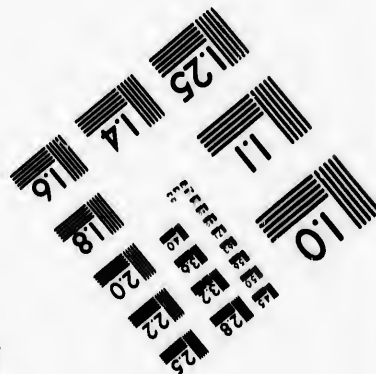
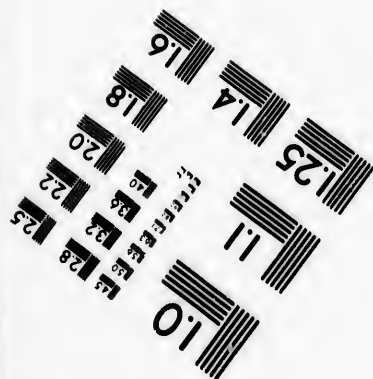
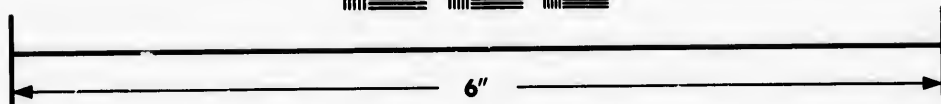
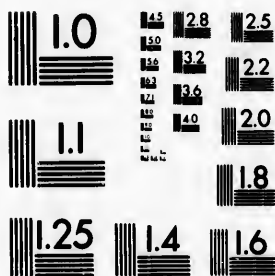


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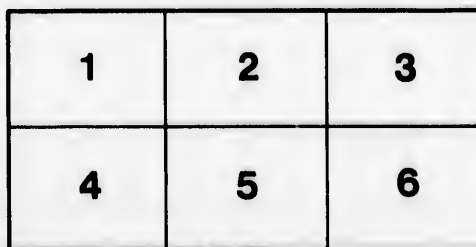
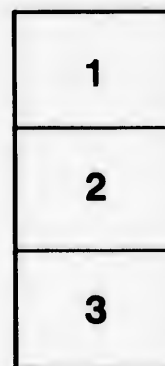
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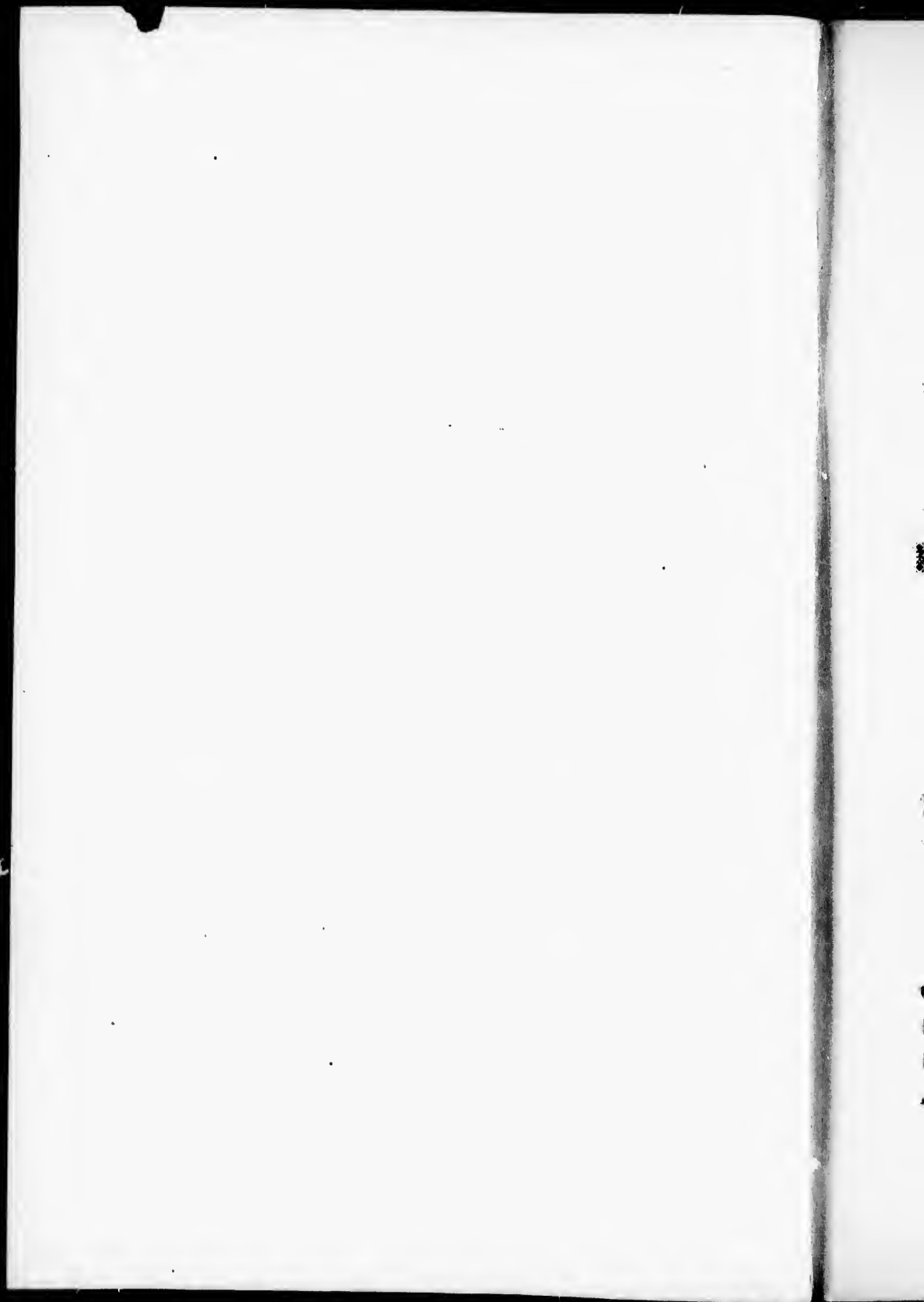
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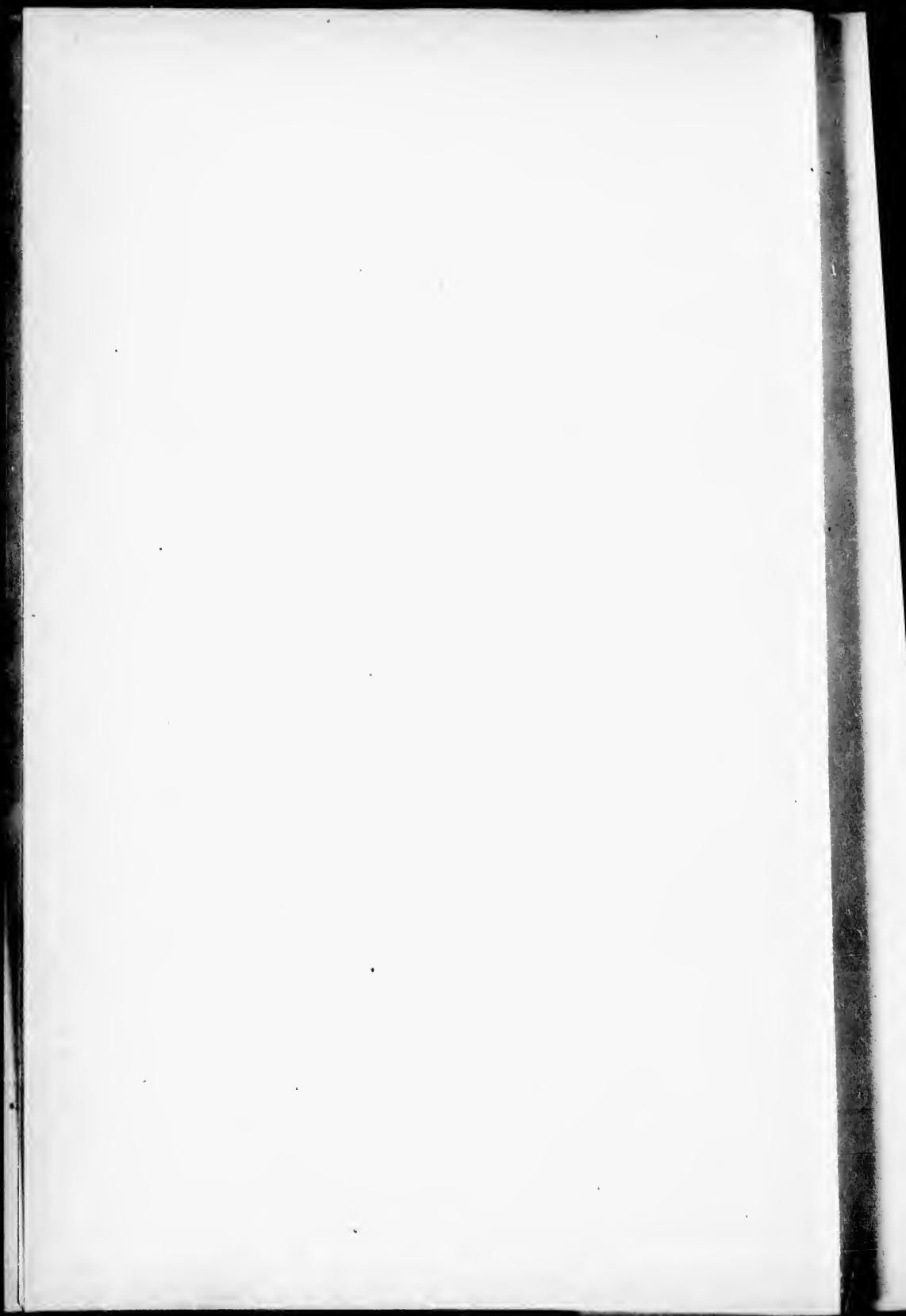
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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FRIEND
MARGARET VELEY



“ Go, Love, go—if needs it must be so—
Go, as the sun goes down his western way
At dying of the day,
And all the earth is wrapped
In shadows chill and grey.

Go, Love, go—if needs it must be so—
Go from my longing as the summer goes
From many a garden close,
And through the branches bare
The wind of autumn blows.

Go, Love, go—if needs it must be so—
Go as the tide, that, sobbing, makes its moan,
O'er sand and weedy stone,
And yet is drawn perforce
Unto the deep unknown.

Go, Love, go—if needs it must be so—
Summer and sun, and surges of the main,
Ye cannot heed my pain !
Go, Love, go—if needs it must be so—
But come, Love, come !—O Love, come thus again !
Come as they come, Love, going as they go ! ”

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REETTS.

MAISIE DERRICK.

CHAPTER I.

A WALK.

THERE had been mist since early morning. The far-off country was completely blotted out, the old gray church tower that rose out of the village at the foot of the hill had also disappeared, only the budding branches of the trees asserted themselves, and showed like unsubstantial phantoms through the dull grey atmosphere.

Now, at two o'clock, the mist was still thick in the village, but round Yardon Hall, half way up the lane that climbed steeply between the church and the common, it had become scattered. The windows on the north side of the old-fashioned house now gave a clear view of the common and its distant surroundings, but from those on its southern side the church tower was still only an indication, and the tops of the trees appeared without any sign of trunks below.

The old house stood some way back from the lane, which with its tall forest trees and hedges newly powdered with a tender green made a pleasant avenue-like approach to the entrance gates and to the long winding walk that led to the house. The gates were on the left of the lane, as one climbed up from the village; the winding path within them had been newly gravelled, and made a vivid contrast to the closely packed shrubberies that bordered it. These

were edged with stones half hidden by mossy saxifrage and other small-leaved plants, and behind the green edging primroses and snowdrops and the golden gleam of crocus blossom took away all monotony from the rich brown earth and the mass of evergreen foliage above it.

A girl in a grey woollen gown was bending down while she gathered a handful of the snowdrops which had clustered out of sight at the foot of a huge rhododendron.

"How lovely!" she sighed with enjoyment, then stooped again for a few of the blue-green blades which looked too pure and fresh to have forced their way through the mould.

The girl rose up and walked back to the house, looking at the flowers in her hand. Maisie Derrick was dark-eyed and dark-haired, yet there was a likeness between her and the snowdrops. She looked exquisitely fresh and bright; her brown eyes sparkled, her clear brown skin glowed, and as her lips parted in a smile of content, her perfectly white and even teeth gleamed out between them. Maisie was neither tall nor short; she was erect and had a fairly good figure. She was pleasant looking, not beautiful, yet there was in her face a special character that attracted notice, and made strangers ask who she was. It was this expression that likened her to the snowdrops. It seemed to say she might be deceived over and over again; but that she would go straight on trusting and believing in every one but herself. She carried the snowdrops into the house and upstairs to a dainty-looking visitor's room facing southward. On the dressing table a tiny basket filled with moss stood waiting for the snowdrops.

Maisie put in the delicate blossoms with a deft yet careless touch that made the flowers look as if they were growing in the dark green moss. She gave a look round the room and then came down the stairs and the broad low steps beneath the entrance porch, and crossing the desolate looking spread of gravel in front of the house, she took her

way along the winding shrubby path till she reached the entrance to the lane.

Maisie paused at the gates, looked down to the village, and then with another contented sigh she turned to the left and began to climb the hill to the common.

There was not much light and shade on the path for the sun had pierced the mist, and, as the trees were leafless and not thickly planted, it shot down a warm golden glory on the yellow road. Its glare dazzled the eyes of a man who just now came in sight at the top of the hill, where the steep road seemed to touch a distant background of trees. Maisie saw him before he could make out who she was.

At first her face showed a sudden delight, and then the bright expression faded. She looked timid and ill at ease. It was curious to note the opposite effects of this meeting in the two faces. The man's doubtful scrutiny of Maisie's advancing figure altered in a second to joyful certainty, his pace quickened, his figure seemed to dilate, and a warm expecting smile lighted up his handsome face and parted his expressive lips. It was plain that these two were more than mere acquaintances, and that the man cared very much for the girl. It also seemed plain that Maisie shrank from showing pleasure at the meeting.

"How is Mr. Yardon?" he said.

"Quite well, thank you. Were you coming to see us?" Maisie half turned to go back to the Hall.

"Yes, I was going there, but why should I stop your walk this bright afternoon? Mayn't I go across the common with you and then come back and have a chat with the squire? Everything looks extra cheerful after that dreary morning mist."

"You must not call my grandfather squire."

She smiled as she turned and walked up the hill side by side with Mr. Stanmore.

He was so tall that he bent down his head to listen while she spoke, and though she had seen him often, Maisie thought what a remarkable face he had.

There was something eagle-like in the strong line of his profile, his eyebrows were curved and dark, and his mouth, though wide, was full of rapid changes of expression. A keen flashing rapidity was perhaps the first reading one took from his face, and his light springy step and the careless grace of his movements fitted well with this idea of his character ; but the piercing glance of his dark deeply-set eyes, now turned on Maisie with an ardent glance beneath which hers drooped, indicated a grasp of intellect suited to some great reasoner or scientific discoverer.

At present, however, Mr. Luke Stanmore was only on the verge of life. He was five and twenty, a young engineer entrusted with the making a branch line of railway between the village or town of Figgsmarsh, at the bottom of the lane, and the thriving city of Blievedon, which, as all the world knows, is placed in one of the pleasantest parts of Southern England.

He had come down to Figgsmarsh a total stranger, and greatly to the surprise of that unselfish community, who took far more trouble about their neighbors' affairs than they ever took in their own, Mr. Stanmore had been at once invited to Yardon Hall, whose owner was considered a misanthrope, even if he were not better suited to be the inmate of a lunatic asylum than to be possessor of the only good house in the neighborhood, always excepting the Manor House in Wentworth Park. There was, of course, the Vicarage at the foot of the hill, but then that did not count, the clergyman and his family were bound, the Figgsmarsh people said, to be friendly and sociable with their parishioners ; but it was a burning shame and an irritation to the Figgsmarsh mind that such a sort of half-way house as Yardon Hall might have proved itself should be ren-

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dered useless for all hospitable purposes by the eccentric habits of its owner.

There was no special mystery about Mr. Yardon's exclusiveness ; every one knew his story. He had been a banker in one of the great northern towns, and had retired early to a beautiful country home near the lakes, though he kept an interest in the bank. He had been fairly benevolent, though people said his good deeds sprang from his wife, but he was considered proud, reserved and tyrannical. Everything prospered with him till his wife died. She must have been dearer to her undemonstrative husband than people thought, for he sold off all his property and went abroad as soon as he could.

His daughter, an only child, had married before her mother's death, and when Mr. Yardon suddenly came back to England after many years of wandering he found that this daughter, Mrs. Derrick, was in a decline, and that, in spite of the liberal settlement he had made on her at her marriage, she was living in a small house in London, with very limited means. Her marriage had displeased him. She had chosen for herself a Mr. Derrick, an interesting young curate without a penny. It appeared that marriage had developed ambition and extravagant tastes in Mr. Derrick. His father-in-law had provided him with a small country living, and he attended fairly well to his parochial duties ; but the young rector had a passion for orchids, and he also liked to drive and to ride better horses than his neighbors did. His wife was known to be the only daughter of a rich man, so Mr. Derrick was allowed to go on happily with his expensive hobbies. He disliked business, and had a habit of tearing up bills without looking at them, but he had some good qualities. He was a kind and affectionate husband, and his wife did not dream of doubting his judgment on any matter, spiritual or temporal. A fall from one of his cherished horses broke

his neck, and then his idolizing wife discovered in the moment of her crushing sorrow that her husband's affairs were in utter confusion, and that he had died overwhelmed with debts. He had not kept any accounts, and his widow was at the mercy of the numerous claimants, who were now as impatient for settlement as they had been slow sending in their accounts.

Perhaps the mental shock to poor Mrs. Derrick helped a natural weakness of constitution. She lingered about a year after her father's return, and then left him the sole charge of her only child, his granddaughter Maisie.

Mr. Yardon had settled down with this girl of eighteen at Yardon Hall, and although Miss Derrick was by this time twenty, the young engineer was the first person who had been allowed to visit freely at the old house.

The Figgsmarsh people said that Mr. Stanmore was also eccentric. He wore his hair longer than other young men did, and had never been seen in fashionably cut clothes, or with a flower in his button-hole. The impression he made on the Figgsmarsh female mind was that of being always in a hurry. Even coming out of church he went along the path with long swinging steps, looking neither to the right or left, with a stray lock of hair over his bright dark eyes, which were seemingly bent on some object far ahead.

Every one in Figgsmarsh knew how the acquaintance had begun between the impulsive young man and the overbearing old one. In fact in Figgsmarsh every one knew everything before it was an hour old, so there could be no doubt that public opinion was rightly informed on this particular subject. There had been a quarrel between Mr. Yardon and Mr. Stanmore. The ex-banker had accused the engineer of trespassing on his land, which was nearly grazed by the line of the new railway, and Mr. Stanmore had had the best of the dispute, and had so com-

pletely proved himself to be in the right, that Mr. Yardon, after being very rude, had called at the young man's lodging, had apologized and had asked him to dinner.

This was the Figgsmarsh version of the story ; but when the vicar, Mr. Vernon, heard it from his sister he laughed.

"My dear Auricula," he said, "I don't like to contradict you, but I hardly think Mr. Yardon ever made an apology to any one."

There was no doubt, however, that the contradictory old man liked Luke Stanmore. At their first meeting the young fellow's frank easy manner had taken his fancy, and now at the end of three months they were firm friends.

"You expect Miss Savvay to-day I think," Mr. Stanmore said, as he and Maisie went on to the breezy common. A lark was singing high above them, and the sunshine was gilding the faded bent as well as the fresh green blades of grass that tried to blot it out of sight. Maisie looked up smiling.

"Yes, I can hardly say how much I am looking forward to her visit. She is such a dear old friend, there is no one like her."

"You like her better than Miss Vernon then ——"

Maisie looked uncomfortable. She gave a swift upward glance of inquiry, and discovered that Mr. Stanmore had an amused smile on his lips.

"You see, it is so different," she said, as if she were excusing herself. "I have known Miss Savvay ever since I was a child, and she knew my mother before that, and Miss Vernon has not been here a year yet. She did not come as soon as her brother did." She paused, with a look of discontent. He did not speak, and she went on more quickly: "It is better to be honest"—she had the truthful look in her eyes that made her so attractive ; "if I had known Miss Vernon much longer, I do not think we should

have found much sympathy. She is modern and accustomed to society, and I am"—she hesitated—"well, I am shy and old-fashioned. It is not likely Miss Vernon could care much for me. I am sadly behind the rest of the world."

She laughed as she spoke, but there was a timid look of appeal in her eyes.

Mr. Stanmore longed to say "You darling," but he had determined not to be premature, and he also knew by instinct that unless he wished to give serious offence to the old master of the Hall, he must not make love to his granddaughter until he had asked his leave to do so.

"All the better," he said, and his look soothed the girl's doubting heart. It was delightful to have such an assurance that this new friend really sympathized with her. He went on swishing rather nervously at a bare red blackberry arm that was peeping out of the furze. "I wonder whether your friend will care to inspect the new line. Can she walk as far as Beadon Hill, do you think? I could explain its course to you both if she could, but perhaps she would be bored."

He said this with so little of his usual ease that Maisie was surprised. She wondered why Mr. Stanmore, who never seemed to care for the opinion of any one, should be anxious to please Miss Savvay.

"I think she would like it very much," she answered simply, and her calm direct words set him at ease while she went on: "Miss Savvay takes an especial interest in this country. She is Captain Wentworth's aunt, you know."

"I have been told so." He looked grave again. "May I ask if Captain Wentworth is a friend of yours?"

Maisie laughed out at this question.

"I have never seen him. Captain Wentworth has been away for years. He came back once or twice, but Miss Savvay says that for many years he has stayed on in India. The beautiful old house has been shut up, and is much the

worse for it, I believe. In her last letter, Miss Savvay says her nephew is coming home perhaps."

Stanmore turned impatiently and looked towards the lane.

"I will call for you to-morrow afternoon, then," he said, "or shall I meet you and Miss Savvay on Beadon Hill?"

"I think that will be best," Maisie said.

They had left the common and were crossing the road that separated it from the lane. A passing cloud made it seem as if they were entering into shadow as they went down the road between the trees.

"There is my grandfather at the gate," the girl said.

Luke raised his hat, but Mr. Yardon did not seem to see him. Maisie felt in a moment dull and constrained. She was once more the stiff shy creature she felt herself to be when she was alone with Mr. Yardon.

CHAPTER II.

MAISIE'S GRANDFATHER.

ONCE upon a time a new keeper was engaged to attend on the lions and tigers of a zoological garden. The new keeper had first-rate testimonials, and his care and punctual attendance on the animals were warmly praised by the head keeper when he made his rounds. The new attendant was intelligent too, and had detected a weakness hitherto unsuspected in the eye of a valuable lioness. For three weeks the new man was in high favor. Then there came a change—not in his care or attention to his duties, these were as unremitting as ever ; the change was in the beasts themselves. They became sulky and irritable, the pet lioness actually refused her food and pined at the back of her den, while the lions and the tigers growled and snarled till the new keeper felt more or less nervous of approaching them.

This was not all. A young tigress, who had been hitherto graceful and docile with the caressing ways of a petted domestic cat, became suddenly dull and lethargic. She moved about her den in the most commonplace manner, only rousing from her apathy to growl now and then at her new attendant, with whom she had at first been affectionate and full of play. It was soon rumored that the new attendant wished to give up his post ; he complained that the beasts were bad-tempered, and his life was not safe with them, he said.

This accusation irritated his superiors, and the other keepers asserted that, on the contrary, the beasts were remarkably docile and good-tempered, and the man was

reminded that he had himself expressed this opinion at the beginning of his service.

While the head keeper sat lost in perplexity at this sudden change in the behavior of his favorites, one of the hangers-on of the gardens asked leave to speak to him.

"Well," the head keeper said gruffly, "what's your business?"

"Well, sir," said the man. "I guess you wants to know the reason for all this snarling and growling, don't you?"

A sudden idea came to "Elmhats," the keeper, and he felt sure that some underhand plot against the welfare of the beasts was about to be revealed to him.

"It lies in a nutshell," the man went on. "Them beasts—" he jerked his thumb over his shoulder to indicate their dens—"is dull, that's the long and short of it."

"Dull?"

"Yes, sir, dull. They walks on four legs, but what then? They're uncommon like ourselves, 'cept they eats their joints raw and we takes ours cooked. Call yourself to mind, sir, and you'll see there's nothink more trying than dullness to them as can't go about to amuse theyselves. Why that there Peter as used to tend 'em as you discharged because he was too fond of liquor, you should just hev hearkened to Peter when he was a-sweeping out the lioness—I mean Susan, sir, the savage one. "Sukey," says he, "my old gal Sukey. Ain't she a beauty now, eh Sukey lass? Was she a purring puss then and a doodling old darling of a Suke." Bless you, sir, he'd go on ten minutes at a time with such a string of nonsense talk as you never hearkened to. Just the same with the lions and the tigers too, the beasts was never tired of listening to the chap, he spoke that pleasant to them. As for the little tigress, the saucy beauty he called her, bless you, sir, I've seen her roll about on her back and let him tickle her while she listened to his coaxing ways; he just knew how to amuse them dumb brutes. That

was the whole moral of it, and in course they showed their best sides to him. Well, sir, you give Peter the sack, and then comes this yere sober correct party, and he talks to 'em just as if the critters went on two legs ; what talk he did, he ain't got much of a tongue ; precious dumb chap all round—he never wastes time in play, not he. He grumbled at the poor beasts for growling and snarling ; bless you, sir, they was only swearin' at the dullness."

"Why wasn't I told this before Nash gave notice, perhaps he might still learn to do better with them."

The answer came with great contempt—"You know better than that, sir, I take it. Feelings for dumb brutes or for anythink else can't be taught, sir. There's them as can't rest till they see those they lives with happy and bright like, an' there's others as only wants to be pleased theirselves."

Now the influence of Mr. Yardon's atmosphere on Maisie Derrick had been nearly related to that exercised by the silent keeper on the great caravansary. The warm-hearted sensitive girl could not snarl or growl, but she drooped and pined for the affection which had been lavished on her by her father and mother, by Miss Savvay, and by every one who had hitherto known her. Maisie had always been shy and retiring, but she possessed a rare gift—the faculty of attracting love without seeking it.

Before her grandfather came back to England, Maisie had begun to study in order to be able to teach. Mrs. Derrick had become a complete invalid, and the girl longed for power to increase her mother's comforts. She had been helped in this purpose by the old friend who was coming to-day to Yardon—Miss Savvay.

It was her friend's first visit since Maisie had been claimed by her grandfather, and the girl had been counting the hours to her arrival, she so hungered for love and kindness.

Mr. Yardon seldom blamed his granddaughter ; but he was utterly indifferent to her presence or her absence. Maisie had remarked that he never looked at her. She did not know that she owed this avoidance to her likeness to her father. This avoidance and Mr. Yardon's sternly repressive manner had week by week frozen up the girl's frank nature, and had increased her shyness. She was growing nervous and self-conscious, and the old man was deeply vexed by her silence and her timid manner towards him.

She blushed now as she came up to the gate, and saw how stern he looked. It was as if she had read his thoughts and heard him say : " Conceited fool, always thinking about herself and what I think of her. I must get rid of her, that's the long and short of it. The very sight of her puts me out of temper."

Mr. Luke Stanmore, who lived too much in the open air, and who was too full of health and good spirits to be troubled with irritable nerves, did not feel the mute antagonism of his companions.

" Why did you not come and meet us, squire ? " he said ; " it was delightful on the common."

Mr. Yardon looked still more unpleasant. " Captain Wentworth is the squire here," he said, " pray do not misapply titles, Stanmore. I have no wish to defraud Captain Wentworth of anything he really possesses. Well, I won't detain you ; you no doubt wish to prolong your walk."

He nodded and seemed not to see Mr. Stanmore's outstretched hand, but turned his back on the gate when Maisie had passed into the shrubbery walk.

Mr. Yardon did not try to overtake the girl, and they walked back to the house in silence. The delicious flutter that had darkened Maisie's eyes and made them liquid with happiness was weighed down by her wonder at this change in her grandfather.

" He has always asked Mr. Stanmore to come in ; he did

not even shake hands with him to-day. What can have happened?" Maisie had an uneasy consciousness that she was the cause of Mr. Yardon's churlish behavior. It was a relief that, being at least two yards behind her, he could not see her guilty looks.

The hall was so large that her grandfather had come in before she had time to reach the foot of the staircase.

"I want you in my study," he said.

His voice sounded rougher than usual. Maisie drew a deep breath, and felt as if she were going to have a tooth out.

Mr. Yardon went into a room on the right of the hall, and seated himself behind a writing table that faced the door by which Maisie had to enter. He also faced the fireplace, and at his back were two windows, so that, while he sat in comparative shadow, the light fell full on the girl's face as she came in and stood facing him.

There was a likeness between them of expression rather than of feature. In both faces was the same look of truth and yet of reserve. There was a likeness which should have made them think in unison, and yet an indication of qualities which would make confidence difficult between them unless there was love to bring it forth.

As their eyes met Maisie saw a hard stern look of dislike, and she saw rightly. At that moment Mr. Yardon almost hated her. She had come in the way of all his plans and future projects; she even interfered with his solitary amusement—a chat with Mr. Stanmore.

"Confound her," he thought, "the fellow comes to see her now, not me, and I won't play second fiddle in my own house."

"Do you want me, grandfather?" Maisie had become so shy under his stern eyes that one shoulder insensibly rose higher than its fellow.

"Yes," he said angrily. "Can't you stand straight, girl? Look here—I do not want Mr. Stanmore to be invited by

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any one but myself, Maisie. Will you remember this, if you please ? ”

Maisie colored, hesitated, and then said in a shy voice, “ I did not ask him, grandfather.”

“ That is a mere excuse. If girls go out to meet young men, the men consider themselves invited. I am not blaming Stanmore—the young fellow only did what was natural—I blame you. You should keep out of his way. He—he does not care for you, do you understand ? ”

He had been rude, but never so rude as this, and Maisie’s spirit rose at the taunt.

“ It does not signify about that.” She had raised her head and was looking straight at him, and Mr. Yardon saw how very bright her eyes were and how dark they looked. “ I met Mr. Stanmore, but he was coming here to ask Miss Savvay and me to come and see the new line to-morrow. He knows Miss Savvay a little.”

Mr. Yardon gave a grunt, but he did not answer. He took up a newspaper, and Maisie felt that she was dismissed.

CHAPTER III.

LUKE STANMORE MAKES UP HIS MIND.

LUKE STANMORE walked down the hill to his lodging in the village. He was half affronted and yet amused by Mr. Yardon's uncourteous behavior.

"He sees what I think of his granddaughter, and he does not like it. Well, he'll have to like it."

He smiled, and then went on thinking of Maisie. She was still a puzzle to him, for he did not guess the extent of her shyness. She was sometimes so bright and animated, and then she would become as she had just now, limp and unable to join in the talk. While Mr. Stanmore pondered this contradiction, it occurred to him that Maisie only had this drooping aspect in Mr. Yardon's presence. The thought jarred him. He had keen perception when he gave it fair play, but he was apt to judge rapidly and hastily at the outset.

He had decided that Mr. Yardon was excellent, a rough outside with a warm heart, and now he could not lay the blame at once on him. Surely, he argued, her grandfather must know Maisie better than he did, and there was perhaps a reason for his silence towards her; she perhaps did not appreciate the generous heart that lay under such a prickly outside. Well, well, if matters went as he wished, Mr. Stanmore thought he would soon set all right between Maisie and her grandfather.

It had not occurred to this new-comer—he had been only a few months in Figgsmarsh—to make inquiry about the extent of Mr. Yardon's popularity. He had been flattered by the old man's liking for himself. and he was therefore

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inclined to judge him favorably. Had his landlady been less garrulous, perhaps, Mr. Stanmore might have questioned her; but the woman had a torrent of words ready whenever he saw her, and although his rooms were nicely furnished and well kept, and his meals were appetizing, he often meditated a change of abode.

The calm repose of Maisie's manner was yet more delightful to him as an effect of contrast; Mrs. Grieg's disjointed words clattered one against another like bits of broken china.

He looked forward on his right when he reached the end of the steeply descending lane, and he felt a sort of disgust when he saw his landlady's trim little figure standing in her doorway across the road.

Mrs. Grieg did not wear a cap, and thus showed the pointed shape of her small head with its shining braids of brown hair—still brown though she was nearly fifty.

Something in the attitude, her skinny yellow face and throat, and her bright bead-like eyes, reminded Stanmore of a tortoise, as she craned her head forward at the sound of wheels on the newly mended road that led to the railway station and formed a sort of continuation of Rectory Lane on the further side of the High Street of Figgsmarsh.

A fly with luggage outside it was a rare event, and Mrs. Grieg stared at the vehicle as it came in sight. A lady looked out of the fly window and nodded, and Mr. Stanmore raised his hat in answer to this greeting. Mrs. Grieg rubbed her lean hands, a momentary gleam showed in her expressionless eyes. "I shall know who it is before any one else does," she said to herself, "though I'd bet it was a visitor for the Hall if 'twern't too unlikely."

She admired her lodger's tall figure as he came down the lane with an easy step that became still easier after he had returned the bow of the lady in the fly. He sighed

with a sense of relief ; he felt sure that his old acquaintance would help him to see more of Maisie.

"Good-evening, sir." Mrs. Grieg's cackling voice roused him from this pleasant prospect. "Was that a friend of yours, sir? We don't often see a strange lady at Figgsmarsh."

Mr. Stanmore smiled. "I believe that lady was born at the Manor House," he said.

"You don't say so, sir. I didn't know as Captain Wentworth had any ladies in his family." Then she went on glibly, "I beg pardon, sir, but you'll remember I said I came from Hoxter, not being in noways a Figgsmarsh woman, save always and except so far as being the wife of a Figgsmarsh man, and you see, sir, the property have come to Captain Wentworth from his grandmother years ago, he being a minor when old Mrs. Savvay died. There's those that says the old lady might have left it in better hands." Stanmore frowned, and she went on at double quick pace, feeling that her chance was a short one. "There's no secret, sir, about the captain's doings, he just stays away and takes all out of the place he can, don't do nothing for no one, and they do say——"

But Mr. Stanmore was already half-way upstairs, and had not heard half of Mrs. Grieg's information.

Some of her words, however, clung to him, and roused a disturbance in his reflections on Maisie Derrick.

When he was not thinking of his work, it must be said that Mr. Stanmore's thoughts had taken a habit of travelling in one direction only. Luke Stanmore was not vain. Though he felt hopeful that she cared for him, he did not think that Maisie was won ; but the singular truth of her nature revealed itself easily in spite of her reserve, and the young man had felt sure while he talked to her that she was heart-free. She might be won, but he did not think she would be won easily. Till to-day he had seemed

to have many chances in his favor. Mr. Yardon's friendship and the absence of visitors at the Hall gave him a clear field, for, as yet, he had not met a fellow guest there. The rector had dined once. Though he had talked to Maisie, Mr. Vernon was evidently not on intimate terms with his host. Luke Stanmore had therefore felt that his success depended on his own power of winning Maisie's love. He was so intensely happy in these brief meetings with her, that he had been willing to prolong this delightful time. To-day he had felt almost sure that the sight of him had called so deep a glow into the girl's sweet eyes. Till her manner suddenly changed at the gate, he had begun to hope that the prize of her love was won.

This check had set him thinking on his way down the lane whether he was wise in delaying. Maisie might expect him to speak. She might feel that he exposed her to remark by these meetings, which had become frequent during the last fortnight; she might even at this moment be considering him a mere trifle.

At this point Mr. Stanmore had caught sight of the lady in the fly, and he had seen in her a way of deliverance. Mrs. Grieg's torrent of talk, that is the portion of it to which he had listened, had, however, set a blot on the bright vision that succeeded his bow to Miss Savvay. Captain Wentworth was coming home, was he? Captain Wentworth being poor, and in debt besides, would want to marry a girl who had some money, and yet who was accustomed to live in a quiet unostentatious way. He would certainly be charmed with Maisie, and, whether he loved her or not, he would see the prudence of securing such a wife.

This evening, while he smoked, the wreaths that blotted out the corners of his room from Mr. Stanmore's eyes no longer showed Maisie's bright face among them. There came instead a vision of Captain Went-

worth. He was no doubt fascinating, girls often found army men fascinating because these men believed in themselves. Well, if Maisie preferred Captain Wentworth to himself it would be better that she should marry him. But it was one thing to say this and another to accept it. The vision of Captain Wentworth colored by Mrs. Grieg's comments was not that of a man likely to make a good husband. He had doubtless seen a good deal of life, and had no first affection to give to any one. It was quite possible that this *blasé* man of the world might be capable of marrying Maisie for her money.

Luke Stanmore felt guiltless on this point ; he thought it better that a girl should have a small income, but it was not necessary. His own father and mother had died early, but they had left enough to provide for this only child's education and start in life. Luke Stanmore's own ability and determination, helped by a certain charm of manner which had made him friends early in life, had done the rest.

He felt that he was now at six-and-twenty in a position to marry. Luke Stanmore's creed was that if a man seeks for money in marrying, he must give up some more desirable quality. No man, he argued, has a right to expect perfection. He cannot hope for a wife who is amiable and rich as well as beautiful and talented. He had not a good opinion of his own merits, and therefore thought he had no right to expect as much as some men might. He told himself that if he could win Maisie's love he should be truly happy, and he began to see that he had better not lose time, and thus give opportunity to some one else to take it from him.

He once more leaned back and called up Maisie's look as she met him in the lane. The sweet dark eyes had been bright with what he had thought was love. Mr. Stanmore had never been able to decide on the color of Maisie's eyes,

they seemed to vary in varying degrees of light ; he only knew that they were dark and yet full of color as they looked at him under the rebellious cluster of brown wavy hair that the wind scattered over her broad forehead. Either the rich color of her hair, or her clear brown skin, or both together, always reminded him of bright autumn coloring a bunch of ripe nuts. Scarlet berries, the golden bronze of the brake, brilliant bilberry leaves and gleams of golden lichen seemed suited to Maisie, only that the fresh daintiness that characterized her gave this girl a sparkle especially her own, a sparkle more akin to spring. "There is no other girl in this world for me," Mr. Stanmore said, and stretching out his hand he refilled his pipe and thought again.

When he went to bed he had determined that although he might not find the opportunity he sought to-morrow, yet he could make Maisie clearly understand that he was in earnest.

CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS THE CHANNEL.

ACROSS the Channel and some way farther south, instead of mist and leafless trees, the meadows were sprinkled with white narcissus blossoms and yellow asphodel, the green slopes were gay with many colored lilies, and the out-of-the-way nooks were fragrant with pale violets and delicate primulas. A belt of flowers of all hues girdled in the little town of Sentis, and the English travellers who passed through it on their way to the Riviera marvelled at the lavish beauty, and sometimes left their carriages and helped themselves to nosegays. At the farther end of Sentis, just outside the town, there is a point where three valleys open on to the road, revealing far-off mountains ; at the end of one valley is a shining glacier that seems to touch the sky. The ground slopes away from the road on either side and shows tempting hollows gay with flowers, and paths leading in various ways to the wooded valleys.

On the left of the road opposite the valleys, beside one of the flowery hollows, there stood a cottage, built partly of stone and partly of logs. It had an air of comfort in the absence of litter outside. There were four small windows, with green shutter blinds ; these were now closed to exclude the great heat of the sun.

A carriage full of travellers came along the road, disturbing the stillness of the place. It went at a rapid rate, as if the travellers it carried hoped to escape the burning sunshine by mere speed. They had evidently been gathering flowers, for a huge basket beside one of the occupants

was laden with blossoms, and she held a white umbrella over the fading blooms.

The travellers did not notice the cottage as they went rapidly by, but from behind the green sun shutters two bright, dark eyes laughed merrily as the carriage passed by.

The girl who laughed was alone, a lithe, slender creature with a small head ; a profusion of rich, fair hair fell loosely over her shoulders, for she had been brushing it when the noise of the carriage-wheels drew her to the window. She stood watching till the travellers vanished into the valley on the left, and her large dark eyes were half-closed, her rich, pouting lips were parted in laughter, and her chin was supported between her thumb and fingers. She looked like a faun, or some mischievous sprite, capable of casting a spell over the unconscious travellers who had been so near her a while ago.

"Well," she said to herself, "those are English people. I feel that I shall not like the English ; they take so much trouble always. I would not trouble about wretched weeds if I had the good fortune to ride in a carriage." She closed her eyes, showing long brown eyelashes resting on her cheeks. "Ah ! perhaps I shall have a carriage of my own some day." She opened her eyes, and there was a look of gladness in them, as if they had just seen something pleasant. "I am curious," her thoughts went on, "it seems like the play-acting I saw at Cannes years ago, so many things have happened to me since mother died. Poor mother, she was always grumbling because life was dull. She would have enjoyed getting so many letters as I have had this week, and she would have liked to see Mr. Ray."

She put down the brush and began skillfully to twist her soft, abundant hair into a thick rope. She rolled this round and round the back of her head, her long fingers setting here a comb and there a pin, till her golden head-

dress seemed created by magic—a smooth contrast to the ruffled waves of hair above her fair forehead. If Drusilla Lescure had lived in a northern climate she would have had a dazzlingly fair skin; but although her mother had always been watchful over the girl's beauty, she had not been able to keep Drusilla completely out of the sunshine, and there was a tinge of gold on her face which, perhaps, added to its fascination, and added to the glow of her dark eyes. The girl put away her brush and comb, and pulled off the cotton jacket over which she had brushed her hair. She had a slender, graceful figure, dressed simply in black soft stuff. Her full, round throat looked white against this, but her hands did not follow suit; they were golden brown against the cuffs of her mourning gown. Drusilla took up a cracked hand-mirror and looked at herself; she made a grimace and her brown eyebrows met in a frown.

"I would not wear black if I were going to stay here; it makes me look ordinary. If it was not that I fear to shock the Englishman, I would have put on my blue frock to-day." She stopped and opened a drawer of the old gilt-handled *armoire* near her bed. A glow of blue like that of wild hyacinths in a copse showed in the opening. Drusilla touched the stuff lovingly and sighed. She closed the drawer and shook her head. "No, I am sure the English are all formalists, and if this agent saw me in a colored frock, he would be sure to write to his employer that I was wanting in respect to my mother. Poor mother! she was often cross, but I wish she was here to advise me. She was very wise; she used to say girls must be silent—not too ready to talk; but then it was easy for mother to behave in the best way. She knew life; she had been among gentlemen and ladies; she knew what to say and what to do. Why did she hate everybody I wonder, and shut herself up here alone with me? I don't believe any

girl was ever so shut up as I have been. I wonder if the Englishman knows more about me than I know about myself."

She went to the window and looked out. At some distance a figure was coming along the white road, and at the first glance Drusilla felt sure it was the Englishman. Drusilla considered that she had been deprived of the pleasures that other girls had. She had never been allowed to join in village *fêtes* or dances; her mother had watched over her like a jailor ever since the one episode in her young life from which all this seclusion dated. It happened while she was still a day pupil at the Convent at Sentis, and was about thirteen. One day her mother told her to pack up her best clothes, as she was going with her on a journey.

Drusilla had not yet forgotten the delight of that journey, or of the two days that followed when they reached Cannes. There was a performance of marionettes the day after their arrival, and the good-natured woman of the house asked leave to take Drusilla to see it. It was the happiest time the girl had ever known. The brilliant lights, the brilliant dresses of the little performers, the excitement of the applause, and the music bewitched Drusilla, and when she returned with flushed cheeks and her dark eyes shining like stars, her mother stared at her with wonder. She had not before realized how beautiful a creature her daughter was becoming. She had refused to tell Drusilla the reason of this journey, but the girl felt sure that she had been allowed to go to the Marionette Theatre in order that her mother might be rid of her.

The next morning Madame Lescure told the girl that she was going out to see a friend, and that Drusilla was to stay in doors till she came back. Drusilla had not been able to sleep, and she still felt restless from excitement. As soon as she was sure that her mother was out of sight she crept softly downstairs, opened the house-door and

stood looking at the people who passed up and down the street. She saw that almost every one looked at her admiringly, but they were mostly work-people and they did not linger.

At last a gentleman came up the street ; he was very well dressed, and Drusilla looked at him to see if he was handsome. No ; he was plain and rather stout, but he smiled at her. The girl returned his smile in the most enchanting manner, and he stood still before her.

"What is your name ?" he said. "You are a stranger here, I am sure."

He said this in English, and Drusilla felt glad that she was able to answer him.

"Yes," she said, simply, "I am Drusilla Lescure."

"A strange name," he said ; and he wrote it down on his wristband with a little gold pencil.

He asked her age, and with whom she was staying.

"I am thirteen," Drusilla said, and that was the end of her adventure. As she spoke, her mother seemed to spring out of the ground, pushed the gentleman aside, and pulled Drusilla into the house.

"Pack your clothes at once, disobedient child !" she said. "We must go home to-night !"

It was a cruel disappointment, and, what made it worse, her mother told her on their journey home that, but for her misconduct, she had meant to spend several days in Cannes.

Drusilla had not forgotten this adventure. She had grown taller and her figure had developed, and she knew that she was still more beautiful than she was at thirteen ; but since that journey she had been far less happy, owing to her mother's incessant watchfulness. She had been sent as a boarder to the Convent when Madame Lescure's health failed and she could no longer take the girl to and fro. Even in her last illness, the dying woman insisted on keep-

ing Drusilla beside her, although one of the Convent Sisters came to nurse their pupil's mother.

Madame Lescure had died not quite a week ago ; she had been buried only yesterday, but Drusilla had not yet found time in which to enjoy her freedom. The Sentis lawyer had come three times to see her ; he had brought her two letters from England ; he had sent her stuff to make a black gown, and he had told her she was to help the seamstress he brought with him in making her mourning. Drusilla was careful to see that she was well fitted, but beyond this she spent her time in fingering the stuff, softer and finer than any her mother had given her, and in trying on and adjusting to her perfect satisfaction a large black leghorn hat which the lawyer had sent, and which suited her admirably.

Besides these engrossing occupations, she had also been obliged to write two letters. It must be owned that the Sisters had taught her to write a fine clear hand, and to speak French and English correctly. Her mother had made a point of her learning English, and as there were two English Sisters in the Convent, Drusilla had acquired a pure accent, and could speak easily, but the writing of these two English letters had been a hard task, and she had torn up several copies before she succeeded in pleasing herself.

The first letter was an answer to one from Mr. Yardon, who announced himself as an old friend of her father, and offered her a temporary home at his own house in England. The second letter was a notification of the time when she would have to be ready to leave Sentis. Yesterday she had received a few words saying that the gentleman who was appointed by Mr. Yardon to escort Miss Lescure to England would call on her next day. These occupations had scarcely given her time in which to realize her freedom.

Drusilla had dreamed all night of the pleasure that lay

before her in this change of life and of scene. She had pictured to herself that the rich old man—she felt sure that Mr. Yardon must be rich and old—would have some male friend, young and handsome, who would at once become her slave. She should accept all his admiration and his devotion, but the rest would depend on circumstances. Her mother had told her that if she were discreet she might marry a very wealthy husband, perhaps a titled one, and the girl thought there was no fear that she should throw herself away.

It was a disappointment to Drusilla to see that the coming visitor was not attractive-looking, and when Victoire, the woman who had stayed on with her since her mother's death, threw open the door and showed in Mr. Ray, Drusilla thought he looked ugly. He was short and stout, and dark; his eyes were his best feature, but they were too black and eager to please the girl. He made her a low bow, and then his admiring glance raised him in her opinion.

"I come on behalf of Mr. Yardon," he said. "You understand English, I believe, Miss Lescure?"

She smiled, and the prettiest of dimples showed in her cheek. Mr. Ray felt a little confused by the dazzling beauty of this young girl. His wife, a matter-of-fact, plain woman, was always much better dressed, so far as stuffs went, than was the girl before him. He knew that, and he asked himself where this bewitching young creature could have learned the art of putting her clothes on so perfectly. Mr. Ray had been at a Parisian school in his boyhood, and Miss Lescure reminded him of those days and of his first love. Mr. Yardon had said that his ward knew nothing of the world, and had been brought up in seclusion. It was very difficult for the lawyer to believe that her easy grace of manner was inborn.

Drusilla answered him in very pretty English. She

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spoke easily, but with a foreign accent which added to the charm of her soft, sweet voice, as she said, with a certain formality,

"I hope you can tell me that Mr. Yardon is quite well."

"He is very well, thank you, Miss Lescure, and anxious to see you at the time you have named. I believe you are willing to start to-morrow."

"Yes, monsieur!" Drusilla looked still brighter. "I am ready, at any time, to go."

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he said. "Can I pay any bills, give any messages, or anything?"

"Monsieur Adolphe, our Sentis lawyer, has paid for everything," she said; "but I thank you, monsieur, for your great kindness. I can give you no messages to deliver, because I have no friends."

She gave him a swift glance and then sighed, and cast down her eyes till they were completely veiled by her eyelashes.

Mr. Ray found himself so drawn into sympathy with the lonely girl by this frank avowal, that he actually sighed in answer.

"Ah!" he said, "that is perhaps fortunate; you will have the less regret in leaving Sentis. You will find plenty of friends in England, Miss Lescure, when once you are at Yardon Hall."

Drusilla looked up.

"Is the Hall quite away by itself; or are there other houses near it?"

Mr. Ray had been, lawyer-like, watching for some revelation of character, and he smiled at the interest he saw in her dark eyes, and then the observant lawyer was startled by her changed expression as she noted his smile; this young and inexperienced girl was actually on guard against his observation. "So much the better," he thought. "She will get on better with Yardon for having a little tact."

Aloud, he said, "Yardon Hall stands by itself, but it is near a large village."

Miss Lescure left off smiling: "In England I believe only poor people live in villages?"

"That depends. There is always the clergyman's family—sometimes there are two clergymen; a doctor—unless the village is small, there is a doctor."

Miss Lescure was pouting, and frowning a little, too.

"I did not mean those sort of people," she said, with her pretty accent. "I mean real gentlemen and ladies."

Mr. Ray felt greatly amused; he wondered what the Rev. Charles Vernon, the Rector of Figgsmarsh, and his sister, Miss Auricula, would think of Miss Lescure's ideas.

"There are several country houses at a little distance, Miss Lescure. The nearest, the Manor House, is certainly shut up, as its owner is away with his regiment in India."

"He will come back, I suppose." She looked radiant again. "Ah, but then"—she gave another swift glance at the lawyer—"I forgot; Mr. Yardon only asks me for a visit, so I may, perhaps, not stay long with him."

"That will be as you please, I fancy, Miss Lescure."

"Do you think so? There is still one question I have to ask you, monsieur. Mr. Yardon says he is my guardian, but my mother never told me about him. Was he a friend of my father's?" She looked grave as she added, "I can hardly remember my father; he died when I was so little, and he was French. I hope Mr. Yardon can tell me who he was, and all about him."

"No doubt," said the lawyer. "Mr. Yardon says that you are related to him on your father's side."

"On my father's side!"

She checked herself, for she saw curiosity in the lawyer's eyes. Her mother had spoken to her once or twice, in a vague, mysterious way, about her rich, unknown friend, who would certainly take care of Drusilla; but Madame

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Lescure had said, "A friend of mine." She had not said, "A friend of your father's."

Mr. Ray rose to go, reluctantly. He had enjoyed his interview, and he would have liked to prolong it, but he had several arrangements to make, and, above all, he had to write to Mr. Yardon.

"I must wish you good-day," he said; "I will order the carriage to be here at six o'clock to-morrow. I will say *au revoir* till then, Miss Lescure."

Drusilla stood thinking.

"The country is pretty here," she said, with a bewitching smile, "I should like to show it to you. If you will call again at six this evening, monsieur, we will take a walk. I will show you some views."

The lawyer bowed; he went out of the house with a thrill of pleasure. This journey to see Mr. Yardon's ward, which had seemed such a troublesome business, was likely to prove a most agreeable experience. Mr. Ray smiled on his way back to the hotel, he was wondering what Mrs. Ray would think of Miss Lescure's invitation, which, he told himself, he would have been very rude to decline. "The better an English woman is, the more narrow-minded she grows," the cautious lawyer said to himself, by way of salve to his scruples, "and unless the birds carry news, I hardly see that my proceedings can travel beyond Sentis."

CHAPTER V.

Miss SAVVAY, Maisie, and Mr. Stanmore, came down the hill abreast.

They were all silent. Mr. Stanmore's eyes were fixed on Maisie ; but there was as much regret in them as any other expression. He was telling himself that he who always gloried in seizing the opportunities of life at the right moment, had let slip the most precious chance that had ever been placed within his grasp. Miss Savvay had lingered behind in a prolonged search for some special moss which she remembered as a native of the common, and Stanmore and Maisie had been left together. The young fellow's love had become more ardent by the restriction which the visitor's presence had laid on his glances. He thought Maisie had never looked so delightful, and he longed to gaze his fill on her sweet face, and, when the chance came, he had been content to feast his eyes, and so lost the chance of telling his love in words.

"What a fool I was," he repeated to himself. "What a dull, dreamy fool!"

Maisie walked on with her eyes fixed on the ground. She could not have told what she was thinking of—a vague trouble that was half delicious, half tormenting, absorbed her. If she had a definite thought, it came as a slantwise wonder whether Miss Savvay must not have found this walk dull which had made her so bewilderingly happy. Miss Savvay had said so little, and it was rare for Miss Savvay to be so silent.

The brisk little lady was studying her companions. Something in Maisie's face, when, after her first greeting, she led her friend to the room prepared for her, had aroused

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Miss Savvay's suspicions. The dull, depressed tone which had infused itself into the girl's letters had made her old friend anxious to see her. But, at first, Miss Savvay's own pride had stood in the way; for she gathered that Mr. Yardon did not wish to make her acquaintance, and she determined that, instead of going to Yardon, she would ask Maisie to come to her for a long visit.

Meantime, Mr. Yardon learned that Miss Savvay had been born at the Manor House and was aunt to Captain Wentworth. He severely rebuked Maisie for not having at once told him her friend's position in life, and wrote Miss Savvay a civil invitation to Yardon Hall.

This civility came too late. Miss Savvay had sailed for Australia with a sick friend, and six months passed before she was able to visit Maisie.

She had expected to find her friend sad-eyed and melancholy; but, as she watched the girl, there was a shy smile and a sudden blushing glow of happiness, that the good spinster, although she did not think meanly of herself, could not entirely appropriate.

While Miss Savvay arranged her cap firmly before the glass, she nodded sagaciously at her own reflection.

"There's a man in the case," she smiled a little cynically. "Well, I'll not force Maisie's confidence; she'll tell me before long. I can see she is as sweet as ever."

No one having been asked to meet the guest at dinner—an omission which had disturbed Maisie—Miss Savvay talked to Mr. Yardon, and succeeded in impressing him with the opinion of her good sense and capability. But, afterwards, when she and Maisie were alone, the girl said timidly:

"Shall you be too tired for a walk to-morrow?"

The tone struck Miss Savvay, but she did not even look up as she answered:

"I'm not tired, dear child; I believe I walk as well as ever. Where shall we go?"

She looked at Maisie, the girl had gone to the window ; without turning her head she answered :

"A friend of my grandfather, Mr. Stanmore, offered to show us the new line of railway he is making—it goes through a very pretty part ; but don't go unless you like, it will perhaps bore you."

Maisie turned round as she ended. Her friend was looking at her with a contented smile, but Maisie did not feel contented ; she knew that Miss Savvay felt the change in her, and that she would find out the state of her feelings.

After dinner, Mr. Yardon appeared in the drawing-room much earlier than he usually did, and when his guest said she was fond of *écarté*, he offered to play a game with her.

When she had said good-night to Maisie, Miss Savvay resolved that she would not ask questions, she would trust to her own powers of observation, and while she brushed her scanty locks, her small dark face looked keenly intelligent.

"There's truth in that old saying about fools and angels," she thought ; "I don't set up to be an angel, but I know better than to act like a fool."

The silence that had possessed her to-day after they left the common, the silence which had roused Maisie's wonder, had partly been spent in self-congratulation on her reticence and partly in guessing whether Mr. Stanmore had taken advantage of the chance she had given him in her moss hunt. The silence of the young pair inclined her to think he had spoken, and that he had been favorably answered. Maisie's downcast glowing looks were, Miss Savvay argued, conclusive on this point ; but when her keen eyes searched Mr. Stanmore's face, she saw that he looked troubled and impatient. Miss Savvay's thin nose had a fine little upward point, and this seemed to rise with her thoughts.

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"He wants me out of the way ; but, no, sir ! He who will not when he may, must not have the way rolled for him later on. I think it spoils a man and lowers a woman to take all the roughnesses out of their path. I'll see, though, that he speaks during my visit. Maisie must not be kept in doubt, and she will want me at such a time, poor child."

Miss Savvay had never received an offer of marriage, but she felt as experienced as if she had had a dozen.

She had seen how constrained Maisie's manner was towards her grandfather, and he seemed hardly to address a word to the girl.

Mr. Stanmore, at last, broke the long silence.

"Mr. Yardon is not at the gate, so I will go in and see him."

"Yes," Maisie answered. She hoped her grandfather would not be very ungracious, but she knew that he would have met them at the gate if he had wanted to see Mr. Stanmore.

Miss Savvay admired the young fellow as he swung open the heavy green gate and held it till the ladies had passed into the drive.

"He and Maisie will make a fine couple," she thought, and she stooped to gather a snowdrop, so that they might walk side by side. But Maisie stood still ; she resolved that her grandfather should not meet her walking with Mr. Stanmore.

"Are you tired, dear Miss Savvay ?" she said.

"Oh, no ; I have done nothing to tire myself. Why did not Mr. Yardon come with us, he would have enjoyed it ? I suppose he takes walks with you, Maisie ?"

"No." Maisie looked grave, for this had been one of her disappointments at Yardon. "I believe Mr. Stanmore walks with him sometimes ; but he likes to be alone."

"Did you ever ask him to go a walk with you, Maisie ?"

Miss Savvay looked rather mischievous as she put the question. "Men are such curious beings they often don't know what they like or what is good for them till it is put in their way."

Maisie laughed and looked shyly at Mr. Stanmore.

"Do you agree?" she said.

"Well," he spoke quickly, for he had often wished to suggest this idea to Maisie, "I fancy you spoil the squire, Miss Derrick, by letting him get his own way on all occasions."

Maisie smiled; she wondered what Mr. Stanmore would have thought of her grandfather's speech yesterday.

"You used to have your own way with me." Miss Savvay nodded. "I had to go out walking with you whenever you wanted me. I don't say it was against my will, but you had a will of your own then."

The Hall door stood open, but Mr. Yardon did not come out to welcome them.

"I shall find your grandfather in his study, I fancy."

Mr. Stanmore usually took for granted that events would happen as he wished.

"Perhaps; but he may be in the garden."

Maisie felt ill at ease. It would have been natural to go with Mr. Stanmore in search of her grandfather, and a month ago she would have gone without a misgiving; now she could not.

"I shall see you again." Mr. Stanmore smiled at them and turned to the study.

A very gruff "Come in" answered his knock. He went in, but Mr. Yardon continued to write without raising his eyes.

"Good-evening," the young man said. He felt surprised and annoyed at this reception.

Mr. Yardon looked up; he nodded, but he did not hold out his hand.

"I'm not glad to see you," he said bluntly. "I'm busy, and I have a good deal to plan and arrange."

He looked hard at his visitor, and he saw that he was vexed.

"Look here, Stanmore," he tried to speak genially, "this is Tuesday. Come round to dinner on Friday and I shall be glad to see you. The truth is I'm very much worried, and by that time I shall be able to tell you all about it."

He held his hand out now in token of dismissal, and, as if a second thought had come to him, he rose and opened the door for his young visitor.

"Then it's settled—you dine with me on Friday? I'll—I'll say good-bye till then."

Mr. Stanmore felt almost too angry to speak. He had vowed to himself that he would not go away till he knew whether Maisie loved him, and now he was dismissed for three days; this eccentric old man was actually turning him out of the house.

"I'm not sure that I can come on Friday," he said without a smile; "I may be called to town on business."

The old man nodded and looked so malicious that Stanmore felt puzzled.

"At your age," Mr. Yardon said, "we often mistake shadow for substance; but it doesn't signify after the mistake is set right. Good-evening to you."

Stanmore went slowly down the drive. He was rousing to a consciousness that there was something under this dismissal. Yesterday he had expected to be asked in and he had been sent away. What did it all mean? Mr. Yardon had always pressed hospitality on him, and what was he talking about shadow and substance for? He looked back. Mr. Yardon was still standing at the door with that meaning expression lingering on his face. It seemed to Stanmore that he was being watched off the premises.

He smiled. If all this was done to keep him from Maisie, it would be easy enough, he thought, to meet her out of doors. That extraordinary sixth sense which seems to be as variously dealt out to us as the lengths of antennæ are to butterflies had already assured Mr. Stanmore that he might look on Miss Savvay as a friend. She would not be likely to hinder him from telling his love to Maisie Derrick.

This reflection soothed his vexation. He whistled as he went down the tree-bordered hill.

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CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE REQUEST.

THE room opposite Mr. Yardon's study was the dining-room. It looked out only on the drive because the stable yard lay beside it, blocked from view by a tall laurel hedge that made a half circle from the farther angle of the dining-room, and followed the sweep of the drive to a second pair of rarely used carriage gates farther down the lane. A carriage was a rare sight at the Hall, and when one came there was plenty of space for it to turn on the broad gravelled sweep.

Perhaps from its limited outlook the dining-room was dull, and as the drawing-room fire was not lighted till midday, Miss Savvay had established herself in the library, a small room behind Mr. Yardon's study, and which could be made to communicate with the drawing-room by means of sliding doors. It had a door of its own which led into the hall and another door opening into the study. All these entrances were curtained, so that the room with its bright fire in one corner looked extremely cosy. The door curtains were dark, but they were rich both in color and texture. The window curtains were a dark orange velvet, which made pleasant framing to the green lawn in front and the clumps of rhododendrons right and left.

In the middle of the room was a long leather-topped table with books and writing materials. A portrait of a sweet-faced young woman, Maisie's mother, hung over the corner set mantel-shelf. On its lower shelf were a few old blue and white cups and saucers. The fireplace was near

the window, and the sides and end of the room were covered with rows of books except where the curtained doors came in the way.

Miss Savvay was very sensible and practical, but she dearly loved a story, and she had to search among Mr. Yardon's old-fashioned volumes for some time before she could please herself. She could not find anything modern, so she helped herself to the Vicar of Wakefield, and was deep in the first chapter when a sound disturbed her. She had placed herself in a comfortable chair beside the fire. Some-time ago Maisie had come in and had put a stool under her friend's feet, a cushion behind her head and a little table within reach. This sound was so unusual that Miss Savvay started from her book and looked behind her at the corner opposite the fireplace. A bolt seemed to be slowly undrawn behind the heavy curtain which hung over the door leading into Mr. Yardon's study.

Miss Savvay felt very curious. Maisie had told her this door was never opened, and the visitor wondered why her host, if it were he, should not come in by the door that led into the hall.

Even after the noise of the bolt had stopped, the door seemed to stick fast, and only opened at last with a loud crack. Mr. Yardon's face, when he appeared from behind the curtain, was very red from his exertions.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said politely, "but I wanted to talk to you privately—just a little matter which need not go beyond ourselves if you please."

He bowed, then he seated himself opposite to Miss Savvay.

Miss Savvay drew herself up. She felt affronted. She thought it was most extraordinary of Mr. Yardon to come in by this shut-up door, but he certainly ought to have knocked before he began to withdraw the bolt.

"If I was nervous, Mr. Yardon," she said, "you would have alarmed me. I fancied that door was never used."

"It is only used when I need it, madam ; I apologize for the liberty I have taken. But I was not afraid of startling you, I can see you have plenty of nerve, and also if I may say so, of good judgment." He paused and looked at her intently. "I want you to help me if you will be so good."

Miss Savvay was already deeply interested in watching the course of Maisie's love story. Mr. Stanmore's manner had convinced her that he would not be contented till he knew his fate, and when Mr. Yardon said this she felt a sudden fear that the contradictory old man intended to put obstacles in the way of the young people.

"I hesitate to begin," he went on, "because what I have to say must sound to you so very inhospitable, but the fact is that I am very much worried. I received a letter two days ago which told me to expect a visitor, a lady, a stranger to me and also a foreigner."

"And you wish me to give up my room to this visitor? Why did you not write and put me off at once?" She smiled cheerfully at him. "I am so sorry you have made a trouble of it. I am ready to go at once."

There was no change in Mr. Yardon's grave face, he only put out his hand to show her that she had not reached his meaning.

"You are very kind, but that I take as a matter of course from Miss Savvay. But, madam, allow me to say it was necessary that you should come here, for two reasons. I have to place Maisie under your charge, and I have also to tell you why I must, for the present, send her away from Yardon."

"Send Maisie away!"

Miss Savvay checked herself. She saw Mr. Yardon's lip curl at her want of calm.

"I am obliged to have this visitor here—for a time—I do not know how long—circumstances will decide that point—but until I am sure that I can have this—this person and

Maisie in the house together, I wish my granddaughter to be in safe keeping. I can only think of you, madam," he bowed, "to whom I can entrust Maisie. She is young. She is supposed, whether rightfully or wrongfully, to have expectations. She would be thought a catch by some designing people. I do not choose to send her to school. Will you give me this help?" He stopped and looked at her. Then, before Miss Savvay could answer, he went on: "Perhaps you will be good enough to take Maisie away to-morrow morning, and to keep her with you till I ask you both to come back to Yardon."

He got up from his chair and bowed.

After a pause Miss Savvay said coldly, "Very well. I will do as you ask."

"Thank you. The carriage will take you to the station at nine o'clock."

He went out at the door by which he had come in, and Miss Savvay heard him fasten the bolt.

"What a tyrannical old boor," she thought. "He must be doubtful whether this stranger is a fit companion for Maisie. Maisie could have come to me. It is most extraordinary behavior. Poor Maisie!"

The harsh grating of the bolt announced another visit from Mr. Yardon.

"I beg your pardon, madam"—he spoke as if he had been listening to her thoughts—"but I think I will get you to announce this arrangement to Maisie. She is so *gauche* and so shy with me that I should not find it easy to explain myself. You will perhaps say to her that a matter of business makes it necessary that she should go away with you till I send for her."

He was going away again, but Miss Savvay had recovered from her previous surprise.

"You must excuse me," she said, "but I prefer that you should tell Maisie yourself. She is of age, remember,

and I am not her guardian, I have no authority over her."

He gave her a cynical look.

"You have a greater power than authority. You must know that a woman will yield to influence far more easily than she will to reason, and if you had known Lancelot Derrick, Miss Savvay, you would not expect his daughter to listen to simple reason."

"I call that a prejudice. It surprises me that you should take it for granted that a child is bound to inherit its father's faults. Why should not Maisie resemble her mother? I see a great personal likeness in her to that portrait."

Mr. Yardon's lower lip was pushed up above its fellow.

"You must be uncommonly fond of Maisie, madam. My daughter, Mrs. Derrick was a lovely young woman. She might have married any one she pleased—and she married that poor creature."

"She married a clergyman, and he was well-connected and well-bred."

Mr. Yardon snapped his fingers, contradiction always sent away his self-control.

"He was my son-in-law, madam, so I suppose I should know his points. Derrick never tried to please me or any one but himself. He was a poor creature, madam. If my unfortunate child had made a better choice, she might have been alive now. Well, madam, you will confer an obligation on me if you will explain my wishes to Maisie. She will thank you for doing it," he added significantly.

"You will that I shall do it more pleasantly. Perhaps so." Miss Savvay spoke dryly. "Very well, I will speak to Maisie."

"Yes," she said to herself when Mr. Yardon had gone, "I begin to understand the change in Maisie, and I am not sorry to take her away from that old tyrant. The girl will get back her courage and her spirits when she is away from him, and a short separation will make Mr.

Stanmore more ardent and anxious to take her away altogether."

Miss Savvay could not go back to the Vicar of Wakefield—she sat thinking. It seemed to her that if Maisie could meet Mr. Stanmore before they left Yardon the matter would probably be settled, "and then," Miss Savvay nodded complacently, "if the young people are engaged there will be nothing to hinder me from asking Mr. Stanmore to come over to Nappa."

Considering that Miss Savvay lacked any personal experience in the conduct of a courtship, it must be said that she showed some generalship in her plans.

She met Maisie just before luncheon and settled about the walk. It seemed to her that it was better to defer giving Mr. Yardon's message till they were safely out of the house. Miss Savvay had changed her opinion of Maisie's grandfather; she did not like him, but she shrank from him with more fear than dislike. When she recalled the determined look in his face this morning she felt secretly glad that she was free to take Maisie away. She remembered that Mr. Yardon had lived abroad for many years, and in her opinion no man who exiled himself from his own country for so long a period ever came back exactly as he went away. He might perhaps be capable of locking Maisie in her room if she did not obey his wishes.

There is no saying how far this warm-hearted woman might have allowed her imagination to lead her. She was so sure to carry both liking and disliking beyond a reasonable limit. Miss Savvay's swans were apt to prove geese, and her tiger often dwindled down to a much more tameable creature.

And yet, making all due allowance for the power of Miss Savvay's imagination, there seemed to be machinery at work on that afternoon which kept Maisie within the garden gates. Mr. Vernon and his sister, Miss Auricula, came up from the rectory to call on Mr. Yardon's visitor. Miss

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Savvay saw plainly that the young vicar admired Maisie, and that Miss Auricula was disposed to patronize until she learned that Miss Savvay belonged to the Manor House family. Then Miss Vernon became appropriately gushing, and turning her back on Maisie devoted herself to the visitor.

At last the brother and sister went away, and then Mr. Yardon asked Maisie to come with him to the library.

He took down two volumes of an old county history, and showed her three passages of several pages each.

"You have asked me more than once, Maisie, to give you something to do for me," he smiled unpleasantly the girl thought, "you will do me a service if you copy these out. I have to send them to a friend who wants the information, and I do not choose to lend him the books."

"Yes, grandfather." Then she plucked up courage. "I suppose to-morrow will do," she said. "I have promised to take a walk this afternoon with Miss Savvay."

Mr. Yardon smiled, but the girl felt that he was displeased.

"I want this copying done to-day, if you please. I am sorry to disarrange your plans, but this is business. Make your copy as distinct as possible, some of it may have to be printed from if my friend should quote from it."

Miss Savvay came in and found Maisie standing alone and miserable-looking before the big open books.

"What is happening?" the girl said. "I have felt in a maze ever since I heard you refuse Miss Vernon's invitation. I heard you say 'I am leaving to-morrow,' what could you mean?"

"That is just what I have come to tell you."

She took Maisie by the arm and seated her in a chair beside the fire.

"I have a message to give you from your grandfather," she said.

CHAPTER VII.

DRUSILLA'S JOURNEY TO ENGLAND.

MISS LESCURE and her companion had travelled as quickly as possible, but when they reached Paris, Drusilla told Mr. Ray she was too tired to travel any farther.

"I hope you will give me a day's rest," she said, "or I shall be ill when I get to Yardon Hall."

Mr. Ray felt obliged to yield. He said they would spend next day quietly in Paris, although he had had Mr. Yardon's instructions not to halt anywhere on the journey.

Secretly he was glad of the rest, and he promised himself a very pleasant day in Paris with his beautiful charge. He went to bed early, and did not rise till late next morning.

When he reached the coffee-room of the hotel, he told the waiter that the lady would breakfast in her room.

"I beg pardon, sir," the man answered, "but the lady ordered breakfast some time ago. She then ordered a carriage and she has gone out shopping. The demoiselle de bureau has gone with her."

Mr. Ray looked annoyed. He felt very much alarmed at the idea of Drusilla driving about Paris with a stranger. He asked where the carriage had been told to go, but the waiter said he believed the lady wished to visit several shops, and that he did not think she could be back till past eleven.

"In fact, sir," the man smiled and shrugged his shoulders, "I should not be surprised if madame were to be even a little later. If monsieur will leave a message I will give it to madame when she returns."

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But Mr. Ray preferred to wait. He was greatly perplexed.

When he consented to stay a day in Paris, he knew that he had risked a reproof from Mr. Yardon, but he had planned out a very pleasant programme for himself and for Miss Lescure. He had ordered a private sitting-room, for he considered that Drusilla ought not to appear at a Paris *table d'hôte*, and he had looked forward to an afternoon drive when the young lady had recovered from her fatigue, then to a charming little *tête-a-tête* dinner, followed by a visit to the theatre.

It seemed to the lawyer that the theatre would be more of a treat to a girl who had never seen a great city than any amount of picture galleries or public buildings, and now Miss Lescure had defeated his plans. He was very much upset by this escapade, and yet, as he paced up and down the street in front of the hotel, he told himself, from what he had seen of the girl, it was just the sort of thing that might have been expected.

"She feels out of the cage, poor little thing, and she is determined to have a fling. I don't fancy she will find much amusement at Yardon."

At one o'clock Miss Lescure had not come in, and Mr. Ray had become so much alarmed by her continued absence that he resolved to set the police on her track. He was going downstairs when he met Drusilla looking radiant with pleasure. His anxious face told its own story, and the girl's natural grace gave an extra charm to her apology. When they reached their room she held out her hand and smiled.

"You have been thinking me lost, ah yes, is it not so?" She said this so sweetly that the lawyer could no more have scolded her than he could have flown—he felt simply helpless under the eyes of this lovely creature; it seemed to him that she was far more lovely than when he last saw

her. What had she been doing to herself, he wondered.

"Let us sit down," the girl said. "I am very happy, but I am just a little tired, and I am ever so hungry, Mr. Ray. Can we not have something to eat?" she said plaintively in the pretty childish way that her companion found irresistible.

He rang the bell and ordered luncheon, but even when it was over Miss Lescure did not gratify her companion's curiosity.

"Perhaps you will give orders about my parcels." She spoke in a more languid tone than she had as yet used towards him. "I expect several parcels, and they have to be paid for, if you please."

"Do you know how much they will amount to?" he asked.

She laughed and showed her pretty even teeth. "I will give you the bills—I know nothing about money." Then she went into her room and brought out a little embroidered bag, evidently a new purchase, from which she took a handful of bills and placed them on the table before Mr. Ray.

"See," she said carelessly, "they cannot amount to much. I have not looked at them, but I only bought trifles till I had asked your leave. I want to stay another day, please. I had no idea Paris was so charming. I have seen some gowns and bonnets which would exactly suit me."

He glanced over the bills, and while he added them up Drusilla took off her hat.

Mr. Ray was looking very serious at the sum total, but when he glanced at his companion he stared in utter surprise.

"Ah!" she laughed, "you like the change! You may thank yourself for it, Mr. Ray. You told me a good deal about my guardian yesterday, and I am sure that he will

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prefer to see me like other ladies. I was like an uncouth country girl till I went to the hairdresser."

"Pardon me," he said, "you could never be uncouth, but I can't help regretting the loss of your beautiful hair."

Drusilla clapped her hands and then laughed at him.

"That is so like a man. It does not follow because my front hair has been frizzed and shortened that I have lost any of the rest. See," she half turned her pretty head, "it is coiled round and round at the back. Never mind my hair, I want to hear you say decidedly that we are to stay over to-morrow."

The lawyer's face grew red, he fidgetted and hesitated, but Drusilla stood looking at him as if she meant to smile him into saying "yes."

At last he gathered up the bills and looked again at his own adding up.

"I regret to say, Miss Lescure, that it is not possible to stay. This is an expensive hotel, and in short we have already spent far more than your guardian counted on—these little bills of yours amount to nearly fifty pounds."

"Are you sure you have added them up right—fifty pounds! and there is only one frock, a hat and a few lace things."

"That is only one bill, Miss Lescure; there are three others besides that one—they are quite correct; But we really must leave Paris to-night."

"You cannot mean it, you could not be so cruel." She looked up at him imploringly, but he went on—

"I am very sorry, but I am due in London, and you are expected at Yardon to-morrow. I—I cannot tell you how grieved I am to vex you by refusing," he said gently; but Drusilla turned her back on him and hurried into her bedroom.

She refused Mr. Ray's proposal of a drive when he sent to offer it, and she spent the afternoon in the contemplation of her purchases. She tried on the gown, and it fitted

her as if it had been made for her. She would have liked to dine in it, but Mr. Ray had sent word they must start soon after dinner, and she knew the gown required careful packing.

Drusilla had never packed before this journey, but she deftly placed all her purchases in the trunk she had bought to hold them. She was as tender of the pleats and trimmings as though they were living things. The contemplation and handling of them restored her good temper, and when dinner was announced she came in with a sweet smile that consoled Mr. Ray for his dull afternoon. The poor man had not dared to leave the hotel lest in his absence Miss Lescure should take another flight among the shops.

Drusilla was determined to be pleasant. She listened to her companion's stories, and led him to talk about Mr. Yardon far more fully than he had intended to do.

She looked very bright and happy, but she listened far more than she talked, and once or twice the lawyer thought he saw a far-off look in her sweet dark eyes, as if she were thinking of something else differing from what he was saying.

The girl was really dazed with the amount of novelty that had been suddenly thrust on her. So many new places, new people and beautiful things had passed like ever-shifting visions before her eyes in these last days that life had begun to seem unreal.

Two days ago she would have said this frankly to Mr. Ray, but after her evening walk with the lawyer Drusilla had taken herself to task. Her mother had always told her that no girl would succeed in life who held herself cheap, and although she had taken Victoire with her, she felt that her mother would have disapproved of her own easy way of talking and going about with a stranger.

Madame Lescure had lived in seclusion in the lonely cottage, but she had been always treated with great re-

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spect by her neighbors. The tall, plainly dressed, silent lady had kept aloof from all these sociable happy people, yet she had always been kindly greeted by them, and when she died Drusilla had been overwhelmed with sympathy. But the girl had not felt inclined to talk freely to the Sentis people. She saw that their eyes were full of eager curiosity, and she had repelled their advances ; it was the intoxication of her coming splendor that had drawn her into such artless confidences with Mr. Ray on that first evening. She had very nearly told him of the Cannes episode, but she had not found the opportunity.

When she reached home on that evening, she told Victoire that she would give her Madame Lescure's clothes and her own—for the girl thought that there was no need to let any one know how poor she had been, or how shabbily she had dressed.

Drusilla was extremely practical, and she handled her mother's clothing without any of the sentiment which some daughters would have felt in so doing. She turned out the pockets and found them empty. In folding an under-petticoat it touched a chair and sent out a sound that made her unfold it again. She found a little pocket, and in this a small black silk bag. In this was a tiny leather case containing a locket. On one side was the face of a middle-aged man with dark stern eyes, on the other was the likeness of a younger face, fair-skinned and smiling, with a delicate high-bridged nose and full lips. Underneath this was a strip of paper, and on it were the words, "The likeness of my father, Charles Antoine Lescure."

The girl grew cold while she looked at the faded bit of writing. It was her mother's and signed with her mother's initials, and at the first glance she had hailed it as a means of throwing light on the mystery that hung over her? but that feeling quickly faded. Lescure was her mother's name not her father's, and she grew pale as she realized this.

It could not be that her mother had married a cousin, for Drusilla knew that her mother had often said she had no relations. She had been an only child, and so had her father and mother. It was of course possible that Madame Lescure had married a man with the same name, and for a while Drusilla tried to believe this. But she could not convince herself it was so; it seemed to her that in this portrait she had found the key to the mystery of her bringing up. If her mother had never been married, Drusilla, who knew well how proud she was, could understand her love of solitude and her dislike to her fellow creatures. She wondered who was the other portrait—was it her real father, the man who had ruined her mother's life? Drusilla was so angry when this thought came that she flung the little case on the ground and stamped on it with the heel of her shoe, then she threw it into the stove and tried to forget what it had taught her.

Mr. Ray had found her changed and silent at the beginning of the journey. She had lain awake in the night, and she looked ill and depressed. Little by little the events of her journey had cheered her, and had distracted her mind from this sad trouble, and when she reached Paris she fairly forgot it all in the excitement of finding herself in the gay city.

Her excursion this morning and her talk with the young woman who had gone with her had made Drusilla feel older and wiser. She had learned many lessons in conventional behavior, and she had above all become more certain of her own powers of attraction.

The hairdresser's compliments, and then the adroit flattery of the shop-woman who had sold her the gown and the lace which had so fascinated Drusilla; then the milliner, as she tried the girl's bonnet, had made her know how beautiful she was. She had never heard the old saying,

"Praise to the face
Is open disgrace,"

and at this felt that she had become a very important person.

She had also been impressed by the attention with which some other buyers in the gown shop had looked at her, and she had studied their behavior to the shop-woman and to one another. They had been chiefly English ladies, and Drusilla admired their quiet self-possessed manner and the gentle way in which they spoke. She had a singular gift of imitation, and she at once resolved to adopt this manner, which seemed to her impressive and distinguished, and in those vague talks with her mother Drusilla had learned that a first impression was most important.

While she sat listening to Mr. Ray, the girl had mentally gone back to those talks with her mother. She ardently wished that she had persuaded her to tell her something more definite about her future than those vague allusions to a rich home and a powerful protector. But when Madame Lescure reached this point she had always ended with an abrupt dismissal of the subject. This morning had given Drusilla several lessons. One of the ladies at the milliner's had a beautiful carriage and a fine pair of horses and some well-appointed servants. Drusilla had instantly compared herself with this lady, and she had decided that her own beauty was far greater. She ought therefore, she considered, to have at least as good a position as this lady had. She resolved to make the best of her opportunities at Yardon ; but, unless she was likely to find a rich husband, she did not think she should stay.

CHAPTER VIII.

DRUSILLA AT YARDON.

YARDON HALL was only about three hours distance from London, and the housekeeper had been sent off by a very early train to meet Miss Lescure on her arrival at the station. There was to be no delay, Mr. Yardon had said, and now about three o'clock he sat in the library expecting his ward's arrival.

He was restless and he seemed unhappy. The sad look on his face deepened when he heard the barking of the dogs.

Then came the sound of steps in the hall, and Warren threw open the library door and announced Miss Lescure.

Drusilla came in like a flash of sunshine, tall and slim and beautiful, while her fair hair showed golden as the light fell on it.

Mr. Yardon had risen at her entrance, but he was so dazzled by her appearance that Drusilla took a far more comprehensive view of him than he received of her at the first glance.

She saw a stern-faced man with fine dark eyes deeply set under strong grey eyebrows, and she liked him. There was nothing in his face to justify the attraction she at once found in him except that she thought he looked strong-willed and determined, and that if she could make a friend of him, there would be far more to be proud of than in the conquest of a weaker man. Drusilla had not felt impressed by her reception so far. She had found the housekeeper dowdy and stupid, and she noticed that the journey from the station was made in a dog-cart instead of the carriage and

pair of fine horses and footmen which she had expected to find waiting for her at the station. Warren looked a prime personage. There had been nothing to confuse or make her nervous, and the bare walls of the hall and its faded carpets and mats and old-fashioned chairs made her decide that Mr. Yardon was not quite in the position she hoped one day to occupy. His manner, however, satisfied her ; he held out both hands and shook hers warmly.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear," he said kindly. "I hope you have had a pleasant journey."

His eyes lingered on the girl's lovely face, he could not take them away.

Drusilla answered him calmly and with a pleasant smile ; Mr. Yardon was greatly impressed, there was such an entire absence of shyness in the girl ; no nervous flutter, no flush on the fair smooth face ; she returned his glance fully, but even her pouting lips did not tremble.

"You look older than I expected," he said, as he pulled a chair forward ; "you cannot be more than eighteen, I think."

Drusilla gave him a scrutinizing look out of her long dark eyes ; she seated herself in the chair he had placed for her.

"I am nineteen."

Her calm quiet manner puzzled Mr. Yardon ; he checked a sigh.

"Did your—your mother speak of me sometimes ?" he said.

Drusilla hesitated a moment.

"No," she answered firmly. She could not be sure that Mr. Yardon was the nameless protector about whom her mother had hinted so mysteriously. She had even said that if Drusilla was modest and obedient her future would be splendid. As she looked round she saw how dull it all was, she could not even see a looking glass ; the only

gilding was on the backs of the old brown books, and that was tarnished gilding. It was not possible, she thought, that this was her future benefactor, but she liked him.

"Ah!" Mr. Yardon leaned back in his chair and looked at her inquisitively. "I wonder now what you had thought of doing, young lady, when you found yourself left alone in the world?"

Drusilla slowly raised her eyes and looked into his. There was positively no expression in her fair face as she answered:

"I had not time to think, sir; my mother gave a letter addressed to you to our doctor, but she did not tell me what she had written. She died the day your first letter came to me. There was no need for me to think, you see."

She smiled as she ended.

Her wonderful self-possession astonished him and the smile jarred him. He remembered that this girl's mother had not been buried a week yet, and she could smile already while she spoke of her death. But as he looked at the young girl he felt soothed by the mere sight of her beauty.

"Are you very tired?" he found himself actually thinking about her feelings.

"I am not tired yet," she said brightly, "everything is such a change to me. As long as I am amused I do not think I shall feel tired."

There was a wistful look in her eyes which puzzled him. She was thinking of Mr. Ray's description of life at Yardon, and this old-fashioned room full of books had greatly depressed her. The idea of living in such a place alone with this stern man was dreadful just as she had gained her freedom.

Mr. Yardon smiled, but Drusilla was sure that he was vexed.

"I shall expect you to amuse me," he said. "It is not much trouble to amuse old people," he said drily. Then

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with a twinkle in his dark eyes, "A young friend of mine comes here now and then on purpose to amuse me, he is a capital fellow."

He did not fail to see the pleased look that crossed Drusilla's face. He rose, rang the bell and desired that Miss Lescure should be taken to her room.

Left alone, he wondered why he had made that remark about Stanmore. He was ashamed to confess that Drusilla's hint had alarmed him, and that in the fear of losing so charming a companion as she promised to be he had thrown out this bait ; he was sure that the mere sight of a young man would please her.

He forgot that Drusilla was a French girl and had been brought up in France, and her heart was set on marriage as a means of gratifying her ambition. She liked conquest, but the idea of marrying a man only because she cared for him would have seemed to her selfish and unwise. Her mother had taught her that beauty was the only possession a poor girl needed ; it made her the equal of a rich and distinguished man. She had not told the girl she would have a young or a handsome husband, no girl could expect to have everything, and money and position were the great prizes that made life tolerable.

Drusilla repeated all this to herself as she followed the maid up the broad low staircase and looked curiously about her. They had reached a square landing from which the stairs went on to the left for a little way and then paused at a gloomy arched opening. Through the gloom Drusilla spied a tall clock and a huge black and gold Indian cabinet. The maid pushed open a red baize door facing them, and Drusilla had to follow her along a low gallery lighted from above, with doors on either side. The girl felt disappointed with the surroundings. This low passage with its narrow strip of carpet and bare walls could, she thought, only lead to the inferior rooms ; but she had not much time to think

in, for the passage broadened at its farther end in front of a half-closed door.

The maid pushed this fully open, and Drusilla followed her into a handsome bed-room with a rich carpet and quaint dark furniture.

Drusilla smiled at the sight of a large oval mirror on the dressing table and another exactly opposite on the wardrobe ; she could see herself reflected from head to foot. A large easy chair with a footstool in front of it were placed close to the cheerful wood fire.

The girl seated herself, she felt soothed and cheered. She noticed a little sofa at the end of the bed with a small writing table in front of it, with all the necessaries for writing on it. Yes, she thought, there would after all be something to enjoy in all this unusual comfort. The bed hangings and window curtains were dowdy compared with those of the room she had slept in in Paris, but those were trifles ; if she stayed at Yardon all that could be greatly improved.

The maid disturbed her by asking for her keys.

"I'll take out your things, miss, please," she said.

Drusilla looked at the girl, she had small inquisitive eyes and large clumsy hands.

"I prefer to unpack my own things, thank you. I will ring when I want you," she said in the calm dignified tone she had adopted.

"Yes, ma'am," the maid answered meekly, but she went downstairs and reported that the visitor was a "stuck-up young baggage, for all her prettiness."

Drusilla longed to feast her eyes on her purchases, but she was more anxious to discover whether there was any other inmate of this dismal-looking old house besides Mr. Yardon.

She waited a few minutes and then she went softly to the door and listened. She could only hear the dull tick of a

far-off clock. She left her door ajar and then went back by the red baize door to the landing at the foot of the gloomy archway.

She had an intense curiosity to find out what lay beyond this gloom.

She found herself in a sort of ante-room or landing, surrounded on two sides with books. A small ground glass window admitted scanty light, and opposite it on the left was a short passage.

Drusilla gave a sigh of relief. At the end of the short passage she had come into a lofty gallery with doors on both sides, and a flood of light streamed through a window at the end of it.

Drusilla hesitated. It was possible, she thought, that Mr. Yardon might occupy one of these rooms, and she dared not risk opening one of the closed doors. She went softly on to the window, and then she saw that a passage opened on her right with one door at its end and another close by her.

From the window she looked on to the lawn, only divided by a sunk fence from the far stretching fields beyond it. Drusilla could not see one house for the village lay on the other side of the Hall, and she felt greatly depressed at the prospect before her.

She turned from the window feeling as if she were a prisoner, then she looked again up the little passage on her right and she saw that the door was ajar. Without stopping to think she went forward and pushed it open.

Her bright eyes opened widely. It was a smaller room than hers, and it had only one window which faced the door ; but when Drusilla reached the middle of the room she saw a deep recess parallel with the entrance passage, and in this was a pianoforte and a bookcase. But this was not all. The curtain across a hanging closet was partly undrawn and showed dresses and cloaks, and there were little knick-

knacks on the mantel-shelf and on the toilet table. This was plainly a woman's bedroom. Drusilla went up to the hanging closet and looked at the gowns. They were very simple, but they looked like a lady's gowns.

In a moment the girl felt keenly jealous, and then as she looked round her she saw how much shabbier the furniture was here than in her own room.

The sound of a distant bell interrupted her examination. She resolved to go and unpack, and then to find out who the lady was who occupied this curious old-fashioned room. Drusilla had picked up a good deal more knowledge of life from her school fellows at the convent than she had learned from her mother, it seemed to her possible that some lady might live at the Hall who was not Mr. Yardon's wife.

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CHAPTER IX.

A SPARRING MATCH.

MR. STANMORE received the summons he expected, and he told his landlady he should not return for a week. It seemed to Mrs. Grieg that this was a fortunate time to choose for a long-talked of visit to her own people, and when she received a note from her lodger, putting off his return for yet another week, she decided to go and see the old aunt, from whom she had "expectations," so as to be back before the beginning of "spring cleaning."

She left the day after Miss Lescure's arrival, and now that she had come back, it was vexatious to have no one at hand to question as to what had happened in her absence, for so very much had happened of late. Miss Savvay's arrival and speedy departure, and, finally, the arrival of this handsome young French girl, had excited Mrs. Grieg's curiosity to such a pitch that if she had not made all her arrangements, and had not also been afraid of offending her aunt, she certainly would have deferred her journey; it was mortifying to go away in the early morning, ignorant even of the name of the new visitor at the Hall. Mrs. Grieg had passed a satisfactory holiday with her aunt, and had returned, and she resolved to lose no more time in satisfying herself. As soon as she had finished her tea, and washed up her cup and saucer, she closed the front door behind her and crossed the road to the forge.

On Sundays, and when work was over, the forge had a blank appearance. It was a tiled, low-roofed barn, with a large pair of wooden doors. At this time in the

afternoon, the doors stood open and showed a dark, cavernous place, with a glowing red light in its midst. This light showed the bronzed faces and arms of two powerful-looking men; one ringing out musical blows with a huge hammer on a bit of iron lying on the anvil beside the red glow, his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbow, thereby displaying the muscles of his hairy arms; his companion stood leaning against the wall near by, as if he had given up work.

Mrs. Grieg nodded to him.

"Good-day to you, Mr. George," she said, politely; "shall I find your father in, d'ye think?" She pointed to a thatched cottage just beyond the forge.

The burly smith nodded. "Surely, ma'am, you'll find him, as usual; you always finds the old 'un in at this time. I'd 've thought, by now," he said, with a chuckle, "you'd no call to ask that, Mrs. Grieg."

Mrs. Grieg moved her head as if she felt unjustly accused by the young smith's grin, and she smiled as she went on to the cottage door. It was pleasant to her to be teased about old Foxley. Mrs. Grieg had no present intention of changing her condition, but she believed in the old blacksmith's admiration and enjoyed it.

The cottage-door was closed, but it suddenly opened and a tall woman stood filling up the space so that no one could pass by her. She was blue-eyed and sandy-haired, her face was pale and flabby; except that her mouth was fish-like and greedy, there was no expression in the stare that greeted the visitor.

"Father in, Harriet?"

Harriet nodded, and as she did not seem inclined to move, the widow squeezed between her and the white-washed wall, till she reached the open door of a room within.

Harriet rubbed her shoulder. "She *do* push," she grumbled, "but there, it's them that pushes forrardest as

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takes the cake ! Oh, Lor', oh, Lor'." She sighed, and then she followed her unwelcome guest.

Mr. Foxley was sitting rather bent forward in his chair, with his big blue eyes fixed on Mrs. Grieg. He was strong and hearty, and except for a somewhat frequent visitation of lumbago—due, his daughter said, to a fondness for pastry and such food,—he was as active at seventy-five as he had been ten years before. His sight had begun to fail, and, perhaps, for that reason, he considered Mrs. Grieg a nice-looking little woman. He had, however, no wish to appropriate her. His daughter Harriet was plain and dull, but she was willing and slavishly obedient to his wishes, and she was not likely to be tempted to leave him. Mr. Foxley's notion of life was to let well alone, and better it as much as possible by taking amusement from everything that came in his way, and Mrs. Grieg afforded the light-hearted old man a good deal of amusement, without making a conscious effort to produce it.

"Well," she was saying when Harriet joined them, "I've been thinking a deal about you all, and how things were going on. It isn't leap-year, you know, dear Mr. Foxley, and yet so many strange things have happened. It seemed strange enough, considering what people said about the Hall, that Mr. Yardon should have one young girl to live with him ; but to send for another, and she a furrener, it beats me, it really does."

"But he sent one away before the other came, Mrs. Grieg."

"Isn't Miss Derrick coming back then ? Is that your meaning ? I want to hear what the new one's like, and if she visits the cottages as Miss Derrick did ?"

Mr. Foxley shook his head. "Three questions in a breath, ma'am ; you must give me a little leisure to answer in. You see I don't fancy anyone knows more than their own business—oftimes not too much o' that, so you'll maybe excuse me, ma'am, if I don't give an answer to all

you ask for. But there's no mistake on one point, mind you, Mrs. Grieg. This last come young lady is a real beauty. My son Jarge says he never saw a picter as would beat her, and the sext is mostly made the best of in picters, as you know, ma'am."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Grieg's eyes were round with surprise. She would not have believed in old Foxley's verdict, but Mr. George was well known to have the sharpest sight in Figgsmarsh. "Does the lady visit the cottages, Mr. Foxley?"

The old man's eyes twinkled; he rubbed his bristly chin, for, this being Friday, he was greatly in need of his weekly shave.

"Well," he said, "she's only been here a fortnight. It can't be expected, can it, as she'd fall at once into the ways of Miss Derrick, who came two years and more ago."

"There ain't many like Miss Derrick," said Mrs. Grieg.

Hitherto, she had not thought much of Maisie, who always avoided stopping to talk with her, but so much praise of the new-comer made Mrs. Grieg contradictory.

"Understand me, ma'am. I'm not finding fault with Miss Derrick. She's a fine, well-grown young woman, and she have a pleasant face and quiet ways, but, Lor' bless you, Mrs. Grieg, t'other one would take all the wind out of her sails in a crack."

Mrs. Grieg had become heated with this unlimited praise of Drusilla; her face looked pinched and flushed, and there was a tremble in the superior tone of her voice as she answered:

"I know one as will never put Miss Derrick second."

Mr. Foxley noted, with much enjoyment, the symptoms of irritation in his neighbor. In his opinion women were such inferior beings that they were sure to be wrong in their assertions. It gave him great pleasure to give Mrs. Grieg a setting-down when she ventured to tackle him.

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"Meaning your lodger, ma'am. Well, I wouldn't be cock-sure about that if I was you, neighbor. This young beauty seems able to turn Mr. Yardon with her little finger, and he's tougher to please than your lodger is, I fancy."

Harriet Foxley had stood behind Mrs. Grieg. There was a dull sound, as if she had knocked her head against the wall on which she was leaning.

Mrs. Grieg gave a little start, but old Foxley merely glanced at his daughter and then shrugged his shoulders.

"I should say," he said, briskly, "that this young French miss would look higher than Mr. Stanmore. Harriet, my girl, you'll maybe do that ag'in the wall once too often, and make a hole in your skull. It's only a question of which is hardest."

Mrs. Grieg turned at this and gave a look of wonder at the pale, stout woman behind her, but Harriet's colorless eyes were staring so blankly before her that she remained unconscious of being observed.

"Lor', Mr. Foxley," Mrs. Grieg said, "do you mean that she'll be setting her cap at the rector himself?"

Mr. Foxley leaned back and enjoyed a chuckle at his own superior wisdom.

"I said higher than Mr. Stanmore, my good neighbor, and I'm not going to set a parson higher than a engineer. What's a parson, Mrs. Grieg? Any fool can be made into one, and he may live and die in the same parsonage like one of his own shrubs—he'll never be more than a parson. Of course, ma'am, you'll understand I ain't speaking of bishops."

Mrs. Grieg shivered. She thought her neighbor was very irreverent, if not sacrilegious, and she answered him stiffly, drawing herself up:

"Well, Mr. Foxley, that may be your opinion, but I should say it was a higher dooty to raise folkses' souls to Heaven than to be always a laying rails on the earth, as is the means in a way of cutting short other folks' lives."

The old blacksmith shook his head as he fixed his humorous blue eyes on his visitor.

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, one is as unlikely as t'other, but a capable engineer don't stay where he's first planted, mind, you; he's as safe to rise as that chap, Jack what's-his-name, rose on the bean-vine. Maybe he'll rise into a Barrownight. Such a thing has happened, Mrs. Grieg." He paused, but the little widow did not interrupt. "I was not thinking of any perffessional sweet-heart for Miss Lescure, ma'am," he went on. "She's the build of a woman that a lord or a real gentleman is apt to go wild after." He nodded his head and winked. "I know 'em."

Mrs. Grieg looked at him curiously. She began to think he was a bit childish about this new visitor at the Hall.

"You make me quite anxious to see this beauty," she said in a vexed voice, "but you only praise her; you don't say what she's like. Is she as tall now as Miss Derrick?"

Harriet seemed to think her turn had come.

"Miss Lescure's a good bit taller than what Miss Derrick is," she said; "*she* ain't no height to speak of."

Foxley looked delighted. "Poor Harry!" he said, softly. Then, to Mrs. Grieg: "Yes, ma'am; our beauty is a perfect height; there's nothing about her, so far as I can see, as ain't perfect. I was up the hill yesterday, and she was coming out of the gate along of Mr. Yardon, as straight as a young larch; the wind was blowing her golden hair about, and her eyes was shining like stars. I looked at her as I touched my hat, and she gave me a smile," he smacked his lips. "Lord, I can see it now. I don't b'lieve Eve was a perfecter female creature than what she is." He checked himself, and a little streak of color showed in each cheek. Though he had always plenty to say, Mr. Foxley prided himself on guiding his tongue with discretion; he despised women for their unguarded

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speech. He felt now that he had given Mrs. Grieg "a handle" as he called it.

Mrs. Grieg was looking more tortoise-like than ever, as she listened with her head pointed a little on one side, thereby showing many creases in her lean, brown throat, so loose-skinned that doubtless it had once been plumper. Her keen black eyes glittered with a mixture of curiosity and vexation, as she said:

"Well, I must say, you are wonderful fascinated, Mr. Foxley.—It ain't respectable of him," she thought.

He nodded repressively.

"I tell you all this, ma'am, for you may understand my meaning. There'll be a good bit taking place in Figgsmarsh 'tween this and Christmas—more than's been for years past. Captain Wentworth's coming home for good, and the Manor House will be open again and it'll want a mistress. This young beauty will take the captain by storm or I don't know him." He looked at her triumphantly.

But Mrs. Grieg considered that he was meddling in matters that belonged exclusively to females, and she raised her head stiffly, and drew down her upper lip.

"There's no telling," she said. "The young lady—this beauty, as you call her—may not care for the captain; he'll not be much to look at, I fancy, and all our sex ain't alike in their tastes. You think a heap of him more than likely, because he's lord of the Manor, and so forth, you see." Here she put her head again on one side. "Not being born on his land makes a difference, in my views. If I was this beauty, and a good-looking young gentleman came in my way, don't you suppose I'd liever take up with him than with a man with a broken-down constitution, who has spent his time in India, and Heaven knows where. He may have a wife already for what we know to the contrary."

She gave herself a little flounce of mingled disgust and superior wisdom, and then, as she saw a look of sarcasm in her old friend's face, she felt alarmed.

"I was wondering," he said, slowly, "what any of us know about your lodger; *he* may have a wife, Mrs. Grieg. Has he ever told you in plain words that he is a bachelor man?"

The pale woman behind Mrs. Grieg put out both hands as if to save herself from falling, and Mrs. Grieg herself fidgetted and sat staring with a drooping underlip, but she quickly recovered herself.

"Of course he'd have told me, Mr. Foxley, if he'd had a wife, being such a gentleman as he is in all his ways—let alone there'd be a photo or something or other to show. There is a photo, to be sure, that hangs beside his bed, and a very sweet face it is, but Lor', Mr. Foxley, that's his mother; he's told me so. Well, I must go and see his room's been kep' aired. More than likely, a letter will come to-morrow, a hqur or so before he comes hisself."

CHAPTER X.

A LETTER.

WINTER has been suddenly and prematurely blotted out by delicious weather, and the unwise leaves, judging by their feelings only, have strewn the ground below them with brown husks, and are busy unfolding their crinkled surfaces.

"How delicious the air is!" Maisie said. "Spring air is so sweet, and yet it makes one feel lazy."

Miss Savvay looked up from her book.

"I should not have said there was anything especially lazy about you this morning, child, I was watching you run races with Patch on the grass."

The girl leaned back in her chair and laughed.

"I said feel, it is not easy to be actually idle besides industrious you." Maisie hesitated and then she looked affectionately at her companion, "Perhaps feeling so happy makes me lazy minded."

"Happy!" Miss Savvay shook her head, "you can be happy anywhere if you choose, Maisie. Why are you so different here and at Yardon? If I were a bright healthy young girl with your advantages, I would be happy everywhere, and I would make my grandfather spoil me."

Maisie's head drooped and she looked troubled.

Miss Savvay watched her a moment in silence.

"You see," the girl said plaintively, "it is my fault for being shy. Since I came here I have been wondering whether it is not all vanity; I can't feel shy with you because you are so indulgent; you could not be unkind to me, whatever I might do."

"I don't know that, in fact I am now going to scold you. My notion is that you have irritated your grandfather by letting him see that you are afraid of him."

"There is no use in arguing," the girl said, "we come back to the starting point. I will try to do better when I go back. If I could believe that I was of any use, or that my grandfather really cared to have me with him, I could make myself happy ; but,"—she half-closed her eyes and Miss Savvay saw that she was suffering—presently she went on firmly : "it is better to say it out once for all and then we won't talk of this again. I know what it is to be loved—I never knew anything else till I went to Yardon. I am not fanciful. I never thought about feelings till I lived with my grandfather, but I know that he dislikes me. I go down in the morning bright and happy, and then I can't tell how it comes but I get suddenly chilled, I feel quite frozen. I do everything awkwardly. I look up and I see that he is disgusted ; then my self-control goes. I am frightened, and instead of smiling when I speak, I am as grave and solemn as he is. I *can't* conquer myself, dear Miss Savvay, I can't indeed, it is like a nightmare. Now you see how silly I I am." There was a quaver in her voice as she tried to smile. Her friend looked very severe.

"You want a good deal of change," she said ; then very abruptly added, "I can't make out why you don't stay with me altogether?"

Maisie rose up.

"I promised to live at Yardon," she said in a sorrowful voice and she went upstairs.

Miss Savvay's rooms were smaller than those at Yardon, but they had the undefinable charm about them which a woman's taste can exercise, supposing that she has such a faculty. The carpet was old and the paper on the walls was faded—they had been good, but the curtains were dainty and fresh looking, and so was the covering of the

chairs and sofas and the various cushions lying about on them. Little tables were placed just where a table was needed, and there were pretty knick-knacks on them. Flowers freshly gathered and effectively grouped brightened every part of the room. It is possible that these pleasant surroundings, which reminded Maisie of her own home with her mother, had helped to make the congenial atmosphere she had found at Ailthorpe.

She did not care to stay long upstairs, the talk with her friend had not left any pleasant food for reflection. She found Miss Savvay reading a letter.

"Guess who my correspondent is," she said. "You need not be jealous, Maisie, I will read you Mr. Stanmore's letter."

The girl's eyes brightened. She looked very happy as she seated herself near the window with her face turned from her companion. All this distance away it had seemed to Maisie that her sight had cleared, and that she had been fancying when she thought Mr. Stanmore's manner meant more than kindness.

The letter began :

"DEAR MISS SAVVAY,"

"I could not see you again at Yardon, for the day after our expedition I received a summons to town, and had to stay there a fortnight before the business I went on was completed. I was so much mortified to find that you had fled and had carried off Miss Derrick. I write now to ask when you are coming back, as the squire speaks of it as a thing likely to happen. Have heard about Mr. Yardon's visitor, and you will expect me to say what I think of her. I hear this is her first visit to England.

"Miss Lescure is very beautiful, and she seems very amiable."

"Miss Lescure—what does he mean?" Maisie looked amazed.

"You know I told you there was a reason for our leaving Yardon. Your grandfather, I believe, meant to tell you himself. He asked me to take you away because some one was coming to stay at Yardon, and I fancy he wanted

to be sure that this visitor was quite fit to associate with you, Maisie, but he did not enter into details. Now listen, I had only read so far when you came in.

"I have only seen her once and then Mr. Yardon introduced her as his ward—Miss Lescure. I should like you and Miss Derrick to see her. She impressed me as being very lovely, very silent, but also very anxious to make a good impression; but you have no doubt heard all about her from Mr. Yardon."

"How very strange," Maisie said, "that grandfather does not write and tell me? What does it all mean?"

Miss Savvay was silent; at first she had felt glad that the strange old man should have filled Maisie's place, but as she thought the matter over, it seemed to her that this might be some impostor who would perhaps rob Maisie of what she had a right to expect.

"Just now," the letter went on, "I got up and looked out of window and I saw Mr. Yardon and his ward coming down the hill. He was laughing, and was evidently much amused by his companion's talk. She seems bent on taming our unsociable squire. Tell Miss Derrick she ought to come back and watch over her grandfather. Miss Lescure may be a vampire in the shape of an angel."

"The letter breaks off here," Miss Savvay said; "it goes on again in different ink."

"I have just come in to finish my letter, and I am half-inclined to tear it up. I fear I have given you a wrong impression of Miss Lescure. That is all nonsense I wrote above; she is no doubt as good as she is beautiful. I meant to have sent you a much longer letter, but have been walking with them, and I am to dine at the Hall this evening. I suppose it is no news to you to hear that Captain Wentworth is really coming home and may be expected at the Manor House any time next month. The Figgsmarsh people are agog, talking of triumphal arches, a bonfire, fireworks and all sorts of rejoicing! Good-bye.

"Sincerely yours,

"LUKE STANMORE."

Miss Savvay looked at Maisie. The girl sat with her eyes fixed on the windows and her clasped hands quite still in her lap.

"Do you think Miss Lescure is going to live at Yardon?" she said at last in a voice not like her own.

"I only know what I told you." Then Miss Savvay added cheerfully : "It will make a change, will it not—if you like her. It will be at least pleasant to have a young companion."

"Yes," Maisie said slowly. Then after a pause she added : "You are quite right. I am so slow you see in making up my mind that at first I was not sure that I liked the idea of finding a stranger when I go back to Yardon, but I expect Miss Lescure will brighten us all. She has already done wonders with my grandfather, to judge by that letter. Fancy his taking a walk with her."

"Yes." Miss Savvay felt doubtful and troubled. She did not like this suddenly gained influence over Mr. Yardon, and she did not at all like the change of tone in Mr. Stanmore's letter—there was even a change in the handwriting. It had seemed at the beginning as if he took a pleasure in what he was doing, but after the break in the letter the writing was hurried and scarcely legible—"finished off anyhow," Miss Savvay thought.

The maid came in with a note.

Miss Savvay read it, and then she looked troubled.

"I'm afraid I must go," she said. "I'm wanted at once at the Vicarage. I must leave you to amuse yourself, dear child."

Maisie was glad to be left alone. Mr. Stanmore's letter had given her much to think over ; a feeling that was entirely new to her—something between disquiet and distrust—had taken the place of that serene peace which had made her so happy at Ailthorpe. She had often wished to see Mr. Stanmore, and every day the wish had grown stronger, but she had felt so sure of finding him the same when she went back to Yardon. He had not said in words : "I love you, Maisie," but his eyes had said it more than once. In that last walk across the moor with Miss Savvay they had said : "I love you and you may trust me." Maisie's trust had gone with her love. She thought her-

self unworthy of his affection, and yet she believed in it wholly and without reserve.

She did not know the meaning of this strange trouble that brooded on her and kept her sitting at the window while Miss Savvay went to the Vicarage. In the morning the spring flower-beds on the lawn had seemed to sparkle with color, and now, although the sun was still shining, a grey tone had spread itself over all. Maisie felt that she was tired of Ailthorpe ; she longed to be at Yardon again.

CHAPTER XI.

THE old saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," had justified its truth in Mr. Stanmore. When he found himself obliged to leave Figgsmarsh without seeing Maisie Derrick, he first decided on writing to her; then when he realized how much he should lose by telling his love on paper he resolved to wait.

It was a fresh trial of patience to learn on his return that Maisie was not at the Hall, but Mrs. Grieg lost no time in telling him where she was to be found, and a few days after his return to the village he began a letter to Miss Savvay. His motive in writing was to ask if he might appear at Ailthorpe, but before he reached this point he was interrupted by his landlady.

"If you please, sir," it's Mr. Yardon and his young lady. He wants to see you, sir, but he won't come up tho' I asked him."

Stanmore hurried downstairs and found Mr. Yardon on the door-step.

"Good day, Stanmore," he nodded. "Come along, I want you to look at a horse."

He crossed over to the forge, where one of his horses, a handsome creature, was being shod. The operation was quite finished, and Stanmore found that he was expected to praise this horse which he had already seen and admired more than once; he looked inquiringly at Mr. Yardon, he knew very well that he had not been called downstairs only for this.

"Why don't you come up and see us?"

Mr. Yardon was trying to look grave, yet the corners of his mouth seemed disposed to broaden into a laugh. "What

happened to you in London to make such a change? You were ready enough to come before you went there: what has made you so unsociable, eh?"

Stanmore knew by the change in the old man's face that he must be looking conscious.

"I have only been back a few days," he said.

"Nonsense, you must come up and dine with us; come up this evening, No," he put up his hand, "I won't hear any excuses. I told your landlady just now she needn't provide dinner for you. You'll be surprised I can tell you. Come this way, we shall find Miss Lescure at the draper's."

He walked on, and Stanmore found himself obliged to follow. He noticed that Mr. Yardon did not change greetings with a single villager who passed him. One or two men nodded to Stanmore, and a woman curtsied, but Mr. Yardon seemed far more like a stranger in the village than his companion did. They walked on silently till they reached the draper's.

Miss Lescure came out at the same moment. She did not seem at first to notice Stanmore, but he was looking at her, and he saw how radiantly she smiled at Mr. Yardon. Her face looked very lovely under the shade of her large black hat and feathers.

"If Maisie had only smiled like that at her grandfather," he thought, "her life would have been happier with him, old people like to be petted and made much of. She threw away her chances, poor girl, but then she is too genuine to affect what she does not feel. I believe this girl is playing a part."

"How do you do?" Miss Lescure said in her pretty foreign accent, and as Mr. Yardon introduced Stanmore, she put her long slim fingers into his hand.

Mr. Yardon turned back and led the way to the foot of Vicarage Lane. Miss Lescure was silent, and Stanmore did not feel obliged to talk to her.

"How long have you had that horse, Mr. Yardon?" he said.

Mr. Yardon stopped and looked back, he was a few paces ahead of Stanmore.

"Between three and four years. I must go in here. If you and Miss Lescure walk on I shall catch you up directly."

Stanmore walked on with Mr. Yardon's ward, but he was annoyed; he admired Miss Lescure very much, he felt it was pleasant to look at her, but he considered himself engaged to Maisie, and he did not wish the gossips of Figgsmarsh to say that in her absence he had walked about with this beautiful young woman. She was looking straight before her, and appeared to be unconscious of his admiration. It was evident that she would not break the silence.

"Do you like England?" he said at last as the silence continued.

She turned her eyes on him. What eyes they were—so dark and so liquid, and so full of tender yet pensive thought. Stanmore felt ashamed of his harsh judgment.

"Do you think I can tell yet," she said meekly. "You cannot expect me to like London, I saw only the roofs and the dirty chimnies of houses as we came into it. We did not stir from the station till it was time for the train to bring me to Figgsmarsh."

He liked her clear voice and her pretty foreign accent, he was sorry when she left off speaking.

"Well," he smiled at her, "what do you think of Figgsmarsh and the neighborhood? It is of course a small place, but people can judge from samples."

Drusilla shook her head and smiled.

"Figgsmarsh is too small a place and almost all the people are villagers."

Stanmore laughed.

"I suppose I ought to say, how do you like the change to England?"

Drusilla looked relieved.

"That is an easier question to answer, and I love easy questions so much better than difficult ones," she said with a sweet humility that Stanmore felt was very winning in such a lovely creature.

"Yes," she went on, "I like the change at present because it is change, perhaps, and I suppose Mr. Yardon sometimes has visitors?" She looked calm, but she was very anxious for his answer, she felt that he would tell her all she wanted to know.

She had asked Mr. Yardon who slept in that other part of the house, but he only answered very gravely, "A visitor sometimes sleeps there," and then he began to talk of something else. Drusilla had been afraid to question the housekeeper, but she felt sure there was a mystery.

"There are not often visitors at the Hall," Stanmore answered; "but I suppose you know Miss Derrick lives there, you will soon have her back again—you know she is Mr. Yardon's granddaughter." He said this in answer to her look of surprise.

Drusilla was very much vexed. She felt such power over Mr. Yardon that she could not understand why he had not told her this. She felt determined that Mr. Stanmore should tell her everything.

"Miss Derrick is very young, I suppose, then?"

"She is about your age I fancy, perhaps rather older; you will find her a very delightful companion."

He saw a weary look of discontent in the girl's beautiful eyes, and it puzzled him.

Drusilla had noticed a certain change in his manner. She already liked Mr. Stanmore, and she thought, as visitors seemed to be rare at the Hall, it would be pleasant to see him often, but she should prefer to keep such a visitor to

herself. She disliked a half-share in anything. She thought that Miss Derrick would come in her way both with Mr. Yardon as well as with her present companion. She began to speak of her journey.

"Do you know Mr. Ray?" she said.

"No; I have heard Mr. Yardon speak of him. Did he travel with you?"

"Oh! yes, he fetched me from abroad, he was very amiable, I think." She put her hand up to her mouth to hide a yawn.

Stanmore noticed her gloves, they were new and light-colored, and he felt jarred. Miss Lescure had yet to learn how to dress for a country walk. He answered her with a quickness that attracted her notice.

"Do you find amiable people wearisome?"

Drusilla smiled at him. "You are not; but then you are not, perhaps, always so amiable as you have been to-day."

"You need not be afraid of me. People generally make themselves pleasant to you, do they not?" he said, as frankly as if he were speaking to Maisie Derrick.

Drusilla thought he was brusque.

"I have not lived with many people," she said, stiffly.

"Really!"

He saw an angry look in her dark eyes. She paused before she answered.

"I have lived shut up with an invalid." Presently she said, in a softened tone: "You can guess, perhaps, how much I enjoy the freedom of doing what I like."

Stanmore felt interested and puzzled, but he felt sure that Miss Lescure did not wish to be questioned about her past life.

"I am glad you will soon have Miss Derrick back at Yardon," he said.

She smiled in a bright mocking way, that made him regret his words. He saw now that he had implied his own

good opinion of Maisie. This strange girl seemed to be laughing at him ; she had, perhaps, guessed at his love for Maisie.

"You appear to be very sure that I shall like Miss Derrick," she added, saucily. "I want to hear about her, please. To begin with, she is, of course, beautiful?"

Stanmore bit his lips.

"I am not good at description," he said, nervously, "so I may give you a wrong impression. Every one here will tell you about Miss Derrick's goodness ; she is so kind to the poor people when they are in trouble, you should hear them talk about her."

Drusilla looked serious, she pouted a little.

"I shall be afraid of your paragon, Mr. Stanmore, I am not at all good, you see, and Miss Derrick will despise me."

He was very much vexed.

"I told you how it would be," he said. "I cannot describe people, and I have given you an entirely wrong idea. Miss Derrick is the sweetest, brightest girl you can think of—you cannot help loving her."

Drusilla was staring at him gravely while he spoke, but when he ended she smiled and half closed her eyes till they looked like dark velvet lines.

"You are, at any rate, a warm friend, Mr. Stanmore, you make me curious to see Miss Derrick ; she is, at least, very good-looking, I suppose?"

Stanmore longed to turn the subject, but he was obliged to answer.

"No ; there is a singular charm about her, but you will not think her beautiful. She is gifted in many ways, and she has read a great deal."

"Worse and worse. I shall be frightened to death. I shall not dare to open my mouth before her ; I am sure she is what our Sisters at the Convent used to call 'a very superior person?'"

Stanmore walked on in savage silence. He almost hated Miss Lescure, she had somehow put Maisie in an unfavorable light, or rather she had made him see that his beloved's qualities were too rare to be appreciated by every one.

He was glad and sorry when they reached the Hall gates; he wished he could alter the impression he had given of Maisie, and yet something warned him that he had better not speak of her anymore to Miss Lescure.

"Good-bye," she said, "we shall see you this evening, so I will say '*au revoir*!'"

"By jove, what a grace the girl has about her!" Stanmore thought; "she will be like a queen when she has mixed a little more with others."

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

MISS SAVVAY wrote to Mr. Yardon to propose Maisie's return, and she received a polite but decided refusal. Mr. Yardon hoped soon, however, to write and fix a time when he should have the pleasure of seeing both Miss Savvay and his granddaughter.

At the end of a month, Miss Savvay was summoned to London to meet her nephew, Captain Wentworth, on his arrival, and she wrote to Mr. Yardon to announce Maisie's return.

The girl was a little nervous about her reception, and also about Miss Lescure. She had counted on having Miss Savvay with her whenever she went back, and she felt shy to her finger-tips when she reached the Hall. Warren told her his master was out, but that she would find Miss Lescure in the drawing-room.

Maisie tried to call up her courage as she crossed the hall; she reminded herself that it was her place to welcome this young foreigner; but she felt shyer than ever when she found herself sitting on the sofa beside Drusilla.

She could not take her eyes from the lovely creature. Maisie thought that Miss Lescure looked as sweet and innocent as a child, there was such a serene wonder in her eyes. This wonder was real. Drusilla could not understand how a lady—for she felt that Maisie was a lady—could dress so simply, and be so entirely unassuming. She considered these were serious failings, and she decided that she need not fear Maisie as a rival, either with Mr. Yardon or with Mr. Stanmore. She found Miss Derrick hand-

somer than she expected. "She has a fine figure, too, if she would only squeeze her waist in," Drusilla thought, and she found herself very near envying the rich brown, wavy locks which made such a contrast to her own golden frizzle.

They began to talk, and as Maisie shrank from talking about herself, she soon became deeply interested in Drusilla's account of her journey. She looked at the girl's black gown, but she did not like to ask why she wore it. Drusilla understood Maisie's wistful glance, and said abruptly,—

"I am in mourning for my mother."

Maisie leaned forward and kissed her; she felt that there was a link between her and this beautiful stranger.

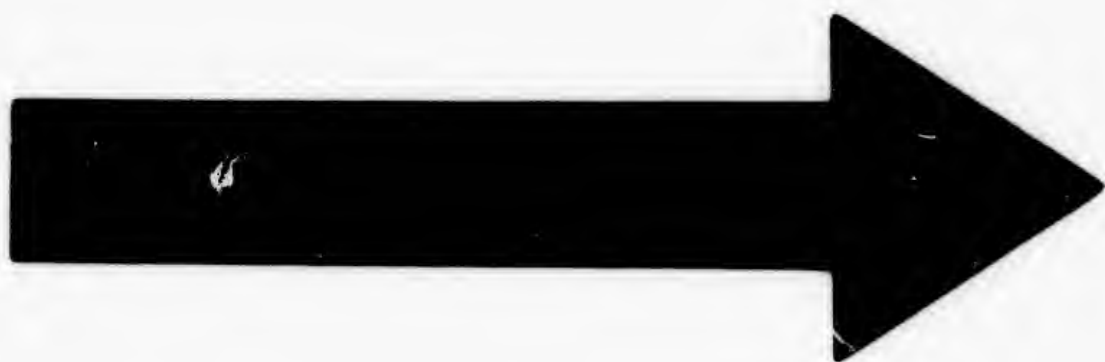
"I know what that loss is," she said, tenderly, "it seems the worst grief that anyone can have."

A sort of wonder at herself flitted across Drusilla's thoughts. She seldom indulged in self-questioning about the past, feeling sure of being in the right; her point of view being that success and the right were one. With her, reflection and speculation were always directed to the future, and to the best methods of avoiding failure in her purposes. It was, therefore, like the revelations of a new self, to see in the light cast by Maisie's words that she had not been conscious of an over-powering grief. She felt, however, that it was better to assume what was expected of her; she had already determined to have Maisie on her side, as she expressed it, and she accepted her offered sympathy as if she needed it.

"Yes," she sighed, "I miss her very much."

She was speaking the truth. She had often wished for her mother's advice since she had been at Yardon. She enjoyed her freedom from restraint, and from the taunts to which she had been accustomed, but she was well aware that those very taunts had stung into her lessons of reticence and of worldly wisdom which helped her every day.

"Was she ill long?" Maisie said, softly.



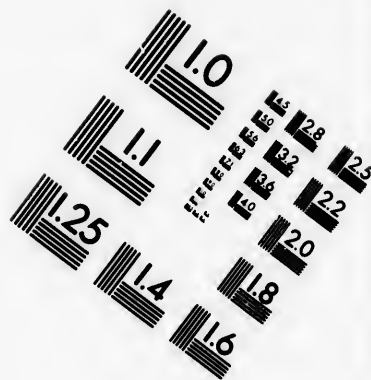
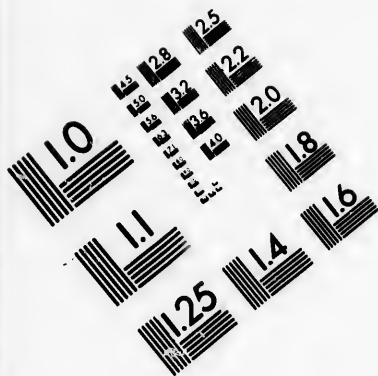
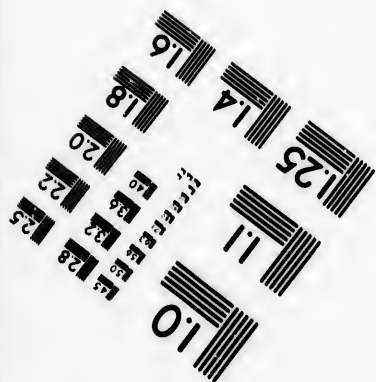
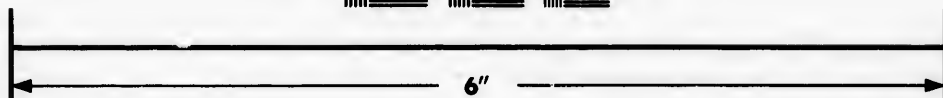
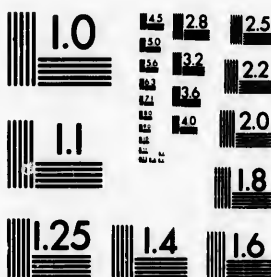


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Drusilla turned away—there was a limit to grief. “She was always ill. ‘I—I—would rather not talk about it.’”

Maisie sighed ; she was very sorry for the poor semi-foreign girl ; she sighed, too, a little over her own hasty judgment. She had really thought, at first, that Drusilla was not sorrowful enough, and all the while the poor thing was feeling her mother’s loss too deeply to talk about it.

“I have been spoiled at Ailthorpe,” Maisie thought. “I believe, after all, Yardon is the wholesomest place for me.”

It seemed to her it would be better in every way, now that she had this interesting companion to occupy herself with. Till Maisie Derrick came to Yardon, she had never found time or inclination to think about herself or her feelings ; but, except the few rare occasions when he had asked her to copy out a passage from one of his old books, her grandfather had made her feel that she was useless to him. He preferred that all household details should be regulated by his housekeeper, and Maisie had been glad to take to cottage-visiting as a means of occupation. But for her village friends and her love for gardening, time would have hung heavily, and for this reason she had found winter depressing, because she could not transplant and watch over her seedlings as she could in the time of growth. She looked tenderly at Drusilla, and resolved to make the motherless girl’s life as pleasant as she could. This idea of protection gave Maisie a sudden courage which beautified her.

Drusilla, meantime, was watching her with secret amusement. “She is strange,” she thought. “I am not sure that mother would have called her a lady—she shows such tenderness in her eyes ; and mother said that ladies, real ones, never let their feelings be known. They are beautiful eyes,” she thought critically, and almost in spite of herself, for Drusilla was not enthusiastic about female beauty. “Perhaps she knows that her eyes look hand-

somer when she puts feeling in them," her thoughts added.

"I suppose you speak French easily?" Maisie said.

Drusilla smiled bewitchingly. "I spoke English with my mother, but I was born in France and I have always lived there, so French is my native tongue."

"Your name is not English?"

"No." Drusilla drew her delicate eyebrows together and compressed her lips. Maisie had touched on her secret trouble. She had often puzzled over her name, when her mother had once said that her father had English relations; but the revelation that had come to her when she found the locket had been a bitter trial; it had made the girl believe that she had no right to her father's name. This memory, obscured by the sudden changes in her monotonous life, had returned in the quiet of Yardon, and now Maisie's words seemed to her prompted by a secret knowledge, and Drusilla looked at her with suspicion.

Maisie was wholly unconscious of the effect her words had produced.

"I wonder if I can muster courage to talk French with you," she said; "it would be such a help to me."

"Would it? I thought you knew everything; a friend of yours tells me you are quite learned."

Maisie wondered whether the friend was Mr. Stanmore or her grandfather; her face flushed and her eyes drooped as Drusilla looked at her.

"Do you play any instrument or sing?" said the French girl.

"I do both for my own amusement, but you must please not ask me either to play or to sing before my grandfather."

"Why not? I try to amuse him; I play my guitar and I sing and he is never tired of listening to me. I dance, too—queer, old-fashioned dances I have seen the peasants dance in France, and Mr. Yardon claps his hands with

delight when I dance and sing *patois* songs. He says I am very accomplished, so I suppose I am."

Maisie felt amused, and yet a little uneasy.

"Do you like reading?" she said.

Drusilla shook her head.

"My mother would not let me read her books, she said the amusing ones were not fit for girls; and the nuns' books were so dull—all about children or good people, or things that never really happened. I tried to read a book on the journey here, a French novel—*that* amused me, but Mr. Ray was vexed when he found me reading it, and he took it away, I believe, for I could not find it when we reached England. What do you do to amuse yourself, Miss Derrick?" she said, abruptly.

"Please call me Maisie." The girl wondered whether her amusements would suit this lively creature who loved singing and dancing and reading French novels. "I garden a good deal," she said, simply, "and I take walks, and—" she hesitated, for Drusilla's eyes were searching her face with a suspicious expression, checked, however, as soon as she saw that it was observed,—"I go and see a few poor people in the village."

"Why do you do that? If a rich lady had come—I mean if I were poor and a lady came prying into my house, I should shut the door against her."

Maisie laughed. "I do not go to pry," she said, "and I only go where help is wanted. One old woman is blind and has no one to read to her, and there are several mothers who have delicate health and a good many young children."

"I do not see how you can care for it, or help them," Drusilla said scornfully. "Poor people are dirty, and children are horrid little things, and their hands are always sticky. I expect they spoil your gowns."

"I wear gowns that won't spoil, but if you like you can help these children without even going to see them. I am sure you would make much nicer frocks than I can."

Drusilla's face flushed ; her large dark eyes looked very hard.

"I make frocks !" she said, harshly ; "you are quite mistaken. I never made a child's frock in my life. I asked you how you amused yourself. I hope you don't consider that sort of thing amusing. My goodness, no."

She shrugged her graceful shoulders, and her lip curled.

Maisie laughed. "Oh, I daresay we shall be able to amuse ourselves in other ways. Will you come with me now and call at the Vicarage?"

Drusilla was vexed at her own want of self-control ; the lady she had seen in the Paris shop would not have let anyone see that she was ruffled, she felt sure of that, and she forced herself to smile back at Maisie.

"No ; thank you ! I am sure, from what he has said, that Mr. Vernon admires you, so I should only be in the way, and I do not care for Miss Auricula. She thinks she is queen of Figgsmarsh."

She imitated Miss Vernon's way of holding her head so exactly, yet so absurdly, that Maisie could not help laughing.

"Good-bye, then," she said, "I shall be back in less than an hour, but I promised to give the vicar Miss Savvay's message directly I reached home."

"You are too dutiful to live," Drusilla called after her as she went away. Her mocking tone jarred Maisie.

"I was foolish to say anything about the poor people," she said. "If I wish to make her life pleasant, I must not try to make her like what I do. Drusilla is, perhaps, more useful than I am, though she makes no show of it. She is, indeed, a sweet girl."

And when, half-an-hour later, Maisie went down hill to the Vicarage, her heart beat faster with the hope that she might meet Mr. Stanmore.

Drusilla, meantime, was carefully studying herself in one of the long glasses between the drawing-room windows.

She smiled at the sight of her own beauty. She went upstairs and fetched a large, coarse straw hat which she had bought in the village, and she stood bending it with a dextrous grace into a form that exactly suited her. Then she gave each delicate cheek a slight pinch.

"Poor Maisie, she is as easy to see through as a bit of glass. I wish I had the lovely color she gets when she flushes. She looked so handsome just now, that I was glad Mr. Stanmore did not see her. Still he would not look at me as he does if he cared for Maisie. I wish she had not come back just yet. People should not return before they are wanted.

She looked at her watch. She was expecting Luke Stanmore, but she had thought it unnecessary to say so to Maisie.

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CHAPTER XIII.

MAISIE went down hill with a springy step and that buoyant feeling of lightness, both in body and spirit, which makes a very near approach to happiness so far as happiness can be found in mere sensation. She was even joyful. She was sure that she should have a delightful companion—for the girl liked the give and take of human intercourse far better than a constant acquiescence in her own ideas. She enjoyed, too, the invigoration of going back to the daily routine of life. She was on her way to see an old friend in the village, and then she was bound for the Vicarage.

Maisie had a keen sense of humor and Miss Auricula's superior manner amused her far more than it vexed her.

"Poor woman," she said, as she passed the trim gate on her way down the lane, "she has always had to associate with untaught people, and her own superior knowledge has become a fixed idea; she cannot, perhaps, change her manner when she is among her equals."

Maisie turned to the right when she reached the bottom of the lane; she did not see that Mrs. Greig was peeping at her from behind her lodger's curtains.

Mrs. Greig told herself that Miss Derrick had probably picked up another sweetheart while she was away, she looked so completely free from care.

The blacksmith was not sitting at the half-open door of his cottage, but Harriet Foxley came out and gave a half-sulky nod in answer to Maisie's smiling greeting. Harriet's left shoulder was so near her ear that anyone of her associates would have known at once that she was in a temper.

"Is your father quite well, Harriet?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Harriet saw that Miss Derrick lingered as if she would come in, and coming more forward she filled the doorway with her ample brown skirt and black apron. In the fuller light, Harriet's hair looked the color of red gravel against her dull yellow face. She stared hard at Miss Derrick, and Maisie fancied there was an expression of dislike in the woman's large pale blue eyes.

"Father's not in, ma'am," Harriet said slowly, "he's gone up to the Hall. Summat's amiss with the mare's foot, Miss Lescure's mare."

She stopped and Maisie felt restless under her steady stare. Harriet had avoided her for the past winter, and Maisie had felt more at ease with the genial old blacksmith in his silent daughter's absence.

Miss Derrick nodded farewell to Harriet, and was turning back towards the lane :

"Ain't she a beauty?" Harriet said abruptly, and she pointed in the direction of the Hall.

Maisie was surprised at this attempt at conversation. Some people said Harriet was only "half-saved," but, in spite of her trustful spirit, Maisie had the divining instincts which detects antipathy as quickly as it feels liking, and she had attributed the large pale woman's avoidance to dislike of her own visits to the blacksmith's cottage.

"Yes, Miss Lescure is very beautiful," she answered.

Harriet scarcely waited for her to finish.

"Yes, and there others that think the same. There's a gentleman as lives not so far off, neither, as loves the very ground the foreign lady walks on—it's he as came after father maybe half an hour ago, and now he's gone across the meadows to find him. Mr. Stanmore was in a taking about that mare."

Maisie had turned her head away before the words were all said.

"Good-bye, Harriet ; tell your father I am sorry to have missed him."

Miss Derrick felt bewildered as she went on towards the lane. Something was urging her to go back to the Hall. Even when she reached the Vicarage she longed to pass it by. She stood still and smiled at her own fancies. She had come out chiefly to deliver Miss Savvay's message to the vicar, it would be absurd not to leave it. She needn't pay a long visit.

The vicar was not at home, and Maisie was obliged to go in to see Miss Auricula.

A tall stiff-figured woman of doubtful age, with auburn hair curling over her forehead and faint colored blue eyes. Something in the face suggested a derived beauty, possibly from a handsome grandmother ; beauty which had become faded in transmission, although its owner believed in its existence, and valued herself extremely on the possession of a hectic complexion and a high-bridged nose.

"You left Miss Savvay well, I hope," she said graciously.

Maisie Derrick had taken a higher place in Miss Auricula's opinion since she had discovered the girl's friendly relations with Captain Wentworth's aunt. The young vicar's devotion to Maisie was a constant vexation to Auricula Vernon. Miss Derrick was Mr. Yardon's granddaughter ; but that was not much, and she was not a great favorite with him. Besides, Mr. Yardon was not so very old, he was young enough to marry again, and then where would be Miss Derrick's prospects ?

Miss Auricula considered that Maisie was ordinary ; she was not plain nor awkward, but she was much too retiring and simple to get on in society, and society meant Heaven to Miss Vernon, who had spent her life in a country village clinging to the fringe of notice accorded by her titled neighbors. Miss Auricula did not wish her brother to marry, because she liked to rule at the Vicarage ; she fancied she ruled Figgsmarsh also, but Figgsmarsh thought

differently. Still, if Charles found it necessary to have a wife, she told herself that he must choose some one who would sympathise with his sister and accept her as a permanent institution in the Vicarage. Miss Auricula felt that she could tolerate a really beautiful creature like Drusilla Lescure. Her style and manner seemed perfect to Miss Vernon, that was a girl who would make her way anywhere, and who would be an ornament wherever she went. Miss Auricula was so curious to discover Maisie's opinion of Mr. Yardon's ward that she hardly had patience to listen to Miss Savvay's message, although at another time she would have been delighted to learn that Maisie's friend had decided to shut up her own house and take up her abode during the autumn with her nephew.

"I feel so happy about it," Maisie said.

Miss Auricula looked at her keenly.

"I wonder what Captain Wentworth will think of your visitor," she said. "Is she not beautiful; she seems already to have turned the heads of all the men in Figgs-marsh. I tell my brother that he has Miss Lescure on the brain."

"She is very beautiful," Maisie said, "and she is very bright and pleasant."

Miss Auricula nodded and smiled. She had a high voice and rather a gushing manner.

"My dear, you should only hear the men about her. They simply worship her. I suppose Captain Wentworth will be as devoted as any of the others. As to your friend, Mr. Stanmore, he spends half his time with her, and is quite fascinated. They look such a handsome pair riding together."

Maisie did not betray herself; she was always on guard with Miss Auricula, who had a way of saying spiteful things with the best intentions for the moral good of her listener. The girl waited even while Miss Vernon dilated

on the great advantage that would accrue to the neighborhood from the presence of Captain Wentworth at the Manor House. When the lady paused for breath, Maisie rose and took leave.

Miss Vernon came with her to the door, and then, having watched Maisie to the gate, she straightened her flat back till it looked hollow, and she wondered, as she returned to her tasteless drawing-room, what attraction so likely a young fellow as Mr. Stanmore could find in Maisie Derrick.

Meanwhile, the girl was going up the hill at a pace that soon made her stop to take breath—but the rapid movement helped her spirits, and when she reached the gate her eyes and her cheeks glowed with health.

"Has my grandfather come in?" Maisie asked when the door was opened.

"No, ma'am," Warren said. Maisie was a favorite with the household, and the man thought that his master might have stayed in to welcome Miss Derrick; he had a shrewd suspicion that she had not been fairly used, and he considered himself a philanthropist. He fumbled over the closing of the door while the girl crossed the hall; then he said abruptly, as she turned to go into the drawing-room,

"Miss Lescure's in the garden, ma'am, with Mr. Stanmore."

Maisie's heart gave a bound. She did not stop to think. She crossed the room, and went out by one of the long, open windows. The fresh air cooled her hot face. She looked across the lawn, but she could not see either Drusilla or Mr. Stanmore.

The lawn sloped on for some distance to a sunk fence which divided it from a large meadow planted with trees. Maisie walked down to the ha-ha, and shaded her eyes as she looked along a path that slanted across the meadow, till it reached a clump of trees.

While she stood looking, Drusilla came out from behind the trees, and up the path homewards. She walked slowly, with her eyes bent on the ground. Maisie walked on to some steps at the end of the sunk fence, and then went forward along the field-path.

Drusilla gave a little start when she saw her.

"So you have come back," she said gaily, "I knew you would not be long, and I told Mr. Stanmore so, but he said he could not wait."

She said this glibly, as if she knew it by heart, but Maisie was looking at her with such a searching, direct glance, that Drusilla's eyes drooped; she seemed unable to bear the truth that shone in her companion's face.

She looked up again almost directly, with a curious, questioning expression.

"I told him it was unkind; because I knew you two were old friends," she said—"I don't care about him, you know."

Maisie felt a sudden distrust. Nothing had happened to change her opinion of Drusilla, and yet she felt almost dislike to the lovely, graceful girl; she scarcely knew how to answer.

"Yes, we are very good friends," she said, gravely.

Drusilla came up to her and pinched her cheek.

"You are a little angry with me, Maisie, dear, but it is not just of you. I do not care for Mr. Stanmore; I do not want to rob you of his friendship. I told him, more than once, that he ought to wait and see his old friend, but he went off just as if I had not spoken. Do not be vexed, dear—I daresay we shall see him to-morrow; he comes here so often; he doctors my horse, you know, and he teaches me how to ride. I really find him useful, though I do not care a bit for him."

She was surprised by Maisie's coolness. She had made up her mind that there had been something between her

and Mr. Stanmore. Maisie had flushed, and for an instant she had seemed perplexed, but when Drusilla ended she was calm.

"Do you like riding?" she said.

Drusilla made a grimace.

"No, I am afraid of the horse, and if I fell off I might be hurt, but I like being taught to ride, and Mr. Stanmore is very kind. I shall never care to ride without him. Will you take a walk now, Maisie? I will go wherever you like," she said, in her most winning tone.

"No, thank you," Maisie said, decidedly. "I am very tired. I think I will keep quiet till dinner-time."

"She is vexed, although she won't show it," the French girl thought. "Dear Maisie," she said, caressingly; "Come to my room and I will show you the gown I bought in Paris. The woman said it was the dressiest thing she had."

"I'm afraid I can't come to-day."

Maisie spoke bluntly; she felt sorely wounded, and she wanted to be alone. Mr. Stanmore's avoidance seemed so extraordinary, so slighting, that she could hardly keep from tears. She could not cry before Drusilla, or allow her a glimpse of her feelings on the subject. She had not known how proud she was till the French girl asked her not to be angry."

"Why should I be angry with her?" Maisie asked herself when she reached her room, "and yet I am—very—very angry. She has no delicacy—no feeling either. I am afraid she is not true. Oh, how could I think she was nice, just because she is so lovely?"

CHAPTER XIV.

FOUR days had gone by and Mr. Stanmore had not come up to the Hall. At first Maisie felt glad that he stayed away. She was trying to convince herself that she had mistaken his feelings for her, and she was ashamed of the ideas she had cherished. It was comforting to know that she had kept her secret; Miss Savvay might have guessed, but then Miss Savvay was so entirely sympathetic that she had probably shared Maisie's error.

But Maisie was too real to succeed in this effort to convince herself that she had mistaken Mr. Stanmore. She could not forget his looks and his manner during that last meeting, and as she allowed herself to dwell on them her spirits rose. She became conscious of injustice towards him; yes, she had been unjust and jealous also, and it was only natural that he should admire so beautiful a creature as Drusilla.

Maisie's meeting with her grandfather had been formal, and she was now even more timid with the strange old man as she saw the fascination which Drusilla exercised over him.

The French girl teased him, laughed at him, clapped her hands gaily if he spoke crossly, it seemed to Maisie that the lovely girl had a weird and uncanny influence, for Mr. Yardon always spoke more harshly to Maisie when he turned to her from her bewitching companion.

In some ways it was pleasant to have Drusilla to talk to, but Maisie knew that she preferred the old life to the keen mortifications which seemed to come to her through Miss Lescure. Maisie had always arranged the flowers for the table, and she did it fairly well, but the day after her return

Mr. Yardon told her she had better give up this duty.

"Miss Lescure has a natural talent for such trifles," he said, "you had better leave them to her."

Maisie was obliged to own that when Drusilla chose to exert it she had the singular deftness which makes the best out of everything it touches, but then Drusilla rarely chose to do anything except to please herself.

Maisie felt uneasy, she repeated that she was jealous and mean, she was fully susceptible of the French girl's strange power of fascination. It was the consciousness of this power that made Maisie at times dread the effect it might have had on Mr. Stanmore. And yet with the wayward contradiction of love, the girl blamed herself for her doubts and her impatience,—oh, yes, he would come, and she should see the same love in his eyes that had been there when they parted.

On this fourth afternoon Drusilla slipped out by herself, she was going to the Vicarage and she did not want Maisie's company.

She went leisurely down the lane, her fair flower-like face in dazzling contrast with the dark folds of her gown and her black broad-leafed hat. Stanmore was coming up from the village, and as he saw her he longed to have her picture as she moved out of the shade into the sunshine, and then again passed under the crossing branches that almost held their own against the golden light above their leafage.

Drusilla did not seem to see him. He pulled off his hat and she gave him a lovely smile.

"Are you going to the Hall?" she said, saucily.

"Yes; I was on my way there." His eyes were fixed on her face, and she smiled again and looked away.

"I am going to the Vicarage," she said carelessly.

"You'll not be long." He gave her a jealous look, he could not bear to lose a moment of the time he had counted on being with her.

Drusilla smiled slowly till her whole face beamed with amusement.

"You have forgotten something, Mr. Stanmore, you will not miss me to-day, you will have Maisie Derrick."

"I want you," he said impatiently.

She gave her little silvery laugh, and shook her head.

"What ! is not one enough ? Well, you have got to be good and patient and, perhaps, I'll come. Oh ! but," she pursed up her lips as she looked into his eyes, "I have such a secret, my guardian told me this morning—you must not tell, not even your friend Maisie—it is to be a surprise for her. Mr. Yardon heard from Miss Savvay this morning, and she says Captain Wentworth is coming to the Manor House in less than a week and she is coming with him. I am so delighted."

Mr. Stanmore did not look pleased, she saw he was frowning at her.

"Why should you be delighted," he said, "you do not know either Miss Savvay or her nephew, they are nothing to you ?"

Drusilla clapped her hands. "Fancy saying that much to me, why new things are nicer than old ones. I have been simply dying for a little variety ; can't you imagine what it will be to me to see a real English captain. I have made up my mind to adore Captain Wentworth—a soldier and a gentleman—why, what more can a man be ?"

Stanmore looked so very angry that she stopped.

"Now you are angry ; please forgive me."

She was penitent and ashamed he thought

"I love to tease so much that, I suppose, I have talked nonsense, it was your fault though. You provoked me by looking cross. Don't try to stop me, I must go,—good-bye ?"

She nodded and hurried by him like a flash of light, her bright eyes and small mouth smiling a "good-bye" as she

passed. Stanmore could hardly keep himself from following her, as he looked after her. He had resolved that morning to go up and see Maisie Derrick ; he told himself he had never said a word to her beyond the limits of friendship, but she had a right to expect him to go and see her. A half resolve had come as he had left home to remain passive and to see the effect produced on him by this renewal of friendship ; he was haunted by a dim suspicion that a glamor had been cast on him of late, an enchantment which might prove itself fleeting and unreal under the stedfast eyes in which he had read only a few weeks ago such sweetness and such truth. As he climbed the hill, this resolve had gained strength, and then he had met Drusilla Lescure, and she had again bewitched him. He had never thought her so charming ; but, indeed, every time he saw her, she revealed some new power of attraction. Drusilla's singular quickness and her gift of acquisitiveness had made her profit largely by her intercourse with Mr. Yardon and also with Maisie. To-day Stanmore had found her irresistible, and her news had turned the young man's thoughts into a new direction. The idea of seeing Maisie was obscured by the dread of the advent of the captain.

Stanmore had plenty of self-reliance in regard to his profession, his readiness to grasp the opportunities of life ; but he had little personal conceit, in his own eyes he considered he should have no chance with Drusilla beside a soldier.

He went up the last bit of the hill moodily, with his eyes bent on the ground, he did not see that he had reached the gate, and he started at the sound of Mr. Yardon's voice.

The old man smiled as he stood at the gate.

"What has been the matter, man," he said, "you have made yourself so scarce that I thought you were away from the village ?"

"I have been meaning to come up to see Miss Derrick," Stanmore said gravely, and then he hesitated and grew confused under the malicious expression in his companion's eyes.

"Ah!" Mr. Yardon seemed amused. "Did you meet my ward just now?"

"Yes, I met her;" and then the young fellow added, "I hear you are going to have a neighbor at last at the Manor House."

"Yes," Mr. Yardon said slowly. "I fancy Captain Wentworth will soon find his way here, he wont shilly-shally mind you. I told Miss Lescure this morning that she will soon have him sighing for her?"

"He!" said Stanmore sharply, "why he is, I understand, an invalid; a man with a broken constitution and a mortgaged estate, he cannot think of marrying."

Mr. Yardon laughed and opened the gate.

"Come in," he said, "remember the dog in the manger Stanmore; and what's this proverb 'he who will not when he may,'—you know how it ends? go your ways, young man—go your ways, even to please you. I cannot shut my doors against Captain Wentworth?"

They had reached the hall door, and Mr. Yardon waived his hand towards it, but Stanmore drew back.

"I shall find Miss Derrick in the garden," he said, and, without waiting, he passed through an opening in the shrubbery on the right to a winding path that led to the lawn. He had caught a glimpse of a white gown among the shrubs while he listened angrily to Mr. Yardon, and he was glad of this excuse for leaving him. Stanmore found Maisie walking up and down the path below the drawing-room windows. She turned at the sound of footsteps, and a glad, happy look showed on her face when she saw him.

Stanmore held her hand an instant while he asked how she was and how she had enjoyed her visit; but even in

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that brief time Maisie missed something from his smile, and from his eyes, and the next minute as he dropped her hand he looked grave. He wished he had not exposed himself to this trial. There was no change in Maisie, and yet he felt a sharp pain at his heart, he asked himself if this girl's eyes had always held that deep look of love when they met his. He thought that he could not have forgotten it if he had seen it there. He walked beside her in a trouble that felt like remorse, for he could only pity her; she was as sweet, as steadfast as ever, but his pulses did not quicken as he looked at her, she was his dear friend, his sister, that was all. The trouble he felt was for her.

Maisie broke the silence by asking "if the railway line was progressing to his satisfaction." She looked so calm as she spoke that Stanmore felt relieved. He thought he had, perhaps, mistaken the pleasant glow of friendship for a warmer feeling. "I am a coxcomb after all," he said, and it was a great relief to accept the conviction

"I hope you left Miss Savvay well?" he said.

Maisie's face brightened.

"Yes, thank you, and she thinks she may spend this autumn at the Manor House. Will not that be pleasant for me?" she said, smiling.

"I suppose so." Then urged by something stronger than his own will which had determined to avoid this topic, he added nervously, "but you are not as lonely as you used to be?"

Maisie's face changed as he spoke, he fancied she raised her head a little stiffly, and she looked directly into his eyes.

"You mean I have Miss Lescure for a companion, she is very bright, but Miss Savvay is such a dear old friend."

Stanmore winced, it seemed as if the words were meant purposely for him.

"I fancied," he said indifferently, "that you would have preferred a companion of your own age?"

Maisie gave him a quick impatient glance. He was not looking at her but in the direction of the lane, though the shrubbery that bordered the lane and the tall trees beyond them intercepted any direct view of it. The girl's spirit rose, she had done nothing to cause his changed manner, and his evident indifference towards her made her rebellious against his implied advice.

"I have often told you I am old-fashioned," she said coldly. "There are certainly a good many years between Miss Savvay and me; but, I fancy, we were brought up in the same ways and habits when we were children. Miss Lescure is a foreigner, and—and there can never be the same sympathy between us."

Stanmore knew very well the meaning of her words, and it irritated him the more because of the slight absence of refinement he had now and then observed in Drusilla.

He said very coldly:—

"I should have fancied you would be superior to a mere national prejudice"

Maisie flushed with vexation, something warned her to be silent or else to make a soothing answer, but she would not listen to the warning.

"I suppose we all like to choose our own friends," she said. "I cannot put aside a friend just to set a new one in her place."

They had reached the edge of the sunk fence at the far end of the lawn. A little summer house stood at the corner facing towards the park-like meadow beyond. They turned and came back in silence, neither of them looked at the other. Stanmore bent his head; Maisie's words had been too full of suggestion to be answered. He was more angry with himself than with his companion, but he was pained that she could stoop to reproach.

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She felt as if she must hurry away and hide herself from Stanmore and from every one. The words had scarcely been spoken before she saw the meaning her companion might find in them. She had been angry with him for insisting that she should make a friend of Drusilla, and he would understand that she meant to reproach him for his inconstancy.

She could not speak, she was too much crushed even to find a pretext for leaving her companion. She walked on in dumb misery till they had again reached the broad raised walk below the drawing-room windows.

CHAPTER XV.

WARREN came round the angle of the house which was marked by the shrubberies through which Stanmore had passed to join Maisie on the lawn.

The stolid-faced butler was watching what he was pleased to call "the game," with intense interest—he and all the other servants greatly preferred Miss Derrick to Miss Les-cure, but they also preferred their interests to their likings, and it was easy to see which of the two young ladies ruled Mr. Yardon.

Warren's bow was extra deferential.

"Mr. Yardon wishes to speak to you ma'am," he waited as if to follow Miss Derrick to the house.

"I will say good-bye for the present ;" Maisie said in a timid voice.

Stanmore held out his hand. "Good-bye," but he spoke unwillingly ; he was already sorry for the jar that he knew he had caused, a few more words might have set it right, and yet he could hardly bring himself to ask Maisie to come back to him. "I will wait a little while," he said.

As soon as Maisie had disappeared into the shrubbery Warren came back to Mr. Stanmore.

"I was to say, sir," he said pompously, "that if you are not in a particular hurry, Mr. Yardon will be glad if you'll wait here for him, sir."

"Very well," Stanmore said. He frowned as the man left him, he was ashamed of his hope that by waiting he might again see Drusilla. This hope had been very present when he reached the gate—now it seemed a sort of insult to Maisie's vexation.

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"They do not like one another that is plain," he said. He remembered with satisfaction that Mr. Yardon's study was in the front of the house. If Drusilla joined him there would be no one to watch their meeting.

Maisie had gone straight to the study and she sat there still, she was feeling greatly puzzled.

It was so incomprehensible that a practical man like her grandfather could send for her when she was engaged with a visitor just to discuss a household matter of no present moment, and even when he had told her his wishes about getting a boy from the village to serve as under-gardener, he kept her chatting a'out trifles. He was, however, singularly gracious, he even seemed to be enjoying his talk.

Maisie felt that her attention wandered, already she was sorry for the vexation she had shown in the garden, and she resolved if possible to see Mr. Stanmore again and try to efface the impression she feared he had received. But time was passing, it was possible that he had grown tired of waiting. Maisie had become feverish with impatience when there came a pause in Mr. Yardon's talk ; he was looking at her very intently but with a doubtful curious expression.

"I will go now grandfather," the girl rose as she spoke. "I was talking to Mr. Stanmore when you sent for me and I want to go back ; he said he would wait."

A smile passed across her grandfather's face but it left a bitterness behind it. Maisie shrank under his glance, she felt scared like a spring leaf by the breath of the east wind.

"Exactly so," Mr. Yardon said, "I knew perfectly well, Maisie, who was your companion when I sent for you, but Stanmore does not come to see you, my girl, you did very well when there was no one else, but this is a different matter, he has found metal more attractive here of late.

Sit you down again, if you go back now you will, I think, find yourself one too many for the situation."

Maisie reddened to the roots of her hair, and for the first time Mr. Yardon saw a flash of angry light in her eyes.

This gratified him, he was pleased to find that she had a spirit, it gave his pugnacious nature something to fight with.

He threw his head back and looked at her critically, on the whole he thought she was a fine young woman with that bright color on her cheeks and that glow of light in her eyes.

"I do not understand you—" Maisie was no longer shy, she spoke with some heat, he was her grandfather but she felt that he had no right to sit enjoying her confusion.

"I will explain if you will have the goodness to sit down and listen." Maisie could not help wincing at the sarcasm in his voice. "I should have fancied my meaning was clear enough to an unprejudiced listener, but there seemingly we differ. During your absence my young friend Stanmore has become attached to Miss Lescure. They see each other constantly, and I fancy the liking is mutual. You were placed with your back to the window and, therefore, you did not see Drusilla come in just now. I did and she has turned into the shrubbery walk. I ask you, Maisie, what claim have you to disturb a meeting between these two?"

"Do you mean me to understand that Mr. Stanmore is engaged to her?" Maisie spoke in a dull hard voice. She was thinking of the way in which she had just now spoken of Drusilla.

Mr. Yardon paused, he had kept his eyes fixed on her face and he was surprised by its calmness, he began to respect his granddaughter more than he could have thought possible. Maisie's shyness and constraint towards him had made him consider her nervous, and a nervous woman

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was to Mr. Yardon an excitable mystical creature, the slave of impulse and emotion. It did not occur to him that Maisie Derrick might be quite another person in a congenial and sympathetic atmosphere ; it may be that his lack of imagination made him incapable of sympathy with needs of which he had no practical experience—and it may be also that part of his dislike to his grandchild arose from the difficulty he had found in understanding her, she did not fit his theory of what a woman was sure to do, say and think in such and such circumstances—therefore there was something wrong about her as a woman ; the feeling of respect that she had now created was not yielded to the woman but to that which he considered a masculine firmness in repressing the natural feelings of her sex.

His heart did not warm towards her but his judgment appreciated her behavior.

"I have no reason to suppose that either Mr. Stanmore or my ward would take so decided a step without apprising me that they had done so," he said very formally—"but," he went on in a more genial voice, "I should say it might come to pass any day, and I for one am ready to give a hearty consent to such a well-assorted marriage."

Maisie did not grow pale, the strong constraint she was putting on herself kept the color flaming on her cheeks, and Mr. Yardon's last words had in one way relieved her. Her own nature was too noble to believe that her grandfather could continue to speak in this way if he really guessed the pain he was inflicting. A strange resolute feeling was taking possession of the girl. Mr. Stanmore had changed, but she had not thought he loved Drusilla, it was possible, nay it was evident, that her grandfather wished for this marriage and that he would do his best to bring it about ; but that did not prove that it would make Stanmore and Drusilla happy. Maisie saw in the man

the ideal she loved—the ideal to whom she felt herself so inferior, she seemed to know by a sure insight that when the first glamor was past Stanmore would be miserable with this French girl. The old power—the power of the touch of an angelic spear seems to live again in a pure and truthful nature, a nature that does not easily suspect, yet, which if it realizes that its trust is deceived, sees at once the flimsy veils of falsehood, they are no hindrance to its direct vision.

While Mr. Yardon spoke of this attachment, Maisie remembered the slighting terms in which Drusilla had spoken—and her assertion that she did not care for him—of Mr. Stanmore—there was falsehood somewhere. Maisie decided and it might not be too late to remedy it. She had no hope of regaining Stanmore's love, she doubted whether she had ever had it, but she loved him still and she would try to save him from being deceived.

She looked steadily at Mr. Yardon.

"If they are not engaged," she said, "I do not mind disturbing them for a moment, I said I would go back."

She went to the door, opened it and closed it behind her before her grandfather had recovered from his surprise.

When he did—he also went to the door and followed Maisie.

He went slowly however ; his grim sense of humor told him that there might be something amusing to witness if he gave the scene time for development.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THOSE minutes which had seemed to Maisie so long and wearisome had been passing at double-winged speed to the young pair in the garden.

When Maisie left him Mr. Stanmore had longed to recall her, he seemed to think of so much that he wanted to say, and he also wished to speak more kindly to undo, if that were possible, some of the vexation which he was conscious of having caused.

He was sure that Maisie had not meant to give him pain, she did not know his feelings for Drusilla, and she had spoken as to an old friend or a new acquaintance. As Mr. Stanmore reflected, a smile spread over his face, he very much doubted whether Drusilla would have spoken of his frequent visits to her or of her meetings with him on the common.

He turned at the end of the walk and saw Drusilla's tall graceful figure and the large drooping black hat coming from the shrubbery. She smiled as she came forward a few steps. Then she stood still and he joined her, she looked even lovelier than usual for she had a tinge of color and her eyes were full of expression.

"You look," he said as he hurried up to her, "as if you had had some pleasant adventure or had heard some pleasant news, may I not hear what it is?"

Her eyes were mischievous as she fixed them on him.

"You seem to take it for granted that what is pleasant to me will please you also—I on the contrary am not so sure about it, you will perhaps be crosser than you were in the lane," she shook her head and her lips seemed to mock him.

"But you will tell me for all that," he said impulsively, then moved out of himself by the arch beauty, that seemed to defy him to resist its power, I claim a right to share your joys and your griefs too—if you ever had any," he added in a more doubtful tone.

They had turned the angle of the lawn near the house, and, going up the flower-bordered path beside it, had nearly reached the summer-house at its further corner.

"You English make so much fuss about everything." Drusilla had apparently forgotten her companion she was looking at the flower-border gay with the spring darlings of the year. "They make a fuss about those little flowers, and yet long before I came here we had them and finer ones too growing in the valleys near us without any care or trouble."

Stanmore thought she was adorable, so fresh and innocent.

"I agree with you," he said, "that we English people cumber our lives with much unnecessary fuss about trifles, but I fancy we are obliged to shelter some of these plants to make up for the snow covering they get abroad in the winter."

Drusilla raised her eyebrows, for the first time she found Mr. Stanmore dull. She thought is interview with Maisie had changed him.

"I will tell you my news, if I can sit down," she said, "I am so tired, that hill is so steep."

They had reached the summer-house and Stanmore could hardly believe he heard rightly, he had tried more than once to get a talk in this summer-house with his lovely companion and she had always contrived to avoid it ; to-day, however, Miss Lescure was so sensible of the change in his manner, that she determined to try her power ; it was absurd to suppose that he could prefer Maisie to her, and yet he had changed—Drusilla considered that he

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belonged to her, he was her first lover and she would not yield him to any one. She had scarcely considered her own feelings towards Mr. Stanmore, but then it must be confessed that Drusilla always preferred receiving to giving, and she resolved again that she would not as she expressed it go halves about Mr. Stanmore with Maisie Derrick. She gave him a charming glance as she bent her graceful head to avoid the straying rose sprays that had spread from the large poles of the summer-house to the thatch above them.

She waited till Stanmore had placed himself beside her.

"Are you ready to listen?"—there was a mischievous light in her eyes though her tone was quiet.

"I am all attention," said Stanmore.

"Well then, do you remember the news I told you in the lane."

The eager flash in his eyes answered her, and she went on.

"I said that was good news, but I think this is better."

She stopped abruptly, Mr. Stanmore was frowning till he looked very angry.

"What is it?" he said, with impatience.

Drusilla shrugged her shoulders and moved a little away from him.

"You see I was right, I am afraid you are a—what is this word that you have said about my guardian—I know" she went on with a smile, "it is misanthrope, you dislike other people. No, you will never understand that I am pleased because of Captain Wentworth."

"You have already told me about him." Stanmore was looking across the meadow and he spoke sulkily. He almost hated Drusilla for trifling with him.

"Yes," she said slowly, for she enjoyed his jealousy, though, she was half afraid lest he should abruptly leave her if she provoked him beyond bearing. "I told you

Captain Wentworth and his aunt were to come next week. Well, I saw the vicar just now and he told me that Captain Wentworth is expected to-day. Now do you understand how glad I am."

Her eyes were full of sunny laughter, and the look of misery in his face did not check her loquaciousness.

"Have you no feelings," he said angrily—so very angrily that a bright tinge of color flew across Drusilla's cheeks as though she had received a sudden blow. She rallied however, but her eyelashes twinkled as if to keep back tears.

"I feel when people are unjust," she said.

Her voice sounded so pathetic that Stanmore was at once penitent, he had been brutal to this lovely fragile creature. Brutal too just when he wanted her to cling to him as a safe guard against the worldly spendthrift who was coming to disturb their peace.

He took her hand and tenderly kissed it. "You darling," he whispered, "but you will forgive me, I love you so, dear girl, that I can't bear to hear you even speak to any one else."

Drusilla blushed and her eyes fell under his, she was a little startled by Stanmore's suddenness, but it was very nice to be sure that he loved her. She had not time to think, the young man poured out his love in rapid impetuous words that fairly carried her away and made her feel as if she were out of breath while she listened.

Stanmore's arm had come round her, and she let him draw her close against his breast, but Drusilla was not completely absorbed by his love-story, even while he kissed her she heard another sound outside the summer-house.

There were footsteps, and then Maisie's voice said "Drusilla, are you there?"

Drusilla pushed Stanmore away and rose up from the bench. "It is Maisie." She looked curiously at her lover, and then she went out of the summer-house.

Stanmore was too happy to feel disturbed, but he did not at once follow Drusilla.

When he did come out Maisie was some way up the walk and Mr. Yardon stood beside Drusilla clasping the girl's hand in his.

"What is all this about my young friend?" he said—and he looked from one face to the other as if he were completely puzzled.

Stanmore had dreaded this moment; Mr. Yardon had encouraged his attentions to Drusilla as much as he had formerly discouraged them and yet the young fellow knew that his host was capricious and contradictory, he might even wish to leave the girl free till she had seen Captain Wentworth.

But he answered the question frankly.

"It means that I want you to give me your ward. She consents, so you have no choice," he said gaily as he saw a smile curving the old man's lips.

"Is that so?" Mr. Yardon put his long brown finger under the girl's delicate chin and looked at her.

Drusilla pouted.

"I did not say yes," she said shyly, "he takes my consent for granted."

"You should have said 'no,'" Mr. Yardon said laughing, "its an old story child that silence gives consent."

He put out his hand and shook Stanmore's heartily. "I'm glad it is settled," he said, "on all accounts; kiss me Drusilla, and then go and get me my glasses, I've left them on my desk."

She darted off like a fawn, glad that Maisie had already disappeared within the house.

Drusilla dreaded lest she should meet Warren, she was ashamed of her own agitation, she thought it must show on her face, and she was vexed with herself for feeling it; she had been wishing that Mr. Stanmore would propose to her,

because that seemed to be the only sure way of keeping him to herself, but she had rehearsed the proposal and it had ended quite differently. She had planned that Mr. Stanmore should be more humble and she had not meant him to feel sure of her acceptance.

It was Mr. Yardon's fault for breaking in upon them, and she was conscious that the sound of Maisie's voice had made her unwilling to vex her lover.

She went up to her room and seated herself to think.

"It is not yet decided," she said pouting her full under lip—"I do not see that I belong to Mr. Stanmore because he has taken me by surprise, it must be wrong to take the first man who asks, there is no choice in that, it is the act of a simpleton."

Drusilla sat thinking, but she did not look thoughtful. Her forehead remained smooth and her delicately marked eyebrows did not draw together; her mother had taught the girl from a very early age that her face was her most precious possession, and that a lined forehead and a wrinkled mouth were signs of careless bringing up.

But serene and lovely as she looked Drusilla was thinking, and her thoughts at last took the form of a decision.

She would permit Stanmore to consider himself engaged to her on two conditions. The attachment between them was to be kept a secret from every one but Mr. Yardon, and she was to be left free to do as she pleased, as free as she had been when she reached Yardon Hall.

For an instant she wondered about Maisie, and then she remembered that the girl had been too far off to hear the talk between her grandfather and Luke Stanmore.

"It will be much more comfortable if she does not know, it will spare her feelings and—and it will leave me so much freer."

Drusilla gave a sigh of relief as she got up from her sofa and looked out of her window, it was at the side of the house but the lawn could be seen from it.

There was Mr. Yardon alone pacing up and down, his head drooping forward and his hands clasped behind him.

Drusilla took up her hat from the sofa, put it on before the glass and then went softly downstairs and into the garden by a side door near the offices.

She came so softly across the grass that she had slipped her hand under Mr. Yardon's arm before he knew she was near him.

She pinched his arm as he started and looked up at him affectionately.

"You startled me, you mischievous puss," he said, "well you seem to have made a rapid business of it."

"Hush," she said quietly, "I am going to tell you," and she led him down to the border of the sunk fence at the further corner from the summer-house.

Then she let go his arm and drew herself up till the old man smiled at her pretty dignified manner.

"You see," she said ingenuously, "we were interrupted before I had time to answer, and—and he took my consent for granted."

Mr. Yardon frowned, he looked red and angry too.

"Stop," he said, "you can't say yes and no in the same breath, girl, a fellow like Stanmore would not have made a mistake unless he'd had good reason."

Drusilla shook her head and pretended to wring her long slim fingers.

"You English people are so literal," she said, "even the best of you ; dear me, I only want you to listen," there was an imploring tone in her voice for Mr. Yardon was looking as she had not seen him look—hard and inaccessible.

She waited but he did not soften. Drusilla gave a little sigh, she had to forego some of her scheme in that momentary waiting.

"I do not know what you are making a fuss about," she said with some scorn. "I have not said that I want to alter things ; dear me no, I will tell you what I want :

in France, you know, a man does not propose his own feelings—he,” she turned her head away till the flap of her hat screened her face from him—“he speaks to some one else. I have been too much surprised, and—and I want you to go after Mr. Stanmore and say to him that for the present I wish him not to speak of this. Do you understand, guardian?”

“I hear what you say,” Mr. Yardon still looked stern; “but I cannot enter into this till you give me a reason. You are in England, I have told you that your father was English-born and Mr. Stanmore is English. I don’t want any foreign methods here, the English way seems to me the best; if you could give me a reason.” She heard his voice soften and she looked once more serene.

“Isn’t it reason enough,” she said demurely, still keeping her face hidden, for she could not keep it grave—“if you say I am shy, and I don’t want the servants and the village people and Miss Auricula to stare at me, and—and, surely Maisie need not know just yet—I do not want to be fussed about.”

Mr. Yardon’s face relaxed into a smile—but he was not satisfied.

“Suppose Stanmore does not agree,” he said.

“I care far more that you should,” she suddenly turned to him with a beaming smile, “you cannot think how you frightened me just now, my heart is still beating much faster than usual, if you are willing, then of course he will be, he cannot go against us two, can he?”

Mr. Yardon thought that if she looked at Mr. Stanmore as she was looking at him there would not be much chance that he would refuse any request she made him. He felt a very unusual compunction at having frightened the sweet winning child, as he called her to himself.

He patted her on the shoulder by way of making up and Drusilla looked pleased and dutiful, and took care to keep in the amusement his awkwardness afforded her.

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"Well," he said, "you two had best settle it between you, it is not my business."

He turned away but she held his arm fast between her slender palms.

"Oh please listen ; you are my guardian, so it must be your business to help me. I want you to see," she went on quickly, "that there's no time to be lost, and you are the only person who has a right to speak to—to Mr. Stanmore. Please go to him now directly. Oh yes, please do, and ask him to keep this a secret ; he *must* or—"

Her eyes sparkled with impatience, and a pretty flush had spread over her face.

"Hush," said Mr. Yardon, "do not threaten—a woman should not let herself do anything so ugly."

Drusilla stared at him and her arms fell to her sides.

"That is what mother used to say," she said, "when I was cross."

She was startled by the sudden change in his face, he gave her a suspicious glance of scrutiny, then he shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"She was probably only repeating what had been said to her," he said in his most cynical tone. "There, be at peace child, you shall have your way, and be careful not to tease me with questions."

He left her standing on the lawn, but she crept softly after him when he was out of sight and she smiled as she heard the click of the outer gates.

He was going down to the village and she felt sure that Mr. Stanmore would have to consent to keep her secret for the present.

Drusilla danced in the shrubbery path, she knew that no one could see.

"The afterwards must take care of itself," her lovely eyes were shining with glee. "I wish I was not engaged, but then perhaps if I had said so, he might have gone back to Maisie."

As she went back to the house Drusilla decided that she was much too young to marry, her life was only just beginning and it seemed to be full of delightful possibilities.

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CHAPTER XVII.

DRUSILLA was a close observer of words and looks, but she rarely troubled herself about the feelings of others, and, although she had the idea that there had been some kind of an attachment between Luke Stanmore and Maisie, it did not occur to her that what had passed in the summer-house would prove a shock to the girl when it came to her knowledge.

Drusilla had been absorbed by the double excitement of urging her guardian to secure Mr. Stanmore's consent to a temporary silence, and also in persuading him to pay an early visit to the Manor House ; she did not notice Maisie's manner, and she went to bed more delighted with her own success with Mr. Yardon, than by the thought of her engagement.

Next morning, at breakfast, Maisie was the gayest of the party. She laughed so merrily that Mr. Yardon looked up from his paper ; he wondered whether the girl was trying to cover her feeling of defeat—for he fancied she must have understood his meaning about Stanmore and Drusilla. He had not meant to be cruel to his granddaughter ; the certainty that there was no longer any chance of her marrying Stanmore, had softened his own feelings towards her ; but, as he wished Maisie to remain at the Hall for some time longer, he considered that it was only fair to tell her the truth, instead of leaving her to discover it.

He wondered now whether Drusilla had told her news ; but as soon as Maisie left the room, Drusilla attacked him.

"You will go this morning, guardian, and then you will tell Maisie and me the news at lunch. I am dying to hear what the captain is like."

Mr. Yardon looked up at her, as she stood on the other side of the table facing him, the only object worth looking at in the long, gloomy room. The rare sunshine that visited that side of the house came in at breakfast time, and it had concentrated itself on her golden hair, finding out here and there a ruddy thread or two, which seemed to burn with incendiary light among the rest. For the first time, her guardian surveyed the fair creature critically, and he fancied that Drusilla's splendid wealth of hair would be yet more splendid, if it were simply arranged. Something about the frizzy coronet irritated him.

"If Stanmore's half the fellow I take him for, he'll have that altered."

Mr. Yardon also reflected, on his way to the Manor House, that Drusilla's waist looked too small for reality. This fact had not struck him during Maisie's absence, but now it suggested itself as another tendency to artificial habits.

He sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and then let his head droop forward with the action of a man who resigned himself to the inevitable. He took a path across some fields beyond the lawn, a path which formed a short cut to the Manor House.

The man was completely genuine, and yet he had not the love for outside nature which so often exists with truth of character. A lark, high above, was pouring out soul-stirring melody enough to hold a listener still and rapt with enjoyment, but Mr. Yardon passed on, unheeding it. The almond fragrance of the hawthorn blossoms, and the tufts of forget-me-not in the hedge below, lying turquoise-like in a green setting, were as little noted by him as was the exquisite leafage of some birch trees in a copse at the end of the field. Mr. Yardon was even blinder than usual; he had not been across this way for two months, and he must have seen that the red-grey mist of the interlacing

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branches was now replaced by tenderest green, and that both branches and twigs were, in a measure, effaced by the feathery leafage quivering in the sunshine; his thoughts were wholly filled with a disquietude for which he could not find a reason, unless it was that shrinking from change which sometimes besets a man as he grows older.

Mr. Yardon went quickly down the slope the field made into the copse, from which a plank bridge divided it.

An hour later, he again came in sight, but the expression on his face was no longer doubtful. He looked red and angry, and as he crossed the single plank, he trod so heavily that it seemed possible he might dislodge it, and send it crashing down the red sides of the ditch, soft with their coating of last year's leaves, a coating which the gem-like forget-me-nots seemed glad to nestle in.

Miss Lescure decided that her guardian would lunch at the Manor House, and she and Maisie were already seated when he came into the dining-room. Drusilla waited until the end of the meal before she asked him a question, but when he rose from table without having uttered a word about his visit, she stopped him.

"Please sit down again," she said; "you seem to forget that you have not told us what the captain is like. Did you see him?"

Maisie felt surprised. She had not heard of Captain Wentworth's arrival. She fancied that her grandfather looked vexed. There crept once more over the girl the bewildered feeling that she was living in a world of her own with her eyes closed to what was happening in the real world around her.

"Yes, I saw Captain Wentworth," Mr. Yardon said roughly; "but I cannot see why *you* should care to hear about him. Maisie, now, who might be expected to take some interest does not ask a question.

He looked at his granddaughter, and she understood him to allude to Miss Savvay's connection with the owner of the Manor House as the reason of her interest in Captain Wentworth.

"Has Captain Wentworth arrived?" she said, "and is Miss Savvay with him?"

The joy sparkling in her face annoyed Mr. Yardon.

"No; Miss Savvay comes later," he said, drily, and he went towards the door.

But Drusilla reached it before he did, and she set her back against it, while she looked sweetly at her guardian.

"I am not threatening; on the contrary, I know I look as sweet as sugar; considering that I am very curious, do please answer my questions. Is the squire tall or short, fair or dark, ugly or handsome. I want to know exactly what he is like?"

Mr. Yardon tried to frown, but he ended by smiling. He shook his head at the lovely, pleading face.

"You are a little simpleton; a regular baby," he said. "There is nothing about Captain Wentworth to distinguish him from a score of captains fresh from India. He is not tall; he is spare; he would be perhaps fair, if he were less sun-bronzed, and he is certainly not handsome."

Drusilla made a grimace and looked at Maisie.

"He will adore us both then," she said, softly; "little men always like tall women."

"You are talking sad nonsense," and Mr. Yardon looked so ungracious that Drusilla moved aside and allowed him to pass out.

She turned to Maisie, with eyes full of mischief.

"My goodness!" she said it very prettily; "what is the meaning of it? Can you explain, my dear Maisie, why the name—the very name—of Captain Wentworth makes people cross. I spoke of him to your friend, Mr. Stanmore, and he became at once irritable and contradictory,

and you see how cross my guardian is at a mere question ; what does it mean ? ”

“ I thought my grandfather looked worried when he came in,” Maisie said, gravely. She felt disturbed by Drusilla flippancy.

“ You are prudish, Maisie ; you looked grave when you heard that Miss Savvay had not come with her nephew. Why should not two girls do just as well alone as one girl and a chaperon ; it must be just the same, you dear old frump. We don’t want Miss Savvay to take care of us at the Manor House.”

Maisie laughed.

“ Is that a French idea ? In England—in the country at any rate—we are still old-fashioned ; but why are you interested in Captain Wentworth ? his photograph is not interesting.”

“ Your photo is not interesting ; it makes you look like a nigger. The only nice thing in it is your hair ;” she looked critically at the rich, careless brown waves as she spoke ; “ perhaps the captain’s photo will not be a bit truer to nature than yours is.”

Maisie felt jarred and out of sympathy with her companion. She was conscious of a wish to get away from Drusilla.

Miss Savvay’s last words to her had been,

“ Whenever my nephew settles down at the Manor House, I shall only be a few days in following him.”

It was such entire relief to feel that she should soon have her friend near her, perhaps for weeks to come.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Two men came in by the Hall gates. One of them could easily be identified as the absentee squire by the sun-bronzed skin. Mr. Yardon had specified Captain Wentworth as slightly made, neither tall nor short, with a thin face that had the placid expression of a plump one.

Now, as he smiled at his companion, there was a momentary glisten in his narrow green-blue eyes, and his pale moustaches seemed to quiver with passing amusement; but these tokens of feeling subsided before his words ended, and once more a pleasant vapidty resumed its place. Captain Wentworth looked delicate for all his sunbronzing, he also looked refined; but the strongest impression he produced was that of a man who would not covet anything which would cost him trouble to possess, and who would shrink from being bored more than he would shrink from hunger or thirst. His thin voice had the sharpness one sometimes hears in a woman's.

"You will have to be careful; I fancy our friend here," he looked at the Hall as they proceeded up the drive, "is said to be strict."

His companion gave a hearty rather coarse laugh. He was tall enough and broad enough to make two Captain Wentworths, and his face showed not only a hearty enjoyment of life but a determined will to take all he could of the chances to be found in it. His walk across the meadows had given a slight tone of brick red to his square face; his ruddy hair seemed to curl more crisply, and his red-brown eyes glowed as he slowly shook his head.

"You are prepared to see a beauty here, are you—just because your aunt has bestowed that title on a girl whom she has never seen?"

"No, my boy; so far as my experience goes—some years longer than yours does—beauty never appears where we expect to see it. You'll find a really beautiful woman in the very last place you would think to find her in. There aren't many about, let me tell you. I've only seen a few."

"Is it worth while to take the trouble to find one?"—the sharp thin voice sounded languid—"if a first prize is so difficult to discover, a second, surely, does as well."

"Ah, you don't mean to marry? I couldn't put up with second-best anything; wait till you have seen Beaulands, my good fellow, then you'll understand that Beaulands wouldn't match with a second-rate Mrs. Boyd."

Captain Wentworth winced very slightly; but Warren had opened the door in answer to their knock, and the friends, giving their names as Captain Wentworth and Mr. Boyd, were shown into the drawing-room.

Maisie came in from the library and received them with an ease that surprised and pleased Captain Wentworth. His aunt had spoken of Miss Derrick's shyness; but Maisie was rarely shy with strangers whose opinion she did not value. As yet she had not formed a high opinion of Captain Wentworth; only Miss Vernon had praised him, and it must be said that Maisie rarely agreed with Miss Auricula's opinions.

Captain Wentworth introduced his friend, Mr. Boyd, and then he began to talk of Miss Savvay and her plan of joining them. He had not finished when Mr. Yardon came in.

He was cordial in his greeting, but he soon turned his back on Mr. Boyd and left Maisie to entertain him.

This was not difficult, though she did not feel interested

in this visitor, for Mr. Boyd seemed to be able to talk on every subject ; he asked her if she had travelled and she had to confess to a limited experience of journeys in Switzerland and a couple of visits to Paris.

Her companion, however, seemed to have been round the world ; he had visited the East, North and South America, and the Japanese Empire. He had seen Iceland and the Islands of the Mediterranean. He was in the midst of a description of Majorca when Mr. Yardon abruptly broke in :

" Maisie, do you know whether Drusilla is in ? "

The captain's inquiry for Miss Lescure had forced her guardian into this question.

" She is out," Maisie said.

Mr. Yardon was greatly relieved ; he did not wish Mr. Boyd to see his ward. The impression of to-day had confirmed the opinion he had formed at the Manor House, that though Captain Wentworth was a gentleman, Mr. Boyd was only a wealthy snob. On his way home her guardian had testily decided that Drusilla should be kept out of the way of this sensuous-looking millionaire.

He scarcely knew why he felt so contradictory on the subject ; he had long ago seen that Drusilla was fond of admiration ; but then Mr. Yardon would have said, had he been questioned on this point, that love of admiration was only natural in so beautiful a creature.

Just at this moment Drusilla came slowly across the grass towards the drawing-room window, which opened on to the terrace.

" Ah," said Captain Wentworth languidly, " here is, I fancy, the lady you are asking about."

The captain looked hard at the advancing figure. Drusilla's face was as yet shadowed by her broad-leaved hat ; but Mr. Boyd did not hear his friend's remark. He went on talking to Maisie ; too much absorbed by the details of his last yachting voyage to be stopped by interruption.

Drusilla came in at the window next the library and Captain Wentworth's eyes glistened considerably as Mr. Yardon introduced him to his ward.

The slender, golden-haired creature held herself far more stiffly than she did when she was introduced to Luke Stanmore ; her eyelids did not droop under the captain's gaze, indeed she returned it with a sort of curious but friendly interest.

She went on smiling, but she was disappointed ; she liked a man to look strong and capable. The captain was, she fancied, as weak as a woman. He had a pleasant face, and the courtesy of his tone delighted her ; he said he hoped they should have the pleasure of seeing her at the Manor House when Miss Savvay came into residence.

Drusilla placed herself on the sofa by the window and the captain sat beside her. Mr. Yardon thus found himself shut out of the talk and he smiled at the girl's self-assertion ; she took her place as mistress of the house as Maisie had never done.

"When do you expect your aunt?" he heard her say, and he saw the captain's pleased smile at the dainty foreign accent that clung to her words.

"She will be here for Sunday ; you will see her at church ;" he hesitated and looked at the fair, colorless face, into which as yet he had drawn no special expression ; "perhaps you don't go to our village church ; you are French, are you not?"

Drusilla smiled.

"Oh, yes, I go to church. I have not any opinions, opinions seem to be tiresome ;" she gave him such a pretty questioning look that he felt roused from his habitual indolence.

"You mean opinions about going to church." He thought she was perfectly charming ; it was a pleasure to look at her and to listen to her pretty English.

"That is one sort of opinion ; but it belongs to the dull things I mean," she said in a perplexed tone.

Captain Wentworth heard a movement at the other end of the room ; he knew that his friend would not hesitate to disturb his enjoyment when he once caught sight of Miss Lescure.

At present Mr. Boyd could only see the outline of her figure as she sat turned towards the door that led into the library.

"Have you suffered much from dullness, you seem to speak of dull things feelingly?"

He saw a sort of challenge in her eyes at his question and he smiled. If he meant to learn the history of Miss Lescure's life, it would not be from herself; that was evident.

"Are you dull in India?" she said, passing by his question as if she had not heard it.

"Are we dull in India? That depends—dullness generally does depend, does it not, on our surroundings ; but then does dullness exhibit itself in the same way to every one?"

Drusilla did not quite understand, she had a consciousness that her guardian was listening to every word, and she felt uncomfortable.

"Shall you not be dull in this quiet place?"

She drew down the corners of her mouth as if to say—"I am."

Mr. Yardon gave a grim smile—he was thinking of the lovely cottage beyond Sentis.

Captain Wentworth's answer pleased her :

"That depends," he said, "at present I am not afraid of being dull."

Drusilla gave him a lovely smile ; but her attention was claimed by Mr. Boyd, who came up at the moment to speak to Mr. Yardon.

"You promised to show us your dogs, Mr. Yardon," he said; then, as if he had suddenly become aware of the presence of the figure in black, who was looking steadily at him, he went on: "Is this another granddaughter, may I ask?"

Drusilla held her head stiffly at this interruption; she did not want Mr. Boyd just then; she was enjoying her talk with Captain Wentworth.

She looked at the intruder as she bowed to him, and, accustomed as she was to admiring glances, something in his glowing red-brown eyes brought a quick flush to her delicate face.

For an instant her dark eyelashes drooped and quivered, then she looked coolly at her new admirer. She was resolved to show this big man who had intruded where he was not wanted, that she was not a mere country girl who felt honored by his notice.

She felt a certain admiration. He looked well-dressed and masterful, a man who was accustomed to be much thought of, and, therefore, Drusilla argued a rich man; she fancied, too, that somewhere or other she had already seen him.

But the effect of her appearance on Mr. Boyd had been electrical. While he sat talking to Miss Derrick he had glanced across at the other; she seemed to have a pliant, willowy figure in thought; but she was not so well made as Miss Derrick was. Maisie's figure and well-shaped feet and hands had impressed this epicure in female beauty far more than her face had. Miss Derrick looked too earnest, that pure trustful expression was not calculated to please an admirer of *Greuze* faces and golden hair.

He stood looking down at Drusilla with delight; he could hardly believe in the good fortune which, in an out of the way place like this, had shown him so rare a creature, and he liked her none the less for the pout that showed

her red lips so perfectly. He wanted, however, to see her smile before he left her.

"Shall we go to the kennels?"

Mr. Yardon spoke roughly, the little scene had annoyed him, and he meant to end it.

"Ah, yes; why not?" But Mr. Boyd did not move, he kept his eyes fixed on the fair face with its dark liquid eyes and the mass of sunny hair above the creamy blue-veined temples. "Are you fond of dogs?" he said to Drusilla.

"I!" She opened her eyes widely, as if she were surprised to be spoken to. "Oh, no; I dislike dogs;" and she looked at Captain Wentworth.

"You will not stay long at the Manor House, I expect." She turned her back on Mr. Boyd.

The captain shrugged his shoulders. "I must not be in London during the season," he said; "I am supposed to be here for health's sake. Unless you all send me to Coventry—I mean to spend part of the summer here."

"Miss Derrick will be so glad," Drusilla said softly; "she is so very fond of your aunt."

"Yes," the captain spoke languidly; "Maisie's affection for Miss Savvay did not interest him. "By-the-bye, will not you and Miss Derrick honor the Manor House by a visit on Saturday afternoon. My aunt will be with us early?"

He saw a sudden sparkle in Drusilla's eyes and he was puzzled. It seemed impossible that so beautiful a creature could take an interest in seeing a dull old place like the Manor House.

"We will certainly come," she said; "but your being sent to Coventry must depend on yourself."

"You must not expect much," he returned her saucy smile. "There are no pictures worth looking at, only some family portraits, and my grandmother appears to have

sold a good deal of old tapestry which was really interesting and had a pedigree."

Drusilla shook her head.

"I'm glad she sold it. I dare say it was ugly and faded," she made a grimace. "Old things usually are," she added in a low tone.

"Are you coming," captain?" Mr. Yardon said, and at this the captain rose and said "good-bye" to Drusilla and to Maisie, to whom he repeated his invitation for Saturday.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was said in Figgsmarsh, as it had formerly been said in the north country town in which Mr. Yardon had been chief banker, that he was a mystery. Miss Auricula had more than once given it as her opinion that he was a mystery to himself; she said he never thought either about others or about anything; even Miss Savvay, a woman seldom either shallow or harsh in judgment, considered that he thought too little about others to have much regard for their feelings.

To-day when he had said "good-bye" to his unwelcome guests, for apart from a special antipathy to Mr. Boyd, he had a sort of fatherly dislike to young male visitors, always excepting the young engineer. He came up the drive with his hands behind him and his head bent forward. He was doubly discontented.

Drusilla's manner had vexed him, and he was conscious of a certain responsibility with regard to Luke Stanmore. The young fellow's opposition to Drusilla's wish for secrecy had irritated him, he now saw how justly founded it had been, and he despised himself for his own blindness.

"Little jade," he said, "she has handicapped us both so that she may flirt as she pleases."

He was hardly angry with Drusilla, it seemed to him natural that a merry light-hearted girl, to whom all social intercourse was a novelty, should wish for liberty to enjoy herself to the full, but he winced when he contrasted her behavior with the quiet dignity he had remarked in Maisie.

Miss Vernon and Miss Savvay would have wondered if

they had seen the pain in Mr. Yardon's face as he thought of his granddaughter and Luke Stanmore.

He knew that he had separated them by his own act, that he had purposely put this lovely bewitching creature in the young fellow's way, because he wished him to forget Maisie. Mr. Yardon wanted to have a lively young couple to keep house for him at the Hall when he began to fail, but he did not want Maisie there, she was too quiet, too good, he saw what the parson thought of her and that was enough for Mr. Yardon; but although he disliked as much as ever any idea which connected Maisie with Luke Stanmore, he had to-day a feeling of remorse in regard to her, He had given her to understand that Stanmore cared for Drusilla, but that was not enough, he felt sure that Maisie was unconscious of what had passed in the summer-house, and she must know it, it was cowardly to keep her in the dark any longer.

As he passed the end of the shrubbery walk leading to the lawn he heard voices raised in dispute. Luke Stanmore was speaking angrily, and Drusilla was laughing in a way that sounded mocking to her guardian. He turned at once into the narrow path. Stanmore's back was towards him. Drusilla faced him, and there was a light in her eyes and a bright red flush on her cheeks that looked like anger.

"You have your choice?" she said, "it is better to find it out now than later on, that I do not suit you. You want to keep me in a cage like some poor moped bird, and I—I—ah! here is Mr. Yardon, perhaps you will listen to him."

She tried to hurry away up the walk, but as she passed him, Mr. Yardon took her hand and drew it under his arm.

"Quarrelling already," he said, with a sneer, "why you are as bad as the birds. Stanmore, my good fellow, you must give women there heads at first or they'll kick over the traces. What's it all about, eh?"

Drusilla had pulled out her handkerchief and she put it to her eyes.

"He's so false," she said, in a choked voice. "He want's to break his promise not to tell."

Mr. Yardon walked on in silence till they all stood by the sunk fence. He noticed that Stanmore looked pale and that the veins on his temple showed unusually.

He looked now fully at Mr. Yardon with a dumb agony in his eyes.

"I was a fool to consent yesterday, you overuled me, but then I did not know those other fellows were at the Manor House. I can't see that it is fair either to them or to me that she is to be considered free?"

"I am at least free to go away, am I not? It is not kind," Drusilla said, pettishly, "to discuss me to my face."

She gave Mr. Yardon an imploring look as she ended, but he kept his eyes on Mr. Stanmore, while his hold on the hand he had drawn under his arm tightened.

"I am quite of you opinion," he said, as if Drusilla had not spoken. "But you surely don't need to call me in, if you cannot convince her now, how will it be later on?"

He glanced at Drusilla and he was startled at the scowl he saw on her face. Her eyes were aflame with anger. She was in one of the tempers that used to visit her at Sentis, and which her mother had exorcised by shutting her up by herself.

"I don't want to be managed," she broke out, "I did not want to be engaged, but you would not listen. I—I—will not be tormented and blamed." She was crying, and the two men looked uncomfortable and foolish. Mr. Yardon loosed Drusilla's hand.

"Go in to my study" he said, roughly, "and wait till I come."

The girl was quickly out of sight. She was already heartily ashamed of her outbreak.

Yardon looked angrily at the younger man.

"You don't know how to treat a woman. I tell you they are brittle cattle, more especially the light-haired ones."

"But," Stanmore began, impetuously.

"Why don't you listen man, did I not say I was of your opinion, your matter is right enough, its the way of putting it that's faulty. You must humor the child instead of scolding her. Bless you these things leak out ; before Miss Savvay has been two days at the Manor House it will be known all over Figgsmarsh."

Luke Stanmore looked extremely discontented.

"It must be set straight," he said, doggedly. Then he felt that this was not the most likely way to influence his companion, and he looked appealingly at him.

"You can help me if you will? I can't have fellows looking at her and talking to her as they please, she—she's not like an ordinary girl."

"Well, no." There was sarcasm in the old man's voice. "she's not, and I fancy the sooner she is married the better in all ways. I suppose you don't want a long engagement, eh?"

"No." But Stanmore felt that he and Drusilla must settle this for themselves. He had received a shock just now—for an instant it had seemed as though a mask fell from the lovely face he worshiped, and then when he saw her tears he could have knelt to her for forgiveness. He had deserved Mr. Yardon's rebuke, though he had not as the elder man said 'scolded' Drusilla. He had asked her in justice to others as well as to him to make their engagement known, but he had asked this very urgently, and she had refused, at first playfully and then when he pressed his request and held both her hands tenderly clasped, she had angrily freed herself and persisted in her refusal.

No, he did not wish for a long engagement, but he felt

that he and this sweet wayward child ought to understand one another a little better before they joined their lives.

"If you are wise," Yardon said, "you'll leave her alone a day or two. You will find her all right when you come again."

He laughed as he shook hands, but Stanmore felt discomfited, and as he went down the lane he told himself that he ought to have insisted on his own right to make his engagement public. He resolved to announce it himself to Miss Savvay, but he would write and tell Drusilla his intention as gently and tenderly as he could.

Mr. Yardon had gone direct to his study. He found Drusilla pacing up and down it. There was still a red spot on each cheek, but she had evidently controlled her anger. She smiled at her guardian as he came in.

He looked gravely at her.

"Please sit down, Miss Lescure," he said, "you make me feel as if I was out in the wind while you move about."

"Gracious!" This was one of the girl's words that annoyed her guardian. "You *are* fidgetty to-day."

But she sat down close by him and put her slim hand on the arm of his chair.

He looked curiously at her. It puzzled him that a creature to all appearance so refined and dainty could talk sometimes more like a shop-girl than a lady. He thought Drusilla's archness was one of her greatest charms; but now and then her flippancy jarred him. It had a strange effect on the difficult old man. Just now in the garden it had seemed to him that the exquisite creature who had promised to be the joy of his declining years was transformed into a fury, it was a real relief to see the smile that always soothed him on her lovely face.

"You must be reasonable," he said, gravely, "you are not a child, and when you have given one man to understand that you mean to be his wife you must not flirt with others."

"What do you mean by flirt?" she said, gravely. "You forget how ignorant I am about what Miss Vernon calls society?"

"Hang Miss Vernon," Mr. Yardon spoke angrily. "You'll not get wise advice from her."

Drusilla pinched his arm.

"I'm afraid you forget," she said, "when first I came, you told me that Miss Auricula was very lady-like, and I think she is quite a grande dame; but you need not fear, she is dull; I do not often go to see her?"

Mr. Yardon uttered an impatient exclamation. "Miss Vernon's a safe guide about house-keeping and dressing and so forth, but she's not the pattern I wish you to follow, in her ways with—with men. I don't want to be hard on her, but she's not so young as she was, and she means to marry."

Drusilla looked at him in simple wonder.

"Guardian! I have heard you say that it is every woman's duty to get married; what can you mean?"

He shook his head:

"I did not say just that, child. I said it was the duty of a woman to marry, provided she was young and healthy, but you never heard me say it was a woman's duty to get herself married. Look you here, Drusilla, you are going to marry Luke Stanmore; you care for him, I have seen it, and he loves you well enough to satisfy any woman. Now, you are my ward, and I'm not going to let you play fast and loose with any man. Well! let bygones be; but I shall tell Miss Savvay of your engagement, as soon as she comes to the Manor House. I'm not going to have the captain here again till he knows you are engaged. He's not in a position to marry, I can tell you that; he'll not be able to free himself in his lifetime; he'll be a poor man to the end of his days. The old man checked himself. "I don't know what interest that can have for you, seeing that you belong to Luke Stanmore."

Drusilla rose up, she was struggling against herself. A new strange restraint was warning her not to irritate Mr. Yardon, and she strove angrily not to yield to the awe with which this stern old man inspired her.

"You talk of me as if I was a sheep or a dog," she pouted out her red lips. "I told you I had been hurried into this. I like Mr. Stanmore, but—"

"Listen, child?" He spoke sternly and caught hold of her wrist as though he feared she would not stay to listen. "I am not a tyrant, Drusilla; if you want to break altogether with Luke Stanmore, do it at once, only there shall be no playing fast and loose in this house. Give me a plain answer whether you wish your engagement ended—Yes or No?"

Drusilla moved her head wearily, all this fuss seemed to her so unnecessary, and then she began to consider pros and cons.

"Why should you think I want to break with Mr. Stanmore," she said. "I like him?"

She moved to the door as Mr. Yardon let her go, he had warned her, and yet he felt that he did not trust her.

Mr. Yardon's dissatisfaction with his ward had softened his feelings with regard to Maisie. He had a certain pride in feeling that his granddaughter would not be capable of flirting. It was probable that in the beginning, Maisie had, as he expressed it, made up to Mr. Stanmore, but her grandfather was just enough to own that if she had done this it must have been from liking, not mere flirting; his own observation having shown him how quiet her manner was both with Mr. Vernon and with Mr. Boyd, or with any other stray visitor at the Hall. If she still liked Stanmore the sooner ought she to know of Drusilla's engagement. There was a shrewd twinkle in the old man's eyes as he went to the library.

"Set a thief to catch a thief—I say set a girl to watch

another girl when they both care for the same man, Maisie will be the best of watch dogs."

But for all that he felt nervous at approaching the subject with his granddaughter. He found her in the library writing.

Mr. Yardon was one of the fortunate mortals who have a readiness in seizing opportunities.

"Are you writing to Miss Savvay, Maisie?"

It was so new for her grandfather to take an interest in her doings that the girl felt a sudden warmth at her heart, and this showed gratefully in her dark eyes.

"Yes," she said, "I am so glad she is to stay."

The last words annoyed Mr. Yardon.

"Very well—" he had meant to say it so much more gently—"you can tell her then that Drusilla is engaged. I wish Miss Savvay to know it and Captain Wentworth also. You'll make it clear to her that it not a secret, Maisie?"

He had kept looking at the books opposite him, but now he turned and bent down as if he were choosing a volume from one of the shelves behind him.

"She is engaged to Mr. Stanmore, I suppose?"

Maisie was better prepared than he had expected. Less than an hour ago she, from her window, had seen a meeting of Luke Stanmore and Drusilla, it was not very lover-like, yet something in Mr. Stanmore's manner had at once warned her of the truth. Since then she had been trying not to think; she had only resolved that no one should know the pain she suffered. She was stupefied with the sudden certainty of her loss; so stupefied that she could not realize the trial that lay before her.

"Yes!" Her calm tone surprised him, he turned round and looked at her, but Maisie went on writing as if she were undisturbed.

Her grandfather felt an involuntary admiration. He fumbled with the books a few minutes longer, then he said huskily:

"Make my kind regards to Miss Savvay?" and he went away.

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CHAPTER XX.

FOR the next two days Maisie could not have said how life went. Each night was a long, tortured wakefulness, and each day was dream-like. Drusilla did not speak of her engagement or of Luke Stanmore, and Maisie felt that it was unnecessary to force the subject. As yet she could not analyse the dull, dreadful pain that gripped her till she could scarcely bear it. She knew, in a dim, far-off way, that this sorrow was not purely selfish; that she grieved for Stanmore almost more than for herself. She could not believe in Drusilla's love for him. She shrank from the girl's deceit with a horror equalling the blind trust she had felt. But she only seemed to think clearly in her long, wakeful nights, and she knew the convictions that came to her in those dark hours might be like most night thoughts, exaggerated.

She looked so worn and pale at luncheon on Saturday that even Mr. Yardon saw the change in her.

"You want a good walk, Maisie," he said, "Why don't the two of you go across the common as far as Ruddock Wood?"

"Drusilla gave a silvery, rippling laugh.

"You dear thing," she looked so sweetly at him, "don't you know that we are engaged this afternoon? We are going to tea with Miss Savvay."

"Is that so?"

Mr. Yardon frowned a little.

"You will give my best regards to Miss Savvay, Maisie, and—and I will come and meet you on your way home."

"Thank you," Maisie, said.

Drusilla looked into her plate and began a game which she was fond of playing—flinging little bread pellets dex-

terously into her plate, so as to form some definite figure.

The girl bent over her plate as if she were reading her future in the shape the crumbs had taken. She started, when Maisie said—

“Will you be ready at four?”

They found Miss Savvay in a quaint little room at the extreme end of the entrance hall. One of the windows opened under a verandah wreathed in clinging plants, and two steps from this led into a little garden, or, rather, a grass plot, surrounded by flowering shrubs, with a gay bed of spring flowers in the middle of the grass plot. Miss Savvay was sitting under the verandah.

Maisie had to bend her head as she passed out to greet her friend.

“This is pleasant,” Miss Savvay said, as she kissed her; then she turned to Drusilla, “Miss Lescure, I am glad to see you.”

Drusilla was pleased with the admiring look she met.

“You are very kind to be glad,” she said, “I was afraid I should be in the way.”

“That is very sweet; you must give me a kiss, my dear; you are not likely to be in the way; it is a pleasure to look at you.”

Drusilla smiled, and then she looked back into the room behind her.

“What a charming room,” she said. “I never saw anything so pretty; these little brackets and all this china; I never saw anything like it. May I go in and examine them?”

Miss Savvay smiled.

“This is a poor little room, but my mother was fond of it. You must see the Manor House itself, and you, too, Maisie, you ought to see it. There is an old oak staircase, and upstairs there is a picture gallery, and, I believe, some really valuable tapestry.”

"Is there a ghost?" said Drusilla.

"I have never seen one; but I was young when I left the Hall."

"There are always foolish stories about an old house. This one has been shut up, off and on, for thirty years. You have never seen it, have you, Maisie? No, I thought not. You must see it next time you come. Lawrence and his friend are out to-day."

Miss Savvay was as bright as the sunshine of a spring day, and full of cheery talk. Her keen, wise eyes had been feasting on Drusilla's beauty, and as she spoke she saw a cloud fall on the lovely face.

She turned at once to Maisie. "May I ask if you talked to my nephew?" she said. "He said he had been charmingly entertained; I hope you found him pleasant."

"I did not talk to Captain Wentworth," Maisie answered. "I was listening to Mr. Boyd."

"Then it was you alone who so bewitched him," Miss Savvay looked at Drusilla, as the girl turned from the china, "he said he had not heard that you were bespoken."

A bright flush of annoyance showed on Drusilla's face. Miss Savvay imagined it to be a natural confusion at the mention of her engagement; and this suddenly recalled the fact which Drusilla's beauty had put out of her remembrance, that Mr. Stanmore was a faithless flirt.

"Lawrence is very pleasant," she looked at Maisie again; "it is a pity he can't marry, but unless he finds an heiress able and willing to pay his debts, I see no chance for him."

"Perhaps he does not care to marry?"

Maisie hardly knew why she looked at Drusilla, and saw that the girl was listening with interest.

"Perhaps not; he was laughing at his friend this morning. Mr. Boyd is so anxious to find a wife. He is one of the lucky men who need not look out for an heiress; he

seems to be a millionaire ; by-the-bye, Miss Lescure," she suddenly looked full into the room at Drusilla, "Mr. Boyd says he has met you somewhere ; do you remember him?"

Drusilla felt a sudden shock.

"Yes," she said, indifferently. "I saw him once when I was travelling."

Miss Savvay was going to ask a question, but the girl had moved to the farthest corner of the little room, and was examining a china saucer. Miss Savvay turned again to Maisie.

"I never heard of any one so rich as Mr. Boyd is. At least I may have heard, but I certainly never talked to a man who goes yachting all over the world, who has a villa on Lake Como, and a lovely house in the Bay of Naples ; he seems to live like a royal personage when he is at home."

Drusilla longed to speak, but she continued her inspection of the china and curios on the mantel-shelf and the brackets within the room.

Does he live abroad?" Maisie said.

"I fancy he spends most of his time abroad, but he has a beautiful place in Devonshire, 'Beaulands,' and he said that when he marries, he shall have a house in London, in either Mayfair or Belgravia."

Maisie sat looking at her friend, this common-place, gossip talk was so unlike Miss Savvay, it puzzled her. Presently tea was brought, and Drusilla came out and took her place near the dainty little table with its fringed cloth and old-fashioned china and silver burden.

Maisie leaned back, with a smile on her parted lips.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself," Drusilla said.

"It is all so beautiful," Maisie said ; "from where I sit, I see those grand old trees spreading on and on, till they seem to form a wood at the end of the park ; then the grey tone of the old stone work and the old brick wing

look more like a house in a story than a real one ; a house in which one race of people has lived for so long must be different from a mere modern house.

Drusilla turned away her head ; she was gaping.

"An old house is, perhaps, not so healthy," Miss Savvay said ; "there is a mustiness about this one ; but there is a certain charm in the links of an unbroken succession, that connects one generation with another ; that china, for instance, which Miss Lescure was examining, is to me full of little family episodes and memories."

Drusilla had become silent and abstracted ; she rose, and crossing the grass she bent over the rhododendrons that made a rich purple background to the green semi-circle of lawn.

The tall, graceful figure in black went on, bending now and then over some rarer blossom, till she passed out of sight behind the spring flower-bed in the centre of the grass.

"She is very lovely," Miss Savvay said ; "do you like her, Maisie ?"

Maisie hesitated an instant.

"Yes," she said, "she is very sweet."

Miss Savvay gave her friend a searching look, but Maisie bore it.

There was a large myrtle in a tub, partly sheltered by the verandah, and Miss Savvay looked at it in search of a fresh sprig, as she began to speak.

"She is charming ; but she is not a fit wife for young Stanmore—dear me, no. I have nothing to say against him ; he'll get on in life fast enough, but his life will be a work-a-day one, and his wife will be called on to share his cares as well as his pleasures. That pretty, showy creature is too expensive a luxury for a rising engineer. She should marry a millionaire."

'My grandfather says that she and Mr. Stanmore are

very much attached to one another ;" said Maisie, gravely.

Miss Savvay suddenly held out the sprig of myrtle to Maisie.

"Nonsense ; you must not be vexed ; but your grandfather is as blind as a bat about an attachment ; don't know the right sort from the wrong. I said all that just now about Mr. Boyd, on purpose ; I fancy our beauty will not be quite so devoted to her engineer when next they meet. Boyd is just the man for her. Why should the pretty creature be robbed of her diamonds and her frocks, and all the gay things that would set her off and make her happy ?"

Maisie's eyes were round with surprise ; she stared at her friend in some bewilderment.

"Do you think that money, of itself, will make Drusilla happy ?" she said.

"Yes, I do. Money would not make you happy ; nor me either, Maisie ; but if you gave Miss Lescure her free choice, she would not hesitate. I fancy she will care more for the means he has, than for the man she marries."

"You are hard."

Maisie looked after Drusilla, who stood, half-hidden, among the trees beyond the garden. It seemed treason to talk of the girl in this way.

"I'm afraid we must not stay much longer. Mr. Yardon said he should come and meet us."

"Well, then, let him come on here ; I should have no scruple in saying to him what I have said to you, Maisie, and he might help matters.

Maisie looked gravely at her friend.

"You surely are not in earnest ; it would, at least, make Mr. Stanmore unhappy, and my grandfather would be very angry if Drusilla were to behave so ill."

She rose from her seat and walked on towards Miss Lescure.

Miss Savvay looked after her and shook her head.

"Behave so ill, indeed! As if anyone need keep faith with such a fickle fellow. I wish Maisie would pluck up a spirit and despise him. No, you don't, Eleanor Savvay, you know very well you would give the top-joint of your little finger if you could break this engagement, and bring the engineer back to that sweet, brave girl."

She was obliged to quit her reflections, for Drusilla had come back and was asking to be shown a way home through the park.

"Captain Wentworth told me about it," she said, with a lovely light in her eyes.

Miss Savvay looked at her less admiringly than she had done on her arrival, though she still felt the fascination of her fresh beautiful youth.

"He told you about that gate, did he?" she said, sharply; he might also have said that no one ever uses that gate except the master, and that he only has the key of it. I am afraid it is useless to go that way to-day. You would find the gate locked, and it would be a long round back to the entrance gates."

Drusilla made the prettiest apologies; she was distressed to have suggested anything troublesome; and then she bent down to kiss her farewell.

"I should like to come and see you again soon, may I?"

She spoke so caressingly, so like a dear little child, that Miss Savvay was ashamed of herself.

"Come whenever you like," she said, genially, "I won't say you'll be as welcome as flowers in May; you are like a flower, yourself, you know—like a tall June lily."

Drusilla smiled and nodded, and kissed her hand, looking back as she walked after Maisie, who was already going down the shady walk that led to the avenue.

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE had not been so much talk in Figgsmarsh since the news of old Mr. Savvay's death came from Rome twenty years ago.

It seemed almost hard on the worthy villagers that they should get such budgets of news at one and the same time, an unfairness towards the rest of the year, equalling that of the flowering trees and shrubs of early June, which monopolise more than their share of the year's beauty.

First of all, had come the apparition of the beautiful foreign lady at the Hall, without so much as a word of warning, and then the almost simultaneous love-making between her and Mr. Stanmore and the home-coming of the squire.

But this last event was a grievance—it was indeed probable that the Figgsmarsh worthies, notably the carpenter, Mr. Frame, and the blacksmith, Mr. Foxley, to say nothing of the newsman, Mr. Simon, or, as he was usually called, Sim Parrot, would carry a sore memory of it to their dying day. Joshua Frame had used what he was pleased to call a vast amount of brain power in the designing of a triumphal arch, with which he had intended to encumber the road on the day of the captain's home-coming.

"It were a work of hart, that's what t'was," he was saying mournfully to the blacksmith, as he leaned against the cottage door-post while old Foxley sat smoking and listening. "I'd shown it to the vicar—sort of compliment, you understan me, neighbor, more an I set any store by parson's judgment; an he says, leave me this till to-morrow, will you? In course I did so; an from what the

missus hev heard 'tis plain as the nose on yer face, Mr. Foxley, 'at the parson knowed as the captain was going to sneak in in this here ordinary manner ; why I was axiolly in the road near by the station an I saw the cab going along, an I took no more account on it an if 'thad been the parson hisself. No, Mr. Foxley I'll not go to church come to-morrow, nor Sunday after neither. I'm longer in the parish than what the vicar is. I pays my doos when called on, and I've not been treated on the square."

Mr. Foxley took out his pipe with some alacrity. Joshua Frame's voice was monotonous, and the blacksmith considered he had been long enough on the stump for the present.

" 'Tis modern," he said with superior wisdom ; " bless you its the small end of the wedge that's a piercin everywhere. Why do the squire—you calls him capen, Joshua ; to my mind he's a capen in the army, but at home among his tenants an' his neighbors why he takes his rightful title sure enough and that's Squire of Figgsmarsh."

" Well, what about the squire ? " Foxley asked, the carpenter's propensity to turn down by paths in his talk worried him.

" Well, 'tis the same with him as the rest. None of the gentry now-a-days don't see no use in superfluss, that's the word, superfluss expense, triumphal arches and the rest ; well that means expense and drink money and treating, and you see no one can't take no notice if he sets his own face agin being took notice of. I'm blessed if I don't think the old man up the hill of more valler to the tradespeople than what the captain's like to be. Good-mornin, Miss Foxley."

Harriet came forward from the kitchen, but it was evident that she had not been drawn forward by the attraction exercised by Mr. Frame. Her pale blue eyes stared

past him even while she nodded, and he turned to see who might be passing.

Then indeed he knew that his gossip was over ; Mrs. Greig was coming across the road, and between her and the loquacious carpenter there reigned a peaceful, but none the less for its silence, a poignant antipathy.

For this reason, doubtless, they spoke to one another with extra civility, and the carpenter stepped down on to the path, so that Mrs. Greig could pass into the cottage.

But Mrs. Greig had come out in search of sympathy, not to pour out her trouble to such a listener as Mr. Frame.

"I couldn't think of intruding," she said, "I'll look in presently when Mr. Foxley is disengaged."

"Come in, ma'am, come in," the blacksmith said heartily, his handsome old face beaming as he kept back a hardly repressed chuckle at the civilities interchanged between his friends. He would have enjoyed their joint company ; but the determination in Mrs. Greig's closed lips warned him that he must choose between her and the carpenter.

"Good-day, ma'am," Joshua said. "Good-day, Foxley," and nodding to Harriet, whose pale face showed above her father's high chair-back, Mr. Frame went back to his carpenter's shed on the further side of Vicarage Lane.

Mrs. Greig did not begin upon her trouble ; she understood mankind, as she expressed herself, too well for that. She asked how Mr. Foxley felt, if he did not feel a touch of east wind under this warm sunshine, and, in the same breath, was sure he didn't or he could not look so bright and altogether cheering.

"It is such a thing to be a family man," she said smiling, "what with Harriet," she ventured a glance at the pale face which showed no trace of sympathy, "and, Mr. George, you are never, so to say, alone."

"Bless you, ma'am," the blacksmith said heartily. "I like to be alone so long as I have my pipe for company. I've a deal to think about taking one day with another."

She gazed at him admiringly: "No doubt of it," she said, "with such a head as yours so full of wisdom you could never be at a loss as some are."

Harriet stuck her tongue into her cheek, she had a secret belief that Mrs. Greig aimed at being her stepmother, and this flattery was one of her weapons.

Foxley half-closed one eye and then he looked compassionately at his visitor.

"We are all at a loss sometimes," he said, "but I take it a woman can help a man with her hands while the man helps her with his head; so, as I've said before, neighbor, when there's trouble forrard you can lay it before me."

He had not turned his head, but he knew that his daughter could hear every word he said; he knew too that jealousy interfered with Harriet's cookery, and he was in no fear of offending Mrs. Greig.

"I might call it puzzle more than trouble," Mrs. Greig's narrow forehead puckered into yellow furrows, "its concerning my lodger—and it beats me."

She heard Harriet's gown rustle as she leaned forward to listen. The blacksmith had begun to smoke and he did not interrupt.

"You thought and thought that he was gone on Miss Derrick, and then, when the French lady came, he was always going up to see her; he don't go near so often since Miss Derrick came back, and yet I've been told by one as ought to know that he's as good as promised to Miss Les-cure."

Harriet gave a defiant snort.

"Its not true—who said it?"

Mrs. Greig raised her eyebrows. It was wonderful she thought that this big flabby woman could live with such a

polite young fellow as her brother and such an old gentleman as Mr. Foxley, who, to Mrs. Greig, represented perfection in most ways, and yet be so uncouth ; yes, uncouth was the word for Harriet, and it must be owned that Foxley's daughter looked repulsive enough as she bent forward, her eyes darker than usual with anger and her heavy lipped mouth pushed forward in sullen challenge.

"I don't care to gossip," said Mrs. Greig. "Mr. Vernon told us last Sunday as we didn't ought to gossip about what's not our business ; though this partly is my business, because when Mr. Stanmore marries he'll not want to live in lodgings." She looked up, Harriet was scowling till her yellow pallor was hideous to behold. "I mean this," Mrs. Greig's words came more quickly : "Four days ago, Mr. Stanmore and the beauty was sitting hand in hand in the summer-house in the garden—and all at once," Mrs. Greig lowered her voice as if she were speaking of a crime, "he kissed her," she said severely.

"Well," said the blacksmith, "and there's no wonder in that surely."

Mrs. Greig felt so disturbed that she forgot to watch Harriet.

"Well," she said, "Mr. Stanmore's not free ; he hasn't ways like some gents ; if Mr. Stanmore kisses a lady, its because he cares for her, and so on ; and this happened four days ago, and yet, my lodger hasn't took a bit of notice to me about it, no more than if nothing had happened."

The blacksmith smoked on, his daughter stood leaning against the wall unbelieving and contemptuous.

Mr. Foxley was a crony of Warren's and he sometimes heard of the doings at Yardon Hall from the butler ; but he was a safe confident, and, moreover, he had a complete disbelief in the discretion of women.

"Give a female anything to keep," he said. "She can't do it ; there ain't nothing she's so liberal in as news, she'll

always add some of her own to a story afore she passes it on."

"Tell ye what it is, Mrs. Greig," he said at last, "you've no call to worry yourself, 'tis maybe a secret between the young folks, and the least said about it the better. The old gentleman is hard, no doubt on it; perhaps, he don't want to lose his pretty visitor. We can't tell; time will show, so make your mind easy."

Mrs. Greig sighed. She had eased her mind, but she was was not comforted. She liked her lodger; he paid regularly; he gave little trouble and he spoke and behaved like a gentleman, and he kept early hours; she was not likely to get his match. She wished to linger, but she knew Mr. Foxley's ways; he had had enough of her for the present, so she gave a friendly nod and prepared to take her leave.

Harriet had retreated to the kitchen and a low gibbering sound indicated that she was talking to herself. Her father knew that this was a sign of mental disturbance, and he feared it would affect later on the cooking of his supper; he also knew that remonstrance was useless. So he sat still, while every now and then some abusive epithet sounded above the monotonous gibber in which the woman's frenzy found vent. It seemed to Foxley that Harriet was threatening Miss Lescure, but he could not hear any coherent meaning in her bursts of anger.

He smiled sadly as he gave himself up to the soothing influence of his pipe.

"Poor lass!" he said. "Her brains wasn't all born with her and she knows it; and her temper gets fretted in seeking after her strayed wits—poor fractious soul."

CHAPTER XXII.

As Maisie and Drusilla went down to the Manor House there had been little talk between them. Maisie had been unusually silent and Drusilla had walked on singing in a pleasant but thin voice some fragments of French peasant lays.

As they came home, the girls seemed to have changed characters.

Maisie was brighter than she had been for days ; it had been delightful to see her old friend's kind face, and Miss Savvay's warm kisses and the tender clasp of her fingers lingered with the girl as she walked homewards.

Even to this tried friend Maisie could not have told her trouble, she, as much as she could, kept her own mental sight closed to the wound that had been dealt her, but that great mysterious power, sympathy, had made itself felt, and without one spoken word a healing touch had been laid on her grief. She could hardly believe that this comfort had come within reach ; her friend had said she would make a long stay at the Manor House ; for weeks to come Maisie knew that she would find love and help close at hand.

She had spoken more than once to Drusilla since they left the wood, but she had only received monosyllables in reply. Miss Lescure had lagged behind, she was troubled by an unpleasant memory and its presence doubled the steepness of the way.

"Are you tired?" Maisie stopped and looked round at her companion.

"Tired!" Drusilla's voice sounded irritable, "I should think so, my back aches with this steep climb. I had no idea it was such a hill."

"We are nearly home," Maisie said encouragingly. "Stay," she added as Mr. Yardon came in sight, "my grandfather has kept his word, he is coming to meet us, he will help you along."

Miss Lescure's fair face had a defeated look on it, she only smiled faintly when they met Mr. Yardon.

"Are you tired?" his eyes had passed over Maisie, and rested on the face he loved to look at, "take my arm young lady, you have not had proper training or you'd make nothing of such a walk."

"I call it a desperately tiring one." Drusilla pouted and turned away her head.

Mr. Yardon looked at his granddaughter.

"That Foxley woman wants to speak to you," he said, "I told Warren to let her wait in the hall."

"I'll go on," but the brightness left Maisie's face, she had been listening to the lark's song, with that uplifted feeling which sometimes seems to be in the very air of Spring. Now it ceased to move her, the mention of Harriet Foxley had brought her back to reality and her burden was once more weighing at her heart.

As she went down and then up the steps of the sunk fence, she was conscious that this mood was not one in which she ought to indulge. She wished she could get to like this woman, but besides Harriet's covert insolence the prying peering curiosity in her eyes had always a disconcerting effect on Maisie.

She found Harriet sitting in a corner of the hall, the woman rose slowly when she saw Miss Derrick.

"Father says," she looked so inquisitive that Maisie felt her color rise, "that Miss Savvay, the lady at the Manor House is a friend of yours, miss——"

She paused here and stood staring as if so far she had been repeating by rote, and had forgotten the end of her sentence.

Maisie smiled at her.

"Sit down, you must be tired with your walk up-hill. Can I do anything for you with Miss Savvay, Harriet?"

Harriet laughed and showed her long yellow teeth; she seemed really amused that Miss Derrick should think she wanted help from her.

"It's about Matilda," she said, "it's no favor; they've taken on a new kitchen maid at the Manor House, and that's my Cousin Matilda. An' Mrs. Prew says as she comes from Wales and don't have no acquaintances. I may go up and see her now and again while Tilda's so strange like."

"Well, that is kind of Mrs. Prew." Maisie wondered what she could have to do with the arrangement.

Harriet had resumed her seat, she moved her head uneasily at Maisie's words.

"Well," she said harshly, "perhaps you'd now and again have a note or a message for the lady, and 'tis the same to me whether I goes across the common or Mr. Yardon's meadows. I must pass your gate anyway, so if you please I'll call now and again."

Maisie felt ashamed of her dislike, the woman had looked her in the face while she spoke, and she seemed anxious that Miss Derrick should accept her services.

"Thank you very much," Maisie said—"It will save you some distance if you go through the grounds when you come. I will ask Mr. Yardon's leave for this."

A ring at the door bell interrupted the talk. Harriet seemed anxious to go, but Warren was opening the front door and he admitted Mr. Stanmore.

The two women looking on from the corner of the hall saw how determined Mr. Stanmore looked as he crossed the hall unconscious of observers.

Maisie went forward, "Good morning," she said, then she added.

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"Do you want my grandfather, I fancy you will find him in the garden."

Stanmore bowed, thanked her and passed on.

Maisie had forgotten Miss Foxley. She looked round at her and saw an odious grin on the woman's face ; she gave a familiar nod, said "good morning, miss," and disappeared by a door on the left that led to the offices.

Maisie stood shivering, the hateful mocking look sank into her heart, she felt powerless under it ; was this creature a witch or how could she divine thoughts which Maisie imagined she had kept hidden from every one. She hurried up to her room and looked out of the window.

Mr. Stanmore and her grandfather were standing on the lawn with their backs to the house but it was evident that Stanmore was speaking very earnestly.

Drusilla sat near them on a garden chair, her head was bent and her face showed only in profile, but Maisie saw that the girl was angry.

Maisie moved away from the window, she did not see how impatiently Drusilla turned to the speakers as they came up to her. "I leave you two to settle it together," Mr. Yardon said, "mind Drusilla I won't have any shilly-shallying. I hate unnecessary delay—three weeks or a month is long enough to keep any man waiting."

He went off without waiting for an answer.

Stanmore had found Drusilla alone in the drawing-room, and he had taken her in his arms and asked her to fix a time for their marriage ; he did not know that Mr. Yardon was just outside the open window fastening up a clematis which the wind had torn down from the house. But Drusilla drew herself away :

"It is too soon," she said, and then she heard her guardian laugh.

"Come out Drusilla," he said, "here is a chair for you. Ah how d'ye do Stanmore, what do you want I wonder."

He laughed and they all adjourned to the lawn much to Stanmore's vexation, he felt sure that he could have settled the matter far more easily if he had been left alone with Drusilla. Mr. Yardon's departure was therefore a relief, he was eager to plead his own cause without assistance.

"Come to the summer-house," he said, bending over her, "we can talk better there."

Drusilla looked up at him, with a sweet plaintive expression.

"Won't you let me rest here," she said softly. "I have had a long walk and I am so tired."

Stanmore was disappointed, he did not care to talk in front of the windows for the benefit of any of the household who might be on the watch, but as he wanted to gain his point, he was willing to yield to her.

"What do you say to three weeks, dearest?" He said it very tenderly, at that moment he felt that this exquisite creature's happiness was a very precious charge.

Drusilla pouted a moment and then she laughed in her pretty rippling way.

"Men are so amusing. How can I get ready in three weeks? I have not clothes enough even for this dull place, and you said you should not stay here when your line was finished."

This was the first allusion she had made to her future life with him and he was delighted.

"Darling—of course I am ignorant about such things—you see I have always lived alone or with men, but I believe now-a-days gowns can be had much more quickly than they could formerly. I only want you to fix a definite day—it will be better for us all to have it settled."

She frowned a little, and then she looked up at him ingenuously.

"You see," she said, "I want advice and only a woman can give it me. No one in Figgsmarsh knows anything

about London shops or dressmakers except Miss Savvay." She paused with a pretty pathetic expression. "I am afraid you would not like me to consult her."

She spoke timidly as if she really cared for his opinion.

"Why not, dearest?" he answered, "Miss Savvay is just the person who can help you, she often goes to town and spends part of every year there, and she must know all about shopping. I am sorry to be such a duffer," he laughed, "but I'm quite out of that sort of thing."

Drusilla looked her own bright self again. She rose and began to walk across the lawn with her lover.

"I like you best as you are" she said, "it does not seem manly for a man to know about shopping, I hated that Mr. Ray because he interfered about my shopping in Paris."

Stanmore laughed.

"He was a bold man," he said, "and I dare say you had your own way after all."

Drusilla gave a comical glance out of her half closed eyes.

"Poor man, I ought not to be hard on him. I got up early and did my shopping before he waked."

"Come out of sight of the house," Stanmore said as he laughed at her confession. "I want to give you something, and I should like to try if it fits your finger."

Drusilla's eyes sparkled. It was worth while being engaged she thought if the engagement brought her a gift, and it occurred to her that if she were very nice to Luke Stanmore he might repeat his offering.

"We will go to the summer-house," she said cheerfully, and she led the way across the grass.

Stanmore had taken a tiny parcel from his pocket, and, when Drusilla had seated herself in the summer-house, took off the outer wrappings and opened a little casket he showed what seemed to Drusilla a blaze of light.

It came from a ring, a plain gold circle with a narrow upright oval closely set with brilliants which flashed out

every color in the prism as Stanmore placed it on the girl's slender finger.

"Oh how lovely, how beautiful!" she cried. "Is it really mine?" he was bending over her and she put up her lips and kissed him.

"Dearest girl," he whispered, as he slipped his arm round her, "you will say this day four weeks. Yes, I know you will not keep me waiting for my happiness."

Drusilla leaned back in saucy triumph and shook her head at him.

"Don't make too sure," she said, "how do you know that you will be as happy married as you are now; this is much nicer than being married." She nestled her head against his shoulder, but his enraptured answer took her by surprised and she drew herself a little away from him.

"You are too encroaching," she said, "but I shall not spoil you, let us go back to the lawn."

"Presently my darling," he held her hands fast in his, for this yielding on her part to his love had been so unexpected that he could not give it up at once, "you forget one thing," he said tenderly, you have not given me my answer; I have been waiting ever since for you to fix the day."

"How persevering you are," she said gaily, she rose from the bench and laughed as she freed her hands, "why don't you trust me, and then when everything is ready I will let you know—" a stern look in his eyes made her hurry out her next words—"please wait," she said shyly, "wait till I have consulted Miss Savvay. I can't see her to-morrow because to-morrow is Sunday, but she is sure to come and see us very soon, she was so kind to me to-day, you will wait won't you?" She spoke so gently that he could not resist her.

"Very well," he said, "I will wait a week or so but I shall come very soon to learn your decision. I am going

to London this evening to tell my news to one of my remaining relations, and I shall not be back till Monday ; so I shan't see you till Tuesday my pet."

He took a loving farewell and left her. Drusilla stood looking at her ring twisting her hand about till the stones sent out tongues of flame-colored light.

She felt that she cared for Mr. Stanmore more than she had ever done before, more than for any one she had ever seen, he was so clever she thought, surely he would be successful, and perhaps this relation he was going to see was rich and would leave him money ; yes her lover was wiser than she was, he had no doubt a motive for this journey, and she had felt so vexed when he said he was going away, that she had almost asked him to give up the journey. She resolved to ask Miss Savvay's advice and to fix a time for her marriage, but she also resolved that there was no need for hurry, if she kept Luke Stanmore in good temper and petted him, she felt sure he would always take her part, and then she might snap her fingers at Mr. Yardon. She thought too, that Stanmore would make a more devoted husband if he were kept waiting a little longer than he expected.

"He is a very dear fellow," she was looking at her ring and making it reflect itself in the long mirror in her room ; "but for all that I want to amuse myself a bit before I quite belong to him, and I'm going to see a little more of Captain Wentworth and Mr. Boyd too before I marry—no there's no occasion to hurry."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DRUSILLA spent the chief part of the evening in making her ring send out colored flashes of light, she forgot the perplexity in which she had walked back from the Manor House.

Next day in church when she saw that Mr. Boyd was not in Captain Wentworth's pew, she remembered Miss Savvay question, and the blood rushed warmly to her face. Why had she confessed to her remembrance of Mr. Boyd. She wondered whether he had told Miss Savvay about the short-frocked child he had seen at Cannes, but she fancied he had not done this or she should have discovered some patronage in the manner of Maisie's friend, and Miss Savvay had been on the contrary caressing. Miss Lescure, it is to be feared, was not in either a prayerful or an attentive mood. Mr. Vernon's sermon seemed to pass over her head, she was so intent on planning a visit to the Manor House at a likely time for finding Mr. Boyd.

She felt that she must see him at once and without witnesses. She was not going to ask a favor of him, but she thought he would see by her manner that she wanted him to forget his previous knowledge of her.

When she saw him at the Hall she had had a vague feeling of discomfort, she knew that the square face with its keen hard eyes was not unknown to her, but she could not call to mind where she had seen it. Miss Savvay's words supplied the clue and created a restless eagerness to see this man again.

About two o'clock on Monday, Miss Lescure presented herself at the Manor House, and asked for Miss Savvay.

Captain Wentworth's man, well-dressed and well-trained, a great contrast, Drusilla thought, to pompous old Warren, said that Miss Savvay had gone to town for the day, she was not expected home till evening, could he take any message for Miss Savvay.

The dining-room door opened and Captain Wentworth came out with a cigar in his mouth.

"Won't you come in and rest," he said, after he had given her a delighted welcome, "you'll write a message for my aunt, perhaps, and she shall have it on her arrival." And he took his charming visitor to the library, a snug out-of-the-way room, as full of old books as the library at Yardon, but furnished with far more luxury.

Captain Wentworth placed writing materials ready, while Drusilla stood pulling off her gloves. She felt in her element, happier than she had been since she came to Yardon, for this promised to be an adventure, and she meant to get as much amusement from it as she could. She looked at Captain Wentworth, he was not staring, but she saw that he was admiring her. She sat down and took up the pen placed ready for her, and then she paused—

It was not likely she thought that Captain Wentworth would tell tales, and Miss Savvay need not know any details, beyond the mere fact that Miss Lescure had called in her absence.

She laid down the pen.

"Really, I have nothing to write about," she said, with her rippling laugh. "I am ashamed to have taken up your time." She rose as if she were going away, and took up her gloves. "Please say to Miss Savvay, how sorry I am to miss the pleasure of seeing her, and the rooms she so kindly promised to show me."

"What rooms were they, I wonder," Captain Wentworth smiled.

Miss Lescure was about the loveliest creature he had

ever seen, but his opinion of her simplicity was not quite so exalted as it had been at their first meeting.

Drusilla thought a moment.

"One was a room with pictures," she said, "and another had tapisserie, ah! you call it in English tapestry on the walls."

While she talked to him she exaggerated her pretty foreign accent, for she saw how delightedly he was listening.

"Will you allow me to have the honor of showing you those rooms?" he said, "it is too bad that you should have had a long walk for nothing. I will try to be a good showman, if you will give me the chance?"

She smiled at him.

"I have seen you, so it is not for nothing that I came," she said, "it will be very kind of you to show me this wonderful tapestry, I have been told that it is three hundred years old."

"It is quite as old as that."

He touched one of the book shelves on the right side of the library and suddenly an opening appeared as a portion of the book-shelves slid out of sight.

"Ah!" Drusilla cried, "you are a conjuror."

"Those are only sham books," he said, "they serve to mask this sliding door, I will go first and show you the way?"

He went on and she followed through two other rooms. Drusilla wished to look at the furniture and the ornaments on the tables and cabinets, but the captain was holding the last door open, and passing through it she saw a small turning staircase at the end of a passage. She wondered if they were to go upstairs, why he had not taken her across the hall and up the great staircase which she had seen on her last visit. But she forgot this when they reached the picture gallery, a splendid long room with win-

dows on one side, and at its further end looking into the—the other side and end were hung with large pictures, most of them family portraits.

Drusilla felt awed when she heard that all these wigged and grandly dressed gentlemen and the ladies, some with high powdered heads and stiff figures, and others with flowing curls and the loosest of robes, were all ancestors of Captain Wentworth.

"The name was Wentworth till this property came to my grandmother," he said, "and it was settled that who ever came into possession after her death should resume the old name. I can never remember being a Savvay, it was all planned for me."

"I wonder," the girl said, thoughtfully, "that you could stay away so long from such a beautiful old place?"

"And yet you suggested that I should find it dull."

"To stay here always—but London and Paris is not so very far away. I should think one must always be lively in Paris?"

Captain Wentworth looked at her with increased admiration, if he could ever marry, he thought here was a woman to suit him, but Captain Wentworth had served his apprenticeship to the world and he knew perfectly well that Miss Lescure would not dream of marrying him if she knew that he had come down to the Manor House to consider the best means of compounding with his creditors. At the same time Miss Lescure was lawful pastime, and moreover she was his visitor, and he was bound to amuse her as much as possible.

"There is a fine view of the old trees from this window," he said.

And so there was. The trees had been planted in far off days for ornament, not as mere timber; there were splendid groups of planes only partly clothed with tender green, and against them and the delicate lime foliage the broad grey

stemmed beech trees were dark and as yet wintry of aspect, as to the elms they still showed only a blur of red on their dark branches. There were long vistas between these groups of giants, and views of green and yellow country with dim blue hills beyond showed more than once at the end of the long grassed drives between the trees. While Drusilla stood gazing and wondering how Captain Wentworth could be poor and yet own all this property, he was watching her face and its changes of expression. He did not hear that the door opened softly, some one looked into the room, and then the door was as softly closed.

"What was that?" Drusilla looked around with alarm in her eyes.

"I heard nothing," Captain Wentworth smiled reassuringly, "I see you have heard of our ghost, but it does not walk here; whenever it has been seen it has been on one side of the Tapestry Room. Shall we go there?"

As he spoke he pushed open a sliding-door between two of the pictures, but this one stuck on its way and failed to produce the magical effect of the book-covered panel which had slid into the wall at the mere touch of a finger.

Drusilla grew pale and she drew back—from the opening.

"You do not really believe in such nonsense," he said. "All these stories are made up, depend on it, for some purpose or another by servants."

Drusilla was unwilling to appear foolish.

"Oh! yes," she said, but she did not go forward. She contented herself with the view of the tapestry she could get from the opening. It was a strangely-shaped room, long and narrow, with the corners taken off so as to form a sort of octagon, the ceiling was coned and painted, and in the middle of it was a shallow lantern above, from which light fell on the glowing blue and green of much of the tapestry. At either end of the room was a colored subject, one a terribly realistic picture of the martyrdom of some saint, the other, a grotesque arrangement of cupids with

watering pots and garden tools in an enormous Italian garden, with statues and vases, and fountains among plots of brilliant flowers. Faded old settees and arm-chairs, and a few spindle-legged tables furnished the edges of this room; the centre was left bare, there was not even a carpet on this dark floor. Drusilla shuddered as she stood in the doorway, and Captain Wentworth laughed at her.

"If our housekeeper were here, she would say you were likely to see our ghost," he said, "I believe that to shiver in a haunted room denotes a likely ghost seer."

Drusilla felt her terror coming back, but she tried to hide it.

"It is not that," she said, "it is because the room looks so gloomy, and that picture there is so ghastly; those dear little cherubs and their watering pots are the best things in the room. Is it very dreadful not to admire your tapestry?"

She gave him one of her winning smiles as she stepped back into the picture gallery.

He stopped to close the door before he joined her.

"It is more curious than beautiful," he said. "I prefer the beautiful in all ways."

Drusilla felt that his admiration was very pleasant, but she also felt that she had been long enough alone with him. In her school life, she had learned that such an adventure as this would be considered compromising. She knew that English girls were permitted much greater freedom than was enjoyed by French ones, but she also knew that a servant had opened the door to her and that he might, perhaps, chatter about her long visit to his master.

"I must be going," she said, "thank you very much for all the pleasure you have given me."

He was opening the door for her to pass out of the gallery, he stood holding it half open while he spoke.

"On the contrary it is quite the other way, it is I who

cannot be grateful enough for the delight of your visit. You will permit me to see you across the park ? ”

Drusilla had expected this and was prepared with her answer. She felt certain that Mr. Boyd was in the house. She believed it was he who had looked into the gallery, for she had heard a footstep, and something seemed to assure her that he would contrive to see her on her way home.

She thought Captain Wentworth was very well-bred and nice, but he had an air of ill-health and dejection which was antipathetic to her. Drusilla liked everyone with whom she came in contact to be fresh and young, or if not in full possession of these attributes to be able fully to minister to her gratifications.

“ No, thank you,” she said, decidedly, though her smile softened her refusal. “ I cannot permit it ; my guardian, Mr. Yardon, would prefer me to come home alone ? ”

Wentworth thought her more charming than ever, she dropped out these words as simply as if she had been a little child, but he had not forgotten Miss Savvay’s caution regarding Mr. Yardon : “ He can be as rude as a bear,” she said, “ and he has no respect of persons.” He decided that it was wiser to give up the pleasure of a walk with Miss Lescure to the probability of being forbidden the house by her pugnacious guardian.

He stood outside the entrance watching the tall graceful girl till she passed out of sight behind a clump of beech trees, completely hidden by their massive grey trunks, marbled near the base with brilliant green and dark olive-tinted moss.

The girl yawned and then laughed at herself. A few months ago she would have thought a talk with Captain Wentworth, an officer and an English gentleman, delightful, and also far beyond her reach ; for though she had listened to her mother’s promises she had not fully believed in them ; and now she had had Captain Wentworth all to herself for

an hour at least—it seemed to Drusilla much longer ; and he had not been very amusing, nor had he held out any prospect of amusement ; she hoped he would have proposed some expedition. No, he was not to be compared in any way to Luke Stanmore, “ and he’s not as rich ” she sighed to herself. She thought just then that if Mr. Stanmore were only rich, really rich—he would be delightful as a husband, but that notion which he had so often expressed that the greatest happiness was to be found in a modest competency, was wholly repugnant to Drusilla, and she turned from it with a feeling of disgust as she once recalled it on her way through the park.

“ After marriage,” she thought, “ the means does not matter so much as the power he has of giving what one wants ; a wife sees so little of a husband who goes to business every day.”

Captain Wentworth had gone back into the house, he was discontented with himself, he knew that he had been dull and dreamy, when he should have made the best of his chances with his lovely visitor. He had unawares suffered himself to be ensnared by her beauty, and all he had cared for had been to feast his eyes on her face and to listen to her pretty half-foreign talk.

“ I might as well be a lout of twenty,” he said savagely, as he went back to his cigar.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A wood of some depth lay between the park and the narrow brook that divided it from Mr. Yardon's meadows ; the chief part of this wood was copse and underwood, but every now and then, huge, gnarled oaks, grey and hoary, rose above the leafage which already showed below them ; these were evidently the survivors of some ancient forest, and had a girth of trunk sufficient to form a hiding place for a pair of lovers.

It was not a lover-like face that now peered from behind the biggest of the oak trunks. The yellow, sullen face of Harriet Foxley was tempered by an expectant smile, as she stood half hidden and listened to some approaching sounds.

There was so little to do at the Manor House, that the household had plenty of leisure for observing all that happened, and for seeing visitors from the village.

Harriet had learned from her cousin on the previous evening, as they came out of church together, that as Mrs. Prew, the housekeeper, was going to town shopping with Miss Savvay, she ('Tilda) could easily show Harriet the wonderful haunted room, without anyone being the wiser. Harriet and her cousin were engaged in examining the tapestry, when voices in the gallery gave them warning to retire. Instead of opening the door by which they had come in, at the top of a back staircase, 'Tilda showed her cousin that there was plenty of room to stand between the heavy tapestry and the wall, so that they had seen Drusilla with the captain, and had listened to much of the talk.

Harriet was greatly relieved. She had felt after Mrs. Greig's revelations that she must do some desperate act

rather than allow the "Frenchwoman"—as she called Miss Lescure,—to marry Mr. Stanmore. There was more danger, she fancied, that such a marriage would happen, because Mr. Yardon was partial to the Frenchwoman, and it was no secret to the village people that he had never made a favorite of his grandchild.

What end the half-witted woman proposed to herself in interfering with Mr. Stanmore's marriage, she, perhaps, hardly knew; till Mr. Stanmore came to Figgsmarsh, she had seemed to be a harmless imbecile. She loved her father and was devoted to his comfort; but she knew that he treated her more as a child than as a woman, and she was very jealous of anyone he praised or noticed. Then Luke Stanmore came to the village, and it seemed to Harriet as if life had changed for her. She had found her idol, and she yielded herself up in a mute adoration that watched, eagle-eyed, for every going and coming of her hero. She had hated Miss Derrick because her father praised Maisie, but when she heard Mrs. Greig couple the girl's name with Mr. Stanmore's, she longed to do Miss Derrick a mischief; she even rejoiced at first to learn that Mr. Stanmore had been seen walking with Miss Lescure. But this talk of marriage had made her furious, and she resolved to watch Drusilla, and to put it out of her power to marry Mr. Stanmore. Mr. Stanmore was only taken with the Frenchwoman's face, that was all; and if Miss Lescure lost her beauty, she would also lose her lover. Harriet remembered now that "Tilda's sister Mary, only a year ago, had taken small-pox and lost all her looks, and her promised husband, Charley Phayre, had given her up in consequence. It was, therefore, a relief to find that Miss Lescure was "carrying on," as she termed it, with the captain. She made sure that Captain Wentworth would see the beauty home, and she hurried away from her cousin's tempting offer of tea and muffins, in the hope of

seeing or hearing something which she could report to Miss Derrick, for Harriet was persuaded that Maisie would be willing to separate Miss Lescure from her lover.

Miss Foxley had hurried so recklessly through the wood that her hat was over one eye,—to her father's annoyance she persisted in wearing a tall black hat,—she had torn her mauve gown, and her thin, tow-colored hair was as full of ends as a bird's-nest, but she took no heed; she stood peering forward from behind the oak trunk, listening to the snapping of twigs, caused by the nearing footsteps, and straining her ears to catch words out of the voices that came every moment more plainly through the wood.

They were so near now that Harriet drew back behind the tree, and gathered her skirts closely lest they should betray her. She could hear the voices distinctly. Harriet's face became paler with jealous anger as she listened to Miss Lescure's silvery laugh and to her pretty foreign-spoken words.

"That's how she catches them with her tricks!" she muttered.

It seemed to her that the speakers had halted just before they reached the tree.

"Not any further, please," Miss Lescure said, "you must go back now."

"Well, then, let us stand here; I must have you a few minutes longer."

It was not Captain Wentworth's voice, and Harriet's wonder and curiosity made her imprudent. She peeped from behind the tree; then drew her head back in alarm.

They were close by her—they had spoken in a low tone, and had seemed further off. Miss Lescure stood sideways, her head bent slightly forward, and her eyes fixed on the ground; her companion was tall and stout, with red whiskers, and red-backed throat; he wore a white hat and a light overcoat and Harriet guessed that he must be the visitor staying at the Manor House.

"When shall I see you again?" Harriet could not see how he bent over Miss Lescure, who seemed to be intent on breaking the point of her sunshade in the tough heavy ground. "Will you come this way to-morrow?" he said impatiently, as she did not answer.

Drusilla's lips curved with amusement; she raised her head and looked steadily at her new admirer. She was so conscious of her beauty that his admiration did not vex her so much as its absence would have done; but she thought Mr. Boyd was not sufficiently grateful for the favor she had already shown in permitting him to walk with her. Surely he must know she would not permit every one she met to walk with her.

"Are you soon leaving the Manor House?" her lip still had an upward curve.

"No; I have settled to stay some time longer. Do you think I could run away directly I had found you?" he said reproachfully.

"I do not know, you seem so impatient."

He laughed. "Isn't it natural that I should be impatient to see you again—when I have altered all my plans on your account. I ought to be in town."

Drusilla stared at him; she thought he had a much freer way of speaking than either Captain Wentworth or Luke Stanmore; he did not seem as anxious to please her as they did, and she was not sure whether a real lady would permit such freedom. Next minute she checked her own doubts by the assurance that she was a lady and that it was not likely that Mr. Boyd meant to be familiar; it was simply that, judging by what he had said about his life as they walked through the wood, Mr. Boyd was more fashionable than even Captain Wentworth, and was much more accustomed to society. Drusilla considered that he must certainly know better how to behave than a man who had passed so many years in India, or than a hard-working engineer. A pretty flush rose on her face at this last

thought. She had consented to be the wife of a man who did not go into society, and Miss Auricula Vernon had said, that to an English person society meant the best part of life, a part of life which Miss Auricula was debarred from enjoying, because the Rev. Charles Vernon preferred a mere existence in Figgsmarsh—all the year round.

"Won't you tell me," Mr. Boyd said more gently, "when I can see you again?"

"You can call if you like."

She spoke simply, but she looked saucy.

"I think not. Your guardian has no wish to see me at Yardon, and I do not wish to force myself upon him. Say you will come down here to-morrow."

"Not to-morrow." She spoke sweetly, but so calmly that he saw he must submit. "I may be here Wednesday or Thursday; but I am not sure. Perhaps," she said gravely, as if the thought had just come. "Perhaps, Mr. Yardon may not approve of my coming at all."

Mr. Boyd gave an impatient exclamation.

"I don't think you will ask his leave, will you?" He took her hand and held it in his: "A guardian is not the same as a parent, and even a tyrannical parent has only himself to blame if he is deceived; besides, I ask you, do we want companions? I want to meet you alone, so that you may know more of me. I wish for your good opinion, and I fear I cannot claim that on so short an acquaintance; my case is so different, I feel as if I had known you all my life."

"And yet you have only seen me twice," she said laughing, and yet looking keenly at him. Her eyes drooped. "You forget our first meeting."

He was still looking hard at her, and Drusilla did not like this look, it was so bold. She, however, forced herself to meet it with a challenge in her eyes.

"There are things which it is best to forget altogether,"

she said haughtily. "I detest a friend who remembers everything. I am not sure that I should ever wish to see such a person again."

Boyd raised her hand and kissed it.

"No fear that you will be tried in that way. Well, I shall be on the watch and I trust to your sweetness not to disappoint me."

She looked quickly towards the hoary trunk.

"Good-bye," she nodded, hurriedly. Suppose they had been watched she thought, and she wished she was safe on the farther side of the brook.

She was surprised that Mr. Boyd let her go so easily; he did not try to stop her as she hurried on along the leafy path and then crossed the brook to the meadow.

Drusilla's face glowed as she walked. She could not tell how it had happened, but this man had taken a masterful tone with her; she did not like him as much as either the captain or Luke Stanmore, and yet she felt quite intimate with him already. She was not sure that she liked Mr. Boyd at all, but she liked what he had told her about his fine English home and his Mediterranean villa, and his yacht. He had also said that when he married, his wife should have the finest diamonds he could give her. Drusilla gave a little sigh; she felt sure this man was only flirting with her, or why should he be afraid of Mr. Yardon; he was, no doubt, very rich, and he would try to marry a well-born woman, perhaps some one with a title.

"Why do I care," she said crossly. "What can it matter to me, haven't I got to marry Luke Stanmore and be content with a modest competence."

She looked, on the contrary, extremely discontented as she crossed the meadows and climbed the steep path to the Hall.

Mr. Boyd stood where she had left him. He was smiling at the lichen-frosted oak-trunk as if he knew how tired

Harriet Foxley was of standing behind it ; the situation evidently amused him. Presently he said quietly :

"You can come out now, the lady's gone."

Harriet was so alarmed that she sank against the trunk, her heart beat wildly for a moment or so, she could not move—but Mr. Boyd switched his stick impatiently :

"Come out, I say—come at once."

The trembling woman came limply out of her hiding place, with bent knees and elbows and her hands hanging in front like the paws of a dog begging. She was too much terrified to look up.

Mr. Boyd could hardly help laughing ; but he tried to speak severely.

"What were you doing there ?" Harriet stood still as he placed himself in her way ; she forced herself to look at him.

"That aint no business of yours," she said sulkily.

"Yes, it is ; what business have you in Captain Wentworth's wood ? You are not one of his servants."

He was not quite sure of this and her answer relieved him.

"I've got leave to go this way," she said in the same defiant tone.

Boyd hesitated ; he did not know whether to bribe or to threaten her.

"Look here," he said at last, "I believe you were spying on Miss Lescure. I advise you not to chatter ; if you do, you will not be allowed in this wood again. I will see to that—now you had better clear out as quick as maybe."

He spoke so sternly that the woman obeyed him from sheer cowedness, telling herself all the while that she had as much right there as he had and more too, being a native of Figgsmarsh. Deep in her heart she resolved to lose no time in seeking Miss Derrick and letting her know the goings on of the French woman.

CHAPTER XXV.

DRUSILLA had settled herself in a cosy chair in her bedroom; she was so filled with pleasant thoughts that she hardly knew how to digest them. Her brief vision of Paris and its shops had shown her the dazzling delights that lay outside her experience, and also when she had lately remembered them beyond any future hope as the wife of Luke Stanmore. As she drove about that morning in Paris to make her purchases, the girl had caught glimpses of jewellers' windows, where brilliants blazed in pale blue velvet cases, and enveloped all sorts of other gems in their many hued and flaming light. These memories had been vividly re-called by her lover's gift to her, and now as she lolled back in her chair and held up her slender finger for inspection she gave a half-scornful smile in thinking of the delights with which it had filled her.

"Poor fellow," she sighed, "I believe he thought it a handsome present."

She flushed at the remembrance of Mr. Boyd's eyes when he told her his wife should have all the diamonds she could wish for; he had also said he considered it a married woman's duty to dress as perfectly as possible so as to do credit to her own taste and her husband's liberality; the last word jarred Drusilla as she recalled it. When she was married she told herself she should have an allowance that would enable her to dress as she pleased. She sighed—she did not believe that Luke Stanmore could make her happy in this way; he might be able to provide her with an allowance for gowns and millinery, but she should have to wait years for jewellery; perhaps she might get just one trinket now and then!



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"And when I am old and not worth looking at, I shall get what I want, perhaps—only perhaps, oh, dear me!" She gave a gasp of discontent. The bright fancies and gay visions which had just now made life so pleasant, turned to a grey monotony as she contemplated her future with Luke Stanmore.

She rose and paced her room, the walk up-hill had not tired her to-day; her talk with Mr. Boyd had been so pleasant in retrospect that she had reached her room in a sort of dream. Now, by way of banishing the vexatious memory that had disturbed it, she called up the images of the two men and considered them side by side.

Mr. Boyd was a fine man, she thought, and his eyes were handsome; but something in their red-brown gaze disturbed her and gave her the suspicion that Mr. Boyd was not quite frank with her; he seemed to be more fascinated by her looks than Mr. Stanmore had been, for he said so much about her beauty, while Luke had only talked about his love, and yet Drusilla was conscious that from the first she had exercised a certain power over Mr. Stanmore. It was quite different with Mr. Boyd. Even when he asked her to meet him again. He had asked in a masterful tone; there had been no wistful imploring look in his strange eyes. His influence over her seemed to be more like Mr. Yardon's, something to which she yielded against her will. Yes, she could not deny it, it was pleasanter to think of Mr. Stanmore; he, too, had beautiful eyes; but they always looked tenderly at her. Here was a man, Drusilla thought, who might sometimes be vexed with her if she flirted, or was extravagant, but who would forgive everything if she smiled at him—and then, again, she called up Mr. Boyd's face and tried to picture how it would look with an angry frown on it.

At this she turned a little pale; but she laughed off her fancies—"How silly I am. Mr. Boyd is nothing to me.

I am going to marry Luke. Luke—what an ugly name it is, and the other's name is Reginald. I wonder why he said his wife should call him Reggy—is he engaged? It was so odd the way he went on talking about what his wife would do, just as if he thought that could interest her."

She sat thinking for some time longer, and she convinced herself that she must be what was called "in love" with Luke Stanmore, if she could really prefer him to this wealthy admirer, who seemed ready to put all the desirable things of life at his wife's disposal.

Drusilla was quick-witted, and although she was sometimes passionate she was far more often cold, so that she deceived herself less than a warmer-hearted woman might have done; but, in her considerations, she had forgotten that she was sure of Luke Stanmore's affection, and also of his wish to marry her; while Mr. Boyd, with all his compliments, had only flirted with her.

Mr. Boyd did not consider his behavior in the same light. He was far too modern to think of a love marriage on both sides; he probably dignified his feelings for Drusilla by the name of love; but, according to his creed, a woman could be taught to love any man who could minister to her taste and fancy, and already he had gathered from Drusilla's talk that she longed for the pleasures of life, and considered herself buried alive at Figgsmarsh. Mr. Boyd had been told of her engagement to the young engineer; but he had not spoken of it—it was evident to him that she could not care very much for Mr. Stanmore or she would not have flirted with Captain Wentworth and then with him. Mr. Boyd's eyes had a very unpleasant look in them as he reflected on this inclination in Miss Lescure. But he soon laughed himself into security.

"Any pretty girl would flirt shut up in a dull house," he said to himself; "give a woman plenty of amusement and you'll keep her good-tempered, and then you can manage her as you please."

He looked annoyed, however; as he thought of the spying woman behind the tree; he had not intended to hurry matters with Drusilla; but this discovery might change his plans. He had learned from Miss Savvay that this engagement with the engineer was recent, and also that Mr. Yardon was very favorable to it, it would evidently be useless to try to win Drusilla in any open manner.

If the girl preferred him to this young fellow, it would be an act of justice to free her from Mr. Yardon's tyranny and would punish the old man for what Mr. Boyd considered "confounded impertinence towards himself."

He did not trouble himself about Captain Wentworth's views.

"Wentworth knows too well on which side his bread is buttered to find fault with me," he said.

He did not go back to the Manor House. When he stationed himself in the wood so that he might meet Drusilla, he was on his way to the railway station to telegraph some orders to London tradesmen. By turning to the left and skirting the wood in that direction instead of crossing the brook to the Yardon meadows, he could reach the high road half a mile beyond Figgsmarsh, but the spy had gone that way and, also, it took him far away from the station. Turning to the right he soon came to the end of the wood and stepping across a broad dry leaf-strewn ditch he found himself on the breezy common where the sunshine and the lark, golden gorse and the fragrance of the thyme, as he crushed it under foot, all ministered soothingly to his ruffled senses.

He was a traveller and he easily found his way to the top of Rectory Lane. It was in full beauty, for each day had developed the leafage and broad shadow crossed the road with only occasional lines of light between.

He had nearly reached the Rectory and was in full view

of the High street that crossed the foot of the lane, when he saw Miss Derrick pass. He looked after her when he reached the cross roads, and he saw that she passed by the blacksmith's and went on. Some one, a tall young fellow, came suddenly out of the blacksmith's and hurried after Miss Derrick.

It occurred to Mr. Boyd that this could only be the young engineer.

He laughed and showed an even range of white teeth.

"Some men in my position would try to make market out of this with my beauty ; but I know better, I have not studied women so long for nothing. If I were to tell Miss Lescure that I caught her lover walking with some one else, she'd leave no stone unturned to bring him back—mightn't stick to him even then ; but so much time would be lost and, to make amends, he might want to hurry the marriage ; its best to let well alone. I have always the story to tell should it be necessary. He smiled and went down the road leading to the station.

Maisie had seen him, though she had not looked round. She secretly hoped Mr. Boyd might be going away ; she did not like him, something about him jarred her. She had meant to call at the blacksmith's cottage ; but she saw that Mr. Stanmore was talking to old Foxley and passed on.

"I am so glad to have met you," Stanmore said, as he came up with her. "I have just been up to the Hall and no one was in."

"I fancy Drusilla was in," Maisie said ; "but I have been a long round."

"Miss Lescure has been to the Manor House." Stanmore looked vexed as he spoke. "I came home this morning instead of this evening, as I had intended, and I met Miss Savvay at the station, she was on her way to London."

Maisie flushed—she remembered now that her friend had said she was going to town, as they came out of church

together, and she felt sure that Drusilla could have heard it too.

She walked on in silence and Stanmore walked beside, frowning and ill at ease.

"Miss Derrick," he said suddenly, but he did not look at Maisie: "I have no right to force my troubles on you; but you are the only person who can help me, I cannot tell any one else, and you are so good," he said hoarsely, "that I believe I may speak to you."

Maisie looked frankly at him.

"What is it?" she said so calmly that he felt at ease; his trouble was already lighter.

"I was told just now that Miss Lescure called on—on Captain Wentworth in Miss Savvay's absence."

Maisie thought his eyes looked fierce, and then a look of shame settled on his face.

"You think me a coward," he went on, "because I say this to any one but herself; but I am not sure that Drusilla will listen. I am very unhappy, Miss Derrick, and I despise myself for my cowardice."

His face worked nervously, and as his eyes met hers so full of kindness and sympathy, he turned away.

"You must tell me how I can help you?" Maisie said; "you do not, I think, wish me to speak to—to Drusilla."

They had now left the village behind them and were in the open high road, once the coach-road to London; with hedges gay with spring leaves on either side; the dust raised by their footsteps flew about in great clouds and threatened soon to blight this green freshness.

Both Stanmore and Maisie felt a sense of relief in their freedom from observation.

"No," he said, "not that; but I want advice. Your grandfather says I don't know how to treat a woman; you see my mother died years ago, and I have never had a sister or even a girl cousin to study. Each time I have

ventured to remonstrate with Miss Lescure, I have vexed her ; I feel that I ought to ask an explanation about what has happened this afternoon and yet, if I do, it may cause a quarrel between us—I—" He stopped, he could not bring himself to say that he did not feel sure enough of Drusilla's love to risk the chance of offending her so seriously.

A sudden strong desire seized on Maisie. When she first heard of the engagement, she had longed to tell Stanmore how deceitful and frivolous Drusilla really was, for, up to the last, she had spoken of him as Maisie's friend, and as if she took little interest in him ; but Maisie's humility was real, and almost as soon as the thought came, she had become aware that what she considered was a strong desire for Mr. Stanmore's happiness was simply that prompting of jealousy which so often makes a woman with the best intention spiteful. An almost overwhelming desire now came to open this blind lover's eyes and she struggled bravely against it. It was not an easy struggle, Maisie's lips quivered, and the rich color that had flushed her cheeks left them—as she asked herself by what right she could judge of what might come of this union, how could she foresee the influence for good which such a love as Mr. Stanmore's might not work in this young untaught girl—her head drooped forward and she felt self-convicted. She was so long silent, that he was puzzled.

"You think I ought not to ask your help. I should have begun by saying that you must know so much better than I do what is the best course to take in such a case. You see Miss Lescure every day and you are doubtless in her confidence. I have no wish to pry into that," he said hurriedly, "only can you tell me what I had better do about this?"

Maisie had recovered herself ; she smiled as she gave him one of those frank truthful glances that had won him on their first acquaintance.

"To begin with, are you sure that what you have been told is true?"

"I came the long way round from the Hall stables this morning," he said, "the way Foxley goes—across your meadows and then into the road beyond where we are now, I was walking fast and I heard my name called. I stopped and I saw that poor creature, Harriet Foxley, running after me; she was so out of breath she could scarcely speak, but I made out that she had just come from the Manor House, and that she had seen Miss Lescure and Captain Wentworth going over the house together. Before I could get away, she said some very unpleasant things; but surely the woman can have no motive in inventing such a story."

A pained look came into Maisie's face.

"I am not sure about that," she said sadly, "you must remember that the poor creature is only half-witted and that she is very jealous, do you know," she went on earnestly, she was thinking of her own feelings so short a while ago. "I believe jealousy is the most dangerous feeling a woman can have; it is so violent and so unreasoning. Old Foxley admires Miss Lescure immensely, and I expect he has talked about her before Harriet till very likely the poor thing hates her and would harm her if she could. I am sure, from my own observation, that Harriet is very spiteful."

Stanmore did not look convinced.

"You would advise me, then, not to take any notice of Drusilla?"

"Yes, and if I may say so," she spoke timidly. "I would be very indulgent. Drusilla is so young and inexperienced, she knows nothing about conventionalities, or wordly ways; her mother, she tells me, was a complete invalid, and lived a very secluded life. Girls of Drusilla's age are not often to blame, you know," she said laughing,

—and I am not sure that spoiling is not better. I find her very easy to get on with," she ended brightly.

"Thank you, I am ashamed of having troubled you."

There was a grave sad look on his face that haunted Maisie after she had left him as she went home by, what he had called, "Foxley's way across the meadows."

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEARLY a week had gone by since Drusilla's visit to the Manor House. Miss Savvay and her nephew paid a call, during which Captain Wentworth pointedly talked to Maisie and her grandfather, and left Drusilla to entertain his aunt ; but when the visitors had gone, Miss Lescure said that she found Miss Savvay far more entertaining than her nephew and certainly pleasanter to look at. She repeated this to Mr. Stanmore when he came to see her. He was pleased he had followed Maisie's advice, and was on the best of terms with his *fiancée* ; it must be owned that Drusilla was determined not to vex him. She wanted to defer her marriage as long as possible, and she wanted to get another meeting with Mr. Boyd. For the last few days Maisie had asked daily each afternoon to walk with her ; and each time Drusilla had gone out early towards the woods she had caught sight of Mr. Stanmore or of her grandfather in the near distance. She began to think that her adventure had got wind and that she was watched, and she devoted herself to her lover with a gentleness that delighted him. She did not talk much, she listened and gave sweet looks of assent to all his plans for their future till Stanmore hated himself for having listened to a word against such an angel. He scorned himself for his confidence to Miss Derrick, but he trusted her ; he knew that she would not make mischief between him and Drusilla. So the days went on serenely between the lovers, even Mr. Yardon wondered at the change in his ward. It was wonderful, he thought, how the near prospect of marriage had tamed her. For the present her saucy moods seemed to have banished.

At last there came an afternoon which left Drusilla free. Mr. Yardon asked Maisie to accompany him to the Manor House, and he gave Drusilla a message to deliver at the Rectory. Mr. Stanmore had said when he went away last night that he had to spend the day at Blievedon.

Drusilla went slowly towards the gate ; there was a certain risk, she thought, in going to meet Mr. Boyd in the wood ; but then she knew that her guardian and Maisie would keep to the beaten track, and it would be easy, she fancied, to keep out of sight among the trees. She need only put Mr. Boyd on his guard, and he would manage to keep out of sight. She felt a great reliance on his *savoir-faire* in a matter of this kind. It did not occur to her that she might miss him in the wood. She was persuaded that he would wait there every day till she came.

She opened the gate and hurried down hill to the Rectory. She gave Mr. Yardon's message to the maid, though she had been charged to deliver it to the vicar, but Mr. Vernon was capable, she felt, of walking up the hill with her. Instead of going in the Hall gates, she went past them and across the common. She did not meet anyone in the lane, and even her guardian could not object to her taking a walk when she was left alone.

The lark went on singing blithely over her head ; and Drusilla's eyes ached as she strained them up to the blue sky in search of the invisible singer. She looked with some contempt across the flowerless waste, for a moment her heart swelled as she remembered the dazzling glow of blossoms near her mother's cottage and the exquisite scent which filled the air in spring-time, but the sensation flitted almost as it came.

She reflected that she had rarely cared to gather them, and that whenever in her future life she wanted flowers she could always buy them if she lived in a town ; and she had made up her mind that she would always live in a

large city. As Paris was the only large city she had seen, she meant to spend as much time as she could in Paris ; unless, indeed, she found London nicer. Luke Stanmore preferred London, but at present she was not sure whether her lover liked the sort of things which pleased her. She had no doubt about Mr. Boyd's tastes, he had talked about carriages, and horses, and diamonds, and the opera, and Paris in a way which showed not only how much he knew about them, but also the interest he took in them.

Luke Stanmore had one day said that at first he should not be able to give her a carriage though it would not be long before she had one. Drusilla sighed with discontent, but she also reflected that she had longed to be on foot that morning in Paris, so that she might see more into the shop-windows ; it seemed to her also that she should be far more admired as she walked about than she could be in the momentary glance afforded of her beauty as she flashed by in a carriage ; yes there were amenities in being obliged to walk, but she did not intend to speak of them to Mr. Stanmore ; he would, perhaps, think she could do altogether without a carriage, and in Drusilla's opinion no one could really be a lady who did not possess a carriage and, at least, a pair of horses. She had learned a great deal from Miss Auricula, who delighted in telling the girl of her visits to country houses and to friends in London ; and who, while she thought she was impressing her attentive listener with her own grandeur, was giving the very information that Drusilla hungered after. Society papers had not then an existence. Both Drusilla and Miss Auricula were deprived of what would have been to them a fertile source of enjoyment.

Miss Lescure had reached the wood but she found it difficult to make her way between the trees, the thick growth of underwood was seamed with red-armed briars, and these caught her gown and threatened to tear it. A

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low drooping branch over-head had nearly wrenched off her hat, and she looked vainly round for Mr. Boyd.

"He ought to be here," she said, "it is just the time I came here with him, and he must have known I should choose that time."

A pretty flush tinged her cheeks. She was tingling with impatience. It was so mortifying, so absurd in every way to have taken this trouble for nothing. She stood waiting, starting when a rabbit darted jumping to its hole, or at the sudden chuck-chuck of a squirrel springing up a tree close by. The birds kept the wood lively, though there was no actual singing to rival the lark she had left high poised above the common.

She waited several minutes and she became very fretful. She kept back so that she might not be seen by any chance passer through the wood, Mr. Yardon and Maisie would certainly come, but not yet; Drusilla thought that if Mr. Boyd had been at his post, she might have finished her chat with him and been out of the wood again before Maisie and her grandfather quitted the Manor House.

There was a sound at last, a low murmur, drawing nearer and nearer till it took form, a man's rich voice singing, its owner was evidently following the path through the wood.

Drusilla hid behind an old oak trunk, not so big a one as Harriet Foxley's shelter had been, the larger oak trees were all on the further side of the main path through the wood. The girl had not calculated how much more of the back of the trunk could be seen from a distance, and she had resolved if this proved to be Mr. Boyd, to let him pass on and wait for her; she would come forward and join him some minutes after, as if she had just arrived.

But she was disappointed.

He passed the tree without even turning his head and then came quickly back to it. Before Drusilla knew that

he was so near, he had clasped both her hands tightly in his. She gave a little cry.

"Hush!" he said, "we must be prudent, your guardian may come any moment. Come further back behind the trees."

Drusilla drew one hand away, but he kept the other in his, while he led her to a much thicker part of the wood nearer to the park. There was little fear of discovery here. Three enormous holly bushes stood near together and left a trampled space in their midst which defied observation from prying eyes.

Mr. Boyd led Drusilla into this retreat, and then he shook his head at her.

"Little truant," he said, "a nice dance you have led me, if you had not come to-day, I should have gone up to the Hall to-morrow and dared the guardian's anger."

"I could not come sooner?"

She did not say this defiantly; she was slightly afraid of Mr. Boyd, he was looking so hard at her that her own eyes fell, and she felt a hot flush rising in her cheeks.

"And now that you have come, what are you going to say to me; or have you only come to show me how exquisitely lovely you can look, eh!"

He was bending over her, and Drusilla drew back.

"Do you mean to run away? I must prevent that?" and as he spoke he slipped a massive gold bracelet over each of her slender hands.

"Now you are handcuffed," he said, laughing, "do you like them?"

"You do not mean them for me?" she said in a troubled voice, she longed so much for the beautiful things, but she dared not keep them.

"Why not! they are nothing—mere trifles; but I thought they might please you. I fancied from what you said that you liked jewellery, and my wish is to please you in all things."

He was looking at her earnestly now and she felt at her ease again.

"I wonder why," she spoke very softly, "you should so much wish to please me? I am nothing to you but a mere acquaintance?"

"Are you not? You are the only woman I have seen worth pleasing. If I try to please you it is because I cannot help it, because I love—"

He had once more taken her hand, and the ardor in his eyes once more startled Drusilla.

Though she was startled she thought it was nice to be loved like this; this was the sort of wooing her mother had predicted, when she had bid the girl take care of her looks, and then men of all ranks would be fascinated by her beauty. The remembrance of Luke Stanmore came to her help.

"I ought not to listen to you, Mr. Boyd, and I cannot take your gifts." She drew off the bracelets and put them in his hand, "have you not heard that I am going to marry Mr. Stanmore?"

Mr. Boyd smiled, then he looked at her steadily.

"I have heard that Mr. Stanmore has done a very selfish thing; what right has a man of his limited means to ask such a creature as you are to share them. I can give you everything a woman should have, and yet I feel that nothing could be worthy of your exquisite self. You are a paragon my child, a pearl as yet immured in the shell; think what you will be in your proper sphere, dressed as I think you could dress if the means were placed in your power.

Drusilla felt ready to cry.

"I cannot listen to you," she said in a vexed voice, "it is too late?"

"You had better listen," he said, sternly, "listen before it is really too late, Miss Lescure. You think because this

young fellow loves you ;" he gave a contemptuous exclamation, "as if any man could fail to do that, and because he has taken advantage of your seclusion and your guardian's tyranny to get your consent, that you are going to be happy with him. I tell you you will be nothing of the sort ?"

Drusilla roused herself to interrupt him.

"Of course you say that ; but I don't see how you can tell," she pouted.

He had not attempted to replace the bracelets but he pressed her hand tenderly.

Poor little darling, poor little entrapped bird," he said, "you may not care for me, but at least I will not let you beat your tender self against the bars of a cage without a warning. You think you care for your lover, and just now perhaps you do ; you are his idol, he is at your feet, he will do anything to win a smile from you ; but when you are married he will have to leave you every day ; you will have to amuse yourself in a mediocre home without the luxuries and daintiness and the beautiful things that belong to you of right ; now think of your life, my dear child, see for yourself how dull and monotonous and meagre it will be ; do you care enough for Mr. Stanmore to make him the one object of your life, to find all your pleasure in listening to him and becoming in his absence a good and careful housewife, a domestic drudge ; in fact, in the effort to live within your modest income, bound to account for every shilling you spend."

He felt the hand he held thrill as if an electric touch passed through it, and he paused.

When he began to speak again it was to describe his home at Beaulands, and the house he meant to have in London.

"When I first saw you," he said, "I resolved to ask you to be my wife, and then I learned that you had been inveigled into this engagement."

Drusilla had been standing silent, her eyes bent on the ground.

"Hush!" she said, in a stifled voice.

It was easy enough to hear footsteps; the wood was so seldom used as a thoroughfare that twigs and fallen branches lay across the path, and the snapping sound announced passers by.

Drusilla fancied it must be her grandfather, and Mr. Boyd saw that she grew pale as the footsteps went on along the road.

"Are you faint?" he whispered, and he gently put his arm round her.

He was surprised to see tears falling over her face, but she did not turn from him.

"I am so miserable," she sobbed, "my guardian will be so angry if he finds out I have been with you?"

She broke down and cried passionately for several minutes. Her fear of her guardian puzzled her companion, but he did not at first try to soothe her.

"I must go?" she said, when she had wiped her eyes.

He saw that he must not thwart her and he guided her slowly towards the edge of the wood so that she might return as she had come by the common; now and then he said a few words, but Drusilla scarcely answered him; she hung her head and looked despairing. When they reached the last trees, he looked at her very earnestly.

"You will remember all I have said," he whispered, "if you have courage enough to trust yourself to me, I will make you my wife; and once my wife, you need have no fear of Mr. Yardon or of anyone."

He longed to kiss her, but he refrained, and thought her present mood has hopeful; he was not quite sure enough of her to run any risk of offending her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. BOYD'S eyes and his stern voice had so terrified Harriet that she had not spoken even to her father about her adventure in the wood.

She had not even ventured to the Manor House, although that tea with hot muffins lingered in her memory, and she sorely longed for the chance of such enjoyment.

She was possessed with the dread of meeting this portly fierce-eyed man if she went through the wood; and the Manor House was a long way off by the road.

On this afternoon she bethought her of her offer to Miss Derrick, if she had a note to carry to Miss Savvay, Mr. Boyd would not venture she thought to stop her.

She reached the Hall gates and went up the drive. While she stood at the Hall door, waiting for admittance, Mr. Yardon came out.

"Miss Derrick is not in," he said, looking sharply at her. "What do you want my girl?"

Mr. Yardon had a tender corner in his heart for helpless creatures, he was always kind to children, and he never spoke roughly to Harriet Foxley, though her uncouth appearance at his own door annoyed him.

"I want to see Miss Derrick, she said as I might call for a message when I were going down to Manor House." She spoke sulkily, she felt ill-used by Maisie's absence—then in a sort of despair she went on—"Perhaps you have a note or a word to send, sir."

Mr. Yardon smiled at her persistence. "I have just come back from seeing Miss Savvay, but if you want Miss Derrick, you will meet her in the wood or else at the Manor House." Warren, the butler, had just come to an-

swer Harriet's ring—"Do you know which way Miss Lescure went?"

"I saw her pass the gate, sir, going up that way, sir," he pointed up-hill.

Mr. Yardon turned away and went down the drive. He heard footsteps behind him, but he did not look round. He was anxious to meet Drusilla. He had felt very tender towards her in these last days, and he asked himself why he had been in such haste to part from her and give her away to Luke Stanmore. It would have been easy enough, he reflected, to keep admirers aloof if he had chose to take steps to that end. Before he reached the gates, Harriet's voice sounded like a croak beside him.

The woman was afraid of Mr. Yardon; though he spoke kindly to her, there was always in his face the latest indication of a frown.

"Please, sir," in an unusually humble tone, "have you come across by the wood from Manor House?"

Mr. Yardon did frown now. "Yes," he said, "I did, what makes you ask?"

She hung her head and looked guilty. "It's only—I'm wanting to know if there's a man in the wood"—her voice had sank to a whisper.

"A man! No." Her manner puzzled him. "Speak out," he said more gently, "tell me what you mean about a man in the wood."

Harriet looked cunning. Here was a chance to wreak her spite on Mr. Boyd, but she did not want to get into trouble. "It's a stout man," she said slowly, "he's red-whiskered and red-faced; maybe he goes to the wood to meet his sweetheart, I'm not telling tales, I'm feared on him, so there." She looked with a frightened stare into the lane. Mr. Yardon saw she was telling the truth. "There was no one in the wood just now," he said, "go back, my girl, take my short way through the shrubbery

there, across meadows, you'll surely meet Miss Derrick on the way."

He went on briskly towards the common without waiting for thanks. Mr. Yardon was no longer even middle-aged, yet up-hill or level made no difference to him, he delighted in long walks, and he never walked slowly.

For a little while he enjoyed the fresh breezy air of the common, and then Harriet's words came back to him. She had described Mr. Boyd, it was evident that the woman had surprised the fellow with some village girl, and Mr. Yardon gathered that Boyd had threatened her or frightened her in some way or she would have spoken more freely.

His lip curled, he had already decided that Captain Wentworth's visitor was commonplace and purse-proud; it did not surprise him that he had low tastes, but he was indignant that Mr. Boyd should use the wood for his stolen interviews. It was almost in the Hall property, and he considered he had a personal right of way through it. He wished now he had questioned Harriet further, a man of Mr. Boyd's type might do serious mischief; he wished the vicar could get a hint of the matter.

He laughed at himself, for an old woman; why should he trouble himself about the morals of the village girls. "If a woman means mischief, no matter what the hindrance is, she'll go into it"—he looked very bitter as he walked on, and then he congratulated himself on the seclusion in which her mother had reared Drusilla. The bitter look lingered however, till he caught sight of his ward sitting on a little hillock, below an enormous gorse-bush. Her face was turned towards him, but she did not rise, and he fancied she had been crying.

"Tired, ladybird," he spoke affectionately, but Drusilla did not smile at him. "I twisted my foot," she said, plaintively, "so I sat down here, will you help me up, I am afraid I can't walk alone."

He bent over her with, a tenderness she had never seen in him. "Poor pet," he said softly, "which is the lame foot, if it still pains you I will go and fetch the carriage."

The anxiety in his stern face amused her ; as she stood leaning on his arm, she became aware that she had alarmed herself causelessly, her foot had been slightly twisted, the rest on the thyme bank had eased the pain. "I can walk, thank you."

He pressed her hand with his arm. "That's right," he said cheerfully, "lean on me, dear child, as heavily as you like, I shan't get many more walks with you, shall I ? "

Drusilla had scarcely ever seen him in such a mood as this, he had more than once shown her a glimpse of affection, he had been even tender for a few moments, but he had always repressed these indications of warm feeling, by the restrained manner that seemed habitual to him. Now she saw that his eyes were glistening with kindness, he seemed for once to be willing that natural feeling should have its way. Drusilla waited, this opportunity was too good to be lost, but she was unwilling to be premature lest she should send her guardian back again into the shell which she had once or twice found impenetrable.

"How long will Miss Savvay stay at the Manor House," she said carelessly.

"Miss Savvay told us to-day she should be here till August. She means to stay on after you leave for Maisie's sake."

"Does she think Maisie will miss me," the girl said slyly, then she looked up into her guardian's face, and she met his fond fatherly smile.

"I want to tell you something if you will promise not to be angry," she said in a sweet coaxing tone, "we are so near home now, shall I tell you when we get in, dear ? "

This was a second thought, Drusilla reflected that if her guardian were to become very angry, and she had the

impression that his anger might be violent if fully roused, it would be far easier to leave him indoors than as she was now clinging to his arm on the common.

"Just as you like," he said, but he was pleased that she wished to prolong their interview.

He felt impatient when on reaching the Hall he was told that the vicar was waiting for him. "Go into my study," he said to Drusilla, "I will come to you as soon as I can."

The girl was glad of the respite thus given her, she wanted a few moments to reflect in.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. VERNON stayed so long that he at last saw his host's impatience and departed.

The interval had given Drusilla time to consider her position ; Mr. Yardon called himself her guardian, and assumed authority over her ; but his gentleness to-day had lessened her fear of him ; after all she told herself, he could only be angry, and she must make up her mind to risk offending him.

"There is no rose without a thorn," she said gaily. She heard Mr. Yardon coming across the hall and she settled herself into a bewitching attitude near his high-backed chair.

He stroked her sunny hair as he seated himself.

"Well, sweetheart, what is it we are to discuss ?"

"You will not be angry," she looked up at him curiously.

"I dare say not ; I can't tell."

"Yes, you can tell—you can, if you choose, at least ; you are so wise that surely you can keep from being angry if you like."

He nodded and looked expectant.

"Go on," he said.

"I have been thinking," she spoke gravely, "and I find I do not wish to marry Mr. Stanmore—there now." She raised her finger : "I asked you not to be angry."

His face was very red and he was frowning, so that she could not see his eyes.

"I have a right to be angry," he said ; "only a week or so ago I offered to release you from this engagement and you abided by it, and ever since you and Stanmore

have been like a pair of turtle-doves—have you quarrelled, may I ask ? ”

She looked perfectly calm ; his frown and his contemptuous tone did not even bring a flush to her cheeks.

“ No, we have not quarrelled ; but I have had time to think, and I see that I cannot be happy with Mr. Stanmore ; the life he wishes me to lead will not suit me. You wish me to be happy, do you not ? ” She said this so earnestly that he was startled.

“ You know I wish it, child,” he left off frowning. “ I should not have listened to Stanmore if I had not felt sure he would make you a good husband.”

“ Ah but,” she smiled winningly at him, “ I did not say he would be anything but very good ; but I want something more than a good husband.” She had begun to twine her fingers together ; his keen gaze had made her at last nervous. “ I—,” she went on, “ I have met with some one who likes me as well as Mr. Stanmore does and who can give me all I want.”

She spoke slowly, for her courage sank under the gathering sternness in his eyes ; she could not tell how it was, but under that look her proposal seemed false and foolish.

“ Explain yourself,” he said bitterly. “ I cannot grasp your meaning.”

Drusilla felt sullen ; she thought Mr. Yardon was treating her like a criminal, when she was acting so honestly towards him ; but she strove to keep her anger under control.

“ I cannot marry Mr. Stanmore,” she said calmly, “ I ask you to tell him this. I prefer not to see him again.”

Mr. Yardon was too indignant to notice the quiver in her voice, or he might have heard in it a hope for Luke Stanmore.

“ And the reason you offer for this modest confession is that you have seen some one who can give you all you want. Do you wish to sell yourself, you shameless child ? ”

Drusilla rose up; she was white with anger, and her dark eyes flamed.

"You are rude, Mr. Yardon. You have no right to speak to me so. I had no need to consult you, but I wished to be honest, of course. I should not wish to marry Mr. Boyd if I did not like him."

Mr. Yardon brought his fist down on his desk with a crash

"Curse Mr. Boyd. When have you seen the fellow? He has not ventured to show his face here since I gave him the cold shoulder."

He suddenly grasped both arms of his chair and looked at Drusilla.

She stood very erect, but she was quivering, and her color faded rapidly into whiteness and then burned hotly on her cheeks.

"Sit down," he said hoarsely. She did not stir; he rose, and, taking her by both arms, he placed her in her chair.

"Is it you," he went on, "who have been meeting this man in the wood, exposing yourself to insult and to scandal like a common village trollop—has this been you, Drusilla?—answer me."

Drusilla kept silence; she turned away her face—she was not quivering now—she looked scornful and defiant at his injustice.

"Do you think a gentleman would place his wife or any one he meant to respect in such a position? Mr. Boyd is not a man to be trusted by a woman, you foolish child—he is wholly inferior to the man you have deceived."

"Perhaps," she did not turn round, but he felt that she was sneering; "I never said Mr. Boyd was as good as Mr. Stanmore is; he suits me better, that's all."

Mr. Yardon shrank back into his chair as though she had struck him. He covered his face with his hands, and there was silence for some minutes.

When Mr. Yardon spoke, there was a tone of defeat in his voice.

"Do you mean to ask my advice in this matter?"

She turned round and looked at him enquiringly.

"That depends—It seems to me that I have a right to do as I please. I consult you only because you have been kind to me, and because you are Mr. Stanmore's friend; I am free, you call yourself my guardian, but you are not related to me; there is no use in trying to drive me—my mother tried that."

He gave her a long yearning look, but her eyes were full of defiance; he began to walk up and down the room.

"How could you deceive me so, child," he said at last.

"I saw you, as I believed, happy in the thought of your marriage, making that poor fellow, too, believe you loved him—that is the worst part of it, Drusilla—and all the while you were meeting this man and encouraging his proposals."

"You exaggerate," she said coldly; "I have seen Mr. Boyd twice, and he only proposed to me to-day; besides, do you suppose I am the only girl who ever changed her mind?"

"You have seen this man twice, and yet you are willing to marry him; listen, Drusilla, how do you know Mr. Boyd means honestly by you; how do you even know he is all he professes to be; you have only his word for it. Good heavens, my girl! do you know that when a young thing like you has left her home against her parents' wishes, she has sometimes gone back to it disgraced, ashamed to look any one in the face."

Drusilla stamped her foot with impatience.

"If you arrange with Mr. Stanmore, I can make it right; I can marry Mr. Boyd in the usual way," she said; "I very much prefer to have a proper wedding."

She checked her anger and smiled in her pretty bright

way ; it seemed to her he must give way for her sake, if she continued firm.

"And if I refuse my consent to such a marriage."

She looked at him carefully, there was more appeal than anger in his eyes.

"You will not refuse me, you cannot ; it will make me quite happy if you consent."

He had been standing in front of her—now he turned impatiently away.

"Would a mother give her child poison if it asked for it? Listen, Drusilla, this is a matter in which you must trust yourself to my judgment. You promised of your own free will to marry Mr. Stanmore ; he has not given you any reason for breaking your word."

"There is no use in repeating that," she spoke wearily.

"I say also that there is no use in asking me to break my word. I told Stanmore that I wished you to be his wife, and you were willing ; I cannot now say to him I wish you to marry Mr. Boyd ; besides I will not say it, it would be a falsehood ; I prefer that you should never see the fellow again,"

Drusilla rose.

"Well then," she said, "I must act for myself ; I shall tell Mr. Stanmore that I cannot marry him."

Mr. Yardon again walked up and down the room in an agitation that puzzled Drusilla. She did not think he was angry, but she saw he was thoroughly unlike himself. At last he stopped in front of her ; he cleared his throat, yet when his voice came it sounded hoarse.

"I ask you to give up Mr Boyd as a simple act of obedience."

"I cannot do so : I am sorry, for you have been very kind, but there is no reason why I should obey you." She was sorry now that she had confided in him. It was so difficult to listen to him patiently.

"And if I tell you that there is a reason for your obedience, I must be obeyed because I am your mother's husband, I am your own father—what then, eh?"

There was a strange contrast between the two faces, the man's showed a longing hunger for his child's affection; Drusilla's face beamed with triumph, and her next words gave the key to this expression.

"My mother's husband, sir; are you sure, quite sure, you were married to her?"

"My poor child." He laid his hand gently on her hair. "I am sure; you have a right to be called Yardon. Your mother's name was Lescure. But, Drusilla, have you not a word or a kiss for your father?"

He said this abruptly—his feelings were getting the master and he could hardly control them—it was pitiful to see how this hard man yearned for his child's love.

Drusilla rose as he spoke and offered him her cool cheek to kiss; but she made no attempt to caress him. For a moment or two, as she felt his arms round her and his warm kisses on her forehead, something stirred in her; but even this was hardly spontaneous feeling, it was a sense of possession, of rest and help, rather than of affection; all this, while she had thought herself fatherless; for if her father lived she believed he had not been her mother's husband, and now she had a home as well as a father; was better off than Maisie. She could have laughed and shouted out her joy at this discovery, and then as quickly suspicion fell across her triumph like a smear.

Why had she and her mother lived alone in that poor cottage all those years. Drusilla could recall a time before that, where they lived for a short while by the sea; she had had a father then, but he was tall and he had fair hair; he could not have been Mr. Yardon.

The girl was never garrulous, even when she felt happiest she spoke little, and now she waited for her father's explanation.

He seated himself beside her and kept her hand in his.

"I had intended to tell you this on your wedding-day, so you have only learned it a little sooner;" he paused, looked tenderly at her and then turned away as he spoke again.

"There is, I am aware," he said stiffly, "an explanation due to you, my child; but it is painful to me to give it, for it must cast blame on others. You would never have heard the whole truth, Drusilla, but for what has just passed between us. I think, now, it may be a safeguard to you to know it, unless—" he looked at her with grave sadness—"unless it will greatly distress you to hear me blame your mother."

She raised her head, which had drooped as he began.

"No; I knew she was not good; you had better tell me; I want to know all about myself."

"Poor child," he pressed the hand he still held; "who could be hard on you?—not I; but I must save you, if I can, from your mother's fate."

He let go her hand and passed his own slowly across his forehead, as if he were trying to brighten into more distinct vision the recollection of earlier years.

"I had a great sorrow," he began, abruptly, "and I could not bear to go on living among all that recalled it. Twenty years ago I went abroad. I met with your mother, Drusilla, she was as beautiful as you are; but you are not like her child, thank God."

He rose and walked up a down before he went on. "We were soon married; I kept it secret, for I was ashamed of having married so soon. I suppose I was infatuated. I saw your mother living in a pretty home with an old woman whom she called aunt; I asked no questions; I knew afterwards that the old woman was a mere acquaintance—your mother's companion. It seems to me now that I acted like a blind fool. I soon learned that your mother had married me because she thought I was an

English millionaire, and, as long as I gave her all she wished for, she seemed pleased and kind ; I knew she did not love me, but I hoped to win her love. We were spending the winter on the Riviera when you were born ; I had been dissatisfied for some months with your mother, but I hoped the baby's birth would bring us together. You were just a month old when I was summoned to Paris on business. Your mother pleaded to be left behind, the weather was chilly, unfit for a young child to travel—I have told you enough, Drusilla. Your mother had had a rich lover before she married me, and she wanted to go back to him. I saw her once again—for I would not believe till she confessed that the story I had heard was true. I wronged you then, for I left you with her and refused to accept you as my child ; I wandered about for years and I heard nothing of you or your mother either. When you were about twelve she wrote and begged for help. She had been deserted for several years, and had had to earn her living ; but she was very ill, and when she wrote to me she knew that she could not live many years. In that appeal she satisfied me that I was really your father, and I arranged to care for you whenever you should be left alone ; your mother begged that you might be spared to her while she lived. She promised me that you should be brought up at Sentis, and that you should be kept from any knowledge of evil."

There was silence—even at that distance, Drusilla could hear the doves cooing from the stables and the tinkle of the red cow's bell as she came in to be milked in the farm-yard.

She felt wronged and resentful. It was then her father's fault that her childhood had been so lonely. She looked sullen and he guessed at her thoughts. He again sat down beside her and took her thin hand in his.

"You think I ought to have claimed you sooner so as to give you a better education ; but, remember, I already

reproached myself for the misery your mother had had to suffer during the time that she had been left deserted, and she asked me to leave you with her; I ascertained that there was a school at the Sentis Convent and it was not possible that your mother could come to England. I did not return myself till my son-in-law died, and then I resolved to go home and take my daughter and her child to live with me. That was not to be, however; and when I saw my granddaughter, I thought she could never be a daughter to me. I heard at intervals of your mother's declining health, and settled that if when I saw you I could receive you as a daughter that I would give you a home here. Weeks before you came, my Drusilla, I had planned that you should be Stanmore's wife."

His strange flow of speech, and the glistening, longing gaze with which he watched her face had fascinated Drusilla; her mother's story had called up such a vision of misery and sorrow that the girl's feelings softened. Her poor mother, how hardly she had felt towards her for strict severe rules, which the girl now saw had been prompted by the desire of keeping her child from the evils to which she had yielded herself. Drusilla felt herself growing older as these thoughts passed in review before her.

She looked up at her father, and, raising his hand to her lips, she kissed it.

"Your life has been spoiled," she said, "first by my mother and now I have brought trouble into it." She smiled and added brightly: "Is it not a risk to couple people who have not met—I think Maisie would suit Mr. Stanmore far better than I ever could."

Mr. Yardon winced, Drusilla's calm tone jarred him at such a time, he felt that she did not love him.

"No; I think you are wrong there; they are too much alike to make one another happy; opposite qualities in a husband or wife give each that which is wanting in the

other ; that is what people say you know, and I fancy there is some truth in the saying."

He leaned back in his chair and looked very thoughtful. Drusilla could hardly help gaping, it was such an effort to keep up to his level of excited feeling ; she did not object to act a part if it would serve any purpose. She had acted both with Mr. Stanmore and Mr. Boyd ; but, then, she had reaped praise and admiration in a way that had soothed her ; and she did not feel inclined to act filial devotion unless something real, or, at any rate, pleasant was to be gained by it. She began to wonder if she might leave the study.

"There is still something more, if I understand you, child, it is not Stanmore you shrink from, but his want of a large income." The girl started, it seemed to her that he had read her thoughts. "Even on that point you are mistaken ; he is safe to come to the front and to win money as well as distinction ; his wife will probably become Lady Stanmore ; but that is not what I wish to say. I am a much richer man than you fancy, Drusilla, than any one knows, except my lawyer."

It seemed to him that she became more attentive as he went on.

"You have a large claim on me, and if you marry to please me, I can settle enough on you to give you an independent income. If you and your husband are prudent and free from extravagance you will be able to live easily and with all the comforts you can wish for."

A question burned on Drusilla's lips : "Can I have a carriage?" she longed to say, but her father's sad, almost pathetic face subdued her.

"In that case," she said slowly, "I ought, I suppose, to get handsomer clothes and things than I had thought of doing."

He bent his head.

"I went over this afternoon to see Miss Savvay about this, and I am to tell you that she puts herself at your disposal. You have only to write and fix a day for going to London and she is ready to accompany you."

There was still a sadness in his eyes, he felt that Drussilla was farther from him now than when she had been his ward.

"May I have time to think," she said.

"Surely, your decision is far too important to be made in a hurry. Let me have your answer to-morrow morning."

He rose and kissed her forehead, then he held open the door for her to pass out of the study.

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNDER THE HEDGE.

FROM Shakespeare's days and long before them, time has flown all too swiftly between the date named for a marriage and the day itself.

So much has to be done, and there is such constant distraction offered from without, that day speeds after day without fulfilling that which was to have been accomplished in it.

Mr. Yardon was once more infatuated by Drusilla, as he read her prettily worded note. In it she thanked him for his goodness to her and for the confidence he had shown her—"I am willing to marry Mr. Stanmore," she ended, "and I hope my dear father will forget the nonsense I talked."

Her father felt years younger while he re-read the childish words. He went to the girl's room and praised her for her submission. Drusilla kissed him in a loving, daughterly way that completed her fascination.

She was, however, self-willed on one point: she asked him to keep the secret of her birth till after her marriage, giving as her reason that she did not want to have to talk it over with Maisie.

Mr. Yardon consented, but he resolved that his lovely child should be spared any temptations to break in faith. He wrote to Mr. Stanmore that the wedding must take place in three weeks, and he settled with Miss Savvay and with Maisie that all should be ready by that time.

Drusilla looked astonished when he announced his decision, but she yielded with a gentleness that delighted him.

She was surprised at herself and at her own defeat. She did not know how potently her father's assurance that she would have an income of her own had weighed against her chances of life with Mr. Boyd. She knew very well that if she made a runaway marriage she should forfeit this income and be wholly dependent on her husband. Mr. Boyd would be less exacting she fancied than Mr. Stanmore would be, but she shrank from being entirely at his mercy now that her horizon had mounted by the change in her own position. After all, the difference between the two men meant the loss of a few trinkets, and Mr. Stanmore was so generous and so devoted, that she should be able to get all she wanted from him. She was growing fond of Luke Stanmore in her way; she even began to look with some impatience for his daily visits.

Maisie fancied as she watched the girl that her lover's influence had raised Drusilla's tone; she seemed sweeter and more loveable, and above all, and this was perhaps her chief interest in Maisie's eyes, Drusilla seemed really to care for her promised husband.

Maisie had grown thin, and Miss Savvay thought she looked years older, but no one had a right to guess from any outward sign how keenly the girl had suffered. The sharpest anguish of all had, however, been softened to her. Since the day when Stanmore had claimed her help, Maisie had been sensible of a change of feeling towards him. She loved him perhaps as much, but the nature of her love had changed. She no longer craved for his love. His happiness was dearer to her than ever, for it seemed more doubtful, but she could at least work for it in the way he had pointed out. Perhaps she had not entirely believed in Stanmore's love for Drusilla, and her own hope, however unconscious, perished when he asked for her help.

Maisie shrank from cherishing this dead hope, for she now believed it to be founded on a mistake. Mr. Stanmore had always meant to be her friend, nothing more,

and for his sake she had devoted herself to Drusilla. She had watched the girl closely, and if Luke Stanmore had given her the opportunity, she could have told him that Harriet Foxley's story was a falsehood ; but she never saw Mr. Stanmore alone. Drusilla knew when to expect him, and she was usually on the watch for her lover. It was a relief to Maisie to be spared the pain of meeting him. He was always kind, but his constrained manner was more painful than complete indifference. She told herself that time would cure the pain she suffered, but it was a great relief to learn that Mr. Stanmore had taken a house in London, and would not return to Figgsmarsh when he and Drusilla came back from their wedding journey.

Only four days now to that fixed for the wedding, and Maisie wished that they were over. Everything was done that could be done at home. The vicar and Miss Auricula, Miss Savvay and her nephew would be the only guests. Mr. Stanmore's one living relative, a cousin, had sent a handsome gift to the young couple, but she was too much of an invalid to travel. Maisie would only have to arrange the flowers on the marriage-day and to help the bride to dress.

She had been glad to hear that Mr. Boyd had left the Manor House. Maisie had taken a singular dislike to the red-whiskered man when he came to the Hall.

It had been a tiring day ; several presents had arrived, and Maisie had unpacked and repacked them, so as to exhibit them to her visitors from the Manor House and the Vicarage.

Mr. Ray had come down over night, and the settlements had been signed this morning.

Maisie had been surprised by Drusilla's haughty manner to the lawyer. She had been not only haughty, but as indifferent as if she had never seen him before. Mr. Ray had been perhaps rather effusive when he first met his lovely fellow-traveller, but Maisie thought that he only

meant kindly, and she was pained by Drusilla's repressiveness.

He was gone and as Mr. Stanmore had been up to the Hall in the morning he was not expected to come again. Maisie gave a sigh of relief as she at last sat down in the library to rest.

Drusilla had gone, to her room after lunch, she had not seen any of the afternoon visitors.

"I have a good deal to see about in my room," she said, "you can do very well without me."

As Maisie sat resting in one of the high-backed chairs, the only luxuries in the library at Yardon, she thought how strange it was that in the weeks they had spent together, real confidence had not grown up between her and Drusilla Lescure. She had taken the girl on trust as her grandfather's ward, but she knew no more about Drusilla than Christabelle did about the dark-haired Geraldine.

Was it her fault or Drusilla's, Maisie wondered, that they had remained, with an outward show of intimacy, really strangers to one another. Her face burned as she remembered that but for the reticence she had observed towards the girl, Drusilla might have discovered Maisie's mistake about Luke Stanmore; perhaps she had done this, and felt constrained by the knowledge.

"It has been all for the best," Maisie said. "I was getting to love her till I saw the truth, and I should soon have been devoted to her—it is best as it is. I shall not miss her when she goes; I shall be able to give myself up wholly to my grandfather, he will miss her sadly."

She was interrupted—the butler came in to say she was wanted. A poor cottager with a baby only a week old had been taken suddenly ill, and had begged her husband to fetch Miss Derrick.

"I'll go at once. Warren, if Miss Lescure asks for me, you can tell her where I am."

"Miss Lescure is out, ma'am, went out an hour or so ago."

It was six o'clock, an unusual time for either of the girls to go out walking, and Drusilla had said she was tired. Maisie thought she was probably in the garden, but there was no time to lose, and she hurried down to the gate. The nearest way to the cottage for which she was bound was up some steps cut in the hedge-bank, and over a stile set in the hedge itself on the other side of the lane from the Hall and nearer the common.

By the time Maisie had crossed two fields and reached the cottage, which stood alone in a rough road, she found the woman better; a neighbor had come in to stay the night with her, and there was no need for Miss Derrick's presence. She stayed a few minutes, and then went away, promising to come again in the morning.

The evening was darker than usual, for a dense bank of dark purple cloud had risen in the west, and though a golden light still showed above this, it had become cold and pale.

There was plenty of light on the field-path, but the hedges were in gloomy shadow.

The sick woman's husband had offered to see Miss Derrick home, on account of its being late, but Maisie had declined his offer.

All at once she felt afraid. It seemed to her that a tall dark figure was moving swiftly along in her direction, keeping beside the hedge on her right. She walked faster and faster, so as to reach the stile first, and as she strained her eyes to see if she were gaining on her pursuer, it seemed to her that there were two figures, one larger than the other, a man and a woman she fancied.

She smiled and felt reassured. "A pair of village lovers," she thought, "skulking under the hedge to avoid notice." She walked on rapidly to the stile without taking any more heed of the skulkers. She crossed the stile, and looked back from the top of the bank and turned sick with a sudden dread. The dark slender figure was some

way in advance of the other, the face was turned away, but Maisie felt sure that the turn of the head, the graceful gliding walk, and the large hat with its drooping feather, were Drusilla's. Well, why not? Why should not Drusilla and Mr. Stanmore have settled to take a walk together this evening? Maisie's eyes went on to Drusilla's companion. He was not Mr. Stanmore. It was a man, but he was shorter and much stouter in make—he looked like a stranger.

Maisie stood with her hand on the stile. She wondered whether she ought not to go back and meet Drusilla, but she shrank from doing this. The figure in the shadow of the hedge might be Mr. Yardon. It did not look like her grandfather, but there was always the possible doubt.

She turned away, and going down the steps crossed over to the Hall gates. Half way up the drive, she watched and waited.

Presently the gate clicked, but Drusilla did not overtake her. The person who came in passed up the drive on the farther side of the rhododendrons clump to that on which Maisie stood. The light tread told that it was a woman.

Maisie waited till the Hall door had opened and closed, and then she went through the side shrubbery walk on to the lawn. Mr. Yardon was pacing up and down below the drawing-window.

"Where have you been?" he said gravely. "It is too late for you to be out alone; you would have done wisely to imitate Drusilla. Matthews tells me she has been resting in her room ever since lunch."

Maisie explained in a confused manner her own summons to the sick woman, and then she hurried away from her grandfather as quickly as she could. She felt guilty of Drusilla's secret, yet could not speak of what she had seen till she had asked the girl its meaning.

The dressing bell had rung before she reached her room and Mr. Yardon was exactly punctual. Maisie knew

that it was useless to seek Drusilla before dinner. She counted on the time they usually spent together while Mr. Yardon retired to his study for a quiet nap.

But this evening Drusilla lingered in the dining-room. "Must you have a nap?" she said. "Mayn't I stay in here with you?"

Her father looked grave from the effort he made to repress his delight. "I will come with you into the drawing-room," he said, "and you shall sing me some French songs."

"Sing you to sleep, eh?" but as they rose from the table she took his hand and drew it under her arm.

Maisie opened the door for them to pass out. She was puzzled by the new tenderness of Drusilla's manner. Her grandfather, too, had changed, she fancied; he did not joke and laugh with his ward as he used to, he was now often grave when he spoke to her, but Maisie thought she saw even more affection in his eyes than there used to be when they rested on Drusilla.

She felt sad and isolated; it must surely be her own fault that she had failed to win her grandfather's love, in ever so small a degree, when this stranger had so quickly conquered his whole affection, and seemingly without any special effort to please him. She was thinking this as she walked slowly across the hall to the library; Drusilla's sweet, thin voice was singing the refrain:

"Majolaine,
Ma Jolie Majolaine,"

as gaily as if she were a child free from deceit or concealment.

"I am jealous," Maisie said, as she looked out across the darkened grass-plot, and saw how black the elm branches were against the cool grey sky. "I have conquered one jealousy only to fall into another, and jealousy is such a mean, pitiful feeling."

She wondered at herself how she could think it possible that any one could prefer her to Drusilla, or even like her nearly as well. She had been fascinated by the girl when she first saw her, and she knew that such qualities as Drusilla's were far more captivating to men than they were to women.

"I am jealous," she repeated, "and so I fancy all sorts of evil about poor Drusilla. I even thought she was pretending just now to be fonder of grandfather than she really felt."

The door between the drawing-room and the library opened, and Drusilla came softly in. She went up to Maisie and put her arm round her.

"Talk out loud to me," she said, "I want to whisper to you. Do not say to anyone that you saw me in the field; I saw you. I will tell you about it later."

CHAPTER XXX.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

MAISIE sat brushing her hair before her dressing-table. She had guessed that Drusilla meant to pay her a visit, but as time went on, and the girl did not come, Maisie took down a favorite book and began to read. She soon found this unsatisfactory. She put down her book, and began to gather up her rich shining hair into two long tails ; then she once more tried to read, but she was too restless : something, a feeling that she could not define, warned her to be on the alert ; to keep all her faculties awake, so that she might prevent mischief.

And yet what could she do ? Maisie asked herself. She looked at her watch, half-past eleven, and then she remembered that her watch had been slow when she compared it with the clock in the library. The day had been mild rather than warm, yet Maisie found the air of her room oppressive. It seemed to her as she sat thinking that it was her own fault that she was so perplexed. It would have been so much more simple and natural if she had called out to Drusilla from the stile, or at any rate if she had waited so as to come indoors with her.

She went to her window and looked out. The dense bank of purple cloud now looked leaden as it spread upwards ; the whole sky was rapidly darkening. The wind had risen, and it howled among the tall elm trees that sheltered the house on either side. A gauze-like mass of black vapor came from the west and scudded across the grey overhead as if it were the herald of coming tempest. Maisie leaned out and watched the filmy veil swept by the wind round the farthest angle of the Hall ; she suddenly

drew back from the window and retreated a few steps into the room. Near her came a murmur of voices, and one of them was surely Drusilla's.

Maisie did not stop to reflect, her only idea was to find the girl. She shaded her candle with her hand as she left her room and closed the door behind her, then she went swiftly along the dark passage and down the few steps that led to the landing with the baize door.

She tried this but it would not open, and fancying it had stuck fast she set her candle down on the short stair-flight. The flame flickered wildly in an eddy of wind that had got into the house, and Maisie feared she should be left in darkness, while she strove with both hands to open the door. It would not move—evidently some one had drawn the bolt on the farther side. She stood still, wondering who could have fastened it. She was the only occupant on this side of the house on this floor. There were servants overhead, but they communicated only with a back staircase. The closing of this door cut her off from everyone. Maisie felt indignant, but she had no power of redress; she could not rouse the household for the sake of having that door unbolted; it was, she supposed, a servant's carelessness.

She took up her candle and went back to her room. There was an eerie feeling about it now that she knew how completely isolated she was.

But her adventure had quieted her restlessness. She reflected that the voices she had heard might be those of the servants on the upper floor; it was possible that they, too, had opened their windows and had leaned out talking.

Maisie undressed and said her prayers; she had put out her candle when a tap came at the door.

The girl was so startled that she could hardly strike a match; but while she re-lit a candle, Drusilla's voice said cheerfully,—

"Can I come in? It's only me."

Maisie opened the door and the girl came in. She had thrown a black cloak over her dressing gown and she looked very cold.

"Why do you lock yourself up?" she said. "Are you afraid of thieves, Maisie?"

Maisie smiled.

"You are very late," she said, "I was just going to bed."

"It is late," Drusilla said, coolly. "I can make up for it by a long night; you won't see me at breakfast, you excellent Maisie, and I'll keep you up the shortest possible time. Now, look here"—she sank into Maisie's easy-chair as if she were tired,—"I wish to keep the peace, and it would vex my guardian terribly if he knew about my walk; I do not wish to vex him just before I go away."

Maisie lit another candle, she could hardly see Drusilla's face in the dim light.

"Why did you do it, then, if you knew it would vex him?"

"Maisie, I often think you are too good to be real. Did you never do anything you did not care to proclaim on the house tops?"

"But, Drusilla, you were doing something very strange; it was not Mr. Stanmore you were walking with."

Maisie spoke very abruptly, she could hardly get the words out.

"You had best let well alone, Maisie." Drusilla was loosening her hair and she let it fall round her shoulders like a golden cape. "You are so innocent, though, that I mean to trust you. I am so sure you will not tell tales. Besides, you would do no good if you did tell. When you saw me I had been simply ending up something which had to be ended before I begin a new life."

Maisie drew back with a feeling of disgust. This girl whom she had thought so ignorant and innocent had been, then, entangled with some man before she met Mr. Stanmore.

"You saw that the person who was with me was a stranger." Drusilla looked hard at Maisie, as if she expected her to answer.

"I saw that it was not Mr. Stanmore because of the difference of height, but in the shadow of the hedge I could not see distinctly."

"That's all right." Drusilla spoke as if she were relieved. "No, he is not a friend of yours, Maisie. I knew him abroad in my mother's lifetime. She—she," Drusilla hesitated a minute before she went on,—“well, she parted us, or perhaps I should never have appeared at Yardon. As it was I forgot him, and I preferred Luke Stanmore; but when this poor fellow found me out and asked for a chance of saying good-bye, I don't think even you would be so hard-hearted as to say I ought to have refused to see him. That's all," she said, gaily. "It is all over. Why should I rake it up and make Mr. Yardon think it ever so much more than it is? He would never believe in me again; I understand him better than you do."

"It seems to me," Maisie spoke very gravely, "that if you shrink from telling my grandfather, you had better speak of this meeting to Mr. Stanmore; but, I beg your pardon, you have perhaps told him all about this—this affair?"

Drusilla stretched herself out in the easy-chair, and looked insolently at her companion.

"I do not tell Luke Stanmore everything," she said, slowly. "I certainly should not bore him with my little difficulties. I do not tell tales about myself nor about you either, most wise Duenna."

Maisie drew still further away from her companion.

"I do not understand you," she said, sternly; "you cannot tell tales about me to anyone. I have not any secrets."

She was sorry as soon as she had spoken, for she saw that Drusilla looked very angry.

"What hypocrites good women are," she said, passionately. "I may have failings, but I don't pretend to be good while all the time I am crawling after a man who cares nothing for me. No; I will speak, Maisie. I've been silent long enough; do you suppose your eyes have not told tales? I believe even to-night you were hoping to make up a story, when you spied after me in the field, so as to set Luke against me. You'd best try, that's all. You may try your heart out, but you'll do yourself more harm than you'll do me."

She gathered her cloak round her and, snatching up one of Maisie's candlesticks, she hurried out of the room and along the dark passages.

Maisie stood still. A tempest of shame and horror seemed to be whirling her off her feet; she put out her hand and caught at the table near which she stood.

She had, then, betrayed her secret, and this girl who had guessed it had proved herself to be as unfit to marry Luke Stanmore as Maisie, in what she had called a jealous mood, had thought her to be. Drusilla—"there is no use in thinking of her," the girl sternly checked herself, "she will tell him, but he will not blame me, and I do not think he will even allow her to blame me." Hot tears fell over her face; something told her that if anyone so unsympathetic as Drusilla had guessed at her love, she must have betrayed it herself in those earlier days with Luke Stanmore.

She stood in the darkness thinking—thinking. It seemed useless to go to bed, for she knew she could not sleep while the wound that Drusilla had re-opened smarted so keenly.

She shrank from the idea of daylight, and from seeing this girl again; but, after a while, she felt that it could not really signify what Drusilla thought of her, or said of her either.

She went to bed at last and she slept soundly.

Relief came to her in the morning before she had thoroughly wakened.

"If you please, Miss," Matthews said, when she had drawn up the blinds, "this note came very early—it was to have come last night, the messenger said."

Maisie found only a few lines from Miss Savvay asking her to spend the next three days at the Manor House.

Miss Savvay rarely interfered with others, but when she did her will asserted itself strongly and conquered all opposition. She had noticed the change in Maisie's looks, and she entirely disbelieved in her gay spirits. She knew that the girl would not be missed at the Hall, and she determined that she should come to her.

Maisie found her grandfather in singularly good spirits,

"Miss Savvay wants you to take care of her in her nephew's absence," he said, "and she will not be refused, she says. You will go, won't you, Maisie?"

"Yes; if you like." The girl said it was a blessed escape, and she saw that her grandfather wished for her absence.

Some weeks ago this would have pained her; but now it seemed only natural that he should wish to have Drusilla all to himself for these few days.

she had

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DAY BEFORE THE WEDDING.

DURING the night rain had fallen heavily, and on the lawn below the rhododendron bushes were miniature encampments of purple and lilac tents. The golden laburnum tresses, bent down with moisture, looked darker and duller than they had looked yesterday, so did the blossoms on one side of a huge lilac tree near the summer-house; but the other side which had been basking for some time in the full glow of morning sunshine was a blaze of reddish flowers that seemed to open their calyxes ever wider and wider to the welcome warmth. But though the sun had been drinking thirstily from the grass, Drusilla found it still very wet when she crossed it on her way to the summer-house.

"It is so stupid," she said, as her shoes soaked in the wet grass; "there is no way to this corner without crossing the lawn."

The birds were singing everywhere. A burst of music greeted her as she reached the summer-house, but she did not pause to listen; stooping down she looked under its wooden seat and found the note she expected stuck in between the bench and its rustic support.

Drusilla forgot her wet shoes, she sat down and read the note.

"How lazy these servant are," she sighed, as she put the note in her pocket, "it is almost six, and I don't believe any one is stirring unless it is my—I was just going to say, guardian; it is so difficult to believe he is my father. I wonder"—she looked unusually thoughtful—"if he really is my father. Poor old thing, it is plain he thinks so."

She yawned, and then she laughed at herself. "I have not got up so early since I came to England. Oh dear, how long the day will be. I was glad when Maisie went to Miss Savvay, but it's awfully dull without her, as dull as Sentis was without the excitement I had there looking out for what might happen."

As she walked towards the house she found that her skirts were almost as wet as her shoes were, and when she reached her room she decided that it would shorten this wearisome day if she went to bed again and had a nap before breakfast. She slept on so late that at last Mr. Yardon sent up to enquire for her, and to tell her that Mr. Stanmore was waiting to see her.

Drusilla was breakfasting when the message came.

"How tiresome," she said in French; she always spoke French before servants, and this habit had added to her unpopularity. "You can say I am coming, Matthews," she said to the maid.

Luke Stanmore was waiting for her in the hall. He looked so delighted when she appeared, that Drusilla smiled at him.

"I thought you were not to come to-day," she said; "I felt cross when I heard you were here."

"I knew I was not to come this evening, but I wanted particularly to see you this morning. Come into the garden, darling."

Drusilla gave a little shiver. "It will be very damp after the rain, won't it? Is it not better to go in here instead?"

She went into the drawing-room and placed herself before one of the open windows so as to command a full view of the gardener who moved slowly up and down, bending forward as he dragged the roller along the gravel.

"That is not a nice place; come here, darling." Stanmore sat down on a sofa on the farther side of the room.

"No," she said gravely, "this is my last day of freedom and I mean to spend it as I choose. I can only spare you a few minutes, so it does not matter whether I sit or stand."

She had lately been so gentle and complying that this change of mood surprised him. He crossed the room and stood beside her, looking down into her lovely face and wondering at the happiness that lay before him.

"You are right to stand in the sunshine, sweet one," he said tenderly. "I wish you could see the exquisite color it brings out in your hair. If I were an artist I should want to be painting you all day long—you are such an emblem of sunshine."

"I should like to have my portrait taken by a good painter," she said thoughtfully, "but I suppose that would be expensive. Would it cost very much, do you think?" She looked at him questioningly. "I mean, of course, a real life-size picture like the portraits at the Manor house."

He looked into her eyes, but she seemed unconscious, and he did not feel disposed to vex her by asking who had shown her these pictures.

"I am afraid such a portrait as that would cost several hundreds," he said, "but a mere likeness can be taken in a far less expensive way."

Drusilla shrugged her shoulders. "Unless I have the real thing I do not care for make believes; but now what is it you want so especially to say? I expect Mr. Yardon is looking for me."

Mr. Stanmore seemed to have forgotten his especial reason for coming to see her. He was so happy standing there beside her with the consciousness that to-morrow would begin the new life he so ardently longed for, that he did not want to talk. He liked to listen to her pretty French English, as he stood looking down at her lovely face with its liquid dark fringed eyes and the red gold hair that glistened in the sunshine. He was disturbed when Mr. Yardon came bursting into the room.

"You are still here, are you, Stanmore? Well, I want Drusilla presently—the child has got to choose any especial books she wishes me to leave her in my will. She

shall only have those she cares for ; there's no use in filling up a bright modern house with old musty out-of-date stuff, that can all go to the hammer when I'm hammered down. You'll find me in the library, dear child," he said as he went away.

"You had better go," Drusilla said. "No, you need not take a solemn leave." She held herself away as her lover bent down to kiss her when the gardener had passed out of sight.

Stanmore laughed. "It ought to be extra solemn, because I hope it is the last time we shall be parted for some time to come."

She looked gravely at him.

"You are a good fellow, Luke, and I shall always respect you. I wish you were richer, though," she said with a sigh, and breaking almost roughly away from him, she took refuge in the library.

"She is in a strange humor," Stanmore thought. "Are girls always flighty and unloving the day before the wedding, I wonder."

He smiled in thinking of to-morrow. When he reached the bottom of the lane, he found himself surrounded by a gaping crowd of boys and girls as they came thronging out of school. They evidently considered him a sort of hero, a foretaste of the sight to which they were looking forward.

Not one of the urchins had ever seen a grand wedding, and rumor of a white satin dress and lace veil and various other items had excited the juvenile mind of Figgsmarsh, till a perennial restlessness was the outcome, especially in school hours.

Mrs. Grieg, who looked tearful as she stood at her door came forward and swished at the small crowd with her apron ; but Stanmore laughed, and, nodding to one of the elder children, said they should all have something to remember him by to-morrow. He hurried rather suddenly into his lodgings as he caught sight of Harriet Foxley

coming towards him ; he was determined not to give this woman a chance of venting her spite on Miss Lescure.

Perhaps if he had then listened to Harriet his life might have been changed. He would have gone back to the Hall and he would have asked Drusilla to clear herself from the charge of having met Mr. Boyd, and she might have yielded to the strength of his honest love.

But Stanmore, who, except as regarded his business, was by no means a methodical person, had plenty to do in the few hours left him. He had been giving every evening to Drusilla, and had yet to set his papers and accounts straight, besides the arrangements he had to make for to-morrow's journey. They were to go straight to London, spend a few days there and then on to Paris. This had been Drusilla's plan, and although Stanmore would have preferred to avoid cities, he thought it was natural that she should wish for the bustle and movement of London.

It was Drusilla's happiest thought to-day that she should never have to live at Figgsmarsh or in any such dull place again. She was strongly unlike herself—fretful and impatient with Matthews, who was finishing the packing of her trunk so that it might be sent over night to the railway station, till the woman was puzzled ; she began to think that Miss Lescure had some feeling after all, and was fretting at leaving the Hall.

Maisie came home in the afternoon, but although Drusilla had been wishing for her return, she met her without a smile.

Maisie, however, had brought with her a fresh stock of spirits. She was full of the new impressions she had received at the Manor House ; she gave Drusilla a note from Miss Savvay to excuse her nephew's absence from the wedding ; he had gone to town to see his doctor, and had been advised to remain there a fortnight before returning to Figgsmarsh.

"It is a pity, is it not ?" Maisie said ; "it will make us an odd number."

"Does it matter?" Drusilla said carelessly. "Life seems so full of thwartings that nothing matters much, I fancy." Maisie stared at her, and then she laughed.

"Come, come," she said rightly, "this is not fit talk for a bride-elect. What have they been doing to you, eh?"

Drusilla had not seen Maisie since their quarrel, and she felt ashamed of meeting the girl's eyes; this cheerful banter took her by surprise.

"Maisie has not much feeling after all," she thought. "If any one had taunted me like that, I would never have forgiven such a thing. She has no spirit, poor thing, and she is too good tempered to feel; she is not nearly good enough for Luke Stanmore."

At dinner-time Drusilla was in the gayest spirits. She teased Mr. Yardon, and made up by kissing him, a performance which surprised Maisie, who had never seen her grandfather kissed by any one, and who was still ignorant of the girl's real position.

"I believe the captain is too great a swell to patronize my wedding," Drusilla said, and she gave so perfect an imitation of Captain Wentworth's polished, *blasé* manner, that both her companions laughed. "You are a wicked little witch," Mr. Yardon said. "I believe the poor chap was so hard hit that he has made an excuse for absence; he cannot stand seeing you handed over to some one else, eh?"

Drusilla looked pensive.

"I like him, mind you," she said, "though I take him off. He is a gentleman, but a poor gentleman is a mistake—no use to himself or to any one."

She sighed. For a few minutes she sat silent and frowning, but she was bent on amusing her companions this evening. She presently imitated Miss Auricula's attempts at fashionable ways so exactly that Mr. Yardon again guffawed. Maisie smiled but she felt pained; she knew how especially kind Miss Auricula had been to Drusilla, and the girl's keen ridicule seemed to her disloyal.

"Well, well," Drusilla abruptly checked her mimicry ; "she has taught me a good deal, poor woman. I should have been quite ignorant without Miss Auricula's fashion books ; but my dear Maisie, even you would have laughed if you had heard her talk of her third cousin once removed who is so well-bred and quite in society and nearly related to a duchess. When I am in society," she said thoughtfully, "I shall be able to see if Miss Auricula is all right, she seems to me to be a caricature." She sighed and then sat silent and moody till Maisie rose.

Mr. Yardon followed the girls into the drawing-room, and asked Drusilla to sing, but she refused.

"I have no voice to-night," she said. "I am so tired that I had better go to bed ; so had you, Maisie, or you'll be as white as your gown to-morrow."

She just touched Maisie's forehead with her lips, but the girl caught Drusilla's hand as she passed her and warmly kissed her cheek.

"Can I not do something for you ?" she said. "I'll come with you."

"Oh no, please, don't. I stood over Matthews and worried her till she had packed the last hair-pin. I'm going to bed straight ; thanks, there is nothing you could do to-night."

Drusilla hurried up to Mr. Yardon, put both arms round his neck and kissed him, and then in the same hurried way she left the room and closed the door behind her.

Her father sat still, his eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Do you think Drusilla is well ?" Maisie said timidly.

"She seems so unlike herself."

"Nonsense," his voice sounded hoarse, "she is excited, that's all. All girls who have any feeling are strange and flighty at such a time. I'm glad to see the dear child cares so much about leaving home."

He walked off to his study and did not reappear. Maisie sat thinking for some time longer. She was uneasy.

It seemed to her that some strange change had passed over Drusilla during her own visit to the Manor House. It was impossible to think that the girl was happy in the prospect of her marriage. Her gaiety had been painfully forced.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DRUSILLA'S WEDDING DAY.

MAISIE had a disturbed night, full of terrible dreams from which she waked up trembling with terror, only to fall asleep again and dream of fresh alarms.

She was awake very early, but though she felt unrefreshed and heavy hearted she was glad to leave her bed, which seemed to have become a fertile nest of tormenting fancies.

She was ready long before Matthews came to waken her, and she sat reading by her window, looking out now and then at the fresh loveliness of the garden; where all the flowering shrubs seemed in league to do honor to Drusilla's wedding day.

And the sunshine was gilding everything. Even the tiniest grass blade quivered with enjoyment as it basked in the universal brightness, while the chorus of birds was more musical than ever. One stout brown thrush on a tree close by seemed to be giving a singing lesson to his neighbors, he made so many trials before he let his voice out into a full tide of song.

Maisie sat absorbed, listening to the thrush, when into the midst of the song came discord—a thundering rap on her door.

"What is it?" she said, as she crossed over to open it.

Her grandfather stood outside. He looked very ill, his face was pale, his necktie was on one side, and his hair stood up round his face like a stiff grey frame, it was plain he had not yet brushed it.

"Can I come in?" He spoke roughly and harshly as if he were suffering.

Maisie opened the door to admit him.

"What is it? You are in some trouble, grandfather?"

He had fixed his eyes on her with such piercing scrutiny, that for an instant hers sank under it, but she rallied and looked at him so firmly that his purpose changed.

"Do you know anything about Drusilla? Have you seen her this morning?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

His sorrow had got the better of his anger, and Maisie's sympathetic eyes reflected the anguish she saw in his face.

"Shut your door, shut your window; now, Maisie, what did you mean last night? Did you know anything when you said she was strange?"

There was such eager hope in his eyes, that the girl felt tenderly pitiful.

"I hardly know what I meant; I felt that Drusilla had changed very much in these few days that I had been away at the Manor House, she seemed so much older."

"Good Heavens!" he struck one clenched hand into the palm of the other, "and I saw nothing different. I have been a blind deluded fool—she—she's gone—she went away this morning."

Maisie could not speak. She felt as if she had known all this before; every word her grandfather said was expected as if she had already heard it; she could only stare at him with wide-open, startled eyes.

"Are you out of your senses? Why don't you speak?" he said angrily. "Can you give no help, no clue? Can you do nothing but stare?"

"I think, grandfather," the girl said, "that Drusilla must have gone away to meet some one—some one who has taken her away. I believe you will get news of her at the railway station."

The words seemed to come without her will, but Mr. Yardon hailed them with relief. Half an hour ago Warren had roused him from his sleep with the news that Miss Lescure was missing; he was still stupefied with the sudden

shock, but Maisie's suggestion had given him something definite to do.

"What makes you say that? have you a reason?" Then he stretched out his hand to check her answer, and hurried away.

Maisie waited anxiously for his return and so did the household. Warren and the housekeeper were mystified, the maids were extremely discontented at the delay of the wedding, for Mr. Warren had said that such a bride as Miss Lescure would have been worth coming from London to see.

A quantity of flowers had been brought in over night, but Maisie ordered them to be left in the huge china bowls in which the gardener had placed them; it seemed a mockery to make the house gay at such a time of trouble. The girl waited till about an hour before the time fixed for the wedding, and then she wrote a note to Mr. Vernon and took it down the hill to the Vicarage. She simply wrote that the marriage was unavoidably postponed, and she asked if Mr. Vernon would be kind enough to go to the Manor House and tell this fact to Miss Savyay.

She also said that her grandfather would prefer to be left alone. She did this from her longing to be of some use, but as she came up the hill again she felt a little frightened lest she had been precipitate. Mr. Yardon might bring Drusilla back after all.

When one o'clock came and her grandfather was still absent, she felt glad she had acted promptly, and had thus saved so much vexation and expectation; she knew that Mr. Vernon would be discreet as well as kind, and would not encourage gossip.

She had just made a hurried lunch when Mr. Yardon came in to the dining-room. He looked ghastly, but he did not speak, and Maisie did not venture to question him. He drank off a glass of claret and ate a few mouthfuls of bread, then he looked up at Maisie.

"Come with me," he said.

When he had closed his study door behind them, he drew the heavy felt curtain across it with a look of keen suspicion.

"You were right, Maisie,"—he pointed to a seat near him,—"there was news at the station. Miss Lescure travelled by the 5.45 train to Elling. I learned at Elling that she was joined on the platform by a gentleman, and that they were married at the Roman Catholic chapel at Elling. I called on the priest, and found that both parties, she and Boyd—Boyd is the scoundrel—satisfied him that they were members of his communion, and I came back here; that is all."

He said all this slowly as if he had learned it, while he sat stiffly upright; his face too looked rigid; he seemed to have lost all feeling.

"I am dreadfully sorry," Maisie said at last.

He smiled.

"Are you? You usually say what you mean; I cannot really see what you have to be sorry about. She was nothing to you, worse than nothing; she came in your way in more senses than one. Poor Stanmore, poor chap, I could hardly stand the look on his face; I'm not sure he believes it yet. It's a case of heartbreak, poor lad—curse that rascal. She—it is as much as I can do to keep from cursing her—you don't know the worst yet." He waited a few minutes, then he said slowly, "She is my own child, and she knows it."

"Your child! oh grandfather!"

She could reach his hand where she sat, and she pressed her lips lovingly on it. But he drew it away.

"There—there," he said not unkindly, but with a calmness that surprised her. "You are a good girl, Maisie; yes, you are really good, but I am best alone, child. Go away now. I leave it to you to make all straight with the servants."

Maisie longed to put her arms round the desolate old

man, and to try and comfort him ; but he had said he wished to be alone, and she quietly left the room. She went into the library and summoned Warren, and told him that the wedding would not take place.

She felt quite as much bewildered by her grandfather's confession as by the events of the morning, for it made Drusilla's flight still more puzzling. It seemed impossible to Maisie that the girl could have preferred such a man as Mr. Boyd to Luke Stanmore. But Maisie's thoughts soon went back to her grandfather.

It was so cruel that he should have been deceived in Drusilla, especially cruel that he who had found it so hard to like any one heartily should have been cheated into the warm affection which he had bestowed on her. Maisie tried to be merciful, but she felt indignant as she realized how skilfully they had all been tricked. How could she leave her father in this way when he loved her so ? and her heart went out warmly to her grandfather.

With true love, fear for the beloved one goes hand in hand, and as the girl sat thinking, she felt an anxious dread.

Her grandfather's perfect calmness had surprised her. Suppose this sudden shock was even now working him serious mischief.

She sat a few moments, thinking sadly how very desolate he was ; she did not think he had one friend to whom he could turn for comfort in this strait. Her intense pity warmed into renewed life the love she had felt for him when first she came to Yardon ; almost unconsciously she moved quietly to the door which divided the library from the study, and stood there. She had stood there some minutes, when she heard a strange sound, a cry for help in a voice she did not recognize, then a heavy fall.

Maisie had found her grandfather lying senseless on the floor, to all appearance dead ; but he had rallied with wonderful power, and now at the end of some weeks, the doctor

pronounced him to be almost as well as he was before his seizure.

To-day the doctor paid a longer visit than usual, and when he went away he told Maisie he thought her patient was going to have a nap.

"You should go for a walk, Miss Derrick," he said. "I gather from what I hear that you have taken far too much off the nurse's hands ; I shall have you for my next patient, if you are not careful. You need all your strength, for you must take your grandfather away as soon as you can. He is quite able to travel, and wants a change."

Maisie smiled. She felt a longing to escape from Figgs-marsh and its associations, but she feared that her grandfather would not consent to leave home.

There was no one to consult with. Miss Savvay was in town nursing her nephew, whose stay in London had been prolonged till it had ended in an attack of low fever.

Maisie had been very lonely during Mr. Yardon's illness, but a new hope had come into her life. More than once she had met her grandfather's eyes fixed on her with a look that puzzled her, it was so sad and yet it was not unkind ; lately too she had seen with surprise that he preferred her services to those of the nurse.

Maisie was so incredulous of her own powers of pleasing the strange old man that she scarcely allowed herself to believe in this hope ; and yet every day some fresh proof rebuked her doubt. Till she saw her grandfather with Drusilla she had thought her first idea of him a mistake ; she had grown to think Miss Savvay's perception was keener than her own when the spinster said that he was a hard old man who had no love to give to any one. Maisie had urged against her friend's opinion Mr. Yardon's warm friendship for Luke Stanmore ; but Miss Savvay had promptly answered that he might like men, but he could have no liking for women or he would and must love Maisie.

When the girl came in from her walk, Warren met her in the hall ; he said his master wished to see Miss Derrick in the library.

Mr. Yardon was sitting with his back to the windows. Maisie thought he looked strangely grave, but his face softened as she came up to him.

"The doctor has been frightening me about you, my girl," he said ; "you do not look so pale either, I suppose your walk has given you a color. Should you like to pack up your traps and start off for Switzerland with such an old fellow-traveller as I am ? eh, Maisie ?"

The sparkle in her eyes and her deepened color answered him.

"I should like it ever so much," she said ; "but are you sure you wish to travel, grandfather ?"

He put out his hand for hers, but the look in his eyes was enough for Maisie.

She bent down, and putting her arms round him she kissed him.

He held her close for an instant, then he whispered,—

"You have much to forgive, child, and I have much to make up for, but please God I'll do it yet."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN A SWISS VILLAGE.

THE Hall had been shut up for a year. The servants still remained there, for Mr. Yardon's absence had been indefinitely prolonged—it was supposed that he might come home any day with scanty notice for preparation; and the Manor House was again deserted, Captain Wentworth was abroad for his health. Miss Auricula Vernon and the Figgsmarsh gossips found themselves, therefore, starved for want of amusement. The vicar was dull and out of spirits—life had lost much of its flavor for him with the absence of Miss Derrick.

In the village itself there had been changes. Mr. Stanmore had gone away the day after Drusilla's disappearance, and he had not come back.

Harriet Foxley had become more and more crazy, till at last she flung a saucepan at her brother George, whereupon George took the law in his own hands; and procured her admission to the imbecile ward of the County Asylum. Old Foxley yielded to his son's stronger will, but he greatly regretted his daughter and her cookery.

Mrs. Greig, therefore, as behoved a kind neighbor, tried her best to comfort the bereaved father, and he had found her attentions so indispensable, that, on this sunny June day, she had for some time been settled in her new home as Mrs. Foxley. She had contrived to conciliate her stepson, who found home a far pleasanter place since his crazy sister had left it; and although, now that the first politenesses had worn off, the old blacksmith sometimes told his wife to "shut up" in the midst of her gossip, there was more peace and comfort in the Foxley home than there had been under Harriet's rule.

"Did you hear any news up at the house, father?" Mrs. Foxley asked. "Any chance of the squire coming back, or of Miss Derrick getting married?"

She was sitting at the table, darning, with a heap of stockings before her.

"No, wife, I didn't."

The old man went on smoking his long clay pipe as he sat at his door, basking in the sunshine.

"I say, Foxley, George ain't here, so nobody needn't say it's gossip, when we're only ourselves; but doesn't it seem to you it would be a likely thing for Mr. Stanmore to take up with Miss Derrick again; he was sweet on her—I'm witness to that—before that 'Frenchwoman,' as poor Harriet used to call her, stepped into her shoes. What do you say?"

"You've asked me that fifty times already, Mrs. Foxley, and you've had my answer. If it's to be it will be, and if it ain't it won't, an' no words o' yourn will make it be. So you only waste breath."

He looked straight before him into the road, while his wife, safely sheltered by his broad back as she sat behind his chair, shrugged her shoulders and then nodded, with a little sniggering laugh, over the heap of stockings.

"Poor dear Mr. Foxley," she thought; "he's clever and learned about politics, and horses' hoofs, and the ministers, and such like, but, dear me, what could he know about a love affair? He who never found out what was known to every one, that his poor daughter Harriet was mad with love for Mr. Stanmore. Why, she'd have disgraced them all, that she would, but for George's good sense."

Mrs. Foxley was grateful, and never forgot the debt which, as Mrs. Greig, she had owed to her stepson.

Foxley sat smoking in silence.

"Yes, wife," he said, at last, "I did hear something."

"Did you now?"

In her eager delight, she jumped up, and coming for-

ward, stocking in hand, she stood and darned beside her husband.

"Yes, dear?" for he went on smoking.

"Yes, Mrs. Foxley! I did hear something."

He liked to call his wife by her new name. He was proud that, at past sixty-five, with the gout in both feet, he had prevailed on so very genteel a person as Mrs. Greig to accept him. "Quite the lady, my boy," he often said to his son George; "there's a style in everything she puts her hand to."

"Well, dear, go on."

She spoke affectionately; but she wished he would lay down his pipe and tell his story out.

"There's been a letter, I understand, what has come a week or more ago, from one or other of these foreign places, directed to Mr. Yardon; and Mr. Warren, he says to the best of his knowledge and belief, that there letter was from Miss Lescure,—'Mrs. Boyd,' as they call her,—an' he's sent it at once travelling after Mr. Yardon."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Foxley felt excited; "and there are those who say the poor old gentleman went off in search of her, because he could not live without her. It's plain as my darning-needle he's not come up with her, or that letter wouldn't have come to Yardon. I'm sure I hope he never will come up with her. Miss Derrick's worth a dozen of her. She's a lady. T'other one's a yellow-haired witch; that's what I call her."

"Shut up, Mrs. Foxley! we can't have any calling of names; the lady was pretty enough to please anyone, and 'tis no wonder the old man's fancy was caught. All the men were in the same cry, for that matter."

On that same sunny June afternoon, "the old man," as Foxley called him, was resting half-way up the green side of a mountain. Maisie strayed about on the flowery turf, half wild with delight at the abundance and variety of the blossoms that carpeted the slope.

At their feet, some way below, lay a picturesque village of log cottages, with tiny gardens full of trees and flowers. These cottages straggled along a narrow terrace on the hillside, which on the left broadened out into a projecting spur, on which the tall, black, sharply-pointed steeple of the little white church made a landmark from the valley, hundreds of feet below. Along this valley rushed a river, sometimes fairly broad, but more often choked with stones, against which the water dashed and foamed, yet made no way for its passage ; it had to leap over the stone barrier that had, perhaps, fallen across it since the mountains had yawned this tremendous ravine.

There were many lateral openings on the farther side, and at the end of one of these a glacier lay glittering in the sunshine, tinged just now with rosy light ; the nearer mountains showed green ridges and brown cattle shelters among the pine woods, but the farther-off mountains had grey rocky sides, green at the base, with snowy summits.

Mr. Yardon was never tired of gazing at the scene. He looked stronger and much younger than when he left England. He had for some months gone back to his old wandering habits, and had shown Maisie many very interesting cities and countries. The girl had often dreamed of these places while she had read about them, but she had never expected to see them. She found Mr. Yardon an experienced guide ; and he was pleased to discover how well-informed his young companion was, and how many associations her reading had given her with the places they visited.

He was thinking about this to-day as he lay on the sun-dried hill slope. He had received Drusilla's letter, and he smiled grimly as he thought how different a companion he should have found her. Perhaps of all Maisie's qualities, the one that endeared her most to her grandfather was her cheerful acceptance of the little troubles and disappointments that are apt to beset travellers. More than once

when his own temper had become crooked from a delayed dinner or an inability to find rooms, or when an unlucky trunk had gone astray, Maisie's bright smile and cheerful words, and, above all, her ready helpfulness, had set all straight. Her grandfather told her she was courier and companion united. She came up to him now with her hands full of delicate white flowers.

"Maisie," he said, "I want to talk to you; come and sit down. Bless you, child, those weeds are not worth the store you set by them."

"Wait a bit." Maisie laughed happily. "Just wait till I have time to put them in water, and you'll see how bright that desolate little sitting-room will look. You won't recognize it."

"Maisie," her grandfather said abruptly. "now should you like Drusilla to come home and live at Yardon again?"

The light faded out of Maisie's face; her shy, shrinking manner came back. She looked a limp contrast to the happy girl of a few moments ago, as she sat bending forward, her eyes fixed on the turf. Drusilla's name had scarcely been mentioned since they left England, and Maisie believed that the girl had not written to her father. She felt crushed by his proposal, and then her honest nature, which had become more outspoken during these months of freedom, asserted itself.

"I should not like it!" she said. "I could not be happy with her, because I could not trust her."

He gave her a sly, humorous look.

"To think how hard a good woman can be! Well, well," he sighed, "the poor thing is in the same plight; she says she can't trust her husband. He quarrels with her for being extravagant, and she says he spends too much on his own self-indulgence. She says she's very unhappy. There, you can read and see what you make of it. It's a sad business. I fancy the fellow drinks."

Maisie's lip curled as she read Drusilla's petting, caress-

ing words. Mrs. Boyd said she had long ago repented that she had chosen for herself instead of relying on her dearest father's unerring judgment. More than one page was filled with vehement complaints of her husband's ill-treatment and his stinginess. She said she had his permission to come to England and stay with her father, and that she longed to see Yardon and his kind dear face again. She longed, too, to take her place as the daughter he had so lovingly taken to his heart. Except for the abuse of her husband, Maisie could not find fault with Drusilla's letter, and yet to her it did not seem true; it gave her the impression that if Mr. Boyd had continued to behave well to his wife, she would not have written to her father. There was no expression of contrition for the pain she had given; she only repented because her choice had not proved a success.

Maisie sat holding the letter dumbly, when she had finished reading it.

"Well!" he said, in the mocking tone she had not heard for so long; "what is your verdict, Maisie? Shall we go home to receive the prodigal, and kill the fatted calf?"

She looked up at him gravely. She could not understand how he could joke about what seemed to her so very serious.

"Did you get this letter to-day, grandfather?"

"No; it came two days ago; I wanted to think it over quietly; it took me some time to digest it." Then his manner changed, and he turned to Maisie with the deep, loving look in his eyes, which she had never met there until his recovery, a year ago.

"My dear, I have decided. I have already written to Mrs. Boyd, and I have given her the best advice I can. I have told her that at present, at any rate, I do not wish to see her. Who knows?" he said, with a faint smile; "Drusilla is such a fascinating little witch, I might be simpleton enough to let her deceive me once more."

He saw the wonder in Maisie's eyes, and he put his hand on her shoulder.

"You can't understand it, child. I don't fancy that it affects women so much; but fascination is about the most dangerous power any one can possess; and when such a girl as Drusilla has it, it's hard to stand firm against; even against proved deceit. In man, and in woman, too, it is a gift that seldom goes with higher gifts. Unluckily, no one remembers that in time; one follows as the children in the Hamelin legend followed the weird music of the Rattenfanger's fife; one begins to dance and the irresistible music leads one on; one's own will is for the time bewitched."

"Yes."

Maisie spoke thoughtfully; she was wondering whether this potent gift could ever lose its power; and whether, if Drusilla appeared in person she would not easily reconquer not only her father's affection, but also that of Luke Stanmore. She felt grateful to Mr. Yardon for his decision, but she knew that it was for his own sake as much as for hers that he refused to receive Drusilla.

Mr. Yardon had made a fresh will before he left England; the bulk of his property was left to Maisie, but he had settled a small yearly allowance on his daughter, so that, in the event of her being left unprovided for, she need not want. He still believed Drusilla would come right in the end, but he felt a stern satisfaction in punishing her for her deceit. He had told her of this provision in his letter; he wished to prevent her from cherishing undue expectations, and he also felt that it would be a test of her sincerity.

Maisie, silently plucking the flowers, wondered what would have happened if Drusilla had made her appeal in person; and then she thought of Luke Stanmore. If he were to meet Drusilla, and she once more tried to fascinate him, would he be able to resist her?

Mr. Yardon was also silent. He was planning how to escape a meeting with his daughter. He felt sure Drusilla would try to join him, and he determined to leave this charming valley, where he had been so happy, and to communicate his future route only to his lawyer, Mr. Ray.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HAVE I COME TOO LATE?

Two days later a tall Englishman left the train at Landquart, and set off to walk to the little Alpine village, although the steep three miles' climb was in the full blaze of sunshine.

The traveller's brown skin showed that he was accustomed to a much warmer climate, and he climbed the road as briskly as if the sun were not at its prime of heat and light.

Once or twice he stood still, and turned to look down the steep descent into the valley; then seeing that on his right the mountain rose up like a green wall beside him, as the road climbed it in zigzag, he halted and took a long breath before he went on again.

At last as he turned an angle of the road he looked up and saw the long white hotel rising out of the dark shrubs and trees of its garden, backed by the green mountain, which went up still another thousand feet or so above.

Just then the garden gate opened, and Mr. Stanmore's eyes glistened as he saw his old friend come out and take the road leading down towards him.

"It will be a surprise for him," Stanmore thought. He had called on Mr. Ray, and had learned where to find Mr. Yardon; he had not written to announce himself.

He soon saw that he was observed. Mr. Yardon stopped and shaded his eyes with his hand. Then he put on his glasses, and having taken a good look through them, he came forward at a quickened pace.

"This is unexpected. I'm delighted,"—he shook Stanmore's hand as if he never meant to let it go. "Where do you hail from?"

"From London. I only left it yesterday. I wanted so much to see you again."

"You have not spent much time in London, your skin tells me that." Mr. Yardon had been noticing his friend's sun-bronzed face.

"No, I have been a year in Spain, railroad making. I went there soon after I left Figgsmarsh, and I was glad to get this appointment. Is Miss Derrick with you?"

"Yes." Mr. Yardon gave an uneasy smile. "Oh yes, she's up in the village sketching. I hope you found this Spanish affair profitable."

"Yes, and it has opened the way for a still better appointment. I feel," Stanmore smiled happily in the elder man's face, "that my foot is firm on the ladder now, it must be my own fault if I don't go up it."

"Bravo, that's all right." Mr. Yardon shook his hand heartily.

"Shall we go and find Miss Derrick?" Stanmore did not say this in the same firm cheery tone, he looked questioningly at Mr. Yardon.

"Yes, we'll go up and find her, why not? Are you come to stay, Stanmore?"

"That depends; I hope so."

The older man eyed him keenly. He cleared his throat to speak and then checked himself; he had almost said "You were always impetuous, my friend, do not be in too great a hurry now."

They walked on in silence till they came to a point where, still on a lower level than the hotel, the road forked, and led on the right round the long white building to the spur which held the little black spired church, suspended as it were above the valley, while the road on the left took its way along the village street to the Rathhans, beyond which showed long straggling lines of *chalets* which seemed to cling to the green hill-side.

"You will find Maisie in that direction," Mr. Yardon

said. "I will go on to the inn and order your room before the diligence comes in with fresh arrivals."

Stanmore thought his old friend spoke sadly as he turned away towards the hotel. He was right. Mr. Yardon walked on slowly with his head sunk on his chest. He had been glad to see his friend, but now he felt angry as well as unhappy.

Just when he and Maisie had learned to love one another, and when he seemed day by day to find out what a treasure of pleasant companionship he had denied himself in those years when he had resolutely closed his heart against his granddaughter, he was to lose her. He knew by a sort of instinct that Stanmore had come for Maisie—not to see him.

The young fellow's silence all this while had not surprised him. Mr. Yardon had felt disgraced by Drusilla's conduct, and it had been a relief to him when Stanmore left Figgsmarsh without saying good-bye to any one.

He smiled bitterly as he remembered Drusilla's letter. It seemed to him that she would follow it and seek to find him out. "Will it come to that?" he thought; then shrugging his shoulders, "I suppose so. Stanmore will take Maisie away from me, and I shall have to go home with Drusilla and submit myself to her whims and caprices for the sake of a quiet life. Serves me right, Miss Savvay will say. I shall never forget the lecture she wrote me before we left England. She'll have no pity on me now, and I dare say she's right. I've made my bed and I've got to lie on it."

He gave a grim smile, and proceeded to secure the best room that was vacant for Luke Stanmore.

Meantime Stanmore had strolled upwards till he reached the first line of *chalets*; rows of straw beehives showed in the gardens of these *chalets*, and in front of the hives were flaming poppies and yellow nasturtiums, and the ever-present carnation, with a background of huge blue green

cabbages, and here and there a plot of golden maize and tall hemp. There were three rows of these straggling cottages, and in the third was a *chalet* that especially attracted Stanmore's notice ; the balcony under the broad eaves was bright with pot flowers, and there was a profusion of carnations and fuchsias on the rude wooden shelves below each window.

Maisie was standing opposite this cottage as if she were considering it, but her sketch-book lay on the block of wood behind her.

"Miss Derrick," Stanmore said, and she turned and saw him.

She looked very bright, ever so much younger he thought than when he had last seen her ; her dark eyes glowed with pleasure when she saw him.

"Have you met my grandfather ?" she said, as they shook hands.

"Yes, I met him on the slope, and he told me where to find you."

"Is not this a picturesque Swiss village ? If you like to come a little higher I will show you an exquisite view into the valley beyond us ; but there are beautiful bits on every side, especially if you climb."

"Do you climb alone ?" he said laughing ; her animation relieved his embarrassment, and he already felt the exhilaration of the fresh mountain air.

"I am seldom alone," she said, with a happy assured look that Stanmore had rarely seen in her truthful face ; "my grandfather and I take our walks together. He has been teaching me how to climb since we came here, but he says these mountains are very easy and insignificant. I suppose they will not satisfy you."

He looked into her eyes.

"I am come here to rest." He paused. She met his look so frankly that he felt checked, and he remembered he had resolved to be cautious. "Where is this view ? I should like to see it, if you are not tired."

"I am never tired here, and—and—" Maisie hesitated, and yet it seemed to be only just towards her grandfather to let Mr. Stanmore know how kind he was. "I am so happy. I find my grandfather such a delightful companion; he has travelled so much that he knows something about every place we visit."

Stanmore felt suddenly irritable, it seemed to him that Mr. Yardon must be a bore with his guide-book information.

Every moment, as he walked beside her, his feelings strove to overmaster his prudence. They had come back months ago, and had gained strength from repression; and till he saw her to-day he had felt fairly confident of success.

But now fear was stronger than hope.

This bright handsome laughing girl was not the shrinking shy Maisie he had known at Yardon. As he followed her across a long series of flowery meadows to a plank bridge over the brook, a new idea came to him. It was so long since they had parted, much might have happened in the interval; it was possible that she was no longer free. She looked so handsome, so distinguished, that she must have found admirers.

"This way," said Maisie cheerily, as she hurried on into the thick fir wood they had been making for.

It was rather perilous walking in this wood. The path went along the very edge of a steep ravine, and the ground was so slippery and broken that Maisie caught every now and then at one of the slender fir trunks on the right. Even Stanmore was obliged to walk carefully lest he should lose his foothold, and the trees grew so near the narrow path that he could not help Maisie as she walked on in front.

They came out at last on a projecting spur that bulged forward into the ravine. There was a small clearing here among the pines, and Stanmore exclaimed at the beauty of the view. The Rhine valley gemmed with tiny villages lay

at his feet, while a succession of pale pearl-tinted mountains rose above the dark ridge that walled in the valley, till they seemed to melt into the sky line. Just below the point on which they stood, a torrent leapt down the face of the rock into the sunshine ; it halted half-way to take breath, and seemed to take also an increase of color as the sunbeams touched its spray.

"This is delightful."

Stanmore flung himself down on the brown carpet of pine needles ; Maisie had already seated herself on a huge moss-grown stone.

Stanmore felt a sense of heavenly rest and happiness as he looked at his companion. Her eyes were fixed on the far-off mountains, and he could gaze his fill on her noble, trusting face ; he thought she looked so sweet and so true, free from vain and petty thoughts. He had discovered long ago that he had deserted the true woman for the lovely falsehood who had deceived him, but he had never so fully realized this as he now did sitting at Maisie's feet.

He had resolved months ago to seek her as soon as he reached England. He had made wise resolutions. He told himself that Maisie would not at once forgive him, but he trusted more to personal pleading than to a letter, and he had not therefore announced his coming. He meant to be very humble, and above all very patient, and little by little he hoped to win back the love which he believed she had once felt for him. Now the first sight of her put all these wise intentions to flight ; he felt timid instead of hopeful, but also desperately impatient to learn his fate.

All unconsciously, Maisie's next words increased this impatience beyond his power of controlling it.

"We go on perhaps to-morrow to the Engadine," she said, "to meet some friends who were with us in Rome last winter."

Stanmore raised himself on his elbow and looked intently at her upturned face. Her eyes were still fixed on the mountains, and she was smiling as if at some happy memory.

"There is room on your stone for half a dozen people," he said abruptly ; "may I come and sit there ?"

Maisie smiled as he placed himself beside her ; he wished she would look a little shy, less sisterly ; he felt irritated by her perfect composure.

"I should have been more in my place down there," he looked at the pine needles. "Maisie, I want to be forgiven. I have come here to tell you so."

"Forgiven—you ?"

She was looking troubled at last, and he felt suddenly hopeful.

"I mean that I had learned soon after I came to Yardon that only you could make me happy, and yet I was infatuated enough, foolish enough——"

"Please stop," Maisie said ; "it was a grief to us all that you were deceived, but I do not see how you could help it, every one was deceived."

"It is like your sweetness to say that, but a man ought not to be a child, led away by a mere fancy. I do not deserve forgiveness, and yet I ask for it."

Maisie was silent. Her grandfather's words as they sat together on the hill kept on repeating themselves. If Mr. Stanmore were to meet Drusilla, how could she dare to hope that his love for herself would not once more yield to this powerful fascination. She thought, too, Drusilla could never have loved her husband as well as she had loved Stanmore.

"Will you forgive me ?" he said tenderly.

She tried to look at him calmly.

"Indeed, I have nothing to forgive. I have always felt that you were my friend ; we never quarrelled, you know." She smiled and rose from her mossy seat. "Shall we go and find my grandfather ?"

He took her hand to detain her ; she saw the masterful look in his eyes she so well remembered, but his eyes did not thrill her now, as they had done all those months ago.

"No, I cannot let you go till I know my fate ; I do not believe in your forgiveness while you remain so cold. Will you not believe I love you, Maisie ?"

She drew her hand away,

He heard the trouble in her voice, it trembled with agitation.

"I cannot ; it is not my fault, but I cannot."

She turned from him and went along the slippery path. Stanmore was obliged to follow her in silence till they came to the plank bridge ; he went on first here, and held out his hand to guide her over, but Maisie only touched it lightly with her fingers.

He stood before her when she reached the meadow so that she could not pass him.

"You will give me another answer ?" he said passionately, clasping her hand between his. "Maisie, you cannot be so unforgiving."

"It is not a question of forgiveness." She trembled very much, but she frankly raised her eyes to his. "I say 'No,' for your happiness as well as for mine. I should not make you happy if I did not believe in your love ; besides," she smiled brightly as she again drew her hand from his grasp, "you forget my grandfather ; so long as he wishes it, he must be my chief care in life. I love him very dearly, and he knows it."

Stanmore still stood barring her way, with wistful hungry eyes.

"That is no reason at all. We could both care for him if you would have it so. Why should you be so full of love and mercy to him and yet have none for me ? Tell me how I can make you believe that you, only you, can make me happy ?"

She turned her head away ; he thought she was weary of his pleading.

"Have I come too late ?" he cried out. "Oh Maisie, tell me, you might spare me my useless hope ; well I deserve this."

He stood aside to let her pass, but she turned to him her eyes were full of tender pity.

"It is not as you think," she said. "I find it hard to explain myself, but I must make you understand this: I know I could not make you happy unless I could fully trust your love, and if you were unhappy," she paused. "well, I should be unhappy too."

She smiled at him and Stanmore understood; it was plain to him that Maisie still feared Drusilla's power to revive his feelings.

They walked on side by side in silence; he thought if he could only have patience he might win her, but it was terrible to have to wait. As they walked on, he told himself that determination must conquer; time and his own constancy must convince Maisie of the truth of his love. All at once she ran forward, and he saw Mr. Yardon waiting for them at the gate of the furthest field.

Mr. Yardon looked at the girl's earnest loving eyes, and then his glance anxiously travelled on to her companion.

Stanmore's face told him what had been said between them; he drew his granddaughter's hand under his arm, and tenderly pressed it.

"My friend Luke is a simpleton," he said to himself "so much the better for me; the foolish fellow should have waited."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

THERE was a little shop at the corner of the village street, and Maisie went into it, telling her companions she would follow them.

"I will get you to say my good-bye to Miss Derrick." Stanmore spoke so abruptly that his companion stared at him, as he went on : " Yes, for the present, old friend. I have ruined all my hopes by my confounded impatience ; but I do not give up. I must go ; you will not see me till I am more master of myself than I am just now."

Mr. Yardon looked at him curiously. " Did my granddaughter give you any hope ? "

" No, not in words ; but she said she was free, that is she implied it, and she said it as if she meant me to understand that though she will not listen to me now, she has not listened to any one else. She will not trust me," he said bitterly, " that's it."

They had reached the door of the inn. Stanmore looked back, and he saw that Maisie was following them slowly.

" Good-bye," he said hurriedly ; " the kindest thing you can do is to let me go."

Mr. Yardon led the way through the house into the garden which ran along the front, and commanded a view of the valley.

" Stay a minute," he said ; " we shall not be followed, and I will start you on your way. Now, look here, Stanmore,"—he stood still when they were outside the gate—" you must not be hard on Maisie ; are you sure that *you* are free ? "

Stanmore reddened. "Do you really think I should have dared to offer myself to such a girl as Maisie if I had not learned that I cannot be happy without her? You must have seen, you could not help knowing, that I loved her almost as soon as I saw her."

"Yes, I knew;" Mr. Yardon's voice sounded husky as he made this admission; "and I was blind enough to think you a fool; but, my good fellow, that only makes your position worse. If a man is changeable once, he——"

"No, I cannot agree with you." Stanmore spoke so very earnestly that Mr. Yardon was greatly impressed. "I have never really loved any one but Maisie; but till to-day I did not know how I loved her, or how little I deserve to win her. I behaved like a foolish boy at Figgsmarsh, and I had a lesson which has, I fancy, helped to make a man of me." His voice suddenly faltered. "Let me go," he said. "Good-bye."

Mr. Yardon stood watching him, he wished he had told him their probable route; then he remembered that Stanmore could always apply to Mr. Ray. He turned sadly into the house. His talk with Stanmore had recalled what is always the most odious of memories, the conviction that by our own self-will we have wrecked the happiness of others. It seemed to Mr. Yardon that if he had let Stanmore and Maisie manage their own affairs, they might now be happily married.

"Well, well," he thought as he went up to his room, "who can say? He was a boy in those days, and who knows whether that lovely young witch might not have fascinated him after marriage; I have heard of such disasters, and Maisie is not the sort of woman who would have got over such a desertion. Poor soul! it might have killed her." He had reached his room and he went to his window to see if Stanmore was still visible. Yes, there he was, standing still just at the point where the sudden turn of the road would in a few minutes completely hide him from

observation. He was speaking to a tall woman dressed in black, and Mr. Yardon saw that a carriage was slowly coming round the angle of the zigzag road. Mr. Yardon was fond of studying the scenery through an opera-glass, and he now levelled this at Stanmore's companion.

"Good Heavens!" he muttered, "it is that unhappy girl."

He saw Drusilla raise her head as if she were asking some favor of her companion, and then, as Stanmore drew away from her, he saw her stretch out her hand to put it on the young fellow's arm; but Stanmore stepped back, and then bowed to her and continued his journey.

Drusilla stood looking after him, but he did not once turn round. Her father smiled sadly as he watched her toss her head in the old petulant way, and then, when Stanmore was out of sight, she got into the carriage which had halted beside her.

Mr. Yardon stood for some minutes frowning while he reflected. "It is a good thing not to be taken by surprise," he said at last, but he looked sad rather than frowning. "I must warn Maisie."

He knocked at the door of communication between their rooms, and Maisie said, "Come in."

She was standing at the window, and her face warned her grandfather that she too had seen the meeting between Stanmore and Drusilla.

"You must see her, Maisie, she will be here directly," Mr. Yardon said abruptly.

Her grandfather looked hard at her.

"Sit down, my dear. Mrs. Boyd will not be here for ten minutes at least; if I know anything about her Swiss drivers, she will come slowly up that hill," he said cynically. "I have a selfish motive in asking you to keep quiet, Maisie; you have had an exciting morning, and you ought to rest an hour or two, but instead of that I want you to do me a service. I want you to receive Mrs. Boyd."

Maisie looked wistfully at him; he did not seem angry she thought, but he looked extremely decided.

"I will go down and meet her, and bring her to you in the sitting-room, shall I? and shall I say downstairs that we want another bedroom for to-night?"

"No; I ask you to see Drusilla, because I have decided not to do so. If she chooses to stay here, we will drive over to Klosters; we were to leave to-morrow, you know;" then as he saw the protest in her eyes, he said severely, "Do not interfere, child, or I shall be angry; you can say to Drusilla, that I will see her some day, but I must choose my own time, and it will not be yet awhile. What she has to say to me is best said through Mr. Ray."

Maisie wondered, as she looked after her grandfather, whether he was afraid of Drusilla's influence. She went to the window, the carriage was now so near that she had no time to loose. She felt timid at meeting Drusilla, but she resolved to help her if she could only find the way. The discouraging sense of being wholly misunderstood, which always seemed to paralyze Maisie, was fast gaining on her at the thought of this meeting. There was not a salon in the primitive little hotel, and Maisie dared not take Drusilla to their own sitting-room which adjoined her grandfather's room. She resolved to talk to her in the garden. She stood in the flagged low-arched entrance passage and anxiously watched Drusilla's arrival.

Maisie thought that Mrs. Boyd looked more beautiful even than Drusilla Lescure; but as the visitor moved forward, the girl saw that she had coarsened, she was stouter, and she had more color, and when she spoke to the landlord, whose manner was obsequious to so distinguished looking a guest, Maisie was surprised by the haughtiness of Mrs. Boyd's manner.

She went forward and held out her hand; she was ready to kiss Drusilla, but she saw a repressive expression on the lovely face. "Where is my father?" Mrs. Boyd spoke imperiously. At that moment she hated Maisie, and she believed that the girl was capable of keeping her away from her father.

"Will you come with me?" Maisie knew that the landlord understood English, and she saw that he looked inquisitive when Mrs. Boyd asked for her father.

She led the way through the house to the garden, and Drusilla followed her.

She looked round her when they reached the garden, and then she turned haughtily to Maisie.

"Why do you bring me here, Maisie Derrick? I did not come all this way to see you. I want my father: where is he? I know he will not refuse to see me when he knows how I long for a meeting. I must see him." Drusilla raised her voice as if she thought Mr. Yardon was in hiding among the trees.

"Let us sit down," said Maisie. Her supreme pity gave her courage; it seemed to her that her message must inflict great pain on Drusilla. Drusilla placed herself on the shaded bench before which they had stopped, and stared up at the windows of the hotel.

"I will rest here while you go and fetch my father. I am determined to see him. Go and tell him so."

She fixed her eyes on the girl; a look of surprise curved her delicate eyebrows when Maisie did not move to obey her.

"You must be patient, dear," Maisie spoke very tenderly, "and then I believe all will come right. My grandfather told me to say that just now he does not wish to see you."

"Of course that is your version." Drusilla shrugged her shoulders. "I do not blame you very much, Maisie, though perhaps so immaculate a person ought to have turned out less worldly; but you have got your turn, and I suppose you have a right to make the best of it; only I warn you to take care of yourself." Maisie shivered, Drusilla was looking so spiteful. "I warn you that if once I get hold of my father again, you will not get a second chance to step into my shoes."

Drusilla stamped her foot and turned round on her with angry eyes.

"Why do you not speak? you mean, dumb creature. You take away my father and then my lover, and you expect me to be friendly, and to forgive you! As to Luke Stanmore, you are welcome to such a starched Puritan, but my father is another matter. I could strike you, you demure sneak, for the way in which you have wheedled him if I did not despise you too much."

Maisie rose. "I am sorry you will not see things as they are," she said. "I am sure if you will only trust to time, my grandfather will soften."

Drusilla looked at her in silence; at last she sighed.

"I wish I could believe in you," she said bitterly. "I did when we were together at Yardon; I can't now, though. I was an innocent trusting child in those days; now I know that things were not what they seemed to me then. My husband has not behaved well, but he has taught me a great deal of wisdom. I shall never believe in any one again, never. I thought you a fool in those days, Maisie, but I thought, too, that you were almost an angel; but I was the fool, not you. You were not at all angel-like, you were only on the look-out for your grandfather's leavings."

"You are unjust, but I do not believe you really mean what you say."

"Do I not? I will tell you something else; ah yes, something you may find harder to digest, you sweet, innocent cuckoo. Do you suppose for a moment that Luke Stanmore would have thought of you again if he had not found out that you are to have my father's money?"

Maisie rose and began to walk towards the house. She could hardly believe that this virago could be Drusilla, and then her pity held her back.

"I had to give you that message sorely against my will. Will you tell me what I am to say to your father in answer?"

Drusilla was silent she was already sorry for her out-

burst of temper ; her sharp wits told her that it would be far wiser to have Maisie for a friend as long as the girl was in favor with her grandfather. Stanmore's repulse when she met him just now on the hill had made her hate the girl as the cause of it, but she told herself it was worse than foolish to show this dislike. She smiled and looked up at Maisie.

"I am hot and tired, and naturally I feel ill used that my father will not see me. I thought he was so large-minded, I hoped he would forgive and forget. Never mind, I will take your advice, if you really think he is so hard-hearted and that he will not see me." She gave Maisie a lovely smile and looked beseeching. "You can say that I only want to see him and to hear him say, 'I forgive you.' Do go to him at once, Maisie, I will wait here. If he consents you will come and fetch me ; if you do not come back I shall understand that he has no wish to forgive me though I am his own child." She had crossed the walk and she stood under the windows while she spoke.

It seemed to Maisie that Drusilla had raised her voice on the chance that her father might hear through one of the open windows.

"I hope I shall have to come back," Maisie said brightly, and she went into the house.

Drusilla's smile change to a scowl.

"No, you don't, you hateful hypocrite. I would rather be worse than I am, an honest sinner, than be like Maisie ; I felt as if I must strangle her if she stayed five minutes longer. I'll go back to Boyd. At any rate he does not pretend to be good, and he does not ask me to be good either. Yes, I'll go back to him."

Later in the afternoon, when the heat had lessened, Mr. Yardon and Maisie were driving through the lovely Prättigau to Klosters.

For a long time there was perfect silence between the fellow-travellers ; indeed, her grandfather had not spoken

to Maisie since she took him Drusilla's message, then he had answered.

"I wish you to be ready to start for Klosters in an hour. I will see after everything."

They had been driving for some time, and then Mr. Yardon said abruptly:


"I am glad that poor thing had grace enough to go off as she did. I should not have seen her even if she had stayed, but I am glad she went." He sighed. "Some day," he said, "I will tell you the story of my second marriage; it was a folly repented almost as soon as it was accomplished, and, like every other folly that a man commits, it has brought bitter consequences, and those not only on the chief offender." He smiled and looked at Maisie. "Now, young woman, I observe that you have inherited your grandfather's strong will. Do not be too severe on that poor fellow Stanmore; we owe him some amends for all he has had to suffer, don't we?"

Maisie smiled, and put her hand lovingly into her grandfather's.

"Perhaps we do," she said.

THE END.

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