all your friends? Positively nothing—nothing. Of course it is painful for you just at first, but everybody sympathizes so

truly with you—I'm sure I never was so surprised or so shocked in all my life. I always thought she was so different. Not that I blame *her*, mind, at least not altogether. But without doubt Captain St. John is a most insidious person. All last season we were expecting an engagement to come about between him and my poor niece, Mary Maturin—they met at several country houses in the autumn, and everyone was full of it. Then all this came out, and Mary has never been the same since. Oh! yes, she is engaged. She is going to be married next month."

"And to whom?" asked Adair, now deeply interested.

"To Lord Cannock. Old? Oh! yes, sixty if he's a day—but rich, you know, very rich and a good position. And Mary looks thirty."

"But Miss Maturin is not——"

"Thirty? Oh, dear no!" the lady cried—"just twenty-two. Poor child, I shall be glad when the marriage is over—she will feel more settled then."

Adair did not speak, because he had no words in which to express his thoughts at that moment. His heart was torn in half-a-dozen ways—he had a wild longing to go and kill St. John straight away without a moment's grace or quarter. And he felt too an aching pity for the

girl who had loved this man and was going to try to heal the deep wound in her heart with the companionship of a detestable old roué like Lord Cannock.

"Now I want you to come and dine with me this evening, Mr. Adair," the lady continued. "I know it won't be pleasant to you at first, but I want you to be brave and give life a new trial. I have a few friends coming and I want another man to make the table right, for my brother Jack, you remember Jack, of course, has been sent off to Berlin at two hours' notice —Oh! Jack's a Queen's messenger now. Did you not know it? Now say that you will come."

Adair looked from right to left, but he saw no reasonable way out of the difficulty. "Dear Mrs. Ponsonby," he said after a moment's hesitation, "I shall only spoil your party."

"I will take the risk of that," she answered confidently.

But Adair still demurred. "Mrs. Ponsonby," he said, "I am not fit to go out. I've been living the life of a hermit the last ten months. I don't know what is going on—I don't take any interest in anything, and—and I would much rather not come," he broke off in desperation.

But Mrs. Ponsonby was a lady who liked her own way in all things, and what was more to the point, she generally got it.

"Listen to me," she said. "I want you to come as much for your good as for my pleasure; and I mean you to come, so it is very little use our arguing the question. You are not engaged this evening, so I shall expect you at eight o'clock—the same house in Cadogan Square."

Then she got into her carriage, which was waiting beside the curb-stone, waved her hand to him and was driven away. Adair stood a moment looking after it.

"That's a persistent old woman," he said to himself in no very complimentary mood towards the lady. "Hope always detested her," and then he sighed to think that Hope's likes and dislikes would be nothing to him now.

But all reluctant as he was, he had tacitly pledged himself to go to her dinner-party, and there was no possible way out of the engagement, consistent with ordinary politeness that is. So at two minutes past eight, he went into the well-remembered drawing-room in Cadogan Square, where he found about a dozen people already gathered together. Mrs. Ponsonby received him with a great show of affection and a studied tenderness which made him feel horribly uncomfortable. However, happily, and even mercifully in some cases, a hostess cannot confine herself long to one guest during the quarter-of-an-hour which goes before a dinner, and after

presenting him to a young lady, with a whisper that he was to take her in to dinner, Mrs. Ponsonby had to turn her attention elsewhere.

As he had said earlier in the day, Adair had been living the life of a hermit since he had separated from Hope, and this was the very first time that he had taken a lady in to dinner since the last time he had gone to a similar entertainment with her; it was with a dreadful pang that he recalled the fact, and he looked at the lady who was his fate for that night with a feeling of repugnance, almost of disgust.

She was not very young, five or six and twenty perhaps, was pretty, of a pink and white type, and had rather perky features. And she had a demure air of being very, very good, which accorded but badly with the little sharp features, and which would have amused him immensely if he had not been so miserable and had not felt so much like a caged lion and out of his element.

But however miserable a man is he cannot stand like a tailor's dummy at a social entertainment; he must talk and appear as if nothing is wrong with him, even though his heart is breaking. Adair had to bow and say something civil, and then he stood upright again, and looked round the room that he might see who was there. And almost the first person upon whom his eyes fell was Mary Maturin.

She, of course, had seen him come in, and had therefore been expecting him to see her every moment. He moved towards her at once with a sort of instinct that here was a heart which would understand exactly all the pain and misery that he was feeling. It would be hard to say which of the two was the most ghastly white as their hands met.

"I did not expect to see *you*," she murmured.

"Nor I to be here until three hours ago," he answered. "But Mrs. Ponsonby was short of a man and insisted on my coming. I haven't been about before."

"Ah! *I* go everywhere," she said with a faint sigh, then remembered that he perhaps did not know of any reason why she should not be willing to go everywhere as usual. "Of course one goes about a good deal at this time of year; I'm getting tired of it."

He pressed the hand he still held in his. "Yes, yes, I understood you at first," he said in a low voice.

She looked up at him. "*You* know all about it. Yes. Everybody does. These people are all revelling in our meeting like this, drinking in our—our misery. And you do look miserable, Mr. Adair."

"I look exactly what I am," he replied. "However, it's no use wearing one's heart on

one's sleeve. I'll go back to my lady and try to amuse her. We shall meet again after dinner."

"Yes—yes, go back," she said.

She understood—no one on earth better—the advantage of keeping a brave front to the world. She turned back to the man to whom she had been talking before, and Adair wheeled round to return to the young lady with the pink and white complexion. But he did not get there without interruption—a little fairish woman with a giggle and an audacious sort of manner put her hand on his arm and stopped him. "Oh, Mr. Adair, you haven't forgotten *me* I hope?"

"Certainly not, Miss Tempest," with a grave bow. "How could I possibly forget you?"

"Oh, Mr. Adair," giggling again and glancing up at him from under her eye-lashes. "How sweet of you to remember me. I think it's so mean of Margaret not to have sent me in to dinner with you. I didn't know you were coming until I saw you. She has given me a boy. Such a boy, and she knows I can't bear boys."

"Let us hope you will have an alleviating circumstance on the other side," said Adair.

"Oh, I hope you'll be on the other side," Miss Tempest burst out, then went very red and pulled herself up short with her finger on her lips. "Oh, what have I said? Really I didn't quite mean that. Only Margaret is so

careful never to put me near anyone nice—always."

"You are too kind to me," murmured Adair in a very low voice.

A remarkable kind of intoxication began to steal over him. He was not fickle, indeed his was as faithful and steadfast a nature as ever lived. But for nine, nay, ten long months, he had been feeding on his own heart, going into no society, seeing none of the people who constituted his world. And instantly he began to feel the pleasure which the mere association with well-mannered, well-dressed women gives to most men.

A few minutes later they began to file down to dinner—he with the finger-tips of the very demure young lady upon his arm. She was really very demure.

"Did you go to Ascot?" he asked as they left the drawing-room.

"Oh! I don't care about races," she replied promptly.

Adair raised his eyebrows. "No? But Ascot is scarcely to be described as 'races'—I thought all ladies went there."

"Oh, yes! I do go—I have to go because the others go—but I don't like it," she protested—"in fact I hate it."

"Really. Ah! I've always found Ascot very pleasant," said he half sighing.

They reached the dining-room then and very quickly found their places, which were about half-way down the table. Adair had barely seated himself when a gay voice at his left hand whispered—"Margaret's not so bad after all. I'm so glad she put us together."

"And so am I," he answered, without an instant's hesitation.

And he really was glad. He saw as plainly as could be that the demure young lady who was his lawful fate had never been so starched and demure in all her life as she was then. Now Adair did not believe much in starch or in extreme demureness, and the open gaiety, even if she did giggle a little, of the hostess' sister was infinitely more dangerous to him in his forlorn and loveless condition than all the primness and stiffness that ever spelt propriety.

I did not say that Flossie Tempest, as everybody called her, was Mrs. Ponsonby's sister. Earlier in the day Adair had spoken of her as "old." But Mrs. Ponsonby was not at the outside more than five and forty, and as she was the eldest of a very large family and Flossie the youngest, the difference in their ages was something over twenty years. And Flossie

Tempest was blessed—or the reverse—with a tongue, well, a tongue of really unusual and remarkable power. She could talk—and did—on any subject and under the most awkward and distressing circumstances. Mrs. Ponsonby had done quite wisely in not sending her down to dinner with Adair, but in placing her upon his other hand. Had she been his lawful fate he might have found her fluency a little trying after his months of seclusion; as it was he found the extreme propriety with which his own lady had sought to charm him aggravatingly dull, while every time that he had a chance he turned with relief to his other neighbor, Miss Flossie. It was such a relief, too, to be talked to as if he was quite an ordinary person with quite an ordinary story, not to be talked "good" at!

On the whole his lawful fate was a stupid girl and naturally rather dull, though upon occasion, as he had more than a shrewd suspicion, she could be gay enough. But she never saw how bored he was by her liking for serious things, by her earnestness and her very crude ideas and her profession of valuing only the great problems of life, her open contempt for all the little frivolities and gaieties thereof. If she had only known of the inward sigh with which each time, after five minutes' chat with her, he turned to Flossie with her upward looks, her

gay little brainless laugh, her ceaseless flow of questions, questions which carried on a conversation quite comfortably by themselves without any particular necessity for answers to them! However, Miss Ganthony-Dewkes, as I said just now, was not blessed with a great amount of understanding, so having begun with an idea that something very grave and demure would be sure to attract a man of Adair's unfortunate experience, she kept resolutely on that course of behavior to the very end of the meal.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRESH START.

ADAIR went home after Mrs. Ponsonby's little dinner with his head on fire. He sat down in the library and thought it all out—the overdone primness of Miss Ganthony-Dewkes, and the gay and careless good-fellowship of Flossie Tempest, positively the only person whom he had met since his troubles began who had not looked, in some way or other, *conscious* of his circumstances.

"I never thought I should sit down and think about Flossie Tempest," he said with a sort of grim amusement to himself at last—"but all the same she was the only one to-night whose manner did not hurt me more or less. Miss Dewkes' propriety made me ill, and Mary Maturin's face cut me like a knife. By Jove, she must have been fond of him and—he of her. If I had kept quiet, I suppose he would have married her safe enough. As it is I wonder she came to speak to me at all. I daresay, though, she thinks it's always best to find it out before than afterwards. Well, Mrs. Ponsonby

had her own way and I went to her party—I suppose I shall be going to parties now whether I care about them or not."

He had stoically gone back to his own house again, and still more stoically was sleeping in the same bedroom in which he had slept for five years. Nobody but himself knew what an effort it was to him; how every time he came in or went out, the same pang struck chill to his heart. Nobody knew how the tones of the new butler's voice grated on his ears, how the sight of his smooth decorous face offended his eyes, or how often he was vexed or pained by the new ways of the house.

But perhaps he was happier, or, I may more truthfully put it, he was less miserable that night than he had been for nearly a year, and he went to bed and slept without the long hours of wakefulness which were his nightly portion now. But he did not sleep well—he dreamt that he was making one of an endless procession down a broad flight of stairs, a procession of men and women in evening dress, and he was held fast by Miss Ganthony-Dewkes, whose fingers were fixed on his arm like a vice, while her falsely prim voice kept saying—"I am very good—I don't care about races."

To have dreamt it once would have been nothing, he would scarcely have remembered it.

But the procession seemed to be going on for ever, step by step, downwards, always downwards, and he was always afraid of treading upon the trailing yellow gown of the woman who was walking in front of him, while in his ears rang unceasingly those unreal words—"I am very good—I don't care about races."

It went on so long that at last he woke up shivering and shuddering, and laughed outright as he pictured himself going on for the rest of time with Miss Ganthony-Dewkes holding fast on to his arm.

"Are you awake, Hope?" he said aloud. "I've had such an idiotic dream——" and then he remembered that no Hope was there, that Hope would never be there again for ever.

It was such moments as these that had broken the man's nerve and brought him mentally to the very shadow of his old self; that night he awoke with a start to a new sense of his utter desolation, and under the friendly shelter of the dark hours of silence he cried like a woman or a child, only, unlike a child in great distress, no sleep came again to his eyes, and he got up in the morning haggard and weary-looking, with a racking headache and a heart as heavy as lead!

Well, the busy days of the brilliant season passed away and Adair quickly slipped back

into the old life, going from dinner to dance and to one reception after another, meeting just the same people, seeing just the same decorations, eating precisely the same dinners and suppers, hearing quite the same things—the young lady who recited semi-humorous poems with a plaintive air, the young gentleman with the lion-like voice, who delighted society after the manner of George Giddens—aye, and a good long way after him too—all the more or less brilliant stars who sang and played on lute, harp, sackbut, psaltery and dulcimer or their equivalents of to-day, and I am bound to confess that he equally hated and loathed the whole show.

And it is a show, the season in London. I love my London, I revel in society, human beings seldom bore me, even when they are full of sham, humbug and pretentiousness—after all they are all human, and a human being, a civilized human being, is in the majority of cases a delightful study. But it is hard to keep going in London, in the world that is, when your heart is breaking.

And yet, sick and weary and lonely as he was, Adair kept on simply because he was afraid of finding himself once more alone and cast on the resources of his own sad mind. He was so tired of the phrases he heard each and

every day. "So charmed to see you"—and "Maraschino, Chartreuse of liqueur-brandy, sir?" And most of all was he weary of the ostentatious modesty and goodness of the many damsels who thought it would be a good and profitable thing to be the second Mrs. Richard Adair.

It was astonishing to him how they all harped on the same string—they all hated society—London bored them all. None of them cared for dress or fashion or any of the tenets in which they had been assiduously, nay, I may even say religiously brought up. They all liked a quiet simple life and the dinner of herbs by choice, and Adair, who had known his world fairly well and loved it, grew positively to dread the very sight of a petticoat.

And almost every day he met St. John somewhere or other; they belonged to the same clubs, frequented the same places, and sometimes met in the same houses, though in the latter instance never at very close quarters. Once it happened that he went into his club to spend a quiet hour in the smoking-room. There was only one man there, sitting with a newspaper in front of him and with his back turned towards the door. Adair could only see the back of his head from where he seated himself. And so for five minutes or so they sat

without moving or even troubling to look at one another. Then the other man stretched out his hand and touched a little electric bell upon the table, and when a waiter came in answer to his summons, he asked some questions and Adair recognized the voice as St. John's.

So they were quite alone together. St. John was evidently unaware of Adair's presence, and Adair sat there for ten minutes nerving himself to go across the room to ask his old friend boldly—"Tell me the truth—where is she? Is she well? Is she with you? Are you going to marry her or not?"

But Adair's nerve was not what it had been! Put what control upon himself he would he could not keep his lips from trembling or his limbs from shaking, his head reeled and swam, and a white mist danced before his eyes—he *could not* get up and do what his whole heart and soul were prompting him to do, to do at any cost. And while this fierce struggle with his own weakness was going on, St. John put down his paper, got up, crossed to the table near the big bow window, picked up a paper—*Punch*, apparently—and glanced at its contents, then threw it back upon the table and went out of the room without so much as turning his eyes in the direction of the solitary figure by the fireplace.

I think if the ice had been broken that day that the current of several lives would have been entirely changed, and it is more than probable that two announcements which appeared six weeks later in the society papers would never have seen the light.

They were not side by side, though it is true that they were not very far apart—and they ran thus:

"Lord and Lady Cannock have returned to town from the Continent and will remain a few days in Eaton Square on their way to Scotland"; and—"A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Mr. Richard Adair, of Grosvenor Street, and Miss Florence Tempest, youngest daughter of the late Sir John Tempest, of Tempest Holme, Devonshire."

CHAPTER IX.

ALL THE TO-MORROWS SHALL BE AS TO-DAY.

FIVE years had gone by—most people had long, long ago forgotten all about what in its time had been called the Adair scandal, and the second Mrs. Adair had been mistress of the house in Grosvenor Street the same length of time as the first one had so reigned.

"What *is* the story about Adair," a man asked of a friend one day in the Park, after having stood for ten minutes talking to Mrs. Adair, whose carriage was drawn up by the rails.

"The story—oh! he divorced his first wife, that's all," the other man answered.

"Divorced his wife! Oh! he divorced her then?"

"Oh, yes! that was so."

"Did you know her?"

"Oh, yes! I knew her well. She was a pretty creature. Never could tell myself how he could stand this one after the first."

"Well, poor devil, he doesn't try to stand anything—he seems to me to let things slide anyhow," said the seeker after knowledge carelessly. "Who was the other?"

"A Miss Deering — parson's daughter of course. Odd thing," said Le Marchant in a musing tone, "that parsons' daughters are very much like parsons' sons, always the wildest rockets out. Not that Mrs. Adair was wild—not a bit of it; on the contrary, she was one of the gentlest, best-mannered women I ever knew; you might—as far as outside appearances went—have staked your life on her being all right, and yet—he had to divorce her."

"H'm—a pity. Was he fond of her?"

"Oh! awfully. It cut him up no end, no end. And then he married this little woman, and I don't fancy he found much solid consolation or satisfaction out of that."

"I should think not. 'Pon my word but she's the gayest little soul ever I knew in my life—'How d'you like my bonnet?' she asked me just now—'Dick says it's hideous and I'm a fright in it. Do you think so? No! Ah! neither do I. I tell Dick he's jaundiced, poor old dear.' But Dick, poor old dear, seems pretty usually to think Mrs. Dick's bonnet hideous or she a fright or something—any way he's never with her."

"Oh! I don't know—they get on all right. He always shows when she's got a dinner-party," said Le Marchant—"and for the rest I

daresay he gives her quite as much of his company as she cares about."

They had not gone much further before they met Adair coming slowly along by himself, not seeing or looking for anyone. He nodded to them but passed on, evidently without thinking for a moment of stopping—they were not his friends, but intimates of his wife's, which was quite another matter.

He walked slowly up the path, past the rows and rows of chairs, a man so wofully changed from what Adair had been in the old days before the dark trouble had fallen upon him. Two ladies stopped and spoke to him, just a word or two.

"What a handsome man," said one to the other when they had parted.

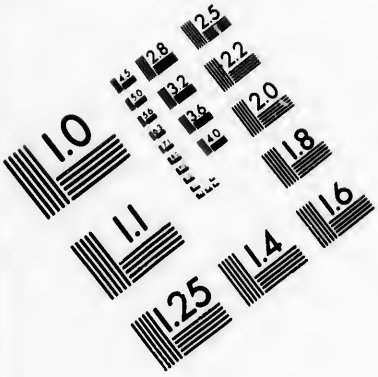
"Yes, that is Mr. Adair—poor fellow," answered the elder one.

"Why poor?"

"Oh! you remember 'the Adair case' surely," the elder one exclaimed.

"Ah, yes! to be sure. But he married again."

"Yes, and fairly soon, but he never got over it, he was never the same afterwards. *I* never believed a word against her, poor girl, but of course all the men were down upon her like a load of bricks—they always are."



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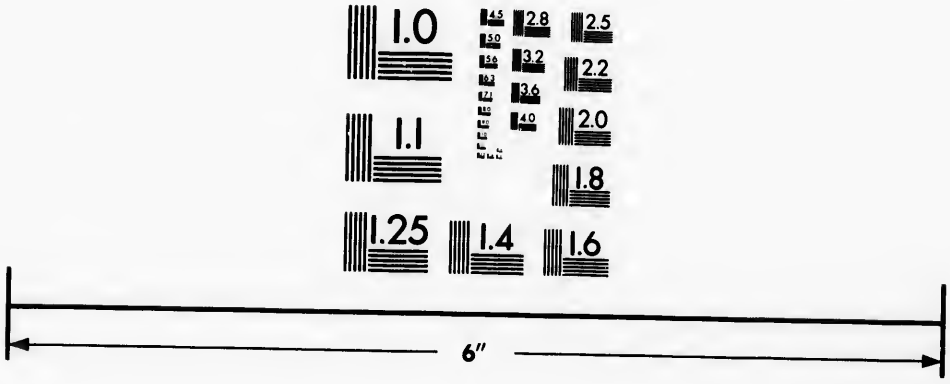

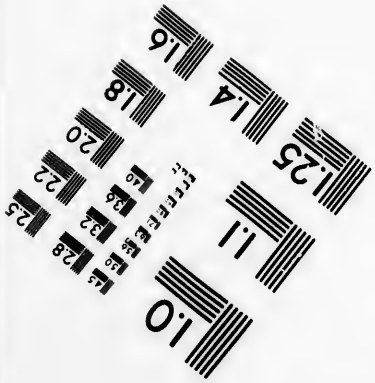

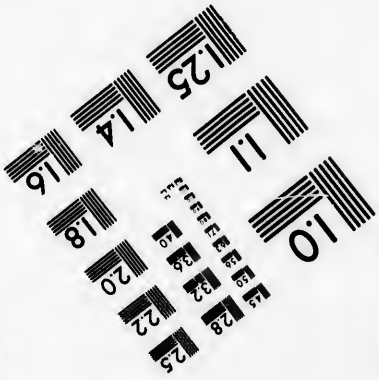

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"Yes, I believe you are right," said the young lady in a thoughtful tone.

"About the men—oh! my dear, the beautiful virtue with which a man who is as black as night, midnight, himself, will descant on the sanctity of the marriage tie, really is very often astounding. Ah, yes! the men make the laws and the poor women have to keep them and suffer by them."

And Adair, keeping quietly on his way, met one and another of his acquaintances, and then suddenly found himself face to face with St. John, who looked at him with cold eyes that seemed to see nothing. Even after five years the mere sight of St. John was enough to set his heart beating hard, to blanch his face to the lips, and to send his mind back with all the old agony to the tragedy with which his happy days had ended. He wondered, as he walked slowly through the throng of gay folks that brilliant summer day, where Hope was now, where could she be? Why, he did not even know if she was alive or dead, whether she was or had been with St. John or not! And he—he had filled her place with a gay little woman who had not heart enough ever to go wrong—he could trust her, yes, as he would be able to trust a stone. Well—he could not grumble—he had not asked for bread, he had but offered

a stone himself and Flossie Tempest had duly paid him in kind.

For he had been quite honest with her when he had asked her to fill Hope's place. He had pretended nothing, made believe nothing. After the season came to an end he had gone to several country houses, or rather he had gone to Homburg first and thence to several English country houses. At two out of the first three houses he went to, he found Flossie Tempest, and as they got on excellently well together, they had been, naturally enough, thrown a good deal into one another's society, and the end of it was that he asked her to marry him.

"And I will be quite honest," he said, with pathetic wretchedness—"I have no love to offer you—I gave Hope all my love, all, and I shall never love anyone again as I loved her. But I am well off, and I will give you your own way in everything, and I am very lonely and miserable—What do you say?"

And Flossie said yes. She pretended no love on her side, she spoke gravely, even tenderly of Hope; she told him that for her part she had never quite believed in what the world had said against her, she expressed a doubt as to whether it would be actually right to marry him—but she said yes.

So they were married, and after a few weeks

spent happily enough in the Riviera, they came back to the house in Grosvenor Street to begin life together.

And alas, and alas for the mutability of human hopes! He found only too soon that he had bound himself in adamantine chains for nothing! As Mrs. Adair, Flossie was not half as much his friend as she had been as Flossie Tempest, who had comforted him by her very carelessness and unconsciousness of manner! The new life to him was a series of shocks.

It cost him for many months a bitter pang to see her in the dainty boudoir, which had been Hope's favorite sitting-room, until indeed she had gradually altered the little room out of all likeness to its former self.

"Dick," she said to him a few days after they had returned to Grosvenor Street—"I don't want to pain you, but I must ask you one question. Would you like me to make the house look different at all, or would you like me to leave all poor Hope's things just as they are?"

"It is your house to do just as you like with," he answered, his face darkening. "Whatever was sacred about it has been violated for me, until you sanctify it afresh. Make what alterations you like—you need not consider the past at all."

"Thanks, that was all I wanted to ask," she said quietly.

She felt instinctively that he would rather that she did make such alterations as would remind him less of Hope than the house would do if left precisely as she had left it.

"Poor Hope," she said, "how hard he is on her yet—and how she must have suffered, for she was fond of him. Oh, yes! she was fond of him. Well—I begin differently—I begin as I mean to go on. Dick can never make me suffer in that way—nothing would make me risk it."

And as she had begun, so she had gone on. She was perfectly friendly, but she was quite indifferent—she was always pleasant to him, but she was thoroughly independent of him. She was altogether different to what Hope had been—and Hope had been for five years the impersonation of all feminine charms and graces to him.

And Flossie was as she had always been, a flirt of the very first water! Flirt she could and did with everyone, even with him until she grew tired of trying to flirt with a being so unresponsive and icy. And once when he remonstrated with her for flirting with other men, she turned upon him and fairly scorched him with her scorn.

"Flirt—I?" she cried. "Why how long have you known me, Dick? Ten years? and have

I not flirted all that time? Have I ever been injudicious, underhand, sneaky over my flirtations? No, a thousand times, no. You thought because I married you that I was going to change my whole nature and become a tame pussy cat. Then, my dear, let me advise you to lose no time in getting any such idea out of your mind, for a flirt I was when you married me and a flirt I shall be to the end of the chapter. You are jaundiced, Dick, my friend, simply jaundiced."

And Dick knew that it was true, and Flossie went on her gay and careless way, making an admirable mistress for the pretty house, an admirable hostess, a charming gay volatile figurehead for his dinner-table.

But as a wife—well he might sigh and sigh for the irrevocable past, for the tender grace of a day that was dead, but that day was dead, and all that had filled his heart and life with tenderness and love had slipped from his grasp, like a fragile goblet of glass may fall from your hands to the floor and be shattered in an instant into a thousand pieces, never to be put together again for ever.

His mind went back over it all as he walked through the Park, and when he reached that point of the railings at which you may cross to the corner, he suddenly became aware that his

wife's carriage was drawn up beside the railings and that two young men were standing there chatting to her. They were very young and very familiar—they leant their arms upon the side of the carriage with all the assurance imaginable—"Oh! there's Dick," he heard her say.

He felt that he was not wanted there, that he was only a wet blanket, a kill-joy; yet he could not pass his wife in public without stopping and saying something or other to her, so he took off his hat to her and saluted the two men, one of whom he knew and one whom he had never seen before.

"Fancy your being in the Park, Dick," Mrs. Adair said with a laugh, and it was just the same inconsequent foolish laugh that she had had as a girl. "You'd better get in and take a turn with me—I shall be quite proud to be seen with you. I believe heaps of people think you haven't a wife at all, or rather that I haven't got a husband."

"Certainly, I am at your service," said he readily; and so they remained talking together for a few minutes.

Just as Adair was about to get into the carriage, however, a big bronzed soldierly-looking man came sauntering along, looked at him carelessly, then keenly, then stopped short—"Why,

Adair, old fellow, I'm delighted to see you," he burst out—" I haven't seen you for seven years, old chap, seven years have I been frizzling up in Alapore, not seeing a white face except in the looking-glass once in three months."

" Geoff!" cried Adair incredulously.

" Yes," returned the big man heartily. " Geoff Trevor—and it's very evident to me, my friend, that you've never given Geoff Trevor a thought since we parted seven years ago. Well, well, I'll forgive you. And your wife, how is she? Is she in the Park to-day?"

" My wife?" repeated Adair, feeling himself going deadly faint. " Oh! yes, to be sure—let me introduce you," with an uncertain gesture towards Flossie. " You've not met Mrs. Adair before."

It was an intensely awkward moment for them all—Major Trevor stared at Flossie, then perceived Adair's ghastly face and guessed that something serious had happened of which he was ignorant. Flossie, however, came gallantly to the rescue—" I am the second Mrs. Adair," she said in an undertone. " You remember Hope, I see. I hope you will come to see us —you will dine with us, of course, one evening soon. You are quite wrong in thinking that Dick had forgotten you—he has spoken of you very often to me."

Adair breathed freely once more. He was astonished at Flossie's nerve and equally so at her inventive qualities, for to the best of his remembrance he had never uttered Major Trevor's name to her in his life. However, she had successfully bridged over an awkwardness, and he was profoundly thankful to her for it.

"I should like to take a turn," she went on —"open the door, one of you, please."

In two minutes more she had stepped out of the carriage and was gaily walking down towards Albert Gate with Major Trevor beside her. And gaily she talked on the light and trivial topics of the town until she saw by glancing sideways that they had gained a little on Adair and the two young men.

"Major Trevor," she said sharply then, "don't look surprised or anything—but you mustn't mention Hope to my husband. He can't bear it."

"I had no idea that she was dead," he said contritely.

Mrs. Adair hesitated. "Well, Major Trevor," she said at last—"so far as I know Hope is not dead; but the marriage was dissolved, and—and Dick doesn't like to hear her mentioned. You understand."

"Perfectly—perfectly," he replied; yet, all the same, he only understood that a divorce had taken place, nothing more.

CHAPTER X.

A VOICE FROM THE FAR AWAY!

THE following evening Major Trevor dined at the house of his old friend in Grosvenor Street! Mrs. Adair had gone to a good deal of trouble in order to make as pleasant an evening as possible—she had three of her own special "boys"—she called all her men-friends her boys—there, whether for Major Trevor's edification or her own it would be difficult to determine. And she had two of the prettiest girls of her acquaintance, which made up a pleasant little party of eight.

Major Trevor, of course, took her in to dinner and sat at her left hand, and as the table was a round one, the conversation was more general than is usual even with parties of eight.

Adair, for once, was quite in good spirits, and every now and then chatted across the table to his old friend as Flossie had not heard him talk for years.

"By the bye I saw Chummy the other day," Major Trevor remarked, when the meal was about mid-way over.

"Chummy," echoed Adair—"not Chummy Vincent surely?"

"That same and no other. He was doing a spell of waiting in a restaurant in Melbourne."

"Chummy Vincent—waiter in a restaurant," Adair cried aghast. "Oh!—you must have been dreaming, old fellow."

"Not a bit of it—he waited on me and I chaffed him fearfully, poor old chap; and he made an uncommonly good waiter too."

"'Pon my soul," Adair burst out—"I never was so surprised in my life. Why, Chummy was the biggest swell we knew ten years ago—poor old chap, what rough luck to have got down to that. But, Trevor, what were you doing in Melbourne?"

"Well, I came home from India that way. You see, I hadn't seen Alaric for over eight years, so I went that way and stayed a few weeks with him at his place about fifty miles from Melbourne."

"And is he doing well?"

"Oh! wonderfully well—farming, you know. Well, I—I couldn't describe it, it isn't like farming as we understand it. And by the bye, I've brought you a mysterious letter from there."

"A letter—for me?"

"Yes—a few days before I got there one of his hands died, got hurt or something. He

asked to see a magistrate when he was dying, and they fetched one from the next place, who heard him make some statement or other, and then he gave it to Alaric, asking him to get it conveyed to you with as little delay as possible. Alaric told him that I was then on my way there, and would be going home after a few weeks, and asked him if he would like me to take it or would he have it sent by post. He said that he'd rather I brought it and I did so. I've got it in my pocket now."

"H'm—very mysterious," said Adair with a laugh.

"Perhaps someone has left you some money, Dick," his wife suggested.

"More likely wants me to pay some debt of honor for him," answered Adair. "I'll open it by and by, and then you will know all about it."

But he did not open the packet as soon as he had intended. The conversation turned on the evening's amusement, and Mrs. Adair told him that she was due at three dances, and also that she had to take the young ladies to one to meet their mother.

"Then—" said Adair—"you won't want me, will you? If you all go off to your dances, Trevor and I will stop and have a quiet yarn together—eh, Trevor?"

"My dear chap, I shall be enchanted," Trevor replied.

"But Major Trevor would like to come with us, perhaps," Mrs. Adair suggested—for she loved to be seen with a new "boy" in attendance upon her, and Major Trevor was so big and brown, so distinguished-looking, and was so charming besides, that it would have been a real treat for her to have marched him into the world's fair by her side, to make all her other "boys" jealous and all the women full of envy.

But Major Trevor was not to be drawn out so easily—"Not to-night, thanks, a thousand times, Mrs. Adair," he said. "I gave up dancing years ago, and I feel rather strange and out of it as yet—don't know the latest jargon, or the newest stars or anything. So if you really don't mind, I will stay and have a yarn with Dick and then go home quietly to bed."

"Of course as you like," she said—"though I know Lady Ventura would be enchanted to see you—she is always so glad of a few extra men. Then, Dick, will you really come to me? I shall go on to Mrs. Charles Waters' at half-past twelve."

"I'll see—anyway I will be there by one o'clock if I feel inclined to come. If I don't, you'll be all right, won't you?"

"Oh, yes—don't come on my account," she answered gaily.

In about half-an-hour's time they all went off to their ball, the three ladies and the three young men, with a great deal of laughter and merriment, Adair and Major Trevor seeing them off at the door.

"She's a gay little soul," said Adair, as they went back to the dining-room again—"but straight as a die, straight as a die, and that's the great thing, after all."

Now Major Trevor had during the day taken care to gather some information of the circumstances under which Adair's first marriage had been set aside. He had known Hope Adair intimately, and could as yet scarcely believe that she could have altered so utterly as to merit such a condemnation; yet several men to whom he had spoken of her were all agreed that her guilt was without doubt, her downfall deserved. No, they all admitted that they had never seen anything wrong in her conduct, but the case had been clearly proved, and of course, they said, the deep quiet ones who play a careful game are seldom found out, except through treachery.

He scarcely knew what to say when Adair thus unmistakably led up to the subject—it was a most awkward situation for him. And yet he

felt that he must speak, he must say something about her.

"Old chap—" he said rather hesitatingly—"I'm afraid I made things very awkward for you in the Park yesterday—but—but you see I didn't know, I hadn't heard a word, and—and I was so astonished I couldn't help showing it."

"Oh! I understood—I understood—I am used to that sort of thing," Adair answered—"don't think of it again. Yes—the old state of things came to an end—all in a moment, like a house of cards tumbling about my ears. And I couldn't stand living by myself, so I married again—But you've heard all about it, of course."

"Yes, I've heard a little to-day," Major Trevor admitted.

"Well, it's no use talking about it now—it's all over and done with. I married Miss Tempest, and although we never pretended to be over head and ears in love with each other, she's made me a good wife, a very good wife indeed. I doubt if I've been much of a husband to her—you see I was embittered and soured by my first experience."

"Oh! Mrs. Adair seems very happy anyway," Major Trevor remarked—"I wouldn't worry myself on that score if I were you."

They sat for an hour or so talking over old times, over the old times of their boyhood be-

fore either of them had ever heard of Hope Deering. Then Trevor got up and said that he must be going—"and by the bye," he exclaimed, "I haven't given you that packet yet —here it is."

"Oh! thanks—I didn't give it another thought."

Adair set it upright on the chimney-shelf against the clock, and when he had seen his old friend out of the house, he came back and opened it. "I wonder what the precious thing is," he said to himself, as he broke two of the four big red seals, each bearing the monogram of the magistrate who had witnessed the declaration and sealed it from prying eyes. He glanced at the signature first—"Henry Firth," he read, "Henry Firth—why—why that was the name of the cabman who gave evidence against Hope —Good heavens, what does this mean?"

He turned the paper over with trembling hands and began at the beginning of the declaration.

"I, Henry Firth—" it began—"late a cabman in the City of London, England, No. 0101001, and now in the service of Mr. Alaric Trevor, of Trevor Gap, Victoria—knowing myself to be dying, wish to make what restitution lies in my power for a great wrong

which I did to Mr. Richard Adair and his wife between six and seven years ago.

"I was an important witness in a divorce suit which he brought against his wife, and I gave evidence that I had driven the lady many times to the rooms of Captain St. John in St. James' Street. All this was absolutely false. To my knowledge I never drove the lady in my life, nor did I ever see her until within a week of the case, when she was pointed out to me by her late maid, Rosalie Vallin. This I swear on my dying oath. At that time I was keeping company with Rosalie Vallin, who was paid handsomely for giving her evidence against her mistress. I had fifty pounds as my share of the booty. I don't know who paid Rosalie Vallin, nor where she is now. She lived with me for a few weeks, but her temper was such that I could not stand her any longer. I have committed many sins, but this business has weighed more heavily on me than all the rest. I feel I cannot go to meet my God, whom I have defied and outraged, without being clear of this secret at least. If those I wronged can find it in their hearts to forgive me, I believe my time to come will not be so bad. I am truly penitent and I am dying fast.

"HENRY FIRTH.

"Taken down verbatim
and witnessed by
"WILLIAM MCEWEN,
"Magistrate.
"Trevor Gap, March 19th, 188 ."

Adair turned back and read the letter again —"I never drove the lady in my life, nor did I ever see her until within a week of the case, when she was pointed out to me by her late maid, Rosalie Vallin!"

CHAPTER XI.

HUSH!

I NEED hardly say that Adair never gave a thought to his half-promise to meet his wife at Mrs. Charles Waters' ball. Indeed he never moved from the spot where he had been standing when this new and awful blow had fallen upon him. When he fully realized the meaning of Firth's declaration, he dropped into the chair immediately in front of the fire, the chair in which Trevor had sat chatting on all manner of unimportant topics, while all the time he was carrying, though unconsciously, a bomb-shell in his breast, a bomb-shell which had burst at Adair's very feet. And there he sat stunned and cold, incapable of thinking out the situation, dizzy and sick and ill, with one terrible feeling tearing at his heart, that he had wronged Hope all along, and that he had driven her out of house and home without mercy and without a hearing.

He was sitting there still when Flossie came home from her dances. She came in to the dining-room, seeing the light, with a rush and a

laugh. "Why, Dick, are you up still, and alone? Well, you're a nice person to promise so faithfully to come to me. I told everybody that you were coming, and they all jeered at me—jeered at me—said that they would believe it when they saw you—Why, Dick, is anything the matter? Aren't you well, Dick?"

He turned his ghastly face towards her, and the gay little woman shuddered at what she saw written there. A terrible sense of coming ill crept over her, and her quick mind coupled, in an instant, the open paper in his hand with the mysterious packet of which Major Trevor had spoken at dinner, and over which they had been so careless and so merry.

She drew the paper from his unresisting fingers, and stood there to read it in her glittering ball-gown, which somebody had within the hour described as a summer sunrise, with its clouds of delicate rose-tinted draperies, its trimmings of glittering crystal, and the great bunch of fading blush roses upon her breast.

She did not need to read it twice, the wretched story it told was graven on her mind at once; she was cold, stiff, frozen, and through her brain there rang one awful question, above all other thoughts, "What is to become of me?"

She looked at Adair at last. "Dick," she

said, "it's no use sitting there like that—there's a great deal to be done."

He looked up in a blind sort of way. "There is nothing to be done," he said in a thick voice.

But she caught him by the shoulder and shook him. "Dick, you are ill—you don't understand this," holding up the paper.

"I understand it perfectly," he said, and his frozen lips uttered the words in a voice quite unlike his own. "She was innocent all the time, all the time, and I have driven her to—God knows what."

She looked at him anxiously. "And what will become of me, Dick?"

"Of you? I don't understand you."

"It is easy enough," she answered half impatiently—"all this fresh evidence will, of course, annul the decree which set aside your first marriage—that will be made legal again. Hope will come back here, of course, for you will be able to find her if she is alive. It will be all right for her, she is not the kind of woman to have done anything to be ashamed of, no matter what hard times she may have had to go through. *I* never believed her guilty, as you know. It will be all right for her, but what, *what* shall *I* do?"

Adair's ghastly face grew paler as he heard her. "You don't know what you are talking

about, Flossie," he said very gently. "I may be able to set Hope right in the eyes of the world, and perhaps, if she is very forgiving, she may consent to use her settlements, which she has never touched all these years. But that is all the reparation I can make her. You are my wife—nothing—nothing can alter your position. Hope is nothing to me, can be nothing to me but a bitter regret, a shame, yes, a shame when I think of the part I have played."

Flossie was silent for a minute or two, standing still by the chimney shelf, with the lamplight shining on her brave array, so out of keeping with her scared face.

"It was all my fault," she burst out at last—"all my fault. I had no right to marry you, for I didn't believe it of Hope, you know I didn't. I didn't want to marry you, but Margaret never let me rest, and she said I was an idiot to have any scruples, and—and—I was so miserable at that time. You don't know the temptation it was to me to marry anyone who was young and rich and—and all that you were."

"But you did not love me?" he said, a spasm passing over his face.

"No more than you loved me," she answered quickly. "I liked you well enough always—oh, more than well enough, I liked you very much. If only I had said no, instead of yes!

Then you would have been free and you could have brought her back at once."

"Not at all," he said. "I should probably have married somebody else—I should *surely* have done so. Don't distress yourself on that score, Flossie, I beg."

"But what are you going to do?" she asked.

He spread his hands out with a helpless gesture. "What can I do? As I said I must try to set her right before the world, and make provision for her—there is nothing more to be done—nothing—nothing."

She moved from the hearth and paced restlessly to and fro about the large and handsome room; at last, however, she stopped beside him.

"Dick," she said. "Will you answer me a question as plainly as I ask it?"

"Of course I will."

"Putting me out of the question, you love Hope still?"

He half hesitated but only for a moment—"With all my heart and soul," he answered.

"And if you were free you would marry Hope again?"

"At once," he replied.

"Couldn't you get our marriage set aside?"

"No,—not without an Act of Parliament, perhaps not then," he answered.

"Cannot you get an Act of Parliament—you

are rich, and money can do much in most things."

"I don't know—I shall not try," he said decidedly—"I've been a brute I know, a misguided. mistaken brute, but I've never done a deliberate, cold-blooded wrong to a woman in my life, and I am not going to begin with you. I would pay neither you nor my poor girl such a bad compliment."

She walked away again, went to the window and pulled the heavy velvet curtain aside. The dawn was just beginning to break—the dawn of the day which would make such a great difference in several lives.

"Look here, Dick," she said after a few minutes—"I'm not a sentimental woman, as you know. And I meant it seriously when I suggested that you should take steps to bring Hope back again. Perhaps you are right, but—but one thing is certain, I neither can nor will go on living with you knowing that your heart is entirely given to a perfectly innocent woman whose place I have usurped. I shall go to Margaret as soon as it is broad day—and she must put up with me until I can get a place of my own."

"But, Flossie——" he cried.

"Oh! I am not going to be foolish or squeamish," she said, holding her head very high—"I

shall willingly take what provision you think I ought to have. I've no money of my own, and, of course, I can't live on nothing; and I feel in a certain sense that I have a right to it. But I will not stop here, that is beyond me. While I believed that there might be a doubt about Hope,—and you never expressed any doubt as to the justice of the decree—it was different."

"You shall do exactly as you like," he said humbly, and poor fellow he did feel humble, for to himself he seemed to bring only a curse on the women who had trusted him.

"Margaret won't like it, I daresay," Flossie said, with grim amusement—"but Margaret will have to put up with it. It was she who badgered me into this position, and there is no choice for her now but to see me out of it."

Adair winced—"I'm afraid that——"

"Nothing will get me out of it," she said quickly—"No, perhaps not. Well, Dick, I am going to lie down for an hour or two. I'm worn out—simply worn out."

She went away with a careless wave of her hand and toiled wearily up to her own bedroom. The grey dawn was stealing in at the sides of the window-blinds and her maid was sitting in a chair fast asleep. Mrs. Adair touched her on the shoulder.

"Louise—Louise—wake up," she said—"I

am very late, much later than usual. Unlace my dress and go to bed at once. I will do my own hair."

"Ma'am," cried Louise starting up.

"Yes, I know it is frightfully late," Mrs. Adair went on—"I wish I had remembered you when I came in two hours ago. But I didn't—Louise, I'm in trouble and I want to be alone. Undo me quickly and go to bed."

"Cannot I help you in any way, ma'am?" Louise asked. She was exceedingly fond of her mistress, and, half asleep as she was, her tone was sympathetic and kind.

"To-morrow, Louise, perhaps—not to-night," Mrs. Adair answered. "There—now go—Good-night. I'm sorry to have been so late."

She had been struggling with her tears all the time, and when Louise closed the door behind her, she fairly broke down and sobbed bitterly—partly for herself, partly for him and a great deal for that other blameless one who had stood out in the darkness and the cold all these weary years.

She was still sobbing when Adair knocked gently at the door. By a mighty effort she controlled herself and crossed the room to open it.

"May I come in for a minute?" he asked.

"Oh! yes."

"You've been crying," he said, looking searchingly at her.

She smiled, a wan little smile as faint as the first hues of morning outside. "Well, it's not the sort of thing to make one feel gay."

"Flossie—need you go away to-morrow?" he asked.

"I think so. It will have to be done, and I shall feel it less the quicker it is done."

"And you will feel it?"

"Yes, Dick, I shall feel it," she said frankly.

"But—but I shall see you sometimes—we shall part good friends?" he said.

"The best of friends always I hope, Dick," she answered holding out her hand to him.

"And I have not made you unhappy?" he asked.

"Unhappy, no—I've had a royal time—but—but when I think of Hope, alone—Oh! Dick," half sobbing.

"Don't—don't—don't!" he cried in a voice of agony, and then he bent his head and kissed her little cold hands half-a-dozen times, and the next moment the door had closed behind him and she was alone.

CHAPTER XII.

HOPE, THE STRANGER.

I AM bound to say that the second Mrs. Adair bore herself very well indeed under terribly trying circumstances. After Adair had left her room in the early grey of the morning, she had given way to another fit of weeping, more violent and less restrained than the first one had been, and when it was over, she had thrown herself on her bed dressed as she was in a loose cashmere gown and had drawn the silk eider quilt over her. And then, naturally enough, she had gone to sleep, as a tired child might have done, and she was still sleeping soundly when Louise came in with her cup of tea at nine o'clock.

Like the good servant she was, she made no sign of noticing that anything unusual had occurred—and certainly it was unusual, very unusual for Mrs. Adair to sleep outside her bed and for Mr. Adair to pass the night in the dining-room; in fact, it had never happened before.

"Shall I bring your breakfast upstairs this morning, ma'am," she asked.

"No. I'll get up presently and go down," Mrs. Adair answered. "Louise—your master and I are in great trouble, and I am going to Mrs. Ponsonby's to-day until we can see how it will be with us."

"I am very sorry, ma'am," Louise said, concluding in her own mind that the trouble her mistress had spoken of the previous night or rather in the early morning had been money, not a quarrel. "Am I to go with you, ma'am?"

"Of course—I shall go immediately after breakfast—you can come on with my things during the afternoon."

"And what things, ma'am?"

"Everything," answered Mrs. Adair,—"that is, all the clothes I am wearing and so on—my dressing-bag I will take with me and my jewelry. And now I will get up."

As the clock struck ten she entered the dining-room. Adair, having received a message to say that she was going to join him at the meal, was waiting for her, and showed the signs of the storm which had broken upon them far more plainly than she did. The servants, who were all agog with the knowledge that something terrible had happened, were completely baffled, and could not make head or tail of the situation. "'Tisn't quarrelling"—remarked the butler when he made his appearance downstairs

—"they're as friendly as ever I see them. The mistress looks no great things, and the master looks awful. It must be money."

And presently Mrs. Adair drove away in her pretty victoria, wearing one of her smartest summer gowns, and a little French bonnet at the back of her head, looking altogether what the women love to call "chic." At her feet were her smart dressing-bag with her initials in gold upon it, and the square leather-covered case in which she kept her jewelry. Adair saw her into the carriage, and carefully tucked the smart white linen cover with its blue embroidered corners and large monogram over her.

"You will let me hear whatever happens," she said.

"Yes—I will bring you any news I have," he replied.

"Yes, that will be best. Good-bye, Dick," she said, then Adair stepped back and they had parted.

There were tears in the eyes of both, and it was such a brilliant smiling morn, such a terrible contrast to those two sad and troubled hearts.

Well, Adair only went indoors to get his hat, and then he called a hansom and set off on a long and heart-breaking quest. First to Mr. Froggart's office—but alas, Mr. Froggart had gone down to the country to attend the funeral

and read the will of an important and recently departed client. He might look in about five o'clock to attend to any important business, but his people were not very sure even on that point. Then Adair went off in a fume to Scotland Yard to see if the police could help him in tracing Hope.

The officials whom he saw there were strictly professional but not very sympathetic, for what was a new experience to Adair was a very ordinary matter to them. By this time it was two o'clock, and, more from a desire to put on the time than because he really wished for lunch, Adair went into his club.

The first person on whom his eyes fell was Captain St. John, who was standing in the hall talking to two men. Adair did not hesitate for an instant. He strode straight up to him.

"St. John," he said, his voice trembling and his face ghastly, "I absolutely and unreservedly apologize to you for everything that is past. Can you bring yourself to shake hands with me?"

For a moment the other was too completely astounded to speak. But he was a brave and generous man, and he knew Adair of old well enough to be sure that he must have some good reason for this sudden change of demeanor. And he was touched by the ghastly pallor of his

old friend's face, and by the sense of the weight of sorrow which could have brought a spirit which he knew to be naturally as proud as Lucifer to humble itself thus. His hesitation only lasted a moment—the next he had taken the trembling outstretched hand in his own.

"Of course I will, old fellow," he said kindly —"What has happened?"

The two other men who had been standing there, feeling themselves in the way of what must be a confidential conversation, were quietly edging away; but Adair stopped them imperatively.

"Don't go," he said—"you may as well hear what St. John here is waiting to know—It cannot be known by too many people. I have found out that I was wrong, that it was all a mistake, that my wife—Hope—was innocent all the time, while I—I—have done the most hideous and cruel wrong that ever man repented or woman suffered for."

"*Adair!*" St. John cried.

"Look at this," Adair went on, taking Firth's confession out of his pocket-book—"Who can have done it? What could have been the motive? What did they gain by it?"

The three young men eagerly read over the paper. St. John put out his hand again—"Old fellow," he said, in a shaking voice—"God

knows I pity you with all my heart," and the others murmured their sympathy and wrung his hand as men do when they are deeply moved.

"And your—your second wife?" St. John asked.

"She has gone already—gone to her sister's. She has behaved nobly about it—not a word of reproach except to herself, for she never believed that Hope was guilty, and she says she oughtn't to have married me. Her first thought was that Hope would be restored—but my poor girl can never be restored, only in part. And that's what I want of you, St. John. Tell me where she is—I must go and see her."

"But I can't—I don't know where she is," St. John replied.

"You don't—know—where Hope is," Adair repeated incredulously.

"I have not the smallest idea—I haven't seen her or had even a word from her since I saw her in court. I have not the very smallest idea."

"My God!" muttered Adair, under his breath.

His disappointment was so great that he turned away to the window the better to hide it. St. John touched him on the shoulder. "Old fellow," he said—"I fancy I can give you a clue. I believe Sir John Wigram knows. He

does if anyone does—go to him. Tell him all about it. Depend upon it he will be able to help you."

"I will go at once. Thanks a thousand times. Good-bye. I'm very, very grateful. When shall I see you? Will you come to-morrow at breakfast-time and we can talk it all over?"

"Yes—I will," St. John replied.

Adair was gone like a flash of lightning, leaving the three men staring blankly at one another.

"Never heard such a story in my life," said one.

"Poor devil," added the other.

"Yes—poor devil—and poor little wife," said St. John softly.

"Which?" asked one of the men.

"Both," answered St. John promptly—"I don't know which to pity the most."

"No—it's rough on them both. But Flossie Tempest isn't the woman to take things much to heart. And she has had an uncommon good time all along and will be well provided for, and nobody will blame her. Oh! no—it's the other one that's to be pitied in my opinion. Well, I must be off—I was due at Lady Bertie's half-an-hour ago."

"And I'm late too—I'll be going—Ta-ta," and away they both went to revel in retailing

the very latest and most relishing bit of news in their most favorite haunts.

Adair, meantime, was in a cab tearing away to Sir John Wigram's chambers—and by great good luck he found him within.

"Say Mr. Adair—stay, I'll give you a card," he said—then scribbled under his name "*most important*," and strongly underlined the words—then waited impatiently to be shown into the great counsel's presence.

He was not kept waiting long before he was taken to a room on the other side of the landing, the room in which Sir John Wigram was sitting.

"I am not sure if you will remember my name," Adair began; he was singularly embarrassed by the cold eyes of the great lawyer.

"Oh! yes—I remember you perfectly," he said promptly. "May I ask what it is you require of me?"

"Perhaps you also remember the details of the case——"

"Yes—yes—perfectly," Sir John put in.

"Well, Sir John—" with a long breath—"I received this, brought by hand from Australia, late last night, after midnight in fact—it will explain."

Sir John took the paper with an indifferent, almost an impatient air, read a few words, then pulled himself up and knitted his brows, assuming an attitude of strict attention.

"Well?" said Adair, finding that he did not speak.

"Well—" Sir John replied—"what do you propose to do?"

"To find Rosalie Vallin—to seek out my wife—" how familiarly he slipped into the old way of speaking of her who was no longer anything to him.

"You forget—" Sir John interrupted—"that she is not your wife and that another lady is. Well—you—you propose——"

"To make what poor reparation lies in my power. It's not much, I know—it's *nothing* to what I would do if I were only free," Adair cried humbly.

"Ah! I daresay not," said Sir John drily. "For my part I don't think you can in any way make up for the past, not in any way. She may, if she is very forgiving, consent to use her settlements—but I don't think she will even do that."

"You know where she is—you speak intimately of her," Adair exclaimed. "Will you give me her address that I may go and tell her what I have heard?"

"I don't feel sure that I am justified in doing so," Sir John said cautiously.

"But she is not married?" the other cried.

"No—she is not married," speaking very slowly—"although if I had my way, she would

have married again almost as soon as you did. It is best for me to tell you so frankly. Look here, young sir," he went on, not heeding Adair's exclamation of surprise—" you had the sweetest, best woman in all the world for your wife, and you shook her off as if she'd been the worst woman in the world instead of a very angel of goodness. From your looks I should think you did not find much satisfaction in your new relations—No," as Adair fairly groaned—" I thought as much. Well, others have seen the value of the jewel which you threw away —I was one of them. I have asked her to marry me over and over again."

" And she would not."

" She would not. But my friend she is always, and as her friend I do not know whether I ought to tell you all you ask or not."

But Adair pleaded so hard, so humbly, for the chance of seeing her that at last Sir John gave way, and told him something of her life during the five years that had gone by since they had parted. Hope had settled herself under her first and second names in a certain suburb and had made a living for herself by keeping a school for little boys, a sort of kindergarten. She had done fairly well at it; that is, she was able to keep a little home for herself, and of late she had also made a little money by literature.

"And her address is——?" Adair asked eagerly.

"Her address is 21, Lime Tree Road, Putney," the other replied.

So within the hour Adair found himself standing at the door of 21, Lime Tree Road, waiting for his knock to be answered. A neat little maid, wearing a smart muslin apron and French cap, opened it and replied that Mrs. Mervyn was at home, would he walk in? What name should she say?

"Say a gentleman on business," said Adair, who was afraid to send in his name lest she should refuse to see him.

The little maid disappeared, and Adair stood waiting in that tiny room, his heart beating hard, his breath coming quick and fast, his eyes already clouded and misty, waiting until Hope, the stranger, should come to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGAIN—AGAIN.

In reality Adair waited but three or four minutes in the little room with its deep wicker chairs and modest decorations, but they seemed to him like hours—years—so long was Hope in coming.

But at last he heard the handle of the door turn and then the door was pushed gently open —"No, dear, go back—I'll come presently—stop with Virtue."

It was Hope's voice—she was coming. Adair's eyes turned towards the door in blind agony but he could see nothing. And then she came in, all unsuspecting but that it was a stranger, someone come about putting a little boy to school with her—"Dick—Dick—" she cried—"is it you? Oh! my God!"

The mist cleared away from his eyes a little—"Hope," he said very humbly, "I know I have no right to come here—but—but I have had strange news within the last few hours, and Sir John Wigram gave me your address—I—I was obliged to come—it is your right to know it."

She was trembling violently—but for the support of the chimney-shelf she must have fallen, and she held her right hand hard upon her throat to still the fierce throbbing there.

"Won't you even speak to me, Hope?" he asked reproachfully—and let me tell you nothing is so reproachful as a man who has wronged a woman if afterwards he repents him of the evil.

She tried to force down the great lump in her throat. "I—you have taken me aback," she managed to say—I—I—never thought of your coming here. I shall be all right in a minute, but—but you frightened me."

"I thought if I sent in my name that you would not receive me," he exclaimed. "But you are trembling and cold"—for he had got hold of both her hands by that time—"Let me put your chair nearer the fire—oh! I forgot there is no fire. Forgive me."

But she did not sit down, she stood just where she was, and he kept fast hold of her hands, devouring her with hungry eyes which found her fairer and lovelier even than she had been among the rich surroundings of a woman of fashion.

"You are not angry with me for coming?" he asked.

He was in no hurry to tell her the news which had brought him there, indeed he forgot everything except herself.

"No, I am not angry," she answered—her agitation was beginning to wear off—"but I would like to know why you have come—after all these years."

She uttered the last words in a much lower tone and with a certain amount of hesitation. To Adair they told a story of forlorn weariness even greater than his own, and oh! how his conscience smote him at that moment, how his heart ached for her, for himself, and for that other girl who had been so generous to them both when he might have expected and could not have resented a fierce torrent of reproaches.

He drew her hands close to his heart. "Hope," he said humbly, "I don't deserve that you should speak to me even. I have come to you with the most abject humility for the hideous wrong that I have done you. I know all the truth now, or enough of the truth to know that I did wrong you utterly and absolutely. And when I remember that pitiful night when you came to me, and I—I sneered at you, when my heart was breaking, Hope, and I loved you more than ever—when I remember how I refused to believe you, how I let you go out into the dark night alone, Hope, I feel as if I shall go mad now that I know the truth."

His poor shamed face was white and drawn and quivering with emotion, he held her hands

tightly against his heart still and devoured her lovely face with sad and love-starved eyes. He was almost afraid to tell her what had brought him there.

And Hope—Well, she who had borne the brunt and all the material trials of that cruel mistake, she who had fought hard with poverty, almost with privation, she who had unhesitatingly resisted the mighty temptation which a great marriage offered to her, she played in that supreme moment of misery for them both, the part of comforter to the man who had unwittingly wronged and who had judged her with stern and bitter unforgiveness.

"You thought that I had wronged you," she said softly, "and if I had been what you thought you would have been justified in every word that you said, in everything that you did."

"Oh! no—no," he cried sharply. "I was wrong, Hope, wrong, all wrong. I never knew the meaning or value of mercy until now—and you—your merciful excuse hurts me more than all the reproaches in the world would do."

"I didn't mean it," she said simply, "it is all hard and cruel enough without my making it worse now. But, Dick, you haven't told me yet what it is you have heard."

He could put it off no longer, so he gave her the paper which Trevor had brought him and stood

watching her as she read it. She showed no surprise, but quietly folded the paper and looked at him enquiringly.

"I have already set the police to trace out Rosalie Vallin," he said.

"You will not find her," she answered quietly.

"Why not?"

"Because she is dead."

"How do you know?" eagerly.

She did not speak for a moment—she seemed to be going back over the past, and she sighed ere she broke the silence.

"Rosalie died nearly two years ago—she died here——"

"In this house?" Adair cried incredulously.

"In this house," she said quietly—"and with her hand in mine."

"And she confessed?"

"Everything."

"You have it in writing?"

"Yes, the doctor witnessed it."

"You ought to have had a magistrate."

"I had—he is a justice for his own county—Dr. Langdale came up to give an opinion on her case and he heard her statement and put it all correctly and formally down. I have it now."

"And you have had the power to prove your innocence for two years and you never used it. You never told me," he cried with deepest re-

proach—"you left me in the dark all this time. Oh! Hope."

She raised her seraphic and dove-like eyes to his. "You forget, Dick," she said, "that I knew nothing of your life, of your circumstances, except such as the merest outsider could know. I knew that you were married—that—" with a scarcely perceptible quiver of her lips—"that you had married Flossie Tempest. How was I to know whether you cared if I was innocent or guilty? For any knowledge I had, you might have been as happy or more happy with her than you were with me. I—I had no grudge against her, and what was done could not be undone. If I had told you all this two years ago, it would have made her, and perhaps you too, wretched, but nothing could have given me back my happy past. So what was the good of speaking?"

"But your name—that could have been cleared," he cried.

A faint smile crossed her lips. "Oh! my name—that is a matter of small importance against other considerations. Who knows or cares about my name now? I hardly think anyone I knew before knows if I am alive or dead, and nobody I know now doubts but that I am Mrs. Mervyn, a young widow struggling to make a decent living by teaching little lads

their letters and pot-hooks. Oh! no, Dick, my name matters to no one."

"It matters to me," he cried stoutly, "and it shall be cleared to the whole world as soon as the lawyers can do it. And, Hope, you will not go on keeping this wretched little school now? You will use your settlements, they are yours and you have never touched them. But you will now, and let me provide for you properly, suitably—as the sign of your forgiveness."

She hesitated a moment. "Yes," she said after a few moments, "I will use my settlements—but no more—it will be wealth to me after my struggles here and I shall not need more. But—but—about Flossie? Does she know yet? Need she?"

"Flossie knew almost as soon as I did—she saw the statement last night, She has left me—nothing would induce her to remain."

"But—why?" in amazement.

"Because she never herself believed a word against you, she always told me so. But Mrs. Ponsonby badgered her into accepting me, and I asked her because I was so lonely, so wretched, I couldn't stand living alone and that's just the plain truth. I didn't care a button for her, or she a toss for me—we never pretended to. But she never sympathized with me or talked meek and modest at me, and I was half-mad and it came about somehow."

"But you care for her now?" Hope cried.

"No—I like her—we've got on very well each on our own line. She's been a good wife all along, and since this came out, Hope, she has been an angel, the most generous, the most noble woman I ever knew excepting yourself. For instance, almost her first thought was for you. She planned it all out in a minute—that I should take you back to Grosvenor Street—and she would live in a flat and nobody would blame her in any way, everybody would understand exactly. And then when I told her nothing could be made different, she proposed that I should try to get an Act of Parliament passed to dissolve the marriage and leave me free to marry you again—if you would."

He added the words as an afterthought and Hope caught at them eagerly, the tears streaming down her face. "If I would—if I would—oh! Dick—Dick—if I only could! I almost wish you had not come back—I was getting used to being alone—Now it will be harder than ever. And yet—no—no—I don't wish that, but if you see Flossie, tell her I thanked her, that I do thank her with all my heart and soul—tell her I bless her for ever."

She broke down unrestrainedly then and sobbed as she had not sobbed since the night Rosalie Vallin died. And Adair half beside

himself held her in his arms and tried to soothe and comfort her, and presently she grew calmer and drew herself away from him. "I was foolish—I don't often give way," she said, trying to smile.

So they sat on the little old sofa together and talked of the old happy days as only men and women can do when the blind of fate has come down and shut the sunshine out of their lives. And presently Adair asked her a question.

"Tell me, darling," he said, unconsciously slipping back into the old tender way of addressing her—"how came that woman here?"

"Rosalie—Well, it was quite an extraordinary coincidence," she replied—"it was a little later than this, a cold wet night and I was sitting by the fire reading, when my little maid came in—it was this girl Virtue, who had only been a few weeks with me—and told me that a woman was sitting on the door-step evidently very ill. I went out. I felt that she was not only very ill but dying, and—and—my own life and experience have made me very tender to those in trouble or distress, and I determined to bring her in and see what was the matter with her. Between us Virtue and I managed to drag her in here, and then in a moment I knew her. She was dying, in the last stage of consumption, with blood upon her lips every few

minutes. She was without a penny in the world, without a home, without a friend, and—and—I forgot what she had done and kept her right to the end—it wasn't very long."

"My generous love," murmured Adair tenderly.

"But Rosalie could be generous too. She need not have told me the truth—if I had turned her out that night she never would have told it. Conscience never troubled her, but a little kindness touched her as nothing else did."

"But who paid her? Why did she lie against you as she did?" Adair asked.

"I don't know. She would not tell me the name. She said that she had been paid and that she would keep her bargain. All she would say was that it was a woman who had loved you years before, loved you hopelessly and was tortured by the sight of our happiness. She thought if we were parted——"

"I know," said Adair, in an awed tone, "and vengeance fell upon that unhappy woman—she is raving mad now, without hope of recovery. I never dreamt of her in connection with all this before—now I see it all."

Before she could speak again the door was flung open and a child ran in, throwing himself upon her with many demonstrations of delight. "Is the gentleman *never* going?" he demanded,

fixing a pair of wide-open gray eyes upon Adair.

Adair was puzzled! The child was so like someone he knew and knew well, but he did not know whom.

"Is this one of your little pupils?" he asked kindly—he felt overflowing with kindness just then, although Hope, in reality, was as far away from him as ever. "He's a jolly little chap anyhow! How old is he? Five or six?"

Hope turned and looked at him with an ineffable smile lighting up her face. "Dick," she said, "don't you understand?"

"Hope!" He stared at her, and all the color faded from his face in an instant, he was almost afraid to breathe.

She bit her lip, and drew the child close to her side, still looking at him with that wonderful mother-love shining in her tender eyes.

"Yes," she said, "it is quite true. Robin has been the very comfort of my heart since I left home. I called him Richard Mervyn Adair, but I *couldn't* call him 'Dick.' I couldn't bring myself to do it."

For a time there was dead silence—Hope looking proud and smiling, the child gazing at the strange gentleman, and Adair staring wildly first at Hope and then at the child. He tried to think—to remember—and then suddenly he knew to whom the likeness in the child was—it

was to himself, it was his own face which looked at him from under that mass of sunny curls—it was—it was—but no, he could bear the strain no longer, he flung himself down upon the cushions of the sofa and hid his face there, bursting into a storm of bitter sobs.

"What is the gentleman crying for, mother?" Robin asked. "You aren't angry with him, are you? Has anyone hurted him?"

"No, darling, no," answered Hope, keeping her hand upon Adair's heaving shoulder. "I am not angry with him at all, darling."

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD LINKS WE BREAK!

WHEN Adair left Lime Tree Road, he took the train straight back to Sloane Square, and thence went to Mrs. Ponsonby's house in Cadogan Square. The servant who opened the door told him that Mrs. Adair had been out driving during the afternoon, but that he believed she was at home. And, surely enough, he found her in her sister's boudoir reading a novel.

"Oh, Dick, is it you?" she cried, throwing the book down. "Well, have you any news?"

"I have seen Hope," he answered.

"Poor Hope, how does she look? Was she surprised? Was she glad?"

"She is not much altered in looks, a little thinner perhaps, and she looks more—more womanly," he replied. "She has gone through a great deal, she has had a hard fight for existence, and it has all left its mark upon her. She wasn't much surprised, for she knew."

"She knew what?"

"I mean," said Adair, "that she has had the proof of her innocence in her possession for two years——"

"And never let you know!" Flossie cried in amazement.

"No—she thought it best to say nothing," and then Adair told her all that he had learned from Hope, he told her all the reasons which had kept her from speaking, told her all the struggles and privations through which she had gone, and finally told her of the child, his child, his living image, of whose very existence he had not known until that self-same day.

I think perhaps that he had never been so surprised in all his life before as he was by the way in which Flossie took this particular bit of news. "I know what I ought to say," she cried, dashing the tears away from her eyes, and then bringing to light a scrap of dainty silky muslin and lace with which to dry them—"I ought to say that this blow has crushed me, that though I didn't care a button for you when we were married, yet I have learned to adore you since with all my heart and soul. But I don't, Dick, I can't! I never liked you better than I do this minute, and I never pitied you so intensely before. But my heart is full to bursting when I think of that poor girl shut out in the cold, and I'm glad, Dick, that I never had any children, because if I had I *couldn't* feel so glad that, after all, you have Hope's child to think of, your heir."

"But," said Adair in a strangled voice, "will not the divorce make a difference to him?"

"Not a legal difference, Dick," she said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes—quite sure. Mr. Kindelberg"—naming a famous Q.C.—"has been here this afternoon, and, of course, we talked a great deal about it. He said that he had always thought it was such a good thing that Hope had no children, because if one had been born before the final decree and was a boy, he would have been your legal heir."

"I am not very clear about it," Adair said—"I must find out all about that."

"You will find that I am right. Mr. Kindelberg knows what he is talking about. Oh! Dick, I'm so glad there is a child, and a boy too—I know I ought to feel differently, but I don't—I can't—so what is the use of pretending. I feel so for Hope. Poor girl—poor Hope. And you are as far apart, Dick, as ever."

"Yes," said Adair in a low voice.

"For my part I shall see about a flat at once. I shall be quite happy, you needn't worry about me at all. You know we never liked quite the same things, you and I, and I think I shall like being on my own hook entirely. You'll come and see me now and then, won't you?"

"Oh! Flossie," he exclaimed.

"Ah! you don't take life as philosophically as I do," she said gaily. "And I don't wonder, I really don't. My poor boy, you've had a rough experience, and you have felt everything far more deeply than you ever would admit. I know it. But, Dick, you must be happier already than you were. You know that Hope is just as good and true as you used to think her, as you *want* to think her, and she isn't alone. She has a lovely child of her own—hers and yours—that must have taken half the sting out of her trouble. So, though you are set apart by the wretched ridiculous law still, yet you are differently apart. You must be happier for that knowledge, and I shall be as happy as can be, I promise you."

"There is one thing that I shall never forget, Flossie," he said gratefully—"You might have reproached me and you did not."

She looked at him with a smile. "Did Hope reproach you?" she asked.

"No, she did not," he admitted.

"If I were to reproach you ever so bitterly, if I were to worry you up hill and down dale, and make your life a burden to you, would that have made things easier for any of us? If Hope could meet you without reproaches, surely I may do so. And besides that—I think I shall have a very good time living in a sweet little flat of

my own. I have often felt the responsibility of being mistress of that big house far more than you would think. I don't like responsibility, and I hate house-keeping as an occupation—a flat and three maids will suit me down to the ground."

Adair was a trifle hurt. He could not understand that Flossie could so cheerfully give up her place as his wife, and prattle gaily and lightly about the single life which lay before her. He admired her for the firmness with which she refused to contemplate filling Hope's place any longer, for the nice distinction she made between filling the place of one whem he believed to have betrayed him, against whom there was more than a suspicion of such a betrayal, and one who had been proved to be innocent. And yet I think he would have liked Flossie to be more grieved, more sorry to break away thus, from the home and the associations of five years; but he never for a moment realized that, the first surprise and shock over, Flossie had instinctively, as a flower turns towards the sun, set her mind to make the best of the situation. And although she had not yet admitted as much to herself, and would not have allowed anyone else to hint that such a feeling could have its existence within her heart, yet already she was feeling something of what a child feels when

holiday time has come, a sense of delicious freedom and relief from an irksome sense of restraint.

For almost from the day of their marriage, Adair had bored her to extinction. She had always liked him, and she could not help respecting him, but she was dreadfully bored all the same. And now in spite of her real womanly sympathy for Hope, in spite of her equally real regrets that she could not do something which would enable Adair to take Hope home again, a certain feeling of exhilaration possessed her and influenced her mind and manners accordingly.

"I don't want to stop here," she remarked presently. "Margaret's observations are *too* trying; she persists in treating me as a heart-broken outcast, which is unpleasant. To-morrow I shall go and look out for a flat, and the sooner I settle down in it, the better it will be for everybody. By-the-bye, I suppose you don't particularly want to see Margaret?"

"No—I—can't say I do," Adair admitted.

"Oh! well, I wouldn't if I were you—she will only say something to upset you. I had to make her promise faithfully that when you came she would not come into sight unless I sent for her. And now, Dick, I must be thinking of dressing for dinner. You'll come and see me

sometimes, and we are always the best of friends, are we not?"

"Always," returned Adair promptly. "For my part, Flossie, I shall *never* forget how nobly and generously you have behaved both to me and to my poor girl."

"There—there—say no more about that," she said quickly. "Good-bye, Dick And oh! by-the-bye, you may as well give me Hope's address—I should like to go and see her. There are so many things that I can say that I could not write—and—and I don't think she would mind seeing me."

"I am sure of that," said Adair earnestly.

CHAPTER XV.

WITHOUT HOPE.

It was wonderful how soon the surprise, the conjecture and the interest in the revival of "the Adair Scandal" died away; and Adair, after making every effort possible to clear his first wife's name of disgrace, found himself alone again.

Just at first he had a great deal to occupy him, and a definite end to attain. There were several interviews with Sir John Wigram, who loathed the very sight of him, and promptly went down to Lime Tree Road and renewed his offer of marriage to Mrs. Mervyn.

"You gave as one of your reasons for not accepting it before," he said to her, "the fact that there was a cloud upon your name. And now that the cloud is removed, I have come to you again."

But Hope shook her head, sadly but resolutely. "If I had never known my boy's father, Sir John," she said simply, "I should have been proud and happy to have become your wife. But I never loved but one man in my

life, and him I love just the same to-day as I did ten years ago, as I shall do to the last hour of my life. But, Sir John, you have been the kindest and best and dearest of friends to me, and you won't let this come in between us, will you?"

"Certainly not," he replied quickly—"but tell me one thing. Don't be offended at what I am going to say, because you know I am not a young man, and I have seen a great deal of a very unhappy side of life. You will not let yourself be drawn into a very intimate friendship with Adair."

"There can be no friendship between us," she answered in a pained and almost inaudible voice.

"Just so—that is what I want to warn you against," Sir John said. "All the world knows that Adair repented of what he had done as soon as he did it—that he married Miss Tempest out of sheer loneliness and found very little satisfaction in the marriage. Now he is more hopelessly in love with you than he ever was before, and the mere fact that you are the mother of his only child, his heir, is enough of itself to draw him continually towards you, without any other reason. And although it is only natural that he should be so drawn towards you, you ought to —you must—remember that the eyes of the

whole world will be upon you, and that the world is very censorious."

"I have thought of all that," she said faintly.

And as Sir John had prophesied, Adair found his way continually to the little house in Lime Tree Road, one trifling excuse after another serving to take him there.

He had at first insisted that Hope should give up her little school at once, but upon that point she was firm, and she resolutely declined to do so. "No," she said, "my kind friends here have been my means of living for five years, and I will not throw them over in that way. It would be mean to do it. I will give it up at the midsummer term—not before."

"But it's—it's derogatory—my wife——" he began, when she interrupted him.

"You forget, Dick"—she said very gently—"that I did not come here as your wife but as a poor woman who was very thankful to gather a few little pupils together by whom to live——"

"There was never, under any circumstances, the smallest need——" he began fiercely.

"No, dear, but I thought so," she answered. "It would be very hard upon me if they had all given me up without a moment's warning, wouldn't it?"

"That's a different case altogether. I'm sure not one of the people here would wish you to go on under the circumstances."

"No, but I want to go on, and I mean to go on. It may surprise you, Dick," she said smiling—"but I am really fond of my work. I love all children, and they are such dear little things most of them. No, I will go on until the holidays come, and then I will give them up."

"And then?" jealously.

She gave a sigh—"Well, I should like most of all to take Robin for a long, long spell at the seaside. We have never been able to manage more than a week at a time."

Adair almost cried out from the pain with which her words smote him. "Oh! Hope—my love—my darling"—he exclaimed—"how even your kindest words reproach me and wound me. It breaks my heart to think of you screwing one poor little week's pleasure out of your hard earnings—while I have been gadding about spending money all the time."

"Never mind—never mind. I am going to make up for all that now, and Robin shall have donkey-rides every day if he likes. Don't think about the past, Dick."

"No, no, we will only think of the future, Hope! He shall have a pony of his own—I'll go and see about it to-morrow."

"Better let him keep to his donkey at first," Hope said, smiling to think of the child's pleasure.

"Oh! I'll soon teach him to ride—a bright little chap like that can learn anything in a few weeks," Adair cried. He was quite excited in planning out pleasure for the boy, his boy as he often reminded himself. "And when you get back to London he shall have the pony. Where do you think we had better go?"

"Dick," she cried, "you forget—you cannot go."

"No—no—but I can come and see you, can't I?"

"I don't think so."

"But why? If you go to a quiet enough place, who is to know anything about it? Oh! I must come down while you are there—I must, Hope."

"But, Dick," she said, "if you do—and you come to see me continually in town, what will the end of it all be? Don't you see that you are making it harder for me, harder for both of us in the end? We cannot be friends, you and I, Dick, it is out of the question—impossible. We may as well accept the inevitable first as last."

"Half a loaf is better than no bread," he urged. "If you ask me, Hope, I would rather, far rather come in and see you for ten minutes once a week, once a month, than—than have any other pleasure in the world."

"Yes, I know. And then you would want to come twice a week, then every day. Then you would find it hard to go away at all and——"

"And I should want to stay altogether," he cried triumphantly, "Yes, I daresay I should."

"Yes, but—you make it all the harder for me," she said.

"But it is hard," he cried, "look at it which way you will, it is hard. Still, Hope, I do think the world would understand—I think people would be charitable enough not to think ill of my coming to see my own child, don't you?"

"Perhaps—I do not know. I'm afraid I was thinking only of myself, and—and—Dick, it hurts me less the days that I don't see you, than the days when I do."

She spoke in accents of such intense pain, her eyes were so full of yearning and sorrow, and her poor lips trembled so piteously, that Adair realized, all in a moment, what he had never realized before, that her grief was greater than his, her burden of life was infinitely harder to carry, if anything harder to carry now than it had been before.

The future over which he looked from the standpoint of that moment was blank and desolate and dreary. There was only one improbable and remote contingency which in

this world could open the gates of iron and let him pass into happiness again—and even from that contingency his whole soul shrank as it would shrink from mental murder. All was blank and desolate and impalpable, the darkness lighted only by a little child's sunny eyes, the silence only broken by a little child's ringing laugh. And for all the rest, the world of the future, all was chill and dark.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNTIL THE DAY BREAK!

AFTER this Adair found himself practically alone again. He never thought of giving up his house, or of going away to try to forget his troubles as he had done before. On the contrary he stayed quietly on in town, not going into society it is true but living a dull regular kind of life, as many men do.

Flossie, who was the best of friends with him, had already settled herself in a pretty flat in Earl's Court, and was having an uncommonly good time making the best of things. With a little persuasion she consented to have certain favorite ornaments and articles of furniture from Grosvenor Street, with which to embellish her new home, and Adair made her some very handsome presents to the same end.

And when she had almost got settled, she bethought herself of her wish to go and see Hope.

"I have not been yet," she explained to Adair one day when he had called upon her to see how she was getting on—"I wanted to get

myself settled and out of the reach of Margaret's tongue—Margaret explains things so, you know. And I didn't want to rush down there in too great a hurry. I wanted to let Hope get used to the new state of affairs a little."

As a matter of fact, she had thought that as Hope had been feeling the pinch of poverty for the past five years, she would give her time to get a few new frocks before she descended upon her. So, having as she thought waited long enough, she drove down to Putney one afternoon about five o'clock and asked for Mrs. Mervyn.

There was no rancour, no jealousy, no ill-feeling of any kind in Hope's beautiful mind. She accepted Flossie as one involved with herself in a common misfortune, and the two sat together on the little sofa for a long time talking it all over, and discussing the situation from every possible point of view.

"I still think," Flossie said at last, "that Dick might have got our marriage put aside—you can do anything with an Act of Parliament, anything. But he seems to think it would be a great slight to me even to try—and I can't look at it in that light at all. My dear Hope, there is nothing, nothing short of taking my life or disgracing myself, that I would not do to give you back your own place again."

"My dear Flossie," Hope cried gratefully—"you are so kind and good and unselfish."

"Not at all. It would simply cost me nothing," she protested—"in fact, I would rather, yes, really rather that the marriage was set aside, for Dick would be happy then and so would you, and I could enjoy myself without my conscience troubling me as it does now."

"Oh, Flossie," the other burst out—"didn't you like Dick? Didn't you feel leaving him? Was it all nothing to you?"

Her tone was one of anguish, and Flossie took both her hands as she answered.

"My dear," she said very kindly but with perfect honesty—"when Dick married me he had no love to offer me—you still had it all. I liked him very well then, just as I do now. But never cared a straw for but one man in my life, and he married another woman for a few thousand pounds and a diamond necklace. It's no use pretending to you that I am heart-broken at what has happened. I am not, excepting so far as you and Dick are concerned. Dick was a good match and I liked him well enough, but his way wasn't my way and he bored me to extinction. I did my best as his wife, and he was a good indulgent husband to me. But there wasn't enough love lost between the two of us for you to worry yourself about for one moment."

"I thought it fell so hardly upon you," murmured Hope, who had always adored Dick and simply could not understand anyone being bored by him.

"In the beginning," said the other promptly, "it was the hardest for you. Now I think it is the worst for poor Dick, because you have always the child."

"I may not always have the child," Hope said with an effort. "He is Dick's child as well as mine, and he has a right to——"

"But Dick will never exercise that right, never," Flossie cried—"Dick would die first. If I were you I should let the little lad go and see him sometimes. Send the maid with him, so there would be some one if he got frightened or homesick or anything."

So the following morning Hope, catching at the idea, dressed little Robin in his best, a white sailor suit with a collar of turquoise blue, and sent him in charge of Virtue to spend the day as a surprise to his father. And when Robin got there, his father had gone away for three days; if the truth be told he had gone to look round two or three watering-places that he might make or at least suggest some arrangement for Hope's comfort. However, Hope sent the child up to Grosvenor Street three or four times before they went off on a long glorious holiday at the seaside.

Hope had chosen Eastbourne as being the best possible place for the child, and at Eastbourne they remained for two months in what to little Robin seemed like Paradise.

For he had everything that the heart of any little boy could desire, donkey-rides every day and to an unlimited extent, with all the other luxuries which go to make a perfect existence at the places devoted to holiday pleasures.

And at last they came back to the little house in Lime Tree Road, and Hope set to work in right good earnest to find a suitable place in which to make herself a home henceforward.

Like Flossie, her mind ran towards a flat, and after looking over several blocks of such buildings, she decided upon one not many minutes' walk from the mansion where Mrs. Adair lived. This she furnished very simply but with much taste, and then, with a couple of nice maids, she and Robin took possession of it and turned their backs upon the old life of pinching poverty for ever.

It was by then the middle of October. Of Adair she had seen nothing since she had let slip that agonized appeal that he should keep away from her because the pain of seeing him was greater than the pain of separation. But he wrote to her twice or three times a week, and over and over again he begged her to go

back to Grosvenor Street and choose whatever she would for the beautifying of her new abode.

But Hope never did. "I know the kindness which prompts your wish," she said—"but please, please, dear Dick, don't ask me ever to go into that house again. I could not do it. I use your dressing-bag—my dressing-bag—every day, and I am wearing my ruby ring, the one you gave me. But I could not bear the sight of that house again, I could not."

And Adair, finding that she was inflexible on this point, let the subject drop and contented himself by sending her all sorts of little quaint and curious odds and ends picked up during his autumn wanderings. And at last growing weary of wandering he came home again, and wrote announcing his arrival, and begging to be allowed to come and see her—"if only just this once."

But Hope said no—she was longing to see him, aching, pining for a glimpse of him, yet she was resolute and firm. "No—don't come. I am strong away from you—I will not answer for my strength if you are often with me. I will send Robin to see you."

With that Adair perforce was obliged to content himself; but he thoroughly enjoyed the child's company and took him here and there, showing him to the friends for whom he cared

most, buying him all manner of presents, petting him and lavishing upon him all the love that he was longing to lavish upon his mother.

And about the end of October Mrs. Adair also returned to town from a trip abroad and a round of visits among her friends; and the day after her return she went to see Hope.

"But you are ill," Hope cried as soon as her eyes fell upon her.

"Not very well," Flossie answered. "I haven't been well for some months—I am going to see Dillory to-morrow. And how's the child—never mind about me—I want to see the boy."

"He has been in Grosvenor Street all day," Hope answered.

"Have you seen Dick?" Flossie asked.

"No."

Didn't he want to come to see you?" she demanded.

"Yes—he did," Hope admitted.

"But, my dear child, why shouldn't he come and see you?" Flossie cried. "You are not afraid of what people will say surely? And besides, everyone is so sorry for you both, for us all, and they all speak so kindly about you. I really don't think anyone would blame you whatever you did. Not,"—hastily—"that I am advocating extreme measures, Hope. Don't mistake me, dear."

Hope had just slipped down upon the hearth-rug when Flossie asked the first question. She bent her pretty fair head now until it almost touched the other's knee. "Don't you understand, Flossie?" she said—"I'm afraid to let him come here."

"My poor girl," said Flossie. "My poor, poor child."

For a long time they sat together holding each other's hands and scarcely speaking. Adair's wife could hardly understand the yearning and pain in the heart of the mother of his child, the innocent mother who had suffered so deeply for the spite of a woman whom she had never seen. But although she could not fully realize what that yearning and pain was, she yet respected it, aye felt for it as tenderly as if her sympathy had come out of her own sad and bitter experience.

They were sitting there still when the boy came home, excited and brimful of the events of the day.

"Father bought me a watch to-day, mother," he said gaily. "Look, isn't it a beauty? And a chain and all." Then he caught sight of Mrs. Adair and said—"Oh!"

"You didn't see me, young sir?" said she smiling. "I don't believe you remember me?"

"Yes, I do," answered Robin promptly, "be-

cause you have the same name as father and me—you're Mrs. Adair."

"Yes, that is so," she answered.

"I can't quite make it out," Robin said, fixing her with his great gray eyes. "All the boys that I know have fathers and mothers called alike—Mr. and Mrs. Brown—Mr. and Mrs. Stuart. But my father and mother are called different names, and your name is the same as father's. Isn't it very queer?"

"It is rather queer," said Flossie quietly—"and some day when you are a big man you will know all about it."

"I'd like to know now," he persisted.

"That's not possible. A long time ago, my little man, a great mistake was made. Perhaps some day it may be all put right—I think it not unlikely."

Hope had hidden her face against Flossie's gown, the boy stood looking gravely into the fire.

"Yes. I suppose that is so," he said dreamily, "for I asked father about it this afternoon, and he told me he couldn't tell me either. And father is so dreadfully sorry about it too—he cried to-day—at least I think he cried. I won't be quite sure but I think so. He always very nearly cries when I come away too."

Mrs. Adair put her arm round Hope and held

her close for a minute. "Little man," she said, in a bright tone, a tone which expressed something very different to the kind pressure of her arm—"if your fond and foolish father has not surfeited you with sweets already, you may look in my coat and in one of the pockets you will find a box. Yes, that is it. Now, Hope, my dear girl, I must go. Don't go out to lunch to-morrow—I want you to give me some."

"With pleasure," Hope answered.

She had crushed down the tears which had more than once started to her eyes, but the subdued storm had left its mark upon her pale face. Flossie looked at her very kindly.

"I have an idea that a way will be found," she said. "Good-bye, my dear. I shall be here soon after one to-morrow."

And surely enough soon after the little clock on the chimney-shelf struck one, she entered Hope's pretty drawing-room on the following day. "Flossie, I am sure you are ill," Hope cried.

"My dear," Flossie answered, "I have been to Dillory, and I have got my death-warrant."

"Flossie!"

"No, don't look like that. I have more than suspected it for several months past. Nothing can be done, simply nothing. I made Dillory tell me the truth—and you know how hard it is

to get the truth out of a doctor. Well, it's the old trouble—we all go the same way—lungs all to pieces and I'm to go South at once. And now, Hope, my dear, don't grieve for me—there are tears in your dear eyes. God love and reward you for them, and He will. I have had a good time, and I have had to face this possibility all my life—I am quite content and happy now that it has come. Only—I dare not face it alone—will you go with me?"

"Yes," said Hope, without an instant's hesitation.

"Then let Dick have the boy till then—he will be so lonely, so wretched, in that big house by himself. It's a ghastly house, Hope—I am thankful to die elsewhere. Well, will you spare the boy to him?"

"Yes," cried Hope in accents of sharp distress. "I will do anything to please you, Flossie, anything."

So three days later, when Adair was just finishing his late breakfast, the door opened and little Robin came in. "I've come to stop, father," he said at the top of his sweet shrill child's voice. "Mother has gone away with Mrs. Adair, and here is a note—and you're to take great care of me, and I've brought Virtue too."

Adair j umped up. "You've come to stop?" he exclaimed. "Nonsense."

"It's all in the note," said Robin confidently.

Adair tore it open, saw that it was in Flossie's handwriting and read it hastily—it was not long, but it told a tale plainly enough.

"Hope has consented to go South with me, dear old Dick," it said. "I have to go—you understand? It will not be for long, and she sends you the boy, with her love, to keep until the day break and the shadows flee away.

"It's the old trouble—Dr. Dillory wil' tell you all. Good-bye, dear old Dick. Think kindly in days to come of your affectionate friend,

"FLOSSIE."

THE END.

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